

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
*A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society*

James J. Hill and  
His Oriental Rugs:  
A Practical Millionaire

Page 15

Winter, 2001

Volume 35, Number 4

*Attacked by a Starving Wolf*  
Four Sisters of St. Joseph and Their Mission to St. Paul  
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U.S.P.R.R. EXP & SURVEYS - 47 & 49 PARALLELS.

GENERAL REPORT — PLATE I.



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SAINT PAUL M. T.

St. Paul as it looked in 1853, two years after four Sisters of St. Joseph arrived in St. Paul. This colored lithograph was produced as part of a United States government survey of Minnesota Territory. Ramsey County Historical Society collections.

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

Our Winter issue presents three diverse articles ranging in time from Minnesota's Territorial period to the turn-of-the-century and on to the 1930s. In our lead article, Sister Ann Thomasine Sampson recounts the story of how four Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet came to St. Paul in 1851 and began their missionary work at this lonely outpost high on the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi. Through her access to the details found in the records of the Order and other sources, Sister Ann provides a compelling portrait of these four female pioneers, their religious loyalty and faith, and their persistence in the face of great hardships. This is the story of the enduring influence of these devoted missionaries on St. Paul in its earliest years.

From the poverty and hardships of the four Sisters of St. Joseph, the issue moves on to the opulence and splendor of the mansion that James J. Hill built on Summit Avenue between 1887 and 1891. Writer and historian Lou Ann Matossian focuses on the Oriental rugs that Hill purchased to furnish his splendid home. By examining the available records, Matossian shows that Hill, who could easily have afforded Oriental rugs of any cost, bought many medium-quality rugs that impressed visitors but showed that Hill was what she calls "the practical millionaire." The James J. Hill that emerges from her research is a man who spent only what he needed to on his rugs and avoided any that might have qualified as works of art.

In our third article, John Larson's "Growing Up in St. Paul" tells how he and his family dealt with the serious eye ailment he had in the 1920s and '30s. He also recalls with detail and good humor his experiences as a member of the Vision Class at Webster School. Within the St. Paul Public Schools of that time, the Vision Class consisted of all the students at a particular school who were blind or had other serious vision problems. Although Larson tells his story matter-of-factly, his account is an understated tribute to the caring and well-qualified teachers who helped him (and by inference other students) succeed in their studies in spite of their medical problems.

*John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board*

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## *Attacked by a Starving Wolf*

# Four Sisters of St. Joseph and Their Mission to St. Paul: Patience, Courage, Joyfulness in a Crude Log Cabin

**Editor's Note:** *Early in November, 1851, ten years after dedication of the small chapel that gave its name to St. Paul and only two years after Minnesota became a territory, four black-robed women stepped from a steamboat onto the town's Lower Landing at the foot of Jackson Street. Not much has been known about these women, the vanguard of thousands of others called to service in what is now Minnesota, Wisconsin, and North and South Dakota. They taught, ministered to the poor and sick, cared for the orphaned, and established schools, a college, and St. Paul's first hospital. Their story has been pieced together by historian Sister Ann Thomasine Sampson of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet and drawn from her new book, *Seeds on Good Ground*, which has just been published to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Sisters of St. Joseph's arrival in St. Paul. The author also describes her own journey through the scanty records that survived from a time when the Sisters felt their work was best done in obscurity, even secrecy, their letters and journals often destroyed upon their deaths.*

## *Sister Ann Thomasine Sampson, CSJ*

The origin of the Order of St. Joseph lay in southeastern France, in the small city of LePuy, near Lyon, where on October 15, 1650, six young women donned habits which were patterned after the traditional clothing adopted by widows of the time—black serge with long, wide sleeves; a skirt with pleats in front; a black veil; a white linen band, cornet, and guimpe; a black brass-bound cross; and a black rosary. Their letters patent were confirmed by Louis XIV and their first assignment was to care for the orphans of LePuy.

The *Constitution of the Congregation of St. Joseph* described the careful, rigorous process a young woman, scarcely out of girlhood, underwent to become a member of the community. First she was examined in private as to her country, parentage, habits, health and other matters. If accepted, she became a novice and received the habit of the Order. If she passed through her two-year Novitiate successfully, she would make her profession of the perpetual simple vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

For the next century, the Order spread throughout southern France until the French Revolution almost destroyed it. Their records were obliterated, their

houses ransacked; some of the Sisters were imprisoned, and seven were executed, two by guillotine. Others scattered to their families until the Reign of Terror subsided. As religious worship slowly revived in France, the few remaining Sisters of St. Joseph crept out of hiding to rebuild their congregation. They little knew that within a few decades a growing interest in "foreign missions" would create new work for them. It would be in the far-off United States which, by 1836, had become one of those "foreign missions."

Six Sisters, imbued with missionary zeal for converting the Native Americans, "poor persons, Protestants, Methodists, and all the unhappy sects," sailed from Le Havre in January, 1836. Forty-nine days later, they landed at New Orleans and proceeded up the Mississippi by steamboat to the villages of Carondelet and Cahokia outside of St. Louis, Missouri. Here would be their first permanent home in America and Carondelet would bestow upon them their title, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.

Their experiences at Carondelet and Cahokia foreshadowed those in St. Paul fifteen years later—a crude log cabin, few resources, no transportation, loneliness, frustration, but also joyfulness, good humor and, above all, patience, ac-

ceptance, and courage. Looking back, one of their number would describe their mission to St. Paul as those "dear, sweet, holy, old times."

They had thought their first assignment at Carondelet would be to convert the Indians. Instead, disappointed but undaunted, they and those who followed them taught French-Canadian farmers and cared for orphans. Eventually the bonds with France were loosened, although the Sisters continued to look with pride to the Mother House in France. In the meantime, Bishop Joseph Cretin, the first bishop of the newly-formed diocese of St. Paul, invited four of the Sisters to St. Paul, to work among the "dear Indians." They left Carondelet, again thinking they were to establish an Indian mission.

