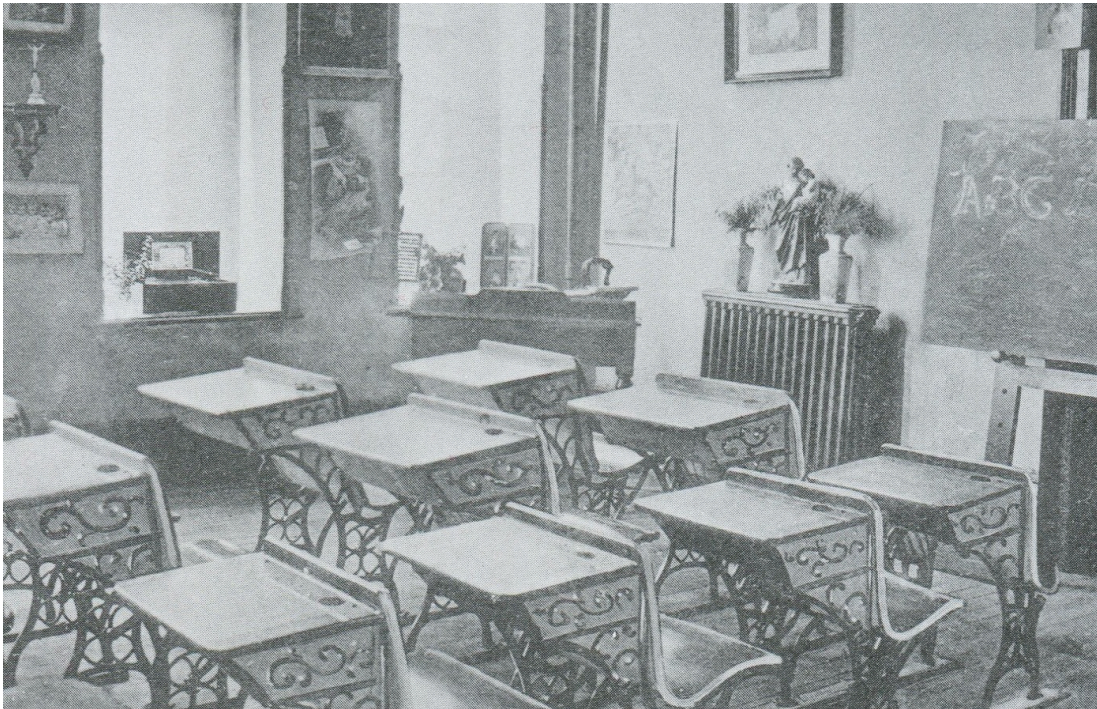


Chapter 25

We Have No Sisters to Send

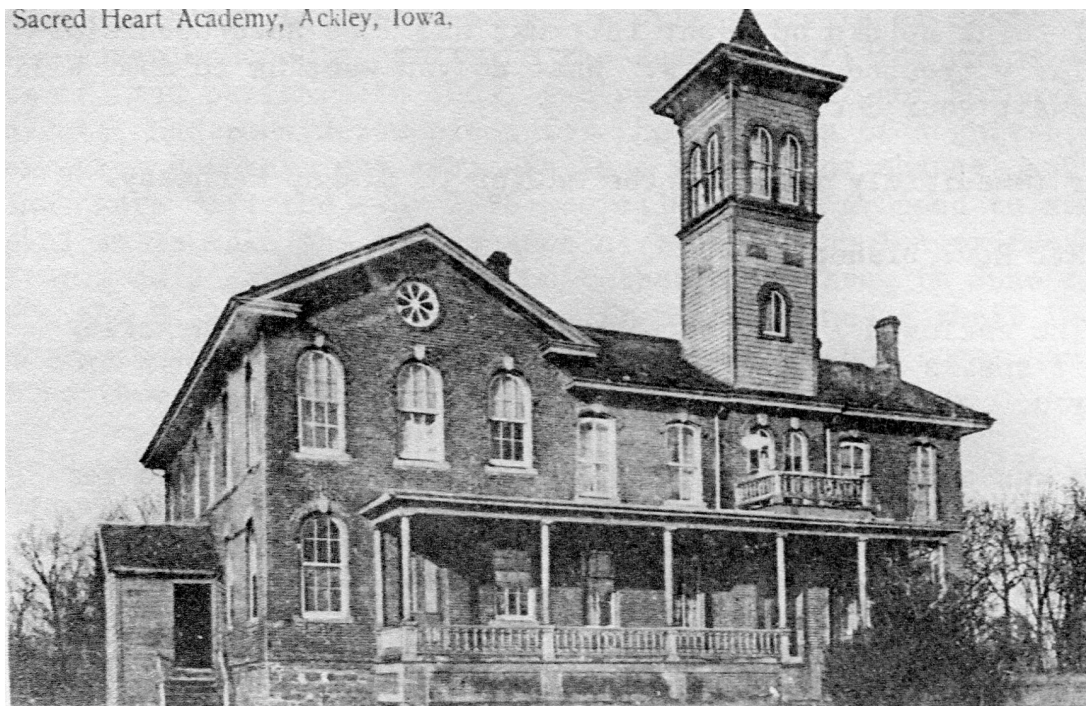


Mount St. Joseph Academy Preparatory Department Classroom
Clarke Lives! p. 36

Following her week of travel, Mother Gertrude planned to stay at her desk answering letters, and in June began quietly with the usual task of refusing new offers—no to Ballard (WA), no to Shelby City (IA)—the usual. Then a message from Sacred Heart (Ft. Dodge) about arrangements for the new convent startled her into taking the next train west. Bishop Garrigan was renovating one half of a double house for the convent at Sacred Heart, leaving a boarding house in the other half. At the turn of the century, with its mix of Victorian propriety and prudery, folks might think men going into the boarding house were visiting the convent and staying overnight—a potential scandal! None of this had occurred to the bishop who had already spent \$5,000 on alterations.

A quick survey convinced Gertrude that she might compromise if Garrigan made some simple gestures toward propriety and privacy. She calmed the concerned superior and decided a partition to separate the Sisters' entrance from the boarders' and latticework around the side yard would meet her requirements. Then she crossed the street to inspect Father Heelan's new school promised for October, and started for Sioux City to visit Garrigan. She listed the alterations the house needed, and Garrigan agreed, mildly countering with the wish for a “finished scholar and a womanly person for the highest grade” at Corpus Christi.¹

