



The *Great* Canadian  
Catholic Hospital History Project

Documenting the legacy and contribution of the  
Congregations of Religious Women in Canada,  
their mission in health care, and the founding and operation of Catholic hospitals.

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Projet de la *Grande* Histoire  
des hôpitaux catholiques au Canada

Retracer l'héritage et la contribution des  
congrégations de religieuses au Canada,  
leur mission en matière de soins de santé ainsi que la fondation et l'exploitation des hôpitaux catholiques.

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**The Prairie Does Flourish**  
**Sisters of St. Elizabeth**  
**100 Years of Blooming on Canadian Soil**

by  
**Joan Eyolfson Cadham**

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# The Prairie Does Flourish

**Sisters of St. Elizabeth**

100 years of blooming on Canadian Soil

**Joan Eyolfson Cadham**

# The Prairie Does Flourish

*Sisters of St. Elizabeth –  
100 years of blooming on Canadian soil*

Joan Eyolfson Cadham

Published by  
Sisters of St. Elizabeth

Humboldt, Saskatchewan, Canada

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When a new committee of Sisters – Sisters Delphine, Philomena and Viola – took hold of the project, it became clear that we needed to bring another person on board to take on the actual writing of the book. Joan Eyolfson Cadham of Foam Lake, herself an author, reporter and regular contributor to the *Prairie Messenger*, generously took on the monumental task at this late date with the goal of having the book published by May of 2011.

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## *Introduction*

*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;  
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,  
and rejoice with joy and singing.*

(Isaiah 35:1-2)

Turning 100 years old makes heads turn and lands reporters on your doorstep. There is something about being an entire century old that makes others feel they are in the company of greatness. And so it should be.

After two harrowing weeks of travel, Sisters Augustina, Gabriela and Philomena arrived in Muenster on May 14, 1911 and took upon their resolute but fragile shoulders an enormous challenge. As I first learned of and truly absorbed the magnitude of their challenge, the image of the dead and bald prairie reared itself up in my mind. My oh my, I thought, did the dear Sisters have any idea what they had come to? Upon seeing the bald prairie, did they wonder how anything could grow on those dry and bare lands, literally and figuratively?

As the years unfolded, the Sisters adapted, persistently planting seeds of hope and care in the hearts of the early settlers, laying down their lives to care for the sick and dying, and braving storms, setbacks and hardships of all kinds. And behold, the lifeless land began to bloom. As the prairie surprises us with the crocus, the cactus flower, the lily and the wild rose, so the Sisters' efforts, planted in dry land and watered with the prayers and efforts of our pioneers, began to bear fruit. Several hospitals, nursing homes, home care organizations, a retreat centre and countless domestic services later, the Sisters of St. Elizabeth can be safely counted among the numerous religious orders which laid the foundation for health care in our province and in our country.

The story in the pages of this book is a sacred story. Someone's life story becomes "sacred" when her/his witness takes on a perennial quality. It's the kind of quality that inspires subsequent generations to give their lives to a wider vision, for the sake of bringing God's reign of justice and peace that much closer to reality.

The Sisters' witness falls into that category, showing us in very concrete ways how to take seriously the line in the Lord's Prayer: Your will be done, *on earth* as it is in heaven.



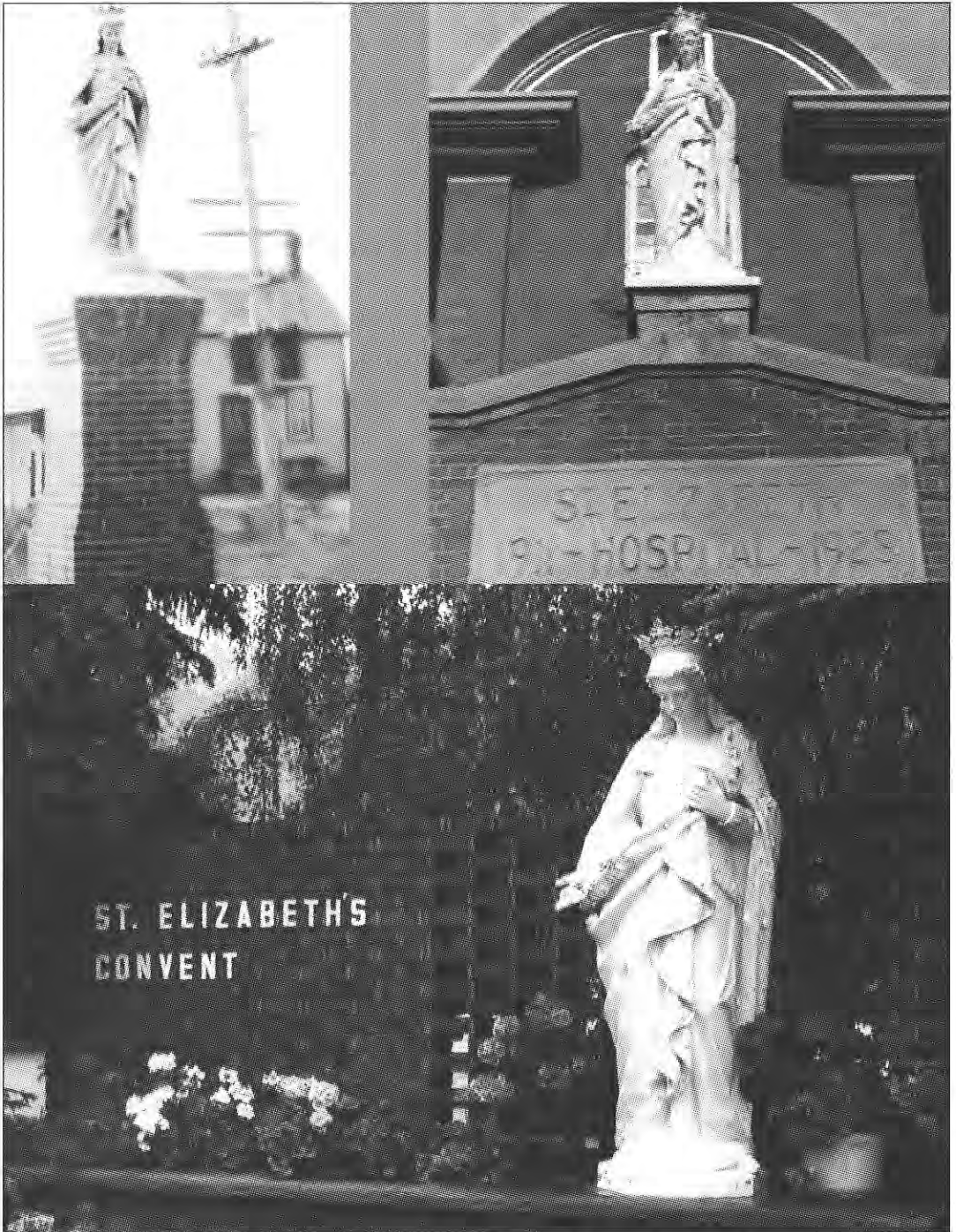
Every spring the crocus surprises us; just when life seems gone forever, the tiny purple flower shoots up quietly and quickly from the middle of dry clumps of grass, throwing its mighty little smile across the fields as far as it can reach. The cactus gives birth to its flower amidst its hostile prickles, as does the wild rose. The prairie lily crowns the prairie landscape with its glowing orange. Those who have eyes see the prairie land dance with life.

The prairie does flourish. The indelible mark and roots of love which the Sisters of St. Elizabeth have left in the prairie-ground will continue to bear the fruit of the Gospel, fertilized by their solid and courageous beginnings in this land.

*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.*

(John 15:13)

– *Marie Louise Ternier-Gommers*  
*History Book Committee Chair*



Sculpted in Europe, the statue of St. Elizabeth has stood in three different locations during her history in Humboldt. Originally, she stood on a pedestal on the west side of Main Street in front of the first hospital. After the additions completed in 1928 she moved to stand above the St. Elizabeth's Hospital entrance. Then in 1969, with the opening of the new Convent, she moved to her current location in front of the main entrance on 12th Street.

## Chapter 1

# The new world is calling

They had travelled for fifteen days, from their cloistered convent home in Austria, by train through Bavaria and Prussia, by steamboat to New York, by train across the United States and, finally, north to their new home in Muenster, Saskatchewan. It was 2:00 p.m. Five days of travelling by coach had taken its toll on the three Sisters. Their travelling companion, Fr. George Trunk, had wired ahead from Winnipeg with their arrival time but the telegram had been delayed a full day. There was nobody waiting for them at the station. Resolutely, Sr. Augustina Platzer, who was acting superior, Sr. Philomena Jug, and Sr. Gabriela Lex, picked up their suitcases and began to drag them up to the Benedictine monastery.

Not a whisper of the hazards of the journey crept into the letter that Sr. Augustina wrote later that evening, May 11, 1911, to the Rev. Mother General back at the motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth in Klagenfurt. "After a hearty dinner which tasted so good and after the joyful and warm welcome accorded us, I immediately sat down to tell you about the events and experiences of our trip," Sr. Augustina wrote. "On the trip, everything went well, in spite of the fact that we never slept more than one or two hours every night. Thus, we arrived in relatively good shape."

The nursing order of the Sisters of Elizabeth had been founded in Aachen, Germany, by Mother Apollonia Radermacher in 1626. The Aachen convent was the starting point for a long series of



**L to R: Sisters Philomena Jug, Augustina Platzer & Gabriela Lex arrive at St. Peter's Abbey with Fr. George Trunk.**

new independent convents, including, in 1690, one at Graz, Austria from where, in 1710, four Sisters had travelled to Klagenfurt to establish a convent in that city. As was the custom in Europe, although the Sisters were nurses, they lived in strict enclosure – structured, regulated, stable, under the authority of the local Bishop. The convent, the church and the hospital were all connected.

The convent, built around a central courtyard, was only one of the stately buildings in the long-established city of Klagenfurt. The bishop's seat of the Roman Catholic diocese of Gurk-Klagenfurt, and capital of the federal state of Carinthia in Austria, Klagenfurt had received its city charter in 1252. Over the centuries it had been ravaged by fires, earthquakes, invasions of locusts, and several wars, but the city always rose again, stronger and more beautiful. In 1863, Klagenfurt had been connected to the Vienna-Trieste railway system, benefiting the city in four ways: economically, architecturally (through the erection of an imposing central station), socially and politically. Klagenfurt became the absolute centre of the region. By 1880, the population was 16,592; with the military included, the total population was 18,749. The baroque-style parish church and the sixteenth-century baroque-style cathedral, where the pulpit and paintings on the high altar date back to the mid-1700s, were only two examples of the beautiful buildings that graced the urban landscape.

Over the years, the congregation had struggled financially, having to limit the number of Sisters to 40, often with a long list of potential candidates. The Sisters



**The founder of The Sisters of St. Elizabeth of the Third Order, Regular of St. Francis of Assisi, Mother Apollonia Radermacher.**



**St. Elizabeth's in Klagenfurt – convent, hospital, and church in one big building.**

were highly regarded and widely acknowledged as providing a much-needed quality service to the area. Therefore, in 1910, Mother Pulcheria Wilhelm, superior general at Klagenfurt, announced her desire to celebrate the bicentenary of their foundation by establishing a lasting legacy. Her choice was to create a foundation in America.



**Fr. Alexander Berthold recommended Canada as a good place for an Elizabethan mission.**

From concept to reality, establishing a new foundation was fraught with challenges. In fact, Canada was not the first destination Mother Pulcheria considered. In November 1908, there was a celebration of Investiture and Profession for new members, a day when dispensation from enclosure was granted so that outsiders could enter areas ordinarily reserved for the Sisters. On that occasion, the Elizabethans had a visit from Abbot Boniface Ecker of the Olivantine Fathers at Tanzenberg, near Klagenfurt. He spoke of his intention to create a foundation in Brazil for his own community and invited the Klagenfurt Sisters to join them. The idea was received with such enthusiasm that five

Sisters immediately began studying Portuguese. However, a year passed with no movement toward South America and no further word from the Abbot.

In 1910, the Sisters met Fr. Alexander Berthold, confessor and spiritual director of the nearby Good Shepherd convent, who had come to Klagenfurt for the investiture of one of his acquaintances. He had spent forty years doing pastoral work in America and had left his heart there. As the Klagenfurt Sisters were interested in establishing their Order in America, they spoke to him about it. Telling him of their plans for Brazil, Fr. Berthold countered, "Brazil is not the place for you. North America, especially Canada, is the place." He recommended British Columbia as a possible location.

Looking for outside advice on a suitable Canadian location, Fr. Berthold wrote to Fr. Bruno Doerfler, OSB, an acquaintance of his and head of the Benedictines in Muenster. On May 19, Prior Bruno responded. He wanted the Sisters for Saskatchewan, for Humboldt, for St. Peter's Colony which had been established in 1903.

Fr. Berthold was so pleased that he immediately wrote to Mother Pulcheria,



**The city of Klagenfurt about 1911.**

saying that Prior Bruno could even obtain a reduced fare to Canada and would be able to suggest the best route. A second letter followed. He had written to Bishop Albert Pascal, OMI, of Prince Albert who had approved the plan. "It would be best if you would go to Canada yourself with four other Sisters, around the beginning of September," Fr. Berthold wrote. "These Sisters could probably help out in other hospitals and learn the English language while waiting for the completion of your hospital at Humboldt." And, he added, "I would regret very much if I had started only a straw fire through my correspondence. It was meant to create an everlasting glow in America. Since I have started to use my influence to implement your plans, I would ask you to put all your energy into the execution of them, so that I may not become an object of ridicule in the eyes of the world. Whenever I began something in America, I was always successful."

The Bishop in Klagenfurt was not as enthusiastic. Klagenfurt would be losing those Sisters. They might be taking considerable amounts of money with them. Besides, the Bishop did not believe that these cloistered women could manage in a foreign land.

Fr. Berthold was undaunted. He wrote again to Mother Pulcheria. "I only ask that you calmly reflect on these few questions: What kind of advice can a Bishop



**Mother Pulcheria Wilhelm, foundress of the Humboldt mission of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth.**

give in matters entirely foreign to him? Klagenfurt is in Europe and Saskatchewan in distant North America. What great works can be undertaken without money? Is it possible to find, in any part of the world, a hospital completely furnished and finished, supplied with beds and patients, simply awaiting Sisters to come along and accept it as a gift? Why start a hospital of 30 to 50 beds right away in some small place, when 20 to 25 beds would suffice for about four to six years? Why expend 150,000 kronen immediately when one-third of it would be sufficient for the purpose?"

Mother Pulcheria was committed, but she was also very practical. She wrote to Prior Bruno. "I would testify to the joy and willingness of the Sisters, and even to their developing a healthy common sense toward making a new foundation.

Thus, if the doctors of this place, or whoever is the authoritative body, are satisfied with our qualifications, we would be willing to come, but it must not be too soon. Time is required to make the necessary preparations and very likely to ask Rome's permission first. How nice it would be after so many years to establish a little convent overseas, especially during our Jubilee year." She readily admitted that she would accept help. "Frankly speaking, we are not academic women and do not have to be for the type of work we are doing. The patients are very fond of us and we are very fond of them."

It looked so easy.

Roman Catholic administrative structures in Saskatchewan did not begin with parishes and dioceses. The first structures were very large apostolic vicariates. The Apostolic Vicariate of Saskatchewan was founded in 1890, with Prince Albert as the see city. In 1891, Bishop Pascal, OMI, was named its first apostolic vicar.

Bishop Pascal gave his approval to the Elizabethans' plans. He had also consented to the Sisters supporting themselves and their project by collecting alms in the territory stretching from Warman to the boundaries of Manitoba along the Canadian Northern Railway. Several priests offered their assistance, including Fr. George Trunk, the parish priest of Villach, west of the Klagenfurt Basin. The only negative voice had come from the chancery office of the Bishop of Gurk, the pilgrimage town near Klagenfurt.

Nobody would have foreseen the turmoil caused by the fatal crash of the "Centralkasse", the credit union, a financial institution which was run by the clergy. Msgr. Weiss, the director and manager, had disappeared, leaving behind debts and disorder. Many people lost everything they had. The convent, which, at the request of the Bishop, had invested part of their capital, lost more than 100,000 kronen, about \$200,000.