Who were these young women? And what did they experience as newcomers to the American frontier and to the rude settlement that lined the ninety-foot bluffs rising above the Mississippi? Here are their stories:

\* \* \*

The weather was cold and ice was forming in the Mississippi as the steamer *St. Paul* made its way through Lake Pepin, upward bound for St. Paul. On board, the



Sketch of Father Galtier's Chapel of St. Paul as it looked in 1852, not long after the Sisters of St. Joseph arrived in St. Paul. The chapel was built in 1841 and the addition at the back was added six years later. From a watercolor by pioneer artist and pharmacist Robert O. Sweeny. Minnesota Historical Society collections.



A map of Minnesota Territory, showing its original counties in 1849-1851. Minnesota Historical Society collections.

little band of four included Mother St. John Fournier, their superior, and Sister Philomene Vilaine, both of whom had been born in France; Sister Scholastica Vasques, born in St. Louis and a Creole, a descendant of the French, Spanish and African settlers of Louisiana; and Sister

Francis Joseph Ivory from Pennsylvania.

Only Sister Philomene was among the first six Sisters of St. Joseph to come from Lyon to St. Louis in 1836. She left no letters, diaries, or annals of her twenty-five years as a missionary, but four other Sisters who lived with her

recorded their experiences many years later for others who wished to write a community history: Sister St. Protais Deboille described the departure from Lyon, the voyage to America, and the years in Carondelet and Cahokia; Sister Frances Joseph Ivory wrote four letters about their journey up the Mississippi and the founding of what became St. Joseph's Academy in St. Paul; in her annals, Sister Ignatius Loyola Cox recalled the first years at St. Mary's Academy, which the Sisters established in St. Anthony (now Minneapolis); and in 1873 Mother St. John Fournier wrote a long letter to the superior general in Lyon in which she included a short account of the trip to St. Paul, the opening of their first school, and the living conditions there.

Old ledgers stored in the attic of St. Joseph's Academy in St. Paul were another fruitful source of information. In 1971, when plans were underway to close the 120-year-old school, I was asked to collect all archival material that had historical significance. I did a detailed study of the contents of each of the five ledgers: expenses, receipts, and names of students, parents, and benefactors. This created a vivid picture of St. Paul during the years 1851 to 1853 and 1855 to 1860. I also wrote out some conclusions I drew at the end of each year. Other information came from the Generalate and Provincialate Archives in St. Louis and St. Paul and the official community history, *The Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet*, published in 1966.

### Mission to America

How those first six Sisters of St. Joseph happened to come to America in 1836 is an interesting story in itself. In 1835 Bishop Joseph Rosati, a member of the religious Congregation of the Priests of the Mission (also known as the Lazarists) and prelate of the newly-created diocese of St. Louis, was seeking Sisters to work in his diocese. It was an area that embraced the present states of Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Arkansas, and western Illinois. Rosati, who also was responsible for the spiritual welfare of the Indians in his diocese, wrote Father Charles Colleton, spiritual director of the Sisters of

St. Joseph, in Lyon. Colleton also had contacts with the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, an organization founded by a Frenchwoman, Pauline Jaricot, who encouraged French working women to contribute a franc each week to support foreign missions. Specifically, Rosati needed both money and help in establishing a school for the deaf in St. Louis. Colleton suggested the Sisters of St. Joseph who already enjoyed an excellent reputation for their work throughout France, and he contacted Mother St. John Fontbonne, superior general of the Order, about the request. Mother St. John was not sure she could help because of limited finances and the fact that no one among her Sisters was trained in sign language.

Meanwhile, a wealthy benefactor, Felicite de Duras, Countess de la Rochejacqueline, had learned of the great need for missionaries in the Mississippi Valley. She greatly admired Mother St. John, and had financed some of her work. In a letter to Rosati, dated June 10, 1835, the countess expressed her desire "to send six Sisters of St. Joseph to North America to convert the savages [and] to teach their children and those of Protestant families." Expressing much of the fervor of that time, she continued:

It seems to me that if I succeed in establishing the Sisters of St. Joseph in your America, near the savages, and near so many heretics in your diocese, I shall have done during my life something pleasing to God to win his mercy for my sins. I know what I have given is not enough, but I will give more. I will help; only say, my Lord, what you think is necessary for the beginning.

Rosati was impressed and wrote to Mother St. John that he was delighted with the prospect of obtaining six Sisters. He also expressed the wish that two others be included who would work with the deaf. Now that Mother St. John knew her Sisters would be welcome and supported financially, she called for volunteers for a mission that she stressed would involve physical and spiritual hardships. A large number volunteered; those chosen were Mother St. John's two nieces, Sisters Delphine and Febronie Fontbonne, who was



*Countess Felicite de Duras, Countess de la Rochejacqueline. From the archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph.*

appointed superior; Sister Marguerite-Felicite Boute, known later as Sister Felicite, in honor of the countess; Sister St. Protais Deboille; and Sister Philomene Vilaine. The others, Sisters Celestine Pommerel and her cousin, Sister St. John Fournier, were to study sign language in France for a year before leaving for America. Mother St. John's nephew, Father James Fontbonne, was chosen to accompany them and work in the St. Louis diocese.

### **The Voyage**

Sister St. Protais later wrote a lengthy account of their departure and journey. In January, 1836, they traveled by stage from Lyon to Paris, where they stayed with the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul, then continued on to Le Havre where they were the guests of a wealthy widow who also contributed to the mission. On January 17, they boarded *The Heidelberg* for North America. It was a long, difficult journey during which the Sisters tried to maintain as much as possible the routine of convent life and observe the Lenten fast. They endured periods of waiting at Brest in France; at Fort Royal

in Martinique; and at Havana, where yellow fever had broken out.