Personnel! Gertrude might also wish along with the bishop—and wish and wish. She had just come from Ackley to Ft. Dodge and from there to Sioux City. Ackley (below) was a poor mission with no financial help from the pastor. The roof leaked, the plaster fell, the Sisters had barely enough money for food and Gertrude sent the rest. She had picked up their music teacher (their only income) to replace the one ill in Sioux City. She boarded the train for Dubuque that night, planning to drop off the sick Sister at the infirmary in the morning.



Sacred Heart Academy, Ackley (IA)
BVM Archives

At 5:30 am, Gertrude arrived at Mount Carmel in time for Mass and breakfast, gave her patient into the hands of waiting nurses, then went, not to

bed, but to her desk. Already stacked for her attention were letters about the \$19,000 loan to St. Francis Academy (Council Bluffs), more requests for Sisters and notes from novices asking permission to make first vows. She disposed quickly of school offers—telegraphing a refusal to Texarkana (AK); mailing regret to Petersburg (NE); sending similar refusals to Watertown (WI), Humboldt (KA) and Seattle (WA).

One letter required a “No” plus a bit of diplomacy. Bishop O'Dea of Seattle had asked Archbishop John Keane himself to contact Mother Gertrude. The BVMs were recommended as excellent teachers and O'Dea wanted them for Seattle. Gertrude sent two members of the Council to the Dubuque chancery to explain her desire to keep the novices home this year, as Keane himself had suggested. They wished they could go to Seattle, but under the circumstances. . .

