

## Chapter 30

### Walk the Walk with Gertrude

Near the end of June 1904, after the bruises healed from her fall in Washington (IA), Mother Gertrude resumed her round of visits to Iowa pastors to

explain recent community decisions. Her route lay through the Missouri river cities of western Iowa: Council Bluffs, Sioux City and nearby Lincoln (NE).

When she reached the Bluffs, she and

Cecilia went together to talk to the pastor. Then they toured the new auditorium and completed arrangements for an additional \$2,000 loan. Pulcheria and Gertrude left Cecilia with the loan, the pastor, and fervent prayers for the future. In Lincoln, they visited Fathers Shine and Cronin, enjoyed a sightseeing tour, and refused new schools from Bishop Bonacum.

With her usual energy, Gertrude left the next morning for Sioux City and a meeting with Bishop Garrigan on the recurrent topic of a high school there. Of course, it was impossible. The community had no more high school teachers available. However, she assured the bishop she had no intention of building in Morningside,<sup>1</sup> admired his new cathedral, met with both Sioux City pastors, and caught the evening train for Dubuque, arriving at Mt. Carmel in time for 6 a.m. Mass. She had been away a week. At the end of this trip, Pulcheria, 30 years younger, finally comments on the pace—



**Livery wagon with luggage from train for boarding students.**

*Seeds/Harvest A History of the Archdiocese of Dubuque p. 33*

a partisan remark, written months after watching the “peacemaker” at work among pastors and bishops!

It is wonderful how Mother Gertrude can stand so much fatigue and overwork at her age [77]. God surely sustains her in her labors for His honor and glory. Many times her companion, completely exhausted, would complain were she not ashamed to mention her weariness when looking on the zeal of little Mother Gertrude. Everywhere she goes she brings a blessing. In her gentle, religious way she makes crooked paths straight, and leaves peace and happiness and renewed courage to the members. May God bless her and spare her to the Community for many years to come. (RE. June 1904.)

Of course, other opinions than Pulcheria's existed. Yet Gertrude had weathered a number of difficult situations quite well. Being a bright little old lady with a slight lisp may even have been an advantage.



BVM Celerina King, at Marian Hall,  
Dubuque 1954 BVM Vista

In July 1904, she moved for two days to The Mount to make herself available to the Sisters on retreat there. Being present for two days to all Sisters at the retreat meant catching up with other work after night prayers. Much of the record of Gertrude's administration reads like a digest of loans, mortgages, buildings, and trips, but Celerina King, sitting in her room in Philomena Hall during the

summer of 1954, insisted, “Mother Gertrude was interested in Sisters developing themselves as religious and gave little thought to building schools and expanding the work of the Community.”<sup>1</sup>

Although Celerina built Philomena Hall at Gertrude's command and knew Gertrude quite well, her opinion does not sound like the Gertrude Regan of the multiple mortgages, meetings with contractors and architects, nor of RE. That Gertrude was a woman driven by the times to respond with buildings and to answer the expansion of Catholic schools with Sisters. But she never separated the Sister as a religious from the work of the community. To her they were one—the Will of God. In her own words to a young Sister in 1892: “No matter, dear child, where we are, let us live, work

on generously in this way for the love of our dear Lord and the Community.” There is little change in a 1904 note: “May we all do God's holy will and under all circumstances to promote His greater honor and glory.”

At the end of July there were still letters from pastors protesting the Council decision not to teach older boys. Sometimes that summer Gertrude would gladly have exchanged problems with one or other of the Sisters at the retreat who talked with her. Bishop Spalding asked for an exception on boys in the case of Moline (IL). The pastor there complained that his boys needed a Catholic education more than his girls. Gertrude replied that she could not treat Moline differently and that other pastors also felt this way. Finally, Spalding and the pastor agreed to find another congregation for the school. In August, Gertrude and Gonzaga went to close the Moline mission.