A violent storm near the Gulf of Mexico threatened to destroy the ship, but at last, after a five-month journey that included forty-six days at sea, they disembarked at New Orleans on March 5. Bishop Rosati welcomed them there, his fears at rest that the Sisters had run away with some of the 400 soldiers and officers traveling with them aboard ship. He explained that three of the Sisters (Delphine, Felicite, and Philomene) would go to the village of Carondelet on the southern outskirts of St. Louis and three (the two Fontbonne Sisters and Sister Protais) to Cahokia, across the Mississippi in Illinois. Two weeks later they all boarded the steamer *George Collier* for St. Louis, the Sisters clad in secular garb because of the lack of respect shown by a number of "non-Catholics and bigots" in the southern and western sections of the region.

### **Carondelet in 1836**

Also known as *Vide Poche* (Empty Pocket) because of the poverty of its residents, Carondelet was situated on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi where it was preserved from the periodic floods Cahokia experienced. Most of Carondelet's inhabitants lacked interest in both religion and education, and the village had no school. The Sisters' experiences at this time, and later in St. Paul, reveal a period in American history when life often was bleak and beset with tragedy as many families struggled to settle the frontier.

Their first home, a log cabin, had two rooms on the ground floor, one room serving as a refectory, parlor or dormitory, the other as a classroom by day and a sleeping apartment for the girl students at night. Overhead was a small attic reached by an outside ladder. Two crude sheds were constructed. Furniture was sparse, and their mattresses were filled with straw.

The Sisters belonged to the Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (later known as Sts. Mary and Joseph parish) where they assisted at mass and devotions and served as sacristans. The pastor, Father Edmond Saulnier, informed them of the church's dire financial circumstances and told them he was in no position to help



Mother St. John Fournier, who led the little band to St. Paul. Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

them. Knowing the Creole people, many of whom were woodcutters, he said the Sisters would have to ask the families for the food they needed. He was an abrupt man, an alcoholic, who meant well but was to cause the Sisters much trouble. Later he was replaced by Father Fontbonne, who was serving as an assistant in the Cathedral parish of St. Louis. Seeing the Sisters' poverty, Father Fontbonne sold some of his new vestments to buy necessities for them. Bishop Rosati, also in impoverished straits, bought cloaks for the Sisters to wear during cold weather, and the Sisters themselves often worked as seamstresses during the evening after classes.

Classes began on September 12, 1836, a week after their arrival. The doors were open to anyone who wished to attend, and enrollment quickly reached twenty. Pupils provided their own desks by bringing a stool, log, or box on which to sit. Their parents gave the Sisters food and wood. There was little contact with St. Louis because of the lack of transportation.

Although formal training of teachers lay in the future, the Sisters had come prepared. They brought with them to America a *Manual of Instruction* published in Lyon in 1832 and containing information on how schools should be planned and

managed and how students should be classified. It included a detailed graded course of instruction for first through eighth grades and suggestions for teaching catechism, spelling, arithmetic, grammar, geography, history, and writing. There were charts of alphabets, syllables, numerals, vowels, consonants, and punctuation, and a listing of twenty-four prayers each student was expected to learn during catechism class.

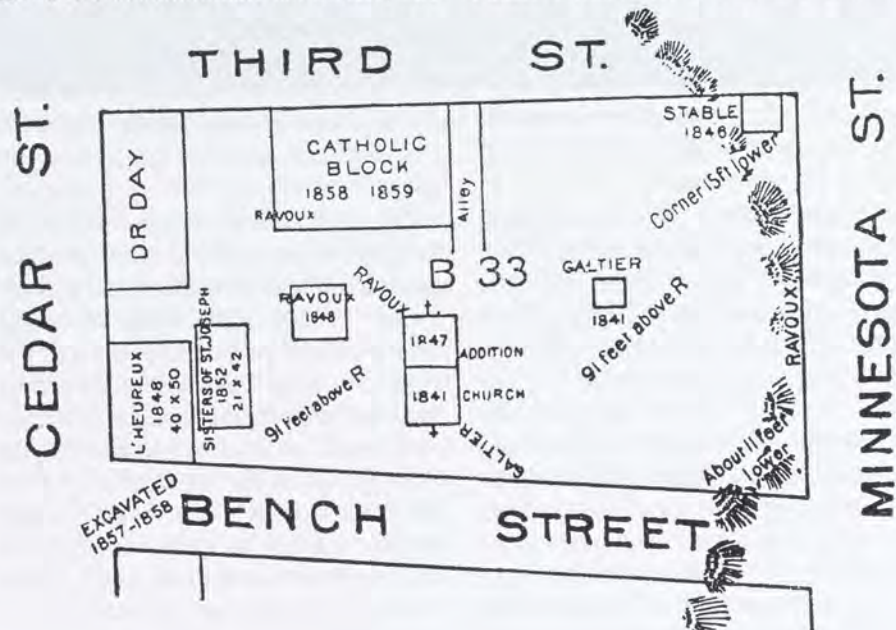
On October 1 a destitute father brought his two motherless daughters to the Sisters, who cared for them. Two weeks later, after two orphans were brought from St. Louis to Carondelet, the convent school began to take on the aspect of an orphanage. The Sisters' work was expanding, and so were their sources of support. A year later the village established a free school for girls, with each Sister receiving a salary of \$375 a year, an arrangement that remained in place for the next ten years. That fall, Sisters Celestine Pommerel and St. John Fournier arrived to teach the deaf. They brought letters, equipment, clothing, and supplies for a chapel. Countess de la Rochejacqueline had sold some of her jewelry to raise 3,000 francs for their journey.

The following spring, four deaf girls arrived at the enlarged convent which now could accommodate six Sisters, one

novice, the four deaf girls, and five orphans. Since theirs was the only school for the deaf in the area, Bishop Rosati and several influential citizens in St. Louis prevailed upon the Missouri legislature to approve a grant of \$2,000 a year to pay the tuition of any student who was a resident of Missouri and had been a pupil in the school for six months.

