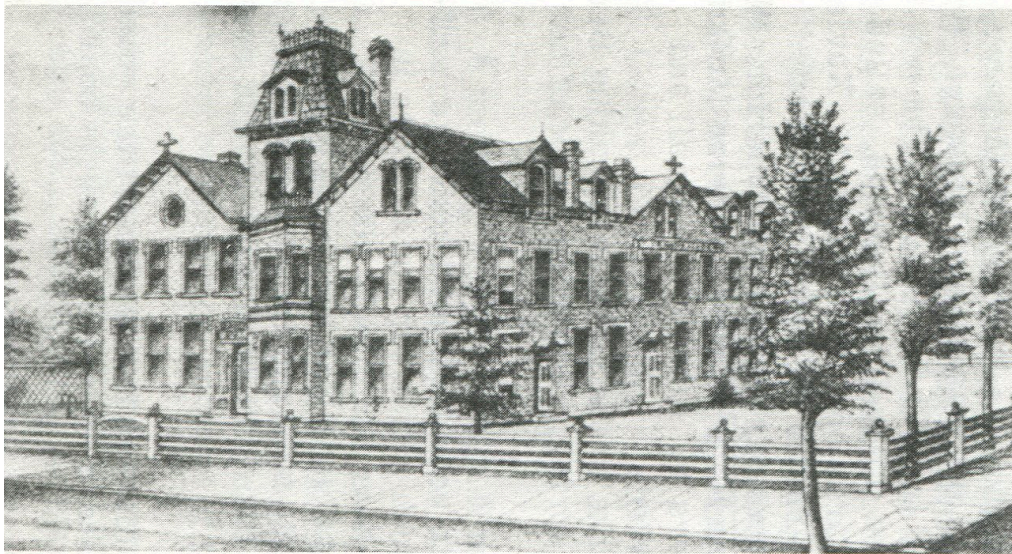


Chapter 23



St. Francis Academy, Council Bluffs (IA)
BVM Archives

In Short Supply—Money and Sisters—1902

Most of the protest over Cecilia's treatment in Davenport, receiving no encouragement from her, sank underground by 1902.

Knowing the value of a gesture, Mother Gertrude went to Davenport to consult Cecilia about St. Francis. The Council Bluffs academy needed money to build a new auditorium. It was a simple problem: the school's enrollment grew faster than its income. Since this growth occurred mainly in the parish school, which the academy housed and staffed FREE, the problem involved the pastor. Gertrude was thinking of proposing Cecilia as the new Bluffs' superior at the 1903 Council meeting. Relations with the pastor, always erratic, had recently turned stormy again and Cecilia would be a calming influence.

As a matter of fact, Gertrude worried about a lack of money in places other than Council Bluffs. She withdrew from the school at Weir (KS) opened as a favor to its pastor Michael Casey. Since his retirement, the Sisters had received no salary.¹ Recalled to staff other schools, they returned the piano to the dealer and stored the furniture until it could be sold

or given to BVM convents needing it. Members of the Council often objected to Sisters furnishing the convent. It was easier and less costly to leave if the furniture and the house belonged to the parish.

Pastors planning their budget sometimes forgot that the Sisters depended on salaries for food and clothing. In Lincoln (IL) the priest, believing the Sunday collection would cover the Sisters, had discontinued tuition in an attempt to set up a free school.² When the experiment failed, no one paid the Sisters. Debts to the grocer, butcher and coal man mounted. Unless the pastor provided money, Gertrude would be forced to leave the Lincoln parish school.

Financial arrangements for Iowa missions looked a little better. In August, Bishop Garrigan came to Dubuque for the annual Temperance meeting. During a friendly visit to the motherhouse, he suggested that, since BVMs already taught at Sacred Heart in Fort Dodge, they might as well take Corpus Christi too.³ Garrigan promised that Corpus Christi would furnish the utilities and equipment for both school and convent. Other expenses the bishop thought could be met out of tuition.

The third floor convent above Corpus Christi school called for Sisters with strong legs and good heart. The first year, boys hauled wood, water and groceries upstairs to the kitchen since Gertrude had not seen Corpus Christi in time to relocate the kitchen on the first floor as in Marcus.

Though Garrigan promised that the people at Corpus Christi would provide well, when school opened in September 1902 with 99 boys and girls, there were no desks. Quietly, the Sisters looked for alternatives, substituting the old pews in the church basement until carpenters finished repairs in the school and new desks arrived. That first year (and every year after) not only did the parish care for the school building, but the people began with a food fair of canned goods and preserves in September. From time to time families on farms butchered and packaged half a steer for the convent meat locker.

