

# The Mercy Motherhouse

Old St. Mary Convent, Charlotte sites preceded Blossom Road headquarters

THE ADDRESS, "1437 Blossom Road" is today known to all in the Rochester Diocese as the location of the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Mercy. But it was not always so. In 1875, "45 South Street" was the Motherhouse location, and in 1916 it became "90 St. John's Park."

The history of these Motherhouse sites is an interesting one.

Back in 1857, when the Sisters of Mercy were invited to teach in this diocese by Bishop John Timon of Buffalo, there was an empty convent home next to St. Mary's Church, formerly occupied by the Bridgetine Sisters. These Sisters, an Irish community, had labored at St. Mary's for several years in the '30's but discontinued their work owing to finances and shortage of Sisters.

The Buffalo Bishop and Father Thomas McEvoy, pastor of St. Mary's Church, decided that this unoccupied dwelling would be a suitable home for the Sisters of Mercy. Consequently, when the Sisters arrived in Rochester on June 9, 1857, "15 South Street" became the first Motherhouse address.

For 59 years the South Street home was the center of all Mercy work in the Diocese. Then a flash fire destroyed the convent on January 2, 1916, and immediately the Sisters' summer house in Charlotte was opened for the burned-out community.

Although the Sisters who taught at St. Mary's School continued to live in the burned building until the close of the school year, it was no longer the Motherhouse. The site in Charlotte at 90 St. John's Park became known as the "Hill Motherhouse" for the next 15 years.

ST. MARY'S Convent property on South Street was sold by the Sisters to Father Simon Fitz Simons, pastor of St. Mary's Church in July, 1916. The main building, nicely remodeled, was used as a convent by the Sisters who taught at St. Mary's Parish School until 1937.

The Rev. George F. Kettell, pastor of St. Mary's at that time, leased the old Mercy convent to the Basilian Fathers who had just taken over Aquinas Institute. Five years later when the Basilian Fathers acquired the former Motherhouse of the Sis-



MOTHER LIGUORI  
Former Superior

ters of St. Joseph on Augustine Street behind the Aquinas property, they moved out of the former Mercy Motherhouse and it was razed to the ground, by the parish.

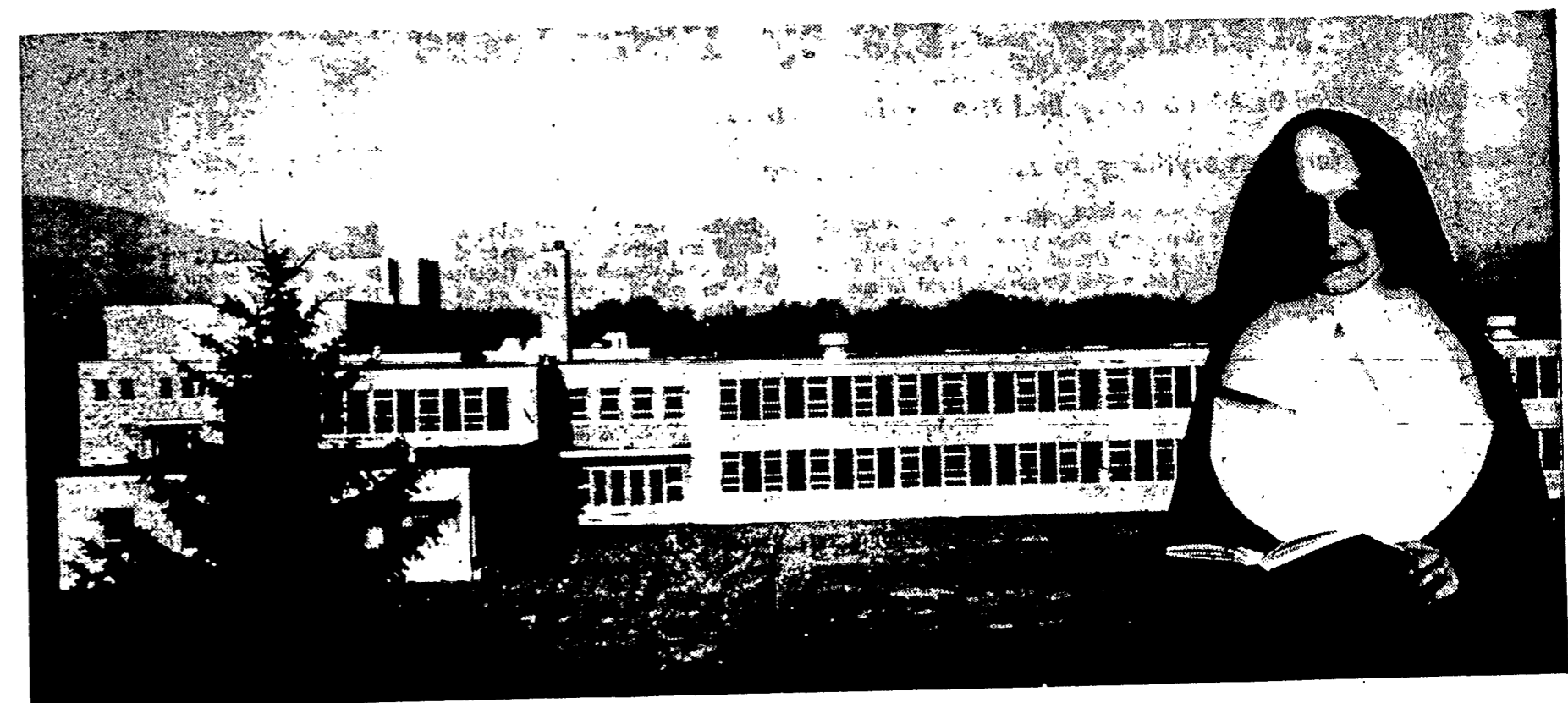
Land on Blossom Road had been purchased as early as 1923 but the Community did not get its Motherhouse until after Our Lady of Mercy High School was built there in 1928. The Motherhouse was formally dedicated next door to the high school on May 7, 1931.

