

THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS IN NEW YORK

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Although the provincialate of the Province of the North is located in Princeton, New Jersey, its roots lie in the neighboring state and city of New York. Here, in 1854, among the emigrés of the French parish of St. Vincent de Paul on 23rd Street, we were first called to serve.

At this time the church was under the jurisdiction of the Fathers of Mercy. These latter were very conscious of the religious neglect experienced by the immigrants. So, with the approval of Archbishop Hughes of New York, Fr. Arnet Lafont, S.P.M., planned to have Holy Cross take over the parish. The Fathers would have the Church, the Brothers were to open industrial schools financed by the parish, and the Sisters would have a threefold work which would include an orphanage, a regular school and an industrial school or workshop. All preparations necessary for the installation would be made and guaranteed by a Mr. Devlin, a Catholic businessman who would take no reimbursement in case of failure. /

Two Sisters each from Canada, France and Louisiana pioneered the project. At Archbishop Hughes' request, one was named Mistress of Novices. Sr. Mary of the Five Wounds cooperated with the Reverend Father Madéore, S.P.M., in organizing the school. Mr. Devlin, mentioned above, the owner of a clothing factory, advanced the necessary funds, donated several sewing machines, provided expert workers to teach the Sisters how to use the machines, and secured remunerative orders.

All seemed well in the new venture, the school soon became well-known, especially after the admission of the daughter of the Spanish Consul to New York. Postulants, novices, boarders, and a sympathetic public augured favorably for the future. But the spirit of evil was at work.

In 1852 Fr. Moreau had named Fr. Sorin to Bengal. The latter refused the appointment. ² At this time he was busy trying to bring all the American foundations under his sway at Notre Dame du Lac, a move which would lead

eventually to rupture with France. He had sent priests to New Orleans, demanded money for the upkeep of Notre Dame du Lac, and opposed professions and clothings ratified by Fr. Moreau. He failed to take over New Orleans because of the fidelity to the Motherhouse exhibited by the Sisters and Brothers of Louisiana, but, in the words of Gaetan Bernoville, "he was to have his revenge in New York where Sisters from Louisiana, Canada and France had established a house called to the most wonderful of futures".³

Whether it was because of the difficulties involving the approbation of the Congregation at that time pending in Rome, or whether it was because he believed in the innate goodness of one who had been as a son to him, we do not know, but we do know that Fr. Moreau tried to placate Fr. Sorin. As a condition for the opening of the New York house, the Archbishop had decreed that it should be under the jurisdiction of the Motherhouse in Le Mans. Fr. Sorin objected to this. Fr. Moreau had been away in Rome when the Act of Foundation was drawn up by Fr. Madéore and Sr. Mary of the Five Wounds. On his return the following April, and because of the opposition of Fr. Sorin, he changed the clause to read, that jurisdiction should be exercised through the intermediary of Fr. Sorin.⁴ In a circular letter from Paris, dated June 5, 1856, Fr. Moreau wrote that, from the beginning of the foundation in New York, it had been his intention that it should depend on the Provincial residing at Notre Dame du Lac, that he had not changed his mind, and that he was grieved to know that his order had not yet been put into execution.⁵

Trouble quickly followed. False rumors were circulated stating that the Sisters in New York were planning to sever all connections both from Indiana and from France. Difficulties ensued between the Archbishop and Fr. Sorin in determining a definite line of authority. Fr. Sorin sent Mother Angela to visit the house of New York.⁶ Matters finally came to such a crisis that the house was ordered closed before either Fr. Moreau or Mother Foundress could intervene. The boarders were dismissed. The postulants and thirteen novices who had received the Holy Habit, May 7, 1856, were sent to Philadelphia, and the furnishings sold. Some of the staff were transferred to Chicago to help establish the new industrial school there on the corner of Cass Street and

Chicago Avenue.⁷ Three Sisters, with Sr. Mary Patrick as Directress, and with twelve little girls from the New York house, were sent to Susquehanna, Pennsylvania, to take charge of an academy opened several years before by the Rev. Vincent O'Reilly, Vicar General of Philadelphia.⁸

In 1859 Archbishop Hughes and Fr. Lafont invited the Marianites to return to New York, but on condition that they remain directly under the Motherhouse in France. In the Administrative Account prepared for the General Chapter of 1867 there is a note to the effect that Fr. Lafont, in accordance with the Archbishop of New York, again proposed the foundation of the St. Vincent de Paul orphanage to Mother Mary of the Seven Dolours on the occasion of her visit to New York in 1860. Again the request was granted.

