

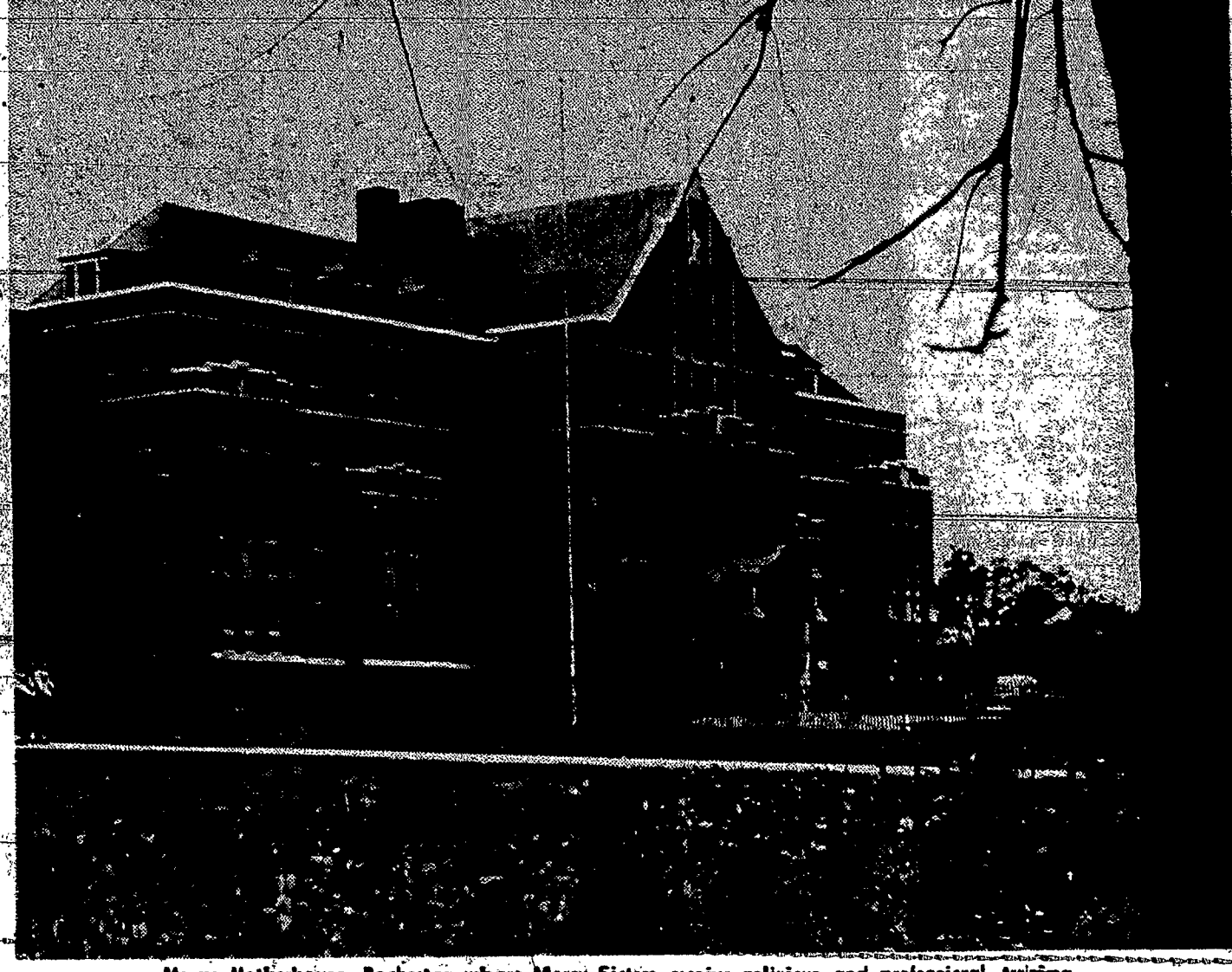
# Sisters Of Mercy—Pioneers In Diocese

Teaching Community Has Given Almost Century Of Service To Diocese,  
Now Conducts 19 Elementary Schools, 3 High Schools, Nursing School