Meanwhile, to start Holy Angels in the Senn mansion (below), in Milwaukee, Gertrude Regan borrowed money. Situated near Marquette, the Milwaukee Jesuit university, the mansion was convenient to Gesu parish school which the Jesuits had asked the BVMs to take. Encouraged by Milwaukee friends to begin Holy Angels Academy, they reorganized the Senn house and, when it was full and classes overflowed into the barn, cut



The first class of five young women graduated from Holy Angels Academy in 1896. Upper row: Kathleen Reilly, Alice Meehan Carpenter and Mary Forrestal. Lower row: Adelaide Ott Hayes and Mary Carpenter. Holy Angels Academy 75 Ed. By Margaret Marv Sankovitz Oct. 1967 centerfold.

off grade school registrations for boys and eventually siphoned all grades off to Gesu parish school, reserving the mansion for Holy Angels Academy.

Though Holy Angels started in Milwaukee at almost the same time as St. Mary in Chicago, the two began from very different concepts and with different aims. St. Mary enrolled girls from blue-collar families on the south side of Chicago; Holy Angels registered girls from all over Milwaukee in its

downtown grade and high school. Enrollment increased from 20 girls and eight Sisters in 1892 to the point where the school filled the mansion, the barn and all the out buildings. The five graduates from the Class of 1896 had multiplied on the Holy Angels stage in 1967 to 126 graduates in the traditional long white formals.

Though as yet no Catholic college in Milwaukee was open to women, Holy Angels Academy fashioned its course of studies as college prep. Downer, a good private school, was available, but higher education for women at Catholic universities and colleges waited a dozen years in the future. Mount St. Joseph drew some Holy Angels grads to Dubuque and within a few years an extension of The University of Wisconsin opened for women students in Milwaukee (State Teachers' College).

RE mentions a Council decision for funding the Holy Angels addition, moving as many construction expenses as possible back to the local level—from the BVM treasury to the school itself. The new policy translated as: "Need to build? Plan and pay on the local level." So, for its new addition and later for its new high school, Holy Angels borrowed money, planned and constructed the new buildings, made and paid its own mortgage.

On the other hand, Chicago's St. Mary High School—the experiment to provide affordable schooling for girls from blue-collar families from the crowded and largely poor big city parishes—received the support of the entire BVM congregation. The Chicago high school aimed to help students succeed in the job market as teachers, secretaries, receptionists and nurses. By giving them the basics, plus social skills useful in the business and professional world, the central high school prepared young women directly for Chicago Normal, the entry point for public school teachers.

Gertrude's visit to the newly opened Holy Angels Academy showed her a school drawing girls from the middle class Catholic neighborhoods of the city. The Milwaukee academy provided students from families of professional and white collar workers with the skills needed for jobs in the business and professional world. Students already spoke English well, lived in middle class homes. They were socially adept, well trained by their families to fit into the middle class and Catholic world of Milwaukee.

By and large this was also the world of the Sisters. Their eyes focused on bettering the education and development of women in every strata of society. Their greatest gifts lay in the world they knew best—the world of the school and the business of educating others. BVMs became models of the possible, showing their students ways to achieve personal as well as economic growth. The Sisters were well placed to become such models, having unparalleled opportunities to run grade schools, build high schools, and try out innovative programs within their own BVM schools.

To provide a more human picture of Gertrude Regan, her secretary and traveling companion, Pulcheria McGuire began to record acts of concern for the Sisters as well as to describe Mother's skill with bankers and mortgages. The secretary's entries in RE during this time include accounts of Gertrude's kindness and thoughtfulness as well as her multiple journeys and business proficiency. Pulcheria presents Gertrude the woman of peace alongside the sharp and competent Mother Gertrude, a model of ability and leadership. Gertrude, the heart as well as the head of a corporation, a CEO.

Pulcheria writes that Gertrude visited all three BVM convents in Milwaukee, then returned to Chicago to see two sick Sisters and to check on another she believed headed for a break. This last Sister she protected from any gossip by including her mission among others in her brief Chicago

stops. Pulcheria comments in RE, “She [Gertrude] is a wonderful little woman, God bless her! She brings peace wherever she goes.”