### And Across the River

The Sisters in Cahokia, in the meantime, were operating a successful school (its initial enrollment was thirty), but not without difficulties. The area was swampy, the climate inhospitable, and the Sisters contracted a malignant fever (perhaps malaria). Nevertheless, their little school grew and several benefactors helped them erect a small chapel. Father Fontbonne served as spiritual director for both convents, but his appointment proved to be a mixed blessing. He loved his two sisters, and at one point he appointed Delphine superior at Cahokia and Febronie superior at Carondelet. It seems, however, from letters written at the time that Father Fontbonne and Sister Delphine were strict adherents to the letter of the law. Some of the Sisters resented what they did and refused to obey them. Letters about the situation went back and forth among Bishop Rosati, Father Fontbonne, and Father Saulnier.



Map prepared by Father Augustin Ravoux of the church properties between Third Street (now Kellogg Boulevard) and Bench Street. Sisters of St. Joseph archives.



*A view of St. Paul in 1851. Off in the distance, First Baptist Church stands on Baptist Hill, now Mears Park. Minnesota Historical Society collections.*

It's apparent that the Sisters were caught in a dilemma, with a legalistic spiritual director (Fontbonne) in charge of them, a pastor (Saulnier) who resented and disliked Fontbonne, and a superior (another Fontbonne) who was an imperious autocrat.

In addition, when Cahokia was flooded, the school had to be closed and the Sisters had to return to Carondelet. Eventually, all of them were withdrawn from Cahokia; Sister Delphine was replaced; Father Fontbonne returned to France, and so did Sister Febronie who had become ill. She died a few years later at Chagny.

Father Joseph Cretin was consecrated

bishop of the newly-created diocese of St. Paul on January 26, 1851. His new diocese included all of the recently established Territory of Minnesota, as well as the region that later became the states of North and South Dakota, stretching as far west as the Rocky Mountains. In his annual report to the Propagation of the Faith, he listed the population as about 3,000 Catholics, 700 "heretics" and 30,000 "infidels." He had three priests and five seminarians to help him, but he also wrote to Mother Celestine Pommerel begging for some sisters. On October 28, 1851, the four Sisters of St. Joseph, imbued with the desire to work

among "infidel" and "heretic" alike, embarked for St. Paul.

### **Mother St. John Fournier**

Julie Alexise Fournier was born November 12, 1814, to John Claude Fournier and Marie Ramsoz in a little town in Arbois, France. She had five older brothers. Not much is known about her early life, but in April, 1828, a few months before her fourteenth birthday, she left her home and traveled to Lyon to enter the contemplative community of the Immaculate Conception where she made her simple vows on April 19, 1832. It was from the Countess de la Rochejaqueline, whose

protégé she had become, that she first learned of the mission being planned by the Sisters of St. Joseph at Lyon. Responding to a deep call to work among the American Indians, she transferred to the Sisters of St. Joseph. Her second novitiate was made at St. Étienne, about seventy miles southwest of Lyon, and she received the habit in the chapel of Chartroux on June 16, 1836. Mother St. John Fontbonne gave Julie her own name "in order to remind these missionaries that her heart did not forget them."

Soon Sister St. John and her cousin, Sister Celestine Pommerel, were sent to study with the Sisters of St. Charles, the only community in the Lyon diocese engaged in teaching the deaf. Completing her training and half of her novitiate, she and her cousin left France for St. Louis where they both would begin their work. She completed her vows on December 31, 1837, in the Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Carondelet.

Trials and misunderstandings tested her. The living conditions and harsh climate played havoc with her health and then there was the friction among the two Fontbonne nieces and their brother. Mother Delphine seemed totally unaware of the effect her imperious and austere nature had on the small community. Sister St. John's health problem was resolved by a transfer to St. Louis where she spent several months in rest, prayer, and the study of English with the Religious of the Sacred Heart.

Back in Carondelet, she taught French to the boarders at Mother Celestine's school, helped with the instruction of the deaf, and visited the sick and the poor in their own homes. In 1845 she was assigned to open St. Joseph's School for the Colored where daughters of free African-Americans were taught elementary subjects, French, and needlework while the children of slaves were taught catechism only, after school hours and on Sunday.

Prejudice and bigotry soon put an end to the school. The following year she became head of an asylum that cared for seventy-five homeless boys. In ten short years, this young nun had become an educator, administrator, and a social service



*Bishop Joseph Cretin. Minnesota Historical Society collections.*

missionary among the deaf, minority groups, the poor and the sick. She would spend the years between 1847 and 1851 serving in an orphanage for boys in Philadelphia before embarking on her mission to St. Paul.

### **Sister Philomene Vilaine**

Anne Marie Vilaine, the daughter of Jean Vilaine and Claire Bochart of LePuy was born on April 13, 1811. When she was twenty-five, she entered the convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Lyon. She received the habit and the name Philomene on January 4, 1836. She too was greatly interested in American foreign missions, so much so that the day after her reception she left Lyon with the other five Sisters. She pronounced her simple vows on January 3, 1838, completing her two-year novitiate.

Vivid descriptions of Sister Philomene can be found in the archives. Except for a year in Cahokia, she lived in Carondelet. When Mother Celestine Pommerel supervised the construction of the first permanent building in what became the Motherhouse, she noted that "the plaster left a mess in the new north building [now the 1840 wing] and no amount of scrubbing on the part of 'our Philomene,'

as we often called her, could make it presentable." Another Sister recalled that Sister Philomene "formed the choir along with Sister St. John [Fournier] in the church, cared for the altar, swept out the church and responded at Mass for the pastor . . . did everything but perform the office of grave digging."

Another described her as a Sister with "a heart without guile" and well-liked by the other Sisters. "Sister Philomene was the Sister we always loved to have with us at our evening recreations and we would assist her in washing dishes in order to have her with us sooner." She evidently taught some of the school-children. "During the hours of manual labor, she might be seen in the midst of her little workers teaching them in the kindest tones and the gentlest ways how to discharge the various duties of housewifery, an art in which she herself excelled."