There was no money available to launch the new venture.

Mother Pulcheria was having second thoughts, although her basic belief



**Most Rev. Bishop Albert Pascal, OMI, of Prince Albert, apostolic vicar of Saskatchewan at the time the Sisters came to Saskatchewan.**



**Prior Bruno Doerfler, OSB.  
Later Abbot Bruno.**

in the project remained strong. In a letter to Prior Bruno in September 1910, she wrote: "Should we risk to undertake the project with the present means or should we wait? This undertaking has caused us much suffering already, more particularly myself but also the convent. I have, however, always thought that a cause usually becomes anchored during a storm and if it be God's will it will move again. Personally, I have not changed my mind as to the undertaking." She did suggest that, as a cost-saving measure, perhaps Fr. Trunk would not need to accompany the Sisters to Canada.

Prior Bruno was undaunted. According to his math, the hospital in Humboldt could be realized for \$10,000 to \$12,000 and if the Sisters could bring \$3,100 to \$3,600, he could help raise up to \$2,000 from private individuals, leaving a debt of only \$5,000 to \$7,000 which, he insisted, did not mean much for a hospital under American conditions. Prior Bruno's estimates were based on a frame building. Brick would cost an extra \$2,000. With regard to the debt, Prior Bruno wrote to Mother Pulcheria, "The Sisters do not have to be concerned because wealthy Catholic people have assured me that they would vouch for the Sisters. If there is an efficient procurator who knows how to manage so that the expense can be kept as low as possible without depriving the patients of essential needs, there is no doubt that within a few years the institution will be free of debt."

There were other delays, again not of the convent's making. Until the matter of the credit union collapse and the disappearance of the manager, Msgr. Weiss, was resolved, none of the clergy were allowed to leave Austria. There would be no escort for the Sisters until then. As well, in the face of the scandal, Bishop Joseph Kahn had resigned. The proposal for the foundation in Humboldt now had to be approved by the new Bishop, Dr. Kaltner.

By now, Prior Bruno was getting anxious. Word had it that the Protestants were going to establish a hospital at Quill Lake, which was about 60 km east of Humboldt. This was serious business. The major interest in the area had been during 1903 when young immigrants moved north from the United States. There was a distinct urban/rural split, with Humboldt and Watson, the two major urban areas, mainly non-German and Protestant, while the rural areas of the colony were German and Roman Catholic.

In a letter to Mother Pulcheria, Prior Bruno expressed his concerns. "The people in Humboldt have become disturbed. The Catholic doctor in Humboldt



stated that if a definite statement was not soon forthcoming, he would approach an unnamed French community of Sisters who would be prepared, he thought, to build a hospital." The intent, said Prior Bruno, was to get ahead of Quill Lake "and be assured that no competition could come from there." He added a little more pressure. The area, he said, was largely German. To have French Sisters build the hospital in the area would be a regretful occurrence.

Eventually Mother Pulcheria was able to provide Prior Bruno with promising news. The Sisters were planning to leave for Canada at the end of April or the beginning of May. Fr. P. Volhert, SJ, extraordinary confessor to the Sisters, who was about to make his visit to Rome, was delegated to handle the matter of papal permission. During his audience, Pope Pius X praised the undertaking and gave his verbal apostolic blessing for the journey. The Holy See issued a decree granting the desired written permission for the Sisters to found a house in Humboldt, provided they obtained permission from the Ordinary of the diocese.

With the obvious roadblocks out of the way, on April 30, 1911, in the company of their escort, Fr. George Trunk, Sr. Augustina, Sr. Philomena, and Sr. Gabriela left Klagenfurt for the unknown land.

While Sr. Augustina's initial letters were full of comforting phrases, when Mother Pulcheria began to plan a trip to Canada to visit the fledgling convent and hospital a few years later, Sr. Augustina provided a more accurate account as a warning to her. "You must take a good rest when you arrive in New York. Stay there at least two days and then take sleeping car accommodation for the rest of the trip," she wrote later that year. "As hasty a trip as we made you would certainly not survive. Sr. Gabriela and I had swollen feet and felt pain in them. We were afraid they would break out into sores."



## Chapter 2

# Beginnings: Fragile and Challenging

The landscape that confronted three exhausted Sisters as they, burdened with their suitcases, made their way toward the abbey, bore no relationship to the home they had left in Austria fifteen days earlier.

Muenster was a raw, new settlement, long on space, short on accepted amenities. The area had been established in 1878 when Humboldt had become a Dominion Telegraph Station along the established settlers' route from Fort Edmonton to Fort Garry, the Carlton Trail. The German American Land Company purchased 100,000 acres of railway land in the Humboldt district and sold it to settlers who wanted more than a quarter-section homestead. The Catholic Settlement Society of St. Paul, Minn. agreed to advertise the colony and provide settlers. The federal government agreed to reserve 50 townships for the colony on the condition that it bring 500 settlers a year for three years. Benedictine monks promised to take over the care of souls in the proposed St. Peter's Colony, named after Abbot Peter Engel, OSB, of St. John's Abbey. The first priests and brothers arrived on May 21, 1903. The Canadian Northern Railway came through Muenster and Humboldt in the fall of 1904 and brought in the settlers, although some arrived through Rosthern as the railway from Regina pushed through earlier. By 1907, Humboldt, described initially as "a wilderness of sloughs and bluffs," had a population of 425, enough to become incorporated officially as a town.

However, the Sisters' journey had ended at Muenster, six miles away. In 1904,



St. Peter's Abbey and Church seen looking northwest. Circa 1910.

the monks at the abbey had begun publication of a German-language newspaper, *Der Bote*. There were 17 monks at the abbey.

The cathedral church had been completed in 1910. For the rest, the fledgling community was composed of the station, a dozen businesses along Railway Avenue, and four houses across the road. There was a livery barn, a hotel, a post office, a shoe maker, and a pair of general stores. There was no electricity, no sewer system, no running water, no phones. As for the roads, Sr. Augustina wrote back to Klagenfurt that the trip to Humboldt, six miles (10 km) away, took about two hours.

As the three Sisters made their way to the monastery, they were met by some of the monks who took over the suitcases. They were also presented with the means to freshen up after their long trip – a pail filled with dark brown rain water.

Almost immediately, they were faced with surviving multiple introductions to their new community. Following a late lunch the Sisters were taken to the house chapel. At 4:00 p.m., there were May devotions and the Sisters were introduced to the assembly gathered there. On their way out of church, they discovered that the Abbot had called in all the important personalities of the community, including the mayor of Humboldt, O.W. Andreasen. By the evening of May 14, in spite of valiant attempts to put a good face to everything in her letter back to Mother Pulcheria, Sr. Augustina ended with, “Now I must close for today, for I am very tired.”

Early in the discussions regarding the Humboldt foundation, Prior Bruno had expressed some misgivings about transplanting cloistered Sisters abruptly from an old, established European city to a pioneer settlement in Saskatchewan. In a 1910 letter to Mother Pulcheria, he wrote, “I cannot unconditionally advise you to pick up the project and go about sending a group of Sisters immediately.

“I do not know how the Sisters from Europe would accept these conditions, which are so different. Our severe winters will probably not affect the Sisters too much since their duties will more or less keep them in a well-warmed hospital. Likely it will be the different languages and customs of the various nationalities which will appear strange to them at the beginning. Perhaps they will also be homesick for the mountains of their homeland in this comparatively flat country. The freedom in the country may appear strange even though not uncomfortable to them. But,” he added, “with regard to Church authorities, one has much more freedom than over there. So long as you observe your constitutions and those regulations prescribed by the Holy See, you need not fear that the bishops will interfere with your affairs.”



**O.W. Andreasen, Humboldt's first mayor (1907 – 1914).**

In his list of potential problems, Prior Bruno had missed something small but significant that was going to present the Sisters with a painfully immediate obstacle to adapting to their new life. While the Sisters were at lunch at the abbey, Prior Bruno had excused himself. In order to provide the Sisters with a little convent, he evicted the abbey chef and his wife from their small building next to the monastery. When the thoroughly tired Sisters attempted to settle in for a decent sleep, they discovered that the place was infested with bed bugs. They spent that, and many subsequent nights out of bed.

There was no time to catch up on sleep. On May 15, the prior whisked them off to Humboldt to begin negotiations for the building of a hospital. Possibly they also dropped Fr. Trunk at the railway station. He was heading back to Austria. A day later, the townspeople held a general meeting, also regarding the building of a hospital, an idea which was apparently well received. "Indeed," Sr. Augustina wrote back to Mother Pulcheria, "we had been expected impatiently for some time since our departure had been delayed for so long."

May 17 saw the Sisters back on the road with Prior Bruno, on their way to Prince Albert by horse and buggy to be presented to Bishop Pascal and to receive his blessing. Prior Bruno had to serve as translator from French to German. The bishop expressed his joy over the Sisters' arrival but explained that, being poor himself, he had no money for them. He did agree, as a special privilege, to allow the Sisters to have the Blessed Sacrament as soon as a suitable building made that possible.

And then respite, and an opportunity for untroubled sleep. The Sisters were gathered up by members of the Notre Dame de Sion convent who ran a boarding school in Prince Albert. They stayed until May 20. They lived at the convent, visited the Holy Family hospital which had been recently opened, and were impressed. During the day, they could use the assistant superior's room and any Sisters of Sion who had some free time between classes would teach them English.

Although grateful for the little oasis of calm, the Sisters were finding life in the new settlement rough going. "With regard to our prayer life," Sr. Augustina wrote, "things are not so good since we are always on the go, having to be now here and now there. Our prayer life is thus frequently disturbed. I am sure the good Lord has reason at times to be dissatisfied. This also holds for my efforts at writing. Everything has to be done in a great rush."

It was great rushing without visible progress.

The architect, Hans Oluf Andreas Albrechtsen from Prince Albert, had designed the hospital for the Sisters of Charity and agreed to draw up plans for a Humboldt hospital. The original concept of a wooden frame building had been replaced with a plan for brick because the cost of wood had gone up significantly. Incoming settlers were buying up all the available supplies for their own houses and wood was often

not available. Plans had to be ratified by the government on the understanding that if all conditions were met, the Sisters would receive 50 cents a day for each patient. In spite of all attempts at speeding up the process, it was obvious that the hospital could not be ready until the following spring at the earliest and most likely not until the fall.

The Town of Humboldt had offered a choice of two building sites, both free. However, Prior Bruno advised refusing the offers because the Sisters would not have clear title to the land. They would only have use of the land as long as the hospital was there. He also advised turning down another plot of 10 acres, also free, offered by Dr. Len Barry of Humboldt. That property, he felt, was too far out of town, and he was concerned that the other Humboldt doctors would object.

The Sisters did find a spot they liked, 7½ acres on the northern edge of Humboldt, conveniently situated with water supplied by a pipeline. Water was going to be a problem. The town did not have its own water supply and the only source was from the railway company which owned the waterline to Burton Lake. On the other hand, Philip Flory, the owner of the property, was prepared to sell the land for \$50 an acre for the hospital, although it was worth twice that much. Later, the Sisters bought another 2½ acres, bringing their total property to 10 acres.

Language was an on-going challenge. The community was solidly German but business people and government authorities spoke only English. The newspaper, the *Humboldt Journal*, was published in English. Moreover, the Sisters, as Prior Bruno had suspected, were undeniably homesick. "We ask you from the bottom of our hearts to pray for us, because we need it," Sr. Augustina wrote. "It has been so long since we have been away from the convent that we feel really homesick for it. Sr. Gabriela especially must feel it, but even I have strong bouts of it at times."

Meanwhile, there was no agreement on the size of the hospital. The prior's opinion was that there should be between 15 and 20 beds. The architect's design was for 25 to 28 beds. In 1910, the prior and the doctors had believed a hospital could be built for \$10,000. Now they had upgraded the cost to \$15,000, an estimate which also proved to be too low. After the Sisters paid for the building site, they were left with \$20 in the cash box with little prospects of raising more. Sr. Augustina wrote Mother Pulcheria, asking for money, but the Klagenfurt convent was cash-strapped as a result of the heavy losses suffered by the failure of the Central Kasse, and was caught in an impossible situation that stripped the Sisters of control of their own money.

The anger that had spread through the civil authorities and the general population of Austria over the now-collapsed credit union with the resultant disorder and debts had spilled over to a general mistrust toward the clergy and religious institutions. Added to that problem, the local authorities might have been worried that the Klagenfurt convent was about to move large sums of money to their Canadian

foundation. Whatever the reason, the right to administer their property at their own discretion was taken away from the superior at the convent. The Sisters had always been under the jurisdiction of the local bishop and could not, without his permission, undertake any important project or make any large expenditure of money. Now, added to that restriction, was the supervisory role of the Austrian government and the finance minister. The smallest transaction – buying, selling or making a donation – had to be approved by these three levels of government.

Lack of funds was not the only problem facing the new Elizabethan nursing community in Saskatchewan. Government policy in Canada stipulated that only trained nurses could care for sick people. The two years of required training would be prohibitively expensive.

None of the Sisters who had come to Saskatchewan had any official diploma from either Austria or Canada. They wanted to enter hospitals where they could acquire the necessary skills and the clinical experience that they were lacking and learn enough English to write the required exams. Otherwise, it would be necessary, at least at the beginning, to hire trained nurses, a heavy financial burden for a small new hospital, given that the monthly fee for one nurse was about \$100. Although Prior Bruno suggested that the Sisters go to some hospital for a brief period of training and an opportunity to learn English, he restrained the Sisters from leaving until construction of the hospital was underway.

The local doctors, meanwhile, wanted the Sisters to tend patients in private homes. The mayor was opposed to the idea because he thought that the people would not learn to trust the Sisters if they began their work in such a small way. Prior Bruno concurred with that opinion, saying that it was better not to take any risks until the hospital was ready.

Prior Bruno also asked the Sisters whether or not Mother Pulcheria intended to send enough Sisters to staff the hospital fully, given that hired help would be too expensive. Sr. Augustina agreed, saying that there were no living quarters for outside staff in the hospital plan, except for one male assistant.

By now, Sr. Augustina was feeling the pressure. “I would be very happy, dear Rev. Mother,” she wrote, “if they (the extra Sisters) could come in the fall and stay on immediately, for when the building is finished, there is all the furnishing to be done. Whether I myself can be present for it I do not know. Prior Bruno thinks I should be there but I begged him to let me go. I asked him to consider it since he shoulders the full responsibility in any event and since I’m unable even to converse with the construction foreman. I told him that I could be gaining knowledge at a hospital during that time, particularly if I were at Saskatoon, which is not far at all. He finally agreed to this.”

However, Prior Bruno had raised another issue in a letter to Mother Pulcheria.

“And now I have a big request,” he wrote. “In our little monastery the kitchen set-up is very poor since we have no lay brothers to take care of it. Outsiders tend to be unreliable and are hard to find for such a job. At present we have an elderly couple to take care of the cooking and baking, but the work is too hard for them and they would like to withdraw. The Sisters here think that you might be able to send us some Sisters to handle the cooking, baking and washing for the monastery. The kitchen and dining hall, as well as the pantry and supply rooms, are in a separate building. We also have in the neighbourhood a house with six rooms which could be adapted to the Sisters’ use. Usually we are nine people in the monastery besides three hired men, but it is to be expected that this number will increase as time goes on. We make no big demands for special quality cooking and baking but are satisfied with simple, healthy, plain fare. I believe three Sisters could easily handle the cooking, baking and washing in the monastery. I would like to ask you to help us in this matter if at all possible.”

Meanwhile, Dr. Barry had modified his house so that it could serve as a small temporary hospital where he could do surgery. A graduate of McGill University in Montreal, he had practiced briefly in Regina before locating to Humboldt about 1909. He had often worried about cases that he felt should have hospital treatment but the question was always, “Can I get this patient to Saskatoon before it is too late?” Although he wanted the Sisters to serve as nurses, Prior Bruno dissuaded them from accepting the assignment. His reason, he said, was “for fear that some failure would occur and hurt the Sisters’ reputation.” A doctor and registered nurse came out from Saskatoon, but a few days after the first operation, Dr. Barry again asked the Sisters to take over nursing care and Sr. Augustina accepted.