On August 29, 1861, a group of Sisters, headed by Mother General and Mother Mary of St. Léocadie, local superior at St. Laurent, arrived from Canada at 190 West 26th Street, where Sr. Mary of the Five Wounds awaited them, to establish another threefold work: an asylum, a workroom, and a school. The first help came from some former students from St. Laurent.⁹

Fr. Lafont arrived on September 4, accompanied by Father Gambouillet and some ladies of his council, to present us with twelve little protégées. Melle. Lagarde was also with him, and it was with tears in their eyes, and protestations of affection, that the little girls bade farewell to this good lady who had protected them until now. One of them, suffering from a nervous ailment, was in such a deplorable state that Fr. Lafont promised to obtain the services of a nurse to help the Sisters take care of her. Forty students under the age of twelve were enrolled as day scholars.

After visiting the Ladies of Charity and soliciting their aid, Mother Madeleine and Mother Léocadie returned to Canada on September 27. In compliance with the Archbishop's wish, Fr. Founder named a sister from France to be the superior. Fr. Lafont procured the services of two seculars, one a lace laundress and the other a dressmaker, to help in the workshop. They worked gratuitously until such time as affairs could be organized. Donations poured in, both in kind and in money. One day an anonymous donor delivered a case of tea and a barrel of sugar. By October the inhabitants of the house numbered seven Sisters, twenty orphans, two apprentices, and two secular help.

This second attempt was to be no more untroubled than the first. Fr. Sorin had not attended the General Chapter,¹⁰ but arrived in Le Mans a few days after its close. In the book, Chroniques des Maisons d'Amerique, (Indiana) 1843 - 1869, we are told of the event. When he found out what the chapter had accorded relative to the house of New York, a tempest burst, for it was he who had provoked the suppression of the first establishment of our Sisters in that city. In an attempt at reconciliation, Fr. Moreau defended him in a circular letter, and gave him a mark of great confidence in assigning him to bring to Rome the Triennial Report of the Congregation, the Constitutions voted by the Marianite Chapter, and the request for approbation addressed to the Pope.¹¹

Nothing would change the disposition of Fr. Sorin. On his return from Rome he redoubled his efforts to prevent the reopening of the New York house. Back in America once more, he wrote to Fr. Moreau that the foundation in New York, as well as some others in the United States, seemed to him to be an insult to his house. In this and in many other letters, the thought was recurrent; there should not be in the United States, any foundation, even of Sisters, that would not be placed in dependence on Indiana, except in the case of a formal decree from Rome. As soon as Mother Mary of the Seven Dolours had installed the Sisters in the New York house, Fr. Sorin notified Fr. Moreau on September 26,¹² that, if the Sisters did not leave immediately no matter what the consequences, he would have recourse to Rome.¹² On October 8, Fr. Sorin wrote that, since they had not found the justice they had expected from Fr. Moreau, they would look for it elsewhere. He even asked permission to go to Rome for the purpose of retiring from the Congregation with many of his followers. At last Fr. Moreau abandoned his attempts at reconciliation, and ignored the threats. The New York house was allowed to develop in peace.

But the troubles were also internal. Three Sisters of this epoch find their way into history. One, she who had helped Fr. Madéore draw up the terms of the establishment, Sr. Mary of the Five Wounds,¹³ left the Congregation. However, she asked for readmission, was re-accepted, and finally left again to found a new project among the workers. This venture, embarked upon with the disapproval of congregational and ecclesiastical superiors, and the product of poor judgment, was doomed to failure.

Of the other two Sisters who would eventually renounce their allegiance to their motherhouse, one was the superior appointed by Fr. Moreau, Sr. Mary of the Redemption. The other was her assistant, and a future saint of the Church, Mother Mary Léonie.

Sr. Mary of the Redemption, née Pauline Rajot, had been an assistant general, a provincial of France, a visitatrix in America, and was now in charge of St. Vincent de Paul Orphanage. Because of her position and her own admirable qualities, she was welcomed warmly by the charitable ladies of the wealthy French society in New York. Under her direction the project developed rapidly. When the local council met for the first time under her presidency, she had the secretary read an extract from the conditions drawn up by the Ladies of Charity of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul for the lodging and care of the orphans. There is a great deal of detail in the council notes, but the sum total was that the Ladies would pay the board for thirteen orphans and dress six, the other seven to be dressed by their families. The Sisters could accept other orphans presented by Fr. Lafont but, if the families did not pay, the Ladies would not be responsible for them. 14

The following year the council met under the presidency of Fr. Charles Moreau, sent by Fr. Moreau to visit the houses of America. Also present was Fr. Lafont, who objected to the references in the minutes to the Ladies of St. Vincent de Paul, as all responsibilities devolved on him. If they defaulted, he would assume all debts. He also questioned why the regulations laid down by Mother Foundress had not been included. To this the Councillors responded that they had completely forgotten about them as Fr. Lafont had taken them with him. These regulations were immediately entered. Thus we see that there was an apparent lack of candor on the part of Sr. Mary of the Redemption. In her zeal for the success of the work, she became so wrapped up in it that she forgot her allegiance both to the Generalate of Le Mans and to the Superior of the Fathers of Mercy. Fr. Lafont wrote to France to ask for her removal. Because of disturbances in the life of the community, Mother Foundress reprimanded her by letter, a fact which her proud nature could not accept. Her response was so outrageous that the General Council deprived her of her position. The unpleasant task of relaying this news fell to Mother Foundress. The latter, wishing to soften

