

**THE HISTORY OF  
THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH  
OF WICHITA, KANSAS  
1888--1900**

---

**SISTER M. VICTORIA LAKE**

THE UNIVERSITY OF WICHITA

THE HISTORY OF  
THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH  
OF WICHITA, KANSAS  
1888--1900

A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED TO THE COMMITTEE ON GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY  
SISTER M. VICTORIA LAKE

JUNE, 1937  
WICHITA, KANSAS

ROBINSON LIBRARY  
UNIVERSITY OF WICHITA

### PREFACE

This history of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Wichita tends quite simply to shape and preserve the principal events which marked the time from the organization of the Community in Abilene in 1888, to the establishment of the Motherhouse in Wichita in 1900. That the events are not striking as compared to those which are ordinarily common to historical narrative is very evident, and for reasons which are obvious. But it has seemed fitting at this time to dwell for a short space upon the history of the Community, in the hope that the written study may reveal the unwritten past. It is furthermore considered appropriate in order that the present may not forget the past, and that death or time be not allowed to further obliterate that which we would preserve.

At the same time it is suitable that the present members of the Community, many of whom are unto the third generation, may become familiar with the processes of a time in the existence of the Community when the beginning and the maintenance of the most simple project was an immense undertaking. The workers of today are gratefully aware that they are reaping where they have not sown; that where others have toiled, they of today enjoy the advantages thereof. It is expedient, also for them to know that the difficulties in the beginning were not a few, that by those difficulties the Congregation has been unified and strengthened; and that anything which may be marked a success today has had its beginning in trial. The difficulties of the pioneer members have been only lightly

touched upon, but sufficiently to show in a measure that a Community of Religious are not exceptions to the universal laws of human affairs.

The writer is indebted to certain members of the Community for much of the material relative to this history. She is grateful to Sister M. Aloysia who so accurately discerned all handwritten copy, and who so patiently and skillfully has produced the final one. She acknowledges with sincere appreciation her indebtedness to Rev. Mother M. Prudentia who in her kindness granted many privileges, and afforded numerous conveniences by which the pleasant pursuit of this work was made possible.

The writer also expresses her gratitude especially to Doctor John Rydjord, Professor and head of the Department of History at the Wichita University, under whose direction the work was accomplished.

## CONTENTS

### CHAPTER I

#### LE PUY-en-VELAY, 1650--KANSAS, 1883.

Origin of the Sisters of St. Joseph.--France.--St. Louis, Missouri.--Rochester, New York.--Erie, Pennsylvania.--The first Sisters come to Kansas. . . . . 1 -- 25

### CHAPTER II

#### BREAKING GROUND

Mt. St. Joseph's College.--Laying of the corner stone.--Collapse of boom.--Division of Leavenworth Diocese.--First Sisters in Abilene.--Bishop Fink makes Abilene a foundation.--Appointment of Sister M. Bernard as Superior.--Beginning of the Community.--First Candidates. . . . . 24 -- 36

### CHAPTER III

#### PIONEER MEMBERS

Mother M. Bernard, birth, parentage, characteristics.--First Spiritual Retreat.--First Religious Reception.--Opening of school at Mt. St. Joseph's.--More Candidates.--Mother M. Bernard obtained a loan.--Community moves into new building. . . . . 37 -- 51

### CHAPTER IV

#### BRANCHING OUT

1890, opening of first mission.--Members of Community from Emerald, Kansas.--Delegates of A.P.A. visit Mt. St. Joseph's.--Death of Sister M. Sebastian.--Opening of St. Thomas' School, Armourdale.--First Profession.--Two Receptions.--1891, St. John the Evangelist's School, Argentine.--Bishop Fink presides at Reception.--1892,

Resident Chaplain at Mt. St. Joseph's.--Largest Reception.  
 --Father Leary leaves Abilene for Chapman.--Opening of St.  
 Leo's School, Norton.--1895, Atlantic, Iowa; Frontenac,  
 Pittsburg, and Wea Schools opened.--1896, St. Brendan's  
 School, Plattsburg, Missouri.--Institute, St. Mary's  
 Academy, Leavenworth. . . . . 52 --72

CHAPTER V

THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH OF WICHITA

The Wichita Diocese.--Rt. Rev. J. J. Hennessy, D.D.--  
 Transfer of the Bishop of Concordia.--Re-division of the  
 Leavenworth Diocese.--Bishop Fink orders novitiate to  
 Parsons, Kansas.--Last Reception in Abilene.--Move to  
 Parsons.--Sacred Heart Academy.--Receptions in Parsons.--  
 Diocesan boundaries, July, 1897.--Sisters of St. Joseph of  
 Wichita.--Bishop Hennessy buys Wichita University for Mother-  
 house.--Dedication of building.--Sisters come home to Wichita,  
 June, 1900. . . . . 73 -- 99

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE. . . . . 100 --101

BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . . 102 --104

MAP . . . . . --105

THE HISTORY OF THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH

OF WICHITA, KANSAS

1888---1900

CHAPTER I

LE PUY-en-VELAY, 1650---KANSAS, 1883.

Origin of the Sisters of St. Joseph.--France.--St. Louis,  
Missouri.--Rochester, New York.--Erie, Pennsylvania.--  
The first Sisters come to Kansas.

-----

More than half a century has passed since the first Sisters of St. Joseph came to Kansas to begin their work for the cause of religion in their service to humanity on the great Western plains. Courage, devotion, and Christian fortitude were not lacking in that first band of Religious, six in number, who relinquished the ties that bound them to the Motherhouse where they had been received, clothed in the religious habit, and had made their vows. One of the band was still a novice. The other five counted years in which ties of endearment had bound them to the companions and missions of their Community, which they now gave up in order that a foundation of their Congregation could

---

1. Mother M. Antoinette, Marymount College, Salina, Kansas, Interview, October 17, 1936.

be made in Kansas. It was no little sacrifice to leave the well-organized Community in the East to lose oneself on the Kansas plains, but theirs was the same spirit which brought the Sisters of St. Joseph from France to the United States in 1836; the same spirit that sent the Sisters of St. Joseph from their Motherhouse in Baden, Pennsylvania, to far away China in 1926. It was the spirit of the love of God; it was the spirit of zeal for His glory and the salvation of souls; it was cheerful acceptance of labor and privations and self-sacrifice viewed as a matter of course.

The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph originated in France, in the town of Le-Puy-en-Velay in 1650, where Bishop Henry de Maupas established it at the suggestion of Father John P. Medaille, a celebrated missionary of the Society of Jesus. The little village in France that marked the beginning of this Community was not noted as a center of culture. Its men and women knew not the court of the king. They were sturdy sons and daughters of the rocky hillsides of ancient Velay. Le-Puy is situated in the Department of Haute-Loire in southeastern France and noted for its medieval charm which it still retains. Historically, it may be traced back to Gallo-Roman days, and legend tells us

- 
1. Sister M. Lucida Savage, The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, Herder, St. Louis, 1923, p. 36.
  2. Elinor Tong Dehey, Religious Orders of Women in the United States, Dehey, Hammond, Indiana, 1930, p. 230.
  3. Constitution of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, O'Shea & Co., n.d., New York, p. 1.



that the Gospel was carried to its inhabitants by friends of St. Peter. It became the episcopal city of St. Evodius about 560. It is known from early middle ages as the "City of Our Lady" where the Cathedral of Notre Dame marked the site of one of the earliest shrines to Mary, in Roman Gaul.

In this quaint city on October 15, 1650, six young women of humble origin, whose names have only recently been found among records which have been missing since the days of the French Revolution, united for the purpose of dedicating their lives to works of piety--the instruction of children, and the care of the sick. They presented themselves to Father John P. Medaille for direction. With the permission of the Rt. Rev. Henry de Maupas, Bishop of Le-Puy, the six aspirants were assembled in the house of a pious widow, Madame de Joux, under whose kindly hospitality a new Institute was fostered. To her Christian generosity, which lasted during her lifetime, the Sisters owed much in the establishment and development of a religious Congregation. For three months they lived in the home of their benefactress, spending the time in meditation and prayer while receiving instructions on the nature and obligations of the new life which they were preparing to embrace.

- 
1. Francoise Eyraud, Anna Vey, and Anna Brun of the diocese of Le-Puy; Marguerite Burdeir, Anna Chaleyser of the diocese of Lyons; and Clauda Chastel of the diocese of Meude.
  2. Sister M. Lucida Savage, The Century's Harvest, St. Louis, 1936, p. 8.
  3. Abbé Rivaux, Life of Rev. Mother St. John Fontbonne, Benziger Brothers, New York, 1887, p. 53.

Following this period of preparation, the probationers were invested with the religious habit, and in the presence of the Rt. Rev. Bishop de Maupas before the altar in the chapel of the orphanage, they consecrated their lives to the service of God. The Bishop in addressing them called them Sisters of St. Joseph and gave to each her name by which she would be known in religion. The memorable day was October 15, 1650, the feast of the great Saint Teresa of Avila. The orphanage was then placed under their direction, and they began their work with ministrations in behalf of the homeless.

The Constitutions which were formulated by Bishop de Maupas and Father Medaille prescribed in detail the life and various works of the Sisters. Besides the episcopal approbation in 1651, the rapidly increasing Congregation received the approval of the civil power, as was attested by letters patent of Louis XIV, which in 1666 authorized and confirmed the establishments of Le-Puy, of St. Didier, and of Mont-Ferrand where the Sisters had taken charge of orphanages. In less than fifteen years branches of the Mother Institute had grown far beyond the expectations of the founders. In the dioceses of Clermont, of Vivier, Usés, and others the Sisters were teaching young girls, caring for the sick in their homes, and in hospitals, conducting schools for the blind and for deaf-mutes, and ministering to the orphans.

---

1. Sister M. Lucida, The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, p. 8.  
 2. Ibid., p. 8.  
 3. Rivaux, Life of Rev. Mother St. John Fontbonne, p. 60.

The different houses of the Congregation were complete, distinct, and independent of one another, but all guided by the same Rule. The Bishop of the diocese in which the Sisters made a foundation was their ecclesiastical superior. It was he who designated the place for the novitiate, and other institutions established by the Sisters throughout his diocese. The Bishop's permission was necessary, also, for the Sisters to leave the diocese to make foundations under other episcopal jurisdiction, but once he had permitted them to go, they became attached to the diocese which they entered. When a new foundation was solicited of the Motherhouse, the Sisters were selected from among volunteers.

Of all the foundations in France the one which appeals most strongly to the Sisters of St. Joseph in America, is that of the city of Lyons. It was from this Community under the direction of Mother St. John Fontbonne, that America was to receive the first Sisters of St. Joseph.

Mother St. John Fontbonne was born at Bas, in the Department of Haute-Loire, March 31, 1759. She and her sister were sent when quite young to the Sisters of St. Joseph in Bas to be educated. Jeanne and Marie, as they were called, were bright, attractive girls and being carefully trained had developed many admirable traits. When their

---

1. Rivaux, Life of Rev. Mother St. John Fontbonne, p. 63.  
 2. Ibid., p. 63.  
 3. Sister of St. Joseph, Mother St. John Fontbonne, P. J. Kenedy and Sons, New York, 1936, p. 26.

course of study was completed, instead of returning to their home they made known to their parents their desire to become Religious. They had previously made known their wishes to Mother St. Francis who was the superior of the Congregation at Bas. Not only was she the superior but she was an aunt to the Fontbonne girls on their father's side. A half-sister to Mother St. Francis was Sister of the Visitation, the Mistress<sup>1</sup> of Novices of the Bas Congregation. The two religious felt it their duty to observe their nieces very closely and test their courage by representing to them the difficulties, sacrifices, and the inevitable renunciations which they would be called upon to meet. However, the two girls were firm in their decision and not to be shaken. When Bishop de Gallard officiated at a Reception at Bas on the feast of St. Joseph, 1778, Jeanne and Marie were presented to his Lordship. He was deeply impressed by their womanly qualities, and gratified at their determination to enter the Religious state.<sup>2</sup>

Before leaving Bas he acquainted Mother St. Francis with his decision that she should have charge of the establishment of a school for the children of Monistrol as Foundress and Superior of a new Congregation. He gave her permission to take with her Marie and Jeanne to be the first candidates, and to begin a novitiate at once. To the Community who were overwhelmed at the thought of losing their beloved superior, he promised her return when the foundation was firmly rooted.

---

1. Sister of St. Joseph, Mother St. John Fontbonne, p. 15.

2. Ibid., p. 17.

On July 1. Mother St. Francis, her two nieces, and Sister of the Visitation left Bas to establish a school and novitiate in Monistrol. On December 17, 1778, Jeanne and Marie received the religious habit, Jeanne<sup>1</sup> to be known as Sister St. John, and Marie as Sister St. Teresa.

For seven years Mother St. Francis directed the Community of Monistrol, but in October, 1785, when the Sisters of Bas reminded Bishop de Gallard of his promise to allow her to return to them he gave the permission for her to do so, and despite the youth of Sister St. John he appointed her as superior of the Community of Monistrol. His appointment was confirmed by the votes of the Sisters when the election<sup>2</sup> for superior was held. Mother St. John assumed her task courageously, and for four years the Community progressed under her more than ordinary ability as administrator. Besides the school the Sisters acquired a hospital, and Mother St. John established a work-shop where pious people assembled under the direction of the Sisters, to work together for the profit of the poor, or for their own families, if need be. Through the good accomplished by this establishment Mother St. John and her Sisters<sup>3</sup> won great veneration throughout the city.

The year 1789 marked the fatal epoch of the Revolution which came upon unhappy France. Before its fury was spent every Congregation throughout the country was to pass through the fiery ordeal, submit to every species of outrage and persecution, and sustain irreparable losses;

---

1. Sister of St. Joseph, Mother St. John Fontbonne, p. 18.

2. Ibid., p. 22.

3. Ibid., p. 24.

1

when "in the name of liberty were suppressed all religious orders".

During the early days of the outbreak the Sisters of St. Joseph worked on prayerfully, not unmindful of the growing hatred for all institutions of the old order. Following the passage of the "Civil Constitution of the Clergy", a proscription was issued in 1792, which formally dissolved all religious Congregations devoted to teaching and works of charity. The Congregations who refused to honor the mandates suffered the sorrow of seeing their convents seized; their Sisters dispersed and sent back to parental homes, driven into exile, or thrown into prison to await the guillotine. The Cure of Monistrol was among the number who consented to the oath of the Clergy. When he announced from the pulpit his intention of taking the constitutional oath, Rome had not yet spoken and many good priests considered it a simple formality. However, when the brief of Pius VI of April 13, 1791, made known the apostacy implied in the oath, the dispositions of Father Ollier were not changed. It was a portent of misfortune to the parish, and to the Religious of the Community.

Upon Bishop de Gallard's refusing to take the oath his place was filled by a constitutional adherent, and he was forced to leave Monistrol. With his departure the Cure went beyond bounds, as he strove

---

1. Charles Guignebert, A Short History of the French People, Macmillan, New York, 1930, Vol. II, p. 268.

2. A. Guggenberger, General History of the Christian Era, Herder, St. Louis, p. 153.

3. Sister of St. Joseph, Mother St. John Fontbonne, p. 26.

1

by every possible means to make his flock followers of the schism.

The position of the Sisters became more critical as those of the schools were forced to abandon their establishments, and go to their homes. Mother St. John, Sister St. Teresa, and Sister Martha donned secular garb, and tried to remain at the hospital in care of the sick. The Curé was not satisfied to allow the Religious to remain without taking part in the Constitutional cult, and determined to force them to do so. When they refused to comply they were compelled to leave Monistrol, and repaired to the home of Mother St. John's father at

2

Bas.

Here disguised in peasant dress they practiced their Rule and lived as Religious. They had the privilege of guarding the Blessed Sacrament which was preserved in their home. The Fontbonne home also gave protection to pursued priests who risked their lives to bring spiritual aid to the faithful. It was to prevent the discovery of a refuge priest that led to Mother St. John and her two companions being taken by the Revolutionists who had rushed into her father's house, and demanded the Sisters. They surrendered at once that the house might

3

not be searched, and the concealed priest exposed. The Sisters were taken to the prison at St. Didier, where for eleven months they suffered

---

1. Sister of St. Joseph, Mother St. John Fontbonne, p. 26.

2. Ibid., p. 34.

3. Ibid., p. 41.

all the horror of the sordid surroundings. They had often to wait for wholesome food on Mother St. John's aged father who walked twelve miles to bring it to them. During their detention they were kept informed of the horrors being culminated on the outside by posters which were placed on the walls of the prison, with the names printed of persons who had been guillotined, or shot to death. In this way the Sisters learned of the execution of several of their own Community.

A most touching incidence occurred which brought inestimable joy to the imprisoned Sisters. One morning two new captives were ushered into the prison, one of whom was a novice, Sister Alexis Payrard from a neighboring convent at St. Hilaire. Sister Alexis had been obliged when her Community was dispersed to go to her aunt, who was now her companion in being captured. At the home of the aunt on the night before, they had been surprised by the night-patrol just after they had assisted at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass offered by a proscribed priest. Mass being ended the priest had departed leaving the Consecrated Hosts in care of the Sisters. She had hidden the box containing the sacred Particles in her dress, and it had not been detected by the soldiers who, in their disappointment at not finding a priest, seized the two women and conducted them to the prison.

The Sisters upon learning that Sister Alexis had brought the Most Blessed Sacrament into their midst, gave themselves to the adoration of their Eucharistic Lord, guarding their sacred treasure until a clergyman

---

1. Sister of St. Joseph, Mother St. John Fontbonne, p. 41.



could be informed of the fact. "Let them communicate with these Hosts," he told his informant, and upon receiving word Mother St. John distributed the Blessed Sacrament to her companions, and received It herself.<sup>1</sup>

The Sisters continued their bondage without any notice as to the term of their imprisonment. Finally one day the jailer said brutally to Mother St. John, "Citizeness, it is your turn tomorrow".<sup>2</sup> Upon hearing this information the Sisters thought their fate was sealed, but Divine Providence interposed, and martyrdom was denied the expectant Religious. Robespierre had been sent to the guillotine himself, and his death gave an unexpected turn to events. By his execution the Sisters, as well as many others who were imprisoned, were made free. Upon leaving the prison they were accosted by Claude Fontbonne, Mother St. John's brother, who having heard of the approaching execution, had hastened to the prison to say a last good-bye.<sup>3</sup>

It was the ardent wish of Mother St. John to reassemble her dispersed Community, but the claim for the return of their property was ignored, as the convent had been sold by the Commune to an ardent Revolutionist who would not give it up. The Sisters realized that the time was not propitious, and accepted the delay. Twelve years were to

---

1. Sister of St. Joseph, Mother St. John Fontbonne, p. 59.

2. Ibid., p. 74.

3. Ibid., p. 76.

pass in which they waited and hoped. Finally in August, 1807, came an appeal from Rev. Claude Cholleton, the Vicar-General of Lyons, for Mother St. John to take charge of the re-establishment of the Congregation.