Certainly Gertrude was going much more those days. Since Agatha’s death, she no longer had help with personnel decisions in Chicago and Milwaukee. Her busy November travel record and her personal diplomacy c filled Pulcheria’s log. The turn of the century marked a time with few telephones but many trains. Over the years, Gertrude had found that letters took as long and accomplished less than a short train ride. So, pass from railroad executives in hand, she traveled—eagerly, constantly, effectively.

On November 24th, a young Sister's illness brought Gertrude and Pulcheria to Rock Island (IL). Without hesitation, Gertrude sent the Sister back to the motherhouse. As long as she was in the Quad Cities (Rock Island, Moline, East Moline and Davenport), she decided to see what was happening in her schools in the area. With a wave of her hand, she hired a carriage to Moline and drove over to visit Sacred Heart parish and Immaculate Conception Academy in downtown Davenport.

The following day, she and Pulcheria boarded the Rock Island for Kansas City (MO). Their sudden appearance at St. Aloysius gave the Sisters “a pleasant surprise,” wrote Pulcheria, who added that after dinner she and Mother went to the hospital to see Mr. McGuire, her father. All these stops Gertrude tacked onto the longer, more important trip to Wichita.

The main reason for this journey lay in seeing the bishop. At 9:15 p.m., Gertrude and Pulcheria boarded a train for Wichita. The next day, shortly after 9:00 a.m., they sat talking to Isabella Kane, new superior of the BVM academy. Pulcheria wrote that their earnest discussion involved land “borrowed” by Bishop John Hennessey of Wichita from the academy. The lots in question were important. The academy had begun a \$30,000 addition on the promise of Bishop John J. Hennessy (a relative of Hennessy of Dubuque) of “all the land he ‘owned’ around the academy grounds, which is considerable.”⁴ Some mismanagement (or ecclesiastical slight of hand) had lost the academy lots to the diocese and principal Isabella Kane wanted Mother Gertrude to see real estate agent Healy and Bishop John J. Hennessy about giving them back.

The plain truth was that Hennessy had pirated the donated academy land when he first came as Wichita bishop in 1888. He seized lots reserved by donor/developers to the BVM academy for future building and collected

rent on them as diocesan property. Was he planning to give all or only a portion back as a show of generosity but keep the rest? Impossible to tell with this bishop, who, as we shall see, held an inflated opinion of his position as “prince of the church.”

To talk about the land with the bishop, Isabella and Gertrude had first to find the bishop. Doing so required the combined talents of detective and diplomat. The two jounced in a hack over bumpy Wichita streets to Valentine Healy's real estate office, then to the bishop's residence. But the bishop was out (as if he knew Gertrude was coming). Finally they traced Hennessy to the Cathedral rectory visiting his friend Father Tihen, a priest he brought with him from St. Louis. The Sisters found His Excellency in a favorable mood. He promised to see about the lots, expressed his pleasure with the work of the BVMS and confirmed his support of their academy. They left reassured. Things had not been so amiable between this bishop and Cecilia a few years before.

Their business done, Gertrude dropped Isabella at the academy and picked up Pulcheria for the train. On the return trip, they stopped by to see Pulcheria's father again before boarding for Dubuque, and reached the motherhouse the next morning in rain and sleet. After breakfast they rested an hour. “Then,” writes Pulcheria in RE, “Mother was at the 2 o'clock visit (rosary and prayers lasting about a half hour in the chapel) and began her work as if she had not been traveling for a week.”

No wonder Gertrude headed straight for her desk regardless of fatigue and a heavy cold. In 1902, there were 59 BVM houses (missions) including the Mt. Carmel motherhouse. Eight were boarding schools; three, BVM high schools; one (Mt. St. Joseph) in the midst of changing from academy to college. The rest were parish grade schools or a combination of grade and high. All mortgages, loans, contracts, and bids passed through Mother's office, though a change had begun with Wichita and Holy Angels funding their own additions. Decisions on what Sisters to change, where to place the ill, the delicate, or the difficult, who to send to a unique school or to an eccentric pastor, these were exclusively Gertrude's. She oversaw almost 700 Sisters teaching all over the U.S. with no provincials (district managers) to share the responsibility.

Opening and closing schools required a Council vote as did the choice of superiors. Though occasionally she sent a Council member to assess

prospective missions, Gertrude liked to make her own yearly visits. She also preferred to see pastors and to contact bishops. Doing so meant travel far (the west coast) and near (Iowa, Illinois, St. Louis, Chicago and Milwaukee) and places half way between (South Dakota, Montana, Colorado, Wichita, Council Bluffs, Boulder). The pace had begun to tell on Gertrude's 76 years, though she could still outlast a Pulcheria (in her 40s).