Leaving Moline freed a few more Sisters for Chicago. On August 16, 1904, Chionia Cavanaugh,<sup>2</sup> new superior of Holy Name Cathedral school, left for Chicago to buy furniture. The Religious of the Sacred Heart had taken theirs with them when they moved north on Sheridan Road, leaving Holy Name convent and school spacious but bare.

St. Dominic's BVMs, starting like Holy Name's with eight teachers and a cook, moved into a small, poor, barely adequate house. Gertrude visited both convents on August 26<sup>th</sup> to see that the Sisters were settled.

With wry humor, Chionia wrote of Holy Name beginnings: “On August 16, 1904, S.M. Chionia, who had been chosen Superior of the new Mission, left Dubuque, more enriched with good wishes than with funds, to take charge of the new home.” She opened the door on a four storey building with 40 absolutely empty rooms! and immediately bought beds and pots and pans.

The day her purchases were delivered “at all five doors simultaneously,” she and her companion forgot lunch until two o'clock when she looked in her purse to count her “entire fortune of 23 cents.” Lunch consisted of two oranges and a pitcher of milk. Just as they were sitting down to it, a hobo knocked at the door “asking,” writes Chionia dryly, “to partake of our abundance.”<sup>3</sup>

To fill the house for the time being, Chionia picked up odds and ends wherever she could. When the rest of the Sisters arrived at Holy Name, they ate at an old swaybacked table in the dining room. Some sat on regular chairs and some on chairs with legs sawed off for use in the bathrooms.

The total effect was a crenellated line of heads so that some towered above others whose chins rested on the table. For cutlery they owned two or three broken knives and forks and no tablecloth or napkins. To this convent, Gertrude “sent the cream of the novitiate—four novices so proper they walked according to number on the street,” wrote Chionia.<sup>4</sup>

It must have been quite an experience for a novice—the exuberance of that first day of school at Holy Name! Children came from “the public,” the “Madames” (Religious of the Sacred Heart), “the Brudders” (Christian Brothers). Most classrooms held 100+ students, while the novice teaching “little ones” counted 125 “but could not say how many more she had.”

“Holy Name needs more Sisters!” said Fitzsimmons. One might imagine with what joy he took the first train to Mt. Carmel and in a 1904 version of the sit-in, refused to leave until he secured a promise of help. He got it! Mother Gertrude sent Maurice Duffy and Octavia Burke to Chicago to “borrow” (Chionia uses “rob”) one Sister each from Holy Family, St. Vincent, Sacred Heart and St. Pius. Fitzsimmons now had 12 Sisters on staff. One year later the Holy Name faculty numbered 29 and still growing.

A variety of less exciting transactions faced the Council in the fall of 1904. The Mount asked permission for immediate purchase of the land across Seminary Road (Clarke Drive). Rumors that a dairy intended to buy caused the Council to vote “yes” in spite of the \$88,000 owed by The Mount from the previous costs for the chapel, an academy wing (Bertrand Hall), pianos, roofing etc., and an additional debt of \$2400.<sup>5</sup>