Six years had elapsed since Napoleon had signed the Concordat of Pope Pius VII when Cardinal Fesch of Lyons and his Vicar-General, Rev. Claude Cholleton, began to consider the re-establishment of religious Communities in the Archdiocese of Lyons. Before Father Cholleton had been called from Saint-Etienne to become Vicar-General of Lyons, he had engaged quite extensively in missionary work assisted by groups of Catechists. In one of these groups were twelve pious women who had come together, and were living the life of Religious<sup>1</sup>. Because of a black costume which they wore they were called the Black Daughters. They gave themselves to works of charity, visiting the sick, and assisting the dying.

When Father Cholleton approached the Cardinal upon the advisability of forming a religious Community of the band, and giving them a Rule by which to regulate their daily life, the Cardinal suggested that they might effect the restoration of the Congregation of St. Joseph<sup>2</sup>. The question now arose as to who would be available to assume the charge of organization. A holy Religious of the order of the Capuchins,

---

1. Sister of St. Joseph, Mother St. John Fontbonne, p. 89.

2. Ibid., p. 91.

which had been dispersed from Monistrol during the Revolution, was giving a mission in Lyons where he learned of the Cardinal's intention, and his need of a Religious Superior. He immediately informed the prelate of the qualifications of the former superior of Monistrol, and of the possibility of procuring her for Saint-Etienne. The Cardinal sent a messenger at once to Mother St. John to invite her to the Archdiocese of Lyons.

There was no little consternation in the Fontbonne home at the prospect of the Sisters leaving it again. However, it was decided that Sister St. Teresa should remain to care for her aged parents, and Mother St. John again left her paternal home, fifteen years after the storm of the Revolution had driven her back to it. It was on the Eve of the Assumption, 1807, that she arrived in Saint-Etienne, and met her future <sup>1</sup>daughters. On July 18, 1808, when they were clothed in the religious habit and given a religious name, took place the actual re-<sup>2</sup>establishment of the Congregation.

Mother St. John had been eagerly received by the little Community, and from the beginning she endeavored to train the members in the manner of life of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Their number increased rapidly, and while the novitiate remained for eight years at Saint-

---

1. Sister of St. Joseph, Mother St. John Fontbonne, p. 93.

2. Ibid., p. 96.

Etienne, there went out from it numerous groups to make new foundations,<sup>1</sup> or to assist in reviving the old.

In 1816 it was decided by episcopal authority that Lyons should be the place for the Motherhouse and Novitiate. The city was the center of religious activity, and already three flourishing institutions were being conducted by the new Congregation. Here Mother St. John was retained in the office of Superior General until her resignation at the age of eighty years, in 1839. Three years before her resignation from office Mother St. John prepared the first colony of her Sisters for a<sup>2</sup> foundation in America.

When the diocese of New Orleans was divided in 1826, and the see<sup>3</sup> of St. Louis was created, Bishop Joseph Rosati became the first Bishop. The Countess de la Rochajaquelein, a generous supporter of foreign missions, reading the "Annals" of the Propagation of the Faith learned of the conditions, and the great poverty of the Mississippi Mission, and her heart was deeply touched. It was her desire that the Sisters of St. Joseph should have a part in teaching and converting the Indians, and she obtained a promise from Mother St. John to send Sisters to the Mississippi Mission, if Bishop Rosati wished to have them, promising<sup>4</sup> that she herself would defray the expenses of the first foundation.

---

1. Sister M. Lucida, The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, p. 20.

2. Ibid., p. 23.

3. Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XI, Marie Louise Points, New Orleans, p. 11.

4. Sister of St. Joseph, Mother St. John Fontbonne, p. 335.

When it was proposed to Bishop Rosati that the Sisters go to St. Louis to open schools, he hesitated to give his assent to the proposal as he realized the burden of such a venture.

However, the Countess was persistent, and she herself wrote to Bishop Rosati a most persuasive letter of great length, in which she convinced him of the sincerity of her motive to propagate the Faith in America through the Sisters of St. Joseph. The Bishop hastened to answer her earnest letter, and accepted the offer of six Sisters with the request for two more, trained to teach the deaf and dumb.

Characteristic of her religious zeal Mother St. John placed before her Sisters the request made by the Bishop. Eager as she herself was for the new field, she was not unmindful of the trials, difficulties, and privations that such a venture would entail. These she represented to the Sisters, graphically, that they might fully understand the mission, and weigh the matter well. Many Sisters offered themselves, and among the number were two nieces of Mother St. John, Sister Delphine and Sister Febronia, who with four others were accepted. Rev. Father James Fontbonne, a brother of the above mentioned Sisters had also volunteered his services to Bishop Rosati.

On January 4, 1836, the travellers departed from Lyons, and on the seventeenth set sail from Havre on the Heidelberg. They were met in

---

1. Sister of St. Joseph, Mother St. John Fontbonne, p. 336.

2. Rivaux, Life of Rev. Mother St. John Fontbonne, p. 204.

New Orleans by the Bishop of St. Louis, who had travelled for eight days that he might be there to welcome them.<sup>1</sup> For forty-eight days they had sailed the uncharted sea, reaching port on March the sixth. During their stay in New Orleans the Sisters enjoyed the charitable hospitality of the Ursuline Nuns where they rested before beginning the last leg of their journey. They were astonished to learn from the Ursulines that they could not go out in safety on the streets of New Orleans wearing the religious habit, and so were obliged to don a secular garb which they continued to wear on board the steamer, George Collier, which carried them from New Orleans to St. Louis.<sup>2</sup> As the journey up the Mississippi River from New Orleans to St. Louis required eleven days, it was not until March 25, 1836, that the Sisters reached their final destination.

The Sisters from France were welcomed to St. Louis by the Sisters of Charity who received them, and with whom they remained until after Easter.<sup>3</sup> The first mission assigned to the newly arrived Sisters was Cahokia, Illinois, three miles from St. Louis, and across the river. It was the oldest white settlement in the Mississippi valley, and was an Indian Mission as early as 1699, but in 1836 it was a French-Canadian village of pious, simple souls adapted to French customs. A convent and

---

1. Sister M. Lucida, The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Garondelet, p. 35.

2. Ibid., p. 35.

3. Rivaux, Life of Rev. Mother St. John Fontbonne, p. 210.

school built of logs were awaiting the coming of the Sisters, and to this industrious little community Bishop Rosati sent three of the missionaries.<sup>1</sup>

The village of Carondelet, six miles south of the original site of St. Louis, had several hundred French inhabitants, some of whom were prospering fur-traders although the greater number of them were poor and living in log cabins. Many of them made a living by cutting and hauling wood which they sold in St. Louis, others industriously cultivated the strips of land according to the rural customs of their native country.<sup>2</sup> To this settlement came the other three Sisters, their convent a log cabin furnished with one cot, a table, and a few chairs. They were frankly informed by the missionary pastor that he was poor,<sup>3</sup> too, and they must provide for themselves. The six pioneers were young, the oldest of the band was not yet thirty-one years of age. Cold weather, primitive living conditions, floods, and fever were to try their enthusiasm, but the people for whom they were to labor were enduring those same hardships, and the Sisters adapted themselves to conditions as they found them, buoyantly, because of their youth; unselfishly, because of their Faith. It was the log-cabin convent of Carondelet that became a lasting foundation, and the first novitiate of the Sisters of St. Joseph in America.

---

1. Sister M. Lucida, The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, p. 39.

2. Ibid., p. 44.

3. Ibid., p. 44.

The first American subject to be received was Anne Eliza Dillon, the daughter of a wealthy land-holder of St. Louis, who entered the Community in October, 1837.<sup>1</sup> In spite of the hardships and vicissitudes of pioneer life the Congregation thrived, and the ranks increased as year followed year. Foundations made from St. Louis were: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1847;<sup>2</sup> St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1851;<sup>3</sup> Toronto, Canada, in 1852;<sup>4</sup> Wheeling, Virginia, in 1853;<sup>5</sup> and Canandaigua, New York, in 1854.<sup>6</sup>

The foundation of Canandaigua is linked with the foundations in Kansas. Mother Agnes Spencer, who was born in Lancashire, England, became a member of the novitiate at Carondelet in 1846. In December, 1854, she left St. Louis with three Sisters for Canandaigua, New York, to open a school. Here in 1855 she received into the novitiate, and gave the religious habit to Sister Stanislaus Leary of Corning, New York.<sup>7</sup> In the course of time the novitiate was transferred to Buffalo, the episcopal city. Rochester, a city of the Buffalo diocese, had received the Sisters of St. Joseph from Buffalo in 1864, and among the number was Sister Stanislaus Leary.<sup>8</sup> The same city became a diocesan

---

1. Sister M. Lucida, The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, p. 50.

2. Ibid., p. 68.

3. Ibid., p. 80.

4. Ibid., p. 73.

5. Ibid., p. 68.

6. Ibid., p. 75.

7. Ibid., p. 77.

8. Dehey, Religious Orders of Women in the United States, p. 227.



see in 1868, and the Sisters of St. Joseph became a diocesan Community with Mother M. Stanislaus as superior.<sup>1</sup>

In 1860 Mother Agnes Spencer with three Sisters was sent to the diocese of Erie, Pennsylvania, to take charge of St. Ann's Academy in Corsica. After a time the novitiate was transferred to Meadville, and later to Erie,<sup>2</sup> where in 1877, Mother Agnes received into the Community Sister M. Bernard Sheridan of Lockport, New York. With the introduction of Mother M. Stanislaus Leary and Sister M. Bernard Sheridan we become acquainted with the two Foundresses of the Congregations to be established in Kansas; linked in the advent but later separated by diocesan division. To the Congregations of Rochester, New York, and Erie, Pennsylvania, the Kansas Sisters of St. Joseph trace their immediate origin.

- The Rt. Rev. Louis M. Fink, O.S.B., was Bishop of the Leavenworth Diocese in 1883. He had succeeded Rt. Rev. John B. Mlege, S.J., who had been consecrated Bishop of Messina March 25, 1851, and made Vicar Apostolic to the Vicariate Apostolic of the Indian Territory east of the Rocky Mountains. This territory included the present states of Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, the part of North and South Dakota west of the Missouri River, Wyoming, Montana, and a part of Colorado. The Catholic population of the vicariate in 1851 numbered 5,000 of whom 3,000 were Indians.<sup>3</sup>

---

1. Dehey, Religious Orders of Women in the United States, p. 227.

2. Ibid., p. 226.

3. Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. IX, J. A. Shorter, Leavenworth, p. 103.

In 1871 Very Rev. Louis M. Fink, O.S.B., became coadjutor to Bishop Miege, and in 1877 upon the acceptance by Rome of the resignation of Bishop Miege, his coadjutor took charge of the vicariate. The diocese of Leavenworth, embracing the entire state of Kansas, was established May 22, 1877. The Catholic population was then 35,000.<sup>1</sup>

The Sisters of St. Joseph had been preceded in Kansas by four religious Communities. In 1841 at the request of Father de Smet who in 1836 had founded a mission among the Pottowatomies on Sugar Creek, Mother Gallitzin, Visitatrix to the United States of the Religious of the Sacred Heart, sent the saintly Mother Philippine Duchesne with three companion Religious to take charge of training the Indian girls. Their work which began at Sugar Creek was continued at St. Mary's where the mission was transferred in 1848.<sup>2</sup> When the government advised a system of district schools on the reservations for the Indians far removed from the mission, and the Indian pupils were withdrawn because of this, the Sisters in 1871 were transferred out of the state to other convents<sup>3</sup> of their order.<sup>4</sup>

Among the aged Osage Indians of Oklahoma may still be found those who were pupils of the Sisters of Loretto at Osage Mission, When the

---

1. Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. VIII, J. A. Shorter, Kansas, p. 601.

2. Trials and Triumphs of the Catholic Church in America, Hyland & Co., Chicago, Illinois, 1901, p. 387.

3. A. T. Andreas, History of the State of Kansas, Chicago, Illinois, 1883, p. 71.

4. Richard Joseph Bollig, History of Catholic Education in Kansas 1836--1932, Catholic University of America, 1933, p. 13.

Rt. Rev. Peter R. Kenrick, Bishop of St. Louis, in 1847 authorized Father Schoenmakers to establish a school for the Indian girls of the mission, the Jesuit Missionary after "knocking at the door of every convent in St. Louis" went farther and placed his request with the Sisters of Loretto in Kentucky. Here he was not refused, and on October 3, 1847, the mission welcomed four of these Sisters. Their labors in Kansas were continuous until 1895 when fire destroyed, completely, all of their buildings with the furnishings, and the Sisters, not having at hand the means to replace what had been lost, withdrew to other  
1  
fields.

The Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, also, came to Kansas because of Father de Smet. Mother Xavier, the superior of the Sisters, met the zealous missionary in St. Louis in 1853, who began immediately to negotiate with her in behalf of Bishop Miege who was looking for Sisters to establish a novitiate in Leavenworth, where he maintained his episcopal residence. Mother Xavier made a visit to Kansas to inspect the field, and feeling satisfied she returned to bring her Sisters,  
2  
with whom she reached Leavenworth, November 11, 1858.

The Sisters of St. Benedict at Atchison came from Cloud, Minnesota, in 1863. Their advent was during the period of agitation and uncertainty as a result of the Civil War. Their years have been marked with  
3  
great progress, although it was slow in the beginning.

---

1. W. W. Graves, Early Jesuits of Osage Mission, St. Paul, Kansas, 1916, p. 278.

2. Dehey, Religious Orders of Women in the United States, p. 505.

3. Bollig, History of Catholic Education in Kansas 1836--1932, p. 30.

One other Community remains to be mentioned, the Sisters of St. Agnes whose Motherhouse is at Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. These Sisters opened a parochial school at Victoria, Ellis County, in 1879, for the children of Russian-German settlers who had come to Kansas in 1876.<sup>1</sup>

When Bishop Fink admitted the Sisters of St. Joseph to the Leavenworth diocese it was from the Congregation at Rochester, New York, that the missionary band was formed. Mother M. Stanislaus, for fifteen years superior of the Community, on May 18, 1885, left Rochester to take charge of the mission herself. Five others accompanied her. They were, Sister M. Frances Leary and Sister M. Josephine Leary, sisters to Mother M. Stanislaus, Sister M. Domitilla Gannon, Sister M. Armella McGrath, and Sister M. Antoinette Cuff, the latter still a novice.<sup>2-3</sup>

Arriving in Kansas they were sent by Bishop Fink to Newton, a city at that time of 5,000 inhabitants. Rev. E. P. Schwembergh was pastor of the Catholic population of over eighty families. In 1882 he had opened a school for which he had employed a lay teacher. Thirty-five pupils had enrolled the first year, but this number had increased to sixty-five.<sup>4</sup> The Sisters entered zealously into the work of building up

- 
1. Bollig, History of Catholic Education in Kansas 1836-1932, p. 73.
  2. Mother M. Antoinette, Marymount College, Salina, Kansas, Interview, October 17, 1936.
  3. Sister M. Antoinette in 1899 succeeded Mother M. Stanislaus as general superior of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, a position which she held for more than twenty years. After fifty-six years in religion, she is now superior and vice-president of Marymount College, Salina, Kansas.
  4. Andreas, History of the State of Kansas, p. 773.

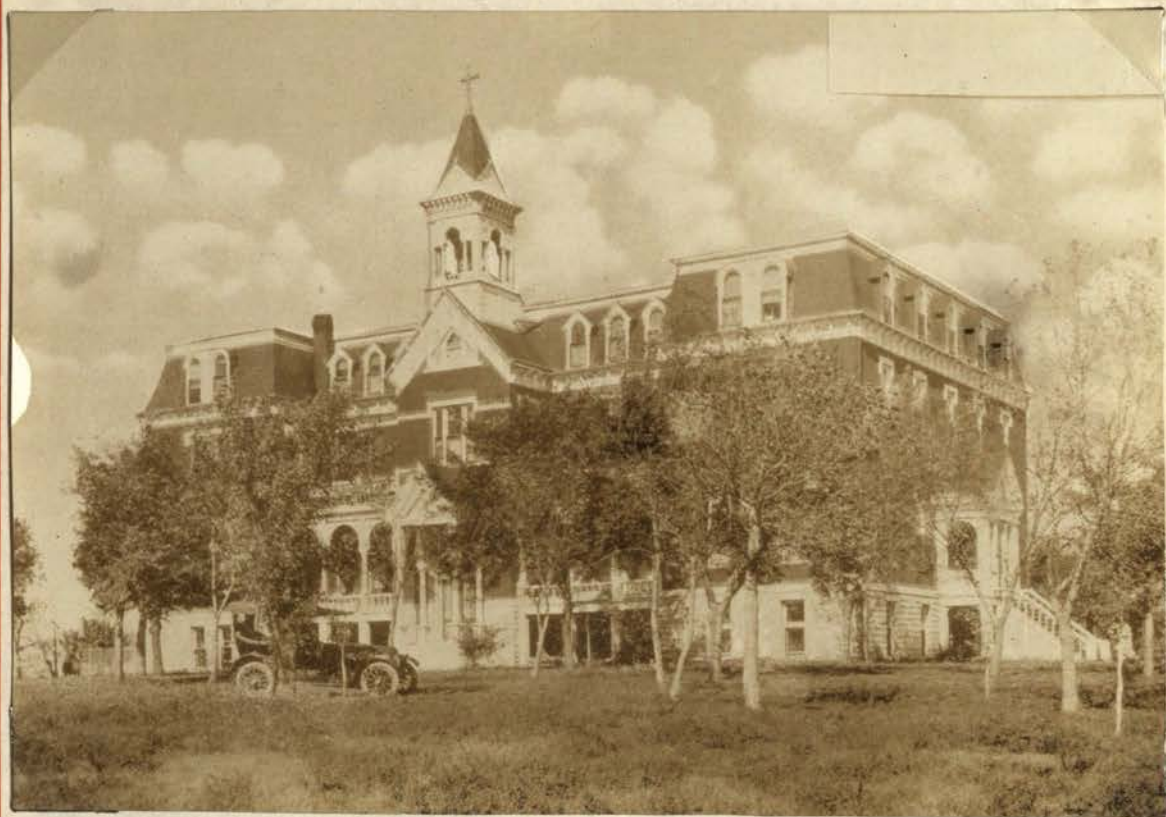
the school, and establishing a foundation. Mother M. Stanislaus, after seeing that the Sisters were settled, returned to the East where she solicited funds for building, and postulants to add to the members of the Community.<sup>1</sup> The song in the heart of the missionary Religious in the early eighties echoed that of young America, "the great, glorious, boundless West". Kansas was a field where opportunity not only abounded but literally called for Religious with an appeal to their missionary spirit that was to result in the foundation of not one, but two Communities of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

In 1884 Father Joseph Perrier of Concordia applied to the Bishop of the diocese for Sisters to come to his parish. The Bishop directed him to Mother M. Stanislaus at Newton. When Father Perrier realized that the Sisters were establishing a Motherhouse, he immediately put forth every effort to induce them to consider Concordia as its location. The rumor was afloat that another diocese was to be formed in the State of Kansas, and that Concordia would be its see. The people of the parish through Father Perrier offered the Sisters \$2,000 as a nucleus to a building fund for a convent. Convinced that the offer gave promise of progress Mother M. Stanislaus with the novices and postulants went to Concordia in 1884, leaving four Sisters who were teaching the school in<sup>2</sup> Newton.