A late November trip to Cascade (IA) by carriage to see about some community land there worsened Gertrude's cold, but she took little time for recovery and went on working. Requests for Sisters appeared in every mail. Where would she find them? Already the September postulants had been received and sent out to master teachers to learn how to manage a classroom. There were a number of ailing Sisters who needed time to recover from serious illnesses. Even some of those teaching were actually too sick or too old to do more than part-time work. Two Sisters must stay in Elgin (IL) to house-sit until the parish agreed to buy the convent and its furnishings from the community.⁵ Gertrude sent a second refusal to Menominee (MI), and letters with "We have no Sisters to send," to Lorain (OH), Zwingle (IA), and Parkston (SD).

During December '02, Gertrude wrote novices teaching on the missions, giving them permission to make first vows and inviting them to Mt. Carmel for the ceremony. She invariably asked each one to make an entire gift of herself, exhorting one, "...give your heart to God and that Peace which is a foretaste of the joy of the blessed will be yours." Advising another, "Ever be obedient and humble and cultivate a spirit of prayer."

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Notes to Chapter 23

1. In between Bishops O'Reilly and Hennessy (the first two bishops of Wichita) Fr. Michael Casey administered the Wichita diocese and arranged with Mother Clarke for her to open a boarding school there. For the story, see Appendix to Ch. 23.

2. Teaching in a FREE school was complicated. Religious congregations educated themselves at their own expense. Often music money kept food on the table since tuition rarely kept pace with school expenses. In some parishes the Sisters were given half the money of a public school teacher's salary (none too generous) and often

asked to build or rent their own residence, and pay for utilities, food and furnishings out of their salary. As demand for Sisters exceeded supply, pastors sweetened the contract by offering a convent, utilities and \$20 a month per Sister. Sometimes the parish supplied the furniture as well. Other bills, including food, clothing, school supplies and repairs, accessed tuition. Without the single-minded devotion of the Sisters, it is doubtful there would have been a Catholic school system in the U.S.—certainly not that of the 20th century.

3. Actually the congregation had begun Corpus Christi in 1862 and left in 1865 when the pastor, Rev. John Marsh, died and was not replaced. Coogan2 288.

4. The letter to Gertrude from Leocadia, superior of the Wichita academy before Isabella, recounts an agreement between the developers and Casey to welcome the BVMs to Wichita. For more on Wichita land, see Appendix, Ch. 23.

5. Life in the American Catholic Church at the turn of the century had its exciting moments. The congregation left Elgin because the pastor, who had a terrible temper, wanted them to clean the church, take care of the altar and sacristy and conduct the choir besides teaching in the school. When he added that they could either do it or leave, (BIG mistake!) they left! Threats always seem to have had the opposite effect on BVM Mothers. Instead of being intimidated, Gertrude took him at his word and closed the mission. Father had a quick temper and a quick apology but Gertrude did not send the Sisters back.

A news clipping about this Elgin pastor (Archives, Elgin file) throws some light on their refusal. When the parishioners petitioned Bishop Spalding of Peoria to move their pastor, Spalding had to order his forcible eviction. According to the clipping, the priest resisted, locked himself in the church with a shotgun and engaged in a shootout with the police.

Because the Sisters owned the convent and its furnishings in Elgin, two Sisters had to house sit until the parish bought the furniture and the house the parish built when they agreed to teach in his school. After a few such experiences, the Council voted to accept only places offering a house and furniture with the invitation to staff the school.

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Appendix to Ch. 23

Background on Mount Carmel, Wichita

In 1886, between bishops, the diocesan administrator, Rev. Michael Casey, came to Dubuque and asked Mother Clarke to send Sisters to Wichita. Legend says he wouldn't leave the parlor until she said yes. (Legend also says this same thing about at least three Chicago priests: Hischen of Holy Cross, Maloney of St. Lawrence and Fitzsimmons of Holy Name Cathedral).

At last, Mother Clarke gave Casey what he wanted—perhaps also what she wanted—asking Agatha Hurley and Gonzaga McLoskey to look over the Wichita academy. When they gave her a good report, she accepted in a May 5, 1887 letter.

