

## *Guardians of the Land*

The property which the Friends of The Academy Preserve are working to acquire for the citizens of Monroe County is predominantly virgin farmland in the midst of the expanding City of Monroe and the Charter Township of Frenchtown. The following narration traces the 20th Century history of the acquisition of the property by the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, SSIHM.

Little did Mother Mechtildis realize that the 106 acres she purchased in 1904 for \$10,000, situated on Water Street (now Elm Avenue), would be the site of the St. Mary Academy and the IHM Motherhouse. In 1912 she purchased another 75 acres, the Ilgenfritz farm.

The land was farmed and had many out-buildings, including two barns, smaller houses for the caretakers, a garage, and a blacksmith shop along with a brooder house. There was also a pond. There are many pictures preserved over time documenting the sisters harvesting the crops and working in the orchards.

The Visitation Barn still stands today and is used primarily for quiet retreats and meditation. The original use of this building was for a riding academy stable to house the riding horses for the equestrian program which was part of the curriculum. Russell Sweeney was the Riding Master until he was called to military service in 1942. At this time the equestrian program was closed and the 17 horses were traded for a Buick used to transport the sisters.

TAP is looking forward to and working toward the day when this land, so lovingly preserved, will be used for recreation and education for everyone in Monroe County.