---

1. Mother M. Antoinette, Marymount College, Salina, Kansas, Interview, October 17, 1936.

2. Ibid.



MT. ST. JOSEPH'S ACADEMY

Abilene, Kansas

Convent and Motherhouse of  
the Sisters of St. Joseph,

1888--1896.

## CHAPTER II

## BREAKING GROUND

Mt. St. Joseph's College.--Laying of the Corner Stone.--  
 Collapse of boom.--Division of Leavenworth Diocese.--First  
 Sisters in Abilene.--Bishop Fink makes Abilene a foundation.  
 --Appointment of Sister M. Bernard as superior.--Beginning  
 of the Community.--First Candidates.

-----

When Bishop Fink visited Abilene to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation, May 25, 1886, Rev. John F. Leary was in charge of St. Andrew's Parish. The rumor still persisted that Concordia might soon be an episcopal see, as Bishop Fink had asked for a division of the diocese that was rapidly becoming too heavily populated for one bishop to care for. However, it was his desire to retain in his own diocese a Motherhouse and Novitiate of the Sisters of St. Joseph. On the occasion of this visit he met a committee of prominent men of the parish: J. T. Prendergast, J. J. Berry, Patrick Berry, Thomas McInerney, and Thomas Kirby, to whom he suggested a plan for erecting a building to be used for a college and academy for young ladies, and a Motherhouse for

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

Sisters. He promised to supply the Sisters from Concordia, and to assume one-half the expense of the building.

Abilene in 1886 was a promising town alive with cattle trade, furnishing a shipping station on the edge of the great range. Few towns of Kansas had missed the delirium of building that preceded the panic of 1887, and the beginning of "Mt. St. Joseph's College" was to be a product of the Abilene impulse. The enterprise was undertaken with zest. The Reverend pastor and the citizens mentioned before, each of whom was a generous contributor, became the building committee. Mr. Thomas Kirby, who was a banker, was authorized to procure a site. He made a purchase of two hundred and forty acres of land for \$12,000<sup>1</sup>, located two miles north of Abilene on Bukeye Avenue, a pleasing elevation overlooking the city. A two-story, brick house of seven rooms which had been a very substantial home at one time, but was now suffering badly from neglect, and damaged by rain and snow was the only building on the land; all other improvements were lacking.

Following the acquisition of a site the project continued with the drawing of plans for the building, and the Evening Reflector, May 24, 1887<sup>2</sup>, announced as follows:

The contract for the erection of Mt. St. Joseph's College has been let and Kruger and Thompson are the lucky ones. The main building will be four stories high, 125 feet long, by 60 wide and 60 high and will cost when completed in the neighborhood of \$40,000.

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Evening Reflector, Abilene, Kansas, May 24, 1887.



The corner stone was laid at five o'clock in the evening on the thirty-first day of July, 1887, in the presence of a large gathering of the citizens of Abilene. The Rt. Rev. Bishop Fink, O.S.B., of Leavenworth officiated, attended by a number of Clergymen from the neighboring towns.<sup>1</sup> The A.O.H. Societies of Chapman and Solomon attended<sup>2</sup> in full regalia.

According to the Evening Reflector, a number of articles were placed in the stone, including a friendly letter addressed to future generations. This letter was written to inform the readers fully of the intention which the promoters had in mind in erecting the building. It contained a list of their names, and the names and contributions of all who had lent assistance to the cause.<sup>3</sup>

The sermon for the occasion was preached by Rev. Father Gleason, S.J.. . . . "A most eloquent discourse and fully suited to the occasion, which lasted forty minutes, the vast audience listening throughout with interest and attention."<sup>4</sup>

The occasion was momentous to Rev. Father Leary and his building committee. They saw in the finished building an educational institution

1. Rev. J. F. Leary of Abilene, Rev. F. Hayden of Kansas City, Rev. John Lee of Manhattan, Rev. G. D. Curtin of Chapman, Rev. B. Hayden of Solomon, and Rev. Father Gleason, S.J., of St. Mary's College, St. Mary's, Kansas.

2. Evening Reflector, August 1, 1887.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

of which any city might well be proud--and the elan of the city newspaper was an echo of their conviction when it went on to say:

"If coming events cast their shadows before, yesterday's dedication is an augury of unparalleled success." 1

The "boom" of 1887 had continued from the first of the year without abatement, but by July its collapse was apparent. Father Leary and his committee pushed the work of the building until the walls were up, and the roof completed. Then came the crash, "and as a breath melts into the wind, the boom was gone." The money already contributed was used up to the last dollar, and a debt of no small amount faced the bewildered workers.

In the meantime another event had occurred which was to affect the establishment now under way in Abilene. This was the division of the Leavenworth diocese, and the erection of two new episcopal sees in the state of Kansas: the diocese of Wichita on July 6, 1887, and that of Concordia on August the second. Rev. Richard Scannell of Nashville, Tennessee, received the announcement from Rome on August the ninth of his nomination to the new see of Concordia. In the diocesan apportionment Abilene remained under the jurisdiction of Bishop Fink of Leavenworth, with its unfinished convent of which the only reality now was a

---

1. Evening Reflector, August 1, 1887.

2. Trials and Triumphs of the Catholic Church in America, Hyland & Co., Chicago, Illinois, 1901, p. 904.

3. Ibid., p. 904.

1  
 heavy debt. To assuage the disappointment of the Abilene people, plans were made for the Sisters to take charge of the parochial school of St. Andrew's parish, for which four Sisters came from Concordia in September. This school had been opened by Father Leary in 1885, when he had generously allowed the two front rooms of the new rectory to be used for the purpose of conducting the school. Forty pupils were in attendance, and for two years the teacher was Miss Elizabeth Haston, a well-educated, young Catholic woman of the parish.

2  
 When Mother M. Stanislaus had visited the convents of the East while on her tour of soliciting funds for the struggling foundation in Kansas, she had occasion to renew her acquaintance with Sister M. Bernard Sheridan of Erie, Pennsylvania, to whom she made an appeal to give her service to the Western Community.

3  
 On the 16th of October, 1877, Sister M. Bernard had been received into the Community of the Sisters of St. Joseph at Erie, Pennsylvania, at the age of seventeen, and now at the age of twenty-six, young and strong, educated in nursing as well as in teaching, she responded immediately to the appeal from the West. What a joy her decision must have brought to the heart of Mother M. Stanislaus, who with prophetic instinct, realized that in this promising young Religious were combined a genuine spirit of sacrifice, and a superb singleness of purpose.

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

Sister M. Bernard came to Kansas during the summer of 1886, and when the appointments were made for the parochial school in Abilene in 1887, she was named superior, and with Sister M. Domitilla, Sister M. Angela, and Sister M. Amelia arrived in Abilene the evening of September <sup>1</sup> the seventh.

They went directly to St. Andrew's Church where in the presence of their Eucharistic Lord they begged God's blessing on their new undertaking. From the church they went to the rectory where they were welcomed by Father Leary with whom they had supper. <sup>2</sup>

The brick dwelling on the grounds of the unfinished building had been repaired, and here the Sisters were to live. The school was a <sup>3</sup> frame building which had been the first church in Abilene. The distance from their home to the Church and school was two miles, and to furnish them a means of transportation. Father Leary generously presented them with his dearest possessions, a horse and a carriage. "Old Charley" had once been a race horse, a fact of which the Sisters experienced evidence on several occasions when they least expected it. However, a long period of faithful service began that very evening when they drove him for the first time out to their new home.

The Sisters attended Mass at St. Andrew's Church for the first

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

time on the following day, the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady. Every morning the Sisters drove the two miles to participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass until a chapel could be prepared in their convent home.

On September the nineteenth, 1887, the school was opened with seventy children in attendance. Sister M. Bernard and Sister M. Amelia<sup>1</sup> were the teachers. With the teaching of their classes, the Sisters combined the work of the hostler and the janitor which two charges were attended to before, and after school, faithfully, as part of the daily routine. To save the carriage from wear and tear the Sister-teachers procured a two-wheeled cart to convey them back and forth from school. The road in winter from the city out to Mt. St. Joseph's, as the convent was designated from the beginning, was usually a mass of mud, or ruts almost hub deep from January until May. The Sisters rode back and forth perched high on the frail conveyance that offered little resistance to the jolting over the rough roads.<sup>2</sup>

As to the convent dwelling, there as a plainness about it which almost suggested destitution. It sheltered the Sisters, but was innocent of paint, veneer, or varnish.

With the coming of Bishop Seannell to his diocese after his consecration on November 30, 1887, in Nashville, Tennessee, Bishop Fink

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

began negotiations to maintain the Abilene Mission which was under his jurisdiction as a separate foundation from the Motherhouse in Concordia. The Bishop of Concordia gave permission to the Sisters in Abilene to render their allegiance to the Bishop of Leavenworth, if they wished to do so. In the choice, Sister M. Amelia and Sister M. Angela returned to Concordia, and were replaced by Sister M. Armella and Sister M. Sebastian, who volunteered for Abilene. Bishop Fink then deputed his Vicar-General, the Very Rev. John F. Cunningham, to go to Abilene to organize the members of the Community there into a diocesan Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Leavenworth. He appointed Sister M. Bernard Sheridan as Superior. The date of the organization was March 25, 1888, just fifty-two years after the first Sisters of St. Joseph had arrived in the United States from France.

The record of the organization contains the following account:

"We, Sister M. Bernard Sheridan, Sister M. Domitilla Gannon, and Sister M. Armella McGrath, in obedience to our Superior, Rt. Rev. Bishop Fink, O.S.B., Bishop of Leavenworth, do hereby assume the debt of Mt. St. Joseph's College and Academy, Abilene, Kansas. The building and thirty acres are mortgaged for \$7,200 at seven per cent. The above mortgage is held by Mr. R. Chapin of Canandaigua, New York. There are eighty acres east of Buckeye Avenue which belong to the Academy. Mr. H. Bolte of St. Louis, Missouri, has a mortgage of \$5,000 on the eighty acres at six per cent, payable annually; the principal to be paid in five years." 1

The two mortgages plus unpaid bills on material and labor amounted in all to \$15,000, the debt which the little Community had agreed to

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

assume on the unfinished college. Their total income when it could be collected was twenty dollars a month each, for the two teachers at St. Andrew's School, but firm in their faith that the Providence of God has created religious orders and sustains them, the four Sisters willingly took up the burden of a foundation.

In the Spring of 1888 a noted missionary from San Francisco, California, Rev. Patrick Henneberry, C.P.P.S., who was an uncle to the late Msgr. T. H. Kinsella of Paola, gave a series of missions throughout the diocese. The first was given in Abilene, and others followed in the neighboring parishes of Solomon, Chapman, Junction City, and Manhattan. During his mission in Abilene the venerable priest had met Mother M. Bernard and her Sisters. He was greatly interested in the foundation, and proved that interest by the promotion of its cause. In every one of his missions he delivered sermons on religious vocations, and gave instructions on the religious life. <sup>1</sup> To those who sought his advice in vocational matters he spoke of the dire need of religious for the Catholic schools on the Kansas plains. At one of his sermons in Junction City were present one Sunday afternoon six young women to whom his sermon had made a special appeal. Four of them were to be among the first group of candidates to be received at Mt. St. Joseph's, while the other two were received later.

<sup>2</sup>  
On Ascension Thursday, May 10, 1888, the four above-mentioned young

---

1. Sister M. Louis, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas, Interview, October 31, 1936.

2. Ibid.

women and another one from Abilene met in the convent parlor at Mt. St. Joseph's to become acquainted with Mother M. Bernard, and to make known to her their desire to become members of the Community. There was mutual joy on that occasion. The prospective candidates were thrilled at meeting Mother M. Bernard, the young Religious whose youthfulness was so evident, yet whose admirable endowments of courage, exhaustless energy, and initiative, and faith in her cause were an inspiration to that band of eager aspirants.

Mother M. Bernard and the three Sisters of her Community were deeply touched that their prayers for additional members were to be so early, and so abundantly answered. Their number would be more than doubled, and that in less than six months of the Community's existence. What an event in the history of a foundation is the coming of the first candidates.

The first aspirant to arrive was Miss Mary Shinn<sup>1</sup>ers, on July 16. Miss Shinners was born in Ireland, and had come to America with her uncle, Rev. John Fogarty, one time pastor of Junction City. Two brothers, John and Cornelius Fogarty had come to America while quite young. The former, completing his studies for the priesthood, was ordained in Leavenworth. Cornelius Fogarty engaged in the cattle trade, and for several years drove his herds to Wichita, and farther north to Newton and Abilene. His fortune accumulated he settled in Junction City, where he purchased a magnificent home, and engaged in milling.

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.



To this home he invited his two nieces. In 1884 Mary Shinnors with her sister, Sarah, accepted the invitation to come to Junction City. Sarah, the older, became the lady of her Uncle's home while Mary was sent by him to St. Mary's Academy of Leavenworth to complete her education. After her graduation she engaged in teaching in the public schools, and at the time of her decision to enter religion she was employed in Junction City. She was the oldest of the five candidates, being twenty-six years of age.

1  
 On July 17 Miss Annie Kennedy followed Miss Shinnors, and, on July 2  
 29, Miss Rose Caspar came, both of Junction City. Annie Kennedy was born in Leavenworth, but for three years she had made her home in Junction City. She was twenty years old at the time she came to Mt. St. Joseph's. Rose Caspar was born in Junction City, and had lived there during her lifetime of twenty-two years.

On July 31 Miss Nora McMillan, the fourth of the band, entered. Her 3  
 home was in Manhattan where she had been born seventeen years before. She had received her education, including music, at Mt. St. Scholastica's Academy in Atchison. She had learned of the new Community in Abilene through Father Henneberry, whose mission she had attended while visiting in Junction City.

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.  
 2. Ibid.  
 3. Ibid.

Miss Marian McInerney, the last to enter, arrived August 14. She was born in Leavenworth nineteen years before, but had come to Abilene while still quite young where her father had become a prosperous merchant. She was educated at St. Mary's Academy, Leavenworth, and afterward graduated in instrumental music and voice culture with the Sisters of Notre Dame at Quincy, Illinois.<sup>1</sup>

To the poor, lowly convent they came and from the first moment of their consecration they, "As living stones built up a spiritual house."  
1 Peter ii, 5.

In the meantime Mother M. Bernard and Sister M. Sebastian left Abilene for the East in the early part of June to negotiate a loan, and to solicit funds to finish the east wing of the college building. Their trip was not without some fruit, and upon their return July 18, Mother M. Bernard immediately engaged the contractors to finish six of the rooms which included a dining room, dormitory, and two class rooms for students.<sup>2</sup> During Mother M. Bernard's absence Sister M. Domitilla, and Sister M. Armella had worked unceasingly in preparation for the coming of the candidates. Sister M. Domitilla planted and cultivated a garden while Sister M. Armella worked in the house. The Sisters had converted one of their seven rooms into a chapel. Sister M. Armella with her own hands and the carpenter's tools had built the altar which was of pine

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

boards painted white, and draped in pleated scrim. To complete the furnishing of the humble chapel she fashioned a kneeling bench of sufficient length to accommodate five persons. She built a prie-dieu for the little sanctuary, and later a confessional that served the convent for more than twenty-five years.<sup>1</sup> When the Sisters, commenting on her work, asked her how she had been able to do it, she told them that the foster-father of our Lord, St. Joseph himself was a carpenter, and that she was his sister. She was truly a humble Sister of St. Joseph.

She lived to celebrate the golden jubilee of her life as a Religious on March 19, 1928. On that day in the Chapel of Mt. St. Mary's, four elegant, gold-plated vases, engraved to commemorate the occasion were placed upon the marble altar. Fitting it was that in her honor, who had built the first altar utterly void of ornament used by the Community, these beautiful golden vases should symbolize the accumulation of her golden years.

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

### CHAPTER III

#### PIONEER MEMBERS

Mother M. Bernard, birth, parentage, characteristics.--  
 First Spiritual Retreat.--First Religious Reception.--  
 Opening of school at Mt. St. Joseph's.--More Candidates.  
 --Mother M. Bernard obtained a loan.--Community moves into  
 new building.