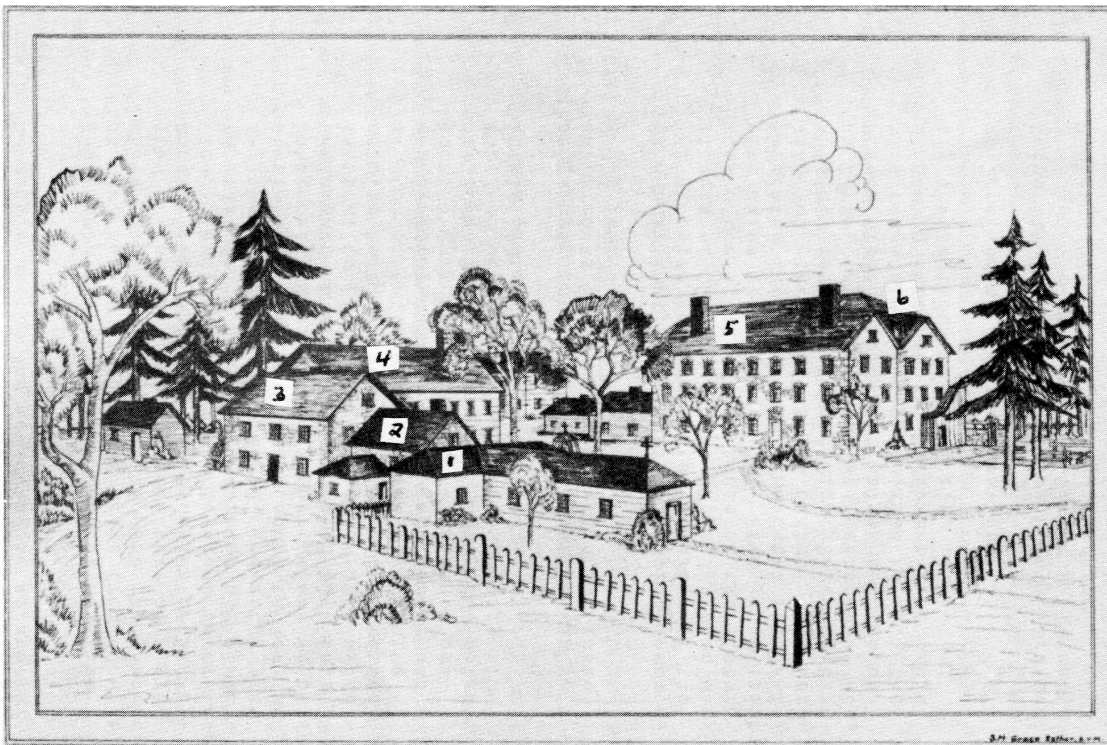
Then Archbishop John Keane urged Mother Gertrude to relax the ruling on boys for the poorer high schools in Iowa. These could hardly afford to hire men and he thought she need not worry about boys in regular classes. Music lessons for boys, he agreed, should be out. Under his pressure, the Council agreed to the proposal (for Iowa), then in justice extended it to all schools in similar circumstances.

After Keane's intervention on boys, Cecilia Dougherty and Bertrand Foley proposed that the Council send a letter to Jesuit provincial Grimmelsmann asking him to restart the process for a Cardinal Protector which had been halted in July. Pulcheria summarized Keane's opinion in RE as “does not think it is necessary nor ever will be.”<sup>6</sup> A letter was indeed drafted but never sent. Gonzaga and Maurice, joining Mother Gertrude, considered it a bad time for such a move.



Bishop Garrigan wrote again about a high school in Sioux City and was asked to wait a year. Gertrude added with a certain humor that if 50 postulants came on December 8<sup>th</sup>, she thought the school could be opened in three years. A delightful use of exaggeration, a witty refusal certainly enjoyed by the bishop. Never, even in September, had as many as 30 postulants entered at once—as Garrigan well knew.

However, the time seemed right for a housekeeping decision. An October visit to the old motherhouse convinced Gertrude that part of it should be razed. No one had occupied the main building since the last wagonload of old Sisters creaked up to the back door of Mt. Carmel in 1902,



**Sketch of old Motherhouse complex**  
BVM Archives

“awestruck by the sight of railway trains.”<sup>7</sup> Gertrude ordered the crumbling old sheepfold chapel (1) torn down as well as the long frame infirmary (4) near it where Mother Clarke's room still stood. The buildings were beyond repair and razing them would clear the ground for tenants. Then she ordered workmen to dynamite the foundations of the old motherhouse (5) and boarding school and novitiate (6). After that, except for an occasional novice picnic, the prairie was given over to farming. “I never thought she

[Gertrude] would be the one to do it!”<sup>8</sup> said Mother Clarke’s BVM niece, Josephine, when she heard of the prairie changes.<sup>9</sup> By 1925, only Father Donaghoe’s house (2) and the parish house (5) remained at Old St. Joseph’s.

