

CHAPTER V

THE FOUNDING OF SAINT JOSEPH ACADEMY

The Request of the Bishop for a Day School

In 1875, when the Sisters had been in Columbus for twenty years, they opened Saint Joseph Academy. As early as 1873 Bishop Rosecrans asked the Sisters to establish a day school in Columbus. The bishop assured Sister Loyola, Sister Louise's representative, that many prominent men of the city favored the project and promised assistance if the Sisters would undertake the work.<sup>1</sup> At that time there was no private school for girls in Columbus, though the Dominican Sisters had moved their boarding school from Somerset to the Leonard farm two miles outside the city. There were three parish schools, Holy Cross with about four hundred pupils, Saint Patrick's with nearly five hundred, and Saint Mary's, where the Sisters, in 1873, were about to take the classes of girls, about 150.<sup>2</sup> Saint Patrick's had a "high school" department of good size in those days, when few girls attended school after their first Holy Communion: in

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<sup>1</sup>Journal, May 20, 1873.

<sup>2</sup>Sadliers' Catholic Directory (New York; D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1873).

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1876, nine girls were in the highest class.<sup>3</sup> There were well over a thousand children in the Catholic schools and over six thousand in the public schools. There was one public high school, at the corner of Broad and Sixth Streets, where nine teachers taught about 250 students.<sup>4</sup>

Sister Mary Liguori's reply, when the bishop first suggested an academy, was: "We have Holy Cross and Saint Patrick's; both are good schools, bishop."<sup>5</sup> They were good schools, if one can judge by the constant supervision they received to make sure the work in them was done well. The Journal of the Sisters records regular visits of the superior to the classes, oral examinations at the end of the semesters in the presence of the pastors, and sometimes the replacing of certain Sisters because they could not "keep the children."

Though Bishop Rosecrans agreed that Saint Patrick's and Holy Cross were good schools, he insisted, "It is not enough; we need an academy for our city."<sup>6</sup> His proposal of

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<sup>3</sup>The Catholic Columbian, Apr. 29, 1876. Bishop Rosecrans began publication of this diocesan newspaper in January, 1875.

<sup>4</sup>Annual Report of the Board of Education of the Columbus Public Schools for the School Year Ending August 31, 1875 (Columbus: S. A. Glenn, Book and Job Printer, 1875), p. 33.

<sup>5</sup>S.N.D., Life of Sister Mary Liguori, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

May, (or earlier<sup>7</sup>), preceded the September panic of 1873, but financial conditions in Ohio had been aggravated for some time by low wages and unemployment.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, before consenting to the bishop's request, Sister Louise sought a security for the undertaking. She asked that ten citizens be found, each of whom would go security for one thousand dollars in case the academy failed.<sup>9</sup> Backed by this promise of help if needed, the Sisters were able to begin negotiations for property.

#### The Plans for Establishment

Lot 784, divided, and held by two distinct owners, was next to the convent on the west; it was the ideal place. The eastern half was purchased first from its owner, Gideon F. Castle, an attorney, on May 18, 1874 for \$2,700. Cornelius Lang, staunch Catholic of Holy Cross parish, purchased the western half of the lot for the Sisters October 1, 1874, for \$3,800 from Nicholas Zimmerman, a stonemason.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Sister Mary Liguori implies this when she wrote of Sister Loyola's visit on May 25, 1873 with the bishop "about the intended day school" as if it were something already being considered.

<sup>8</sup>Philip D. Jordan, *Ohio Comes of Age, 1873-1900*, Vol. V of *The history of the State of Ohio*, ed. Carl Wittke (6 vols.; Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1941-1944), p. 24

<sup>9</sup>*Annals*, p. 39.

<sup>10</sup>*Columbus Directory, 1871-1872* (Columbus: Bailey).