the blow, gave Sr. Mary of the Redemption to the end of the school year to set her affairs in order. However, Sister's reaction in rallying the sympathy of her friends caused the Council in France to insist that she be demoted immediately. Mother Foundress was forced to comply. Sr. Mary of the Redemption was ordered to return to France. She refused, and left the community with the intention of starting a boarding school with the help of some Protestants. She was eventually dissuaded, and agreed at last to return to France where she served as an army nurse during the Franco-Prussian War. At the end she was to die as a member of the Sisters of Holy Cross in Indiana.

The third Sister to be lost to the Marianites in New York was Sr. Mary Léonie.¹⁵ She had been sent to New York from Canada at the age of twenty-two. Three years later she was to be named assistant to Sister Mary of the Redemption. Already in frail health, Mother Léonie as she came to be called, was an exemplary religious, but her role as an assistant demanded more strength than she possessed. By 1869 she had to be sent home to Canada to recuperate, but soon returned to New York. In requesting the removal of Sr. Mary of the Redemption, Fr. LaFont had also asked for that of her assistant. Thus the following year ¹⁸⁷⁰ Mother Léonie was transferred to Canada, but allowed to live with her family for a time in order to regain her health. Twice she returned to New York to meet with her former Superior and friend, and to try to save her from herself. Part of her trip was rewarded when Sr. Mary of the Redemption sailed for France aboard the steamer, Periere. At this time Mother Léonie met with Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors who esteemed her greatly. What passed between them we do not know, but Mother Léonie returned to Canada, and thence to Indiana where she was to be received by Father Sorin, and whence, four years later, she would set out on the path that would lead to the foundation of her own congregation, The Little Sisters of the Holy Family.

It is time to return to St. Vincent de Paul. At first it was just for little girls, orphaned or semi-orphaned, of French extraction, and those whose families were obliged to put them away. That they were not all financially poor may be seen from the requirements. Part of the trousseau consisted of four ordinary dresses plus a special set of blue coat, hat, and dress for Sundays in

winter, and two white capes for summer. Laundry and mending were done by the family. Children were permitted to spend the first Sunday of the month at home, but not to stay overnight. Parents might visit every Sunday and Thursday afternoon. Sick children were to be treated at home. There were two vacation periods, December 26th to January 1st and July 1st to September 1. At the age of fourteen the orphan entered the industrial school where her family paid \$50 for the first year, but she supported herself for the second year. ¹⁶

The duties of the Sisters rapidly increased. The Fathers of Mercy asked for two Sisters to visit the sick in their homes. Little boys were admitted to the orphanage in 1862. On May 16, 1863, Father Lafont, at the request of the Superior, presided over the opening of a school for adults.¹⁷ In the first week at least ten presented themselves every evening from 7:00 to 8:00. All this was carried out amid the rioting in the streets of New York which accompanied the outbreak of the Civil War. July 1862 was to see burnings, assassinations and violence of all sorts.

At this time also the Asylum became a crossroads. The chronicles are full of visits from major superiors, both Priests and Sisters, on their way to and from Indiana, New Orleans, Canada, and France. A Postulant from the Visitation in Brooklyn found lodgings there for two months. Ladies of the Sacred Heart of Mary from Buffalo stayed with us in 1865 as did ladies of the Sacred Heart from Manhattan who were preparing to embark for France. It also became customary for the Sisters from Canada to reside with us when coming to New York to recruit boarders for their school in St. Laurent, and when escorting these boarders to their homes for vacations.

There were crosses to be borne. The children suffered from a variety of diseases; epilepsy, consumption, erysipelas, etc. In 1863 death came to a little French girl only twenty-three days after her Baptism. The following year a little seven year old orphan burst a vein in his chest while coughing. Apparently he was very precocious, for he chose his own confessor, made his first confession, and died a saintly death. The chronicles do not give his name, but mention casually that he was rich and the nephew of a count. In January 1866 a young French girl, nineteen years of age, was kidnapped from the orphanage by her uncle and aunt.

She was not found until April 21, at which time she was sent back to her relatives in France.

Not all the children were saintly. In January of 1866, an eleven year old orphan who had always shown a vicious disposition, set fire to two beds. Luckily, Sr. Mary of St. Philomena saw the flames, and prevented serious damage by throwing the burning mattresses out of the window. The police took a very serious view of the incident, and the boy was exiled from the State of New York until his twenty-first birthday.