Obviously, Sr. Augustina never did go to Saskatoon. Later she wrote back to



**Dr. Len Barry sitting in his clinic.**





**This house was located on the grounds of the abbey in Muenster. The Sisters lived here until a house was built in Humboldt.**

Klagenfurt, "I have just returned from Dr. Barry's hospital where I was relieved by Sr. Philomena. I have been working there for five months now and have assisted at seven operations, of which two were appendectomies. There was also the case of a woman having an eye removed. At the last two operations I had to administer the chloroform since the doctor assigned to this function could not be there. I also had to treat a Protestant man with a broken foot. He was said to be formerly unfavourably disposed toward the Sisters, but since he was quite sick and needed a lot of care, particularly during the night, he expressed his satisfaction to the other patients and is now in quite the opposite frame of mind."

As upbeat as Sr. Augustina tried to sound, life was obviously not easy. "Our prayer life is suffering these days. Private nursing is demanding since the patients are so exacting. Thus I once spent eight days with a woman patient without being able to go to bed for even one night." She tried to put a positive spin on even that story. "The wages are good, however, \$3 a day, and this will help us in the building of the new hospital. Also, the service to the sick we have rendered thus far will benefit the collection which I am about to undertake (until now I have had no time for it) since it has made us better known amongst the people."

If Sr. Augustina was feeling homesick and lonely for the comfortable rituals of the cloister and the community she had once enjoyed, matters were about to become more difficult. Prior Bruno, looking for a hospital where the Sisters could receive their necessary upgrades, was in contact with the Benedictine Sisters in Duluth, Minn., who offered to take two Sisters, teach them English, and allow them to take

nursing courses. Sr. Philomena and Sr. Gabriela left for the United States on Sept. 18, 1911, leaving Sr. Augustina alone, combining home nursing with travelling around the colony on an alms collecting tour in support of the hospital.

Winter began early that year. Because of the severe cold, work on construction of the hospital stopped at the beginning of November with only the walls of the ground floor completed. The begging tour also had to be interrupted. However, now Sr. Augustina had some joy to anticipate. In the spring, Mother Pulcheria would come to Humboldt herself to organize things. Sandwiched in and around her repeated requests for Mother Pulcheria to come to Canada, Sr. Augustina finally told the truth about their trip, warning Mother Pulcheria to arrange her voyage with great care.

Her hopes for support were short-lived. Mother Pulcheria became ill in Klagenfurt. As she recovered, Sr. Augustina sent a letter written with unusual honesty. "Yesterday I returned from nursing a lady who would have liked me to stay on for another month. I just could not do it, for my own health was being impaired by it. I had a high fever for a few days. I think the cause was the lack of sleep since the time remaining over from nursing I had to spend in prayer and the care of the little baby. I earned \$40 for that month, which is really a bit less than in other places, but since the lady has tuberculosis which is a lingering illness, I did not want to take more. Dear Mother, you ask whether the Sisters should come in the spring even if the hospital is not ready. Yes, of course. Let there be many and let them be brave ones who come, for there will certainly be enough work."

On April 11, 1912, Sr. Augustina wrote: "A whole year will soon have flown by in the stream of eternity since we departed from our dear cloister where so many graces were imparted to us and from the community of unforgettable Sisters whose many good deeds, teaching and examples we are grateful for. Yes, the 30th of April will surely be the most unforgettable of our lives. Yes, were it not a work of God and had not God's grace strengthened my recalcitrant nature, I would never have been able to make the necessary sacrifices."

Finally help was at hand. A small temporary house was under construction for the Sisters. Although it was initially meant to be a barn, it had been remodelled into a dwelling. The two Sisters who had gone to Duluth returned for Easter and began nursing in private homes. Plans were underway for Prior Bruno to go to Austria to escort seven Sisters and a laywoman who had served the Klagenfurt community as hired help for many years. The three pioneers would soon be given back some sense of community.

## Chapter 3

# An Inside Look

The first group of Sisters had, of course, no way of knowing how they would feel when they left their cloister to travel halfway around the world. Because Sr. Augustina was so determinedly positive, it is possible that the second wave was not much better prepared, although Sr. Augustina had let slip a few phrases in her regular letters to Mother Pulcheria, including, "Let there be many and let them be brave ones who come, for there will certainly be enough work."

On the other hand, Sr. Augustina's rare negative comments were refuted by Prior Bruno's glowing reports: "The Sisters are not only healthier and stronger than they were in Klagenfurt, but they are cheerful and full of hope. Often have they told me: 'If only the Sisters over there knew how good our prospects here are.' If I then said: 'Why don't you write them?' the answer would be: 'It's no use. They wouldn't believe us. But if we wrote that things are going badly, they would believe us.' Perhaps,



Left to Right: Sr. Augustina Platzer, Sister Philomena Juch (Jug), Sr. Gabriela Lex.

Reverend Mother, you will feel the same way about what I am writing to you. And I cannot blame you, for it is because there is such a difference between the situation here and that over there. Someone who knows only the situation over there cannot possibly have any conception as to that over here. I assure you, though, that all I have written in this long letter corresponds exactly to facts." Prior Bruno was also elated that the monastery had been raised to the status of abbey. He was consecrated as the first Abbot on October 18, 1911.

Perhaps, if the second group of Sisters awaiting Abbot Bruno, who was going to accompany them to Canada, had been privy to Sr. Philomena's diary, they might have

been better prepared. Sr. Philomena addressed her diary to “Dear Brother.” In it, she was completely and totally honest in her evaluation of the physical, mental and emotional devastation created by leaving the cloister to make the trip to Humboldt. She was 34 when she made the trip. In her diary, she wrote:

“Mother Pulcheria received a letter in which Prior Bruno asked the Sisters to come and start a hospital. It took nearly two years before things became serious since many Sisters, especially the older ones, were opposed to sending the Sisters so far away. But Prior Bruno did not give up until he achieved his goal. Then began the discussion of who should be sent. Mother Pulcheria said the Sisters who were prepared to go to the mission should let her know in writing. Several Sisters expressed their wish to be sent. I, however, did not volunteer since I thought I wouldn’t be sent anyway and there were others who were better suited than I was. Sr. Euphrasia came to me and said that Mother Pulcheria was displeased because I had not volunteered. She said I should satisfy her by doing it. So I volunteered. I wrote in a few words that if it were God’s will, I would be ready to go to Canada. At first I was not chosen and I was happy. Three others were designated until one of them changed her mind one week before the date of departure and I was asked to replace her. I let out a sigh of shock. I know it was all like a dream. I had not thought about anything. I would not even have remembered to notify my mother and brothers and sisters if one of the others had not reminded me, it all happened so fast.

“On Monday I was told I was going and on the following Sunday we were leaving. Early on Sunday morning, my poor mother came. I believe Justin was with her. I was called to go to her. We both began to cry and couldn’t say a word. Then I was called again. I told mother that I would be right back, but with all the running back and forth, all the crying and farewells, I forgot about mother. Then all at once everything was moving down to the yard where a beautiful covered carriage was waiting to take us to the train station. We were climbing into it when I heard a painful shriek. It was my mother. I believe she heard all the commotion and preparations for departure as she waited at the entrance.”

The convent was run under the rules of strict cloister. Nobody from the outside was allowed in. Sr. Philomena’s mother had been waiting at one end of the building, where visitors were received, but the entourage was leaving from the cloistered side.

Sr. Philomena continued: “She forgot everything – that strangers were not allowed into the convent interior – she ran through the convent and screamed and cried heart-rending screams as the carriage was already leaving. She hung onto it and several Sisters had to forcefully pull her away. Oh, the poor mother. That was some farewell without saying a word. What happened to her after that and how she returned home I never heard. She herself couldn’t write and the other children were too small and incapable of writing that kind of letter.”

(Sr. Philomena did return to Europe in 1931 with Sr. Salesia Scheriau, who was returning permanently to Klagenfurt. During her time in Klagenfurt, she had the opportunity to visit her aged mother.)

“The three of us packed our few things into small trunks and a photo was taken of us. I looked awful. The previous winter, many of our Sisters had the flu. I, however, was in good health and took care of my Sisters. It was very strenuous duty, and I, too, became ill – with bronchitis. The illness affected my heart and I was given the last rites. Soon after, however, I recovered, but I was very weak. That was in February 1911 and in April of the same year we left. That is why I still looked like a ghost, and then that long journey!

“That last night at the convent I could not sleep. There was so much to prepare and so many people wanted to see us. At that time, the whole idea of going to America, especially for Sisters, was an extraordinary event. There was so much crying and such turmoil. In the morning, we left for the train station. It was raining and snowing, which made the farewell even more difficult. An elderly lady, who had been living with us in the convent for several years, drove along to the train

and to Villach because we were so uninformed and helpless.”

Fr. Trunk chose to meet the Sisters at Villach, the location of his parish, about 40 km from Klagenfurt.

Sr. Philomena continued: “We travelled through Salzburg, changed our currency and travelled on through Munich. The other three were sleeping but I was wide awake and admired the beautifully lit city. I was unable to close my eyes all night. There was no decent place to lie down. We were just the four of us in this coach but Fr. Trunk lay on one seat and slept well. The other two Sisters crowded together on the other seat. I was sitting by the window, looking out into the dark night, praying and always happy when the lights of another city or town popped up.



**Sr. Philomena Jug, one of the first three Sisters to come to Humboldt, pictured on the back steps of St. Elizabeth's Convent, Humboldt, sometime after 1929.**

“The sunrise on the morning of May 1 was glorious to see. The beautiful greens, the blooming meadows and trees gave me joy, but, at the same time, I cried tears of real sorrow. After all, we were on the way to the faraway strange land of America and especially Canada. We had imagined all kinds of terrible things, since we knew nothing about the world. It seemed to me that we were being sent into the wilderness where there were only wild people and wild animals. At home, in the convent, I didn’t have time to think about it but here, as I sat all alone in the true sense of the word, I could think. Surprisingly, I was not afraid.

“I do remember that we suffered a great deal of hunger. On Sunday morning, we didn’t feel like eating. Nothing went down. We had taken a packed lunch along but we had eaten almost all of it before we had arrived at Villach. There was only a small portion left for us in the afternoon. None of us realized what a trip of this kind would be like, so we weren’t prepared. We had very little food for that day and on the second day the hunger pangs were intense. Fr. Trunk tried to console us, saying that we would be in Berlin by 8:00 a.m. where we would have an hour’s stop with time to have breakfast before leaving for Bremen. Alas, as we disembarked in Berlin, we were told to embark immediately on another train and continue on, not to Bremen but to Hamburg. Apparently there was some mishap on the railway so we had to take a different route. We were famished and feeling weak.

“Fr. Trunk came to see how we were. We were, however, so timid we didn’t dare admit that we were at the end of our strength. We were frightened of this big strange priest. At 3:00 p.m. we arrived at Hamburg. Here we had ample time and could get a hot meal at the station. What a feeling to see all these people. It was May 1, and perhaps a holiday. There was music all over and here we were like shy birds among this crowd of people, many of whom stared at us as if they had never seen Sisters before. Probably we looked very simple-minded and plain.”

They travelled from Hamburg to Bremen, arriving at supper time and having their first really substantial meal in two days. They also attended Mass, but Sr. Philomena could not remember the details.

Sr. Philomena continued to write: “All I remember is a very large dark church and that a friendly elderly priest brought an elderly woman to meet us after Mass and asked us if she could travel with us. She stayed close to us. Then we had a genuine American breakfast – coffee, meat and potatoes – which seemed very queer to us since we had never heard, let alone seen, anything like that. Fr. Trunk knew all about it since he had been in America before. It was 10:30 when the train arrived to take us to the harbour. As we embarked onto the ship there was music, oh, so sad! Many people said farewell to their loved ones and there were many tears. Sr. Augustina, too, began to sob bitterly. I had wept already at Villach when the reality of this trip became clear to me and I realized we would never return. When we boarded the ship we were

given a cabin for the three of us. Sr. Augustina had a bed, Sr. Gabriela a so-called shelf, and I had a sofa.

“We sat in our cabin most of the time. We read, sang and even had our May devotions. The lady who had joined us earlier often came to see us and we entertained one another. Fr. Trunk came from time to time to see how we were getting along. The ship’s crew also checked in and sometimes we went up on the deck. We loved to go there early in the morning so we could watch the sunrise before the people came out. One day when we were on deck, Fr. Trunk said, ‘On the other side of the deck there is a lot of activity already.’ We didn’t know what he meant and wanted to see but he laughed and advised us not to go. Alas, at that moment Sr. Augustina became ill and we returned to our cabin.

“It is not agreeable for religious, especially for Sisters, to be travelling. We just didn’t seem to belong among the crowd. I felt like a bird that has been chased away. The beautiful ship *Kaiser Wilhelm* appeared to be completely Protestant. There were three or four priests on board but we never had Mass. Fr. Trunk wasn’t even dressed like a priest. He looked like any other man. In New York, he started dressing like a priest.

“We arrived in New York at noon on May 8. As we landed, we were greeted by the brothers of the lady who had become our companion. We were overjoyed to be greeted in such a friendly way and not, as we had imagined, by wild people. Then we went for our baggage. One trunk was partly open and some things were hanging out. We huddled together, frightened, and waited to see what would happen. The people had told us how severe things would be when we landed, so we had imagined the worst. Soon an agent came along. I believe he must have noticed how frightened we were. He smiled, and we saw that he wasn’t wild. He opened only the little trunk that was already half open. We were shocked when several pieces of soap fell onto the floor. That was the only item that we had brought along that wasn’t essential. We stood there like someone caught in the act. The agent said, ‘It’s all right.’ We didn’t understand what he said but he looked so friendly and kind. We were done. We picked up our soap and tried to secure the trunk so it wouldn’t open again. Many didn’t get off so easily. They searched every item of baggage of our lady companion. Then her brothers took us and the lady to a hotel for lunch. We boarded an underground train and, at a certain underground station, the lady and her brothers disembarked and we never saw them again. One of the brothers, who had also paid for our lunch, gave us \$5, our first alms in America.

“We continued underground and I don’t know where we were when we emerged above ground. It was all too much for my poor human heart. Having come from the mountains where I didn’t know much of the world and then fourteen years in a convent with strict enclosure where I knew even less, and then all at once all this!

It was like a dream and I really wasn't interested in anything, it was all too tiring. I only remember that all at once we were in Leo House and we stayed there overnight. It was so hot and in spite of being tired, we didn't sleep much. There also was all this noise on the railways and streetcars.

"We attended Mass in the morning and after having breakfast in America, we were on the way again. I only recall that we were all anxious to get out of this noise and turmoil as fast as possible. Rather suddenly, I remember, we arrived in what we thought was a building that seemed like a farmhouse to us. We sat on the benches and thought it was a waiting room. After awhile we looked out of the window and were surprised to see that we were on a boat again, sailing on water and had moved far from the shore. If I remember correctly, we sailed all the way to Pittsburgh. From Pittsburgh we went to Chicago. At the station in Chicago we had a meal. I believe it was about 5:00 p.m., and we continued our travels all night. At 8 the next morning we were in St. Paul. We stayed somewhere there with some priests the whole day and rested a bit. Oh, we were so tired from all that sitting on the train. If we hadn't been so stupid and timid we could have taken a sleeper for the night.

"The priests at St. Paul were very kind to us and gave us a room where we could rest. There also was a Slavonic priest there. I don't know how he found out that I was Slovenian. He started to speak to me in Slovenian. I was so frightened that I didn't understand him. I thought he was speaking English. In the evening he brought us back to the train station and we continued on the train until the morning of May 13 when we arrived in Winnipeg where we spent the day at the Holy Spirit Church of the Oblate Fathers. It was a Polish parish. The priests there received us graciously. The superior was Fr. Kawatzky; one of the priests was Fr. P. Streit and the other Fr. P. Nauzik. We arrived on Saturday and attended Mass and had breakfast. The priests wanted us to stay for Sunday but Fr. Trunk didn't want to. I still don't understand even today why we had to leave there on Saturday evening. He must have realized that we would not be able to attend Mass on Sunday on the train, and that it would be afternoon when we arrived in Muenster.

