

NEW YORK

Windsor, Ontario, 29 May 1865 – Schenectady, New York, 31 May 1865

Sisters Mary Alphonse (*Marie Louise David, 1826-1887*); Mary of Mount Carmel (*Emma Duhamel 1842-1899*); Mary of Bon Secours (*Albine St. Charles 1835-1883*); Mary Michael of the Saints (*Julie Renaud 1846-1923*)

In March 1865, Superior General Mother Theresa of Jesus (1823-1890) received a request for Sisters from Reverend Daniel Falvey of St. John's parish in Schenectady, New York. After a failed attempt to establish a mission in Troy the year before, she was hesitant to consider another New York foundation. She wrote in May 1865:

I do not think it wise to send Sisters to the Albany diocese. . . I believe that we shall not receive permission to settle there, any more than we did in Troy, only one year ago.

In order to avoid rejection by the New York Archbishop, Mother Theresa sent Reverend Falvey to speak to Reverend Truteau, acting administrator of the Montreal diocese. Truteau responded favorably to Falvey's invitation and again plans began for a New York foundation. On 8 May, Falvey wrote promising a house, rent-free; a yearly salary of \$200 minimum for each of two Sisters; an extra ten dollars per month for a Sister to take over the organ and the choir; and permission to open a private academy.

Schenectady was a bustling place in 1865. Settled at the confluence of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers, just a few miles northwest of Albany, it was chartered as a city in 1798. Along with the rivers, canals enabled Schenectady to develop as a shipping center. Numerous factories drew Irish and German immigrants and by 1858 the city had 8,000 residents. A private young ladies' seminary opened in 1848, followed by a free public school system in 1854. As the Catholic population grew, Catholic citizens sought to establish their own schools.

After a visit to Schenectady, Mother Theresa traveled to Windsor, Ontario to ask Sister Mary Alphonse to again take up the challenge of a New York foundation. Sisters Mary Alphonse and Mary of Mount Carmel left Windsor via train on 29 May, headed for Schenectady. When they arrived two days later, the church's spire served to guide them to the priest's house. They stayed in the presbytery for several weeks, awaiting the arrival of their furnishings.



Sister Mary Alphonse, Superior
Circa 1860

On 5 June, school opened in the building that would become their future home. The Sisters were to run both a parochial school and a private academy for girls. An unusual issue of how pupils should refer to the Sisters arose, a result of the fact that they had recently been taught by a former religious of the Sacred Heart, who they called "Sister."

For this reason Father Falvey will not allow us to be so called, and insists upon our pupils calling us "Mother."

– HOUSE OF SCHENECTADY CHRONICLES, 31 MAY 1865

Happily, one day after the Sisters opened their school, two more Sisters (Mary of Bon Secours and Mary Michael of the Saints) arrived on the train from Montreal, along with an English-speaking lay teacher. A few weeks later, the furniture arrived and they moved into their home.

We have the happiness of taking up our permanent residence in our new home, which is situated on Franklin St., just opposite the Church. Our house is a two-story brick building, the parlor, chapel, music-room and two class rooms are on the first floor, the dormitories occupy the second.

– HOUSE OF SCHENECTADY CHRONICLES, 19 JUNE 1865

To get the students accustomed to their new school and teachers, classes were taught through the summer. In an effort to attract students from the public schools, students were allowed to bring their own books. Unfortunately, the Sisters themselves had none! Things settled down and by summer's end, the students numbered one hundred girls and sixty boys.

An unsettling moment came in late August, when Sister Superior Mary Alphonse and Sister Mary of Mount Carmel were sent to Rome, New York, to open a foundation there. Every indication was that these two Sisters would return to Schenectady once replacement Sisters arrived from Quebec. However, one hour after their departure from



St. John the Evangelist convent and academy
Schenectady, New York, 1865

Schenectady, new Sisters arrived from Quebec to take their place—in Schenectady! Sister Mary of Bon Secours was appointed Superior for Schenectady, which led to great confusion when the two Sisters returned from Rome. However, word came from Quebec that the two Rome foundresses were to return there, which they did.

The new school year began in September with three Sisters and two lay teachers. The Sisters welcomed their first boarder and fifteen day scholars in the academy. In addition, four hundred students enrolled in the parochial school. The academy closed in 1878 and the Sisters devoted their energies to the parochial school, which closed in 1929. Other places where the Sisters settled in New York include Rome (1865) and Albany (1880).