-----

The year 1888 was an eventful one to the zealous though small band who were so quickly, and so surely united in a spirit of consecration to an exalted purpose. Outstanding in that group was Mother M. Bernard who imparted to the entire Community a temperament and character as distinct as those of any individual, and she sustained the group by her great and vivid personality. 'Tis the Providence of God that fortifies a Community with personalities such as hers. He inspires the courage, and gives qualities natural and supernatural, both of mind and heart. In Mother M. Bernard to a marked degree were to be found valor, magnanimity, and natural goodness, vivacity and penetration, all of which would have been but an illusion had it not been for the profound depth of piety for which she was noted. Jeanne Sheridan was born in Elphin, County Roscommon, Ireland, December 4, 1860. She was the youngest of seven

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

children, having two brothers, John and Owen, and four Sisters, Nora, Maria, Eliza, and Anne. Her father, James Sheridan, left Ireland in 1862 to come to America. He and his wife, Jenny, had planned that he would make the trip ahead of the family, purchase a home, and when all was in readiness he would return to Ireland to bring the family back to America with him. The Mother busied herself in preparation for the move while she awaited her husband's return. When a reasonable time had elapsed, and no word came from him she wrote to her friends in Lockport, New York, whom he had expected to reach. What was the consternation of the family to learn that he had never arrived there. He was never seen or heard of again. Mrs. Sheridan waited for a year at the end of which she took her family and embarked for America. She settled in Lockport, New York, where by the work of her own hands she sustained, reared, and educated her seven children. Her courage and will power were not lacking in her youngest child, Jeanne, who had at the age of seventeen years entered the novitiate of the Sisters of St. Joseph at Erie, Pennsylvania, and who now at twenty-seven assumed the responsibilities of Superior and Foundress of a religious Community.

The growth of the Congregation was not the result of a plan deliberately formed in the mind of the Foundress. Her companions of the pioneer band who survive her today are firm in the belief that it was a goal reached by her charitable impulses under the guidance of God. She had accepted with resignation the place which Divine Providence had founded for her, as great Religious have always done, and confided

herself, childlike, to His guidance. The secret of her wonderful personality was faith; faith in God, faith in the cause, faith in her little band of fellow-workers, faith in the great people of Kansas, and faith in herself. This faith lighted up the horizon, and showed her the great possibilities of the golden West. Without financial resources, and in the absence of all material adjuncts which are deemed indispensable by men of the world for the accomplishment of civic enterprises, she, by dint of moral strength, and the prayerful cooperation of her companions, laid deep and strong the foundations of her work.

<sup>2</sup>  
 Mother M. Bernard was always, and everywhere a woman in every fibre of her being. In her position naturally her contacts with the outside world were many. Those of her contemporaries who had no ear for her words, no sympathy with her ways, nor understanding of her mission were not unmindful of the charm of her personality. They never failed to associate with her name a dignity which was queenly in its reserve. She had a confidence in human nature that was childlike in its forgetfulness of past ingratitude and disappointments. The strength and nobility of her character were manifested in her constant regard for erring human nature, because she loved the God of human nature for His own sake. The sum total of her spiritual teaching was charity, and she loved and labored for her fellow being because in him she beheld the image of her Lord and Master. As a friend she was exquisite; she readily recognized those

---

1. The Catholic Advance, Wichita, Kansas, February 8, 1924.

2. The consensus of those members of the Community who survive Mother M. Bernard today infers her characteristic traits in accord with the above exposition. The writer regrets her inability to more faithfully combine into a single and consistent impression the character of her whose re-

whom she felt to be akin to her. One felt in her company a strong desire of obtaining her friendship, and cherished a hope of having obtained it. She had a native spirit of merriment that could not resist a good joke, yet she had always, and everywhere the deepest and most essential element of human kindness; and her sense of the laughable in trivial misfortunes was not so keen as her ready and active sympathy in great. Her merry and fortunate thoughts spoke as much from her eyes and her gestures as in the quick wit of her Irish tongue, for she had wit of her own as well as spirit and courage of her own. She was the life of her Community, and with a memory stored with anecdotes her conversation had every fascination that religion, truth, or novelty could give it. Therefore, she was popular and widely loved, and much sought after, and she never failed to give that thrill of exaltation which is one of the greatest forces that can uplift the mind and heart. The influence of such a one flowed out and on beyond the Sisters whom she received and professed, beyond those who knew her to those who never knew her, and her charity embraced those whom she never knew or met; and she labored to impress upon her Sisters the fact, that there is no existence uneventful to the recording angel, or unmarked by him.

She was always and everywhere zealous for religious vocations, and with what marvelous skill she cultivated the soil of human nature, and profited by the least token of fertility to sow therein the seed of religious piety, and she labored to enrich it with the graces of religious profession.

---

markable traits should ever be an abiding tradition in the Community which she founded.

With Mother M. Bernard as their superior, the five candidates were soon imbued with the same ardor and enthusiasm which emanated from her, the same belief in her mission, its justice, nobility, and ultimate triumph to life eternal. They were taken captive in the same net of charity, and drawn forward by an apparent inevitableness of the Providence of God.

One may readily conceive that the hand of destiny was there--as only one specially gifted as was Mother M. Bernard could take her place at the head of the struggling Community in a time when the way often seemed "desert and pathless land, where no water is." The laborious beginning of the work, the unfinished convent which gave plenty of opportunity for active devotion, and for practicing poverty and charity, served to consolidate the basis upon which a spiritual edifice was to be reared; and under the tutelage of Mother M. Bernard was cultivated in the novitiate, beyond occupations which in themselves were very commonplace, very mean, the greatest, deepest, and closest spiritual union with God. With true fervor of spirit the Community accepted the destitution of the little convent as a source of delight, and they tasted the joy which always accompanies privations generously accepted, and the inconvenience which they had to suffer furnished matter for much merriment at recreation.

For the feast of St. Bernard, August the twentieth, 1888, the candidates who were musically gifted planned a surprise for Mother M. Bernard, and in the stolen moments during her trips to town they practiced a hymn to be sung on the occasion. She was truly and agreeably



surprised when the two, Miss Nora McMillan and Miss Marian McInerney, without the aid of instrumental accompaniment but with real devotion sang during the Mass of the day a hymn in honor of St. Bernard, the <sup>1</sup> first hymn to be sung in the Community.

Not without hardship and sacrifice was expansion won and progress made, but Mother M. Bernard was the ship-builder and she it was who encouraged and steered all. In the growth and development of her Community, she visualized and urged so many of the ideas generally considered beneficial which are now so much accepted, that it is hard to imagine existence without them.

Hindrances and contradictions were a major part of their daily portion. They constitute an essential part of the religious vocation as well as its consolation. But in the midst of the many contradictions, those Sisters who formed the nucleus of the Congregation have always maintained their apostolic spirit. It survives today in the three living members of that pioneer band who, as true Religious, always acting entirely in the spirit of their Congregation, have attracted many vocations to their ranks. Few notebooks, cameras, or portfolios were ever brought into play to record the progress as day followed day. The routine of religious observance was paramount because they lived only for the service of the King. And although He went before and made the crooked places straight, yet the way marked out by their Benevolent Creator was anything but soft.

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

As one may have judged ere this, there was no money for hired help and all the work of the farm and convent fell to the Sisters. Manual labor was apportioned to the strength and aptitude of each, but the distinction between choir Sister and lay Sister never existed in the Community.<sup>1</sup> The labors and privations endured, daily, added to their good spirits, and there was no indication of any regret for what they had left. And although they in their filial solicitude looked to Mother M. Bernard as their guiding star, she on her part, abided by them, and their patience and fervor were her greatest consolation.

To facilitate the work of the Community more effectively in the opening of their school in September, Mother M. Bernard petitioned the Rt. Rev. Bishop to shorten the probationary period of the candidates and allow them to be clothed in the religious habit before time to open the school.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the dispensation was granted by his Lordship and the date of the religious Reception was set for August 30.<sup>3</sup> Rev. Father Henneberry conducted the Spiritual Retreat which the Community made in preparation for the event. The day of the Reception was the feast of St. Rose, the first American saint.<sup>4</sup> The ceremonies, including the Profession of Sister Mary Sebastian and the investing in the re-

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

ligious habit of the five candidates, were held in St. Andrew's Church. The Evening Reflector in an article entitled An Interesting Event, describes the ceremony in detail. High Mass was celebrated by Rev. J. F. Leary, pastor of St. Andrew's Church. Very Rev. Dean Hurley of Junction City was present in the sanctuary. When the Mass was ended Rev. Father Henneberry delivered the sermon of the day.

After the sermon the five young ladies dressed in white satin, veiled and wreathed as brides went forth to the altar and knelt at the railing. Rev. Father Henneberry, assisted by Rev. Father Hurley and Father Leary, asked the following questions: What do you ask, my child? They each answered: I ask that I may become a member of the Order of the Sisters of St. Joseph. They were then asked if they were acting of their own free will, after which followed other questions according to the ritual. All being answered they withdrew to the parlor of the parsonage, were assisted by Mother M. Bernard they laid aside their bridal robes and donned the venerable habit of the Sisters of St. Joseph. They then returned and knelt at the altar where more questions were asked to which answers were made in clear and decided voices and thus they were ushered into the religious state.

Then followed the profession of her vows by Sister M. Sebastian after which the congregation was dismissed. During the whole ceremony the church was crowded to its utmost and those present were most attentive to all the ceremony and the strictest order prevailed. 1

One of the most interesting moments in the ceremony especially to the candidates, was the conferring of the names by which the future Sisters were to be known. They were read to them at the close of the ceremony by the Officiant. Mother M. Bernard had selected them. Miss Mary Shinnors was given the name of Sister Mary Rose in honor of the saint upon whose feast the event had occurred. As a compliment to the

---

1. Evening Reflector, August 1, 1888.

Rt. Rev. Bishop his saint was chosen as patron of Miss Annie Kennedy, and she received the name of Sister Mary Louis. Miss Rose Caspar was given the name of Sister Mary Joseph in honor of the patron of the Community. Miss Nora McMillan received the name of Sister Mary Patricia in honor of St. Patrick, who was the patron of Father Henneberry. Miss Marian McInerney was given the name of Sister Mary Agnes in honor of the patron of Mother Agnes Spencer of Erie, who had received Mother M. Bernard as a candidate.

When Saint Andrew's parochial school opened on the tenth of September, Sister M. Sebastian and Sister M. Patricia took charge of the classes. On the first morning of school Mother M. Bernard was taking the two Sisters down when Sister M. Sebastian suddenly exclaimed at the sight of a young woman walking in the direction of Mt. St. Joseph's, recognizing in her one of her friends from her home town of Carbondale, Pennsylvania. It was Miss Annie Burke whom Mother M. Bernard was expecting as she had made application to enter the novitiate, and had received permission to come when she was ready. Before the end of the month Miss Eleanor Mahoney of Prescott, Ontario, also entered the Community.

By the first of October, 1888, Kruger and Thompson had completed the rooms of the Academy according to the contract made with them by Mother M. Bernard on her return from the East. When the work on the building had stopped in 1887, the entrances had been boarded up, and between that time and the coming of the Sisters, the circus advertisers

had covered the boarded spaces with their elaborate posters. The Community record notes the fact that by October the first, the last sign of the circus had disappeared as the newly finished doors were hung in  
<sup>1</sup>  
 place.

On October the first school was opened with seven boarders and  
<sup>2</sup>  
 sixteen day pupils. The teachers were: Sister M. Rose and Sister M. Louis in the Academic branches, and Sister M. Agnes in the music department. The number of pupils continued to grow during the year, and by commencement time there were forty in attendance.

The Community owed much to Father Leary for his extreme goodness in behalf of the Congregation. He was paternal in his devotedness, and the pioneers in their inexperience would have made many a blunder had it not been for his wise counsels. He realized and appreciated the great work to which the members had generously consecrated themselves, and he never failed to show that appreciation. He unhesitatingly accepted the duties of Chaplain to Mt. St. Joseph's although he had an outside mission at Herington, Kansas, besides his parish of St. Andrew's. The Sunday on which he attended his mission the little Fold at Mt. St. Joseph's were deprived of assisting at Mass.  
<sup>4</sup>  
 But as much as he could

- 
1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.
  2. The boarders were: Minnie, Jenny, and Margaret Berry and Mame Allen of Abilene, Jenny Dempsy of Manhattan, Rose Eisenhower of Solomon, and Gertrude Sargent of Dwight.
  3. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.
  4. Ibid.

give, he gave and his name is recorded as assisting at every Reception<sup>1</sup> and Profession ceremony that took place at Mt. St. Joseph's.

When Mother M. Bernard's friends in the East learned of her founding a new establishment in Kansas, there was considerable interest manifested. Several members of the clergy used their influence in procuring subjects for the new Congregation, and in striving to interest persons of means to aid in the work of charity. The disappointments in the latter project were various, and more frequently the interest cooled in the face of monetary sacrifice to the cause. However, in the year 1889 the number in the Community was increased by the reception of five new members--one of the most encouraging signs of future prosperity. Their coming was an occasion of joy and consolation to the ones who had preceded them because they came as an answer to prayer.

On the nineteenth of March, the feast of St. Joseph, Miss Eleanor Mahoney and Miss Annie Burke were given the religious habit.<sup>2</sup> The students' dining room in the Academy building was converted into a chapel. The altar and fixtures were moved from the Sisters' house, not a difficult thing to do, and the ceremony was held in the convent in the presence of the Sisters, their students, and friends. Mass was offered by Very Rev. D. J. Hurley, Dean of Junction City, with Rev. J. F. Leary and Rev. John Lee of Manhattan assisting. Immediately following the Mass

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

the two candidates received the habit. The names conferred upon them were: Miss Eleanor Mahoney, Sister Mary Antony, and Miss Annie Burke, Sister Mary St. John.

In the same month on the twenty-eighth day Mother M. Bernard secured a loan from the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company of Milwaukee. She paid the mortgage of \$7,200 held by Mr. R. Chapin of Canandaigua, and took out an insurance policy for \$12,000 on the Academy, which with a mortgage on the Academy, also, of \$10,000 she turned over to the above company of Milwaukee. The balance of the money was applied toward finishing the first and second floors of the convent building.

Sister M. Domitilla and Sister M. Joseph spent the greater part of the following summer soliciting donations. As a result of their efforts a team of horses was procured for farm work, and a herd of dairy cows was started. The Sister-teachers spent their vacation preparing for diocesan examinations which were given in Leavenworth. Sister M. Rose, Sister M. Louis, and Sister M. Patricia went from Mt. St. Joseph's and were successful in obtaining the diocesan certificates to teach.

In the meantime Kruger and Thompson had completed their work on the building, and the Sisters moved into it from their almost insufferable quarters. Mother M. Bernard had the happiness of directing the moving. She felt that the progress made was by the sweet Providence of God, and the union that reigned among the earnest members of the Community. It was her attitude throughout the years of her office that

whatever the accomplishment might be, it was the fruit of the labors and privations of the Sisters who submitted so religiously to her direction.

Among the most treasured of the new furnishings obtained during the summer was an altar of oak finished in brown, and beautifully decorated in gold leaf. It was the gift of Rt. Rev. Bishop Fink, O.S.B.. The chapel being finished and the altar installed, Mass was offered for the first time on August 2, 1899, the feast of St. Alphonsus de Ligouri.<sup>1</sup> Next to the altar in importance was a Chickering concert grand piano valued at \$1,000, which was purchased from the Carl Hoffman Music Company of Kansas City.

The commodious chapel, the additional classrooms, and the expansion of the living quarters gave an assurance of permanency to the foundation. This assurance was heightened by the arrival of additional candidates. During the summer of 1889 Mother M. Bernard made application to St. Mary's College at St. Mary's, Kansas, for a Retreat Master, but the reply received stated that the number in the Community was too small to warrant the service requested. They were now fourteen in number including the candidates. Mother M. Bernard then appealed to the Franciscan Fathers of Emporia, where Father Leonard Nurre was the superior. He responded by coming himself to give the Sisters the advantages of a Spiritual Retreat.

When he had finished his course of religious conferences, and Mother M. Bernard made him an offering he refused to accept any monetary

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.



compensation because, as he stated, of the many places in which the Community had need of it. For five successive years Father Leonard gave his time and spiritual support to the Sisters at Mt. St. Joseph's in their annual Retreat.<sup>1</sup>

At the close of the Retreat on August 11, Miss Winifred Hayden of New York City received the religious habit, with the name of Sister Mary Frances.<sup>2</sup> Rev. Father Leonard officiated, assisted by Rev. Father Leary and Rev. Bernard Hayden of Solomon, who was a cousin to Sister Mary Frances.<sup>3</sup> On December the eighth the third Reception of the year was held in which Miss Margaret Jordan of New York City, and Miss Bertha Arnest of Ogden, Kansas, were given the religious habit. Rev. Father Leonard officiated at this Reception, also, and was assisted by Rev. Bernard Hayden of Solomon. Miss Jordan received the name of Sister Mary Leonard,<sup>4</sup> and Miss Arnest, that of Sister Mary Thomas.

In the few brief months during which the little Community had marked time, Providence had seemed to show approval of its project. Their number was increased by ten new members, among whom were those qualified to establish an educational institution, as well as those who willingly, and generously labored at the difficult domestic duties of household, farm, and laundry. The building had been finished and furnished

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

for school work, and more than forty students were enrolled. Before another year, expansion was to begin with the Sisters prepared to take up work in outside schools.

## CHAPTER IV

## BRANCHING OUT

Opening of first Mission.--Members of Community from Emerald, Kansas.--Delegates of A.P.A. visit Mt. St. Joseph's.--Death of Sister M. Sebastian.--Opening of St. Thomas' School, Armourdale.--First Profession.--Two Receptions, 1890.--St. John the Evangelist's School, Argentine.--Bishop Fink presides at Reception, 1891.--Resident Chaplain at Mt. St. Joseph's, 1892.--St. Joseph's School, Wathena.--First Graduation at Mt. St. Joseph's.--Largest Reception, 1893.--Sister M. Gertrude professed on deathbed, 1894.--Father Leary leaves Abilene for Chapman.--Opening of St. Leo's School, Horton.--Four schools opened in 1895: Atlantic Iowa; Frontenac, Pittsburg, Wea.--St. Brendan's School, Plattsburg, Missouri, 1896.--Institute, St. Mary's Academy, Leavenworth.

