



# Barquilla de la Santa Maria

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### THE DOMINICAN SISTERS OF THE SACRED HEART AND SACRED HEART ACADEMY (Continued, from Vol. XVIII, No. 7)

#### Part 3 -- Farewell to Columbus

#### The Loss of Sacred Heart Convent and Academy

In the spring after the death of Bishop Rosecrans, Mother Mary Agnes and her community lost their property in Columbus and moved to Somerset. Both Bishop Rosecrans and the young attorney William J. Clarke take some gentle raps in the history by Sister Sheila Hackett.

Bishop Rosecrans and Mother Mary Agnes had co-signed legal documents, and the funds on hand were insufficient to meet the indebtedness on the Sacred Heart school and convent. The "Annals dictated by Mother Rose Lynch" states that Mother Mary Agnes could have received sufficient funds from her father's estate to meet the need, but that Bishop Rosecrans had frequently borrowed from that fund to meet payments on St. Joseph Cathedral in Columbus. The Day Book entries from 1 January 1874 to 27 December 1883 show that Bishop Rosecrans had in fact borrowed in excess of ten thousand dollars from Mother Mary Agnes. The money was borrowed with the intention of later repayment from funds assured him from another source, but the repayment was not made....

Mother Mary Agnes was without finances and the creditors would not wait. One evening in the spring of 1879, while the sisters were praying vespers, the appraisers went through the school and convent. Mother Mary Agnes was ordered to surrender the keys to both institutions immediately, but she succeeded in having the closure postponed until 1 May. The young lawyer, Mr. Clark, negotiated with the creditors, and he advised Mother Mary Agnes to sell back the property to the original owners. He assured her of the cancellation of the debt and a balance of seven thousand dollars. She followed his advice, incurred a debt in excess of fifteen thousand dollars and consequently lost all the property.... (43)

The existing documents bear out some of the above story, but at least the part played by Mr. Clarke seems to have been poorly remembered when the story was put into writing. Mother Mary Agnes was far more than \$15,000 in debt, and long before Mr. Clarke came on the scene. To make the story as complete and accurate as possible, and to clear Mr. Clarke's reputation, if that were necessary, the deed and mortgage records extant in the Franklin County Recorder's office and the records of the Common Pleas Court will be summarized here.

The Main property was purchased by Mother Mary Agnes in her own name on August 15, 1874 for \$20,000 and at first had no mortgage. (44) Less than a year later, June 8, 1875, she, Bishop Rosecrans, M. McAlister, and Thomas Bergin borrowed \$5,100 from William Miller and signed a note due in one year with 8% interest. On September 26, 1876 Mr. Miller filed a petition to recover the debt and the court on October 30 found that \$1,000 was due. (45) This amount apparently was paid, for we hear no more of this debt and it apparently was not levied against the convent.

On September 8, 1875 Mother Mary Agnes purchased the house of Hetta and George Wright, again in her own name, for \$30,000. (46) It would appear that she may have paid too much for the property, for the panic of 1873 had struck the country and in its aftermath property values fell, but it is not clear just when or how fast they fell. The Wrights had paid \$18,000 for this house in 1865 (47) and they had mortgaged it "to the hilt." In 1869 they had borrowed \$10,000 from the Railway Passenger Assurance Company of Hartford, Ct. In 1874 they had borrowed another \$3,000 from the same source and \$5,000 from David Taylor. These three loans were covered by mortgages on the property. (48) Mother Mary Agnes was to pay these debts, including interest. In addition, she mortgaged the house to Hetta Wright for \$12,000; the three associated notes were for \$4,000 each and were due in three, four, and five years from date, that is September 8, 1878, 1879, and 1880. (49)

In 1877, Mother Mary Agnes borrowed \$14,000 -- for what purpose we cannot guess -- from the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company. Certainly this one sum was more than Bishop Rosecrans borrowed from her between 1874 and his death in 1878. At the time, Nov. 5, she was in Shelby County, Tennessee, that is, her family's home in Memphis. She signed a mortgage on the Main (convent) property to cover the notes she gave to the insurance company. These notes were eleven in number, ten for \$400 each, due in six-month increments from date, and the eleventh note for \$10,000 due in five years, or November 5, 1882. (50)

In January of 1878, Mother Mary Agnes made what appears in retrospect to have been her fatal mistake. There is no record to indicate the cause of the action, but it would appear that Hetta Wright was aware that, considering the depth to which property values had fallen, the monetary value of the academy property would not cover the mortgages that existed on it. Somehow, she persuaded Mother Mary Agnes to sign another mortgage on January 17, this one on the Main property, to help cover the three notes associated with the mortgage on the Wright property. (51)