THE CHARLOTTE Motherhouse, closed for good when the Sisters moved to Blossom Road, is today the home of the Ira Jacobson American Legion Post.

Historical research by the late Monsignor Edward Byrne of St. Bernard's Seminary and Dr. Alexander Stewart brought later recognition to the Blossom Road property when it was discovered that this had been the site of the first chapel ("a bark cabin") used for worship in the Rochester and Irondequoit Bay area.

The structure had been built on these grounds by three Franciscan Recollect Fathers in June, 1679 headed by Father Louis Hennepin, famed in American history for explorations of the Mississippi River.

A large plaque commemorating the heritage of the Mercy Motherhouse land was erected on the grounds in October, 1933, by Mr. Herman Fretzler.



Notre Dame High School, Elmira — Sister Raphael, Principal

## Sisters of Mercy High Schools

(Continued from Page 5)

nasium, art room, music department, home economics department, and nurses' rooms. The shining feature of the extension was the auditorium, seating 1140 and equipped with every facility for complete theatrical and musical presentations.

Enrollment at Mercy High this year is 922, with students from 44 Rochester parishes and 10 suburban townships.

Courses of study at Mercy High lead to a Regent's high school diploma under the University of the State of New York. Students may seek majors in business, home economics, music, art, mathematics, science, or language.

The cultural program at Our Lady of Mercy challenges a student's ability and talents in the fields of art, music and drama, as well as in the literary line. Art classes encourage creative work in painting, sketching, designing, and ceramics.

The Glee Club and special choir groups have intensive voice training and are often called upon for outside civic and religious occasions besides regular school functions.

Class and private lessons are given on the piano and orchestral instruments. The orchestra is an integral part of life at Mercy, performing at many programs throughout the year and at the combined annual concert of the orchestra and Glee Club.

Several dramatic productions each year serve to keep interest high in good speech, diction, and acting ability. Among these are the annual senior and school plays, Christmas play and Mission Show.

### Holy Family, Auburn

Holy Family High School in Auburn was opened in September, 1930, during the pastorate of Rev. John A. Conway. Thirty two students with two Mercy Sisters as teachers saw the beginning of this first Catholic high school in Auburn.

Sister M. Martha, R.S.M., was the first principal, and the Sisters of Mercy, who also taught in the Holy Family grammar school, formed the major part of the faculty in later years. Rev. William E. Davie, present pastor of Holy Family, served as principal from 1932 on.

After 25 years as Auburn's only Catholic high school, Holy Family closes its doors this month replaced by the larger Mt. Carmel High School serving all the parishes of the city.

Two courses were offered the students in the steadily growing high school: the Regents Academic and Regents College Entrance programs. Majors could be pursued in Latin, French, Social Science, Mathematics, or Science, with electives if desired in business subjects. Full science and

library facilities met with state requirements.

Although Holy Family was a parish high school, it extended its hospitality to students from other Auburn parishes insofar as its limits allowed, and almost every parish was represented in the student body.

With the opening in 1955 of Auburn's new Mount Carmel High School, a parish high school was no longer necessary. Accordingly, freshmen and sophomores were enrolled at the new school, while only the junior and senior classes remained to finish at Holy Family. This year

the last graduating class will receive its diplomas, to finish the twenty-seven year history of Holy Family High School.

