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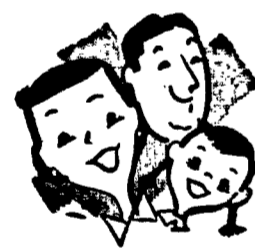
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Sisters Of Mercy High Schools

Our Lady Of Mercy High has enrollment of over 900 Rochester area girls
Nearly 500 boys and girls attend Elmira's new Notre Dame High School

THREE MONTHS after their almost penniless arrival in Rochester in June, 1857, the Sisters of Mercy opened a "select school" for young girls, the first chapter in the history of Mercy's high school education in the diocese.

This bold venture, started in a single room of the Sisters' Convent next to Old St. Mary's Church, launched a century of educational progress.

Today in the Diocese of Rochester, the Sisters of Mercy conduct two major high schools — Our Lady of Mercy (920 girls) in Rochester, and Notre Dame (500 boys and girls) in Elmira. Today, Mercy Sisters also teach on the faculties of Holy Family parish high school in Auburn and of Aquinas Institute in Rochester.

They are also remembered for their direction of St. Mary's Commercial School in Rochester (1913-1950) and of St. Anne's High in Hornell (1884-1954). Both schools were closed as parochial needs changed in recent years.

From instructing a few girls in an unused convent room to teaching thousands of high schoolers in modern plants valued at millions of dollars is more than mere statistical growth. These figures symbolize a fascinating chapter of educational history in which hundreds of Sisters of Mercy have given their lives for the youth of the Diocese of Rochester.

"The Academy of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady of Mercy," opened in September of 1857 for boarders and day students, was the brave beginning of this long history. It occupied one room in the Sisters' Convent on South Street, Rochester, next to St. Mary's Church and parochial school. Fees at this "select boarding school" were \$200 a year.

Elementary and secondary classes continued for forty years in this tiny private institution in the Convent. Hundreds of Rochester's early Catholic families had their daughters trained in this school. Meanwhile the "free" parochial school of St. Mary's parish outgrew its basement rooms and acquired a new building in 1873.

The "select school" closed in 1898 because of lack of accommodations and teaching staff.

In 1872 an industrial school for girls between 10 and 16 was opened by the Sisters next door to the St. Mary's Convent. Here pupils were taught plain sewing, lace making, and wax work.

Although this foundation was primarily for the education and care of young girls, it may have been a pioneer move in Rochester's growth as a clothing-making center. The garments made were sold to well known firms, such as Burke, Fitz-Simons, Hone & Company, Stein-Bloch, and others. The school's work started at 7 a.m. and continued until 5 p.m., with one hour for lunch. Evenings were devoted to academic subjects. The average pupil trained in the Industrial School for four years and then transferred to the "Academy" for training in higher studies.

The Industrial School closed in 1900 because the Sisters in charge were needed more urgently in St. Mary's parochial school.

St. Mary's Commercial School was opened in Rochester in September, 1913, by Rev. Simon Fitz-Simons, pastor, with a two-year curriculum, as a non-tuition school for graduates of St. Mary's grammar school.

Gradually pupils from outside the parish were admitted and financial burdens made it necessary to require a general fee from all pupils. Classes were held on the second floor of Old St. Mary's parish school with two Sisters of Mercy on the teaching staff, supplemented by the assistant pastors of St. Mary's for religious instruction.

In 1950, St. Mary's had become a



Our Lady Of Mercy High School — Mother Francesca, Principal

"downtown" parish and the parish school was no longer needed. Accordingly, both grammar and commercial schools were closed, finishing a long and fruitful record of accomplishment in the cradle mission of the Sisters of Mercy in Rochester.

St. Ann's Parochial School in Hornell, staffed by the Sisters of Mercy, added a ninth grade in 1884, during the pastorate of Rev. James M. Early.

Subjects offered at St. Ann's High were preparatory to the college entrance or academic diploma. Business

subjects were also part of the curriculum. The importance of the school, however, lay in its Catholic atmosphere and excellent course in Religion.

