

SISTER ST. JOHN (ELIZA) IRELAND AND SHACKS

Sister St. John Ireland was certainly a shadowy figure in comparison with her sister, Mother Seraphine and her first cousin, Mother Celestine Howard. No biographical sketch has ever been written about her and in order to construct one, I had to search through a number of books and unpublished articles where I found "bits and pieces" as the Irish would say.

Eliza was born in 1844, two years after her sister Ellen. She came with the Ireland family to St. Paul and also studied at St. Joseph's Academy. Sister Ignatius Loyola Cox, probably one of our first historians of our province, described the 1860 academy graduation ceremonies held out on the front lawn where Eliza delivered an address which she also composed. Bishop Thomas Grace complimented her on the address and the manner in which she delivered it. Then he expressed surprise that she had not received a crown for deportment. She laughingly told him that had she known there was such a prize, she would win it the following year. And she did - with two other students.

Sometime after her graduation, Eliza taught school in the Cahill Settlement, west of Minneapolis. This Settlement which was named after the Reverend Thomas Cahill, an early missionary priest in northwest Minnesota, was centered in an area near what is now the intersection of 70th Street and Cahill Road. The Irish immigrants who settled there began building the community with the construction of a frame school house and a country store in 1864. Earlier in 1857, St. Patrick's Church had been founded and was the first church located in the area later incorporated as the city of Edina. The original small log church was located a couple of miles down the road from the Cahill Settlement at the corner of what is now 70th Street and Woodale Avenue. It was in this location that Eliza taught the children of Irish immigrants until her entrance into the novitiate of the Sisters of St. Joseph on September 8, 1868 at the age of twenty-four. She received the habit and name of John on December 8 of the same year. Sister Seraphine, by this time the assistant provincial as well as principal of St. Joseph's Academy, signed the act of profession made by Sister St. John in 1870.

Sister St. John, like so many Sisters who would follow her, was asked to assume many new responsibilities in rapid succession. From 1871 until 1873 while residing at the academy, she was directress of St. Mary's School, located on Ninth and Locust Streets in St. Paul. The next two years she became the principal of the academy. In 1875 she was assigned the same position at the Immaculate Conception School located in Minneapolis. Here she resided at St. Mary's Convent (later named St. Anthony) and depending on weather conditions, made the daily trip across the Mississippi River bridge either by foot or horse and buggy.

Holy Angels Academy, the institution with which we associate Sister St. John the most, was opened during the administration of Mother Agnes Veronica Williams, the sixth provincial superior, who had a long career as administrator and teacher in such places as St. Joseph's Academy, Mendota, Cathedral grade school and the Girls Orphanage. Holy Angels, like so many of our early institutions, was opened in 1877 in a rented Merritt house known as the "White Convent" on Third Street, North Minneapolis, directly

opposite the Immaculate Conception School. Because the house was in a very neglected and delapidated condition, Sisters Marcelline Dowling and Thecla Reid were sent from St. Joseph's Academy to get it ready for occupancy. On January 29, 1877, this convent was formally named Holy Angels. The members of the pioneer group were: Mother St. John Ireland, superior and directress of the Immaculate Conception School; Sisters Regina Kilty, St. James Doyle and Bertha, teachers; Sisters Marcelline Dowling and Thecla Reid, housekeepers. Sometime during the following year, the Sisters abandoned the "White Convent" for the Ankney home on Second Avenue North and Third Street. Here they built a small temporary frame addition to be used for school purposes. The Ankney home was known as the "Brown Convent" and its only historic interest is that it was the scene of the first graduation from Holy Angels, June, 1880.

With a rapidly growing school and music class, the Sisters foresaw the need for more roomy quarters for the coming school year. To meet this demand, they secured the Skyles home, located on Fifth Street North. Here they built a frame school house, with three class rooms on the first floor, and a study hall occupying the entire second floor. Since this building was painted gray, it was called the "Gray Convent" and it became the scene of the second graduation dated June, 1882. In the summer of 1882, the Sisters purchased the Bassett property on Fourth Street and Sixth Avenue North, to be used as a boarding and day school. It was a large, light brick structure set in the center of the grounds and elevated several feet above the street. The recently built frame school house was moved from the previous site in order to have sufficient space to meet the demands of a growing faculty and school population. Several new members were added to the staff. Sister Francis Clare Bardon was assigned to be in charge of the high school while Sister Victorine Casserly was head of the music department. Sister Irenaeus Egan was in charge of the study hall and Sister Martina Waldron was prefect of resident students.