### Elmira Catholic High

Elmira Catholic High School was founded by the late Bishop John F. O'Hern in 1930. Known at first as "St. Peter and Paul's High School," it was guided in its early years by Rev. Francis J. Reilly, first principal.

In 1932 the growing school was moved to the third floor of St. Patrick's School and became known as Elmira Catholic High School. The

Sisters of St. Joseph served on the faculty from the second year, while 1933 saw the first Sister of Mercy join the staff.

During the ensuing years, two Sisters of Mercy and four Sisters of St. Joseph taught under the guidance of Father Reilly, principal until 1936: Rt. Rev. Msgr. William J. Brien, 1936-1938; and Rev. William A. Burns, 1938-1953. Sister Mary Raphael, preparing for the transfer of the students to new Notre Dame High School, was principal from 1953 to 1955.

Courses were geared for those interested in college entrance or business subjects. A thorough training grounded in Catholic ideals prepared over 800 young men and women through the years of the school's existence, to take their place in religious, business, family, and educational spheres.

Elmira Catholic High School closed its doors in June, 1955, after twenty-five years of service to the Catholics of the Southern Tier city. A spirit of cooperation and friendliness had ever characterized both its faculty and student body. The Sisters of Mercy are proud and happy to have been a part of this small but vital segment of Catholic secondary education in the Southern Tier.

### Notre Dame, Elmira

The Feast of Our Lady of Mercy, September 24, 1955, marked another milestone in the story of Mercy Sisters' role in diocesan high school education when the Notre Dame High School for boys and girls was dedicated in ELMIRA.

Notre Dame has been termed a "monument" to the sacrifice of Elmira Catholics, and to the courage of the Sisters of Mercy in undertaking the financial and administrative burden. A community fund-raising campaign involving the whole Southern Tier presented nearly \$600,000 to the Sisters who spent nearly \$2,000,000 for the entire building, facilities and convent.

Ultra-modern in construction and design, Notre Dame is equipped with 23 classrooms, spacious auditorium, gymnasium, cafeteria, and library, as well as the latest in business, scientific, art, music and domestic science facilities. Courses provide both academic and business training.

Fourteen Sisters and the chaplain, Rev. Joseph F. Hogan, welcomed more than 340 students enrolled that first year, which began with a full four-year course approved by the New York State Board of Regents.

This newest venture of the Sisters of Mercy into secondary education in the diocese augurs well for the future, if good beginnings are any indication. Under the protecting mantle of Our Lady, the banner of Notre Dame High School waves ever more brightly and promisingly on the horizon for thousands of Catholic youth of the Southern Tier.

## Mother Magdalene

MANY ABLE executives of the business world would be appalled if they had to face the responsibilities of a general superior of a religious community in today's America.

But Mother Mary Magdalene, Mother General of the Sisters of Mercy of the Rochester Diocese is not easily frightened or discouraged by the challenging responsibilities of her office.

The Mercy Superior, a kind and gentle lady to all who meet her, knows how to act with prompt and resolute spirit when the occasion demands. Long years of experience have taught her how to face up to practical difficulties.

And her spiritual training has given her that calm patience and confidence which know that despite the difficulties, God always gets His work done.

MOTHER MAGDALENE received her early education in Rochester at Nazareth Grammar School and Academy. She took her college work at Canisius College, Buffalo where she mastered in Latin and philosophy.

Her early teaching career saw service at old St. Mary's, St. John's, Our Lady of Mercy High School, Rochester and St. Patrick's, Elmira.

Close to half of her 40 years of religious life have been spent in administrative positions as local superior in Elmira, Mistress of Novices, Mother Bursar, Mother Assistant, and Reverend Mother.

When she was first elected Reverend Mother in 1943, she found herself facing two problems. First, she needed to liquidate the debt acquired by the auditorium addition to Our Lady of Mercy High School. Secondly, she had to accumulate sufficient funds to begin building the Motherhouse Chapel, a long standing need that had been put aside because of the necessity of an addition to the high school.

By 1949, the debt had been cleared and \$100,000 needed to begin the work

on the chapel was awaiting the architect's plan.

TODAY, A BUILDING problem of a new nature faces Mother Mary Magdalene. The Catherine McAuley Junior College for the professional training of the young Sisters needs expansion to meet the demands of the University of the State of New York.

The University has fully accredited the academic program of the college but physical facilities must be expanded.

To meet the lack of funds, Mother Magdalene is making plans to negotiate a long term note to commence work on the first unit: the Junior College, Reading Laboratory and Test Center.