Classes generally averaged thirty or more students, who then finished their last three years at Hornell High School. The quality of the training received at St. Ann's was evidenced by the fact that so many of the students were elected to offices and were outstanding scholars when they went on to public high.

For a number of years, classes

were held in the Federation Building, but were transferred back to St. Ann's by Monsignor Lawrence Gannon, present pastor. The school was closed in June, 1954.

Following the opening of St. Mary's Commercial School and St. Ann's High in Hornell, Mercy's next step in high school work was made at Aquinas Institute, then known as Cathedral High. Two Sisters of Mercy joined the faculty composed of diocesan priests, Sisters of St. Joseph and laymen in September, 1921, when the school was located on North Plymouth Avenue.

In 1937, when the Basilian Fathers took complete charge of Aquinas, the Mercy Sisters continued to teach there. By 1941, the Aquinas faculty included six Sisters of Mercy, seven Sisters of St. Joseph, two diocesan priests, and twenty-five Basilians.

The Sisters of Mercy have taken no small part in maintaining the lofty traditions of Aquinas and its predecessor, the old Cathedral High. For 36 years the Sisters have shared in this vital work of educating Rochester's Catholic young men. That their graduates maintain an interest in and loyalty toward them, even after many years, is a tribute to the Sisters' efforts.

At the present time there are four Sisters of Mercy on the Aquinas faculty.

Mercy High

The beginnings of Our Lady of Mercy High School on Blossom Road in Rochester marked a courageous and foresighted step on the part of the Mercy Sisters.

Opened in September, 1928, with a freshman class of 80 girls, Mercy High was the answer to many years of dreams and prayers. Four stories high, modern in every detail and costing \$200,000, it was a tremendous undertaking for so small a community.

Mother Mary Francesca, who guided the organization of the new school as its first principal, is still at the head of its faculty in her 29th year of administration.

As enrollment increased, Mercy High dedicated a new wing in 1941 to provide a modern library, gym-

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Knows Where She's Going

MOTHER MARY FRANCESCA, principal of Our Lady of Mercy High School since its opening in September 1928, is an educator whose name is synonymous with vision, foresight and progress.

A wide and varied experience in the elementary schools as music teacher, grade teacher and principal proved valuable background when she assumed charge of Our Lady of Mercy High School. Before she had visited school were opened she had visited every leading private secondary school in the state to study curriculums, programs, philosophies and general needs of the youth of the day.

A native of Rochester, recipient of a Master's Degree from Canisius College, educated in art at Rochester Institute of Technology and school administration at the Catholic University of America, Mother Francesca has enjoyed the respect of leading Rochester educators for more than three decades.

Holder of the unusual distinction of being principal for 29 years in a school she herself founded and supervised from its first day, Mother Francesca has an intimate personal interest in each of Mercy's nearly 3,000 graduates.

BEFORE GUIDANCE, as it is now recognized in education, was a part of every curriculum Mother Francesca was reading and collecting material forming a bibliography and outlining the nucleus of a guidance program. Out of this original work came the publication in 1935 of the first

courtesy booklet, "The Mercy Mode", which Mother Francesca put into the hands of the students at Mercy High.

Soon sample copies were being requested from other private high schools. Monsignor Maurice Sheehy of the Catholic University distributed copies to all his classes in religious guidance at the summer school in 1938. Now under the title of "The Catholic Student" it has been revised three times and has sold over 150,000 copies.

That was the first of the guidance projects Mother Mary Francesca inaugurated. Since then she has formulated a Christian Family Living course and has acted as consultant on the committee for publishing "A Guide for Parents."

Ever alert to new trends in education or to changing policies in the educational world, she keeps the parents of the students of Our Lady of Mercy aware of these facts through the Principal's Periscope, a bi-monthly newsletter for Mercy families.

Highest praise was given to Mother Mary Francesca by the visiting educators who served on committees during the school's intensive evaluation. Her effective and inspiring leadership brought forth the highest commendation.

"As an administrator of a large high school for girls, Mother Francesca knows where she is going, and does a very effective job of getting there", said the 1955 report of the evaluation committee which placed Mercy High in the front ranks of the nation's educational institutions.