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Convent has served as a hospital

Hampton Dunn

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



CONVENT HAS SERVED AS A HOSPITAL

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KEY WEST --- A distinctive landmark in this historic city full of landmarks is the Convent of Mary Immaculate. The unique structure sits next to the St. Mary's Star of the Sea Roman Catholic Church on Truman Ave.

The old convent was built by the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, a Canadian order which first established a school in Key West in 1868, shortly after the Civil War. This building was erected in 1878. The odd architecture was designed by William Kerr of Ireland, and is of Romanesque style, with dormered, mansard roofs and central tower. The building was enlarged in 1904. Mr. Kerr also built three public buildings, the old Post Office, the old City Hall and the Monroe County Court House.

During the Spanish-American War, when Key West was a center of activity with troops headed for Cuba or returning, the Sisters offered their services as nurses and the Convent to the U.S. Navy as a hospital. The Sisters rendered devoted service to the wounded and yellow fever victims.

In 1901, Sister Egidius started a museum at the Convent. It features a large collection of Spanish-American War artifacts. There also are Civil War and World Wars I and II items on display.

A special piece of interest at the museum is a shell encrusted chest that was made by Dr. Samuel A. Mudd during his imprisonment at Fort Jefferson, 69 miles west of Key West in the Dry Tortugas. Mudd was accused as a Lincoln conspirator after treating John Wilkes Booth's leg.