By 1865 there were sixty-four girls and thirty-four boys in the orphanage, and forty students in the parochial school for girls. The result was inevitable - a new building was necessary. By 1867, with the help of the public, money from various events, amounting to \$20,000, was deposited in the bank for the purchase of a site. Times were hard. Inflation drove up the cost of living, but gifts increased and kept the orphanage debt free, although at one time the treasury was reduced to ten cents. Fr. Lafont obtained a chaplain from his community, a Fr. Aubril, to minister to the needs of the orphans and the Sisters. Music teachers donated their services. A Doctor Mourville cared for the sick without fee. On September 8, 1868, the first stone of the new asylum was blessed by the Vicar General in the presence of 167 students of the institute. The public continued to rally to the cause and, on September 16, a fair, conducted by the French Ladies of New York, added the sum of \$10,000 to be used for construction costs.

During this time, in June 1867, the General Chapter was held in New York on the orders of His Excellence Cardinal Barnabo. On June 6 our Honored Mother, Sr. Mary of St. Ligouri, accompanied by Sisters Mary of St. Eugenia and Our Savior, arrived from France after a delightful crossing. The following week, four Sisters from Canada, two from New Orleans, and Mother Mary of St. Angela, with a companion from Indiana, joined them for the opening which took place in the Church of St. Vincent de Paul. The sessions were held in the asylum, and the chapter was terminated on June 19 with the usual elections. All the capitulants were impressed by the wisdom, prudence, and goodness of our archbishop who presided at the meetings.

February 20, 1869 brought an unusual incident. At 9:00 P.M., two ladies came to ask for the Sister in charge of the workshop as they had a package for her. They were left alone in the parlor while the Sister in question was summoned. On her entry a few moments later, the Sister found that the ladies had departed but had left their package behind them. On being opened it was found to contain a new-born baby. The Superior baptized the infant and called for doctors. Two came. They declared the child had been poisoned by a dose of medicine given to make it sleep and to prevent it from crying. It recovered temporarily and was confided to a nurse, but, despite all efforts, the child died on April 11, aged two months, and was buried the following day.

On September 20, 1868, the Ladies of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul conducted a fair that realized more than \$9,000 for the construction of the new building. Under the presidency of Madame L. Delmonico these Ladies had been able to secure property on West 39th Street near Seventh Avenue. By the end of the year the new building was ready. The children were sent to the homes of friends while two gentlemen, at their own expense, moved the goods of 150 people to their new quarters. Altogether it took the labor of twelve men, and thirty trips by teams of two horses each, to complete the transfer on that rainy day.

The new home was well-heated and provided perfectly for the good health of those who were to take possession. Representatives from the "Courrier des Etats-Unis" came to visit. A wonderful rapport developed, and they presented books and silver to the orphans. They also published in their paper articles which were very complimentary to the orphanage. We are indebted to them for a description of the cheerful attitude which prevailed at St. Vincent de Paul's, the assiduity of the young girls at needlework in the workshop, the radiant health of the children at play in the yard, the happiness of the tiny tots in their own department. The reporter found himself so carried away by his admiration that when he came to the infirmary, and found it so well-ordered, he almost lamented that there was not one patient, for he felt that one could dream of being ill in such pleasant surroundings. ¹⁸

New conditions for the foundation were drawn up. ¹⁹ From January, 1870, the asylum would be governed by the Gentlemen of the Corporation or Trustees, with Father Lafont as its president. Each Sister was to receive \$100 a year for

clothing, travel, etc. It was a good beginning. However, one month after the opening on 39th Street, little boys had to be refused. Their dormitory had room for only fifty children, whereas that of the girls was able to take one hundred twenty. The building was already too small.

There is an interesting little aside in the chronicles at this time. In July, 1870, Mother General obtained permission for the Sisters to go outside the convent in their religious habits.

Tragedy struck on September 13, 1870, at 6:30 P.M., when the top floor of the orphanage was engulfed in flames. The fire began in the linen room. All the linen and the two upper floors were burned. Help came promptly. The firemen and the policemen showed great devotion and bravery. One of the firemen risked his life in throwing himself into the flames where he fell suffocated, but the orphanage was saved and was habitable again after a few days of repair. Reverend Fr. Mc Carthy, of Holy Cross Church, offered Fr. Lafont shelter for the religious and the children. Fr. Lafont, Fr. Mc Carthy, Mr. Crooks, and many police officers accompanied the Sisters and the children to 42nd Street, where the worthy Sisters of Charity were waiting to welcome them with charity and sympathy. The latter Sisters gave their dormitory to the Sisters of Holy Cross and the children occupied that of the students.

The fire was the cause of a great outpouring of sympathy. The cause of the fire remains a mystery. Some felt that it was deliberately set by enemies of the orphanage because of the speed with which the flames spread. Others felt that perhaps a child had lit the gas and left it too close to the dresses in the clothesroom. This theory was based on the fact that the door, which was usually kept closed, was found to be open after the fire. The children assured everyone that none of them had gone upstairs. Whatever the cause, after five long, anxious days, and with the assurance from the doctor that there was no danger to health if we remained downstairs, it was decided to start clearing up the building. Finally, on September 24, the Sisters and children were able to return to their home. On December 8th, Father Lafont came to celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving to God for having preserved all from accidents on the day of the catastrophe, and for the speed with which the reparations were accomplished.