When this unit is erected, Mercy staffed schools will be the first to benefit by the building program.

Mother Mary Magdalene is not only an administrator, she is also an instructor. Each year more Sister teachers, and Sister nurses are being sent on for further study in specialized fields and techniques. Within the last two years, Mother Magdalene has sent Sisters to staff new grammar schools at St. Rita's, West Webster, and St. Joseph's, Penfield and the new Notre Dame High School in Elmira.

Our Lady of Lourdes Parish School in Elmira will be staffed this year and Good Shepherd, Henrietta and Annunciation Schools are on the roster for the near future opening.

EACH WEEK requests from pastors for teachers and hospital authorities for nurses cross Mother General's desk from Texas, Florida, California and the mid-west. "Schools are built, convents are furnished, hospitals are waiting for Sisters" declares Mother Mary Magdalene, "but the supply never seems sufficient for the demand."

In the face of so many demands for the services of her Sisters and in the face of so many difficulties, Mother Magdalene remains patient and confident. "Somehow," she is sure, "God will provide!"

Take Home Pepsi-Cola

HANDY, MONEY-SAVING CARTONS

Refreshes without filling

Hicks HOME HEATING GO AIR CONDITIONING

Room — Home — Commercial

Browning 1-9079

If No Answer Call BR 1-4650

99 Norman Rd., Roch. 20, N.Y.

## PLEADS FOR HIS FLOCK

A few weeks ago in a special conciliar letter appealing for missions help the Holy Father very touchingly wrote about the "grave problems imposed upon missionaries" due to lack of funds for the "distasteful paralyzing money mission activities." His office has sent us these two appeals which are striking examples. Next for a chapel, a school or an orphanage, the priest in Mysore, India, begs \$300 to buy land for a cemetery and \$200 to drill a well to provide water for his people. Very important in daily life.

Your STRINGLESS GIFTS help the Holy Father to meet at once countless other mission emergencies like these. Have you made a practice of sending him your sacrifices regularly? Recently a lady sent \$5. "Father, I just decided not to buy as fast as last. Give this to the Holy Father." We're sure he's much happier.

SAINTLY QUEEN MARGARET

The life of this Scottish queen (died June 10) was marked with much fasting, prayer, and personal care of the poor and sick. This also her SISTER MARGARET in Ethiopia will spend the rest of her life. If we can find a noble friend to help her with the \$150 needed yearly for two years training. We have also SISTERS BASILE in Egypt and SISTERS JUSTIN and JASTINTHA in India.

DON'T FAIL TO MAKE A WILL DISPOSE OF YOUR LIFE'S SAVINGS YOUR OWN WAY. GIVE GOD HIS WORTHY SHARE. WITH GOOD LEGAL ADVICE YOU'LL AVOID MISTAKES THAT MAKE MANY WILLS INVALID.

DISASTER SPELLS DESPAIR

Perhaps for the faithful on Santorini Island of Greece which was stricken by a terrible earthquake two summers ago, bringing havoc upon their cathedral, leaving a large crack in the wall and dome and ruining vestments, vessels and furnishings. These poor, simple peasants are a miserably surrounded by Orthodox neighbors who look for aid because their church has long been in ruins. But their good Bishop in full confidence that in his own time God will send the \$4,000 needed to repair the cathedral, and new furnishings for the altar and church.

OUR MISSIONARIES RELY ON YOUR MASS OFFERINGS FOR SUPPORT. MASSES ARE SAID ALMOST AT ONCE.

DON'T NEGLECT YOURSELF

Speaking of Masses which you go so often arranging for friends and loved ones who are departed, the Good Lord would not expect you to forget yourself. With our SUSPENSE CARD you can arrange now for Masses for your own soul, but others forget or pass it before you.

ABRAHAM AND JACOB

From Egypt and India these two lads are hoping for word that we found a "sponsor" to send in any installments the \$100 each boy needs yearly during his six years of missionary training.

Near East Missions

FRANCIS CARDINAL SPELLMAN, President

Mgr. Peter P. Leahy, New York

Send all communications to:

CATHOLIC NEAR EAST WELFARE ASSOCIATION

480 Lexington Ave., at 46th St. New York 17, N. Y.



The easy way to MOW A LAWN

Whether it's an electric lawn mower or the toaster in your kitchen, this man must be a trapeze artist and expert electric repair man to keep them running to your satisfaction. He is Ralph Rivier of the Rochester Gas and Electric Line Maintenance Department and his job in summer and winter is to keep the electric lines of the RG&E in perfect operating condition. He and dozens like him actually risk their lives to keep dependable electric service flowing to the homes, stores and factories of this area at the lowest possible cost.