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The Sisters of the Holy Cross in Utah

1875 – 2008

Holy Cross History Association

Conference

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In 1873 Archbishop Alemany of San Francisco assigned Irish born Father Lawrence Scanlan as the first pastor of the Utah Territory. On August 14<sup>th</sup> Scanlan arrived to pastor what was probably the largest parish in the United States, 150,000 square miles that included all of Utah and seven counties of eastern Nevada. Of the 87,000 inhabitants, only about 800 Catholics were scattered throughout the territory. Scanlan would become bishop of the newly created Vicariate fourteen years later in 1887 and bishop of the new Diocese in 1891.

Father Denis Kiely arrived from San Francisco a year after Scanlan, in 1874. He would serve as Scanlan's Vicar General and closest friend and would be at his bedside when he died in 1915. During those early years a few other priests visited the territory, but it seemed that most found the life too difficult.

It was the Holy Cross Sisters who soon joined Scanlan and Kiely in Utah. Shortly after his 1873 arrival Father Scanlan wrote to Father Edward Sorin, CSC, founder of Notre Dame University and Director General of the American Sisters of the Holy Cross, requesting sisters for Utah. Although they were not yet serving in the west, Father Sorin responded quickly. Mother Augusta Anderson, who would serve three years in Utah and eventually be elected Mother General of the Order, and Sister Raymond Sullivan, who would serve seventeen years in Utah, soon arrived. Scanlan purchased land for the first school and raised \$25,000 for its construction while the two sisters made plans to establish Holy Cross Hospital and Saint Mary's Academy, later to become Saint Mary of the Wasatch on the east bench of Salt Lake.

A movie could be made of the first sisters, clothed in the traditional habit, with their trunks of supplies, making their arduous journey west over the

vast stretches of rough terrain. In his 1941 foreword to the *Centenary Chronicles of the Sisters of the Holy Cross*, Bishop John J. Mitty, Archbishop of San Francisco, previously the third bishop of Utah, described those early days:

In 1875 the Mormon territory of Utah, with its ten Catholic families was a part of the far flung Archdiocese of San Francisco. Caring for the Catholic people in this outpost of the Archdiocese was an intrepid priest, Lawrence Scanlan. To aid in his work for souls he called the Sisters of the Holy Cross from Notre Dame, Indiana. From the June day in 1875 when two Sisters arrived in Salt Lake City until today the Sisters have transmitted their message of knowledge, of culture, of charity, and of faith to the people of the mission dioceses of the west.

Within seven years, by 1882, forty-two sisters joined the two priests in this Mormon stronghold. Thirteen were assigned to Holy Cross Hospital and 29 to Saint Mary's Academy.

In his 1881 letter to Rome Scanlan wrote:

Six years ago, there was no sister here; now there are over 40 and still they come. These sisters have done more to remove prejudice and give tone and prominence to our case than we priests could have done in many years of hard work.

The numbers and longevity of the Holy Cross Sisters brought stability to Utah's missionary effort. Records provide the names of 1,374 different Holy Cross Sisters who served in this diocese over the past 132 years, of whom I have known 144. Over 100 were missioned here for a second or third time. Forty-eight native Utah women entered the Holy Cross Community. For 93 sisters, our Mount Calvary Cemetery was their last earthly assignment.

Imagine the various personalities of the sisters who came west. It is hard to envision how they lived together in small, humble dwellings, with no modern conveniences and endured the hot summers in the old habits. To have seen the sisters in the market place, climbing off the stagecoach or boarding the train up to the mining camps, must have been a curiosity to the Mormons. In time the names and faces of the sisters would be familiar to the residents and their fears regarding the "strange" religious figures would disappear.

The length of assignments insured stability for Utah. At Salt Lake's Holy Cross Hospital Sister Consuelo Hoffelder remained 49 years; Sister Pancratus Murphy 48; Sister Edwin Morris, 44; Sister Luella Kelly, 40; Sister Visitation Gannon 37; Sisters Sebastian Aaron and Ignatia O'Connor 35. Numerous other sisters remained twenty-five or thirty years at the hospital.

