



Fire & Roses: The Burning of the Charlestown Convent, 1834

Nancy Lusignan Schultz

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From its founding in 1826, the convent on Mt Benedict had been rumoured to conceal physical and sexual abuse of nuns and female boarding students within its walls. In 1832 Rebecca Theresa Reed allegedly escaped and wrote a tale of women held against their will and subjected to cruel treatment by convent authorities. A series of anti-Catholic lectures by the Reverend Lyman Beecher stoked existing fears of a papal plot and these lectures eventually lead to a riot during which a drunken mob burnt the convent to the ground. The arsonists' ringleader became a local folk hero. Based on years of research this book offers a tale of violence and redemption, from an era when anit-papist diatribes were the stuff of standing-room only lectures; independent women were feared and reviled; and a new nation was struggling with its own identity.

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