During the remainder of 1878, Mother Mary Agnes and Bishop Rosecrans jointly borrowed several relatively small amounts of money, which we must presume were used for the ceiling of the Cathedral, the only major work done there since 1872. Interestingly, John D. Clarke was one of the two contractors for this work (52) and his son William helped make arrangements for two of the loans. The three loans were: (1) on January 22, 1878 they borrowed \$1,750 from Rufus Main for one year at 8% interest; (2) on August 17, 1878, they borrowed \$1,200 from William J. Clarke for 90 days at 8% interest; on the same day Clarke sold the note to James M. Walker; (3) on September 26, 1878, they borrowed \$2,000 from William J. Clarke for thirty days at 8% interest after maturity; Clarke sold this note to Julia Ambos. (53)

Mother Mary Agnes borrowed another \$404.66 from the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company, at 8% interest, on December 28, 1878. This seems to indicate that she had managed to pay the first note of \$400, due to that company in May of 1878, but had not paid the second, due in November (after the Bishop's death), and the company had had her sign a new note for it, plus interest. The company obtained a judgment against her for \$406.50 due on the new note in January of 1879. (54)

At this point, counting principal and interest, counting both mortgages and unsecured notes, both her own and those signed with the Bishop, Mother Mary Agnes was in debt to the amount of about \$60,000.

In February, pressure must have been growing on Mother Mary Agnes. Perhaps it was then that, as described above, Hetta Wright had the appraisers go through the houses and demanded the property. On February 20, Mother Mary Agnes signed a deed whereby for \$1.00 she sold the Wright property to John C. English, Michael A. Daugherty, and Luke G. Byrne as trustees. They were to take possession on August 1 next, and to lease or sell the property to pay off its encumbrances, etc., and pay the balance to her. (55) This sounds like the proposal ascribed to William Clarke. It must not have been as desperate a plan as it seems now, or as naive as the Sisters' account makes it sound, for Michael A. Daugherty was one of the leading attorneys of the city and Luke Byrne also was an attorney. Both attorneys had the Diocese of Columbus or the Bishop as client at other times. John C. English was a merchant, an old friend of Archbishop Purcell, whose daughters attended Sacred Heart Academy, and who lived a few blocks further out East Broad Street. This attempt to salvage some value from the property was a failure.

In March, 1879 the three holders of the notes signed jointly by Mother Mary Agnes and the Bishop filed suits against her to recover their money. James M. Walker filed on March 5 and on that day it was judged that he was owed \$1,252. On March 20, Julia Ambos filed and on that day it was decided that she was owed \$2,046.67. On March 29, Rufus Main filed his suit and was judged to be owed \$1,914.10. (56) There being no money to pay these debts, they were levied upon Mother Mary Agnes's real estate. (57)

On April 12, 1879 Hetta A. Wright filed her petition in Common Pleas court against Mother Mary Agnes, the three trustees, and all of the mortgagees of the property. A hearing was held on May 16 and Mother Mary Agnes was found in default in the amount of \$2,207.98 on the first note held by Mrs. Wright, which had been due on September 8, 1878. She was given one day to pay this amount, and when she did not pay after three days, on May 19, 1879 the judge issued an order for sale of the property. This is what was meant by Mother Mary Agnes's "one brief statement, '1879, March 19th We lost all--'" (but the month is incorrect, at least as it appears in Hackett on page 42). On June 19 at a public sale at the court house, Hetta Wright herself bought both the convent and the academy, subject to the mortgages held by others, for a total of \$5,105. Of this amount, court costs were \$39.05 and Mrs. Wright kept the remainder. (58)

### Three Years in Somerset

A return of the Dominican Sisters to Somerset had been contemplated by Mother Mary Agnes for some time. By the spring of 1878, she was expecting to

build a novitiate and infirmary in Somerset at some future date. (59) By April 3, 1879, when it was becoming clearer that the property in Columbus would be lost, these plans were advanced and, rather than a few sisters opening a second house in Perry County, the whole community prepared to move. The New Lexington Herald of that date carried an item, in upbeat prose typical of Mother Mary Agnes.

