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Our Diocesan Nuns: The Pioneer Communities

By FATHER ROBERT F. McNAMARA St. Bernard's Seminary The Diocese of Rochester is indebted to several orders of Sisters for the work they have done among us.

There were two other early sisterhoods at work within our twelve counties — the Bridgetines and the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur. But since these were temporary, we shall mention here only the five.

THE FIVE pioneer orders were the following, listed in the order of their arrival: The Daughters (or Sisters) of Charity of Emmitsburg; the School Sisters of Notre Dame; the Sisters of St. Joseph; the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; and the Religious Sisters of Mercy.

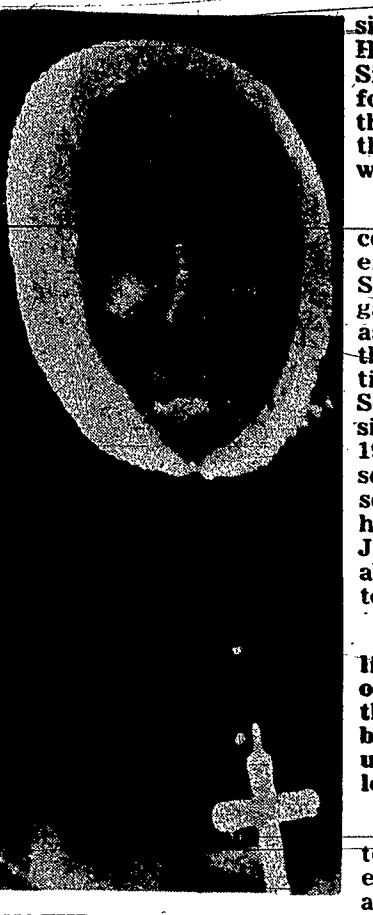
The Sisters of Charity were the "early birds". They came in 1845. An orphanage had been established close to St. Patrick's Church in downtown Rochester, in 1842, and entrusted for the time being to lay supervision.

The first group of sisters who arrived were headed by Sister Martha Daddisman (1797-1889). This religious community was the one established in 1809 by Blessed Elizabeth Seton, for educational and charitable work.

The Notre Dame nuns were so satisfactory at St. Joseph's that their community was subsequently invited to take charge of six other Rochester diocesan schools in German parishes.

The Sacred Heart came to America in 1847 as the German branch, which had become independent during the French Revolution. Their services were much in demand in German parishes in this country.

It was the very influential Mother Caroline Fries (1824-1892), the vicar general of the Congregation of the School Sisters, who personally supervised the establishment of the convent at St. Joseph's.



MOTHER ALOYSIA HARDEY Sacred Heart

starched linen "cornettes" that their order has only recently abandoned. We mention this in order to point out that when Sister Martha brought her group here, they still dressed in the black caped habit and black cap which some non-affiliated branches (like the Sisters of Charity of New York) still use.

When the Sisters of Charity entered upon their duties at St. Patrick's Orphanage, they also commenced a private school for girls.

St. Joseph's Church was the first German parish in Rochester (1836), and it had a little school almost from the beginning. But it was not until October 15, 1854, that the parish secured the aid of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

The School Sisters were by origin a French community founded in 1897 by the French saint, St. Peter Fourier. However, the branch of the Notre Dame nuns that came to America in 1847 was the German branch, which had become independent during the French Revolution.

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side of Rochester, at Sacred Heart, Perkinsville (1856). The Sisters remained in Perkinsville for only thirteen years. In 1918 they added another school to the list: Holy Ghost, in Coldwater.

Only in our own day has the community expanded its local efforts more broadly. In 1962, St. Philip Neri and St. Margaret Mary parish schools were assigned to it; and it was given the supervision of girls' instruction in Bishop Kearney High School. In 1967, the Notre-Dame sisters at St. Joseph's, who since 1908 had had a commercial school for girls next to St. Joseph's Church, began to use the handsome new building of St. Joseph's Business School, now able (for the past three years) to offer a four-year course.

The Sisters of St. Joseph, unlike the School Sisters and the other Rochester orders (except the Sisters of Mercy) were to become a diocesan community, under the jurisdiction of the local bishop.

But at the start, even the Sisters of St. Joseph in the Rochester area were sent out from a distant headquarters. They came from the motherhouse in Carondelet, Missouri, in December, 1854, at the request of the first Bishop of Buffalo, John Timon. Nor did they make their original establishment in Rochester itself. They were called in to set up a convent, school, and orphanage in Canandaigua. The sisterhood had been founded in France in 1850, and brought to the United States in 1836.