Letter of Mother Clarke #240. My Dear Sister, p.118

St. Joseph's Convent
Dubuque May 5, 1887

Rev. M. J. Casey
Dear Rev. Father,

Your favor of the 18th ult. was duly received, and inclosed [sic] "Statement" is most satisfactory to us, if the terms on which our holy Rule permits us to accept your conditions are satisfactory to you.

According to the "Statement," All Hallows Academy is to be a "quasi Mother House."

Now—according to our Rule, we are permitted to have but one Mother House proper, and that must be in the County and Diocese of Dubuque. We have three principal or "Central Houses," as we call them—one in Chicago, one in Davenport, and one in Des Moines. All Hallows Academy could be a fourth "Central House" of the Order, but not a Mother House, since we can have but one Novitiate, and that must be here. Now, perhaps this may not satisfy you, and I am anxious that you should know it in time. There will be no difficulty about the "\$3,000" condition and the salary of two sisters is satisfactory. If I am not mistaken, our Sisters who visited Wichita told me the house would be furnished for the Sisters; is it so? I could not procure the "\$3,000" in the given time, were I obliged to furnish the house, besides defray travel expenses of the Sisters.

I shall be most anxious, Rev. Father, until I hear from you.

Yours humbly,

Mary Frances Clarke

In July the Sisters made the 600-mile train trip to Wichita. In August they were living in the academy built for them by the developers and Father Casey. Mother Clarke also sent two Sisters for the Cathedral parish school. Casey turned over the new academy to the Sisters when they came and finished it by August. At the end of the year the BVMs began paying on it. For 10 years Cathedral parish Sisters commuted from the completed academy to the school at St. Aloysius, the pro-Cathedral.

Unfortunately, Casey and Bishop John Hennessy were not compatible. Before long, Hennessy appointed his friend from St. Louis, Father Tihen, as his vicar and sent Casey to a very poor parish away from Wichita. In sympathy for Casey, the BVMs gave Sisters to help in his parish in Weir, Kansas, but Casey never recovered from the bishop's treatment. He soon became ill and retired to Colorado. The little town of Weir could not keep up the school nor pay the Sisters without Casey, so the BVMs left shortly after he did. Not long after, Father Michael Casey died in Colorado. **Sources:** BVM Margaret Irene Healy and her research; and Coogan² 180 -183.



First pupils at All Hallows Academy gather for a solemn portrait in 1887. The entire student body of 40 boarders stand on the steps of their new building.

Mt. Carmel Wichita: the Stolen Academy Lots

A group of donors proposed to build a part of All Hallows Academy and donated land to be used later to enlarge it as needed. A year after they took possession, the Sisters were to give a note for \$3,000 to Father Casey—a part to be paid then and a part by a certain date. The Wichita city fathers wanted to assure prospective settlers that their city had much to offer. They had already done the same thing with some businesses.

Below is a copy of a letter from Leocritia (retiring superior) about the planned addition to All Hallows [later renamed Mt. Carmel]. The “Mr. Helay (sic)” mentioned by Leocritia is realtor Patrick

Valentine Healy, great uncle of BVM Margaret Irene Healy. The money for the addition would come from the sale of the donors’ lots given to the academy.

According to BVM Margaret Irene Healy’s research, Wichita Bishop John Hennessy appropriated the lots for the diocese when he took office as bishop. The problem for Gertrude and Isabella (the new superior) was how to get the land back from the bishop to pay for the addition. A copy of Leocritia’s letter is in the Mt. Carmel, Wichita file in the Archives.

Chapter 23

Sister Leocritia to Mother Gertrude

Oct. 30, 1900

Dear Mother,

We have received bids on the new addition ... Mr. Helay (sic) was here a few days ago,

(Sister M. Gonzaga and Loyola will remember him). He is the gentleman who donated part of the land we now own. He is delighted to know we have permission to go ahead, and said that as soon as he had sold some land that he has now been offered a good price for he would give me a "good donation." He also said that he knew the bishop would give back the land that was taken away [by the bishop—land donated in 1886 by the business men of Wichita for the academy's future expansion]. I told him that I did not think he would, but he assured me there was no doubt about it. He collects rent etc. for the bishop, and of course knows a great deal about the business. He is going to speak to the bishop. I told him if he did that part we would do the praying. So I want you dear Mother and all at home to join me, and if it be God's Will we will get it . . .

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Holy Angels Academy, Milwaukee, 1927.

Holy Angels Academy 75th by Margaret Mary Sankovitz Oct. 1967 .