

## Chapter 14

### Money and the Motherhouse



**Mt Carmel motherhouse.**  
**Lower right, postulants on Pine Walk.**  
BVM Archives

Cecilia Dougherty usually admitted that she could “do anything except raise money.” Her record shows just the opposite. During her three years as superior in Clinton (IA), she managed to pay off the entire \$6,000 debt. In 1894, her first year in office, she found the scarcity of money a continual problem. Besides the payment of interest and a costly principal on loans in the range of \$120,000—there was the prolonged search for an adequate water supply on the Mt. Carmel grounds and the

plastering of the chapel, the entire third floor, and two upper floors of the north wing. In reality, the large and imposing new motherhouse presented a completed outside, but underneath its red bricks waited a half-finished inside.<sup>1</sup>

Mortgages Cecilia was content to pay as she could and by the end of her first two terms in 1900, she had cut the building debt in half. The \$8,000 awarded in the suit against a roofer for using inferior materials repaired and storm proofed the roof and was not applied to debt reduction.<sup>2</sup>

To handle the motherhouse mortgage, Cecilia sometimes resorted to an earlier remedy employed in times of financial crisis —prayer to Our Lady or St. Joseph. In 1894 she faced an emergency and asked the Sisters to say a novena ending on St. Joseph’s feast (March 19). The payment of \$12,000 on the motherhouse mortgage fell due in early April and she had **no funds**. The novena was prayed and —just in time —a special bequest came to one of the Sisters for??? \$12,000! There is no record of prayer ever failing, but, Cecilia backed away from spiritual brinkmanship by curbing spending.<sup>3</sup>

Following the 1892 move into the new motherhouse, two things eliminated unnecessary trips to the prairie:

1) Discovery of an artesian well toward the end of 1894 assured Mt. Carmel of a constant volume of water.

2) A change from burial at the old motherhouse to the new Mt. Carmel cemetery ended trips for funerals to St. Joseph's Prairie.

By June 1895, the artesian well supplied both steam boilers and laundry. Novices no longer hauled weekly wagonloads of clothes out to the prairie where spring water was plentiful. Bath water stayed a rationed item, restricting all to a bath a week and a dipper of water morning and evening.

Burial at the old motherhouse stopped. Forced by the prairie mud that clogged the wheels of the hearse during the last funeral, Father Daly, the Mt. Carmel chaplain, finally blessed the cemetery at Mt. Carmel without waiting for another death. After that, instead of the 10-mile drive out to the Old Home, two lines of novices processed behind the coffin for a quarter mile to the cemetery at the end of the Pine Walk.



Cecilia



Loyola

**In 1894, the superior at The Mount had a phone installed in the motherhouse. That night, Loyola Rutherford (to try it out) called from the motherhouse to Mother Cecilia at the Mount to say good night. “Good night,” replied Cecilia. “God bless you.” The shortest phone call ever made by a BVM! So began an acquaintance with technology most appealing to Cecilia who had written Mother Clarke in 1880, “When we speak we can repeat until perfectly sure of being understood.” That could have been the longest call ever made.**

After December 1896, all of Mt. Carmel used gaslight, though kerosene lamps and candles always stood ready for emergencies. Though Gertrude had planned gaslight, she practiced her own personal poverty by continuing to read in her room using altar-candle stubs.

For reasons of health, unfinished rooms in the north or “professed” wing concerned Cecilia. Medical theory of the day held that germs rose upward and doctors advised her to change the first floor infirmary to the top floors rather than leave it on the first.

The north or professed wing was planned for individual rooms by adding one more floor with less space between floors. Cecilia finished the top two floors for the sick in three years of careful planning. In February 1897, BVM patients moved into the newly plastered infirmary on the third and fourth floors of the north wing.

During the process of moving upstairs, Mother Cecilia may have thought wistfully of the motherhouse elevator dropped from the original plans to save money. It could have been useful for the move of people and equipment. The journey to the two top floors severely challenged her sick and limited their access to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor oratory. Coogan reported that the infirmary had its own small oratory, the “prettiest room in the house.”<sup>6</sup>

By the end of 1897 Cecilia had finished the second floor plastering and completed the whole north wing, leaving only the large chapel in the south wing undone. The huge space continued to present raw beams and rough floors to the occasional visitor. In spite of this, on the Feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, July 16, 1894, Father Daly said Mass on a temporary altar in the cavernous room. His congregation sat on folding chairs. In August, Sisters again filed into its bare space, this time for the community retreat. For ordinary daily prayers, St. Francis, one of the large second floor dorms in front, served the Mt. Carmel community of novices, postulants and residents until the plastering of the chapel walls and ceiling in the early 1900s hid the lathes.<sup>7</sup>