One can conjecture that she cared for the small boarding students. Some recalled that "many a night we retired to our beds shaking with fear from the horrid ghost stories and fairy tales with which she entertained us." A fair summary: she liked work of all kinds, loved children, and cherished her community whom she knew how to entertain.

### **Sister Francis Joseph Ivory**

Two of the four Sisters of St. Joseph who arrived in St. Paul in 1851 were Americans, and Eliza Ellen Ivory was one of the two. She was born in Loretto, Cambrie County, Pennsylvania, on September 16, 1824, the daughter of Jeremiah Ivory and Sarah Ann Shirley, who were of Irish ancestry. She was baptised by the famous missionary and Russian prince-convert, the Reverend Demetrius Gallitz. On June 12, 1847, when she was twenty-three, she entered the novitiate of the Sisters of St. Joseph at Carondelet. The following October 30 she received the habit and her name, Francis Joseph, chosen for her devotion to St. Francis Xavier, the Jesuit missionary who was patron of missions.

Sister Francis, in a sense, followed in his footsteps. The most adventuresome of these pioneering Sisters, she traveled extensively, helped establish four missions, and wrote letters filled with details about



her experiences and the people she met, including a vivid account of the journey to St. Paul in 1851 and the first St. Paul mission. Her reminiscences create a colorful picture of how primitive life was for these young women who brought education and religion to the rough frontier.

Sister Francis recorded her memories of the early history of St. Joseph's School in Carondelet, the forerunner of the St. Joseph's Academy the Sisters later founded in St. Paul. It was, she recalled, "a very good academy." Although the "accommodations were very poor, they had about one hundred nice young ladies in the small house. All slept in the garret and the beds were peopled with thousands of smaller inhabitants. The fare was very indifferent." One of the Sisters made all the pens. ("We used quills at that time.") She added that "Many of our fine French Ladies of St. Louis in Carondelet were members of the . . . school . . . there were few schools around at that time. We had pleasant retreats. The number was not so great, and we were all very pious. . . ."

In 1848 she was sent to Cahokia to reopen the mission, then to St. Louis to help establish the boys' asylum and teach some sixty girls. She remained there until she was chosen for the mission to St. Paul.

### Sister Scholastica Vasques

Celestine Vasques was also an American. She was born in St. Louis on January 1, 1829, to Hippolite and Marie Louise Vasques and educated in St. Louis. Her mother died when she was very young and she entered the Sisters of St. Joseph convent in Carondelet on April 1, 1847, when she was eighteen. She received the habit and the name, Scholastica, the following August. Two years later, on October 15, 1849, she made her perpetual vows. She was described as a cheerful young woman with a beautiful singing voice and fluent in French.

Sister Francis Joseph left the most detailed account of the Sisters' journey from St. Louis to St. Paul:

We went on board the Steamer *St. Paul*



*St. Joseph's Academy in 1851. The building was once the little Chapel of St. Paul. Sisters of St. Joseph archives.*

about 8 p.m. Tuesday [October 28, 1851]. We traveled on but a few short steps as the weather was cold and ice forming on the river. We arrived in Galena Friday evening, the 31st of Oct. We stopped all night, put up at Mr. Dowling's, who was Mayor of the city that year. His lady was a Catholic and very good to us. The following morning, being the Feast of All Saints, we heard Mass and received Holy Communion in the chapel of the Sisters of Mercy. After breakfast we went aboard the Steamer, and resumed our journey. We made about an hour or 2 delay at Dubuque. We got off and went up to see the Sisters who had been there but a short time. We then resumed our journey, the [weather] being chilly and damp. We did enjoy the scenery very much.

During a short delay at Prairie du Chien, Father Lucien Galtier, who had named the settlement of St. Paul for the chapel he established there in 1841, came on board and traveled some distance with the little band. Also on board was

Colonel Abram Fridley, agent for the Winnebago, and his family. They arrived at St. Paul during the night of November 2 and that morning the Sisters' caught the first glimpse of their new home. It was dismaying. Perched on the bluff ninety feet above them was Father Galtier's Chapel of 1841, with an addition at the back that had been built six years later. To the left was a log shanty occupied first by missionary and priest Father Augustin Ravoux and then by Bishop Cretin as his "palace." Strung out along the bluff were the settlers' cabins.

"It looked very dreary," Sister Francis recalled. "The hills were covered with snow. The lady who provided our first dinner was Madame Turpin, a widow who had only one daughter, and she was Mrs. [Louis Robert], the wife of a wealthy Indian trader. She proved to us a friend indeed. Mrs. [Auguste] Larpenteur, a Baltimore lady and her husband and family were also good friends."



The old cathedral, built in 1852. Mother St. John Fourier was on her way to mass here when a starving wolf attempted to attack her. Daily mass then was held at the convent. After a new Cathedral, right, was built, the old building became a schoolhouse. Ramsey County Historical Society collections.

We took our first meal, supper [Nov. 3rd] in the vestry of the old log church. We had difficulty to get enough water to make our tea as there was but one well in the town and that was locked up. We rested in the vestry . . . we then took possession of our new home. Opened school [the] following Monday in the vestry.

Their new home was that low frame shanty "palace" just vacated by the bishop, their furniture a few old mattresses spread out on the second floor. They named their school St. Mary's. (It would not been known as St. Joseph's Academy until 1859.) That week they received their first boarder,

Miss Mary Ellen Rice [a niece of Henry M. Rice]. We fixed up an old shed . . . Mr. Rice furnished her room with a good bed and made it very comfortable. The next month we received a second boarder for our new academy, Miss Mary Fridley, daughter of Colonel Fridley of the Chippewa [Winnepago] Agency. The young ladies did very well and seemed happy. . . . In March we received a third pupil, Mary Bottineau . . . from St. Anthony.

