

OREGON



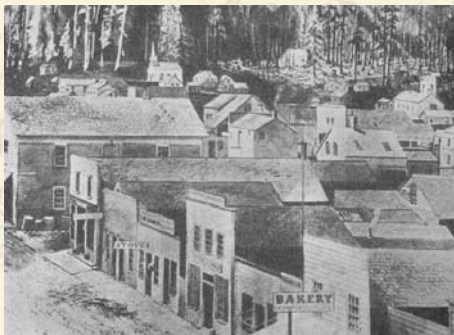
Oregon foundresses, c. 1859

After completing their five-week voyage, the twelve intrepid Sisters of the Holy Names finally set foot in the town they would now call home—Portland. When they arrived in October 1859, Oregon had been a state for eight months. Portland's population in 1855 was just over 1200, making it the largest city north of San Francisco and the major port on the Willamette River. Its first Catholic Church, on the corner of Third and Stark, was dedicated in 1852. Nevertheless, to the eyes of the newcomers, the sight of Portland was probably disappointing, consisting as it did of wood frame structures and only a handful of brick buildings.

It rains, the streets are almost impassible—the distance is great and we are soon exhausted.

— ST. MARY'S ACADEMY (PORTLAND) CHRONICLES, 21 OCTOBER 1859

When they reached their new home, a two-story, unpainted frame building with two small wings



Street scene
Portland, Oregon, 1854

This photograph was taken from the corner of Washington and Front streets, looking south-southwest across the city's business district. It is possible that the large building pictured in the background is the Lowndale House, which served as the first convent and Saint Mary's Academy in Portland.

located on Fourth Avenue between Mill and Market Streets, the Sisters opened the door to discover that their residence, recently inhabited by vagrants, was in no state to receive them. Its interior lacked even the most rudimentary supplies and furniture.

The lowliest hotel could not have been filthier, fortunately His grace [Archbishop Blanchet] purchased two booms on our way through the town... Alas! shovels would have answered the purpose better for removing the masses of debris from the corners and closets... however miserable [our dear Mother and Sisters in Longueuil] might imagine it, it would fall short of the real.

— ST. MARY'S ACADEMY (PORTLAND) CHRONICLES, 21 OCTOBER 1859

Two Sisters immediately undertook an expedition to purchase needed supplies, including blankets and a kitchen stove, while the others cleaned. That night saw the Sisters slept on the floor with their satchels for pillows, as they had no beds or bedding.

In spite of this unpromising beginning, the twelve immediately set to work preparing to open their school. A third wing, intended to serve as a boys' school, was begun on the northwest corner of the block. On 6 November, not three weeks after their arrival, the Sisters opened their doors to the girls of the city.

Six pupils present the mothers: of this small number there are [three] Catholics... [two] Jewsesses... [and] one Episcopalians. May our Immaculate Mother aid us in forming the hearts of these dear children.

— ST. MARY'S ACADEMY (PORTLAND) CHRONICLES, 6 NOVEMBER 1859

The first boarder, an orphan, arrived on 16 November; the boys' school opened on 20 November. By Christmas, there were enough students that the Sisters and pupils sang the Mass of the day at the parish church. By the end of the 1859-1860 school year, there were eighty-eight day students and twelve boarders.

These dedicated twelve, of whom only a few were fluent in English when they arrived, created a rich learning environment for their young pupils. Several were talented artists and musicians, and these disciplines became school trademarks—as well as a way for the fledgling Community to generate additional income through private lessons. Some had strength in math or catechism; others in writing. Two Sisters tended the Community by cooking, cleaning and caring for the sick. This first school, St. Mary's Academy, is the oldest continuously operating high school in Oregon, with over 10,000 graduates to date.

With the success of the Portland mission, other Sisters were sent to Oregon, spreading across the state to found missions and open or teach in schools in Oregon City (1860); St. Paul (1861); Salem



Street scene
Portland, Oregon, 1854

This photograph was taken on the corner of Fourth and Jefferson streets looking northwest. The Sisters' home was three blocks to the left on Fourth

(1864); The Dalles (1864); Jacksonville (1867); Grand Ronde (1874); and Baker City (1875), in addition to other Portland parish schools.



Old St. Mary's Academy, Portland, Oregon
Watercolor on paper, Edith Conn, 1895
Courtesy SNIN, Central Archives Department

The first St. Mary's Academy in Portland opened on the outskirts of town in a large building constructed by Daniel Lowndale, a wealthy Portland tanner. It was vacant for several years before the Sisters moved in. This watercolor was painted by a St. Mary's Academy student in honor of the Congregation's Golden Jubilee in 1895.