-----

In February, 1890, a request came to Mother M. Bernard from St. Patrick's parish of Emerald, Kansas, for Sisters to teach the Emerald School. The request came from Rev. Father J. B. D'Connell who was pastor at the time. Emerald was a settlement of Irish Catholics, and the school to be filled was the public school of the district. Sister M. Rose and Sister M. Patricia were selected as teachers and Sister M. Armella as superior was also the housekeeper. Sister M. Rose and Sister M. Patricia to fulfil the state requirements had to take the county examination at Garnett, Kansas, for certificates to teach in the public school. The county examination was not new to Sister M. Rose, but both she and Sister

M. Patricia were the admiration of the Community when the results of  
<sup>1</sup>  
 the examination were learned.

In Emerald the Sisters experienced the greatest kindness from the people of the parish, whose devotion to them was manifested so often in a substantial way. Being the first mission it was always dear to the Sisters. Not many parishes have given more generously to the novitiate than did St. Patrick's parish of Emerald.--Sister M. Clementine Doyle, Sister M. Teresa Mackin and her sister, Sister M. Martha, Sister M. Lawrence Meagher, Sister M. Mechtildis O'Mara and her two sisters, Sister M. Gertrude and Sister M. Helen, Sister M. Jerome Welsh, and Sister M. de Chantal Cotter. Sister M. Clementine and Sister M. Teresa entered at the close of the school year in 1891.

The records show that at the beginning of the year 1890, the Sisters took out a charter of incorporation of "The Convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Mt. St. Joseph's Academy, Abilene, Kansas," by which the Community was put on a legal basis, and given a legal existence. The objects and purposes set forth and recognized by the state for which the corporation was formed included the teaching of such studies as pertain to academical education, and the performance of such works of mercy as visiting the sick, and caring for orphans and destitute widows. The number of Trustees in the Corporation were five, and their names appear on the charter: Sister M. Bernard, Sister M. Domitilla,  
<sup>2</sup>  
 Sister M. Armella, Sister M. Louis, and Sister M. Agnes.

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

In the early part of 1890 the Sisters had their first, and only<sup>1</sup> experience with the American Protective Association. The association had many zealous members on the sparsely settled plains of Kansas, and the vicinity of Abilene and Chapman was not without its quota. One afternoon in February a number of the members decided it would be a praiseworthy act to satisfy themselves and their fellow members as to the amount of ammunition stored in the big convent on the hill. Accordingly, fourteen men presented themselves at the door, and stated their intention to the Sister-portress who met them. Sister informed Mother M. Bernard of the visitors and their design. Mother M. Bernard summoned Sister M. Antony to accompany her. Sister M. Antony was older in years than Mother M. Bernard, or than any of the other Sisters of the Community, and she was quite fearless, never the least intimidated at anything at which another might quail. The two went out to meet the delegation, and in a most gracious and casual manner as if the incident were of ordinary occurrence, the Sisters led the men from garret to basement not missing a single room or corner, Mother M. Bernard or Sister M. Antony suggesting ways by which the investigators could be the more sure of their search. As the search continued the men became more and more ashamed of their venture as Mother M. Bernard, in her incontrovertible sincerity of exposition, convinced<sup>2</sup> them so thoroughly of their wrong impression.

As to Mother M. Bernard it was to her an occasion; she who always

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

found mankind a perpetual food for observation and curiosity, because of his immortal soul, and she who steadily aimed at the one great, lofty object of uplifting the soul, made use of this occasion. Deluded creatures were objects of pity to her, and with her keen understanding of human nature, she easily distinguished a deluded creature from one with evil intent. She was quick with the glow and vitality of intelligence and emotion, charged with the electric force of sympathy, and she could express herself in words that glowed and glittered. Her sympathy went out always to the ignorant and the uninformed, and before she allowed her visitors to withdraw, in an earnest endeavor to dispel their prejudice, she gave them a lecture on convent life that was authentic in its source. She had reason to believe that the time was not ill-spent as the visitors left apparently quite satisfied, and to their credit<sup>1</sup> they evinced the fact that they were truly ashamed.

There was a rich human side to Mother M. Bernard's personality that was well-balanced and sane, and she had a native tact that enabled her to meet the most peculiar situations with the least discomposure. And while she could contend, command, and control, yet her stand for her religion against those separated from her by creed was ever maintained by means of the most cordial charity, and the most consummate diplomacy. Had St. Francis de Sales himself taught her his maxim that "one may catch more flies with a spoonful of honey than with a barrel of vinegar", she could not have been more imbued with the import of his teaching.<sup>2</sup>

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

It was in the summer of 1890 that death made its first visit to Mt. St. Joseph's. Sister Mary Sebastian, young and strong, was chosen as the first victim. Love's refining process had completed its work in her soul, and one may think that it was ripe for heaven. Her name in the young Community brought to mind all that was attractive in virtue. Sister M. Sebastian and Sister M. Leonard had closed school at St. Andrew's on June the twentieth. For several days Sister had not been well, and on the day of the closing she went to bed. Her illness<sup>1</sup> was typhoid fever which culminated in her death on July the eighteenth.

Mother M. Bernard was her devoted nurse during her illness, giving up food and sleep to watch with delicate, considerate care at the bedside of the sick Sister. The entire Community, twenty in all, including the candidates were present at her deathbed where Father Leary offered the prayers of the dying. There was genuine grief in the hearts of the Sisters and especially in that of the Foundress to whom the loss of the useful member was a harsh trial. She had felt in her a real support and kindred spirit. The two were of one age, being in their twenty-ninth year. Sister died Friday evening as the sun was setting, and on Sunday afternoon the Sisters carried her remains to the Catholic cemetery adjacent to the Convent acres on the west.<sup>2</sup>

In September, 1890, Rev. John Lee of Armourdale applied for Sisters to teach in St. Thomas' School. Father Lee's parishioners were for the

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

greater part the workers at the Armour and the Cudahy Packing plants. He had built a frame school and provided a commodious convent of brick for the Sisters which still serves today. Sister M. Armella, Sister M. Clare, Sister M. Antony, and Sister M. Leonard<sup>1</sup> were sent by Mother M. Bernard to take charge of the school. From the time the Sisters first went to Armourdale, the convent there with its many conveniences was a most helpful asset to the Community. It was large enough to accommodate a number of Sisters besides those engaged in the school, and Mother M. Bernard took advantage of this convenience to allow Sisters to study in Kansas City especially during the summer months.

Father Lee, who was of a delicate constitution, contracted a pulmonary infection which caused his death in 1897.<sup>2</sup> He was succeeded by Rev. John Ward who was later to become Bishop of Leavenworth.

The Commencement exercises of Mt. St. Joseph's were held in the city opera house at the close of the school year. An elaborate program was carried out with participants from St. Andrew's grade school, as well as from the Academy. Sister Mary Agnes directed the production of "A Crown of Glory"<sup>3</sup> which was rendered with great success.

As it seemed to be the custom of that day to have a long program, it was adhered to exactly. However, the Sisters who recall the happy results of the first Commencement entertainment to be given to the public

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.



are of one opinion, that a gratifying change exists between the present time and 1890, when the exercises lasted three and one half hours. However, the performance, in spite of the time which it demanded, received every mark of appreciation from those present.

The principal character in "A Crown of Glory" was Miss Margaret Glenn, one of the boarders at the Academy. Margaret entered the novitiate the following day. Sister M. Domitilla who returned from Carbondale, Pennsylvania, the twenty-third of June, was accompanied by Miss Brigid Taylor and Miss Mary Ann Barbour who also came to enter. Besides these three the summer brought to the novitiate Miss Catherine Keleher, another pupil of Mt. St. Joseph's, Miss Alice Maher of Solomon,<sup>1</sup> and Miss Katherine Blake of Lyndon, Wisconsin.

<sup>2</sup>  
The close of the annual Retreat, August 31, 1890, which had been conducted by Father Leonard, was followed by the Religious Profession of the five novices, who had now completed their two years of preparation for taking the three simple vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience. They received on that day the cross which is the sign of the Profession of a Sister of St. Joseph, and by it they pledged to consecrate to their Heavenly Spouse an undivided heart completely detached from all earthly things, and with it, also, their health and their lives which they willed to sacrifice out of love for God to the service of charity. The thought

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

of absolute consecration seemed to set aside every idea of sacrifice except its beauty and its triumph.

The ceremony took place August 31, at the hands of Rev. Father Leonard. The five novices who became professed Sisters were, Sister Mary Rose, Sister Mary Louis, Sister Mary Joseph, Sister Mary Patricia,  
1  
and Sister Mary Agnes.

Two religious Receptions were held in 1890--one on April the seventh in which Miss Alice Shealy of Delphi, Indiana, became Sister Mary Aurelia, Miss Elizabeth Woods of Council Grove, Kansas, became Sister Mary Clare, and Miss Eleanor Bell of Osage City, became Sister  
2  
Mary Leo.

The second Reception was on the twenty-seventh of December for the candidates who had entered during the summer and fall. Miss Margaret Glenn received the name of Sister Mary Genevieve, Miss Brigid Taylor, Sister Mary Magdalene, Miss Mary Ann Barbour, Sister Mary de Sales, Miss Catherine Keleher, Sister Mary Aloysia, Miss Alice Maher,  
3  
Sister Mary Barbara, and Miss Katherine Blake, Sister Mary Bonaventure.

In Sister M. Aloysia, even as a novice, the Community beheld as it were a child of benediction chosen by Divine Providence to be one of the most trusted associates of Mother M. Bernard, and in their friendship was found that rare mean between likeness and unlikeness. They were both

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

keenly intelligent with a luminous comprehension of human nature and its ways, and something between them created mutual harmony and understanding. While Sister M. Aloysia was still a novice, Mother M. Bernard had her<sup>1</sup> to assist in directing the novices, as the Community was yet too few in number to assign a Sister to this special charge. Sister M. Aloysia was ingenious in smoothing over the difficulties of religious life for her companions, and her pleasing unassumingness and forgetfulness of self made her always accessible to one who was troubled. Repose, humility, and mortification were distinguishing features of her character which marked her from her entrance into religion throughout the years of her profession.

In January, 1891, St. John the Evangelist's School was opened in Argentine with Sister M. Bonaventure, Sister M. Joseph, and Sister M. Leo as teachers. Rev. N. Neusius was pastor. From the opening in January to the end of the school year the Sisters lived at the convent<sup>2</sup> in Armourdale and went to Argentine on the street car every morning. In September, 1891, a house was ready for them in Argentine, and a fourth<sup>3</sup> Sister was added to the mission.

On the thirtieth day of April, 1891, Miss Catherine Dolin of Peoria, Illinois, and Miss Nora Blake of Lyndon, Wisconsin, a sister to Sister M. Bonaventure, were received, and given the names of Sister M. Austin.

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

and Sister M. Eulalia, Rev. Father Leary officiating. On July the  
 twelfth, 1891, Miss Margaret Riordan of Solomon was given the habit  
 with the name of Sister Mary Bernardine, Rev. Father Leary officiating.  
 On the twenty-seventh of December, the same year, Miss Alice Doyle of  
 Emerald, Miss Julia Mackin of Emerald, Miss Johanna Dixon of Junction  
 City, and Miss Mary Caspar, also of Junction City, and a sister to  
 Sister M. Joseph, were received, and the following names were conferred  
 upon them: Sister M. Clementine, Sister M. Teresa, Sister M. Ursula,  
 and Sister M. Josephine. The recipients of December 27, 1891, had the  
 honor of having the Rt. Rev. Bishop Fink to officiate at their Reception.

On January 17, 1892, the Community at Mt. St. Joseph's were granted  
 a resident Chaplain by Rt. Rev. Bishop Fink. Rev. J. McNamara, a newly  
 ordained priest from Ireland, received the appointment. The residents  
 of the Academy, Sisters and pupils, now numbered during the school year  
 more than sixty; the Sisters from the missions came home for at least  
 part of the summer including the time of the annual Retreat. The priv-  
 ilege of daily Mass which was now a possibility because of the resident  
 Chaplain was a source of joy to the Community. From then on as long as  
 the Sisters were at Mt. St. Joseph's they enjoyed that happiness.

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

In September, 1892, St. Joseph's School was opened in Wathena at the request of Rev. Father Timphaus, who as the pastor. Sister M. Leo, Sister M. Clementine, and Sister M. Josephine were chosen. Sister M. Martina was added to the household in January, 1893.<sup>1</sup>

The next Reception occurred December 28, 1892, when Miss Catherine Burke of Carbondale, Pennsylvania, a niece to Sister M. St. John, and Miss Annie MacMahon of Leavenworth were clothed in the habit, and given the names of Sister Mary Martina and Sister Mary Irene. Rev. J. F. Leary officiated, assisted by Rev. R. B. Groener, Rev. A. Katouc, and Rev. J. McNamara.<sup>2</sup>

The first Graduation occurred at Mt. St. Joseph's Academy in 1893 of a class of four members.<sup>3</sup> The Academy had been accredited by the State Board of Education in 1890. As an institution of learning it ranked high among the Catholic Schools of the state, and in 1893 was recognized as one of the best of its kind in the state.<sup>4</sup>

The grade department was then offering a complete course in primary, intermediate, and grammar subjects. The high school offered courses in English, Latin, Science, music, art, and commerce. Sister M. Austin was a graduate of the Peoria Teachers' Normal College in Peoria, Illinois, and she with Sister M. Rose and Sister M. Louis had compiled a course of

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid. The members of the class were: Miss Julia McInerney and Miss Gertrude Kirby of Abilene, Miss Margaret Sullivan and Miss Mary Ann Riordan of Solomon.

4. Bollig, History of Catholic Education in Kansas 1836--1932, p. 60.

study for the Academy, which at the time of the first graduation had been in use for two years and had endured the trial very favorably. Sister M. Antony had charge of the commercial branches, and Sister M. Aurelia conducted the classes in art.<sup>1</sup>

On August 13, 1893, occurred the largest Reception in the Community up to that time. Seven candidates were received; Miss Mary Peasley of Kansas City, Miss Joanna Hesnan of Armourdale, Miss Margaret Meagher of Emerald, and her cousin, Miss Nora O'Mara of Emerald, Miss Rosa Kipp of Piqua, Miss Catherine Finan of Carbondale, Pennsylvania, and Miss Catherine Finucane of Corry, Pennsylvania. The names conferred upon the recipients were; Sister Mary Gertrude, Sister Mary Assissium, Sister Mary Lawrence, Sister Mary Mechtildis, Sister Mary Colette, Sister Mary Vincent, and Sister Mary Gregory. The strong, promising band was broken, however, on December 23, 1894, when Sister M. Gertrude died. She had contracted inflammatory rheumatism which was complicated by a heart lesion. Sister M. Gertrude made her vows on her deathbed, December 8,<sup>2</sup> 1894.

Rev. Father Leonard officiated at the Reception on August 13, 1893, after having conducted the last Spiritual Retreat that he gave to the Community. There is something of pathos in the record that notes, also, that Father Leonard was assisted by Rev. J. F. Leary of Chapman. One gleans from it a portent of "the old order changing, giving place to the

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

new", old friends passing on after having so generously and faithfully spent themselves for the infant foundation.

What woe had been in the heart of every member of the Community when a few weeks previous the information had been received that Father Leary, their steadfast and loyal friend, was to be transferred to St. Michael's parish at Chapman.<sup>1</sup>

Father Leary had been the first resident priest of Abilene, coming there in 1884. While attending to the needs of St. Andrew's he had in 1888, been given the pastoral charge of Herington, Kansas, where he offered the first Mass in what is now St. John's parish. In 1892 he built the first church in Herington, and continued in charge of the parish until 1894.<sup>2</sup>

The reader is aware long ere this of Father Leary's efforts in behalf of Mt. St. Joseph's, and can well imagine the grief engendered throughout the Community at the thought of his leaving Abilene. However, with one accord they rejoiced that Father Leary was to be assigned to a parish in which there was less demand on his health and strength, more leisure time, and certain conveniences which would allow the saving of himself. His health had been failing as a result of a life of hard work and much worry.<sup>3</sup>

Father Leary was born at Brasher, New York, June 24, 1846. His

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

advantages in school as a child were meagre, indeed, but he was always industrious beyond his years. Before he was sixteen years old he had learned to be a shoemaker, and had made shoes for twelve members of his own family as well as some of the neighbors. While he worked during the day, he studied at night. In 1864 at the age of eighteen he enlisted in the Union Army as a substitute, and served until the end of the War, for which he received \$1400 which helped to support his mother and brothers and sisters during his absence from home.

At the close of the War he took up his studies preparatory to the priesthood at the school of the Christian Brothers, La Salle, Illinois. He entered the Theological Seminary at Niagara, New York, in 1867. His studies at Niagara were interrupted by ill health, and when he was able he resumed them at Germantown, Pennsylvania. He was compelled a second time to withdraw on account of his health, and upon the advice of his physician went West to Collegeville, Minnesota, where he was finally able to finish. He was ordained in the Cathedral of Leavenworth by Rt. Rev. Bishop Fink, O.S.B., on April 24, 1875. At no time in all his life was he more distressed or worried than when with all funds exhausted he was faced by the poor, laboring men who had spent their time on the building of Mt. St. Joseph's, and looked to him for support. He aged during the weeks of waiting until he could meet their just demands, which he did by dint of his own sacrifice.

He was a member of the G.A.R., and for several years was the

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.



National Chaplain, succeeding Archbishop John Ireland of St. Paul, Minnesota. His interest and love for Mt. St. Joseph's were not mitigated by distance although he was no longer the pastor. Chapman is only twelve miles from Abilene, and the distance was often covered as in his frequent visits he maintained his paternal solicitude in the foundation ever dear to his heart.<sup>1</sup>

In September, 1893, Rev. T. H. Kinsella of Horton applied for teachers for St. Leo's School. Mother M. Bernard sent Sister M. Leo,<sup>2</sup> Sister M. Clare, and Sister M. Clementine to open the school. Later Sister M. Armella and Sister M. Colette were added to the number. Besides the day school, Sister M. Clementine and Sister M. Colette organized an evening class for a number of older pupils, and Sister M. Colette also taught music.