We had a small stove on the first floor, the pipe of which was set upright through the roof. Around this opening we could count the stars. In the spring, rain storms were frequent. When the rains poured down through

the roof, we (like the man in the gospel) would take up our beds and walk, but only to rest in the water on the second floor. We took our meals prepared by ourselves in the vestry of the old log church. We all enjoyed the novelty of our position; as there was only one well, and that generally locked, we had often a long wait for our coffee in the morning. I having nothing to eat for a day when Mother [St. John Fournier] surprised us with a portion of a small loaf of bread.

Sister Francis Joseph described Minnesota Territory that first year as "an Indian camping ground." The "chief settlers," she wrote, "were Indian traders, no farms had yet been planted. No public

conveyance [during the winter]." The only road to Prairie du Chien and Dubuque, 500 miles away, was the frozen Mississippi where "the wolves often attacked travelers as they traveled over the ice." She remembered the coming of a northern spring and the first steamboat to dock at the levee:

As the steamer, the *City of St. Paul*, came steaming up the excitement was intense. Every individual in town was on the river bank with a loud welcome for the friends who brought them all comforts. . . . The spring was charming, the prairies all in bloom. Wild ducks were plenty on the river and lakes. The settlers were coming in from all quarters. . . . Once in awhile we received a present of venison, bear, deer or smaller animals, also fish, all very acceptable.

Living conditions that first year undoubtedly reminded the Sisters of Carondelet—poverty, lack of necessities, isolation, unfavorable weather, a frame shanty where they lived, a log chapel. Sister Philomene taught French; Sister Francis Joseph, who was in charge of the school, taught English. Mother St. John contacted merchants, parents, and others who could help, and was responsible for seeing that the Sisters lived a community life under the Constitution of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Ledger "A," which the Sisters kept, reflects their activities. School, the ledger noted, "opened on the 17th of November, 1851 . . . under the title of St. Mary's School." The expenses "of the House" that year totaled \$40. Lists of expenditures for food and its preparation revealed what the Sisters and the boarding students ate: bread, lard, hops, potatoes, cornmeal, molasses, salt, pepper, mustard, ham, vinegar, butter, fish, eggs, sugar, coffee, cheese, flour, and allspice.

Other supplies included china, soap, wire, wash basins, medicine, indigo, starch, a stove, flatirons, postage, spoons, tins, candles, sewing thread, wood, water, windows, glass, hartshorn [ammonia], pan, bell, shovel, tongs, turpentine, oil tapers, washtubs, needles, brooms, a rat trap (and poison!), a bedstead, zinc, nails, and a lock for a well. They spent \$3 for the use of a carriage. They bought shoes, shawls, ribbon, muslin, silk, bon-



Three Sisters. Ellen Howard (Sister Celestine), center, and Ellen Ireland (Sister Seraphine), right, were the first graduates of St. Joseph's Academy. Eliza Ireland (Sister St. John), left, founded St. Agatha's Conservatory of Music and Art, still standing in downtown St. Paul as the Exchange Building. Ellen and Eliza Ireland were sisters of the future Archbishop John Ireland; Ellen Howard was their cousin. From the Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

nets, red chintz and fringe, calico, shirting, ticking, sheeting, flannel and cotton. School supplies included blank books, gum arabic, books and paper, dictionary and ink.

They paid a washerwoman, a grocer, and Bishop Cretin for supplies, and they sent money, shoes and yarn to the mission at Long Prairie. A Mr. [Joseph E.] Fullerton [merchant] received money for sheeting and calico and from a Mr. Dufast [William Dugas?] they purchased flour. They had masses offered for deceased Sisters, and they gave alms for Lent and a jubilee. At one point they apparently kept a horse because they bought oats and hay.

#### Attack by a Wolf

Receipts and expenditures were carefully noted in their ledgers, which then were examined and "found correct" by

Bishop Cretin. For the fifteen months between October 30, 1851 and December 31, 1852, expenses totaled \$589.06; receipts \$587.01.

All Sisters on a small mission engaged in housework, cooking, community prayer and recreation and teaching. During the winter, they trudged through mounds of snow to attend daily mass at the Cathedral on Wabasha and Sixth Street. After a starving wolf attempted to attack Mother St. John Fournier, the bishop came daily to the convent for mass.

There were changes as the months moved along. Enrollment at the school increased steadily. The names (sometimes misspelled) of either parents or students—the Territory's pioneers—are listed in the ledger with the amounts they paid: E. Cox, Robert, Mehegan, Lytte, Vadnais, Dufast, Larpenteur, Buchanen, Bottineau, Dumphy, Dorsaire,

Oliver, Robert, Desnoyer, Fridley, Creek, Alexander, Walters, Weaver, Quinn, Bruce, Lampert, Rice, Egan, Fairbanks, Sloakes, Keep, O'Neil, Brenan, Dayton, Dorsay, Sweeney, Kittson, Gregor, Walerien, and Fridley. By September, 1852, a two-story brick building the bishop had built for the growing school was ready for use. The lower floor housed two airy classrooms and the upper floor served as a sleeping room for the boarders. The Sisters used the log church as their chapel.

The years between 1852 and 1855 were difficult for Bishop Cretin. He negotiated with officials in the Territory and in Washington for government support of a school. He felt it was a duty of conscience to promote the spiritual and temporal welfare of the 25,000 Native Americans living within Minnesota. He wrote countless letters to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Paris, and the 37,500 francs the Society eventually sent to St. Paul made possible the Sisters' school, hospital, orphanage, and a school for Indians. The bishop's appeals to the federal government for financial help resulted in a five-year contract for the school for the Winnebagos on their reservation near Long Prairie, 100 miles north of St. Paul. He was to be paid \$75 a year for each child over five and under eighteen enrolled in the school. The money was never sent. The Indian Bureau was slow in answering letters. The officials of the Indian Agency raised many difficulties, even refusing at times to deliver food and clothing to the children. There was constant friction, but the entire project came to an end in 1855 when the Winnebago Indians were moved to Blue Earth in southern Minnesota.