It is not certain how far plans had progressed or whether the property had been bought, when Sister Mary Liguori learned that the Dominican Sisters from Saint Mary of the Springs had been invited by Bishop Rosecrans to begin a separate foundation in Columbus, and to conduct a select day school for young ladies within a few blocks of the academy she was planning. It seemed to her that one academy was as much as the city was ready for and furthermore she did not want to compete with another community. So she went to the bishop and told him how far her plans had progressed and that she was quite willing to abandon her whole scheme. He replied that if he had not wanted an academy he would not have asked her to establish it.<sup>11</sup>

Why the bishop should have requested a second day school during the year 1874 is difficult to understand. It seems he had not expected the Dominican Sisters to come so soon.<sup>12</sup> At any rate, the two communities of Sisters were faced with an additional cause for concern over enrollment because of the duplication. The Dominicans opened their school, Sacred Heart Academy, on January 8, 1875, in a building at the corner of Fifth and Gay Streets near the

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<sup>11</sup>S.N.D., *Life of Sister Mary Liguori*, p. 42.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

Cathedral, with seventy pupils.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile the Sisters of Notre Dame, moved ahead with plans for a building during the winter of 1874-1875. Several times the men who had agreed to back the project, met with Father Hemsteger and the Sisters. They were present at the Sisters' request, for the opening of bids and for discussions with the contractor to see "that all to be carried out according to plans and specifications and they we may not be cheated as we understand ourselves so little about the business."<sup>14</sup> On March 1, they met again for the signing of the contract that stipulated \$13,762 as the total cost of the three-story building.

On March 6, the men began to dig the cellar. By April 15, two weeks after Easter, enough of the foundation had been laid that Father Hemsteger could bless the cornerstone. He performed the quiet ceremony with the help of Fathers John Eis and J.C. Golschmidt, his curates.<sup>15</sup>

There was another condition on which Sister Louise had agreed to the bishop's request for a day school. It was that no objection would be made to her taking Sister

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<sup>13</sup>The Silver Jubilee, Historical Sketch of the Community of Dominican Sisters of the Sacred Heart Convent in Galveston, Texas, 1907. Unpagged. Archives of the Dominican Sisters of Saint Mary of the Springs, Columbus.

<sup>14</sup>Journal, Feb. 30, sic 1875.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., Apr. 15, 1875.

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Josephine Ignatius (Tierney) from Saint Patrick School to be the principal of the academy.<sup>16</sup> Sister Josephine Ignatius had come immediately after her vows to Saint Patrick's in 1871, and, though only twenty years old, her competence had made a favorable impression on the bishop and others interested in the school. No objection was made to her transfer to the new day school and so she assumed charge of the new academy. She had a commanding presence, as well as a sincere and cordial manner that won all hearts. She was an excellent teacher, and a true religious. It was due first and foremost to her influence that the day school of the Sisters of Notre Dame in Columbus acquired a high reputation for the education of young girls.

However, the success of the school was something of which the Sisters were anything but sure in that summer of 1875. Therefore, they placed the whole venture under the patronage of Saint Joseph, naming the proposed school in his honor. They had earlier, buried his medals in the property when there was some danger the owner would ask an exorbitant price.<sup>17</sup> Sister Mary Liguori's ardent devotion to the saint, which led her even to carry a small statue of him in her pocket, was easily caught by the Sisters of her community and prayerful trust in his intercession did not go

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<sup>16</sup>Annals, p. 40.

<sup>17</sup>S.N.D., Life of Sister Mary Liguori, p. 42.

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unrewarded.

Besides prayers to Saint Joseph, during that summer when the building was being erected, the Sisters began a novena of evening holy hours, from ten to eleven o'clock, once a week, "to draw the

blessing of heaven on our undertakings, especially on the new building and work undertaken in it.”<sup>18</sup> After the novena, the holy hours were continued, but sometimes from nine to ten, “in order not to tire the Sisters too much”<sup>19</sup> after a long day that began with the rising hour of five o’clock.

The Sisters learned, that summer of 1875, that the Dominicans, in order to care for increased enrollment, had transferred their very successful school to a building at the corner of Grant and Broad Streets,<sup>20</sup> three and a half blocks away from the rising red brick walls of Saint Joseph Academy.

#### The First Year

September 6 the new school opened even though the building was unfinished. The only rooms ready for use were

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<sup>18</sup>Journal, Oct. 25, 1875.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>The Silver Jubilee, Historical Sketch of the Community of Dominican Sisters of the Sacred Heart Convent in Galveston, Texas, 1907. Unpaged. Archives of the Dominican Sisters of Saint Mary of the Springs, Columbus.