The following year, 1871, brought a great favor. On January 26, the Archbishop, accompanied by his secretary, came to visit. After touring the house, and meeting Sisters and students in their respective apartments, he was so impressed that, as a memento of his first visit, he granted permission to have Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament every Sunday.

Death came in April. On the 9th, at 2:00 A.M. a little nine year old girl suffered an attack of croup. By 7:30, after receiving the sacraments of Penance and Extreme Unction, she was dead. That same day many of the children came down with a fever. An eleven year old girl died within ten days. On the 15th, she received the Last Sacraments with sentiments of faith and an ardent piety. Coupled with a great desire to die, she evinced a deep spirit of submission to the will of God. At 2:00 A.M. on the 16th she lost consciousness, but did not expire till the 20th. This was followed by the death of another nine year old in August.

At this time another change in regulations was made. Children were not to go home for the vacations. Children with good homes were no longer being placed in orphanages. Children who did not have good homes were better off in school than on the street. Instead of returning to their homes, the Sisters and the orphans would go once or twice a week to pass the day in the woods of Carminsville.

During the course of 1871 three postulants had been sent to us by the Fathers of Mercy. Of these one had been sent to make her novitiate in Canada and two to New Orleans. Prior to this there is a comment in the chronicles that eleven young girls had asked to enter, but, as soon as each was put to do manual labor in the laundry or kitchen, she departed.

1872

Sickness came again in June when two little boys were admitted to the infirmary suffering from scarlet fever. In all, eight contracted the disease. On June 30, two children succumbed. One little four year old died at 4:00 A.M., two days after his baptism. The second, a six year old, gave up his pure soul to God at 10:00 A.M., after having received the Last Sacraments with an angelic piety.

These sorrows were offset by the admiration of all who assisted at the First Communion and Graduation ceremonies. The piety of the children and their good behavior were always a source of great pride to the Sisters and of edification to the participants.

We were able to render service to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny on September 25. Two of our Sisters had crossed the Atlantic on the steamer, St. Laurent. Aboard ship with them were two Sisters from the Motherhouse of Cluny in Paris. These poor Sisters had embarked at Le Havre without passports or letters of obedience or recommendation. Through a misunderstanding with the Superior who was supposed to be in charge of their journey, they found themselves in New York without money or acquaintances, and without knowing how to get to their destination of St. Pierre Miquelon. On learning of their predicament, Sister Mary of St. Sebastian brought them to our Superior. The Sisters were offered hospitality at the orphanage and, after five days, were sent on to Boston in the company of the French Chancellor who promised to find means of transportation from Boston to St. Miquelon.

On October 3rd, we had an example of how impenetrable are the designs of God and how he plays with those of men. There was a sixteen year old girl at the orphanage. She wished to remain with us, but her father wanted her to come home to Hoboken with him. On September 11, she developed a stomachache which continued until the 20th, when the doctor ordered her to bed, saying that she had a light case of typhoid. She was neither better nor worse until the 27th, when the doctor declared her to be in danger but not serious. However, it was decided that she should receive the Last Rites, which she did on the 29th, in the presence of her companions in the Children of Mary. She was fully conscious and radiant with piety and joy. On October 1st, despite all the cares of the doctor and Sisters, she slipped into unconsciousness. Her agony began gently and quietly at about ten o'clock in the morning and lasted till six in the evening when she tranquilly surrendered her soul to God. On the 3rd, the day on which he had insisted she return to him, her father came to bring her mortal remains home to Hoboken.

Christmas, 1872, brought a strange event which was to lead eventually to a new venture for the Marianites. An intoxicated man arrived at the convent with a baby a few months old, saying that if it were not taken in, he would kill it or

give it to the Protestants. When questioned by the Superior he declared that he had a fight with his wife and, to punish her, had taken the baby away. The Sisters took the child, saw to its needs, and had it examined by the doctor. The latter declared that the child must have had a good mother as it had suffered no ill effects. Later one of the Trustees and Mr. Crooks went to visit the father who had returned home, but found both parents intoxicated and quarreling. The gentlemen returned the child but exhorted the father to change his ways. The father refused to listen, only complaining about the charity which would not accept his child and threatening to give the baby to the Protestants.

The New Year festivities were barely over when we received news of Father Moreau's death. Fr. Aubril celebrated a funeral Mass which was sung by Fr. Tournier, the Sisters, and some of the orphans. In September the Provincial Superior of Louisiana, Sr. Mary of St. Eudoxie became ill while with us. She was given the Last Rites but lingered on until October 2 and was a source of great edification to all. On October 4, after a Funeral Mass in St. Vincent de Paul Church, she was laid to rest in Calvary cemetery. That same September four Sisters left the orphanage to install themselves at No. 144, 24th Street to take over the direction of the parochial school there.