### The Cholera Epidemic

In 1853 construction began on a new building that would become St. Joseph's Hospital. Looking back in 1891, Sister Francis Ivory wrote:

I know the Hospital was proposed the Spring I was there [1852]. I heard the first attempt. A French doctor, a friend of [Mother St. John] told [us] that many of the immigrants coming at that time were taken sick and some died for lack of care. He looked about [for] what to do.



*Little Crow's summer planting village, known as Kaposia, on the Mississippi across from present-day South St. Paul. The Sisters had hoped to work among "the dear Indians." Minnesota Historical Society collections.*

The Honorable Henry Rice promised to give land for the building, and a Sioux chief who was then occupying the present site of Minneapolis promised to give lumber from his forests, and Mother St. John promised the Sisters would be the caretakers.

It was just in time. In the summer of 1854, cholera, a highly contagious and much feared intestinal disease spread by infected water, milk, and raw food, appeared in epidemic proportions in St. Paul. Many were dying and the Sisters of St. Joseph converted their log church into a temporary hospital to care for them. When the new hospital was completed on Exchange Street, where it remains today, it was given into the care of the Sisters. The novitiate was transferred there and a free school for girls was opened in a small brick building on the hospital grounds. Later the school was transferred to the basement of the Cathedral, named the Cathedral School, and opened to both boys and girls.

Throughout the 1850s, the Sisters' missionary work increasingly moved beyond St. Paul. Within two months of Sister Scholastica's arrival in the Territory, she was sent to Long Prairie to begin the religious instruction of the Indians at the Winnebago reservation. It was a four-day journey for the twenty-two-year-old Sister. She traveled it alone in a train with

open sleighs or wagons heaped with barrels of flour, pork, and other supplies the teamsters were hauling from St. Paul to Long Prairie.

A Sister who made the trip during the winter two years later recalled that after traveling all day, the train would pause for the night at a log house with little or no accommodations. Once a driver took pity on her plight, put her into his sleigh and covered her with buffalo robes and blankets to protect her from the cold. Sister Scholastica remained there for the winter, living with a family named Lequier. Their oldest daughter helped her with the classes she conducted to prepare the Indians for their first communion. Sister Francis Joseph remembered that Sister Scholastica "told us thrilling tales about her school of grownup men and women. Sometimes the men would drink and then she was obliged to hide."

### Mission to St. Anthony

The story of the four Sisters of St. Joseph during the remaining years of the 1850s is one of much travel and changing challenges as the work of the Order began to spread and they were called to help elsewhere.

In 1853 Sister Philomene was transferred from Long Prairie to St. Anthony Falls [now East Minneapolis] to open a

mission there. A small frame church had been built in 1852 and property secured on which to build a convent. It was the first permanent foundation sent out from the Sisters' school and convent in St. Paul.

The Catholics in St. Anthony Falls were not very numerous and they were exceedingly poor, but next to St. Paul the community was considered the most important village in the territory. The immense water power around the Falls was beginning to be tapped and immigrants were coming into the territory in great numbers. Father Denis Ledon, a zealous and energetic French priest stationed there, foresaw a great future for St. Anthony and he hastened to put in place his plans for a school for the children of his parish, which was increasing numerically with every coming year. When he applied to the bishop of St. Paul for Sisters, his request was granted, and the mission was opened.

An old frame house that had been used by fur traders was rented and fitted up as a school and dwelling. In Ledger "A" dated October 3, 1853, the bookkeeper noted that \$32.50 was given to the Sisters at St. Anthony and a stagecoach for two Sisters to travel to St. Anthony cost \$4. Sister Philomene remained there until Sister Scholastica arrived from Long Prairie to become superior and teacher, then returned to St. Paul to teach French.

Many changes followed in the next six years. St. Joseph's Academy's first graduates, Ellen Ireland and her cousin, Ellen Howard, entered the convent in 1858, taking the names of Sisters Seraphine and Celestine. Sister Seraphine became director of St. Joseph's Academy and her brother, John Ireland, became the first archbishop of St. Paul. Sister Celestine founded St. Agatha's Conservatory of Music and Art in downtown St. Paul.

Bishop Cretin died in 1857 and when the Reverend Thomas Grace succeeded him in 1859, he immediately made plans to improve the overcrowded conditions of the Sisters and students in the seven-year-old brick building and the patients in the hospital. He transferred the patients to the school on Bench Street and the students to the hospital. It was the third home for St. Joseph's Academy.

The Sisters broadened their curriculum into classes in sacred and profane history, elements of astronomy, chemistry, botany, literature, and music, in addition to reading, writing, arithmetic, grammar, geography, sewing, and needlework.

Ledger "A" contains information of interest during the years Sister Philomene taught French at the Academy. It could well be that she also was bookkeeper when one finds such words in the ledger as "riz, towels, candels, porc, onyions, Scholastique, and Helene Howard." Besides buying large quantities of groceries from Auguste Larpenteur, they also bought music, music books, and a piano, which they tuned frequently. For the first time, "things for drawing and painting" were recorded. The Sisters sponsored a St. Patrick's Day Supper and they made scapulars.

On one page there appears this note from 1857: "I gave Rev. Ravoux to buy a piece of land \$400." The Sisters were purchasing lots on St. Anthony Hill [present-day Summit Avenue], then on the outskirts of the town, for a large school and convent. The following note, dated 1859, was pinned to the last page of the ledger:

St. Paul January 13th 1859 I certify that Mother Seraphine has paid in full the note she made to the Rt. Rev. Bishop Cretin for the house or lots [on] St. Anthony, on which her Sisters keep school. The note was of two hundred dollars \$200.00. I paid this money on this day. . . . According to the settlement of our account for the free school kept by the Sisters, I owe them fifty dollars. A. Ravoux.

Paid in full by Rev. Mr. Ravoux \$50

Sister Seraphine

Another note records Father Ravoux's payment to the school for a keg of syrup and a half keg of molasses. St. Joseph's Academy still stands on St. Anthony Hill as a majestic collection of limestone buildings. The southwest section dates from 1863 when the Academy first opened as a country school for some twenty boarders.