"Those priests in Winnipeg wanted to give us a good time and to entertain us, so they played the gramophone and told us all kinds of interesting anecdotes. Fr. Trunk especially had all kinds of incidents to relate about our travel experiences. Living close by also were some Sisters who taught in the Polish school. They were brought over to see us but it didn't go too well. Only one of the Sisters knew a little German and we couldn't speak English. The priests decided to let the Sisters show us the city of Winnipeg and they rounded up a horse and a buggy from somewhere. Oh, what a painful experience that was for us. We would have sooner withdrawn someplace to be alone. The people stopped in the streets and stared at us. We had only one desire: to be at our destination as soon as possible. I can't remember anything





**Left to Right: Srs. Gabriela Lex & Philomena Jug (Yuch), Fr. George Trunk, & Sr. Augustina Platzer taken at St. Peter's Abbey, 1911.**

worthwhile that I saw in the city nor do I remember how long this escapade lasted. I only remember how happy we were when this penitential trip ended.

“In the evening, I believe it was around 10:00 p.m., we returned to the train station and were on the last stretch of the journey. At 2:00 p.m. Sunday we disembarked at Muenster. We were terribly disillusioned that there was no one at the station to meet us. Fr. Trunk had sent a telegram from Winnipeg but they never received it. So you can imagine the surprise when they saw us walking toward the monastery. As we approached, a few priests who were outdoors behind the old monastery saw us. You should have seen the commotion and running about that began and soon Prior Bruno came toward us with Fr. Peter Windschiegl, OSB, the sub-prior. They took the heavy baggage, which we were having a hard time dragging along. We were so tired and dirty that we hardly looked like decent persons. The food didn't really taste either. We were just too exhausted.

“When we finished our meal, there was Benediction at the church. We had to go, just as we were, to attend Benediction and to meet the people. There was great surprise and many greetings. Some people, however, were cold toward us and we didn't know why. We heard only later that some of the people were very angry at Prior Bruno for insisting that the hospital be built at Humboldt rather than Muenster. Prior Bruno was a just and unselfish man. He looked to the future and wanted what was the best for the Sisters. He made this decision even though it brought him some mistrust from some of the Muenster people. He said, ‘Humboldt has a future. Muenster does not.’ He saw this even though Humboldt was no bigger than Muenster

at the time. In fact, when we arrived, Muenster already had that beautiful large church while Humboldt was still using a decrepit little hut. There were just bare boards which were all black, simply very crude. Oh, how we felt the first time we stepped into this church!

“Oh, if I ever went on a trip like that again I would know how to help myself now. However, it is past! I don’t know why Fr. Trunk didn’t take better care of us. I’m sure the Sisters at Klagenfurt gave him sufficient money for the trip. If only he had provided us with a sleeper for the night. This way it was very difficult to sit all night in those crowded coaches. Besides that, we suffered so much from hunger pangs. Well, I suppose it had to be that way. Pioneers usually have to suffer. It is the seed for future harvests.”

In 1961, the Sisters sent Fr. Trunk, who was in San Francisco, a copy of their fiftieth anniversary book. He replied by sending them cards from his golden and diamond jubilees as a priest and a postcard featuring a photo of himself holding the magnificent antlers of a freshly killed deer. In remarking that he had received “the souvenir of the splendid work of the Sisters for 50 years,” he added that “it is a memory for me, too.” In 1970, the *Prairie Messenger* ran a story from San Francisco on the priest who was now 100 years old and retired to the Slovenia Catholic Church of the Nativity parish rectory in San Francisco. In the article, Fr. Trunk describes his accomplishments, his exercise regime, his talent at painting – he painted murals at St. Joseph’s church in Colorado – and his fondness for cigars, coffee, honey and brandy. After going back to Austria on May 17, 1911, he moved to the United States in 1921 and had parishes in North Dakota, Colorado and San Francisco. The articles contain no quotes from members of any of his congregations. The only quote from clergy, from the priest of the Slovenian Catholic parish, referred to illnesses and accidents Fr. Trunk had survived. On March 3, 1970, Fr. Trunk responded to a request from the Sisters for a self-portrait, saying, “You could put the picture from the newspaper on a board and thus have a remembrance.”



Fr. George Trunk with his trophy deer

## Chapter 4

### *Rooting in Arid, Rocky yet Fertile Soil*

The arrival of the extra Sisters could not come quickly enough. By now, the first three originals were deeply involved in their new community and in need of more hands. “We will have plenty to do. If only the necessary manpower would not be lacking,” Sr. Augustina wrote to Mother Pulcheria.

Sr. Philomena and Sr. Gabriela had come back from Duluth at Easter 1912. Although Abbot Bruno was adamant that the Sisters not go for training until construction on their hospital was underway, Dr. Barry made his own move, bringing an old house from his farm into Humboldt and setting it up as a small temporary hospital. Sr. Gabriela, who was also a cook, remained in Muenster to help the chef and his wife in the abbey kitchen, while Sr. Augustina and Sr. Philomena were quickly drawn into nursing in Dr. Barry’s hospital as well as continuing home nursing.

“We had some interesting times in that house,” said Sr. Philomena. “We had a small petroleum stove which had only one plate on top. This had to serve for cooking and also for sterilizing. We used a great deal of petroleum. This seemed to surprise the doctor. It was the same with the food. He had no idea how much food was required for three or four men. He would bring one pound of meat and a small loaf of bread. This was to be sufficient food for five or six people for a whole day. I was often so hungry that I felt I could have eaten the whole supply myself. If it had not been for a kind neighbour woman who daily handed us some of her garden vegetables over the fence, we may have let our patients starve. We were both so timid; we did not dare to say anything. We could not speak English either. But we could have said something to someone else or we could have bought something ourselves.



Sr. Philomena Jug in front of St. Elizabeth's Hospital, 1942.

“It was the same story with regard to sleep. One of us would lie down on the floor and sleep while the other one kept night watch. This lasted for several weeks until finally Sr. Augustina became ill and had to be taken back to Muenster. Now I was alone day and night. Thank God the doctor realized I did not have a bed. He had an old rough couch brought in from somewhere. I lay down wearing all my clothes because I had to get up to tend to the needs of the sick. But, oh, dear! All at once the whole thing came alive. I thought I was on an ant hill. I put on a light and saw it was full of bed bugs that were wild with hunger. I suffered more from this than from hunger and lack of sleep combined because I experienced such a great revulsion at the sight.

“What troubled me most was the fact that I could not get to church. It was not far away but I had to stay with the patients. I also had to do all the laundry so I was busy, and that was good as I had no time to be homesick.”

Sr. Augustina had also endured some very awkward moments. During a home nursing situation, faced with a patient who needed around-the-clock care and nobody to replace her, she sat up all night. At no time was she offered food or even a drink of water or coffee, although the family had meals in front of her. Finally, she was forced to ask for some food. The lady of the house was surprised. She believed that Sisters did not eat.

It was an honest enough error. The rules of the day forbade Sisters from eating in front of the laity, even in front of their own families. When they entered religious life they were to put the world behind them and consider the other members of the convent their family.

Sr. Philomena had her own food-related story. “There was an elderly man in hospital with a sore foot. His wife came to visit and brought a live chicken. But who was going to kill the hen? It was something I had never done in all my life. I could never have killed it. I lamented loudly to the man. He could speak only English but he seemed to understand and he volunteered to kill the chicken for me. Since he had a sore leg, I had to help him through the door. Out in the yard he chopped off the head of the hen. I plucked it and cleaned it for the first and last time ever in my life.

“One of the men had broken a leg. He was an Englishman. From him I learned a great deal of English,” she said. “I always went back to him and asked how this or that was called. That way, I was able to cope with the English people fairly well.”

There were bigger dangers than lack of communication or hunger. There were many times when the Sisters had to walk between Muenster and Humboldt. There was always concern that they might be attacked and eaten by coyotes and wolves.

For European Sisters accustomed to the privacy of the cloister, there were personal challenges.

Prior Bruno travelled with the Sisters, serving as negotiator and interpreter as

they searched for a location for their hospital. While walking through bush and prairie one day in company with a parish priest and members of the town council, all on their way to examine a piece of land that might be suitable for a hospital setting, they encountered several barbed wire fences. "On this expedition," said



**Two Muenster farmers with their house, horses and wagon. Circa 1912.**

Sr. Philomena, "we had to learn how to crawl under wire fences. We had to lie on the ground and roll through. Prior Bruno and Father Rudolph and a few of the town council members demonstrated to us how it was done and we followed suit. Oh! Oh!"

But some of their misfortunes made the Sisters laugh. Sr. Philomena told one on herself.

"As I was nursing in Humboldt, I became so homesick I could not stand it any longer. I asked the lady for an afternoon off, which she readily granted. I was going to set out on foot for Muenster, but I went first to see Fr. Rudolph, the pastor of Humboldt, to seek his advice. He said it was impossible to go to Muenster and back in one day but he offered an old horse and offered to hitch it up for me. The housekeeper would not hear of me going alone so she came along.

"The poor animal was blind and deaf. It strode along at its own speed. All at once, the reins fell out of the housekeeper's hands and out of the vehicle. We yelled all we could to get the poor thing to stop, but to no avail. I tried to reach forward as far as I could to get hold of its tail, which I succeeded in doing. I pulled and the horse stopped. We fetched the reins and got back into the seat, but now the animal would not move. Nothing helped but to pull his tail again. This done, we were on our way again, nearly bursting with laughter.

"We saw ripe saskatoon berries along the wayside and decided to step down to break off a few branches. Again, the horse would not stop until its tail was pulled. I pitied the poor thing, that it had to take this long trip for us. I would sooner have loaded it up on the wagon and pulled the thing myself. But, in spite of all this, we had a good afternoon in the sun."

Meanwhile, the Sisters were making progress on raising money for the hospital.

While the two Sisters were in Duluth, Sr. Augustina, accompanied by a priest, set out on her tours, which were very successful. "We have not yet completed three communities and have collected \$1,700," she wrote. "There are in all 23 settlements

in the colony. To the monastery we are very much indebted and still we received from it \$200 for the building fund.”

There were more encounters with horses. Sr. Philomena recounted this one:

“While we were still living in Muenster, one of the priests was going to Humboldt. He asked us if we had anything to do there and offered to take us along. As it happened we did have something to do at Humboldt and accepted the ride although we did not feel safe on the wagon since the horses were forever shying. When we came close to the railway track in town and there happened to be a freight train coming, that was it. They became wild. They stood on their hind legs and danced around. The two of us had enough foresight and courage to get off the wagon while several men came to assist with managing the horses. They were surprised that the horses became calm and stood still. We sat up again but it did not take long before they repeated their performance. This happened at least three times and each time we managed to get off the vehicle.

“The fourth time we were close to Muenster. A sudden thunderstorm broke loose with strong wind, thunder and lightning and a cloudburst-like rain. The horses became wild again and danced around the prairie. When the priest pulled the reins tautly to control the horses, they sprang up on their hind legs. We again left the vehicle. After dancing around for a long time they finally stood on all fours once again, but by now the tongue of the wagon was caught across the back of one of the horses and for a long time there was nothing we could do. As I discovered later, each of us had the same thoughts. We thought for sure this would be the end of us since overheated horses draw lightning to themselves.

“As long as the priest stood in front of the horses, holding them by the bridle, he could not remove the tongue off the back of the horse and as soon as he released his grip, they would get wild. So he asked me to come and stand in front of the horses and hold the bridle. As soon as they saw me they ran around again. But ‘where the need is greatest, God’s help is nearest.’ A farmer came along and helped us. By the time the horses and wagon were restored, the greatest part of the storm was also over. You can imagine what we looked like, soaked through and through. Our black veils faded and the black colour ran down our faces and over our white headdress. I have never looked so messy in my life. After it was all over, we had a good laugh.”

There were also moments that could not be explained away.

“One day Sr. Gabriela and I had to go to Hoffmans’ on some errand,” wrote Sr. Philomena. “This was a very fine German family whose two sons were priests. They lived about four miles from Muenster and we planned to walk there. A man driving a rig came up behind us. He dismounted, insisted that we sit up and drive, and would not take ‘No’ for an answer. He gave us the reins and told us that when we came to the corner where one turns in at Hoffmans’, we should tie the horse to a

tree and leave it there until he could catch up and drive on. He walked along behind and we took off at a gallop. This was of course not one of those old horses like the ones we had used before. When we looked back there was no trace of the man to be seen. At the designated corner we tied the horse to a tree and walked a short distance to Hoffmans'. We described the man, the horse and the rig exactly but no one knew who it could be. In fact they did not remember ever having seen a man like that in this area. We almost believe it could have been St. Joseph."

As well as being a rough structure, the little dwelling that was built in Humboldt as a temporary convent was entirely unfurnished. However, according to Sr. Philomena, who was assistant superior at the time, the Sisters had come into an inheritance.

While Sr. Philomena and Sr. Gabriela were in Duluth, Sr. Augustina had nursed an elderly gentleman on a farm near Muenster. When he died, he left her all his household goods. When Sr. Philomena and Sr. Gabriela came home for Easter, they were assigned to collect the property. In company with a seminarian, they drove out to the farm, using two horses hitched to a hayrack. When the goods were loaded, the Sisters climbed on top and each looked for a secure spot for the homeward journey. "Mr. Hoffman's sons helped us load everything and then we climbed up and sat on top of it all. That was an interesting sight," wrote Sr. Philomena. "All the people who saw us coming stood still and looked wide-eyed to see this sight." By the time they got to Muenster, five miles from the farm, it was dark, too late to go any farther.

The next morning, the men held a council to decide who would accompany the Sisters to Humboldt. The consensus was that all the men were too busy and that the Sisters would have to drive alone. Given that neither of them had ever driven a horse and a runaway was a distinct possibility, the men hitched up two of the oldest, slowest, tamest horses.

"The second day we sought counsel and got advice," Sr. Philomena continued. "Since there was no one free to drive this interesting wagon to Humboldt, they decided to give us two old horses that were retired and simply pastured leisurely in the meadows. That way they were sure we would not have any trouble with the horses. So we climbed up again amid all our goods, with everyone laughing heartily as we drove away.

"Neither of us had ever driven a horse before. We arrived safely at Humboldt after taking three hours to drive the six miles. You can just imagine how that went. But we had great joy and lots of fun. As we neared the hospital, the construction crew stopped working to behold the sight of us coming. But they came and helped us unload. No matter the discomfort. It was all very simple things such as a poor elderly bachelor might have but we were happy to receive it. There was an old cooking stove which served us for many years, there was a table, two very old but sturdy chairs,

some garden supplies – a fork, shovel and rake – a few old kitchen utensils, two coffee cups, three spoons and a broom. We felt so fortunate to have received these things. They were ours. We let the horses rest and graze while we set up our stove, made a fire, washed the dishes and brewed some tea. I don't remember that a cup of tea ever tasted as good as that one in my whole life. We had a lot of fun doing it."

The Sisters still had to make the return trip to Muenster with the horses and the hayrack. The lighter load wasn't much help – the horses had not travelled this far for a long time and had stiffened up. One of them stumbled, fell, got his legs entwined, and couldn't get up unassisted. The Sisters wrestled him to his feet but, in the process, a piece of harness broke. They had to bore a hole in it with a pocket knife and then tie things together with their garters because they had no other material. They bandaged up the horse's torn and bruised leg with a large handkerchief.

"We arrived at Muenster late in the evening. The priests and Sr. Augustina were worried about us. They thought maybe the horses had run away on us."

And there was another bequest, reported to Mother Pulcheria by Sr. Augustina.

"I was away fourteen days nursing. The man died after much pain and suffering. Then I had to stay another fourteen days in order to console the lady, who was the man's sister. These people, the Dauk family of Annaheim, are much concerned about us and are our best benefactors. Since the man's wife and daughter had predeceased him and he had been all alone, the relatives bequeathed me with all his household furnishings. There was a stove, dishes, a good deal of coffee and sugar, five big pillows, two fine goose feather beds, a brand-new meat-grinding machine, three fine gold rings such as we wear, and many other small articles. I also received \$20 and when the hospital is ready we will get two small pigs. Earlier, they had made an offering of \$35 to us."