In December, 1874, the blessing of our new chapel took place. Since His Eminence, the Archbishop, would be busy on the 8th at the Cathedral, the ceremony was held on the 7th, at 9:00 A.M. After the usual speeches and tour, Father Aubril conducted the Archbishop to the workroom where, on the order of Mr. Ramsay Crooks, the employees of the Hotel Delmonico had prepared a magnificent meal for the honored guests.

The day after the festivities Mother General, accompanied by a postulant, Miss Mary Barry, and three Sisters, left for New Orleans. She had already sent Sr. Mary of St. Isabelle to conduct two other postulants to the novitiate in Le Mans. It is interesting to note the cooperation between the different parts of the Congregation.

The cross was not long returning after the Christmas festivities. On January 7, 1875, death claimed the founder of the orphanage, the Rev. Fr. Lafont,

after three years of suffering as a model of submission to the will of God. The Requiem Mass was celebrated on the 8th, the first in the newly-blessed chapel. When the body of the dear departed was exhibited in the mortuary chapel, the Sisters and orphans took turns watching by the coffin until the funeral on January 11. On this date the Bishop of Brooklyn officiated. A colleague of Fr. Lafont, Rev. Fr. Duranquet, S.J., gave the homily in French, followed by Archbishop Mc Closkey who spoke in English. Some of the Sisters and orphans accompanied the body to its final resting - place in Mount Calvary Cemetery. On March 22 the Ladies Committee had erected, in the orphanage chapel, a plaque dedicated to the memory of Fr. Lafont and Mme. Crooks, co-founders of the Orphanage.

During this time one is struck by the number of happy deaths and the number of religious vocations which are recorded in the chronicles. But there are other stories. One involves the Sisters from St. Laurent who came to recruit boarders for their school and to make arrangements with the parents. When they departed with their charges on September 1st, ¹⁸⁷⁵ one poor soul, Sr. Mary of St. Raphael, missed the train because of a suitcase which had gone astray and had to be found. She was forced to return to the orphanage for the night. However, this showed the working of Providence, for, on the morrow, she was able to travel with a student who had also missed the train on the previous day. The same poor Sister had to return to New York on school business on October 22, stayed two days, went home and had to return again for interviews with parents. She was finally to go home to St. Laurent on November 4, after having edified us by her obedience. It just shows how little times have changed.

The year 1876 brought an extension to the orphanage. On May 29 five of the orphans who had attained the age of twelve left us, accompanied by Rev. Fr. Tournier and two Sisters, to go to Brooklyn to the house of St. Francis de Sales where the Fathers of Mercy were opening a work complementary to the orphanage. Here, boys could receive training in the manual arts according to their abilities, while, at the same time, completing their scholastic courses.

Even in the nineteenth century the Sisters were often called to a diverse ministry. On April 14, 1877, the Provincial of Canada was sent to New York as visitatrix, but also to replace the Superior of the orphanage who was to accompany

the Widow de Cuverville in bringing home the body of her late husband. Monsieur de Cuverville, the French Consul to Carthagina, had died while visiting New York. Our Sisters had helped care for him during the few days of suffering by which God had purified him before calling him home. The Consul had edified all who approached him by his great faith, his patience, and his perfect resignation to the will of God. Also accompanying the remains on the steamer St. Laurent was a postulant, Melle. Marie Pellerin, called by Mother General to make her postulate at the Motherhouse in Le Mans.

The orphanage was greatly honored by the visit of a French admiral in 1878. The boat "La Victoire", bearing the flag of Admiral Mauget was anchored in New York Harbor. Admiral Mauget, accompanied by his chaplain, Rev. Fr. Aigueperse, and another ecclesiastic, inspected the house and the students, even quizzing the latter on their knowledge of mathematics and examining the work of the girls. Later, when visiting the Fathers of Mercy, he expressed great pleasure at seeing the good order of the orphanage.

When the deputies to the General Chapter left for France in April, 1879, aboard the "Periere" they had with them one postulant for Le Mans and another for the Benedictines of the Most Blessed Sacrament Novitiate in Omer. But they were also performing a work of mercy. With them was a young orphan of thirty months, fifteen of which had been spent in St. Vincent de Paul's. The youngster, Leon Bourdeux, was travelling to the convent of his aunt, a religious in Caen, France. Captain Danré set aside three first class cabins for the group. The young Leon was the sole survivor of a family of six French immigrants who had settled in Fernandina, Florida. His father, mother and two older brothers had died of yellow fever during the summer of 1877. Two babies, Arthur and Leon, were sent from Fernandina by the mayor to the French Consul in New York who confided them to the Marianites. Arthur, the older of the two, died of croup. It was at the orphanage that Leon learned to walk and talk.