Father Leary was succeeded by Rev. E. Bononcini as pastor of St. Andrew's. On May the third, 1894, Father Bononcini officiated at the Reception of Miss Johanna Blake of Lyndon, Wisconsin. Miss Blake who was a sister to Sister M. Bonaventure and Sister M. Eulalia was given the name of Sister Mary Gabriel.<sup>3</sup> Father Bononcini officiated, also, on September the fifth, 1894, when Miss Ella Doran of Council Grove was received into the Community, and given the name of Sister Mary Raphael.<sup>4</sup>

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

In the month of August, 1895, the Spiritual Retreat for the Community was conducted by Rev. Father Michael, a Passionist Missionary. At its close on August the eighteenth, three candidates were received into the Community. Miss Elizabeth English of Erie, Pennsylvania, a niece of Mother M. Bernard, received the name of Sister M. Loretto, Miss Cecilia Mackin of Emerald, Kansas, a sister of Sister M. Teresa, received the name of Sister M. Martha, and Miss Gertrude Stogdill of Kansas City, received the name of Sister M. Michael.<sup>1</sup>

The year 1895 brought the opening of four schools. Rev. A. J. Wieners of Wea, Kansas, asked for the Sisters for the Holy Rosary School. Sister M. Clare, Sister M. Vincent, and Sister M. Michael were sent. Wea was a rural parish twenty miles from Paola. There were not more pupils, however, than could be cared for by one teacher, and since to have the Sisters in the school meant not only two teachers but a Sister-house-keeper also, it was deemed advisable to lessen the burden of the parish by employing a secular teacher, and the Sisters did not return to Wea the second year.<sup>2</sup>

In September, 1895, the School of Sts. Peter and Paul in Atlantic, Iowa, was opened at the request of Rev. Peter Daly who was pastor. Three Sisters, Sister M. Louis, Sister M. Aurelia, and Sister M. Assissium were assigned to this school. Never had the Sisters gone so far from the<sup>3</sup>

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

Motherhouse before, and as not one of the missions was easily reached from Atlantic they felt quite isolated. One of the joys recorded during the first year was a visit paid them by Sister M. St. John and Sister M. Aloysia, who, while out soliciting for funds for Mt. St. Joseph's, included Atlantic in their itinerary.

St. Mary's School in Pittsburg was opened in September, 1895, by Sister M. Leo, Sister M. de Sales, and Sister M. Boniface. Rev. J. A. Pompeny, D.D., as pastor, had requested the Sisters for his school. St. Mary's and the neighboring parishes embraced a number of the suburban coal colonies of Pittsburg, and the people for the greater part who made up the community were of many nationalities. The Bishop of the diocese and the Rev. Pastor thought to provide for the children, who despite State laws of compulsory education and others against child employment, were the victims of violations in both instances. Because of these conditions the children were sorely in need of the interest and consideration which could be afforded them by the Sisters through the parochial school. Pittsburg and Frontenac in 1895 furnished a field wherein full play could be given to zeal. Two small rooms attached to the old frame church were utilized for the Pittsburg school. The lighting as well as the heating was poor, but the Sisters, carrying out the spirit of the Community in their desire to devote themselves to the poor even in the most abject localities, proceeded to open school without desk, chair, or textbook; and inconveniences notwithstanding, there were far more pupils than could be accommodated.

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

In 1897 Bishop Fink appointed Rev. J. A. Pompeny, D.D., as diocesan  
<sup>1</sup>  
 missionary to non-Catholics. St. Mary's parish felt very deeply the loss  
 of their devoted pastor, "the paragon of religious gentility", as he has  
 been referred to. Doctor Pompeny was succeeded by Rev. E. Coolen. The  
 Sisters found in Father Coolen a kindly pastor who accomplished much by  
 improving conditions in the school. Father Coolen was succeeded in 1903  
 by Rev. J. Donohoe who began the erection of a new church. Before the  
 completion of the church, which was a heavy expense to the parish when  
 all was going well, the people were handicapped by recurring strikes  
 among the coal miners. To keep up the payments on the church debt and  
 support a school at the same time were impossible in the face of such  
 extreme financial difficulties, and the school was not opened in 1906.

In 1895 at the same time of the opening of St. Mary's School in  
 Pittsburg, a school was opened in Frontenac, and two Sisters, Sister M.  
 Colette and Sister M. Lawrence, lived with the Sisters in Pittsburg, and  
<sup>2</sup>  
 took the street car each morning to Frontenac, where in the beginning  
 school was conducted under the most trying conditions. Frontenac was  
 one of the mining camps at that time, and when the application was made  
 for Sisters there was no definite information as to how many pupils might  
 present themselves, and the application asked for one Sister who would  
 live with the Pittsburg Sisters. When Sister M. Colette arrived at her  
 post the first morning she found over a hundred children there ahead of  
 her. Frontenac, then as now, had the distinction of having from four to

---

1. The Catholic Advance, Mrs. E. B. Riordan, "St. Mary's Church at  
 Pittsburg", December 20, 1919.

2. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

six languages spoken among the children of the primary grades. Sister M. Lawrence came with Sister M. Colette the second day, and the two did their best. Poor as their accommodations were, they compared favorably with those of any other school in the vicinity. The Frontenac Sisters taught in the Church, and when Mass was over in the morning a set of portable blackboards was moved into the Sanctuary. The children sat on the kneelers and used the pews for their desks, and the teachers in the front of the room had difficulty in seeing the children's heads over the height of the pews.<sup>1</sup> But the Sisters recall with joy the days they taught in Frontenac, even under those trying circumstances. The people of the little parish were then, as now, most kind to them. From one house or another came a hot dinner every day, and the best of all that the people had was shared with the Sisters. The attitude of the good people may well have been an echo of that of their pastor, Rev. A. P. Podgorsek, whose cordial and kindly deference towards the Sisters was always an example to his people. Despite the poverty and inconveniences which the Sisters encountered, both the pastor and his people always gave evidence of an eager willingness to do all that was possible for their comfort.<sup>2</sup>

In the second year a house was provided for the Sisters, and two more were added to the mission, Sister M. de Sales and Sister M. Martha. The classes were conducted in residences that were rented for that pur-

---

1. Mother M. Colette, Wichita Hospital, Wichita, Kansas, Interview, January 15, 1937.

2. Ibid.

pose. The work went on in crowded quarters seemingly very satisfactorily despite the inconveniences. Sister M. Josephine and Sister M. Xavier were the next Sisters to increase the ranks. Rev. G. W. Freve succeeded Father Podgorsek as pastor of Frontenac.

In 1896 St. Brendan's School at Plattsburg, Missouri, was opened by Sister M. Louis with Sister M. Aloysia, Sister M. Assissium, and Sister M. Loretto.<sup>1</sup> Rev. Denis Keily, the pastor, had a new, brick school building in readiness for the opening of school. As the parish could not afford the building of a home for the Sisters, Father Keily gave up his home in the rectory and provided himself with living quarters in the tower of the church.

During the summer of 1896 St. Thomas' Convent in Armourdale was used as a study house for the Sisters, several of whom were taking music and art in Kansas City, Missouri. Among those specially to be mentioned is Sister M. Aloysia who spent the greater part of the summer receiving instructions in painting at St. Teresa's Academy, under Sister M. Natalie<sup>2</sup> of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.

During that summer, also, the Sisters of Charity of St. Mary's Academy in Leavenworth conducted the first Catholic institute to be held in the State. They invited all the teaching Sisters of the Diocese to

---

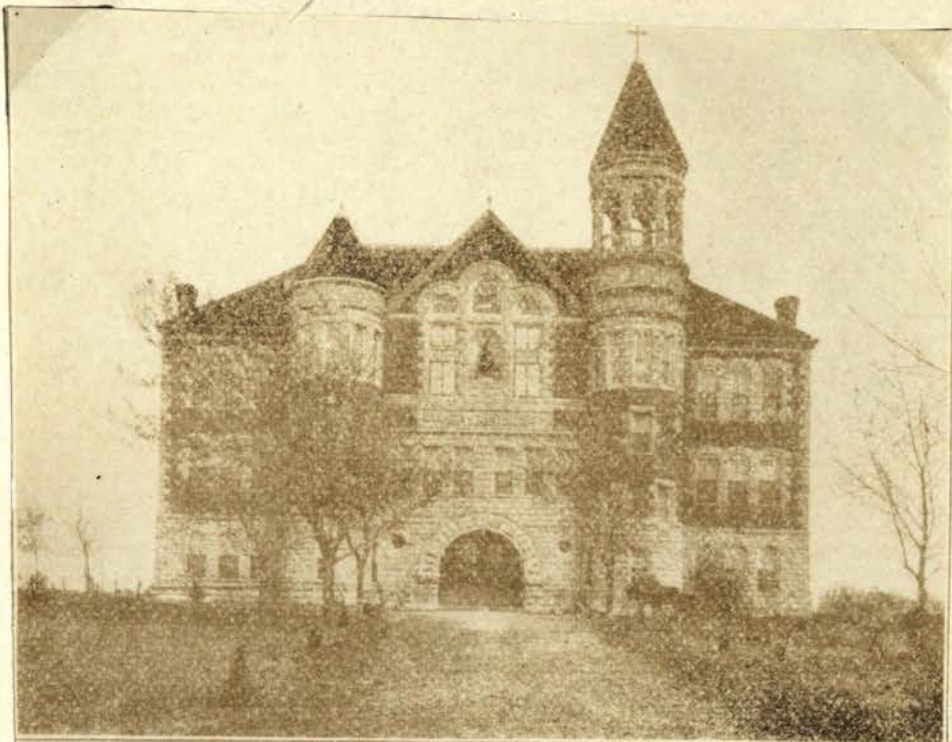
1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

participate. Sister M. Louis, Sister M. Rose, Sister M. Austin, Sister M. Gregory, and Sister M. Eulalia were permitted by Mother M. Bernard<sup>1</sup> to avail themselves of the courses offered to the Sisters.

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.



*Mt. Saint Mary's Convent*  
*Sisters of Saint Joseph*

**WICHITA UNIVERSITY**

**Purchased by Rt. Rev. J. J. Hennessy from the  
Reformed Church in the United States, December 8, 1899.**

**Completely destroyed by fire, September 7, 1913.**



## CHAPTER V

## THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH OF WICHITA

The Wichita Diocese.--Rt. Rev. J. J. Hennessy, D.D.--Transfer of the Bishop of Concordia.--Re-division of the Leavenworth Diocese.--Bishop Fink orders novitiate to Parsons, Kansas.--Last Reception in Abilene.--Move to Parsons.--Sacred Heart Academy.--Receptions in Parsons.--Diocesan boundaries, July, 1897.--Sisters of St. Joseph of Wichita.--Motherhouse in St. Paul.--Withdrawal from schools outside the diocese.--First election in Community.--Sister M. Leonard first Mistress of Novices.--Pro-Cathedral school in Wichita.--Bishop Hennessy buys Wichita University for Motherhouse.--Dedication of building.--Sisters come home to Wichita, June, 1900.

-----

The founding of the Wichita Diocese had been recommended at the same time as that of Concordia, when the Bishops of the Province of St. Louis convened with Archbishop Peter R. Kenrick, D.D., in the Spring of 1887. The first appointee of the Wichita Diocese was Rev. James O'Reilly, D.D., of Topeka, Kansas, who was nominated on July 6, 1887. Bishop-elect O'Reilly died July 26 of the same year, before receiving the official letters of his appointment. In August, 1888, Rev. John Joseph Hennessy, pastor of St. John's Church of St. Louis, Missouri, was chosen for the diocese of Wichita. The Apostolic documents arrived from Rome the first of October, and Father Hennessy was consecrated in

---

1. The Catholic Advance, December 6, 1913.

the church of which he was pastor on November 30, 1888. The Venerable Archbishop of St. Louis officiated, assisted by the Most Rev. John Hennessy, D.D., of Dubuque, and Rt. Rev. Louis M. Fink, O.S.B., of Leavenworth.

The newly consecrated Bishop departed at once for his future home, arriving early in December. As there was no residence to receive him, he engaged rooms at a hotel, and set out to become acquainted with his new field of labor. The city of Wichita had a population of 25,000 among whom were 800 Catholics. There were three Catholic churches in the city, the Pro-Cathedral at Second and St. Francis, St. Boniface which has since been replaced by St. Anthony's, and St. Joseph's on the west side of the river. Mt. Carmel Academy had been founded the year before, and was known as All Hallows Academy. Wichita had suffered,<sup>1</sup> and was still suffering from the collapse of the "boom".

The first census of the diocese which was taken in 1889 gave the Catholic population at 8,000 souls, attended by sixteen priests.<sup>2</sup> The same year marked the opening to free settlement by the United States Government of a large acreage in Oklahoma Territory. Throughout the area of the Wichita diocese crop failures had been frequent, especially in the Western portion, and according to the State Census about 200,000

---

1. The Catholic Advance, December 6, 1913.

2. The diocese at the time of Bishop Hennessy's appointment was bounded on the east by the east lines of Cowley, Butler, and Marion Counties; on the north by the north lines of Marion, McPherson, Rice, Barton, Rush, Ness, Lane, Scott, Wichita, and Greeley Counties.

3. The Catholic Advance, December 6, 1913.

people had left Kansas, either for the Oklahoma Territory or other  
<sup>1</sup>  
 parts.

In 1891 Rt. Rev. Richard Seannell of Concordia was transferred to the see of Omaha, and Bishop Hennessy of Wichita became Apostolic Ad-  
<sup>2</sup>  
 ministrator of the diocese of Concordia, which had at the time a popu-  
 lation of 12,000. More than half of the state, the Western portion, with  
 20,000 souls was now under the episcopal jurisdiction of Bishop Hennessy.

Following a number of poor years in which the revenues of the two dioceses were wholly inadequate to cover the necessary expenses, the Rt. Rev. Bishop spent the greater part of three years soliciting aid among  
<sup>3</sup>  
 the Eastern dioceses, where the Bishops aided his cause whole-heartedly. In the meantime Bishop Hennessy initiated correspondence with the Prefect of the Propaganda in Rome with a view to re-apportionment of the dioceses of Kansas. The Bishop of Leavenworth was aware of the application made by the Bishop of Wichita, and knew that the request had been favorably received by the Prefect at Rome, and he knew that a part of his diocese would be sacrificed in the new boundaries. The territory to be taken from the Leavenworth diocese was a matter of conjecture, but the Rt. Rev. Bishop had convinced himself that the division would follow a line from the north to the south of the state, leaving the territory on the eastern

---

1. The Catholic Advance, December 6, 1913.

2. Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. IV, A. T. Ennis, Diocese of Concordia, p.207.

3. The Catholic Advance, December 6, 1913.

end of the state intact as the Leavenworth diocese. With this in mind he summoned Mother M. Bernard in the Spring of 1896, and communicated to her his wishes regarding the Sisters of St. Joseph. Realizing that Abilene would be lost to his diocese in the division he requested Mother M. Bernard to transfer the novitiate to Parsons, Kansas, and there establish a Motherhouse.<sup>1</sup>

Parsons was a thriving little railroad town of about 12,000 inhabitants. Mother M. Bernard had received an application from Rev. John Ward for Sisters to take charge of St. Patrick's School the following September. The school had been conducted by the Sisters of Loretto since its opening in 1882.<sup>2</sup> The Sisters at St. Ann's Academy in St. Paul, and St. Patrick's School in Parsons were the only missions in Kansas conducted by the Sisters of Loretto.

On September 3, 1895,<sup>3</sup> the Academy and all its furnishings were completely destroyed by fire. Having decided that they were unable at the time to rebuild in St. Paul, the Superiors in Kentucky announced the withdrawal of the Sisters from the two Kansas missions. Accordingly, the Sisters of Loretto left Kansas for a time. In the meantime Rev. John Ward had been transferred to Armourdale because of the illness of Father Lee, and Rev. N. Neusius had come to Parsons. The latter was by this

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Anna C. Minogue, Loretto, Annals of the Century, America Press, New York, 1912, p. 186.

3. Ibid., p. 134.

time a staunch and reliable friend to the Community. He had been pastor of St. John the Evangelist's Church in Argentine, and had welcomed the Sisters to his parish in 1891.<sup>1</sup>

St. Patrick's Convent in Parsons was a small frame house of sufficient size to harbour four or five Sisters, no more.<sup>2</sup> Viewed in retrospect, the turn in the affairs of the Community was certainly a trial, both to the Foundress and to her Sisters. The anxiety of the Rt. Rev. Bishop to retain the Sisters within his diocese was a gratification to the Community, and this mark of his appreciation of the Sisters was a great consolation, but with it all it seemed to be a crucial period for the Community because of the uncertainty as to the outcome, and the fate of the foundation seemed to hang in the balance.

But to Mother M. Bernard and the Sisters the fundamentals of the religious life were real, and they had also learned its lessons, and although "Obedience is better than sacrifice," obedience is also sacrifice, and herein we have an instance. It meant leaving Mt. St. Joseph's just as it was completed, and sacrificing that religious order to which the little Community had become so accustomed in the small though perfectly regulated Convent. It was as if they had slipped their moorings to relinquish the atmosphere radiating from their dearly loved chapel where reposed the Divine Guest, the pivot of religious regularity.

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

It is not strange that it was a trial to their strength or that the serenity of the Community was troubled. Only those who were participants in the affairs of the Community at the time are able to realize the untoward circumstances which were incurred. The hardships have been mentioned by those courageous Sisters only incidentally in order to illustrate some point or other. But great as the difficulties seemed, and strongly as they felt the move, persuaded that the order to go was in accordance with God's design, and His Holy will they accepted it cheerfully. Admirable as we have found Mother M. Bernard, the generosity of her character and its firm energy were never better displayed as she set herself with the future of her Community, and the resetting of a foundation which seemed so suddenly to be uprooted. And in the midst of the heavy trial accompanied by so many kinds of annoyances and humiliations, she was the head and the heart of the Congregation. To Mother M. Bernard it made no difference if a thing were easy or difficult, agreeable or disagreeable, if it had to be done; and though the duty now entailed was hard for her, she faced the heavy responsibility with the same zeal with which she had always fulfilled her charge.

