

Chapter 26

Keeping All the Balls in the Air



In August 1903, some new arrangements settled into place. Cecilia Dougherty arrived in Council Bluffs to begin her three-years as superior of St. Francis Academy. In Chicago the St. Charles Sisters moved into a new convent in Muldoon's parish across from St. Mary High School.

On the Chicago's north side, BVMS opened for registration at the new Our Lady of Lourdes school, one block south of Lawrence on Ashland. In November, Gertrude decided to check on schools and personnel. She and Pulcheria hailed a cab from Union station to nearby St. Charles parish to see Muldoon's new convent. After lunch, they walked across the street to St. Mary for a tour of the new third floor addition.

[See Chicago map] Gertrude wrapped up the trip in four days:
1) Blessed Sacrament, 2) St. Agatha, 3) Annunciation, 4) Holy Family—her secretary checked them off—5) St. Pius, 6) St. Vincent, 7) Our Lady of Lourdes to inspect the new school already overflowing with children;
8) Mercy hospital to visit the BVM sick; 9) St. Lawrence, 10) Holy Cross, 11) a stop on Calumet Avenue to see Gertrude's niece. A cab took the two Sisters to the IC station to catch the train south for 12) Pontiac. There they intended to spend the night before going farther south to 13) Lincoln (IL).

There were only two more stops on this journey planned to explain the Council decision on boys to pastors.

Gertrude and Pulcheria reached Pontiac, 50 miles south of Chicago, at 9:30 p.m. for an overnight visit as scheduled. In the morning they spoke to the pastor and boarded the train which moved slowly through the train yards until it reached 10 miles of track between Pontiac and Lincoln and ground to a halt.

When Pulcheria asked the porter why the wait, he answered that there was trouble on the tracks, trouble that eventually turned the short section between Pontiac and Lincoln into a six hour delay! Finally, they walked into St. Patrick convent, Lincoln, in time for supper and another overnight. They had plenty of time to explain the new resolution on teaching boys to the pastor and the Lincoln Sisters before boarding the 7:30 p.m. train for Dubuque and rolling up to the motherhouse in a cab at midnight. One of the Sisters met them at the side door. A hot cup of tea later, Gertrude pulled up her covers, set her alarm for 5 a.m. and fell asleep.

Label it a typical Chicago visit! a series of spot checks to see how people were fitting in. So quick were many of Gertrude's stops that she kept the cab waiting while she popped in and out. Lewine Enderle, a young Sister at St. Pius, wrote in her *Memoir* that she went downtown for an hour as a companion (probably a trip planned by her forewarned superior) and returned to find Gertrude had come and gone during the interval. The brief stops were Mother's way of keeping in touch, and she trusted them to inform her of the atmosphere of a school or convent. The trip around Chicago houses before the January election marked the end of Gertrude's final term. At the close of this day, she simply went to bed.

In spite of the growth in membership, and perhaps as a result of her journeys, Gertrude Regan knew all her Sisters and their relatives. "I have a good memory," she explained. This memory and the interest that developed it would last well into her 90s. Indeed, she needed a good memory, not only for faces, but for parish situations. After two trips back and forth from Dubuque to Cascade (a small Iowa town 60 miles SW of Dubuque) trying to get better terms for the community property at St. Martin (the Irish parish), she finally sold the BVM lots next to the school to the pastor for his very low price of \$400. She preferred peace to a fair price.

However, Gertrude's memory recalled enough about the pastor that she carefully pointed out the boundary between schoolyard and convent backyard to the superior. Doing so prevented the location of the boys' and girls' privies in the convent yard in August!¹

A few other minor items called for attention. As she searched for a solution for Cedar Falls and its problem of personalities, she recalled that the music teacher and the superior always seemed involved in the pastor's complaints. Merging the two into one woman, Gertrude sent him Cecilian O'Dea as music teacher and superior.

In two trips, she changed all the Sisters and went in August to present the new group to the pastor. The strategy worked. The Book of Superiors lists full terms for Cedar Falls' superiors following the 1903 sweep.

News from western Iowa continued mixed. On the plus side in Council Bluffs, Cecilia completed the interior of the \$50,000 auditorium and reached a stage of peaceful coexistence with the pastor. On the minus side, the debt on the addition was large and money slow coming in.

A businessman in Sioux City again offered land to the congregation at bargain prices for a boarding school in the suburb of Morningside. Gertrude responded with regret that the bishop wanted a high school near the Cathedral at the edge of downtown. Her memory of the last offer of Sioux City land in 1892 included a rebuke from Archbishop Hennessy for even thinking of planning any school in his diocese without consulting him first.²

On top of that, a flurry of letters-to-the-editor had suddenly appeared in the Sioux City paper. These responded to a slighting remark about the BVMs made by a priest cousin of Bishop Hennessy to a reporter who included the remark in a story about the barely considered academy.

