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A French, Reigning Beauty Site of Salve Regina College Governor's Ball

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NEWS RELEASE
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A FRENCH, REIGNING BEAUTY SITE
OF SALVE REGINA COLLEGE
GOVERNOR'S BALL

Ochre Court, the Salve Regina College administration building, was a reigning beauty among the mansions in Newport during the turn of the century. At that time the estate was owned by Ogden Goelet. Neighbor Cornelius Vanderbilt was keeping up with the Goelet's when he summoned the same architect to design his house, the new Breakers that would "put to shame" the Goelet chateau. Both families competed in keeping up with the vanguard of fashion and threw some of the most elaborate parties in the gilded City-by-the-Sea.

Almost one hundred years later, the architectural grace of Ochre Court continues to be the setting for some of the state's most fashionable events, such as the Salve Regina College Governor's Ball. The estate, a classic

more

example of French design, is the appropriate setting for the fourth annual event to be held Saturday, December 6. The theme for the evening is "The Year of the French." Invited guests will enter the French chateau under an arched porte cochere to the Great Hall where the Goelets once shared in the glory of the age of elegance in the City-by-the-Sea with their many lavish events.

Ogden Goelet was a wealthy New York real estate developer and collector of a Manhattan real estate fortune. He was married to the former May Wilson, an extravagant woman who was nicknamed "Steamboat May" because of her frequent trips on luxury liners across the Atlantic.

In the mid 1880s, the Goelets decided to live with high society in Newport, once known as the most fashionable resort in the United States. They acquired coastal land off Ochre Point that was hemmed by the world-famous Cliff Walk. Mr. Goelet asked architect Richard Morris Hunt, who studied in Europe, to build a palace to neighbor with the other "cottages of the elite" on Millionaires' Point.

Construction of the mansion began in 1888 and was completed three years later for the cost of \$4,500,000. Ochre Court was modeled after the French chateau of the Middle Ages and was one of Hunt's largest and most "sumptuous" houses. It was a free adaption of the French Renaissance of the sixteenth century with limestone arches, ornamental iron work and towering gates: a perfect spirit for this year's "French" Governor's Ball.

French artisans created the Ochre Court ceiling paintings, mantel-pieces and intricately carved balustrades. The wood carvings were made in Paris and later reassembled in Newport. The paintings and furniture chosen added to the Parisian decor.

Guests attending this year's Governor's Ball will enter the Great Hall, the most impressive part of the interior of Ochre Court. The immaculate white walls of Caen stone are accented with carvings of heraldic designs and the fleur de lis motif. Among the many symbols incorporated in the designs are the salamander, the porcupine and the cygnet or young swan. The young swan is part of the Goelet family coat-of-arms. It symbolizes poetry, grace, music and purity. Ogden Goelet's initials are combined to make a design in the center of the main arch that opens to the Great Hall.

In keeping with the Gothic character, the Great Hall's carved walls reach to richly worked balcony arcades. The barrel-vaulted ceiling is enhanced with a painting of the banquet scene of the gods. To the right of the Hall is a marble stairway rising up toward a stained-glass cathedral window imported from Germany's Spitzen collection.

Flanking the Great Hall in a white and gold decor is the Ochre Court ballroom. The ceiling painting is in the style of those in the Versailles Palace. This room, now the Salve Regina College chapel, leads into the drawing room which overlooks the expansive grounds leading to the ocean.

Opposite the Hall is the library featuring imported French woodwork and carved panels with gold friezes. Adjoining the library is the state dining room dominated by a double-hearth marble fireplace and two teardrop crystal chandeliers. The small dining room, imported from Europe, is done in a Louis XV style. The Goelet family enjoyed their breakfast here each day. The African rose marble mantelpiece adds a delicate charm to this room.

Mr. Goelet was left with his thoughts behind solid oak doors in the

Tudor room study. Its fireplace is edged with Flemish tiles and genuine pieces from the Gothic period. Paintings include a Spanish princess and a portrait of the Duchess of Sutherland.

Mr. Goelet died in 1897 while cruising in his yacht Mayflower off the Isle of Wright. The yacht was later given to the United States government for presidential use. At his death, the family was counted the third richest by inheritance in America. They had two children, May, who married the Duke of Roxburgh, and Robert. After Ogden's death, Mrs. Goelet continued to live at Ochre Court and kept her fine reputation of entertaining extensively and exclusively among the most prominent families in the social world.

Thirty-two years later Mrs. Goelet died of pneumonia in New York at the age of 74. Son Robert Goelet, who inherited Ochre Court, eventually gave the family estate to Salve Regina College in 1947. The French Provincial chateau became the state's second Roman Catholic College. Today, the mansion is the College's administrative building, chapel and setting for many College and community social and educational gatherings.

The first graduating class was in 1951. Fifty-one students were awarded their degrees. This year the co-ed college has the highest enrollment, approximately 1900 students, in its history.

Robert Goelet died in 1966 in New York when he was 86 years old. He was a financier, real estate developer like his father, and a prominent figure in Newport and New York social circles. He died one of the wealthiest men in the Newport summer colony.

On the evening of the Governor's Ball, invited guests will arrive in formal attire and enter Ochre Court under the broad porte cochere, the same way many of the guests of the Goelet family did almost one hundred years ago.