

The Chicago Portage was first used by the Indians. It was part of their trade route from the Illinois River to Lake Michigan. When Father Marquette and Louis Joliet passed through it in 1673, Joliet thought a canal - possibly for only 3 miles - would greatly reduce the hardship. La Salle, some years later, estimated the canal would have to be about 100 miles long. For years it was debated how the Illinois Territory could be opened with a waterway to the Mississippi.

In 1829 the State of Illinois determined to dig a canal from Lake Michigan down the Chicago River, through the Portage into the DesPlaines River and on to the Illinois River. The site of Chicago was laid out and lots along the River were sold to finance the project. When the last of the Indians left the area in 1836, work on the canal began. Many Irish immigrants had come to find work, and were hired to do the digging. There were no bull-dozers or steam shovels. It was hand-digging.

Camps were set up along the canal route to house the men hired for this back-breaking work. The hardships, the mosquitos, the disease, the feuding and fighting that were the daily experience of these men is part of our history. The Catholic Church tried to reach these men on the frontier. Bishop Brute of Vincennes wrote to a friend in 1838:

"M. Plunkett has set out for the Illinois Canal, Joliet, etc. 250 miles, where the laborers are dying of malignant fever and the other priest could not attend them all, 19 died in three days."

Father John Francis Plunkett was the first pastor of Will County. He began to build a church in what was the beginning of the city of Joliet on the Des Plaines River. The parish was called St. Patrick's.

In 1843 the diocese of Chicago was formed, a cut-off from Vincennes. Five years later the Illinois-Michigan Canal was finished and the first boat sailed the full length of the Canal from Chicago to La Salle. It was Metropolitan Chicago even then. As the highways today carry commerce and commuters, the Canal opened the area to new markets and new industries by linking Chicago and Joliet and Ottawa and the growing cities along the route.

The construction of railroads in Illinois followed the Canal construction. By 1856 ten lines were going in to Chicago. Agriculture and mining and forestry drew settlers from many lands. The Civil War brought a boom in its wake. Population rose. People were making money. And in Joliet parents were able to think of the education of their children.

St. Patrick's Church had been built on the bluff overlooking the Des Plaines River at Broadway and Exchange (Jefferson). To it was added a Convent for the Holy Cross Sisters who came in 1865 to teach the children. They had as many as 230 pupils in the Church basement. Gradually enrollment began to drop off. The conditions of the basement became unhealthy, and when one of the Sisters died, the rest were recalled. It was 1880. Father *Walter* Power was looking for other Sisters.

12 Another parish called St. Mary's had been established across the river two years before. In 1878 ~~by~~ Father Maurice F. Furke, a young priest from Chicago, became pastor.

Father Power and Father Furke were of one mind to write to Mother Teresa Tease of the IBVM.

On August 30, 1880 Reverend Mother Teresa Dease came herself from Toronto to Joliet with 3 Sisters: Mother Gonzaga Gallivan, Mother Dosithea Gibney, and Sister Lidwina Doyle. After a week in Joliet she returned and sent out 4 more Sisters: Sisters Agnes McKenna, Bathilde McBrady, Angels Lynn and Amelia Hurley.

These women and their successors set a marvelous pace for IBVM education in the United States. Besides conducting a parochial school for boys and girls, they gave Joliet its first Academy for girls, chartered under a general law of the State of Illinois, Nov. 6, 1882. In 1892 it was accredited with De Kalb Normal, and in 1903 with the University of Illinois at Urbana.

Amid many sacrifices, the Sisters purchased land on the corner of Cass and Ottawa and built their own Academy in 1883. It was a boarding school as well as a day school, and a Convent for the Sisters who later served in other parishes as well. The Sisters endeared themselves to the grateful people of Joliet and projected an image of IBVM that we struggle today to emulate: compassion and concern for our students, quality education, Loretto hospitality and graciousness.

For 38 years Loretto Sisters labored in Joliet until the steady increase of students required supplementing the staffs with lay teachers. In 1907 45 nuns were there conducting 4 schools. In 1913 they were asked to accept still another. They did accept. New pastors began insisting on all religious for their schools. When the Sisters offered to share the work with another Community this was not acceptable, so they made plans to leave Joliet. St. Mary's Academy and property were bought by the Archdiocese of Chicago. The money realized was used to help the struggling IBVM foundations at Englewood and Woodlawn in Chicago.

In 1892 Reverend Perceval P. Murray invited the Ladies of Loretto to Englewood. This section originally the Town of Lake, had been annexed in 1889 to the City of Chicago. Father Murray's first building was a 2-story brick building with school rooms on the first floor and Church on the second. The first staff for St. Bernard's School included: Mother Christina McCausland, Sister St. Roque Canty, principal, Sister Aldegonde McCann, Sister Angelica Comerford, Sister Bertha Martin. The Sisters lived in a little house on Stewart Avenue, west side, until they built Loretto Convent at 6541 Stewart in 1896.

