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Historical Sketch of the Order of  
America, and the Circumstances  
Which Led to the Establishment of St.  
Elizabeth's Hospital

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## *Historical Sketch of the Order of America*

**M**RS. Sarah Peter, a noble and wealthy woman of Cincinnati, was instrumental in bringing the Congregation of the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis, to America. While in Rome, she placed before the Holy Father her plan of engaging Sisters to nurse the sick poor in Cincinnati. He advised her to apply for aid in the furtherance of her plans, to the Austrian bishop, which she did, but without success. While in Austria, however, she met a charitable woman who offered to intercede with Cardinal Von Geissel, the Archbishop of Cologne, for sisters to engage in this project. The Cardinal sanctioned the plan and referred Mrs. Peter to Mother Frances. At first Mother Frances objected to it, as she thought that the congregation was too young to be transferred to a place so far removed from their home. But, she soon became convinced that it was God's Will that she should assist in this undertaking, with the result that she promised to send sisters to America as soon as she could obtain sufficient funds for this purpose.

On the tenth of August, 1858, five sisters, and a postulant left the Motherhouse in Aix-la-Chapelle, Germany, and landed in New York on the eighth of September. Two days later they arrived in Cincinnati, where they were met at the station and heartily greeted by Mrs. Peter, who conducted them to the Convent of the Good Shepherd on Bank Street. Here they remained for a few days, when they were offered the free use of the old St. Aloysius Orphan Asylum on West Fourth Street in which to begin their work.

The spirit of St. Francis of Assisi permeated the hospital, and it was not long before it drew several young women to leave the world and join the congregation. The blessing of God rested upon the little community for it relied entirely on His Divine Providence for its support. Hardly two years had elapsed when this small branch of the congregation was asked to found a hospital in Covington, Kentucky.

### CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH LED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ST. ELIZABETH'S HOSPITAL

As far back as 1860, Covington had no place to which the sick poor could be taken and cared for. A number of charitably disposed women headed by Mrs. Henrietta Cleveland, founded a society devoted entirely to the relief of the poor. Though this work was splendid, it soon became evident that the society alone could not give the necessary relief, especially when there was question of caring for the sick. Mrs. Cleveland, an intimate friend of Mrs. Peter in Cincinnati, had become acquainted with the work of the sisters in St. Mary's and cherished the desire to see a similar institution in Covington. Mrs. Cleveland, therefore, spoke to Bishop Carrell and urged him to visit St. Mary's Hospital. As the welfare of the poor lay close to his heart, he readily consented to make the visit. The result was that he communicated with Mother Frances requesting her to send on sisters for hospital work in his diocese. This Mother Frances promised to do, and if possible, to send them before the end of the year.





*First Hospital*

On November 3, 1860, Sisters Antonia, Laurentia, and Stylita, who were appointed by Mother Frances to begin the work in Covington, arrived in Cincinnati to the great joy and surprise of the sisters in St. Mary's as they had not expected them so soon.

#### THE FIRST HOUSE

A small brick building that had been used as a grocery store, was purchased by the Most Reverend Bishop Carrell for the sisters to begin their hospital work, and immediate preparations were made to put the house in a habitable condition. The sisters were given free passage on the ferryboats, which enabled them to return at night to St. Mary's until the Covington house should be ready for their occupancy.

The Benedictine Sisters from St. Joseph's parish were the first benefactors of the sisters, for they provided their dinners every day until they took up their residence in Covington. As there was no way in which they could heat water, a kindly disposed woman in the neighborhood offered to heat it for them. The Right Reverend Bishop often surprised the sisters while they were on their knees scrubbing, and he made every effort to cheer and encourage them in their difficult work.

As soon as the house had been made fairly habitable, the sisters took possession of it and immediately began the charitable work of nursing the patients in their own homes. Many alterations in the house would be necessary before it could receive patients, and it was not until the end of the year that the work was completed.

The hospital was dedicated privately by the Right Reverend Bishop as soon as the alterations were finished. The first patient was received on January 23, 1861, and was sent by Dr. Schwartz. On the second of February, the chapel was blessed and the first Mass said.

The Doctors of the city heartily welcomed the hospital. The first to offer his services was Dr. Joseph Blau. He was soon followed by Dr. Schwartz, who resigned in 1866, and who was succeeded by Dr. Kearns. At this time Dr. White and Dr. Noonan also offered their services. The doctors came whenever the sisters called them, and co-operated with them in every way possible.