From its foundation in 1857 until her death in 1897, Mother St. John Ireland was the inspirational guide and leader in the development of the institution. Described as a "woman of granite mould, strong mind, and deep charity" every educational and religious project was accelerated during her administration. The frequent change of dwellings also took its toll on her health. Every move meant another and larger tumbled shack to clean and renovate. Mother St. John once remarked to Sister Thecla, "We'll have all the old shacks in Minneapolis cleaned up before we find a home."

Sister St. John's health suffered greatly during these years of intense growth, activity and overwork. Members of the provincial council became so concerned that they decided to send Mother Seraphine, who was the provincial superior and Sister St. John to a warm climate for the winter months. Early in January, 1893 the two started on their journey to Tucson, Arizona in search of health and a much needed rest. They stayed at St. Mary's Hospital where the Sisters of St. Joseph were in charge of a sanatorium for TB patients and a hospital. While they were gone from the province, The Sisters at Holy Angels sent a picture of that community to Sister St. John. The photograph which hangs on the gallery wall of the second floor cloister at St. Joseph's Provincial House, St. Paul, is interesting in that it shows pictures of twenty-one Sisters seated on the steps of

Holy Angels. Three of them were lay Sisters who wore black serge capes instead of the white linen guimpes. They were Sisters Michaela Ready, Perpetua O'Keefe and Martina Waldron. The others included: Sisters Mercedes Clark, Lucilla Bacon, Gertrude Roach, Florentia Downs, Mary Paul Gibbons, Eulalia Dress, Patricia Moroney, Edith Hogan, Irmina Dougherty, Irene Schulte, Evangelista Melady, Seraphine Comer, Sophia Keating, Eugenia McGinnis, Mary Joseph Kelly, Dominica Strattman, Callista Collins and Francis Clare Bardon. These were the Sisters who taught/worked at the Academy and at the Immaculate Conception grade school, taking care of the grade and high school students, boarders, and music and art students.

During Sister St. John's sojourn in Tucson, she seemed to renew her vigor. She and her sister remained until May when she returned to Holy Angels to assume her duties.

In 1897 she became so ill that Mother Seraphine brought her to St. Joseph's Academy and relieved her of all responsibility. During the night of December 19, while her brother, Archbishop John Ireland pronounced absolution, she slept in Christ. Earlier that evening, she had assured Mother Seraphine that their separation would be only for a little while - ten years at the most. Her funeral Mass, celebrated by her brother, was offered in the Holy Family chapel, St. Joseph's Academy, December 21, 1897 - the thirty-sixth anniversary of her priest-brother's ordination.

Sister St. John is buried in Calvary Cemetery. In her necrology which was to be published a year later, no information was given about the type of work she did. It merely states: "A very earnest and devoted worker in Our Lord's vineyard, our dear Sister wrought much good in the different employments confided to her in the Congregation." Mother St. John must have run a good school and established a solid foundation because at the time of her death, Holy Angels Academy had fifty boarders, 130 music pupils and a big attendance at the day school. Holy Angels also produced many vocations to the religious life. Among those who entered our community were:

S. Marcia Betker	S. Louise Marie Lohmar
S. St. Charles Brennan	S. Madeline Lyons
S. Rosalie Cassidy	S. Teresa Joseph Lyons
S. Ruth Deveraux	S. Emeline McSherry
S. Marion Donovan	S. Raymond Mooney
S. Claude Dougherty	S. Alexandra O'Brien
* S. Anna Goulet	S. Francis Regis O'Leary
S. Rosalia Hays	S. Clare Cecilia Prendergast
S. Seraphica Hylin	S. Caroline Rowles
S. Louise Marie Lohmar	S. Constance Ryan
S. Anna Mary Kennedy	S. Irene Schulte
S. Henrietta King	S. Annetta Wheeler

Sisters Jane Margaret Cullinan and Mary Rita Cullinan entered the Visitation Order in St. Paul.

\* At this time, (September 14, 1982), Sister Anna Goulet is now in her 100th year and resides at Bethany Convent, St. Paul.

----- Sister Ann Thomasine Sampson, CSJ

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For further information:

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Hurley, Sister Helen Angela, CSJ, "Mother Annetta Wheeler" unpublished interview, CSJ Archives, St. Paul Province.

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Savage, Sister Lucida, CSJ, THE CENTURY'S HARVEST 1836-1936. St. Louis, 1936.

Next month: Charles McCarthy and Vocations

## VISITORS' REGISTER.

NAME	RESIDENCE
<i>Sister St. John</i>	<i>Minneapolis</i>