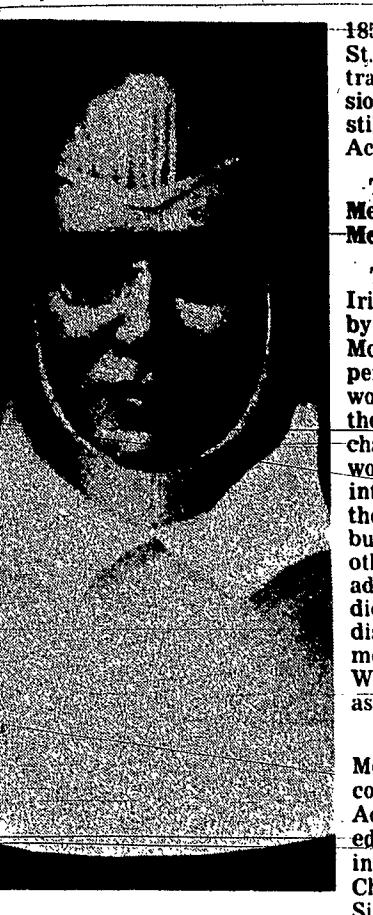
It is unfortunate that we have not been able to find a picture of Mother Agnes Spencer, the original superior of the Canandaigua convent. The 1854 convent building is still standing, however, on Saltonstall Street, a few yards away from the site of the original St. Mary's School only if ten or more years of age, and acceptees were to be "bound to the institution until of age."

Many religious communities undertook multiple programs comparable to those advertised by St. Mary's Convent, Canandaigua. Each of the educational and beneficent departments tied in with the others, and helped the convent to maintain itself.

When Bishop McQuaid became the first bishop of Rochester in 1868, he invited sisters of the Canandaigua convent to assist him in founding a diocesan sisterhood of St. Joseph. Hence the origin of the Rochester Sisters of St. Joseph, of whose foundation we shall speak in another article.

In 1855, the Religious of the Sacred Heart came to Rochester to found their first and only school in the Diocese: Sacred Heart Academy, on Prince Street.

This is an international community of French origin, launched in 1801 by St. Madeleine Sophie Barat (1779-1865). The community was brought to this country in 1818 by Blessed Philippine Duchesne (1769-1852), who opened the first convent and school at St. Charles, Missouri. In 1849, at the request of Bishop Timon, Mother Aloysia Hardey (1800-1886), the American superior, opened a convent school at Buffalo. Unfortunately, everything conspired against the success of the Buffalo venture, so the school was transferred to Rochester in



MOTHER XAVIER WARD Sisters of Mercy

1855. Its first convent was on St. Paul Street; but in 1863 it transferred to the brick mansion at 8 Prince Street which still forms the core of the Academy buildings.

The "Religious Sisters of Mercy," or simply the Sisters of Mercy, came to us in 1857. The Sisters of Mercy are of Irish origin, established in 1831 by the Dublin gentlewoman, Mother Catherine McAuley, to perform corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

One of the dioceses in which Mother Xavier set up Mercy convents was that of Buffalo. Actually, the first convent opened in the Buffalo diocese was in Rochester, at St. Mary's Church (June 9, 1857). The Sisters occupied a convent adjacent to the church on South Street until 1916. Here they conducted an academy and an "industrial" school; and as the community grew, this building also served as a motherhouse.

One year after their arrival in Rochester, the Mercy nuns sent out some of their number to found another convent in Buffalo proper. In 1862, the Rochester convent made a similar establishment at Batavia; and in 1867, still another, at Holy Family parish, Auburn.

When the Diocese of Rochester was set up in 1868, there were only two Mercy convents within the new diocesan area: St. Mary's, Rochester, and Holy Family, Auburn. However, in 1896, four southern diocesan convents were detached by the Holy See from Buffalo and attached to the Rochester Diocese; and this brought into the Rochester jurisdiction four more Mercy convents, which owed their origin to the convent in Batavia: St. Mary's, Corning (1867); St. Patrick's, Owego (1869); St. Ann's, Hornell (1871); and St. Patrick's, Elmira (1884). These all united subsequently into one Rochester Mercy community.

The facts and figures which we have given may seem, at first, to be a bit dry. But they are the facts of the history of the Rochester Diocese, and they are of interest to all who are interested in the history of the Diocese.

least in most cases, to indicate an easy progress. Actually, the pioneer communities were truly pioneers, in the sense that they were poor servants of a poor immigrant population, and had many hardships and difficulties. It is precisely this self-sacrifice and holiness that have made their contribution to the Diocese, in these more than one hundred years, valuable past all estimation.

We end these remarks with one minor but curious fact. All five orders of the five pioneer communities have now adopted different habits from those worn in the pioneer days and, indeed, up to the days of the Second Vatican Council. So if you intend to cut out the accompanying photographs of founders so that you may henceforth be able to identify their communities from the habits, please forget it!

But no matter how much the costume changes, the spirit of each of these orders, thank God, remains the same.

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Card. Ottaviani Wins Papal OK Vatican City—(RNS)—Pope Paul VI has told Alfredo Cardinal Ottaviani, Pro-Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, that he has the full confidence and support of the pontiff, according to Vatican sources. These sources said the Pope's message to the 78-year-old cardinal apparently was sent to kill rumors of papal displeasure over recent actions by Cardinal Ottaviani. The rumors were based on the Pope's nullification of a ban on joint Catholic-Protestant services in Rome, and on the cardinal's letter to Catholic bishops warning against doctrinal errors in the Church. Cardinal Ottaviani's letter to the bishops, sent last year, cautioned against "alarming," "inexact," and "strange" opinions which he said were cropping up in Church renewal. The cardinal, regarded as one of the more conservative prelates in the Roman Curia, urged bishops to be on guard against such opinions.

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