Some members of the congregation waited to move to Mt. Carmel. Not forgotten were those still buried at the prairie. According to an 1898 entry in RE, Cecilia arranged for the transfer of Father Donaghoe’s body from below the altar in the sheepfold chapel to a place in the old motherhouse cemetery. At the same time, she chained off a space at Mt. Carmel for Mary Clarke, Margaret Mann, Eliza Kelly, Catherine Byrne and

Rose O'Toole—"the First Five" from Dublin—but left them at the "Old Home" until she had the mausoleum at Mt. Carmel ready.

With both laundry and funerals now at Mt. Carmel, ties to the prairie stretched thinner until the center of activity gradually became emotionally as well as actually the turreted motherhouse on the Mississippi bluff. The community orbit circled the unfinished new building with a wisp of a thread left floating around the old. Finally, in 1910, the transfer of the bodies of Father Donaghoe and Mother Clarke to the end of the Mt. Carmel "Pine Walk" would swing all gravitational pull to the building at the turnaround on Grandview.<sup>8</sup>

By then the congregation had already turned as well, looking away from its early history into the challenge of the future. Mother Cecilia's aim to improve the professional preparation of her Sisters faced them toward excellence and greater interest in the education of women. When a "wild idea" emerged from a Chicago master teacher at Holy Family in 1896, Cecilia embraced it with arms wide open.

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## Notes to Chapter 14

1. Except for the ground floor, the first floor, and about six rooms on the second, the building was a shell of brick and stone, roofed and floored but not much more. Sisters at the infirmary in 1967 who spoke about the building of the motherhouse gave this information to Doris Walsh who shared her notes with Jane Coogan in 1974.

2. Details on the roofing suit in CM, March 1897. Coogan2 268 and CM places the award at \$8,400.

3. The bequest came to Mary Alphonse Boyle from her family's estate. Coogan 2 251. Money was not what Cecilia did best, but she was not inept or afraid of it.

In 1881, Cecilia successfully paid off the debt at Holy Family, (Clinton) in two years. She made slow headway on a mortgage left for her in Council Bluffs in 1903 from prior construction of an auditorium and a new wing, but Council Bluffs had always been in financial straits. There is no sign in 1911 that Cecilia faltered at the \$6,000 for the six students she sent to Catholic U, though it was "the year's salary for 30 Sisters."

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Just before one mortgage due date, a story has Cecilia sending Gertrude racing out of Mt. Carmel in the buggy bound for Cascade. Reportedly, Gertrude returned late that night with enough money to make the payment the next day.

4. The cemetery was moved to Mt. Carmel after the funeral hearse with Mary Frances Mulligan's coffin stuck in the mud on its way to the prairie. Coogan2 266.

5. Mother Cecilia's letters. 1880. BVM Archives.

6. Description of the little chapel on the infirmary top floor. Coogan2 268.

7. See chapter 22 for the story of young Teresita Butler and the completion of the chapel.

8. In 1910, Cecilia and the Council accompanied the hearses to Old St. Joseph motherhouse to bring the bodies of Father Donaghoe and the "First Five" for interment in the new mausoleum at Mt. Carmel. That same year, John Brady, the motherhouse handyman, and his brother James removed all graves from the prairie cemetery. See "Reburial of Early Members," Appendix to Chapter 14.



**Sisters including novices visit the grave of Mother Clarke at the old motherhouse cemetery. The tall marker is Mary Clarke's.**

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## **Appendix to Chapter 14**

### **Reburial of Early Members**

“In October 1909 the Council decided on the transfer of all bodies from the cemetery on the Prairie to the new graveyard at Mt. Carmel. An order was shortly placed for 152 uniform wooden boxes for that purpose. John Brady, for many years in charge of the motherhouse farm, with his brother James, was entrusted with the task. Into each box with the remains of a Sister went the iron cross that marked her grave. Five wagonloads of this strange cargo completed the transfer in the course of the next year or so. Then the reburial process began and the iron crosses were set in place at the head of each grave.” Coogan2 336.

In spring 1974, Jane Coogan told Doris Walsh that the wooden boxes were the size of shoeboxes and had to be moved at night because of an Iowa law concerning cemeteries. (Informal conversation, Xavier high school).

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