The activity of the Community had reached quite a flourishing condition and numbered fifty-three members; a sufficient number to show organization. The Academy was filled each year to its capacity. Besides

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

the Academy, the Sisters were conducting eleven parochial schools. Mother M. Bernard had on file applications for other schools, and there was every reason to know that the work of the Sisters was being appreciated.

The last Reception at Mt. St. Joseph's was held May 6, 1896, at which Rev. Father Michael, C.P., officiated. Four candidates were received. Miss Mary Dougherty of St. Mary's, Kansas, became Sister M. Xavier, Miss Teresa McGuire of Armourdale, became Sister M. Cecilia, Miss Elizabeth Welsh of Emerald, became Sister M. Jerome, and Miss Margaret O'Mara, also of Emerald, became Sister M. Gertrude.

Following the instructions of Rt. Rev. Bishop Fink, O.S.B., Mother M. Bernard had on the twenty-third of March, 1896, selected the Sisters of the Community who were to be trustees of the corporative body to be established in Parsons, and they had drawn up their charter in accordance with the laws of the State of Kansas. The members of the corporation were seven: Mother M. Bernard, President, Sister M. Gregory, Secretary, Sister M. Domitilla, Sister M. Armella, Sister M. Agnes, Sister M. Louis, and Sister M. Ursula. The Bishop had notified her, also, that Father Neusius of Parsons was making arrangements for the coming of the Sisters,

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Letter, Rt. Rev. Louis M. Fink, O.S.B., Bishop of Leavenworth, to Mother M. Bernard, February 20, 1896.

5. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

6. Ibid.

and was ready to assist them in becoming located. The Bishop advanced Mother M. Bernard \$2,000, for which he received a note for three years with interest at five per cent. This with a loan of \$300 from Father Neusius gave the Sisters a sum of money with which to build an addition to the little convent which had housed the five Sisters of St. Patrick's School.

The work on the addition to the convent was going on under the supervision of Father Neusius. The charity which this worthy priest exercised towards the Sisters at this time by his sympathy, encouragement, and kindly assistance has placed his name forever on the prayer-roll of the Sisters of St. Joseph. The addition to the convent constituted three classrooms, large and pleasant rooms on the first floor, and on the second floor a small chapel and two dormitories.<sup>1</sup>

The Sisters having waited for the last Reception of May the sixth, Mother M. Bernard, leaving Sister M. St. John as superior of Mt. St. Joseph's, went to Parsons, taking with her Sister M. Gregory, Sister M. Aurelia, Sister M. Ursula, Sister M. Assissium, Sister M. Xavier, and two candidates from Kansas City, Miss Martha Peuter and Miss Della Childs,<sup>2</sup> who had just entered the novitiate.

There is something about convent life that is military in its aspect; its uniformity, communal spirit, organization, respect for authority, and its prompt and unquestioned obedience. With their attitudes fixed by

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.



such customs the adjustment of the Sisters to the new order followed as matter of course, and order and comparative comfort ensued.

The Bishop had designated that the Sisters were to have an Academy, and upon the completion of the addition to the Convent it was blessed and dedicated as the Sacred Heart Academy. There were no accommodations for boarders but a splendid class of interested and enthusiastic day pupils filled the school to its capacity. Sister M. Gregory was in charge of the Academy, assisted by several of the novices. St. Patrick's parochial school had as its teachers, Sister M. Aurelia, Sister M. Assissium, and Sister M. Edith.

On the evening of August the twenty-fifth the first religious Reception was held in St. Patrick's Church when Miss Martha Peuter and Miss Della Childs were clothed in the religious habit. Rev. N. Neusius officiated, assisted by Rev. Father Michael, C.P.. The names conferred upon the two were, Sister M. Edith and Sister M. Dorothea. Sister M. Raphael at the same time made her Religious Profession.

Two Receptions were held during the winter in the little chapel of Sacred Heart Academy, the first, November 23, 1896, in which Miss Mary Rowland of Parsons was received and given the name of Sister M. Philomena. Rev. N. Neusius officiated, assisted by Rev. J. A. Pompey, D.D., of Pittsburg. At the second on March 25, 1897, Miss Helen Shannon of Fulton, Kansas, was received and given the name of Sister Mary Alice. Rev. N. Neusius officiated.

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

The following summer of 1897 at the ceremony of Profession which was held on July the seventeenth in the Sacred Heart Chapel in Parsons, Sister M. Loretto, Sister M. Martha, and Sister M. Michael made their vows in the presence of Rev. N. Fowler.<sup>1</sup> A Retreat was conducted at Mt. St. Joseph's for the greater number of the school Sisters who were there for the summer. Rev. Charles Lang, C.P., was the Retreat Master. St. Thomas' Convent in Kansas City was open to those Sisters who were studying music and art.<sup>2</sup>

On July 1, 1897,<sup>3</sup> were dated the apostolic letters in Rome by which the new diocesan boundary lines of Kansas were definitely stated. In due course of time these letters reached their destination and their contents were revealed. Leavenworth Diocese gave up twenty-one counties, fourteen to the Wichita Diocese,<sup>4</sup> and seven to the Diocese of Concordia.<sup>5</sup> The addition to the Wichita Diocese comprised the entire southeastern corner of the state, and included Parsons, while the Diocese of Concordia embraced Abilene. The Community was thereby lost to the Leavenworth Diocese, and became the Sisters of St. Joseph of Wichita.<sup>6</sup>

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

3. The Official Catholic Directory, P. J. Kenedy & Sons, New York, 1934, p. 739.

4. The counties added to Wichita Diocese were: Cherokee, Crawford, Bourbon, Labette, Neosho, Allen, Montgomery, Wilson, Woodson, Chautaugua, Elk, Greenwood, Chase, and Morris.

5. The counties of Kansas added to the Diocese of Concordia were: Washington, Clay, Riley, Ottawa, Salina, Dickinson, and Geary.

6. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

In the new order the Community which had been founded by the permission of Bishop Fink, and had received his episcopal approbation and support were now withdrawn from his jurisdiction when they became a diocesan Community of Wichita; but as Bishop Fink wrote, "though you are over my line you are within God's line," and he assured the Sisters, "If I should be able to help advancing your Community, I will gladly contribute as far as I am able; let the Sisters always render themselves worthy of divine aid by being humble, obedient Religious, and the necessary help will always be at hand."<sup>1</sup>

Bishop Fink had supported the Community whole-heartedly and earnestly for the nine years through which the Sisters looked to him as their diocesan Superior. He was particularly adapted to the direction of a religious Community of the pioneer days in matters both spiritual and temporal as he was both a pioneer, and a Religious himself. He was born in Bavaria, and having come to the United States at the age of eighteen years, he had entered the Benedictine order at St. Vincent's Abbey in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, where he was ordained May 28, 1857, by Rt. Rev. Bishop Young of Erie, Pennsylvania. He began his pioneer work in Kansas as Prior of St. Benedict's Abbey in Atchison, and his zeal so impressed the Rt. Rev. Bishop Miege of Leavenworth that he solicited the appointment of the Benedictine Prior as his co-adjutor.<sup>2</sup> He was one of the most strenuous protagonists of the Catholic School,

---

1. Letter, Bishop Fink to Mother M. Bernard, August 21, 1897.

2. F. H. Kinsella, The History of Our Cradeland, Kansas City, 1921, p.

and under his direction the Leavenworth diocese was first in the United States in organizing an efficient diocesan School Board. Identified<sup>1</sup> with Bishop Fink the Religious of his diocese and the schools over which they had charge made steady progress. The Sisters of St. Joseph truly appreciated the spiritual and educational guidance for which they were indebted to Bishop Fink, and it was not without reluctance that they<sup>2</sup> relinquished it.

The Rt. Rev. Bishop of Wichita received the Sisters of St. Joseph with every mark of esteem and consideration. The diocese of Wichita in 1897 had few Religious within its confines. The oldest Community still carrying on their work in the diocese were the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose Motherhouse is in Dubuque, Iowa, who had opened Mt. Carmel Academy in Wichita in 1887. The Sisters of Mercy<sup>3</sup> of Ft. Scott, a diocesan Community, had made their foundation from Grand Rapids, Michigan, at the request of Bishop Fink in 1887. Their Community<sup>4</sup> numbered ten members in 1897. In 1889 the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother had established St. Francis' Hospital in Wichita. The provincial<sup>5</sup> house of these Sisters is located at Marshfield, Wisconsin.

From the outset the Rt. Rev. Bishop of Wichita manifested a paternal solicitude towards the Community over which he now had jurisdiction. He

---

1. The Catholic Advance, December 17, 1928.

2. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

3. The Catholic Advance, December 20, 1919.

4. Dehey, Religious Orders of Women in the United States, p. 362.

5. Ibid., p: 471.

officiated at the religious Receptions which followed his becoming the diocesan Superior of the Sisters. He was interested, also, in a suitable and permanent location of the Motherhouse for the Sisters. Parsons was in many respects ideal, but the site of Sacred Heart Academy, because of its proximity to the business part of the city, was not a desirable location for a building of sufficient size to accommodate the entire <sup>1</sup> Community.

When the Sisters of Loretto had left St. Paul, they had been succeeded by the Ursuline Sisters of Paola who had taken charge of the parochial school in September, 1896. The Ursuline Sisters had come to Paola in 1895 from Kentucky. When it was learned in January, 1896, that the Loretto Sisters would withdraw from St. Paul, the people and their Pastors, the Rev. Passionist Fathers, had sought permission from <sup>2</sup> Rt. Rev. Bishop Fink, O.S.B., for the Ursuline Sisters to establish a Motherhouse in St. Paul. The Bishop of Leavenworth hesitated at giving permission because he had just ordered the establishment of the Sisters of St. Joseph at Parsons, and the distance of eighteen miles was too near for another such institution.

Bishop Fink then gave further consideration to the request from St. Paul, and consulted Mother M. Bernard about her Community accepting the invitation to locate there. The matter was dropped, however, in July, <sup>3</sup> 1896, when the Bishop failed to reach an agreement with the Sisters of

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Letter, Bishop Fink to Mother M. Bernard, February 27, 1896.

3. Ibid.

Loretto over the convent property in St. Paul.

When the diocesan boundaries were settled in 1897, there followed a readjustment of the parochial schools in the dioceses of Leavenworth and Wichita. St. Andrew's School in Abilene had not been opened in September, 1896,<sup>1</sup> as the number of Sisters required for opening the schools in Parsons left too few to conduct the two schools in Abilene. The greater number of pupils from the down town school became day attendants at Mt. St. Joseph's.

At the close of the school year in May, 1898, the Sisters of St. Joseph withdrew from Horton and Argentine in the Leavenworth Diocese. The Ursuline Sisters of Paola withdrew from St. Paul. Bishop Hennessey expressed the wish that the schools of his diocese be conducted by the Sisters who were now the diocesan Community. He stated, also, that as long as there was a sufficient number of Sisters to conduct the schools in the Wichita diocese, the Sisters would not be withdrawn from those schools over which they presided outside of the diocese. Accordingly, in September, 1898, the Sisters continued in charge of the schools in Atlantic, Iowa; Plattsburg, Missouri; Armourdale, and Wathena, while in the diocese of Wichita three schools were opened, St. Francis' School in St. Paul, for which Mother M. Bernard selected Sister M. Eulalia,<sup>2</sup> Sister M. Loretto, Sister M. Jerome, and Sister M. Eugenia. Rev. Father Peter, C.P., was rector at St. Paul, and Rev. Father Raymond, C.P., was

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

pastor of the parish, and director of the school.

At the request of Rev. A. B. Hull of St. Patrick's parish, Empire City, Mother M. Bernard sent Sister M. St. John, Sister M. Edith, and  
<sup>1</sup>  
 Sister M. Cecilia.

Rev. J. C. Sullivan of Danville had requested the Sisters for St. Rose Academy, as he had designated his school. Being a rural parish, this school was equipped to accommodate a number of boarders who remained with the Sisters from Sunday until Friday evening of each week. Father Sullivan had been a teacher before his ordination to the priesthood, and he took it upon himself as a part of his duty to carry out a schedule of regularly appointed classes which he taught himself. Sister M. Bonaventure, Sister M. <sup>M</sup>artina, Sister M. Raphael, and Sister M. Agatha were the Sisters assigned to open the school. A Sisters' school was not new to the people of St. Rose's parish as the Sisters from Concordia had come to Danville in 1890, and one of the teachers was Sister M. Angela who had been sent to Abilene with Mother M. Bernard in 1887. The Concordia Sisters withdrew from Danville in 1895, when after a severe drought the parish was forced to give up the school, and for a couple of years did not have a resident priest.  
<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup>  
 In February, 1899, agitation was renewed over the Motherhouse being transferred to St. Paul. The Rev. Passionist Fathers urged the coming

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Sister M. Ambrose, Wichita, Kansas, Interview, February 15, 1937.

3. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

of the Sisters, and maintained that the presence in St. Paul of the Rev. Mother and her Novices would be an incentive to the people to aid the Sisters in the construction of a convent. The parish committee in November, 1898, had purchased the T. J. Joyce residence, and renovated it for the Sisters. As a home for the four Sisters of the school it was quite commodious. The house had ten rooms, one of which was furnished as a chapel. It was admirable as a parish convent, but as a Motherhouse it was very inadequate. But it seemed to give promise of a home to the Sisters---in the offing to be sure, but in the hope of a favorable culmination, upon the advice of the Rt. Rev. Bishop, Mother M. Bernard on March 19, 1899, took up her abode in St. Paul. The Community, in view of all the religious advantages held out to them in such a location, were happy to learn from their various missions of the possible permanence of their foundation in St. Paul.

At the organization of the Community in Abilene by Rt. Rev. L. M. Fink, O.S.B., in 1887, he had, as before stated, appointed Mother M. Bernard as Superior, and at the end of each succeeding three years he had confirmed her appointment for another term in office. She had during the space of twelve years fulfilled that appointment with never-failing courage against all the difficulties of her position, its daily worries, hourly anxieties, and ever recurring contradictions and disappointments. While the Community was small and the management less comprehensive, Mother M.

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.



Bernard had filled the offices of Superior and Novice Mistress. Her aide in directing the Novices, as we have mentioned before, had been Sister M. Aloysia, but the necessity of sending her out on a mission<sup>1</sup> had deprived Mother M. Bernard of her assistance. The Community had now grown to such numbers that the offices of Superior and Novice Mistress could not be further combined, a fact which Mother M. Bernard represented to Rt. Rev. Bishop Hennessy when she notified him of the expiration of<sup>2</sup> her term of office. In acknowledgment of this notice the Bishop announced to the Community through Mother M. Bernard that he would hold an election in the summer whereby the Sisters would proceed to vote for<sup>3</sup> their superior and the other officers of their Community. He would not make an appointment since there was now a sufficient number of Sisters to hold an election.

On July 13, 1899, at the close of the Spiritual Retreat in Abilene, Bishop Hennessy, assisted by Bishop Cunningham of Concordia, presided at the first election held in the Community. When the votes were counted Bishop Hennessy announced to the Sisters that Mother M. Bernard "had received the majority of votes, therefore, according to all rules and regulations of your Constitutions she is the Superior of your Congregation for the next three years". After conferring with Mother M. Bernard the Bishop then appointed Sister M. Louis, Sister M. Rose, Sister

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

M. Joseph, and Sister M. Agnes as Councilors, and Sister M. Leonard as  
<sup>1</sup>  
 Mistress of Novices.

When Mother M. Bernard returned to St. Paul after the election, Sister M. Leonard accompanied her, and immediately took up her duties in training and teaching the Novices. Five candidates were received into the Community while the Motherhouse was in St. Paul. Miss Julia Finucane of Corry, Pennsylvania, a sister to Sister M. Gregory, became Sister M. Regina, Miss Brigid Casey of Plainville, Kansas, Sister M. Baptista, Miss Rose McWilliams of Frontenac, Sister M. Paul, Miss Annie Berry of Abilene, Sister M. Sebastian, and Miss Margaret McManus of  
<sup>2</sup>  
 Greenbush, Sister M. Bernadette.

Bishop Hennessy had announced to Mother M. Bernard that she was to have Sisters ready by the first of September to take charge of the Pro-Cathedral School in Wichita. The school had been opened in 1882, and was taught for the first years by a secular teacher, but in 1887 the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who were conducting Mt. Carmel Academy, had taken charge of it. The opening of the Pro-Cathedral in Wichita meant the withdrawal from St. Thomas' School in Armourdale.

It was real grief to the Sisters to give up this school which had become so vital a part of the Community. Father Lee who had invited the Sisters to St. Thomas' had been forced to give up the parish because of ill health, and was succeeded by Rev. John Ward. In 1898 Rev. A. W.

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

Jennings had replaced Father Ward who had become administrator at the Cathedral in Leavenworth. A fire destroyed the frame school building which had been provided by Father Lee. To replace it Father Jennings built a three-story, brick building with eight large class rooms and a splendid auditorium. The Sisters had taught one year in the new building.<sup>1</sup>

Besides all the conveniences enjoyed by the Community because of St. Thomas' Convent as a house of study, there was a still greater indebtedness to St. Thomas' parish for a group of zealous Religious who had entered the novitiate since the coming of the Sisters to Armourdale in 1890. The first member was Sister M. Assissium, followed by Sister M. Gertrude, Sister M. Michael, Sister M. Cecilia, Sister M. Edith, Sister M. Dorothea, and Sister M. Agatha. Not every one of these came from Armourdale, but through the Armourdale mission had met the Sisters of Abilene.<sup>2</sup>

The Sisters assigned to the Pro-Cathedral School in Wichita were, Sister M. Rose, Sister M. Thomas, Sister M. St. John, Sister M. Mechtildis, Sister M. Cecilia, Sister M. Michael, Sister M. Dominica, and Sister M. Regina. The school included the elementary and high school branches for girls, while the boys were taught through the eight grades. Sister M. Cecilia began the organization immediately of a music class which was promising from its beginning. The school was located on the corner of Second and St. Francis' Streets, and the first residence of

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

the Sisters was a house with seven small rooms located east of the school building on Second Street.

