

Loretto Joliet

The Sisters of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, after having spent a year at St. Patrick's, transferred, at the suggestion of His Excellency, Archbishop Feehan, D.D., to St. Mary's parish. The Sisters and school were housed in a small place on Cass Street until St. Mary's Academy was completed and dedicated on August 16, 1883.

From then until the withdrawal of the Sisters the academy continued to flourish and to graduate pupils who have shown a loyalty to their religious teachers that is little less than phenomenal, a loyalty continued until the last graduate died, well over fifty years.

In 1879, the first IBVM's had come from Toronto to make a foundation in Joliet. The cornerstone of their school, St. Mary's Academy, reads 1880). From that time until 1919, they remained in the city opening schools in St. Mary's, Sacred Heart, St. Bernard and St. Patrick parishes. The needs of the growing city made it necessary to provide larger staffs for each of these schools and this the congregation found difficult, if not impossible. As a consequence, they relinquished one school after another until in 1918 they gave up the commercial high school. This they had formerly operated on Eastern Avenue. They retained only for one more year the grade school, St. Mary's.

In August 1919, eighteen Sisters of Providence went to Joliet and the parochial school was then put in charge of the Sisters of Providence. From that time forward a very pleasant relationship flourished

between the Loretto Alumnae and the new Providence Aulmnae. This cordial attitude meant much for the success of the continued co-operation between the people of Joliet and the schools.

IBVM Archives

Loretto Joliet

"Why did the IBVM Sisters leave the Joliet area in 1918?"
The question was addressed by the IBVM archivist to Miss Mary Deiss, Miss Deiss was a Joliet St. Mary's Academy graduate who died at Our Lady of the Angels in 1994:

"I can tell you why. I was in church at Mass that unhappy day. Before the whole congregation, the pastor, Father Quinn, assailed the Sisters, 'You furriners are sending all kinds of money to Canada, a furrin country. I want you out of here.'"

IBVM Archives

Joliet Foundation

Rev. Mother Teresa Dease, accompanied by Mother Gonzaga as Superior, Mother Dosithea and Sister Lidwina, left Toronto on Tuesday, August 29, 1880 and proceeded to Hamilton where they remained a few hours, then, resuming their journey, arrived by train in Joliet on August 30th.

Our future little convent which had been previously occupied by the Sisters of the Holy Cross, being entirely devoid of furniture, obliged us to accept the hospitality of Rev. W. H. Powers for a week. Reverend Mother returned to Toronto having stayed three days in Joliet.

On September 8th, Feast of the Nativity of Mary, we took possession of our Nazareth. On the same day the select school was opened with eight pupils in attendance. A few days before, the parochial school was begun in the basement of St. Patrick's Church with twenty-five pupils including boys and girls. Both schools continued to increase weekly until they reached the number of one hundred.

On September 9th, Sisters Agnes McKenna and Bathilde joined the community.

"To the Glory of God"

The First IBVM's in Chicagoland

"When the snows fall, Sisters and pupils resort to ladders to enter and exit the classrooms and dorms via second storey windows. When the snows melt, we and our neighbors use boats to cross the streets in this low-lying area. All to the glory of God." So wrote Sister Christina in 1881 from Joliet which was then in the Chicago archdiocese.

The Sisters of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, incorporated under the title Ladies of Loretto, arrived from Toronto, Canada, in 1880 to teach the children of quarry, canal and railroad workers. Their sponsor, Father W. H. Power, pastor of St. Patrick's, expressed surprise that they had not come prepared with funds to build and staff a convent and school. However, he graciously located a small unfurnished house for them where, for a time, they slept on the floor. A week later, on Our Lady's birthday, the Sisters moved to an elementary school where they were able, somehow, to prepare meals, and where at night classrooms would become dormitories for Sisters and boarders in the "select academy." Astute parishoners, noting the frugality of the Sisters' grocery baskets, tactfully introduced them to the idea of credit. The strategy served until ready cash became available. "Our first Christmas," writes Sister Christina, "Father Power gifted us with an elegant silver service.

Before long, Loretto Sisters were teaching in five Joliet schools. As the population grew, so did the need for Sisters. Pastors would

tolerate lay teachers only if the Sisters would pay their salaries. But the Sisters had no money. In 1918, the Sisters of the Institute withdrew to Chicago and the Joliet schools were taken over by the more numerous and highly capable Sisters of Providence.

In 1892, Archbishop Feehan appointed Rev. Bernard Murray to establish St. Bernard's, an Irish church and school in Lake Village (Englewood), soon to be incorporated into Chicago. He invited IBVM's to teach there. Father Murray's parish consisted of "struggling huts and shacks," Sister Christina reports. "They are connected by plank sidewalks and muddy roads." In the little frame school and convent, Sister Christina strove to protect students and Sisters against cold in winter, heat, flies and mosquitoes in summer, and in 1893 she was able to inform the motherhouse, "To the glory of God, the school is flourishing and in a few months Loretto Academy will open for girls on the secondary level."

In both Joliet and Chicago, the curriculum was classical with emphasis on religion, deportment, and academic achievement. The schools were chartered, accredited with De Kalb Normal and with Illinois Urbana.

Sisters of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary count as the chief success the love Sister Christina and her companions inspired in their students, their children and their grand children whose loyalty continues today--to the greater glory of God.