It was indeed a trying period to establish a hospital, for there were rumors of war at this time, which actually became a fact in April of the same year. This made it doubly hard for the sisters as they had to depend upon the collection of alms for the maintenance of the sick under their care. Amid these varying and difficult circumstances they placed implicit trust in the Providence of God, who did not forsake them.

Soon after the war broke out, wounded soldiers of both armies were brought to the hospital, from the Southern battle fields. Many of the orphaned children of the men killed in battle were also brought to the institution. This was the beginning of the foundling home, which the sisters continued to operate until 1918. During the first year, seventy-nine patients were received, thirteen of whom died. Notwithstanding these disheartening experiences, the sisters continued to struggle on amid almost insurmountable obstacles. Often there was no coal, or food in the house. The sisters would then go to the store and beg for food. Their trust in God's Providence was always rewarded. The Right Reverend Bishop and the Reverend Father Butler often made the work of the sisters the subject of their sermons, which drew the attention of charitably disposed persons, who frequently offered them aid. Thus the sisters had to pass through those vicissitudes which every undertaking that has the honor and glory of God and the salvation of souls as its objective, must necessarily experience.

Year after year the number of patients increased until it became evident that the house was entirely too small for the growing needs of the city. This gave the sisters cause for increased worry as they had no funds wherewith to purchase another building. Fortunately they were resourceful even in this extremity, for they built a frame house on the grounds and this served as a home for the orphans, and provided more room in the hospital for the patients.

#### CHANGE OF LOCATION

In September, 1867 the newspaper reported that the City Council wished to erect a market-place on that part of Seventh Street which was occupied by the hospital. The sisters, therefore, had to seek another location. But where should they go? became their problem, for their financial condition was such that to build a new hospital was out of the question. In their distress they turned to St. Joseph, who had helped them on other occasions. Their great confidence in his power and assistance was rewarded; for the Right Reverend Bishop called a meeting of the clergy, at which the Reverend Conrad Rotter, pastor of St. Stephen's in Newport, declared himself ready to take the affairs of the hospital in hand. This he did with the approbation of the Right Reverend Bishop, and he began at once to solicit subscriptions in the different parishes. Search for a suitable location then began.

Fortunately, at this time a large building on Eleventh Street was being offered for sale. It had been built in 1840, for a Baptist College, and was used during the Civil War as a military hospital. This building was quite large, and with a few alterations could be made suitable for hospital purposes. Through the efforts of the Reverend Father Rotter the college building was secured on November 11, 1867. The work of renovating began at once and progressed so rapidly that in the spring of 1868, it was ready for occupancy, with the capacity of 110 beds.

In order to help lessen the financial burden of the sisters, the St. Elizabeth's Society was founded at this time. On Palm Sunday, April 5, 1868, the first meeting-of the society was held in the new hos-





pital on Eleventh Street. The Reverend Father's sermon on this occasion explained the object of the society and urged all present to join the new organization, which they did, and through this means the sisters gained many new friends. Mention must be made of the assistance which the editor of the *Wahrheitsfreund* gave to the institution by the articles which it printed at various times, and in which he brought the work of the sisters before the public. To aid in lifting the financial burden, the sisters undertook extensive collecting tours to the different parts of the country. Thus by following in the footsteps of their Holy Father St. Francis, they were able, through the generosity of benefactors, rich and poor, to aid many a poor sufferer in the course of years.

On the feast of our Lady, Help of Christians, the Right Reverend Lishop Carrell blessed the hospital, and a few days later, the patients were transferred to the new building. One of the greatest difficulties that had to be met was the scarcity of water, for the city, at this time, did not have a water-works system. The population had to depend upon cisterns, which frequently became dry, owing to the lack of rain. Often it became necessary to get water from the river—a task that caused great inconvenience and considerable labor. At the time of remodeling the building, the sisters had forseen the necessity for a water-works system, and had installed pipes throughout the house, feeling assured they would eventually be needed. A few years later, they installed a pump in the basement of the hospital, by means of which water from the cistern in the yard could be pumped to the different parts of the house. This improvement caused great rejoicing, for the difficult task of carrying water to different parts of the house was now eliminated. We can hardly realize what a hospital without hot and cold running water was like. Thus the sisters struggled on year by year, until the improvements were completed, and the building finally freed from debt.

