

CALIFORNIA

Hochelaga, Quebec, 13 April 1868–Oakland, California, 12 May 1868

Sisters Mary Salome (*Hortense Martin, 1844-1894*); Mary Scraphine (*Angelique Derome, 1848-1937*); Mary Cyrille (*Sophonie Metras, 1845-1905*); Mary Anthony (*Julie LaChapelle, 1837-1915*); Mary Marcelline (*Rose of Lima Benard, 1848-1869*); Mary Celestine (*Annie Marie O'Leary, 1847-1922*)

The arduous steamship journey the Sisters took from Quebec to Oregon necessitated a change of vessel in several places, the last of which was San Francisco. Travelers continuing to points further north often had several days to recuperate. So it was with the first Portland-bound Sisters in 1859, as well as those who followed in 1863. On both trips, the Sisters were assured hospitality by several religious communities and by Joseph Sadoc Alemany (1814-1888), Archbishop of San Francisco. Archbishop Alemany appointed Reverend Michael King, assistant pastor of St. Patrick Church, to welcome all visiting missionaries and to ensure that their needs were met while in the city.

By 1865 King was resident pastor of the Oakland parish, across the bay from San Francisco. Oakland was a small, growing city of around 3,000 residents. Geographically, the parish covered a vast territory to the north and south. Reverend King anticipated significant population growth and began planning his parish schools around a centrally located convent.

This arrangement would permit the Sisters to walk to schools in town or the outlying area.

None of the San Francisco orders could supply Sisters but Reverend King remembered the Sisters of the Holy Names from their San Francisco stops in 1859 and 1863. After some pleading, the archbishop agreed to allow the Sisters to come to Oakland. In 1866 King sent an appeal for Sisters to the Superior General, Mother Mary Stanislaus (1828-1912), which she accepted.

Back in California, five acres for a convent boarding school were acquired on the northwest shore of Lake Merritt. At great personal expense, Reverend King procured building supplies and set to work digging the foundation himself. After parishioners witnessed his unflagging zeal and physical labors, they came forward to help build and fund the project, having disapproved with the decision to build so far from town. In December 1867, King informed the Sisters that the convent would be ready in March 1868.

On 13 April 1868, six Sisters set out from Quebec, following the same steamship route the Oregon Sisters had in 1859 and 1863. The voyage lasted twenty-eight days and the Sisters arrived in San Francisco on 10 May. They were welcomed by the Sisters of Mercy, who offered the weary travelers strawberries, an event so memorable that "Strawberry Day" is still celebrated annually.

Two days later, the Sisters traveled to Oakland with Reverend King to see their new home. After the large convent in Hochelaga, Quebec, the new convent must have seemed rustic and isolated, situated as it was six miles from town.

The convent looks well enough from a distance... it is small, being only 42 ft. by 30 ft., two stories and a half in height... The

grounds are quite wild yet, barren would be a better word... Father King has just planted a great number of pines and Californian Cypresses as a hedge to the walk. They tell us trees grow rapidly here, I hope it is true.

— CONVENT OF OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART (OAKLAND) CHRONICLES, 12 MAY 1868

Inside, the basement held two refectories and a kitchen. The first and second floors held the chapel and classrooms; the dormitory was on the third floor. From the front windows, the Sisters had a view of San Francisco and the "Golden Gate."



Our Lady of the Sacred Heart convent and academy
Oakland, California, circa 1868

Built on the shore of what is today Lake Merritt. Our Lady of the Sacred Heart was six miles outside of Oakland when it was completed.

They settled into their new quarters on 18 May. Classes began at the private academy on 31 May with four day scholars and one boarder; classes in the free parochial school had begun three days earlier. Four of the six Sisters were proficient in English, including the Superior, Mary Salome, who was educated in the United States. Two Sisters were music teachers while two others were capable

in numerous subjects.

When school closed for vacation in July, there were twenty-three day pupils and four boarders. In spite of only six weeks of classes, the students held a closing program and performed a drama and musical selections.

We had a little exhibition, a few invited guests... It passed off well for the first attempt.

— CONVENT OF OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART (OAKLAND) CHRONICLES, 16 JULY 1868

When classes resumed in September there were many new students. Five new Sisters joined them from Quebec in November. By the end of the academic year there were forty day pupils and nearly thirty boarders. This success was followed by the establishment of foundations in San Francisco (1871) and Los Angeles (1889). In addition, Sisters opened or taught in several other parish schools in Oakland by 1890.



Front cover, exhibition program,
Academy of Our Lady of the
Sacred Heart
Oakland, California, 1869