There was always work to do. "I am very busy sewing during the time left over from nursing the sick," Sr. Augustine wrote. "Today, November 25, I still have to drive fourteen miles to see a sick lady. She is the wife of a storekeeper and is said to be very ill. There are so many sick people and no place to house them. Dr. Barry himself resides in his house now and so I have to visit the sick in their homes. This is very inconvenient."

Inconvenient and, at times, potentially unhealthy. Sr. Augustina spent a month nursing a woman with tuberculosis and left with a high fever. Sr. Philomena was also exposed to her share of communicable diseases. Her first home nursing job fell on Wednesday of Holy Week.

"As we were preparing to retire around 9:00 p.m., there was a knock on the door. It was a cleric who only now realized and remembered that tomorrow was Holy Thursday and that various things had to be prepared in the church. He asked us to help, and we did.



“When we were just about ready for bed again there was another knock on the door. By now, it was already 11:00 p.m. Dr. Barry wanted two Sisters to come with him to Humboldt to care for two very sick patients. Dr. Barry and another man each had a horse and buggy. I went with Dr. Barry and Sr. Gabriela went with the other man. It was very dark, there was still a lot of snow and much of it had melted during the day so that there were puddles of water all over. Horses must have better eyes than humans. Otherwise I doubt it we would ever have reached our destination.

“We could not travel on the regular road. We were tossed and thrown around on the buggy as we drove through mounds of snow and pools of water. We were sprayed continuously. It was so dark, and the wind was bitterly cold. Suddenly we came to a lake. We had missed the crossing and did not know where we were. The man with Sr. Gabriela led the way, got stuck in the mud, and called us for help. We had to dismount into icy water which came up to our knees. The two men had to hitch both horses to the buggy to pull it out.

“Sometime later they found another crossing and after midnight we arrived at Humboldt. The man with Sr. Gabriela suddenly disappeared and after driving on for awhile, I too was unloaded. Only then did I realize that we were on separate cases and would not be together. I was with a good family, Mr. Pollries, a horse dealer. Both of the children had scarlet fever. The wife and I were isolated in the house with the children. The husband was not permitted to enter the house. I stayed there for two weeks. This was my first Easter in Canada.

“When I finished there, I was called to several other families in town or on the farm. I was six weeks with one family. The wife was ill and I had to be the nurse as well as the housekeeper, do all the housework, and take care of the baby and the wife.

“I was also with a man who had typhoid fever and was isolated in a room at the hotel. I was there for three weeks without ever lying down on a bed. They had placed an army cot beside the patient’s bed but I would have rather died than lie on



**The first Humboldt residence of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth.**

that cot beside that man. He also was very restless and kept me busy day and night. Whenever I was simply overcome with sleep, I would sit on an easy chair and rest. I could hardly walk around anymore. I was exhausted. Because my legs were always hanging down and never elevated, my feet began to swell and I developed phlebitis on my twenty-first night since I had been in bed. It got so bad that if I stood up or tried to walk, I could hardly repress a moan, it was so painful. Both legs were badly swollen and dark blue. When the hotel maid looked into the room in the morning and saw me sitting there shivering with fever, she called the doctor. I wasn't able to take another step. The doctor was shocked. They helped me down from the third floor of the hotel to a waiting car.

“During this time, while I was engaged in private duty nursing, the construction crew was busy building the hospital. They had also constructed a small wooden frame cottage into which we Sisters had moved for the time being. There were a few beds set up. Later, when the hospital was completed, it was used as a barn. The doctor brought me to this little house and I lay there several weeks under the roof. The other two Sisters came and went from time to time, otherwise they stayed at Muenster. Sr. Augustina, especially, since she was not well, could not stay in this little hut for any length of time. It was very simply constructed with all wooden siding. The wind howled and blew in at all corners. However, Sr. Gabriela had to stay on account of me. Besides, she also looked after the vegetable garden which we had planted earlier. You can just imagine the poverty of this whole situation. We had not brought much of anything from Klagenfurt except a small trunk with our own personal belongings.”

Around the difficulties, there was good news. “The townspeople of Humboldt are always very friendly,” Sr. Augustina wrote. “In particular, the mayor. I also got to know Dr. Neely last week. He is our representative in Parliament and is frequently absent from here. He was very friendly and wished us success in our hospital project. At the same time, he also promised to assist us in every way possible. He is a charitable man and, although he is not a Catholic, he gives freely to the Church and other worthy causes.”

“I must not fail to say,” Abbot Bruno wrote to Mother Pulcheria, “that the three Sisters made a very favourable impression by their discretion, humility and reserve. An undertaking in the hands of such good people cannot but draw God's blessing upon itself.”

The warm reception was welcome, but not a total antidote to loneliness and fatigue. “It is unfortunate that just this year the cold weather started so early,” wrote Sr. Augustina. “In three weeks, the walls of the hospital would have been finished and work on the inside could have proceeded. The dear Lord seems to take pleasure in seeing us pilgrims without a home of our own. But let everything be in God's hands. The more, I think, we now long for the convent life, the more we will appreciate it later on.”

## Chapter 5

# More Transplants, More Growth

There had been delays, and Mother Pulcheria was not coming, but now there was a definite date for the arrival of reinforcements from Klagenfurt. Abbot Bruno was going to Europe himself to escort them back to Humboldt. On March 30, 1912, he wrote, "I was always certain about my trip overseas. Now I have definitely decided to go and expect to leave here between April 15 and 20."

There were valid reasons why he could not leave earlier. "Since all the subcontracts have not yet been let, I cannot leave immediately after Easter. By the middle of April, things will have reached that stage." Then he added, "Before leaving here, I wish to be of help to the Sisters in making a temporary loan until the building is finished. After that, it will be easier to make one on the basis of a mortgage. Last fall we took initial steps to procure a loan but since construction had to be stopped early on



The Sisters who came in 1912. Left to right: Sr. Xaveria Motschilnig, Sr. Salesia Scheriau, Sr. Gertrudis Bergles (a novice), Sr. Euphrasia Weiss, Sr. Agatha Loibnegger, Sr. Clementina Posenig and Sr. Helena Karnicar. A lay woman, Margaretha came to Canada with the Sisters and married Joseph Brecker.

account of the oncoming winter, we let those plans drop for the time being, in order to avoid the Sisters having to pay interest unnecessarily for six months.”

Three weeks later, he sent another letter to Klagenfurt. “My departure was delayed for a few days since I did not want to leave before all the formalities connected with the loan of the money for the completion of the hospital in Humboldt was attended to. Now that all is in order, I will set out tomorrow, please God.”

He did leave Muenster on April 23, travelling to New York to catch a ship to Europe. He reached Bremen on May 13, travelled through Germany and Switzerland to find students and lay brothers for St. Peter’s Abbey, continued on to Klagenfurt to make arrangements for the Sisters’ trip to America, went to Rome, returned to

Klagenfurt, and, after spending three months in Europe, left with the Sisters and two lay people. Sisters Euphrasia Weiss, Salesia Scheriau, Clementina Possenig, Helena Karnicar, Xaveria Motschilnig, Agatha Loibneggar, and Gertrudis Bergles, a novice, were accompanied by Margaretha Schellander, who later married Joseph Brecker, and Fridolin Baumgarten, a seminarian for St. Peter’s Abbey.

The news that a second group of Sisters was going to Canada reached Fr. Alexander Berthold, who had first suggested Saskatchewan for their new foundation, and his joy knew no bounds. He wrote a rapturous letter to Mother Pulcheria.

“Mother Superior: Had I a hundred tongues, I would intone a Te Deum with every one of them. Thanks and praise be to God, yes, a thousand times. The good work, in the path of which seemingly insurmountable obstacles stood two years ago, has now proven successful by the grace of God and the intercession and power of our blessed Lady. Upon the request and with the planning of His Grace the Most Reverend Abbot Bruno, from a far-off land, your Order has established a foundation in the unmeasurable expanses of distant America. This foundation will outgrow the motherhouse in 25 years. In every respect. Rev. Mother, you have sown in this region, as large as it is distant, a good seed which, under the vigilant and skilled father



**Sr. Gertrudis Bergles, photographed in Klagenfurt, Austria, was the first novice in St. Elizabeth's Convent in Humboldt.**

according to the heart of Christ, Abbot Bruno, will soon bear beautiful and blessed fruit. I will never fail in my prayers for you, for your foundation, and for my dear friends in Muenster, Canada.

“In those darkest, nearly hopeless days, which have now turned to joy, I recommended to you an unshakable trust in God. I beseech you to say a prayer for me that I may have a happy death and that some of my earnings be left over for the foundation in Humboldt. I am very satisfied and happy that all is going the way I predicted in my letter to you two years ago. This Tuesday, the ‘beloved group’, under God’s protection, will arrive in New York.

“One thing is certain. When I proposed the acceptance of my plan and yours for a foundation to Bishop Kahn, had I not enjoyed the trust and friendship of His Excellency, you would not have had as much interest in Canada as you have today. His Grace, the Chancellor, Dr. Ehrlich, and several people in high positions, were definitely against the proposal. Today we sing ‘Alleluia’ that the crisis has blown over, the fog has lifted, and a land full of hope, beautiful and free, is drawing our hope-boat to its shores.”

Meanwhile, the Klagenfurt group, in company with Abbot Bruno, left their cloister on July 6, 1912, travelling to Trieste, which, at the time, was Austria’s largest seaport. On July 7, 1912, Abbot Bruno wrote: “The Sisters have left for supper. I will be going in an hour and I can send you a brief report on our trip so far. Obviously there is not much to report since things have gone so well. We arrived at Trieste yesterday at 11:30 and drove immediately to the main office of the steamship line. I succeeded in having the officials give us another five percent discount off the price of the boat tickets, which for the seven Sisters and Margaretha amounted to 124 kronen. We had to wait a long time for the ship’s doctor who did not come until sometime between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m. to examine the eyes of the ticket holders. At five o’clock we were on the ship and at six it unmoored. The sea was very calm; today it was a little choppy. The ship is the smoothest sailing vessel I have ever travelled on. One can hardly feel the sway and there is not the slightest sign of seasickness on anyone. Today I said Mass at 9:00 a.m. The altar is set up and furnished with all the necessities in a huge cabinet on the second class deck. When not in use, it is locked up.

“When the weather permits, I will be able to celebrate Mass every morning at 6:30 a.m. The Sisters and Margaretha received Holy Communion today and regret only that they did not take along more hosts to permit Communion every day until we reach New York.

“Our travellers are in good spirits. Since our departure from Klagenfurt, I have not seen them weep. Only during that long delay in the office of the steamship company at Trieste did tears nearly make their appearance. I believe the trip will be harder on you and on the Sisters at home than on the travellers.

“We expect to arrive at Patras in Greece early tomorrow morning and from there, this letter will be posted back to Klagenfurt. From Palermo I expect to write again and perhaps the letter will reach you sooner than this one.

With heartfelt greetings to you, to all the good Mothers and Sisters, as well as to the Father Confessor and Fr. Trunk. Bruno, OSB, Abbot”

On July 9, Abbot Bruno wrote back to Mother Pulcheria: “Yesterday morning, early, as we woke up, we were riding at anchor in the harbour at Patras. There was a great deal of noise all over the ship because of the embarkation of passengers and the loading of baggage. I did not, therefore, consider it fitting to say Mass.

“Around 9:00 a.m., a storm with strong winds broke out of the north. Our ship, which was moored at the rear to the stone wall of the wharf and also tied up in front, was blown sideways until it struck an English ship moored nearby. Fortunately, there was no damage done and by 3:00 p.m. we set out again. By 7:00 p.m., we were away from the Greek Islands. The sea was less calm and the vessel began to pitch. By 8:00 p.m., all the Sisters were a little seasick.

“This morning, the weather is fine again. At 7:00 a.m. we had Holy Mass. Our entire community was present and all but two felt well enough to receive Communion. By 2:30 p.m., we expect to reach Palermo where, they say, another 250 passengers will embark. The boat will really be filled. Only first class is still quite empty. For the second and third class there are two shifts at meals. This morning, right after Holy Mass, we passed by Messina where four years ago there was a fierce earthquake. Tomorrow we expect to reach Algiers.”

Unlike the three pioneer Sisters, this group was given the opportunity for almost daily Mass with Communion. They were also integrated into the life on board ship. “We left Palermo yesterday evening,” wrote Abbot Bruno on July 10. “A couple of hundred passengers, mainly Italians, embarked there. The ship is really filled now, although first class is half empty. I write quickly to say things are going well. The Sisters are all well and hale and hearty. They are busy making rosaries which the passengers quickly wheedle off them. This morning, all were able to go to Communion. Tomorrow morning, there will be no Mass because of the noise and disturbances at the harbour. In Algiers probably very few passengers will embark but we will take on a good cargo of coal for the trip. On Friday, we pass through the Strait of Gibraltar, between Spain and Africa. Later we will pass by the Azores, and then no more land will be sighted until we reach New York on the 20th.

The group reached Muenster at 2:00 p.m. on July 27. Sr. Augustina, who had waited a very long time for this moment, was elated and overflowing with gratitude, even though serious health problems prevented her from fully entering into the welcoming.

“I was at Muenster to await the Sisters,” she wrote, “and have spent most

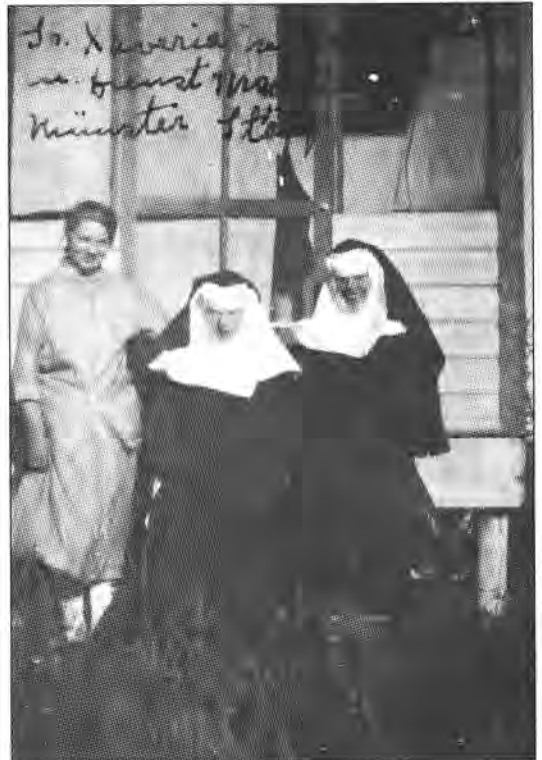
of my time there because of my unsettled state of health. The Sisters all travelled to Humboldt the next day while I had to stay behind, on orders of the Abbot, who thought the weather to be too cool for me.

“The Sisters have already related how our companions at Klagenfurt have busied themselves and have done all in their power to help us here in our early days, which were assuredly beset with many difficulties. I have not seen any of the many nice things that were sent here because the baggage went directly to Humboldt. I will, however, go there as soon as I can to look at it all. I rejoice already because I know that it all came from the still and hallowed cloister, where we spent so many happy days. All those things were made by our companion Sisters, to whom we owe not only corporal benefits but, above all, spiritual ones. These are the greatest gifts we can have and they give us strength and courage to accept sacrifices here below and secure for us a heavenly crown above. I thank the Father Confessor for the ciborium covering, which pleased us very much. I thank the convent boarders, the hired helpers, and all the others who contributed in any way toward it.

“I am now with Sr. Euphrasia and Sr. Gertrudis in Muenster, since the Abbot wishes us here. There is so little room in Humboldt. Sr. Gabriela is with Sisters Salesia, Clementina, Agatha and Xaveria in Humboldt. Sr. Philomena is away nursing some sick person but will return soon. Thank God all the Sisters are in good health. Sr. Gabriela, in particular, has been enjoying constant good health since she came back from Duluth. I marvel at this for she was earlier always so sickly and had to stay in bed in Duluth for six weeks.”

Sr. Augustina talked about being busy because the bishop was coming out and, according to the abbot, there would be many things to look after and to regulate. However, the Sisters' living conditions were not conducive to regulation and keeping things in order.