Then came a counter exchange from someone defending the Sisters as teachers, followed by another flip remark from the priest that he was misquoted by the newspaper—vigorously denied by the paper defending its responsible reporting. Gertrude saw no reason to revive a proposal with that kind of history. In any case, she had no teachers for any kind of school in Sioux City, much less a controversial one.

Land nearer home presented a more familiar problem. The St. Mary Academy building on Dubuque's Cathedral Square, (built in 1884 at BVM expense) stood on diocesan land. After the Visitation nuns moved to their

own school on Locust and gave up the parish school, Bishop Keane asked BVMs to staff the school. In the interim the Sisters continued to live in St. Mary, their own building on the southwest corner of the square. Here they taught the girls of the parish. The boys had class in the Birch building nearby. In 1903, the parish asked to purchase St. Mary convent, but balked at Gertrude's price of \$6,000.

When Gertrude and the Council decided to give the building to the parish in return for a new convent, pastor Father Toomey accepted with delight. Just as the papers for the transfer were all but signed, Toomey and the parish changed their minds. They had money for either a new school or a new convent and now offered to build a new school and provide utilities and maintenance for the present convent. Gertrude accepted, but decided to keep up the insurance since any loss to the building would fall to the community, not the parish.³

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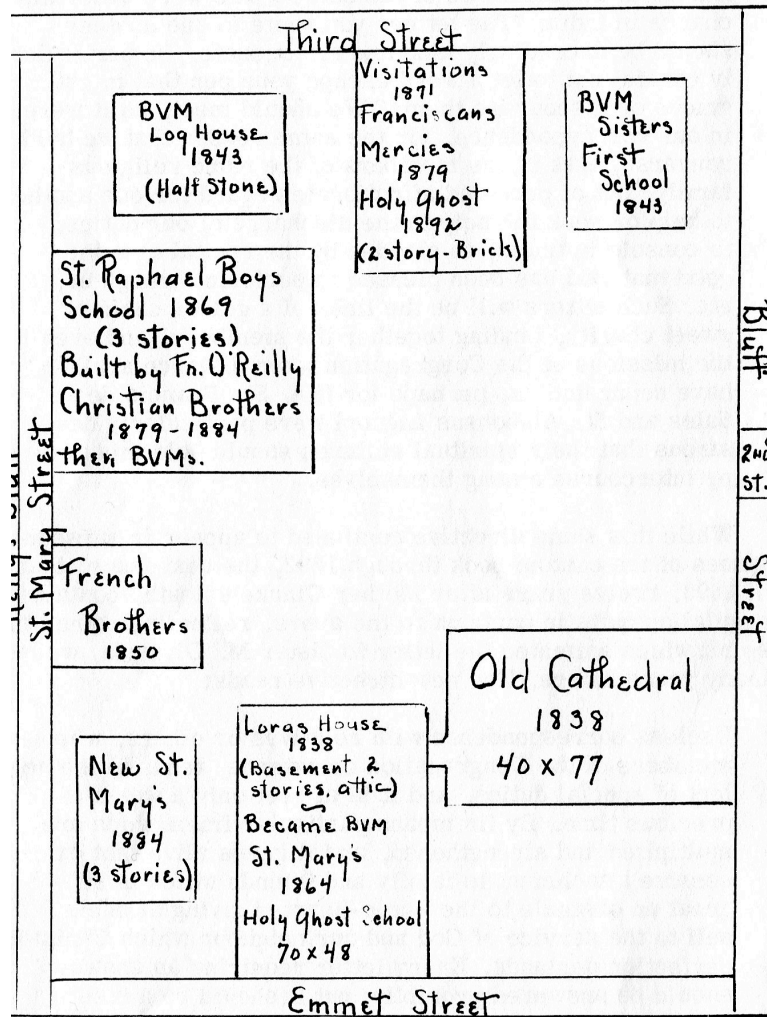
Notes to Chapter 26

1. Part of the problem in Cedar Falls was the pastor's desire to impress the administrators of the State Normal there. To do this, he asked for good teachers, particularly for a good musician for graduation and closing exercises.

2. Sioux City was still part of the diocese of Dubuque in 1892.

3. Bishop Hennessy's earlier attempt to make the BVMs buy the land on which St. Mary convent/school was built was circumvented when Gonzaga McLoskey consulted a lawyer and learned the bishop could not sell land held in trust for the diocese. When she mentioned this, Hennessy—unused to being blocked—was so angry at Gonzaga, one of his favorites, he demanded she be sent elsewhere immediately. “That very evening she left town” for Davenport. It was not the only time Gonzaga stood up to this bishop. In Mother Clarke's time, she refused to turn over the money in her trust to Hennessy when he asked for it. *Lambertina's Journal* Coogan 2,8

AFTER AN EARLY SKETCH OF CATHEDRAL SQUARE, DUBUQUE



Sketch of Cathedral Square, Dubuque (IA)
BVM Archives

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