Two hundred and seventy four different sisters served for over 119 years at Salt Lake's Holy Cross Hospital and school of nursing. The sisters cared for the priests and religious of other communities as well as for the poor. They provided for Catholic Charities unwed mothers and their newborn babies before adoption. The sisters were pioneers in caring for those with contagious diseases, more recently those with AIDS.

When Sister Benita died after her many years nursing at Holy Cross, a 1936 Salt Lake Tribune editorial called her one of the

Ministering angels who now and then are permitted to visit the earth... she was consecrated to the cause of mercy, of compassion...her presence was a benediction and her memory will linger like incense from a censer swinging among the stars.

Sister Pancratia had served 48 years as supervisor of the isolation units during the epidemics of typhoid fever, diphtheria and small pox. She was recognized as a woman of heroic courage. Sister Jude, who served 32 years in the hospital kitchen, was known as the friend of the poor. Many of us remember the years of Sisters Ann Josephine Konvicka, Joann Upjohn, Carolita Hart, Jane Chantal Method and Margo Cain, to mention a few outstanding religious who spent many years in Utah health care.

Longevity was also the case at Saint Mary's Academy. Sister Mercedes Halligan remained 57 years, Sister Henry Tezek 50, Sister Clarencia Reinhardt 48. Many others served twenty-five or thirty years. The sisters, with the longevity of their presence, themselves became institutions in the lives of the people.

In 1921 the sisters purchased 400 acres of beautiful property from the Country Club at the foot of Salt Lake's Wasatch Mountains. Today a marker signifies the old entrance to Saint Mary of the Wasatch, the renowned institution of learning that served at various times as a college, elementary or high school, and in earlier years a boarding school. The Wasatch, as it was known, provided degrees for the nurses at the Holy Cross School of Nursing as well as for the religious who studied there during the summers to complete their academic degrees. Three hundred and eighty sisters served at the Wasatch and old Saint Mary's over 98 years. Its closing, like that of Holy Cross Hospital, marked a sad day in Utah's Catholic history.

The 1926 dedication of the Wasatch was an occasion of great significance for the west. Cardinal Patrick Hayes, Archbishop of New York, along with Archbishop Hanna of San Francisco and Utah's Bishop John J.

Mitty attended. A delegation of Holy Cross Sisters was also present for the celebrations.

Later that year Bishop Mitty wrote to Cardinal Hayes of New York:

At present Saint Mary's College and Academy is floundering under a debt close to a million dollars...For the sake of the Holy Cross Sisters who have done so much for religion here for the past fifty years I shall have to give (a fund drive) every encouragement.

Sister Mary Madeleva, later the Holy Cross poet laureate, was the first president of the college. Years later, reflecting on her years at the Wasatch, she wrote:

We had often been cold, sometimes hungry. Coyotes had cried under our windows at night. Water shortages had left us parched and unwashed during all but unbearable months in summer. Once at least every winter we were snowed in...

Frequently we walked in groups up the mountainside and back, returning in the evening to make hot chocolate in the social hall... the amenities of our lives would have been impossible anywhere else..

Sister Madeleva would later say that the seven years she spent in Utah were among the happiest of her life.

Five years after their 1875 arrival the sisters traveled thirty miles north to open Sacred Heart Academy in Ogden. During its sixty year history, Sacred Heart served as a day school, boarding school and Holy Cross Provincial House. One Hundred and sixty-four sisters served there, several for 50 years. Thirteen of its graduates entered the Holy Cross Community. Many might remember the three O'Connor girls, Sisters Elizabeth Marie, Xavier and Mercedes.

In the Holy Cross archives there is a notation about Ogden's first superior, Sister Pauline O'Neill, from one of the sisters:



...Sister Pauline was calm, dignified, and a daily communicant. The sisters were most self-sacrificing, earnestly and cheerfully bearing the privations of real poverty. I think a cup of black tea was occasionally our greatest luxury.