The temporary house, which sheltered the Sisters in Humboldt, was so small that, even with three Sisters living at Muenster, the beds had to be lined up side by side. There was no space between them. The Sisters had to



Srs. Xaveria Motschilnig & Gertrudis Bergles with an unidentified lady from the Abbey kitchen staff in Muenster.

climb into bed over the bottom end. Clothes were left on the floor, and the Sisters had to sort out shoes and stockings every morning.

“At this time, our Sisters also took over the management of the monastery kitchen at Muenster since the elderly couple was finding it difficult to continue to manage it. The rest of the Sisters began to sew things for the hospital and to prepare everything so that we would be ready when the building was completed,” said Sr. Philomena. “I continued to do private duty nursing in the homes. We also acquired a cow for which we paid very little. She rescued us many times when we were in need. Often, all we had to eat were the vegetables from our garden and some milk.”

Food was as scarce as the living space. The Sisters had to depend on Divine Providence for their daily fare. It happened that one evening there was absolutely nothing to eat. At the last minute, the Sisters were visited by a lady who had come into town to sell vegetables. She had been unable to sell all her produce and she wanted to donate a large head of cabbage and some potatoes. This was received with thanks and, according to Sr. Augustina, provided a good evening meal.

There were embarrassments, too, for women who had almost nothing but who knew the standards that were expected should they play hostess to senior clergy. One day, the abbot dropped into the little convent in Humboldt with Bishop Pascal and asked to have dinner. The Sisters were still working with their three inherited spoons, the table and two chairs, no decent dishes and, more to the point, nothing proper to cook for a meal. “While we scurried hither and thither, frightened and not knowing where to begin,” said Sr. Augustina, “the two worthy gentlemen sat each on one of our trunks and watched us. The bishop said (in English, which was translated into German) ‘Don’t be afraid. I did not have such a nice house at first when I became Bishop.’ We had no forks or knives, only a couple of pocket knives. These we handed to our distinguished visitors, on their first visit.”

Most problematic was the matter of certification. While Abbot Bruno had dissuaded the first three Sisters from nursing in Dr. Barry’s temporary hospital, within a few days they had replaced the registered nurse who had come out from Saskatoon. The nursing course was two years long, and the Sisters needed enough English to write the exams – but no time to achieve either possibility. However, they would not receive the government grant of 50 cents a day if they did not have trained nurses in the Humboldt hospital. The two Sisters who had gone to Duluth had some training and a grounding in English, but Sr. Augustina, who was in high demand, worried that she had no time to learn the language.

Meanwhile, the abbot wrote to Mother Pulcheria. “Sr. Augustina accepted the invitation to take over the nursing care of Dr. Barry’s patients. Soon other cases presented themselves, a leg operation for a school girl, a broken leg, an eye operation. Things went so well that Dr. Barry said Sr. Augustina was better than a registered



nurse. When there was another appendectomy, he insisted on having the Sisters along with the assisting physician. The operation was so successful that in ten days, according to the doctor's verdict, the patient could have gone home. However, she chose to spend another three days with the Sisters.

"I must not fail to say that the three Sisters have made a very favourable impression by their discretion, humility and reserve," he wrote. "An undertaking in the hands of such good people cannot but draw God's blessing upon itself."

When Dr. Barry closed down his temporary hospital, Abbot Bruno again wrote to Mother Pulcheria. "No sooner were all the patients out of the provisional hospital than the Sisters received calls from all sides to do nursing in private homes. They even received telephone calls asking them to act as midwives. In the end they had to stop taking any such work, otherwise the two Sisters would never have gone away to a hospital for training."

Sister Augustina was fully aware of the reputation the Sisters were developing. "Oh, how good the dear Lord is that he should cause us to be so successful in our care of the sick," she wrote. "Our sister companions in Klagenfurt must surely be praying for us. That we have a fairly bright future ahead of us now will no doubt also be a source of joy to you and will make you forget the many heartaches associated with the project."

However, she had a clear understanding of the almost insurmountable problems. "From what I have observed while working in the operating room and with the patients, it would seem that the doctors are satisfied with our work but the language problem makes things difficult, especially in weighty matters. The fact is we have, through lack of time, learned hardly any English, and the doctors are not proficient in German by any means." Contrary to Abbot Bruno's statement that the Sisters had pulled back from home nursing while Sr. Philomena and Sr. Gabriela were in Duluth, Sr. Augustina continued to combine home nursing with alms collecting and consultations about the hospital.

The lack of English was a particular cross for Sr. Augustina. As the superior, she should have been working closely on the building of the hospital. However, as she herself said, she could not even carry on a conversation with the foreman.

As concerned as she was about the Sisters and the workload, she was also very aware about the stresses on the doctors. "We beg you," she wrote, "insistently, to pray well and hard that the project will proceed successfully and end happily. We will have plenty to do. If only the necessary manpower would not be lacking. Dr. Barry is also very happy about our hospital. He is on the road nearly day and night with his horses, and I often wonder how the good man can hold out."

And then, there was a blessed break.

In a letter to Mother Pulcheria in September 1911, Abbot Bruno said, "I can see

you are worried about the approval of the Sisters for nursing. I inquired about this matter to the Health Commissioner when I visited him at the beginning of August. He assured me that the approval depended on him entirely. He does not have a definite program set up for all nurses to follow. Since he visits all the hospitals of the province from time to time, he bases his decision of approval upon the performance of the nurses. He said he could easily see if a nurse understood her business, and, if so, he would give his approval regardless of where she had taken her course.”

When their hospital was finished, the Sisters would be able to provide nursing care without having to find the money to pay for registered nurses. Their only immediate need was for the hospital construction to go smoothly and, in God’s own time, they would be joined by more Sisters from Klagenfurt.

## Chapter 6

# The First Blossoms Appear

“One day,” wrote Sr. Philomena in her diary, “when we had an opportunity to accompany Sr. Gabriela to town, we dismounted in Humboldt and walked to the (hospital) site. There was still a lot of snow around. When we saw a bit of the building emerging from under the snow, we were overcome by a peculiar feeling and the desire to remain with this place and never to leave it again. After all, it had been almost a year now that we were roaming about. But still we had to wait a long time for the building to be completed. It was not ready until the end of October.

“Now it was September. Sister Gabriela and I had travelled to Duluth with a student and we stayed there for six months, until March. Here I worked in all the various hospital departments. This experience was helpful in later days in our hospital since medicine and nursing in America was quite different from that of Europe. It also was good for us to learn English. I actually spoke English better at this time than I did years later. In March 1912 we returned to Muenster where poor Sr. Augustina had spent the whole winter by herself. We were glad to be back in spite of the cold weather because we were homesick for Canada. When we left in the fall the wheat had already been harvested on the land where the hospital was to be constructed and all preparations were ready for the excavations to begin. The basement was dug before winter set in. Then the whole area was covered over until May when the work began again.”

Sr. Philomena had alluded to the Sisters’ ultimate reason for so anxiously awaiting the completion of the hospital. The permanent, properly-constructed convent was built into the hospital design. Until it was built, they had no home. They were left “roaming about,” out of town on home nursing assignments, or crammed into one of two roughly constructed, under-furnished tiny wooden buildings, one in Muenster, one in Humboldt, no chapel, no place of quiet, no privacy, none of the comfortable aspects of the convent life they had known in Klagenfurt.

In and around the towns of Humboldt and Muenster, everyone was caught up in the story of the Austrian Sisters who had come to give them a hospital. In almost weekly instalments, both the *Humboldt Journal*, in English, and *St. Peter’s Bote*, in German, followed the activities of the Sisters, covering their begging missions as well as the progress on the hospital. As building sites changed, construction dates were extended, and estimated costs grew, the two papers continued faithfully to present the facts as they were known at the time.

According to those reports, the cost of the hospital escalated rapidly. On June 1, 1911, *St. Peter's Bote* reported that the Elizabethan Sisters had received the architect's plans for a brick hospital with an estimated cost of \$16,500. On the same date, the *Humboldt Journal* reported the estimated cost as \$20,000. By September 28, 1911 the *Journal* reported that the building, with a completion date of January 1, 1912, would cost \$35,000.

There were fundraising efforts and requests for other assistance. On May 16, 1911, according to *Der Bote*, Prior Bruno and Fr. Trunk attended a special meeting of the town council to ask for a free site and exemption from taxes. Ultimately, the Sisters paid for their land, but on November 16, 1911, when the Sisters bought another 2 ½ acres of land, *Der Bote* reported that the Humboldt town council read for a second time a bylaw in favour of granting the hospital \$2,500.

In June, 1911, *Der Bote* reported that the Sisters had made a five-day round trip through St. Peter's Colony visiting Fulda, Dead Moose Lake, Lake Lenore, Anaheim and St. Gregor. There was no indication about how much money they raised.

*Der Bote* also reported that, in October of 1911, Bishop Pascal, Abbot Bruno, Mayor Andreasen, Prior Peter, and Fathers Rudolph and Casimir along with Mother Augustina, superior of the Sisters, all signed a document which was cemented into the cornerstone along with a few small coins and an issue of *St. Peter's Bote*. On August 29, 1912, *Der Bote* reported that the hospital was so near completion that "the moving in can be celebrated in some days."

Meanwhile, Sr. Philomena was recording her own memories of the project:

"We went to Humboldt again with horse and buggy to select a piece of land suitable for construction of a hospital. First of all we again went to the parish priest. The housekeeper was on her day off, so we were invited to have our noon lunch with a very religious family. Then we went to see the mayor. The town wanted to donate a piece of land to us but the site was not suitable and would not have allowed for future expansion.

"Since we were not happy with this site, we went to see an elderly farmer who owned a farm next to the town, but he was not willing to let us have the piece of land that we wanted. The piece he wanted to give us was rather small and was right beside the cemetery. Then Dr. Barry, whose farm was two miles from town, wanted to donate a site to us. However, the town refused to accept this since it was too far from town. So this day, too, had passed and we returned to Muenster without having accomplished our task. With this the week had gone by.

"The following week, a farmer, Mr. Luten, from south of town, offered us a piece of land. It was a beautiful site close to the town. We had almost closed the deal but when the doctors heard of it, they were opposed because the land was on the south side of the railway track. The doctors maintained that if they were called to the

hospital for an emergency and there was a freight train on the track, they could be unduly delayed in arriving at the hospital. That was true. So we had to abandon this deal again to the deep disappointment of the farmer. Then we were offered a piece of land west of the town. I don't remember whose land it was. Prior Bruno, however, thought it was too close to the railway and would be too noisy for the patients. By this time we were almost discouraged. Prior Bruno thought we should accept the site offered to us by the town. We, however, were not enthusiastic. It was not a good site. It was on the northern end of town." Having the hospital and attached convent on the north end of town meant that the Sisters would have had to walk across the entire town to go to church.

Finally, there was good news. Sr. Philomena continued her story. "Father Rudolph came with a message from Philip Flory. He said that he would give us a piece of land but we would have to wait until after the wheat was harvested before we could begin the excavation. We were all very happy with this since it was a good location and close to town. That is the place where the hospital is now situated. I'm not sure how many acres we first purchased but I believe it was 50. It extended from Main Street to the end of the Sisters' cemetery.

"Next to this piece of land was a beautiful bush which belonged to the town.



L to R (seated): Sr. Augustina Platzer, Mother Pulcheria Wilhelm, Rt. Rev. Bruno Doerfler OSB, Rev. Rudolph Palm OSB, Pastor at Humboldt. (back row): Philip Flory, A. Ecker, Frank Hauser, August Pilla, Henry Brockman, Mike Flory. Absent: John Schaeffer, Frank Fuchs, John Sprangler, John Loehr and Joseph Kopp.

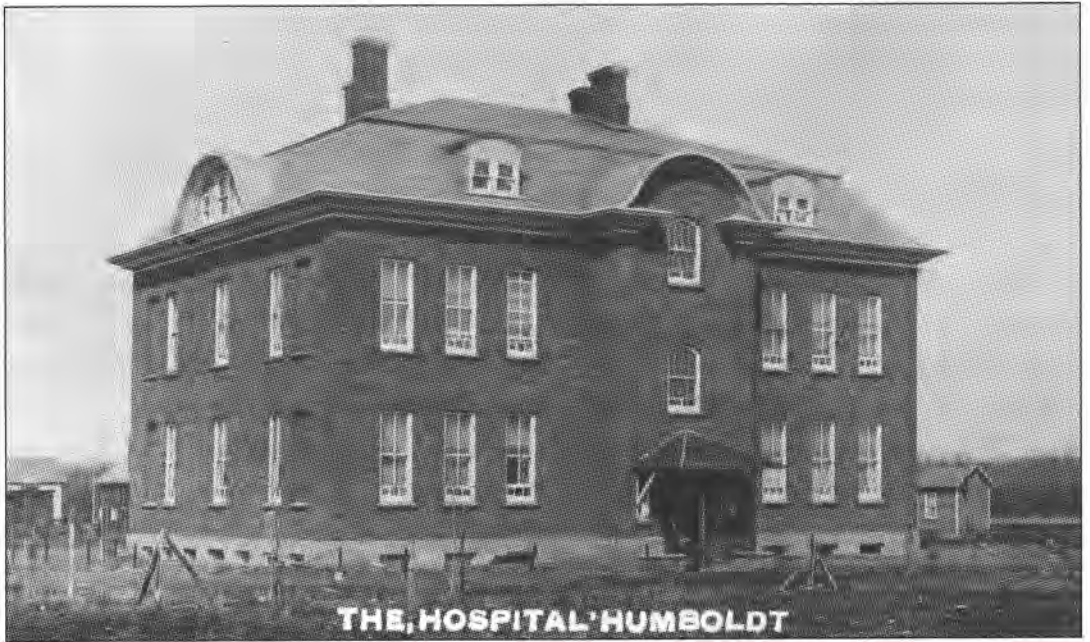
Prior Bruno wanted this bush area to be included and succeeded in acquiring it. It was quite expensive. There were such beautiful trees and he said: 'This can later be developed into a park area.'

"Well, when the land was acquired and everything settled, the building plan was made. I have forgotten the name of the architect. (Mr. Albrechtson.) The plan was for a 20-bed hospital, a good plan. There were four steps at the entrance to the hospital so that the basement windows were large. We had to submit the plan to the provincial government, which to our disappointment did not approve the plan. Dr. Seymour, a Catholic, was believed to delight in refusing requests from Catholic institutions. It seemed to be that way. Nearly all other hospitals had a few steps at their front entrance so that the basement windows could be large enough but we were not granted this permission. Dr. Seymour simply said that this was not permitted. It was not permitted to have steps outside of the main entrance. Thus the plan had to be changed and was spoiled. The basement had to be dug deeper and the windows were very low. The building was stuck down deep into the ground and often when it rained heavily the water ran in at all the windows. The government also insisted that the morgue be in the basement and in fact next to the kitchen. We had to give in but we actually never used it.

"We had many hard times. The little money we had brought from Austria simply melted away. The new building project was expensive. The little that I earned in private-duty nursing did not go far and we hesitated to acquire debts. We did not have a great deal of credit, either. In order to get the needed loan for the construction of the hospital, twelve men had to put up collateral for us. No bank or lending firm or anyone else trusted us. So Prior Bruno got the loan from a Benedictine monastery in the United States. Of course all the people in the area here were pioneers, and most of them were poor and just beginning. That is why many of them were not sure that we would be successful. We drove around for a long time seeking signatures.

"We had already retired one evening when one of the priests came to our little house in Muenster and knocked on the door. He told us that we had to get up and come along because the list of signatures had to be completed that day and there was still one signature missing. The three of us got up and drove along with Prior Bruno to see a farmer, Mr. Loehr of Muenster. It was now 10:00 p.m. It was dark and we might not have found the place if Prior Bruno had not been so well acquainted with the stars. When we arrived it was midnight and the family was already in bed, sleeping. Prior Bruno had to knock for a long time before someone opened the door. Well, we did not have any more difficulties because Mr. Loehr willingly signed without any objections. The list of signatures could be mailed in the morning and we received the loan."

On October 3, 1912, Bishop Albert Pascal, OMI, assisted by Abbot Bruno



The first St. Elizabeth's Hospital completed in 1912

Doerfler, OSB, Prior Peter Windschiegl, OSB, Fr. Rudolph Palm, OSB, pastor of Humboldt and overseer of construction, and Fr. Casimir Cismowski, OSB, blessed the new St. Elizabeth's Hospital. He first blessed the Sisters' quarters with psalms, prayers and holy water. The group then processed to the basement of the hospital, the entrance, the chapel, and the patients' rooms.