**E**STABLISHMENT IN Elmira of the \$1,600,000 new Notre Dame High School marks a major venture for the Sisters of Mercy who have served as educators in the Diocese of Rochester for almost a century. Today in the twelve-county Diocese of Rochester, the Mercy community is engaged in teaching over 10,500 students in the elementary and high school level. They trace their origins to a pioneer group of Mercy Sisters who came to America from Ireland in 1843. The first Mercy Sisters were established in Rochester in 1857 when they made a brave beginning in Old St. Mary's parish.

The American chapter of the Mercy order's apostolate begins December 22, 1843 at the Cathedral parish of Pittsburgh, Pa. Mother Francis Xavier Ward, co-laborer of Mother Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, was the leader of this courageous band of Sisters who left their native home in Ireland to inaugurate in America the spiritual and educational work of the Sisters of Mercy.

The Sisters were hardly well established in their first school in Pittsburgh when appeals came from other dioceses to solicit their help. The educational program of the community was making itself felt and more bishops were anxious to secure their help to train the children of their parishes.



Mercy Motherhouse, Rochester, where Mercy Sisters receive religious and professional training.

**B**ISHOP JOHN TIMON, C.M., first Bishop of Buffalo, N. Y., in 1854, attended the Plenary Council in New York where heavy stress was laid upon the proper education of the young. He became anxious about affairs in his diocese (which then included the present Diocese of Rochester) and appealed to the newly founded community of Sisters of Mercy in Providence, Rhode Island.

His appeal was successful and in June 1857 Mother Francis Xavier Ward, in company with five Sisters set forth to their new mission in Rochester, then part of the Diocese of Buffalo. Bishop Timon in the meantime negotiated with Father Thomas McAvoy, pastor of St. Mary's Church on South Street to receive the new Sisters. Plans were made for the Sisters to occupy the convent adjacent to the church, which had been recently vacated by the Redemptive Sisters who labored in the diocese.

In September, the Sisters opened in their own convent a "select boarding school" for girls of elementary and secondary levels, the Academy of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady of Mercy. They also took up teaching in the first parochial school in St. Mary's parish in the basement of the church. Hand in hand with the teaching began the visitation of the sick in the parish.

In 1872 an Industrial School was opened for poor girls in a building adjoining the South Street convent. As the parochial work of the Sisters increased and demands were made for help from other dioceses, work in the Academy and the Industrial school had to be abandoned.

**F**IVE YEARS after the Sisters were located at the South Street Motherhouse, a small band was sent to Batavia to start a new convent. In 1867 another band of six Sisters started out to establish the

work of Mercy in Auburn. As was customary, in those days a "free" school and select school was always opened in each new foundation.

In 1868 and again in 1897 the diocese of Buffalo underwent some changes and remapping in territory. After the first change the Rochester diocese was established and the Batavia community of the Mercy Sisters was cut off from Rochester. Later the Sisters in the Southern Tier who were founded from the Batavia community were joined to the Rochester community.

The first Southern Tier communities of Mercy was established in 1867 at Corning. Here the Sisters taught at St. Mary's School which for years was directly under the local public school Board of Education. In 1898, when the famous "Religious Gerty Law" went into effect it became a purely parochial school and religion could be taught as part of the regular curriculum.

The parochial school and an academy was opened in 1869 in Owego. Next in order, schools were opened in Hornell and Elmira. Shortly before the death of Father James Early of Hornell in 1890, he purchased a sanitarium now known as St. James Mercy Hospital. He shortly turned it over to the city with the expressed declaration that the "Sisters of Mercy were always to be in charge."

St. James Mercy Hospital, in 1951, added a million dollar wing which brings it up to 150 bed capacity. The hospital has a fully accredited nursing school and an accredited x-ray technician school.