Soon after Sacred Heart Academy was opened, the sisters opened Ogden's Saint Joseph's grade school and eventually the high school. During their 105 years at Saint Joseph's, 114 sisters taught at the schools. Consider that between 1878 and 1986, one hundred and eight years, 278 sisters served in the small railroad town of Ogden, Utah.

One of Bishop Scanlan's dreams was for a Catholic orphanage. In 1891 the sisters opened the orphanage in his Salt Lake home and later moved to a large farm on twenty-first south. There for 62 years, 107 sisters taught and cared for the orphans. Stories abound of their early rising to milk the cows, collect eggs and bake bread to feed their charges before attending morning Mass and teaching school all day.

In 1882, just seven years after their Utah arrival, the sisters opened Saint Mary's school in the mining town of Park City. Sixty-five sisters taught in the school during its 51 years of operation. Old timers reported that when the town was destroyed by fire, the sisters "were untiring in their efforts to care for the homeless and sick". As a result the miners held the sisters in high regard.

Nine years later Saint Joseph's School was opened in the mining town of Eureka, where 68 sisters were assigned during the 50 years it remained open. It was said that the sisters did everything but administer the sacraments. As related in the Holy Cross *Centenary Chronicles*:

...it was not unusual to see Sisters M. Canice and Maud on the street every evening after school, visiting the sick, settling family quarrels, and helping the poor.

When a train wreck killed and injured a number of people a short distance from Eureka, the sisters were sent for. They brought blankets from their convent beds and moved among the injured giving what first aid they could and spiritual comfort by saying aspirations and reciting Acts of Contrition...Two sisters went with the injured on the train to Salt Lake...As a token of gratitude for their service, the railroad company sent the sisters a free pass for many years.

The presence of the sisters at Salt Lake's Judge Mercy School, later called Judge Memorial, took various forms. The sisters began teaching elementary classes in the basements of the Cathedral and the hospital but at the request of Bishop Glass took over Judge Memorial from the Daughters of Charity in 1927. They taught and lived in the old red building, formerly a hospital for miners, donated to the diocese by the Judge family. During the 65 years Holy Cross Sisters were at the school, which concluded in 1992, 110 different sisters served. For many years the sisters taught Sunday School in the surrounding areas and made altar breads for the parishes.

For eighteen years Sister Cleophas Schutz kept house and cooked for the large community, until she fell victim to T.B. Sister was known for her German specialties and especially for the care she had for the poor who frequented the convent door. Local clergy were always welcome at the convent for lunch.

My mother graduated from Judge High in 1929 as did a number of our future priests and Catholic laity. I entered fourth grade at Judge with 52 other students and graduated from the high school there. During those nine years I had only religious as instructors. On Saturdays I worked at the convent for book money and lunch, where I witnessed many a quarrel, but more laughter, sacrifice and charity.



The sisters administered Cathedral Grade School for 21 years, where 49 sisters taught. Fifty-five sisters served on the west side of Salt Lake City at Bishop Glass School during its 32 years. There were several unsuccessful endeavors, such as the six years of Saint John's Hospital in Silver Reef, which burned to the ground along with the town and Saint Lawrence Hospital in Ogden, which closed after eleven years.

The 1,374 sisters who served in Utah over 132 years were well educated women who dedicated themselves without reserve to the service of the Church. The Sisters visited homes, taught thousands of children catechism, art, music and the three R's. They washed floors, baked birthday cakes for their orphans, stayed up nights caring for the sick and would ride the trains up the canyons to visit the mining camps. The sisters were marvelous administrators, building institutions like Sacred Heart Academy in Ogden, Holy Cross Hospital, Moreau Hall and the Wasatch in Salt Lake City. These women were exemplary educators and nurses who brought professional skill along with the compassionate love of our Catholic Faith.