According to *St. Peter's Bote*, "The venerable Sisters, as well as the good people from Humboldt and Muenster and district, observed the various blessings with great interest. Unfortunately, Sr. Salesia and Sr. Helena were unable to be part of the blessing because they were tending to the sick. After the blessing, the priests, along with Fr. P. Boniface Puth, OSB, Mayor Andreasen of Humboldt and the contractor for building the hospital, were served supper in one of the hospital rooms. On the occasion of the blessing, the women of Humboldt and district brought lovely and worthwhile gifts for the Sisters. The Sisters are esteemed by both Catholics and Protestants. Future prospects are the very best."

Sr. Philomena and her diary were there from the beginning:

"The hospital was only completed late in the fall. The bricklayers were barely finished. The carpenters had finished only the first floor when the doctor asked if he could admit patients. We, of course, could not refuse. So we got together and cleaned the rooms. There was lots of plaster lying around and in a few hours the first patient arrived, who was to have surgery the next day. First we had to clean the operating room, set up the sterilizers, set up beds, set up the kitchen stove, and all this in one afternoon. We had to prepare and sterilize dressings and other things. Sister Salesia

and I worked all night so that everything was ready in the morning. We were tired but then there was the operation. We ran all day, cleaning rooms. Meanwhile, the patients were arriving one after the other. The next night we again took the night duty. I was up all night again because the doctors were not satisfied if the person who was on night duty could not speak English.”

In 1912, there was no specific admitting department. The hospital was open to anyone who was ailing. The sick came to the door, they were accepted, and they received the necessary medical attention. Doctors did not work as much in the hospitals. They saw patients in their homes or in their own offices. The nursing Sisters did the best they could to treat patients as they came to the hospital.

Even with all the problems involved in a building that was still under construction, the Sisters were now able to evacuate the little wooden convent. After a year and a half they had a home of their own. They could begin to live at least a marginally regular religious life and, under more professional circumstances, they could practice their calling as nurses.



## Chapter 7

# The Good and the Bad

Mother Pulcheria was coming to Humboldt. The superior who had overcome some daunting obstacles so that she could send the first three pioneering Sisters to Saskatchewan was now able to come to Canada to see, first hand, the fruits of her vision.

Aloisia Wilhelm, named Maria Pulcheria of the Good Shepherd, Sister of St. Elizabeth, was born on February 17, 1853 in Ehrwald, Austrian Empire, the daughter of Thomas Wilhelm and Creszens Westreicher. She worked as a waitress for some years before entering a cloister of Perpetual Adoration at Innsbruck. There she realized that, although she had always wanted to enter religious life, she was destined for a vocation which combined activity with contemplation.

When she was 25, she applied for admission to the convent of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth in Klagenfurt. Invested with the habit on September 29, 1879, she made her solemn vows on November 15, 1880. She served as laundry mistress, seamstress, sacristan, treasurer and, for two terms, superior general (1906-1912), as well she cared for the sick. She studied farm management and, for several years, she was procurator at the convent.

It was during her second term as superior that she conceived the idea of marking the Klagenfurt 200th anniversary by establishing a foundation in North America. Canada became the chosen site. Before the Sisters could undertake the new venture they needed the approval of church authorities in Austria, Rome and Saskatchewan. Mother Pulcheria quickly secured the necessary documents.

In June 1910, after Humboldt had been established as the location for the new foundation, Prior Bruno strongly recommended that Mother Pulcheria come to Canada herself, preferably in September, with four



**Aloisia Wilhelm was born in 1853, made her solemn vows on November 15, 1880 and died in Humboldt on February 5, 1916.**

other Sisters who could, he said, probably help out in other hospitals and learn English while waiting for the hospital to be built.

He wrote her again in July, with a further request that she come to Saskatchewan. "Before we can do anything else from here, it will be necessary for you to come yourself or send some Sisters to investigate and then make a definitive decision on the founding of the hospital," he wrote.

The superior could not leave her convent, however, and until the credit union scandal had been sorted out, clergy were not allowed to leave the country. When the time came, Mother Pulcheria was able to send only three, rather than five, Sisters. She was not among them, and she had considerably less money to offer the new foundation.

Still, the reports that Mother Pulcheria received from Sr. Augustina, superior of the new foundation, and Prior Bruno of the abbey were almost always uniformly glowing, describing the joyful and warm welcome, the three Sisters in good health and happy, a population that had "nothing but hearts full of love and gratitude toward us."

Prior Bruno echoed Sr. Augustina's reassurances. "The Sisters are stronger and healthier than they were in Klagenfurt, and cheerful and full of hope, there is no need to worry about the financial matter, the hospital conforms in every regard to the highest standards which can be found in any modern hospital."

*Der Bote* offered only positive news: "The Elizabethan hospital in Humboldt is an imposing building with red bricks. If it is not one of the biggest hospitals in the country, it is one of the most beautiful with the best arrangements. It is a considerable distance from the noise of the town amid a grove of trees."

The only hint that life in Saskatchewan was not perfect might have come through Sr. Augustina's frequent requests for Mother Pulcheria to please come out and take over the management of the new foundation. Sr. Augustina was uneasy about the prospects of satisfactorily setting up the new mission. Therefore, she made repeated invitations and requests for Mother Pulcheria's presence, going so far as to make recommendations for her trip. Plans were underway for a visit in the spring of 1912, but Mother Pulcheria became ill, and, given that she was still superior at Klagenfurt,



**Mother Pulcheria Wilhelm who founded the Canadian mission based in Humboldt. She was Superior in Klagenfurt when the mission began. She came to Humboldt in 1913.**

moving to Saskatchewan was not practical.

However, in 1912, Mother Pulcheria's second term as superior expired. She became Mistress of Novices, but she was urged by the Sisters in Humboldt to join them as the founder of the new mission. Now that she was free of the responsibilities of superior, and able to devote herself to the new foundation, a journey to Humboldt became a possibility. Plans were made for Abbot Bruno to travel to Klagenfurt in the spring of 1913 to escort Mother Pulcheria and the next wave of Sisters to Canada.

"It was no small matter for her to leave the convent in Klagenfurt," wrote Sr. Mary Elizabeth in her history of the Sisters of Humboldt. "She was not young, having reached the age of 60. At that age, moving from a well-regulated, ancient convent to a far-off foreign land where the customs were totally different and the language not understood was very difficult for her. Still, she made the sacrifice and left her cloister and her homeland toward the end of June 1913 and undertook the long journey. In her group were Sr. Maria Seraphina (Mathilde Pfurtscheller) and Sr. Maria Walburga (Maria Swetlin) as well as Elizabeth Ehrereich and Elizabeth (last name unknown) who married and became Mrs. Massinger."

The Abbot chose the same route he had used with the Sisters a year earlier and embarked on the same vessel, the *Kaiser Franz Joseph I*. The travellers boarded the ship in Trieste, landed in New York and reached Humboldt on July 14, 1913.

"At last the foundress had arrived," Sr. Mary Elizabeth wrote. "She was surprised at some things and disappointed over others. Although the hospital was fully modern, it lacked many comforts and any kinds of superfluity. Although Mother Pulcheria embraced the challenge, she was unable to adapt fully to her new circumstances."

Certainly there was much to prove the value of the new foundation. The Sisters were loved and respected, by Protestants as much as by Catholics. Their collections were going well. They were so trusted that both doctors and patients preferred them – even though they were not formally accredited – to secular registered nurses. The residents of Humboldt had, by a large majority, ratified the bylaw giving a contribution of \$2,500 to the new hospital. The Sisters had received the required number of signatures so that they could get a loan. The local women helped furnish the hospital. As soon as the hospital was blessed in October, the patients started coming.

However, in spite of the glowing comments about a modern structure, Mother



**Mother Pulcheria Wilhelm photographed in Klagenfurt just before embarking to the new mission in Humboldt, 1913.**

Pulcheria, known for her intelligence and efficiency as well as her faith and belief in prayer, might have quickly summed up the flaws and the challenges.

The hospital building had been blessed before work on the inside was completed. “On October 25, when the carpentering was completed on only one floor, the doctors arrived and asked if we could admit a patient,” wrote Sr. Mary Elizabeth. “The kitchen stove had to be set up so that food could be cooked for the patients. There was a continuous flow of patients from then on – seven in the first week.”

In her diary, Sr. Philomena wrote:

“Everything was incomplete at the beginning. The electric lights were on only half the night. There were no sewers, no hot water for the bathrooms. We had to heat the water in the kitchen and then carry it upstairs to the wards. For every little bit we had to go to the kitchen. The same for the sterilizer. We often carried hot water up so that it would boil faster and save electricity. It is no wonder that many of the first Sisters had sore feet from all the walking. This showed up more as we got older. We were often on our feet all day and night. Since we did not yet have a designated night nurse, we were on nights two or three times a week. Besides that I often was up at night when something special happened.”

What about the bushland that Abbot Bruno recommended that the Sisters buy for use as a park? “Unfortunately, this did not happen. At this time the town had not established its sewer system so we were forced to drain all our refuse from the hospital into this bush area. There was a low-lying area into which we were advised to pump our sewage. The sharp chemicals from the laundry and operating room ruined many of the trees. They began to dry out. Fortunately, the town installed the sewer lines soon after.”

“Naturally there are also washrooms and bathrooms in the building,” *Der Bote* had reported. Yes, but, according to Sr. Philomena, “For quite a while we had to carry all the sewage from the toilets out in pails.”

There was no separate medical ward. The first floor, at ground level, was women’s – medical, surgical and maternity. There were three private rooms, two semi-private rooms, one room with three beds, and a public ward with six beds. There was also a verandah which could house three patients but only in summer as it was not heated. A hallway which led to the fire escape also contained three toilets and a tub, plus a rack which contained the bedpans. This was not convenient as it was not close to the patient rooms. Also on this floor were a small office and pharmacy combined, a small visiting room and the nurses’ dining room from which a door led to the chapel.

Sr. Philomena had shown extraordinary insight regarding the problems created by the government official who had insisted the building could not have exterior stairs. When the basement had to be dug deeper than intended, the windows were too low.

“Often there was water in the basement because there was no sewage drainage yet. One day, Prior Bruno brought a hand pump from somewhere and he pumped and worked until he was all dirty and soaked with perspiration. We carried out hundreds of pails of water and also helped to pump. That was the big problem we had because the basement had to be so deep. Later on, much of the ground had to be hauled away from the building so that the water could drain away from the building,” she wrote.

There was also the matter of the physical and emotional health of the Sisters, in particular the three pioneers. What was the reality of the glowing accounts of “good health, good appetite, stronger and healthier than they were in Klagenfurt, cheerful and full of hope?”

Sr. Gabriela suffered pangs of homesickness and a degree of loneliness that can only be imagined by someone who has not gone almost directly from a cloistered community to being the sole sister working with two lay people in the kitchen and laundry at the abbey. While she was expected to be visible and positive, out in the public eye, collecting alms and doing home nursing, Sr. Augustina had endured that same loneliness while Sr. Philomena and Sr. Gabriela were in Duluth.

Until the hospital was built, Sr. Philomena and Sr. Augustina worked around the clock, home nursing, often without having beds provided for them. There was never enough to eat. Too often, all they had were vegetables from their own garden and milk from their own cows. Tired, hungry, lonely, without adequate sanitation, they nursed the injured, the post-surgery patients and the contagious sick.

Dr. Barry performed surgery in his little hospital. Two Sisters worked there. Ether was the anesthetic and when a second doctor was not available, a Sister administered it. In the darkness, lighting was provided by a glass lantern. Ether is very flammable and this light had to be kept a safe distance from the surgical area.

One of the problems was money. Klagenfurt was in no position to keep the new foundation financed. The non-profit voluntary hospital owned by the Sisters of St.



**Chickens running in the yard of the chicken barn at the hospital farm.**

Elizabeth spent more money on patient care than they received in fees. The Sisters depended largely on their farm and orchard to keep everyone fed, and on donations from the surrounding community to keep their facility running.

At the end of July 1912, Sr. Augustina had written, "Jacob, our hired man, is in Muenster for haymaking time. We will receive what hay we need from Muenster. We now have a cow and two small pigs. These were bought for us cheaply by Jacob. For the winter, we would need two to three cows. We already have 17 chickens, which I received from the woman I nursed during the winter. Later, I will receive some more."

Besides doing all the nursing, the Sisters did the cooking, the laundry, the cleaning and the sterilizing for the hospital and maintained a huge garden and a range of farm animals, raised for milk and meat. Although there were now ten Sisters, four were working in the abbey kitchen and laundry. Abbot Bruno had written to Klagenfurt, to Mother Pulcheria, on August 5: "Since August 1, 1912, the Sisters have taken over our monastery kitchen and we are very pleased. They are themselves uneasy, wondering whether they give satisfaction and thus give themselves a lot of trouble and work. Once they get used to the assignment, they will find things easier." Meanwhile, the hospital opened in October and there were no more Sisters from Klagenfurt until Mother Pulcheria brought two with her. The hospital had living space in the basement for one hired man.

When Mother Pulcheria moved to Humboldt, she brought her Christian fortitude, her faith in prayer, her energy and her spirit of enterprise. Having served in so many



**Sr. Salesia with an unknown patient**

administrative capacities in her cloister, she had developed a solid knowledge of psychology, she understood human problems, and she had a deep sympathy for troubled people. She brought these attributes, too, as well as her far-sighted vision.

Before she left Klagenfurt, Mother Pulcheria had obtained permission to establish a canonically erected institution with independent status and to open a novitiate in the new foundation. On August 30, 1913, after celebrating Mass, and having received the necessary documents from Bishop Pascal, Abbot Bruno declared the Sisters of St. Elizabeth of Humboldt independent from the Klagenfurt foundation and declared it as a canonically erected convent and motherhouse. Now the new foundation could accept novices and recruit young Canadians.

At the canonical election of a superior general, which followed the solemn pronouncement, Mother Pulcheria was chosen on the first ballot. From that day, the community at Humboldt was established as a self-sustaining convent and motherhouse. Bishop Pascal confirmed the election of the new superior on September 3, 1913. Sister Augustina, who, up to then, had been the temporarily appointed superior, and whose health had been deteriorating for some time, was overjoyed with the outcome.





## Chapter 8

# Growing Pains and Rejoicing



A view of Humboldt looking east along Railway Avenue taken in 1911

Humboldt was growing up, and many of the changes made life for the Sisters at St. Elizabeth's Hospital somewhat easier.

By August of 1913, the powerhouse was nearing completion and work was in progress for the installation of electric lights. In 1914, the contract for waterworks and sewage was awarded and in 1916, the systems were completed. Also by 1916, Humboldt had electric light service all night and every Wednesday morning. A rural telephone company was organized the same year.

Maintaining sanitary conditions in a hospital with on-going water problems was a serious issue for the Sisters. On October 6, 1911, Sr. Augustina wrote to Mother Pulcheria: "We had hoped to receive our supply of water from the railway company since their conduits run right by the hospital. But how long their supply would last I do not know."

"She was right," wrote Sr. Mary Elizabeth. "The supply did not last for us and not even for the railway company since Burton Lake was all dried up. The hospital had to manage without it for many years, use poor quality of water, and purchase the drinking water. Attempts were made to dig wells but still the hospital had no supply of water of its own." Good news, indeed, for the Sisters when, in 1916, town water was available from the new reservoir.

In 1913, the year Mother Pulcheria moved to Humboldt, the new church, St. Augustine's, was built on a location near the original little wooden building and blessed



**St. Augustine's Church, circa 1913.**



**Isabel Schmidt, maid of honour and Sr. Marianne Schmidt, February 10, 1915 on the day of her temporary profession of vows.**

by Bishop Pascal. An attractive brick structure, it was a short walk from the convent/hospital.