Among the many baptisms which are recorded at the orphanage, one stands out - that of a 36 year old pagan who looked like a woman of more than sixty, worn out as she was by her work with the circus. Born in Tunis, Africa, she had been stolen

from her parents at the age of two and started immediately to work in the circus. Her wanderings had brought her to almost every part of the universe. Married at the age of thirteen to a circus member 27 years older than herself, widowed at 22, she had borne eleven children all of whom had died. Her adoptive parents were killed in a circus act. Afterwards, she left the troupe and came to America as a governess for a Jewish lady. The examples of Bishops, priests, and religious, whom she had met in her travels gave her a desire for Christianity. She had started taking instructions at various times but always something intervened before she could be baptized. Finally, the grace of God brought her to the orphanage to visit the children of one of her acquaintances. She was so touched by the Sisters whom she met in the parlor that they, in turn, recommended her to Rev. Fr. Septier. This good father instructed her and prepared her for Baptism, which she wished to receive in our chapel. With the permission of our Cardinal Archbishop, Fr. Septier performed the Baptismal ceremony on Sunday, September 14, 1879, after the Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament, in the presence of the Community and the children. As a great favor she asked for the privilege of spending the rest of the day with the Sisters - a favor readily granted.

The inauguration of the Statue of Liberty brought many famous French visitors: the head of the French Delegation, M. de Lesseps, General de Pelissier, Colonel de Pusy, and others. Archbishop Corrigan came to bless an extension to the orphanage in 1887. January 25, 1898, brought His Excellency, the Ambassador of France to the United States. He rejoiced to see that here, as elsewhere, French religious were the honor and glory of noble-hearted France by their charity and solicitude for the relief of human misery.

Let us return to the episode of the drunk man at Christmas, 1872. This incident led many committee members to feel that it was a sign from on high that a nursery should be established to care for these waifs. In 1888 the mission of Our Lady of Mercy, at 69 South Washington Square, had opened its doors to care for the children of French descent in downtown New York. These children were not destitute, but were spiritually neglected. The building, under the care of Rev. Fr. Humbert, S.P.M., and the Marianites Sisters, was already outgrown. The infant class met in what was the Church on Sundays. Here the new nursery school

was begun. The building next door was purchased by the Trustees.²⁰ Two rooms on the first floor were transformed into a large chapel which was blessed, on December 8, 1896, by Most Rev. John J. Farley, Auxiliary Bishop of New York, in the presence of the French Consul General. The upper rooms were organized for the Sisters, and others for the nursery. The original building was occupied by the school. The ground floor auditorium was used by the Catholic Boys' Association which did much good among the youth of the neighborhood. Over 500 members were enrolled the first year. All available space was soon filled up. By May, 1896, Mrs. Paul Fuller, president of the Ladies' Committee could write to Mother Foundress that the free day nursery, shelter, and day school operating at South Washington Square, was caring for, educating, and preserving for religion and society, over four hundred children. At the same time, Mrs. Fuller asked that a Sister be assigned to collect funds for the support of the establishment. Mother Foundress acquiesced, and for many long years, the Sisters sat outside stores such as Coty's, or visited French chefs in the big hotels, to collect money and goods for Our Lady of Mercy, just as they were still doing for St. Vincent de Paul's.

In another attempt to help the local children, Fr. Wucher in 1903 acquired a beautiful villa at Sea Cliff, Long Island. The estate, located on Long Island Sound, offered ideal swimming conditions. Here the children of the school were taken in groups to pass some weeks of vacation in healthful conditions under the watchful eyes of the Sisters. On July 20, Msgr. Mc Namara, Vicar General of Brooklyn, blessed the house in the name of Msgr. Mc Donnell. It was to be known as Villa St. Vincent de Paul.

Since the beginning, the Sisters had been taking care of the sick in their homes. It was not unexpected that Mother Foundress should respond affirmatively to the request of Mr. Charles Renaud, President of the French Benevolent Society, to staff its four year old hospital.²¹ It was understood that the hospital would remain absolutely non-sectarian, the only condition for admission being that the applicant would be French or of French descent. Unknown to the Sisters many members of the French Benevolent Society were adamantly opposed to having religious on the staff. Thus, when the Sisters arrived in New York, they were to find that their services had not yet been accepted by the Board. When these gentlemen realized that

the Sisters were already in New York, they felt in honor bound to welcome them. Mr. Charles Renaud, President of the Hospital, and Mr. Louis Joly, Vice-President, came to greet them at St. Vincent de Paul Orphanage. With the enthusiastic approval of Archbishop Corrigan, the Sisters took up their duties on December 26, 1885.

The hospital was located on West 14th Street, in St. Francis Xavier Parish. It could accommodate twenty-two patients in four wards and two private rooms. Later a night shelter and a dispensary were added. For their own quarters, the Sisters were given two rooms on the Sixth Floor, but had to share the dining room with different staff members. Worse than the physical inconvenience was the atmosphere of hostility they encountered in their work from those who were inveterately opposed to religious. The utmost discretion and prudence was required in the delicate mission entrusted to the Sisters. The work was hard, and often the Sisters were on twenty-four hour duty, but they found consolation in the conversions and happy deaths which were often the results of their labor. An article in the *Courrier des Etats Unis*, March 20, 1887, attests to the perfect order and meticulous cleanliness, the regularity and methodical functioning found in the hospital. The writer also notes that, though the building was large, it was already inadequate for the needs.