A number of sisters from Columbus and formerly of St. Mary's at Somerset, intend reopening a school this summer at Somerset. The High School Building has been rented for the summer term and school will open at once. A cash fund of about \$5,000.00 has already been provided for the Seminary, which will be rebuilt this summer on the site of the former Academy. The contracts for the work have been let and work will begin as soon as the weather permits. The enterprise is a laudable one and will meet the hearty encouragement of the people of this county. (60)

It would be interesting to know the source of the "cash fund of about \$5,000.00". Perhaps Mother Mary Agnes was counting on the surplus she expected from sale of the Wright property by the trustees that autumn. It would appear that while they lived in Somerset their entire wealth of personal property amounted to only a few hundred dollars and they lived so really their vow of poverty that Father McKenna of St. Joseph's Priory later sent them one hundred yards of linen to replace their worn and tattered habits -- some of which they used for undergarments, of which they had greater need.

The last commencement exercises of Sacred Heart Academy in Columbus were held on April 28, 1879. On the next day, most of the sisters, ten boarders, and four Columbus students who became boarders were up by three o'clock and soon took the road for Somerset, where they arrived about noon. Two days later, on May 1, they opened their new Sacred Heart Academy in the two-story Union School building, which they rented from the summer from the public school authorities. This building was on the north corner of Main and High streets, in the east end of Somerset where the public school is still located, on the site of John Fink's tavern where Father Fenwick had offered Mass for the pioneer Catholics in 1810. (61) This first session ran for two months and was given for fourteen students from Columbus and twenty-three from Somerset and vicinity.

In August of 1879 the Sisters rented and moved the school into the larger part of the Brown Block, prominently located just south of the old courthouse on Somerset's square. (62) They conducted the Academy and, apparently, lived there for three years. In that first full academic year they also ran a school for boys, which was located across the square in the second story above Frank A. Dittoe's store. (63) The boys'school may have been a financial necessity for the Sisters, for they did not hold the monopoly on Catholic academics in Perry County that they had enjoyed before 1866; St. Aloysius Academy near New Lexington had been opened by the Franciscan Sisters in 1876. The Dominicans also taught catechism classes for Holy Trinity parish.

The Sisters' intention was to own their Academy in Somerset, and toward this end they incorporated themselves under the state laws almost at once. On May 27, Sister Rose in the chair, Sister Evangela as clerk, Mother Mary Agnes, and Sisters Mary Louise Curran and Mary Frances Ackerman formally resolved upon incorporation. Among other points, they resolved "That the purpose and object of the Society and Corporation is by holding property and managing our

affairs as a body Corporate to be enabled the more Effectually to fulfill and carry out the intention of our Order which is to educate females, both gratuitously and for remuneration..." Sisters Rose, Louise, and Frances were elected trustees and the minutes of the meeting, signed by Mother Mary Agnes as President, were recorded by the Perry County Recorder on August 1. (64)

On September 30, 1879 this corporation, "The Sacred Heart Convent of Somerset, Ohio", filed a petition in Common Pleas Court against Henry Martin, Sheriff. The nature of the case is not known today, but apparently the Sheriff had siezed some of the "goods and chattels" of the Sisters. Had they, perhaps, failed to pay some of the rent for use of the public school? Acting on the petition, the court ordered the Coroner to take the property from the Sheriff and return it to the Sisters, which he did on October 4, but the Sisters had to find security that they would repay the Sheriff if the court so ordered. (65) John Gallin and Francis Gallagher stood as securities in the amount of \$875, in return for which the Sisters mortgaged to them their personal property, consisting of furniture, an organ, carpeting, and four pianos. (66) The case dragged on until March 13, 1882, when the court declared for the Sisters, to the amount of one cent and costs to be paid by the Sheriff. (67)

On October 15, 1879 the foundation of the new convent and academy was begun on the site of the former convent, across the street from Holy Trinity Church. By winter, the foundation was complete and half a million bricks were on hand. A fair was held by the Sisters and the people of Somerset that November. It was a grand success, a surprising outcome considering the scarcity of money at the time. (68) By the next winter, the building was ready to roof, but another \$5,000 was needed to complete the project and, under the leadership of the pastor, Father Dominic H. Noon, O.P., another fair was held. (69) This fair seems not to have been such a success, for the building progressed no further.

One reason for the community's lack of progress in Somerset undoubtedly was the ill health of Mother Mary Agnes, who received permission from Bishop Watterson (appointed to the See of Columbus in the summer of 1880) to visit her family in Memphis and New York for long periods in 1881.

The sisters' relations with the new Bishop of Columbus were good at first, but as he came to know them better and considered the situation and needs of his diocese, he determined upon a course of action entirely unacceptable to them. During Lent of 1882, Father Hugh Francis Lilly, O.P., Prior at St. Joseph's near Somerset, visited Bishop Watterson in preparation for a retreat to be given for the Dominican Fathers. During their conversation, Bishop Watterson told Father Lilly of his intentions for the struggling community of Dominican Sisters. Father Lilly, who was Mother Mary Agnes's cousin, immediately told her the sad news, and she was almost heartbroken.

