



On the road to Jubilee 2012

Loretto moves West from 1830 to 1900, founding 99 schools in territories that were soon to become 13 individual states

By Carolyn Dunbar, Editor

As the Sisters of Loretto answered many calls to provide schools and teachers during the 19th century, their travels into the western territories coincided with — and were an integral part of — the prime force, or “manifest destiny,” that drove this extraordinary period in American history.

The call to educate children defined the Sisters of Loretto from their origins as a Catholic order of religious women in 1812 until the Second Vatican Council sparked significant change from 1965 to the present.

In the 70 years from 1830 until 1900, Loretto’s many teaching missions left a lasting legacy, but how does that legacy influence the Loretto Community today when teaching is no longer its sole focus?

In this edition of *Loretto Magazine*, you’ll read several first-hand accounts from our 2010 Diamond and Golden Jubilarians of their Loretto schooling and its direct effect on their lives, pages 12-14. Also, the Sisters of Loretto have worked with their West African sister community, the Daughters of the Blessed Trinity, to open a new primary school for poor children in Ghana, pages 10-11. A brand-new Loretto home (foundation) has just opened in Faisalabad, Pakistan, which is likely to involve a teaching

mission to the poor, pages 5-7. Current activities of Loretto at the United Nations have purposely engaged children and young students from Loretto academies and colleges in attending conferences to learn about the plight of people in developing countries. Loretto’s effort to expose students to difficulties suffered in other parts of the world has opened their eyes, expanded their educational horizons, and given them new tools to spark their future interest in and activism on behalf of others less fortunate, pages 8-9. Today, many donors continue to support Loretto in honor and memory of the sisters who taught them, pages 20-23.

The wide-open frontier

In 1830 the country was still in its infancy, just 47 years after the great War for Independence. And it had been only 24 years since the Lewis and Clark Expedition had returned to St. Louis from its singular journey to the Pacific Ocean. The possibilities for this new nation were wide open, as vast as the western frontier, limited only by the imagination, stamina, and courage of the young Americans who pushed westward. Many families were eager to discover what this new land would hold for them, and what their strong hands and God-fearing hearts could make of it.

Mary Matilda Barrett SL, in her unfinished manuscript *One Hundred and Fifty Years*, described the daunting emptiness of the American West, alluding to the courage and faith it must have taken for the sisters to brave the unknown, intent on teaching the new pioneers. “The Osage Mission, founded [in 1847] seven years before territorial status was given to the region that is now the state of Kansas, lost in a sea of distance, also knew poverty, the poverty of the frontier, which was outweighed only by the loneliness and the appalling stillness of the boundless prairie, far from all human aid, with no recourse but Divine Providence.”

Appalling stillness. How we, driven by our 21st century stress, may often long for that stillness today — but only given our paved roads, motorized transportation, instant communication, plentiful food, clothing, and shelter . . . or with the knowledge that these are never far from reach. Without these comforts, we, too, might face with fear and trepidation an unbroken sea of grass stretching far beyond an unfamiliar horizon. Would we have been brave enough to walk in the company of hardship, sacrifice, and even death to blaze a new trail and push onward until our mission was accomplished?

Tales from the Osage Mission

The Sisters of Loretto who were living in St. Genevieve, Mo., at the time responded to the call to establish the first “Indian Mission of the Congregation” in St. Paul, Kansas. Mother Generose Mattingly named Sisters Concordia Henning, Bridget Hayden, Mary Petronilla Van Prater, and Vincentia McCool to undertake the frontier mission. The year was 1847, and these women too often found their mission standing inconveniently between the Osage Indians and U.S. soldiers in a fight for territorial dominance. Courtesy of Loretto Archivist Katherine Misbauer SL, the following is information taken from the files of Osage Mission. These are the recollections of Bridget Hayden SL.

After getting to know her, the Osage Indians at Osage Mission called Mother Bridget Hayden “Medicine Woman.” She established “the Job Room,” a room in the convent set apart for the purpose of taking care of the sick or those affected in any physical way. The Indians frequently suffered from boils and sores of all kinds.

Every morning regularly two or more sisters would spend some hours in the Job Room. They washed and dressed innumerable boils and sores. In addition, Jesuit Father Schoenmakers’ knowledge was invaluable to the community. With his aid, small pox, malaria, and many other physical ills were combated.

A company of soldiers came to rob the Mission. They began to go through the convent building when one of the leaders said to his companions, “Come away, there is nothing here but poverty.” It was true that poverty was apparent everywhere. Within the humble walls of the convent, however, were \$7,000 dollars worth of various goods needed to care for all at the Mission. The soldiers did not notice anything.

The sisters has been told by the Jesuit Priests never to show fear either to the Indians or the soldiers. So well did the Sisters observe the counsel, that the Indians were often heard to say, “The sisters are braves.” It was a high compliment to the sisters.

Many new foundations

Today the sisters speak of their foundresses — Mary Rhodes, Christina Stuart, and Ann Havern — who began by teaching the children in Kentucky settlements in the early 1800s. They soon wished to form a new religious community, and with the help of Father Charles Nerinckx, began The Little Society of the Friends of Mary under the Cross of Jesus.