Bishop Spalding of Peoria offered a proposal novel enough to bring some thoughtful looks into the eyes of her Council. He suggested the BVMs send Sisters to Arlington (IL) to teach in the public school for a regular salary paid by the state, since most of the children in the school were Catholic. They could teach religion before or after school. As the Council thought about this, one voice and then another considered it. The Council tried it on to see how it might work, poked at it gently, and with some regret fell back at last on the usual response, “We have no members to spare.”² Since it was written down in RE, this intriguing idea was not completely buried. A ghost of it appeared when BVMs went into Title 1 and Sisters earned a public school salary teaching in government programs in Catholic schools.

That left only vow requests to answer. In between times, Gertrude wrote short, personal notes to the young Sisters. “You will soon be home where there will be a big welcome for you.” Some answers reflected the pressure of work explaining, “Yes, child, your request in regard to your Holy Vows was overlooked in the hurry of these busy times. I thank you for reminding me.” Or, “What a shame it was for your old Sister to have overlooked your letter requesting permission for your Holy Vows. This is a permission I grant you with my whole heart.” Finally, in June she mailed a circular letter giving professed Sisters permission to make vows in their own chapel or parish church.³

The same letter contained a brief notice to pastors and superiors that the community had decided to send no more than two music teachers to a parish and would allow the parish to use the music money only if needed to help pay the Sisters' salary. It seems a strange exception to allow a parish to make up their salaries with music money belonging to the Sisters themselves. So the dust of the coming battle over music money stirred slightly in 1903. By 1913 it would “raise the hackles” on many a pastoral neck, forcing the Community to withdraw from some schools.

In the meantime, Gertrude was still having problems with the western part of Iowa. In the summer of 1903, it became clear to the pastor in Council Bluffs that the completed auditorium would surpass his worst expectations. Since the BVM Community owned the boarding school and its land, he helplessly watched the shadow from the new building creep across his sun porch, a galling experience for a pastor in 1903. He recalled the day he signed off on the blueprints which the Sisters showed him out of courtesy. How could he have anticipated the angle of the winter sun? When he protested, they replied that it was too late to alter the building. They were sorry but —

To help smooth the waters, Gertrude sent Cecilia Dougherty to replace the last superior responsible for the new building. Cecilia would not arrive as superior until August, so Gertrude and she rode the train to the Bluffs together in July to ease the situation. “They explained away as best they could some difficulties and arranged for the future,” wrote Pulcheria obliquely in RE, adding that there were “kind feelings at parting.” Gertrude had not only turned to Cecilia, but handed over the problem. The irascible pastor, the shaded sun porch, the debt, the unfinished building were all Cecilia’s to handle.

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Chapter 25

1. Where Bishop Garrigan imagined this finished scholar received her education is a puzzle. Few colleges and universities admitted women. BVM Katie Heffernan’s mother, Julie Anheuser Heffernan, and her sister Amalia Anheuser enrolled at the University of Nebraska in 1911 because it was one of the few state universities that accepted women. Amalia received her BSc in math with a minor in German in 1912 and

then taught at Creighton University, the Jesuit school in Omaha. Julie majored in chemistry and minored in home economics. After getting her BSc in 1915, she too taught at Creighton University. Both young women instructed regular students during the year and Sisters during the summer session. In an interview in 2002 with Doris Walsh for “BVM Newsletter,” Katie talked at length about how her Aunt Amalia and her mother, Julie, earned their degrees in 1912-15. See also Coogan2 463 on women and higher education at the turn of the century.

2. Archbishop Ireland actually set up an agreement with some school boards in his diocese of St. Paul (MN) to rent the Catholic schools to the Board of Education and hire the Sisters as teachers at a public school salary. Early educational movements, Coogan2 appendix 2 458 .

3. Until the approval of the Rule of 1914-15, all BVMs took vows for three years, renewing them at the end of each three-year period. The 1914 Rule permitted Sisters to choose perpetual vows after they had taken annual vows for five years. Nowhere did the Rule say a Sister had to make perpetuals, though for the first perpetuals all except one Sister in a coma at the infirmary did.



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Two early BVM educators: **left**, Josephine Clarke, first superior of Mount St. Joseph Academy; **right**, Gonzaga McLoskey, who directed the music department at ICA, Davenport and improved the training of BVM music teachers.

BVM Archives