Rev. G. Wiersma of Newton asked for Sisters for St. Mary's School, and Sister M. Aloysia, Sister M. Colette, and Sister M. Ursula were  
<sup>1</sup> sent. Rev. B. J. McKernan of the Holy Name parish in Winfield, who was also ready to open a school, made application for three Sisters. Mother M. Bernard assigned Sister M. Leo, Sister M. Genevieve, and Sister M.  
<sup>2</sup> Gabriel to Winfield.

On December 4, 1899, when Rt. Rev. Bishop Hennessy was in St. Paul to officiate at a Reception, he acquainted Mother M. Bernard with the fact that he had decided to have the Motherhouse transferred to Wichita. He preferred to have the Community located in the episcopal city. He told her, also, that he was arranging the purchase of property in Wichita for the Sisters. He had decided, too, that the Sisters were to care for the orphans of the diocese. For several years the Sisters had been caring for from fifteen to twenty orphans in Abilene, without appropri-  
<sup>3</sup> ation from city, state, or diocese. This particular work of mercy was especially pleasing to the heart of Mother M. Bernard, and she had spent  
<sup>3</sup> three years at the work in St. Vincent's Orphanage in Erie, Pennsylvania,

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

before coming to Kansas.

On the eighth of December, 1899, Bishop Hennessy closed his negotiations with the Board of Trustees of the Wichita University of the Reformed Church in the United States, for the purchase of their property in the University Hill addition to Wichita, which consisted of a building and two blocks of land. The structure was of brick trimmed with stone, and chiseled above the main entrance in full length across the front was the title "Wichita University".

In 1887 C. C. Fees and his wife, Helen, had granted to the Board of Trustees of the University one half of the land belonging to the site for the sum of one dollar; and Harry L. Hill and his wife, Emma, had conveyed the other half for a consideration of \$3500. Both parties, however, agreed to grant absolute title to their land only after the construction of a building estimated at \$25,000 or more.<sup>1</sup>

The building had been erected at a cost of \$36,000, and for six years the Board of Trustees operated a school as the "University of Wichita",<sup>2</sup> but at the time of the purchase it was unoccupied and desolate. The slump in property value, and the inability of the organization to keep up the building repairs had decreased its worth to such an extent that Bishop Hennessy procured the building and the land for \$5,000. The

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas. Warranty Deeds.--Harry Hill and wife, February 12, 1887. C. C. Fees and wife, February 5, 1887.

2. The Wichita Eagle, Wichita, Kansas, September 9, 1913.

3. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

structure was three stories high, and comprised twenty-one large rooms including a chapel.

Having been abandoned to neglect and disuse for six years, it was looked upon a nobody's property, and the building was in a deplorable condition. The outside doors were missing from the first floor, and the cattle and horses had taken refuge in it. Bishop Hennessy contracted for the repairs and renovation of the entire building in which he expended \$3,000. This debt and the purchase price, the Sisters assumed when they<sup>1</sup> came to Wichita.

On the nineteenth of March, 1900, the Rt. Rev. Bishop deeded the property to the Sisters, and on the twenty-fifth of March they occupied the building for the first time. It was twelve years to the day of the organization of the Community in Abilene. In thanksgiving to God for the great favor which the Community had received in the acquisition of a permanent home, Mother M. Bernard on that very day directed that the Sisters should add to their horarium the singing of the Magnificat, which<sup>2</sup> is sung every evening in every house of the Community.

The first Mass in the house was offered by Bishop Hennessy on May 1, 1900. The chapel was not yet finished and a temporary altar was set up in a room on the second floor which was later the library. The names of

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

those who were present are listed: Mother M. Bernard, Sister M. Leonard, Sister M. Frances, Sister M. Rose, Sister M. Joseph, Sister M. Assissium, Sister M. Michael, Sister M. Agatha, Sister M. Regina, and Sister M. Baptista. Sister M. Leonard and the novices, also, were now occupants<sup>1</sup> of the new home.

The building was so constructed that it was not difficult in its arrangement to have convenient quarters for the Sisters and the orphans separate from each other. When the renovation was finished it was very pleasant and substantial in every respect. The Convent was named in honor of the Blessed Mother of the Lord upon whose feast of the Immaculate Conception it had been procured for the Community. Because of the delightful elevation of the location, it was called "Mt. St. Mary's".<sup>2</sup> The Orphanage was named in honor of St. Joseph.

At that time the location was far out in the country. The nearest paved street was Douglas Avenue. The street car line extended east on Douglas Avenue to Roosevelt, and the Sisters used to walk across the prairie through what was then the grounds of the Country Club to take the car from there to the city. Not more than half a dozen houses could be counted in the neighborhood of the Mount. The residence of Mr. Fees, one half mile north, the Hill home about the same distance to the southwest, and a cottage on the lots north of the Convent which the Sisters afterward bought for the Chaplain's residence

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

2. Ibid.

were the nearest and only houses in the vicinity. When the Sisters drove to the city they took the road west on Lincoln Avenue to Washington Boulevard, and diagonally, then as now, to Kellog. The Kellog School was a sort of landmark as one felt when she reached it that she was in town.

There were no trees or shrubbery of any kind on the grounds, and one of the first things attended to was the setting out of two avenues of maple trees, one north and one south of the Convent. Bishop Hennessy, himself, with all of his dignity, worked several mornings at setting out trees. These trees grew to a great size, and were very beautiful until 1932 when they began to die, and not more than two or three of the original maple trees are on the grounds today.

The building was far removed from the city water, gas, and electric lines. One of its most modern improvements installed at the time was a plant for the manufacture of acetylene gas for lighting. There were two wells on the place, one at the cottage and one near the main building. The water supply of the wells varied, and was often insufficient for the needs of the day. When the telephone line was extended the contract with the Missouri and Kansas Telephone Exchange which was dated June 8, 1900, was made out to the Wichita University, as the business people continued to call the place for years. The service was a rural party line including a farmer's residence and the County poor farm.

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.  
2. Ibid.  
3. Ibid.



On June 28, 1900, occurred the dedication of the Convent. At nine o'clock the Rt. Rev. Bishop blessed the building, after which he celebrated a solemn pontifical Mass. The Rt. Rev. Bishop T. Meersheart, D.D., Vicar-Apostolic of Indian Territory, of Guthrie, gave the sermon. A goodly number of the Reverend Clergymen of the diocese were present.

The Wichita Eagle under date of June 29, gives a two-column account of the ceremony. The people of Wichita in many ways showed great appreciation of the transformation which the Rt. Rev. Bishop and the Sisters had brought about in the sadly neglected property.

The first Spiritual Retreat to be conducted in the new Motherhouse was opened on June 30, 1900. Rev. Father Felix Ward, C.P., was the Retreat Master. Father Felix was a special friend of Bishop Hennessy, and showed great interest in the Community. Before he left Mt. St. Mary's he made a gift to the Community that is still treasured today. Above the main entrance of the building, between two stained glass windows in the third story, was a niche fashioned in the masonry sufficiently large for a life-size statue. It may have been intended by the builders to hold a statue of a benefactor or founder of the Wichita University. However, that may have been, it appealed to Father Felix as a fitting place for a statue of the Blessed Patroness of Mt. St.

---

1. The Wichita Eagle in an account of the dedication, dated June 29, 1900, lists the following Clergymen: Rev. G. DePretre, Guthrie, O.T.; Rev. D. Kiely, Plattsburg, Missouri; Rev. J. F. Leary, Chapman; Rev. A. Dykeman, Danville; Rev. B. J. McKernan, Ft. Scott; Rev. B. Schmiehauser, St. Mark's; Rev. A. B. Hull, Empire City; Rev. George Frieve, Frontenac; Rev. John Greuter, Ost; Rev. James Kealy, Parsons; and Rev. J. Henry Tihen, Wichita.

2. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

Mary's, and his gift to the Sisters was a bronze statue of Our Lady  
1  
which just fitted the niche.

The Retreat brought to Mt. St. Mary's all the members of the Community except those who were engaged at Mt. St. Joseph's. It was the first visit with few exceptions to the new Motherhouse, and it was with no little gratification that the Sisters availed themselves of the opportunity to become acquainted with their home.

Despite the variable trend of the four years that had passed since the transfer of the Motherhouse from Abilene, the growth of the Community in membership and mission field had not wavered. Failure might be ascribed to some missions if we consider their want of permanency, but in those missions that were closed, individual souls must have been benefited, and from those missions some of the most generous and useful members of the Congregation have been received. The eve of coming to Wichita the Community numbered sixty-three members, forty-five of whom were engaged in teaching. At that time a teacher had not the material equipment of the present up-to-date classrooms, and the Sisters had to depend upon mental and moral equipment which taxed their interest, earnestness, and ingenuity; and yet we feel that the direct and indirect beatific fruits of their labors in those short years reflected somewhat from the Kansas plains. When the Community was organized the prairies were vast and thinly populated, but even twelve years had made of them

---

1. Community Archives, Mt. St. Mary's Convent, Wichita, Kansas.

some fertile portion which had yielded a harvest for those sowers of the seed, some of which "fell upon good ground and having taken root brought forth fruit".

### BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

The principal sources from which the writer compiled this brief history of the origin of the Community are in the Archives of Mt. St. Mary's Convent. They consist of documents; records of Religious Receptions and Professions; letters; some manuscript material; and records of business undertakings.

Material which serves to recall and verify the series of events has been gleaned from the personal records of a group of pioneer members who have participated in the foundation, as well as the expansion of the Community. Among the personal records especially valuable were those of Sister M. Louis, Sister M. Patricia, Sister M. Leonard, Sister M. Thomas, Sister M. Leo, Sister M. Clementine, and Mother M. Colette. These records, though not detailed, are important because of the diversity in the personal element which they impart to the historic material.

Besides her personal record Sister M. Louis has deposited in the archives a fund of material which she has collected down through the years, and preserved for the historical benefit of the Community. Her material is significant because of the position which she has held as Councilor, and her intimate association with the administrative body of the Community. The principal events of the Community she knew by direct observation, and where any of the material of her collection was brought into play the narrative is the more accurate because of the fact that, "all of it she saw, and a part of it she was". The compilation has

adhered quite closely to the records from which material has been gathered, and changes have been made only in the interest of brevity.

The writer has resorted to occasional interviews to supplement the written records. It is suitable, also, to stress here the importance of the interview with Mother M. Antoinette of Marymount College, Salina, who is the only survivor of the six Sisters of St. Joseph who came to Kansas in 1883.

The articles in the newspapers to which reference has been made serve to verify information which the archives hold.

Next in importance to the material in the archives are the sources to which the writer had access for the brief summary of the origin of the Congregation. The most noteworthy is The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, which is most comprehensive because of the wide and varied sources from which the compiler has been able to draw information. The Life of Rev. Mother St. John Fontbonne translated from the French in 1887 is a beautiful story, simply and lovingly told but lacking in bibliographic references. The references lacking in this publication, however, are made up in Mother St. John Fontbonne, 1936, which in its citations of state records, only recently unearthed of the Revolutionary period in France, verifies much of the uncertain information of the former book.

The writer has had at hand and made use of, to a greater or less degree, material from the various sources as referred to in the bibliography.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### I. Primary Sources:

Community Archives. (1) documents and records; (2) letters; (3) personal records in the handwriting of pioneer members; (4) records of business undertakings; (5) records of Religious Receptions and Professions.

### II. Secondary Sources:

#### 1. Repertories

Catholic Encyclopedia, 14 vols., New York, 1907-14.

#### 2. General Works

Andreas, A. T., History of the State of Kansas, Chicago, 1883.

Bollig, Richard Joseph, History of Catholic Education in Kansas 1836--1932, Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C., 1933.

Constitution of the Congregation of The Sisters of St. Joseph, O'Shea and Company, New York, n.d..

Dehey, Elinor Tong, Religious Orders of Women in the United States, Hammond, Indiana, 1930.

Graves, W. W., Early Jesuits of Osage Mission, St. Paul, Kansas, 1916.

Guggenberger, A., General History of the Christian Era, Herder, St. Louis, 1904.

Guignebert, Charles, A Short History of the French People, 2 vols., Macmillan, New York, 1930.

Kinsella, T. H., The History of Our Cradleland, Kansas City, 1921.

Minogue, Anna G., Loretto, Annals of the Century, America Press,  
New York, 1912.

Rivaux, Abbe, Life of Rev. Mother St. John Fontbonne, Benziger  
Brothers, New York, 1887.

Savage, Sister M. Lucida, A Century's Harvest, St. Louis, 1936.

Savage, Sister M. Lucida, The Congregation of the Sisters of St.  
Joseph of Carondelet, Herder, St. Louis, 1923.

Sister of St. Joseph, Mother St. John Fontbonne, P. J. Kenedy and  
Sons, New York, 1936.

The Official Catholic Directory, P. J. Kenedy and Sons, New York,  
1934.

Trials and Triumphs of the Catholic Church in America, Hyland and  
Company, Chicago, 1901.

### 3. Special Articles Referred to or Quoted

Ennis, A. T., "Concordia", Catholic Encyclopedia, IV.

Points, Marie Louise, "New Orleans", Catholic Encyclopedia, XI.

Shorter, J. A., "Kansas", Catholic Encyclopedia, VIII.

Shorter, J. A., "Leavenworth", Catholic Encyclopedia, IX.

### 4. Newspapers

Evening Reflector, Abilene, Kansas, May 24, 1887; August 1, 1887;  
August 1, 1888.

The Catholic Advance, Wichita, Kansas, December 6, 1913; December  
20, 1919; February 8, 1924.

The Wichita Eagle, Wichita, Kansas, June 29, 1900; September 9,  
1913.

## 5. Interviews

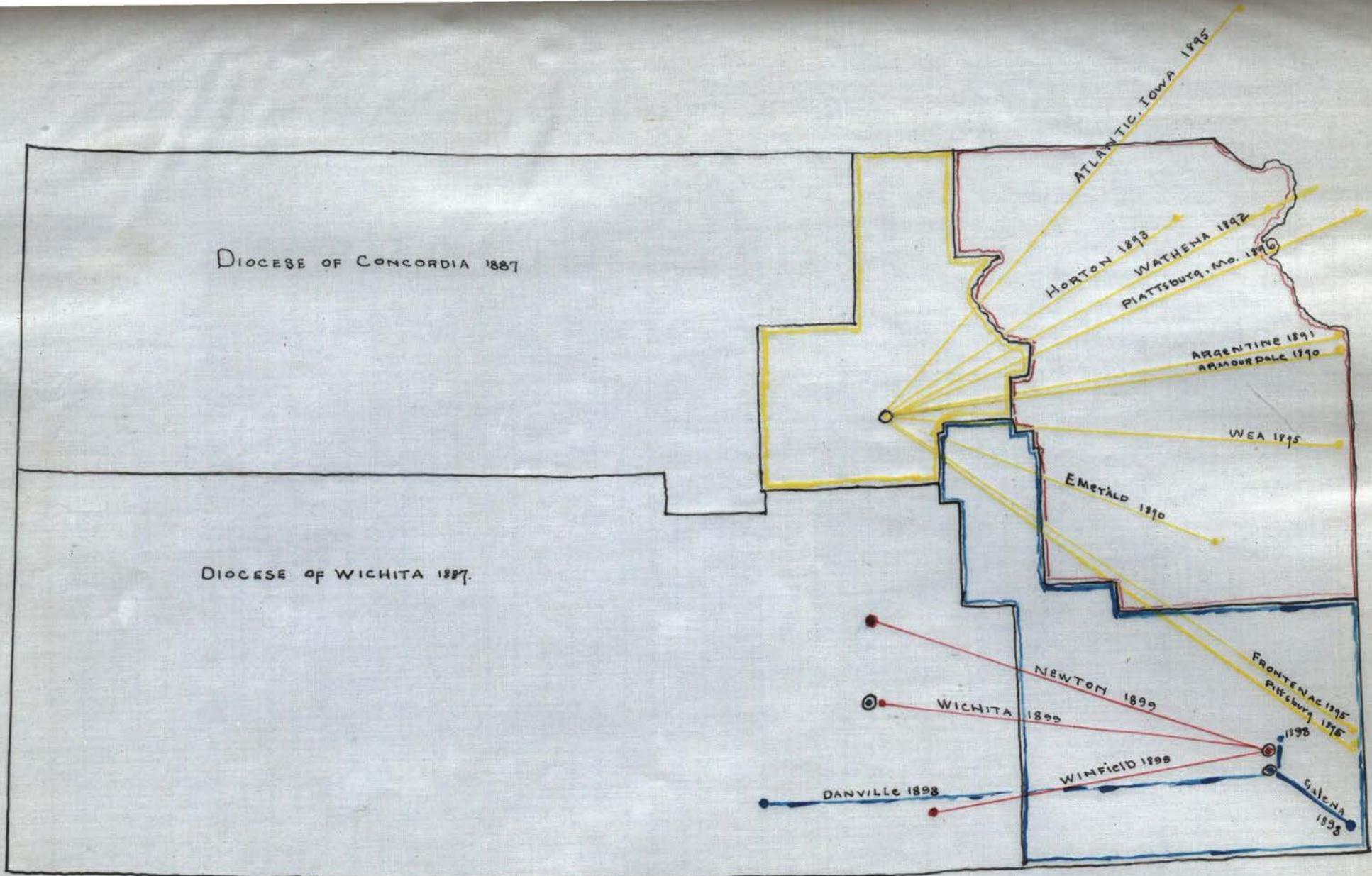
Mother M. Antoinette Cuff, Salina, Kansas, October 17, 1936.

Sister M. Louis Kennedy, Wichita, Kansas, October 31, 1936.

Mother M. Colette Kipp, Wichita, Kansas, January 15, 1937.

Sister M. Ambrose Clarahan, Wichita, Kansas, February 15, 1937.





- ADDITION to Diocese of Concordia, 1897
- ADDITION to Diocese of Wichita, 1897
- ABILENE, MOTHER HOUSE 1888-1896
- PARSONS, " " 1896-1899
- ST. PAUL, " " 1899-1900
- WICHITA " " 1900-1901

- Diocese of LEAVENWORTH, 1897
- SCHOOLS opened FROM ABILENE.
- " " " PARSONS
- " " " ST PAUL