At Holy Name, Chicago, people were moving in instead of out. The house Annals celebrated the coming of pews for the chapel in November. Msgr. Fitzsimmons, in high spirits, continued to triumph. By December, the riot of growth in his school called for another music teacher who arrived in time to help with the Christmas program and shortly after that to shiver in the Chicago cold from typical Chicago weather.

The Sisters were making good use of their Christmas vacation, catching up on papers and cleaning clothes and classrooms, when a sudden drop in temperature froze both water and gas lines. In the emergency everyone moved mattresses and blankets down to the first floor auditorium where two gas stoves connected to jets in the footlights produced the only heat in the house.

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### Notes to Chapter 30

1. Celerina King may have missed the combination of business woman and religious in an 1886 letter written while Gertrude acted as secretary for Mother Clarke. Gertrude writes at length of the coming profession of novices.

My dear Sister,

Mother [Clarke] says for you to acknowledge the receipt of \$50.00 Novitiate Fee which your parents sent her through S.M. Agatha [Hurley]. I should have written you this two days ago but we have been very busy and my hand is so tired now I can hardly hold the pen. Give love to dear S.M. Agnes [Burke] and each dear Sister. We will soon, please God, see nearly all of you home to prepare for your Holy Profession. We pray our Immaculate Mother to obtain for you all every grace to make them, your vows, well.

With Mother's love and blessing.

Collection of Mother Clarke’s letters. BVM Archives.

2. Chionia Cavanaugh was elected to the Council. Coogan2 296. Chionia was appointed superior of The Mount in 1918 when the school became a member of the North Central Association under Antonia Durkin as dean. Coogan2 289.

3. All details on Holy Name's beginnings may be found in the Holy Name file, BVM Archives and in Coogan2 302, 303.

4. BVM postulants receive a number when they enter. This identifies their clothes and in the 1900s was a short way to mark their seat in the dining room and in the novitiate. Their community number served as a permanent congregation ID.

5. Land purchased across from The Mount (Clarke) on Seminary Road (Clarke Drive) later became the site of Terence Donaghoe Hall and Mary Francis Clarke Hall.

6. In RE, May 1904, Pulcheria summarizes the bishop as follows, "Doesn't approve. Says no one will ever interfere with our community as we have approval of the Holy See. Does not see that a cardinal protector would be of any use to us. Like putting a purple ribbon around the neck for show. That if we received Cardinal Martinelli or any other cardinal, we would be required to write a sweet letter once or twice a year and enclose a stipend. They, the Cardinals, make their livings that way."

7. According to Sisters Mary Lucia Murphy and Carlino Guyton, most of the older Sisters on the prairie came to Mt. Carmel shortly after the general move in the 1890s. Lucia's story describes an entrance punctuated by noise. "A big racket—six or eight old Sisters in a wagon...They came to the novitiate every night and would walk with a novice on either side down to the cemetery."

8. Destruction of prairie motherhouse, adobe chapel, and infirmary with Mother Clarke's room occurred in 1904. Father Donaghoe's house has been restored and is cared for by the members of the Clarke Community. The farm itself was sold in the late 1960s. Today the only land owned by the congregation at the old home is that on which Father Donaghoe's house stands. The community property includes the site of the sheepfold chapel and some of the ground around it, plus the right of way on the farm road. For a time those who rented the farm used Donaghoe's house as their home. In the 1940s Sister Mary Arnold, a daughter in one of these families, entered the BVM congregation.

9. At one time, even before the new motherhouse at Mt. Carmel was built, there was talk of renting the old building to the state for an orphanage. A letter from Gonzaga to Gertrude examined the idea pro and con at length, but the proposal came to nothing. A March 1890 letter about an orphanage and the Old Motherhouse is in Coogan2 301

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