In October of 1878 the authorities asked the sisters to admit to the hospital, the inmates of the Poor House, until a new building could be



erected as the one they were using was not fit to live in. The sisters out of sympathy for the poor consented. This accounts for many chronic invalids in the institution. The hospital has been and continues to be a refuge and comfort to thousands of sufferers, for the sisters labor on regardless of creed, color, or race, and for no motive other than to follow in the footsteps of the Master, who had promised to reward the least cup of water given in His name. During the epidemic of smallpox, the sisters took charge of the pesthouse. There again they had to work under extreme difficulty, for, owing to the malignancy of the disease and the dreaded fear of it, these noble women were often alone without any helpers to assist them. Thus the years passed, each succeeding year bringing more patients and more work. It was not long before this building had outgrown the needs of the growing community.

#### THE PRESENT LOCATION

The necessity for a new building had been painfully felt for many years, and mainly for the reason that a considerable amount of money had to be spent annually for repairs. Then, too, the proximity of the railroad yard, with its noise and smoke was a source of great annoyance to the sick. Therefore, efforts were made to find a suitable location for the erection of a New Hospital. With the approval of the Right Reverend Bishop Maes, the plot on Eastern Avenue was secured; and on the second of August, 1911, ground was broken for the erection of the new hospital, the completion of which resting solely upon the assurance that God would provide for the way. The Providence of God was soon wonderfully realized when the honorable Judge Frank M. Tracy of the Covington Circuit Court, voluntarily offered to form a committee of citizens and start a campaign to solicit subscriptions for the raising of a fund to erect the building.

Great enthusiasm was shown by the workers of the campaign, and a splendid spirit of charity was displayed by the people of the city and the vicinity.

The sisters have always enjoyed the good will of the Right Reverend Bishops and clergy, and could always rely upon them for assistance especially when on collecting tours. Besides those mentioned in the beginning of the sketch, the name of the Reverend James L. Gorey is outstanding. He was chaplain of the institution for twenty-one years, during which time he rendered valuable assistance through many difficult situations.

The cornerstone of the new building was laid on the fourteenth of June, 1912. The service was conducted by the Reverend James Gorey, Chancellor of the Diocese, in the presence of the sisters and friends. As the building progressed, interest in the work of the sisters was aroused, with the result that a few ladies of the various parishes of Covington, Newport, Ludlow, Bellevue, Dayton, and the surrounding towns met and decided to establish a charitable society for its benefit, which was to be known as the "Circle of Mercy." Its object was and is to provide help to carry on the charitable work of the sisters. The first meeting was held May 1, 1912. From time to time bazaars and card parties were given to help defray expenses. The sisters wish again to thank those men and women who in those earlier days gave their time and energy in securing funds for the new hospital, and who have ever since been staunch friends of the institution.

Owing to the absence of the Right Reverend Bishop Maes, the hospital at its completion was blessed privately. On Sunday, August 2,



1914 the hospital was opened for public inspection. The visitors were welcomed at the entrance by a reception committee of prominent citizens, and the inspection was continued, on Monday and Tuesday in order to give all an opportunity to visit the hospital. It was estimated that about 15,000 persons passed through the hospital at this time. On the fifteenth of August the first mass was said in the new chapel by the Reverend Busse, chaplain of the New Hospital. By the end of the month, all the patients had been removed from the old hospital to the new one. It was indeed a great change from the old to the quiet rooms of the new modern institution.

Routine life was resumed once more. Years rolled on with new cares and problems. They still had to struggle—as do the sisters at the present time—to meet their obligations. There were years of storm and criticism, but the sisters continued in a quiet way to work for the people of Covington and the surrounding cities, thinking only of the good they were able to do for suffering humanity. Each year new methods were adopted to keep pace with the progress made in the science of medicine and surgery. New equipment was installed from time to time, as it became necessary, in accordance with the demands of a modern institution.

Today when we consider the efficiency of St. Elizabeth's Hospital, we can scarcely visualize the little house on Seventh Street with its few patients and sisters. But it is to these pioneers that we owe a debt of gratitude for their efforts, their self-sacrifice, and their devotedness to God and to suffering humanity. Let us hope that the accomplishments of the past seventy-five years will be equaled, if not surpassed in the years to come, ever keeping pace in its progressiveness with the science of medicine. Let us trust that the spirit of the pioneers in this great movement will ever remain a living flame, reflecting its glory in the work accomplished in this noble institution.



*Chapel*