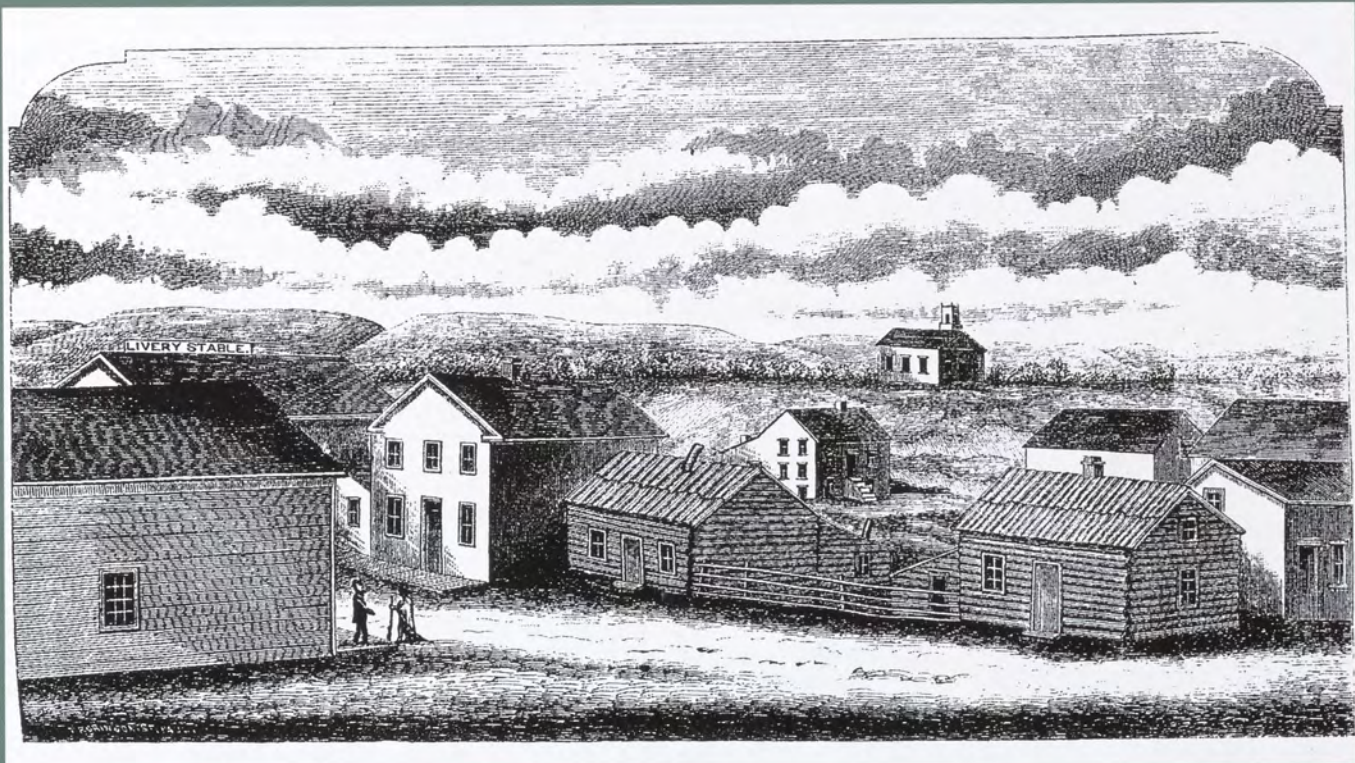
In 1860 Sister Philomene returned to the Motherhouse in Carondelet where she died in 1861 at the age of fifty-two. Sister Scholastica left St. Anthony in 1855 but returned to finish out her term

as superior in 1858. It was a difficult assignment in a poverty-stricken community with no markets, and no butcher shops, so that fresh meat, virtually unprocurable, was "one of our rarest luxuries." Her health impaired by the harshness of life at Long Prairie and St. Anthony, she was sent to the more genial climate of Sulphur Springs, Mississippi, where the Sisters of St. Joseph staffed a school and convent. She was so ill, however, that she died on July 26, 1859, at the age of twenty-eight.

In 1854 Sister Francis Joseph Ivory was assigned to establish a mission in Canandaigua, New York. Two years later she was sent to Rochester, New York, to open a school. In 1858 she founded a mission in Buffalo and she worked among the Indians at Baraga, Michigan, but around 1859 she seems to have returned to Carondelet. In 1866 she headed a pioneer band of Sisters who left St. Louis for Kansas City where they built a convent school. Similar assignments took her to Glens Falls and Binghamton, New York. She eventually retired to Loretto Convent in Glenmore, New York, where she died on February 4, 1902. She was seventy-nine years old.

Mother St. John Fournier, who led the little band of four Sisters to St. Paul in 1851, remained there until May of 1853, when she left for Philadelphia. For the next twenty-two years she helped develop an outstanding parochial school system, organize a nurse corps of twenty-four Sisters who served during the Civil War, and build other new institutions. She taught French and she translated a number of French classics into English. She died in Philadelphia on October 15, 1875, when she was sixty-one years old.

*Sister Ann Thomasine Sampson, CSJ, has written several histories of the Sisters of St. Joseph and their work in Minnesota, including Care With Prayer, a history of St. Mary's Hospital in Minneapolis, published in 1987; Guide to Places of CSJ Interest in Minnesota and North Dakota, and Mother Fournier: Wellspring of Inspiration. Her history of St. Agatha's Conservatory appeared in Volume 24, Number 1 of Ramsey County History, published in 1989.*



*A sketch based on one of the oldest photographs of pioneer St. Paul as it looked in 1851 when the Sisters of St. Joseph arrived there. The log house on the right stands at Third and Robert Streets. Minnesota Historical Society collections. See article beginning on page 4.*

**R.C.H.S.**  
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