The Bishop's intention was to limit the Sacred Heart community by not allowing new members to enter and by allowing them to operate only the Holy Trinity parish school. He did not want two Dominican motherhouses, Sacred Heart and St. Mary's of the Springs, in close proximity and he intended in time to unite Sacred Heart with the Springs. When the Bishop spoke directly with Mother Mary Agnes, he said that he would not make this change while she

lived, but would after she was gone. He would not give her any assurance that the community would continue as such, but he gave her permission to apply to some other bishop for admittance to another diocese. (70)

This intention of Bishop Watterson has always been looked upon by the Sacred Heart Dominicans in stark contrast with the paternal care which they had received from Bishop Rosecrans. However, considered objectively, Bishop Watterson's action or intention toward them was actually more benevolent than Bishop Rosecrans's had been in the similar situation with the Dominicans at St. Columba's in Zanesville. For the same reason, a perceived need to not have two motherhouses of the same order in his diocese, Bishop Rosecrans had accepted Mother Catherine Brown's resignation at St. Columba's and had merged that community with St. Mary's of the Springs in 1870. Bishop Watterson at least was willing to wait for some time and was willing to allow the community to seek a home elsewhere. And, in fact, their hearts were already turned toward a new home.

#### Toward a New Field of Labor

Rev. Nicholas A. Gallagher, who had first learned of the priestly life as Father Jacquet's altar boy at Beaver St. Dominic (71), was the first priest ordained for the Diocese of Columbus. He had been named Administrator of the Diocese after the death of Bishop Rosecrans and subsequently was named Vicar General by Bishop Watterson. On January 10, 1882 he was selected by Pope Leo XIII as Bishop of Canopus and Administrator of the Diocese of Galveston. He went almost immediately to visit St. Joseph's Priory near Somerset and visited also Sacred Heart Convent. There, Mother Mary Agnes spoke with him in private about moving her community to Texas. The other Sisters also jokingly asked him to take them along, "never dreaming that any such thing would happen." After speaking with Bishop Watterson concerning the future of her community, Mother Mary Agnes wrote to Bishop Gallagher and asked him in earnest if he would accept the community. On July 5 she gathered her sisters and obtained their eager assent to the proposal. Bishop Gallagher wrote to Bishop Watterson about this proposal, Bishop Watterson made his formal offer of the transfer, and on July 23 Bishop Gallagher accepted it. (72)

The people of Somerset, upset that the plans for the school had fallen through and saddened that the Sisters were leaving, at first refused to help them pack and load their belongings, but on August 5 four box cars were on their way to Texas. On September 25, Bishop Gallagher arrived in Somerset to accompany the Sisters on their journey. On September 26 he donned the Dominican habit and offered Mass for the Sisters. As the Catholic Columbian pointed out, this was the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Bishop Fenwick, the first Bishop of Cincinnati and the Apostle of Ohio. The paper continued, "Twenty Dominican nuns of the Convent of the Sacred Heart, in Somerset, accompany the good Bishop. They go cheerfully and trustfully to that distant region to carry on the holy work in which they have been engaged for many years in this State. Nothing could be more edifying than the sight of this little army of the Cross of Jesus Christ, in charge of their appointed leader, on their way to a new field of labor -- not of conflict, we hope, except in the sense in which all Christian life is a conflict with the powers of darkness." The Columbian had nothing but praise for Sister Rose and Mother Mary Agnes, saying of the latter, "Her truly Christian character and invincible religious enthusiasm, ever proof against all temporal inconven-

iences and trials, have won for her the undying love of her Sisters in religion and of all who knew her." Mother Rose, it continued, "is known and loved by thousands in this State and in all the western country, whose early intellectual and moral training have been committed to her care."

Surely this is an auspicious day in the Catholic history of Texas, and only the all-seeing Eye can measure the grand results that the future will evolve from this religious movement. Surely the spirit of the great and good Bishop Fenwick, which took its flight to heaven fifty years ago today, must rejoice in the effects of his own work.

