

Now & Then in Ripon ... *Looking back with the Ripon Historical Society*

Nuns contributed to Ripon students' education

Editor's note: This article is the first in a series citing the achievements of Nuns who educated students in Ripon.

The original St. Patrick's Catholic Church, built in 1858, stood at the southeast corner of what is now the intersection of Oshkosh and Hamburg Streets.

The first-ever St. Patrick's Rectory (housing provided to priests and ministers to live in) was built in 1865. A decision was made in 1922 to move the church to a more central location and property was purchased at the corner of Blossom and Houston streets.

The church building was physically moved from its original site and placed at the new corner location. This caused the house immediately behind the church on Houston Street to become the new Rectory.

Catholic nuns also were educators

Catholic nuns are women who vow to dedicate their life to religious service and contemplation, typically living under vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in the enclosure of a monastery or a convent (a building in which nuns live, work and pray).

Nuns also are often referred to as "sisters," which can be used as a preface before their chosen names. Nuns live in a secluded and private life. They often spend time in prayer and work within their parish and convent.

As nuns became more active in the world, they began engaging in many kinds of work including teaching, healthcare and helping others in need.

Nuns were founded by regions and communities. They grew from approximately 900 individuals in 1840 to 135,000 by 1900. By 1965, there were approximately 180,000 Catholic nuns in the United States. Due to a current decline in individuals



ST. PATRICK'S CHURCH sits on its new foundation after it was moved. The bell tower and façade also were reconfigured. This building was eventually demolished and its parish merged with St. Catherine of Siena in 2005. *submitted photo*

joining, however, it is estimated by the year 2042 there will be less than 1,000 nuns. In 2024, the national average nuns' age is 80 years old.

At their peak, many different orders (which is a sisterhood or organization) of nuns were working throughout America.

Examples are "Ursuline Roman Catholic nuns," which were founded in Brescia, Italy, and "Franciscan nuns," which originated in Assisi, Italy.

Ripon's St. Patrick's Church and school nuns arrived in Wisconsin from Notre Dame, Ind. They were "Sisters of the Holy Cross," whose order originated in LeMans, France.

When nuns arrived to teach at St. Patrick's School in 1962, a convent was built to house them. Their role was to teach grades 1 to 6 starting in fall 1963. In the next two years, grades 7 to 8 were added to their curriculum.

Over time, the St. Patrick's School faculty of nuns included:

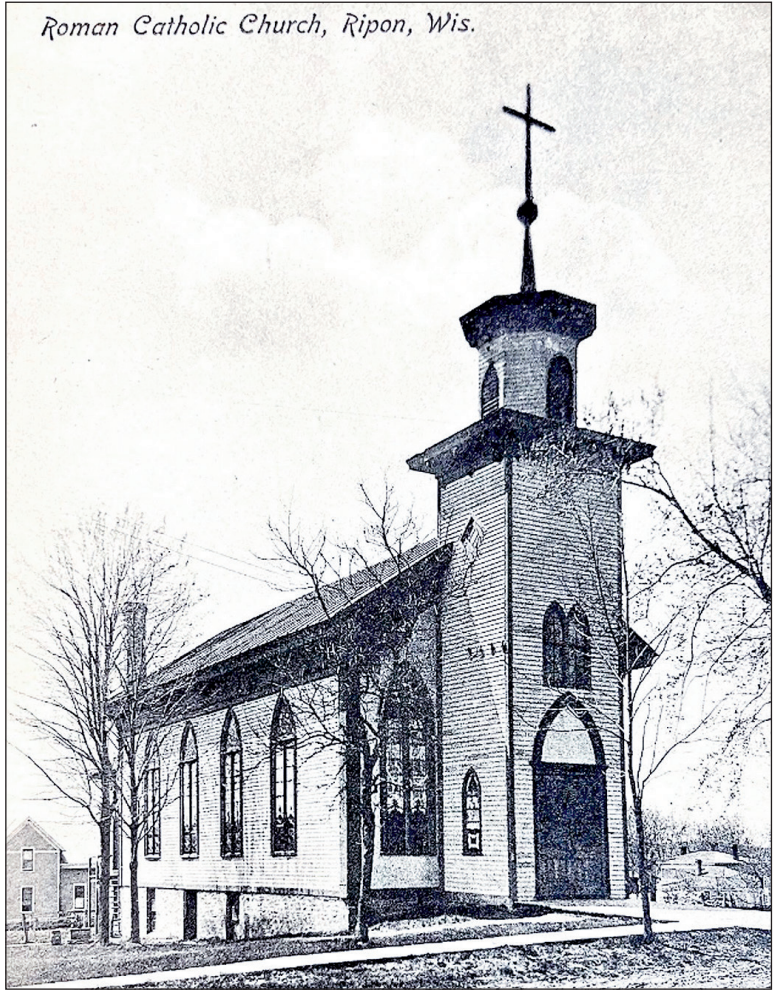
- Sister Angela Dolores Blanz, 1963-1966 (3rd and 4th grades);
- Sister Dorteia Dolan, 1963-1970 (principal, 5th and 6th grades);
- Sister Judith Coffey, 1963-1965 (music and choir);
- Sister Laurus Slee, 1964-

- 1967 (1st and 2nd grades)
- Sister Ursilita Holland, 1965-1969 (music);
- Sister Muriel Herde, 1966-1970 (5th and 6th grades)
- Sister Lillian Petrack, 1968-1970 (1st and 2nd grades)
- Sister Florence Mary May 1969-1970, (3rd grade);
- Sister Judith Ann Murphy 1971-1972 (principal, 3rd and 4th grades);
- Sister Esther Black, 1971-1972 (3rd and 4th grades);

There are no photographs of St. Patrick's nuns in the Ripon Historical Society's professional archives. Individuals who have any pictures that they would like to donate or scan for consideration to the Ripon Historical Society, email riponhistsoc@gmail.com.

The Ripon Historical Society reached out to *National Catholic Reporter* and found there are no records shared about the nuns including where their devotion and work carried them after they left Ripon, obituaries or burial records.

As fewer nuns were available to teach at St. Patrick's in 1970, the upper three grades, 6 to 8, were discontinued. Later, as there were even fewer Nuns to teach in 1972, St. Patrick's School became staffed by "lay



THE ORIGINAL ST. Patrick's Church, built in 1858, stands at the southeast corner of what is now the intersection of Oshkosh and Hamburg streets. *submitted photo*

teachers," who are technically defined members of the church or faith, but not clergy, able to direct the spiritual, educational and personal development of children in a classroom.

Without nuns acting as teachers, St. Patrick's in 1975 converted its convent into additional parish rectory living quarters and space for priests.

St. Patrick's parishioners voted to build a new church in 1975. The last church services were held at their 115-year old church building on Sunday, Feb. 22, 1976. That same afternoon, parishioners helped move the main altar, pews and other furnishings to a temporary space and later into the new church building.

When demolition of the older church building took place in spring, the first mass at the new church was an Easter Vigil service the evening of April 9, 1976.

In 2005, St. Patrick's Catholic Church and St. Wenceslaus Catholic Parish merged to become St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Church and School in Ripon, associated with the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

The Ripon Historical Society is the oldest continually operating historical society in Wisconsin. It is open Fridays and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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