**A**S THE CENTURY turned, the Sisters took up work at Holy Cross school in 1908 and at Mount Carmel in 1909, both in Rochester. Four sisters

## Mercy Sisters Express Thanks

The Sisters of Mercy wish to express their deep appreciation and sincere thanks to their many loyal and generous friends who have shown such keen interest in the progress of Notre Dame High School from its first conception to the opening of its doors on September 7 of this year.

To Mr. Leo Connelley, the contractor and sub-contractor in extended commendation for their untiring work in the growth of the plans. To the many benefactors of Notre Dame and the loyal clergy of Elmira who promote a continued remembrance in daily prayer. Special thanks must be given to Mr. Cornelius J. Wilkinson and the staff of the Elmira Star-Gazette for its long range news coverage which followed Notre Dame's progress so faithfully and to the many advertisers who have made this September 21 Supplement of the Catholic Courier-Journal possible.

Mother Mary Magdalene  
Mother General  
Sisters of Mercy

started work in Mt. Carmel but within a month the registration jumped from two hundred to seven hundred which necessitated an increase of faculty members to ten.

The educational influence of the Sisters of Mercy over the years was widely extended in the diocese. One after another they were called upon to staff the schools of St. Vincent's, Corning; St. John's, Clyde; St. Cecilia's, Elmira; St. John the Evangelist, St. Andrew's, St. Salome's, St. Thomas, St. Cecilia's, St. Charles and St. James in Rochester; St. Michael, Newark, and St. Rita's, West Webster.

On New Year's day in 1916, fire destroyed the South Street Motherhouse in Rochester, so the Sisters were forced to convert their summer cottages at St. John's Park, Charlotte, into a temporary Motherhouse and novitiate. In the fall of 1923, Our Lady of Mercy High School in Rochester was opened and in the spring of 1932 the new Motherhouse adjoining the school on Blossom Road was dedicated. The chapel wing to the Motherhouse was opened in 1951.

As a century of service to the Diocese of Rochester looms on the horizon, the Sisters of Mercy have on their teaching program 19 elementary schools, 3 high schools (Our Lady of Mercy High School, Holy Family High School in Auburn which will in two years give place to Mt. Carmel High School and Notre Dame High School in Elmira).

They also conduct a Nursing Training School in conjunction with St. James Mercy Hospital in Hornell. Mother McAuley Junior College located at the Blossom Road Motherhouse is now a State-accredited training school for the young Sisters about to enter the teaching profession.

During the summer months and on Saturdays, the Sisters are engaged in catechetical work in various centers of the diocese for the instruction of Catholic children in the public schools.

**A** RECENT STEP in meeting the educational needs of the children under their care was the establishment of a Reading Laboratory. This clinic conducts classes throughout the year at Mercy High School and for five weeks during the summer months extends its service to four other centers in Rochester, Auburn, and Corning. With its extensive program it appeals to both

boys and girls at all grade levels who have reading problems.

Mother McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, knowing that secular instruction is subject to many changes wrote no general rules on it. She always held that in the field of education the Sisters should adopt improvements as they are introduced and to keep abreast with the best in the field of education.

Mother McAuley regarded secular education as a means not an end, but a means essential to the ultimate object of education. The end of education in her words is not merely to bestow on children a definite amount of knowledge. "Its main object is to fit children for earth without unfitting them for heaven."

## Dedication Program

Dedication and Blessing of Notre Dame High School, Lower Maple Avenue, Elmira, Saturday, September 23, beginning at 12 noon. Erection of the Crucifix in the Foyer.

Procession into the Auditorium. Mass of the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy, celebrated by His Excellency Bishop Kearney. Sermon by Bishop Kearney.

Notre Dame High Students, under the direction of the Rev. Benedict A. Ehmann, will present the following musical program: "Laudes Hymn", "Thou Art The Star of the Morning", "Mary The Dawn", "O Heart of Mary", and "Hail Holy Queen Enthroned Above."

National Anthem. Lunch for the Reverend Clergy. Guests and friends are invited to tour the new school following the Mass.