Holy Cross Sisters set the standards for quality education and health care within the state. They formed thousands of teachers, nurses and staff of their institutions to carry on the Catholic mission. The convent's kitchen door was often the community food bank or soup kitchen. Many a priest found encouragement and a home-cooked meal with the sisters.

The 1,374 Holy Cross Sisters were the compassionate face and the caring hands of the Catholic Church for the people of the Utah territory. The fact that these educated, religious women were in Utah from the earliest years, that they came in such great numbers, remained so long, collaborated so well with laity and clergy, were flexible in responding to local needs and willing

to live the vow of poverty so radically made the Sisters of the Holy Cross foundation stones of Utah's Catholic Community.

In the *Centenary Chronicles* Bishop Mitty described well what the Sisters of the Holy Cross meant for Utah and for the west.

Women of indomitable courage, of urban culture, of Christlike charity have founded schools and hospitals in Utah, in Idaho, and in California; women of quiet and beautiful dignity, of gracious modesty have worked for the furtherance of Christian education and Christian charity in their schools and hospitals. They have brought to their work that eager enthusiasm, that self-sacrifice, that high resolve which faith at the frontier has always inspired and developed. They have played a noble and enviable part in the upbuilding of the Kingdom of Christ in the west, and their names are written in the hearts of the people they served, as well as in the Book of Life.

## REFERENCES

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Archives  
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Chronology  
Holy Cross Sisters in Utah

Maps I and II

- 1776      Franciscan Fathers Escalante and Dominguez visit Utah  
            Clergy occasionally visit the territory
- 1873      Father Lawrence Scanlan named pastor of Utah
- 1875      Mother Augusta Anderson and  
            Sister Raymond Sullivan arrive # 1  
            Holy Cross Hospital, SLC 1875 – 1994 and the # 2-3-4  
            School of Nursing 1901 – 1973 (274 Sisters)  
            Saint Mary's Academy, SLC 1875 – 1926 and # 5-6  
            Saint Mary of the Wasatch 1926 – 1970 (380 Sisters) # 7-8
- 1876      Saint Joseph's School for Boys – 1903
- 1878      Sacred Heart Academy, Ogden – 1938 (164 Sisters) # 9-10-11
- 1879      Saint John's Hospital, Silver Reef – 1885 (10 Sisters) # 12
- 1881      Saint Joseph's School, Ogden – 1986 (114 Sisters)
- 1882      Saint Mary's School, Park City – 1933 (65 Sisters) # 13
- 1887      Father Lawrence Scanlan named Bishop of Vicariate # 14  
            Saint Lawrence Hospital, Ogden – 1898 (10 Sisters)
- 1891      Diocese of Salt Lake erected; Scanlan Bishop  
            Kearns-Saint Ann Orphanage, SLC - 1953 (107 Sisters) # 15-16  
            Saint Joseph's School, Eureka – 1941 (68 Sisters) # 17

1915	Death of Bishop Scanlan
1920	Judge Memorial Grade School and
1927	High School, SLC - 1992 (110 Sisters) # 18-19-20
1949	Cathedral Parish Grade School, SLC – 1970 (49 Sisters)
1955	Bishop Glass Grade School, SLC – 1987 (55 Sisters)
1980	Diocesan Pastoral Center, SLC – present (4 Sisters)
1981	Holy Cross Center, Cedar City – 1986 (5 Sisters)
1983	Peace House, Richfield - 1986 (4 Sisters)
1994	Holy Cross Ministries, SLC – present (4 Sisters)

*Individual Holy Cross Sisters served at:*

Skaggs Catholic Center, Draper  
 Christ the King Parish, Cedar City  
 Blessed Sacrament School, Sandy  
 Our Lady of Lourdes School, SLC  
 Saint Joseph Parish, Ogden  
 Saint Thomas Aquinas Parish and Newman Center, Logan  
 Newman Center, University of Utah, SLC  
 Guadalupe Early Learning Center, SLC

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