In 1895 the new St. Bernard's Church was begun - very pretentious with a porte cochere on the 66th St. entrance. Father Murray, with silk hat and frock coat, was "beloved by his people, respected by his neighbors." He was an Irish gentleman; used a cane on his walks about the neighborhood. He was a good friend to the nuns, and would spend time with them on Saturday evenings in the Community Room of the Convent. His 2 dreams were accomplished when he had "Loretto Nuns for the School and Hotel Dieu Nuns for the Hospital. Hospitalers of St. Joseph came to the parish in 1903 to found St. Bernard's Hospital.

St. Bernard's High School began in 1893 when the 8th grade graduates (7 in number) begged Sister St. Roque to teach them high school. She did teach them for 4 years. Then she asked the Community to send someone else to continue it. Sister Athanasia Quinlivan was sent and the High School was moved into the Convent. It was still called St. Bernard's High School in 1911. A Guest Book from the year 1926 has Loretto Academy printed in the front. By 1927 the name Loretto appeared in the stone over the doorway of the new high school building.

1927 also saw the opening of Loretto Branch Novitiate on Harvard Avenue in St. Bernard's Parish. Monsignor John F. Ryan, second pastor of St. Bernard's, gave the IBVM the use of the building until 1933 when a parish Lyceum was built on the spot. The Novitiate was moved to Woodlawn and finally to Wheaton in 1946.

In 1896 Reverend J.B. Connally, S.J. pastor of St. Mary's Parish in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, invited us to teach in his parochial school. In response seven Sisters were sent: Mother Gonzaga Gallivan, Mother Stanislaus Liddy, Sisters St. Michael Murphy, Germana Opelt, Agnes Ulm, Euphrosyne Harrington, Isabel Devlin, Francis Concoran, and Sebastian Ede. Mother Gonzaga was recalled because of ill-health and Mother Stanislaus became the Superior. They were eventually housed in the Bishop's Palace behind the parochial school. It was an experience of poverty and close quarters for they had 2 boarders with them the first year.

In 1899 the Sisters moved into their new Loretto Academy where for 56 years they offered girls a quality education and developed Loretto Spirit that Sault Ste. Marie will never forget.

From 1944-1955 the Academy was open for high school boys also to meet the needs of the city. The diocese bought the building in 1955 and built a new Convent for the Sisters on Maple Street.

In 1905 Mother Seraphina Dwyer, Superior of Loretto Convent, Englewood, was able to secure premission from Reverend Mother Ignatia Lynn to begin the building of an Academy in the Woodlawn area of Chicago. Reverend Cyril Kehoe, O.S.A. (formerly of Niagara Falls, Ont., acquainted from childhood with IBVM, nephew of our Sister Martina Shreenan) was her chief advisor in selecting the site. Mother Seraphina had many friends to encourage and help her. Mr. Merle, whose daughters had been taught by Mother Seraphina at Loretto-Niagara, offered to pay the interest on any money she borrowed until things were on their way. Father Bernard Murray, pastor of St. Bernard's Parish in Englewood, urged her to go ahead. In fact he turned the first sod for the building. There were many others who assisted Mother Seraphina and she never wanted the Sisters to forget their benefactors. She was a woman of great faith and doubtless a pleasing personality.

St. Cyril's College was in its infancy also, and the Carmelite priests did all they could to get the new Academy established nearby. From the courses offered in a 1907 brochure it seemed more like a College than an Academy.

Mother Seraphine Dwyer was appointed Superior of the first Woodlawn Community: Sisters Augusta McCarten, De Sales Hanahoe, Theodosia Sweeney, Aquinas Dunne, Scholastica McTague, Fidelis Brown, Rite Doyle. They moved in in December 1905 and classes began January 1906. In September 1906 the following Sisters joined them: Mother Catherine O'Connor, Mother Angels Lynn, Sisters Demetria McGann, Estelle Nolan, St. Thomas McArdle, St. Clare McEachen, Francesca Barrett, Hermes McPhalen, Mary Thurston, Frederica Preece.

In 1909, at the urging of Father Kehoe, the IBVM sent 4 teachers to open the school for Reverend Timothy O'Sullivan at St. Bride's. The Sisters lived at Woodlawn and commuted by streetcar until 1920 when a residence was provided by Reverend William Lynch the second pastor of St. Bride's.

In 1924 the IBVM provided a staff for St. Cyril's parochial school. The Sisters lived at Loretto Academy in Woodlawn.

In 1930 Reverend William McNamara, formerly of St. Bride's, asked for Sisters to staff his new school in St. Adrian's Parish. No Convent was provided there until 1953. The Sisters commuted for 23 years in all weather, by streetcar. For the first few years the staff lived at Englewood, but eventually moved to Woodlawn.

In 1949 Reverend Bernard L. Gordon invited IBVM to staff his new school in Phoenix. The same year Reverend Daniel Twomey invited us to his new school in Sacramento.

In 1953 Reverend *Edward J. Boyle* invited us to Northlake, Il.

In 1954 Reverend *Clair Berry* invited us to Detroit, Mi.

In 1955 Reverend *Thomas Bannon* invited us to Carmichael, Ca.
In that same year the high school Loretto Sacramento opened its doors.

In 1961 Reverend *William Bennett* invited us to Western Springs.

In 1967 Reverend *John Sullivan* invited us to Carol Stream.

In 1975 Reverend *John M. Kane* welcomed us to Oak Lawn.

Mary Clare Mrazek, I.B.V.M.