Mother Foundress crossed the ocean in 1887 to bring her sympathy and encouragement to her daughters whose life of penury and privation caused her great pain. That same year a French delegation on its way to Washington stopped to visit the French Hospital. President Cleveland, who accompanied them, won the hearts of all by taking a bunch of violets from his lapel and pinning it on one of the poor patients. A Dr. Dupre, from the Faculty of Paris, a member of the delegation, declared that although personally anti-religion, he would work unceasingly to keep Sisters in the hospital.

Hard times threatened to put an end to the good that was being accomplished. As most of the patients were treated gratuitously, a yearly deficit accumulated. The financial situation was so bad that Mr. Renaud, President of the Society, resigned. His example was followed by most of the doctors. The Administrative Council decided to abandon the project and to donate a sum of money for the care

of poor French families to one of the city hospitals. However, Mr. Joseph Thoron, a devout Catholic, aghast at the thought of losing the hospital, took over the presidency.

Sr. Mary of St. Cecelia did her best to persuade the new president to seek a larger location where private rooms could be rented to well-to-do patients in order to raise money. Mr. Thoron, seeing the wisdom of Sister's idea, convinced his associates of the feasibility of this plan. They were able to raise \$17,000, enough to enable the Society to purchase a building at 320 West 34th Street which would contain ninety beds. Here the hospital was installed on September 29, 1888.

To the Sisters, the greatest privation was the lack of a sanctuary where the Blessed Sacrament could be preserved. One of the patients, aware of the distress that this caused the Sisters, persuaded a friend to take up a collection at the Hotel Delmonico where he was to dine that evening. A sum of \$69 was realized. It was not much, but it was sufficient to convert a room into an oratory. The first Mass was celebrated there on January 17, 1889, with Mr. Thoron as the first server. During the Mass a poor abandoned woman came knocking at the door. She was in the last stages of labor and gave birth to a child before the Mass was ended. The baby was baptized right after the Mass, first conquest of the Blood of Jesus.

As in the orphanage of St. Vincent de Paul, here at French Hospital the floodgates of good were opened. The records are filled with death-bed conversions; poor mothers were solaced in their last moments by knowing that their little ones were in good hands; a young suicide turned to God before the poison ran its course; the Grand Monarch of the Masons yielded to the King of Kings. The expertise of the doctors and the devoted care of the Sisters brought healing and health to many. Again, as the fame of French Hospital spread, it became necessary to seek new quarters. Thanks to the generosity of friends money was collected and the construction of the new building at 330 West 30 Street was completed. On November 12, 1904, the inauguration took place with M. Jusserand, the French Ambassador to the United States presiding. M. Henry Maillard was, at that time, president of the French Benevolent Society. This large modern hospital was located on the highest part of this section of the city and faced the Hudson River, thus

receiving an abundance of light and fresh air. Nothing had been spared in its medical, surgical, and sanitary installation.

At this time at the beginning of the twentieth century, anti-clericalism waxed strong in France. Many religious houses were suppressed and their goods confiscated by the government. Fearing like treatment, the Marianites sought for a suitable location for their novitiate in America. Their search was brought to the attention of the Archbishop of New York. On June 17, 1904 Monsignor Farley sent Father Byrnes, pastor of Tottenville, Staten Island, New York, with an offer of land to be used as a refuge for the Sisters whom religious persecution was driving out of France. The offer was accepted, and the contract signed on June 29, by H. R. H. Amy on behalf of the Congregation. On September 12th, six Sisters and four postulants arrived.²¹

The new property was situated on Main Street in Tottenville. As well as the house, there was a coachhouse and stable. Here in the stable the parochial school of Our Lady Help of Christians was born. On Opening Day, October 11th, thirty children presented themselves. Fr. Byrnes worked indefatigably for the spiritual and material good of the new foundation, often assuming all expenses himself. By October the solemn blessing of the chapel under the title of Our Lady of Seven Dolors, took place. Monsignor Lavelle, Vicar General of New York, conducted the ceremony, assisted by Fr. Byrnes and numerous other clergy including the Fathers of Mercy. Fr. Byrnes also procured the right to reserve the Blessed Sacrament, to have Mass and Benediction, to have Exposition on First Fridays. On November 16, 1904, the Stations of the Cross were erected. This project was to develop not only into a full-fledged novitiate, but into a parochial school and a separate academy dedicated to St. Louis.

Thus with schools, a hospital, an orphanage, and many other good works, the Marianites in 1904 completed their first fifty years in New York.

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3. Bernoville, Op. cit., p. 98.
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