The Bishop of Galveston, who is the life and soul of this blessed work, is a native of one of the missions established over sixty years ago by Bishop Fenwick. And we have just seen that the first St. Mary's was founded by him in 1830. Certainly the words of holy writ [are] verified in the life and work of Bishop Fenwick: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for their works follow them." And we may truly say: Blessed are the children of this good Father who so exactly walk in his footsteps. (73)

At eight o'clock on the morning of September 26, 1882, the people of Somerset turned out to wish the sisters well as they and Bishop Gallagher went to the depot. Their pastor, Father Noon, "was heartbroken and as tears rolled from his eyes he raised his hand in benediction" as the sisters boarded the train and departed Ohio forever. (74)

(To be concluded)

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NOTES

- 43) Hackett, 41-42
- 44) Franklin County Deed Record 119/359
- 45) Franklin County Common Pleas Court, Complete Record 58/612
- 46) Franklin County Deed Record 125/53
- 47) Deed Record 85/98
- 48) Mortgage Record 32/14, 47/129, and 51/259
- 49) Mortgage Record 55/404
- 50) Mortgage Record 65/91
- 51) Mortgage Record 65/93
- 53) Complete Record 66/76, 124, and 122
- 54) Complete Record 66/42
- 55) Deed Record 138/163
- 56) Complete Record 66/124, 66/122, and 66/76
- 57) Complete Record 74/482
- 58) Deed Record 139/455 and Complete Record 74/482
- 59) Hackett p. 38
- 60) Perry County Heirlines, December, 1992, page 54
- 61) The "probable" sites identified by Sr. Sheila Hackett in her map on page 668 are incorrect. The Somerset Press of May 1, 1879 names the school they used as "the Union School building." E. S. Colborn's History of Perry County (Chicago: W.H.Beers & Co., 1883), page 298, identifies the site. The site is confirmed by the Press's statement that the Sisters would "occupy the Ashbrook property for the present as a residence." This was a house owned by John Ashbrook of Fairfield County on Somerset lot 227, on the west side of High street just north of the alley that ran by the school. (Perry Co. Deed Record 21/296 and 25/319) It is not clear that the sisters lived there for any length of time.
- 62) Again, Sister Sheila's "probable" location is incorrect. The Somerset Press of January 1, 1880 places the Academy in the Brown Block and the street-wise listing makes the location

fairly obvious. Colborn at page 299 places the school in the "Dixon Brown building" and Dixon Brown's ownership of the site on the square is confirmed by Perry County Deed Record 6/456. Brown had died in May of 1879 (Press, May 29) and so, as the Sisters records state, they dealt with his widow.

- 63) Somerset Press, January 1, 1880
- 64) Perry County Recorder, Record of Corporate Bodies, p. 43-44
- 65) Perry County Common Pleas Court, Appearance Docket S, page 321. With thanks to Msgr. George Schlegel for help in locating the Perry County court and deed records.
- 66) Hackett, pp 674-676
- 67) Appearance Docket, op. cit.
- 68) Hackett, p. 45; Somerset Press, Nov. 27, 1879
- 69) Catholic Columbian, Dec. 16, 1880
- 70) Hackett, pp 49-50
- 71) See the Bulletin, Vol. XIV, Nos. 1 and 2 (Jan. & Feb., 1989) for a brief sketch of Bishop Gallagher and his relatives in religion.
- 72) The original of the letter is in the Archives of the Diocese of Columbus. One paragraph was published in the Bulletin, Vol. XIV, No. 1 (Jan., 1989), page 105; other paragraphs are found in Hackett, page 52.
- 73) Catholic Columbian, Sept. 30, 1882, page 8
- 74) Hackett, p. 54

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GIFTS TO THE SOCIETY'S LIBRARY

We are always grateful for gifts of books, photographs, and other memorabilia that expand our knowledge of the Church. Recently these items have been donated:

Foley, Mary C., Lida Rose McCabe: An Early Ohio Journalist; thesis, College of Communications, Ohio University, 1989 - gift of Robert Kirwin

The Holy Bible [Protestant]; New York: American Bible Society, 1883.  
- gift of Sr. Paulette, Diocesan Missions Office

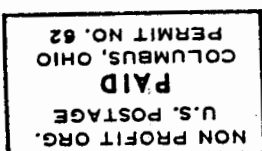
XXVIII International Eucharistic Congress; Chicago: Manz Corp., 1926.  
- gift of Rosemary McMahon

Meier, Norma (ed.), St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, L'Erable, Illinois, Record Book One, 1856-1879, Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, Confirmation; Owensboro [Ky.]: McDowell Publications, 1980.

Missouri Miscellany, Vol. IX (March, 1980), containing "Original Baptismal Register, 1759-1811, The Church of Ste. Genevieve" (across the Mississippi from Kaskaskia, Ill.)  
- gifts of Donald Schlegel

St. Augustine Church, New Straitsville, centennial pamphlet (1971) and related items - gifts of Margaret Ann Long

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