Their purpose was 1) devotion to God and to the honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 2) perpetual contemplation and remembrance of Jesus, and 3) “the propagation of our holy religion by instructing youth and by paying any spiritual or corporal service compatible with the spirit of the institute.” (*I Am the Way*)

During the 70 years from 1830 to 1900, the Sisters of Loretto were intent on achieving their threefold purpose, carrying out the third purpose with vigor. The impact of their efforts is clearly told at the commemoration of their first 100 years as a religious community. Archivist Kate Misbauer provided this excerpt from the address of Reverend Celestine Brey, AM, STB, delivered on occasion of Loretto’s Centennial Celebration, April 25, 1912. He told the crowd:

As early as February 1832, a colony of six sisters under the leadership of Mother Agnes Hart was sent from Loretto to Long Lick, Breckenridge County, Kentucky, where Father Robert Abell had built for them a new house, which they called Mt. Carmel and where they labored heroically for seven years.

1633 — 1812
Catholics Settle in America,
Loretto Story Begins

1812 — 1830
Loretto Foundation and Early Days;
Moving Beyond Kentucky

1830 — 1900
Education Mission Expands;
Loretto Pushes Westward

1900 — 1960
Education Efforts Diversify;
First Loretto Infirmary Opens
1923: Loretto in China

1960 — 1970
Decade of Renewal;
Loretto Studies Guidelines, Governance
1960: Loretto in Latin America

1970 — 1990
New Government Structure;
Loretto Works for Justice/Peace
1989: Loretto in Ghana

1990 — 2000
Co-membership Continues to Flourish;
Loretto and Ecological Awareness

2000 — 2012
Loretto Leadership Expands;
Sister Communities Embrace
2009: Loretto in Pakistan

2012
Loretto Celebrates 200th Jubilee!

While today this house is in a dilapidated condition, “Monastery Farm” and “Monastery Ford” and a faithful Catholic people are still there to remind the newcomer of the great blessings that were showered upon Breckenridge County in the balmy days of its early history by the Sisters of Loretto.

To establish a new school, academy, mission home, or convent is to “make a foundation.” Remarkably, the Little Society made nine foundations in the 18 years between 1812 and 1830. Eight of these were in Kentucky, and one in LaFourche, La., which lasted only three years. Between 1830 and 1900 — the period that concerns this article — the sisters founded 99 schools in territories that would become 13 different states. Twenty-five of these were additional schools in Kentucky. Thirty-two schools opened in Missouri, 12 in New Mexico, nine in Colorado, five in Illinois, four in Alabama, three each in Arkansas and Texas, two in Kansas, and one each in Arizona, California, Nebraska, and Ohio.

Each of the 99 foundations had its own unique history of the manner, time, and unique circumstances in which it came into being. Much has been written about these individual foundations, and is worth study. So how do we determine their impact on the people settling the American West? We can start with the numbers. The Loretto Archives in Nerinx, Ky., keeps a record of every Loretto foundation started in 1812 to the present day. Of the 99 schools opened between 1830 and 1900, many lasted for decades, and some more than 100 years. A few of them are going strong today. Some of them did not succeed and closed after a year or two. If you total the years each school was open until the sisters “withdrew,” in the parlance of the Archives, and then add them together, the number of years these schools matriculated students comes to an amazing 4,509. This is a matter of record.



Loretto Academy in Las Cruces, N.M., was founded in 1879 and educated students for 73 years until it closed in 1943. Illustration by Edith Ann Jaeger SL.

To determine exactly how many students graduated every year from every school is more difficult. Some records exist, others did not survive. We can still get an idea of the impact or influence these schools had, however, by applying some conservative guesses. Suppose, for example, we apply a low estimate to the accumulated 4,509 years the 99 schools were open for business. Say on average, five students graduated from each school for each year it was open. By multiplying five graduates by 4,509 years, an estimate of the total number of students graduating from Loretto schools started between 1830 and 1900 is 22,145. If 10



Founded in 1864, St. Mary's Academy has been a top school on the Denver scene ever since. 2010 marks the 164th year SMA has been educating students. This illustration by Pat Patterson depicts the school's third Denver location, which opened in 1951.

students graduated from each school for each year it remained open, that's 45,090 graduates over the 70-year period. Fifteen students per year makes 67,635 graduates, and so on. Most graduates would grow up to raise their own families and develop their own circles of acquaintance, where the influence of their Loretto education would be likely to spread.

These figures are conservative, but one can begin to grasp the number of people educated and influenced for life by the Sisters of Loretto. Moreover, the heyday of Loretto's educational leadership and strength in the United States was not to reach its zenith until the 1960s.

Sister Mary Lilliana Owens, Ph.D., wrote in “Loretto in Missouri” [1965, B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis] of Loretto's call to teach:

Providence raised the Sisters of Loretto up for the cause of religious education, and placed them in the class and lecture room — one of the most glorious, the most useful, the most important works that God's providence has ever assigned to any society of women.

Interestingly, this book came out in 1965, the year in which profound changes would rock the Catholic Church and many religious orders, including the Sisters of Loretto — ultimately opening their mission and vision beyond the walls of the classroom to serve the poor and needy and promote peace and justice in many new and different ways. A look at this important time and the changes it brought about will be the subject of a future article in our series *Journey to Jubilee 1812-2012*.