Meanwhile, the novitiate was opened and, as candidates came forward, the number of Sisters increased. During these first years, young women from the district began to join the small community. The first Canadian candidate was Agnes Schmidt from Humboldt, who entered in November 1912. Agnes was the second youngest of the 12 children of Carl Ludwig and Agnes Dietner from Waterloo, Ontario. Among the earliest settlers to the area, the family had moved to Humboldt in 1902 after all the children were born. Young Agnes learned quickly to survive less than comfortable living situations – among the household goods her parents brought to Humboldt were four tents, one for the boys, one for the girls, one for the parents, and one for meals. During a particularly nasty thunderstorm, the girls' tent blew over.

The first profession of vows in the Canadian colony was in April 1913. Sr. Gertrudis Bergles, who had come to Humboldt from Klagenfurt as a novice with the second group of Sisters, made her profession of vows in the convent chapel on April 19, 1913. Bishop Pascal presided, assisted by the chaplain, Fr. Hein, Prior Peter Windschiegl, OSB, and Fr. Casimir Cismowski, OSB.



**Sr. Seraphina & Mrs. Anderson in the orchard.**

Sr. Gertrudis was born Julianna Bergles on April 23, 1890, in Kamten, Austria. She entered the convent in Klagenfurt in 1910, studied pharmacy, and received her religious habit on April 18, shortly before coming to Canada with the second group of Sisters on July 27, 1912.

There was a double ceremony on November 24, 1913. Agnes Schmidt entered the novitiate and received the habit and her new name, Sister Marianna. Sister Seraphina, who had entered the convent in Klagenfurt in 1912 and had come to Humboldt with Mother Pulcheria as a novice, pronounced her temporary vows for three years. Born in Austria in 1890 as Mathilde Pfurtscheller, Sr. Seraphina was sent for six months to the Sisters of Sion in Prince Albert to learn English and to work with the Sisters of Charity in the hospital, gaining nursing experience. She later served as superior general and superior at St. John's Hospital in Rosthern.

Between 1913 and 1916, counting Mother Pulcheria and the two Sisters who accompanied her from Klagenfurt, 11 Sisters joined the congregation. Among the other Canadian pioneers were Sisters Elizabeth Lopinski, Benedicta Yungwirth, Theodora Sieben, Aloisia Heisler, Hyacintha Senger and Pulcheria Poth.

Entering a religious order was not always easy. In 1913 and 1914, a pair of Sisters entered. One Sister made her final vows, the other her temporary ones. One left in 1918 and the other a year later.

In spite of improvements, which made the work more rewarding, the Sisters were still facing serious challenges.

Patients were separated by gender, with all the female patients – surgical, maternity, illness and infection – on the first floor, and all the men on the second. The operating room and delivery room were combined. The operating room was

on the second floor and there was no elevator in the first hospital. Women who were about to deliver had to be carried up to the operating room and back down again later, with their babies. In 1914, 21 babies were born. Besides maternity cases, any female patient requiring surgery had to be brought upstairs and taken back down afterward.

Food was served from large pots which were pulled up manually in a dumb waiter. Only bacon and eggs were fried on the ward, and this job was done by the nurses on duty. As well, they set up all the trays, which were kept in the ward kitchen, and washed the dishes. Patient medications, most of which were in liquid form, were kept in a shoe box in the same area as the trays.



**St. Elizabeth's Hospital operating room on the second floor.**

“Although none of the Sisters had a diploma from the government here, they alone did all the nursing in the hospital,” wrote Sr. Mary Elizabeth. “Sr. Philomena had learned a great deal at Duluth and Sisters Salesia and Clementina had completed their courses in Klagenfurt. The clinical cases that presented themselves created no difficulties for them. Still, one day the doctor brought a registered nurse with him to the operating room. He soon let her go again. However, as the shortage of manpower continued to make itself felt, the Sisters did take on one hired nurse.”

By December 1913, a total of 281 patients, including 128 who required surgery, had been cared for. In that time, only 15 patients had died. In 1914, eight patients died and 21 babies were born. Nursing days totaled 4,068. The Sisters were working very long hours.

The local people quickly learned to trust and love the Sisters. Over time, it was not unusual for patients who could not look after themselves to stay in the hospital for seven or eight years. Sometimes they would bequeath their property to the Sisters in return for their stay.

However, unexpected problems arose. One doctor who the Sisters counted on as their helpmate changed radically over time, becoming very critical. Finally, the other

doctors took him aside. They learned that, against all logic, the critical one could not accept some patients dying. It took the combined efforts of the other doctors eventually to convince him that death was part of life, that there were mortality rates in all hospitals, and that the deaths at the Humboldt hospital were not the fault of the Sisters.

Sometimes, getting a little break required ingenuity. Sr. Philomena was never afraid to recount a story about herself. One night, she had prepared a nice little lunch. Timing was important. At that time, the rule for the Eucharistic fast meant that anyone intending to receive communion during Mass had to refrain from food and drink after midnight. Before she could get to her food, one of the doctors called to ask about a patient. Sr. Philomena knew that if she started talking to the doctor, she would run out of time for lunch. So she said, "Doctor, just hold the line for a minute and I'll tell you." She ate her lunch in two minutes and went back to the phone to make her report. "Everything was so limited, you know, and so busy," she said.

Nor was life any easier for the Sisters working at the abbey. When Prior Bruno requested more Sisters to do the cooking, baking and laundry for the monastery, he offered them a house with six rooms. When the new Sisters arrived, some went to live with Sr. Augustina in the bleak little temporary house built near the site of the proposed hospital. The Sisters who remained at the monastery began their new assignment on August 1, 1912, serving in the kitchen and doing laundry as well as the sewing. The Sisters sewed the monks' habits as well as the vestments for Mass and all the altar linens. They had a special apparatus for constructing the cinctures out of cotton thread. The surplices, which were crocheted, were models of fine hand work.

Water was scarce. The Sisters followed the usual practice of using rinse water



**Sr. Xaveria Motschilnig and her unnamed helpers at St. Peter's Abbey, Muenster**

for washing the next load, but, unlike the local housewives, the Sisters were dealing with surplices and altar linens which they would be expected to keep pristine white. Bed sheets were mangled – pressed by running them through a mechanical laundry aid consisting of two rollers in a sturdy frame, connected by cogs and powered by a hand crank. Monks' clothing was ironed by hand. The abundance of mending and darning was managed after the rest of the day's work, usually during the evening recreation period.

## Chapter 9

# Unless a Grain of Wheat. . .

While most people infected with tuberculosis recover completely without treatment, there are known risk factors – crowded or unsanitary living conditions, poor nutrition, prolonged exposure to someone with the disease. Even though during the first half of the twentieth century there was no effective treatment, the incidence of tuberculosis in North America had begun to decline around 1900 because of generally improving living conditions. On the other hand, TB, or “galloping consumption,” as it was often known, was almost impossible to beat when the patient’s immune system had been compromised by long periods of hunger and fatigue.

Sr. Augustina had spent some time home nursing a woman with tuberculosis. Although she tried to put a positive face on life in Humboldt in her letters back to Mother Pulcheria, after that episode, she made her first admission of serious problems.

“She would have liked me to stay on for another month. I just could not do it, for my own health was being impaired. I had a high fever for a few days. I think the cause was the lack of sleep because the time remaining over from nursing I had to spend on prayer and the care of the little baby.” In the same letter, she asked Mother Pulcheria to send more Sisters in the spring.

Sr. Augustina was born in Pusarnitz, Carinthia, on September 7, 1871. She entered St. Elizabeth’s Convent in Klagenfurt on June 29, 1890 and was sent to one of the city’s pharmacies to take the pharmacy course which she passed on October 7, 1893. She was named superior for the new foundation which would establish a hospital



**Sr. Augustina Platzer, the first Superior in Humboldt**

in Humboldt, but the first group of Sisters who arrived in Muenster in 1911 was smaller than Prior Bruno had recommended.

He had wanted Mother Pulcheria to accompany four Sisters. When that plan proved unworkable, he had a second suggestion – an initial exploratory trip to Canada. “Before we can do anything else from here,” he wrote, “it will be necessary for you to come yourself or to send some Sisters to investigate and then make a definite decision on the founding of the hospital.”

Because of various circumstances, Prior Bruno’s group of five became three Sisters who had no time to learn English and Canadian nursing techniques, and, on many occasions, no time to sleep or to eat properly.

According to the rule of the day, Sisters left the secular world when they entered convents which, in Europe, were most often cloisters. Sisters did not eat in the presence of the laity. As a result, in families that did not have a religious Sister among their number, the obvious assumption was that Sisters did not need food. As the pioneer Sisters moved out into home nursing in the Humboldt-Muenster community, they had to override their ingrained sense of privacy and modesty as well as the language barriers in order to ask for a meal or a cup of coffee. Perhaps the local laity also believed that Sisters did not have to sleep. Often they were not provided with a bed.

In a letter she wrote to Mother Pulcheria six days after she arrived in Muenster, Sr. Augustina made her first request for more Sisters to come out in the fall. She had two things on her mind: there would be a drastic need for more Sisters even before the hospital opened, and she wanted the freedom to move to a hospital where she could gain Canadian experience and learn English. “Fr. Prior thinks I should be here but I begged him to let me go. I’m unable even to converse with the construction foreman. It would be better if he were to continue on our behalf.”

As the cost of building the hospital continued to climb, she was chronically concerned about money. In a letter written the following June, she admitted to being homesick for the cloister. She missed the orderly convent routine, and regretted that, with so much to do, her prayer life was frequently disturbed. When Sr. Philomena and Sr. Gabriela went to Duluth, she spent a long and lonely winter alone. She was also unsure that she had the talent for organization and worried that she did not have the skills to set up things satisfactorily.

By the time the second group of Sisters reached Muenster on July 27, 1912, Sr. Augustina’s health was an open concern. In her letter to Mother Pulcheria, she admitted, “I was at Muenster to await them and have spent most of my time there because of my unsettled state of health. The Sisters all travelled to Humboldt the next day while I had to stay behind, on orders of the Abbot, who thought the weather was too cool for me.” The temporary convent in Humboldt was small and poorly made, dangerously drafty for someone who was already ill. Prior Bruno had told Mother



Pulcheria that Saskatchewan's bitter winters would not bother Sisters who would be comfortable in a warm hospital, but there was no warm, well-built, well-insulated convent available while the hospital was under construction.

On August 1, 1912, after many letters to Mother Pulcheria in which he described how happy and healthy the Humboldt Sisters were, Abbot Bruno reported that he did not find Sr. Augustina in good health. He considered the situation precarious because of possible tuberculosis infection. Still, he hoped that a certain doctor in the United States, who had helped many and restored their health, could also help Sr. Augustina.

The doctor advised rest and more rest. She was also to eat well.

Good advice, of course, but not advice that Sr. Augustina would have been able to take. "On the whole," wrote Sr. Mary Elizabeth, "there were not enough people to do the work. The Sisters were very much in demand and each had to be on night duty a few times a week." Also, there was no spare money. The Sisters had to rely on Divine Providence, generous neighbours and what they themselves could produce for their food. The hospital farm was officially established in 1913, but almost immediately, the Sisters had dug a small plot so they could provide themselves with potatoes. Often, that was all they had to eat. Sr. Augustina needed an assortment of vitamin-rich vegetables and a substantial quantity of meat but given her working and living conditions it simply was not available to her.

Not that Sr. Augustina's life in Muenster and Humboldt had been all pain. In letters back to Mother Pulcheria, she described moments of exquisite joy. "I had never expected the Sisters would be so respected here." On the conclusion of the purchase of the land for the hospital, she wrote, "When we had finished these transactions a weight was lifted from my heart. I believe sincerely that it was the prayers of Rev. Mother which changed the tide of events and reached a happy conclusion." In her letter after the arrival of the seven Sisters, she wrote, "For now I can only say a thousand times: God reward you. May the dear Lord recompense you a thousand times by giving you peace and joy. These are the greatest gifts we can have and they give us strength and courage to accept sacrifices here below and secure for us a heavenly crown above."

As well, Sr. Augustina had family in the immediate area. Her younger brother, Jacob Platzer, born in 1888, came to Humboldt in 1912. He had graduated at the top of his class from the agricultural college in Klagenfurt and had farm holdings in the Humboldt area. He helped the Sisters establish their hospital and the farm which provided food for the Sisters and the hospital. He also took care of the grounds and served as a general handyman for the Sisters, working only for room and board for several years.

Sr. Augustina was able to be present at the blessing of the new hospital for which she had endured so many begging missions. Only two Sisters – both on nursing duty

that day – missed the event. Then, joy of all joys, Mother Pulcheria came to Humboldt in July of 1913. In August, the Humboldt foundation was declared independent of Klagenfurt and Mother Pulcheria Wilhelm was chosen superior general. Sr. Augustina was relieved of the leadership role that had so concerned her.

There was one final momentous occasion for joy.

*An Act to Incorporate The Sisters of St. Elizabeth Hospital, Humboldt, Saskatchewan being a Private Act, Chapter 47 of the Statutes of Saskatchewan, 1915,* became effective on June 24, 1915. The first three sections read:

### **Preamble**

WHEREAS an association of nuns has existed for some time in the Province of Saskatchewan under the name of “The Sisters of Saint Elizabeth,” having for its objects the attendance to sick in hospitals, missions, congregations for ladies, orphanages, working places, housekeeping schools, agricultural orphanages, industrial schools, deaf and dumb institutions, dispensaries, boarding houses for lame and aged persons, and to impart education and moral training to pupils in convents and schools, to instruct prisoners and to visit the sick and poor; And whereas the petition presented in their name prays that the association may be vested with corporate powers and it is expedient to grant their prayer: Therefore His Majesty by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan enacts as follows:

### **Incorporation**

1. Mother Pulcheria, nee Aloisia Wilhelm, Sister Augustina, nee Mary Platzer, Sister Philomena, nee Anna Jug, Sister Gabriela, nee Anna Lex, and such other persons as are now or may hereafter become under the provisions of this Act members of the said association, shall be and are hereby declared to be a body politic corporate in deed and in name by the name of “The Sisters of Saint Elizabeth Hospital,” for the purposes and objects aforesaid.

### **Powers**

2. The said corporation shall have perpetual succession and a common seal, and may at all times hereafter contract and be contracted with, including the borrowing of money on mortgage or promissory note, sue and be sued, implead and be impleaded in any matter whatsoever in all courts and places in this province.

The challenges, the struggles, the deprivations had paid off. Sr. Augustina had seen the fruition of her work. Her mission had been to go to the new land and to establish a hospital, and the deed was now, officially and legally, done. (*See Letters in Appendix III.*)

“Sister Augustina’s health continued to fail,” wrote Sr. Mary Elizabeth. “The blow that was feared for so long struck the fledgling community on January 8, 1916, when the first superior and one of the pioneers, Sr. Augustina Platzer, died after prolonged suffering. Her illness had been partly caused by the drain of her energies resulting from the strenuous efforts exerted in her practice of charity. She had contracted consumption and died at 45 years of age. Her health, even at Klagenfurt, was never the best. The hardships of the first year and the many privations endured by the Sisters at that time could not but leave a lasting effect.

“The burial took place on January 11, after the Requiem Mass celebrated in the parish church of Humboldt by Prior Peter WindschiegI, OSB. That day, it was 49 below zero. Sr. Augustina was laid to rest in a plot of ground chosen as God’s acre by the Sisters themselves only a few weeks before her death.”



**Fr. Peter WindschiegI, OSB, presiding at investiture and profession ceremonies at St. Elizabeth’s convent, Humboldt.**



## Chapter 10

# Prairie Growth Amidst World Events

Mother Pulcheria made her move from Klagenfurt to Humboldt at a pivotal time in world history.

In Canada, the Canadian Northern Railway completed the second cross-Canada railway, stretching from Vancouver to Toronto and Montreal with branches to Nova Scotia, in 1912. Initially called the National Transcontinental Railway, in 1918, this railway became the Canadian National Railway.

Meanwhile, by Saskatchewan standards, Humboldt was developing into a very modern community with a post office and customs office building, electricity, water and sewer, a new City Hall, and a waterline from Burton Lake, courtesy of the new CNR. Nobody in town would have anticipated that during 1914, a recruiting station would open in town and 21 young men from the Humboldt area would immediately sign up for a war thousands of miles away.

That really dark future was not apparent when Mother Pulcheria, escorted by Abbot Bruno, departed from Klagenfurt with Sr. Seraphina Pfurtscheller, Sr. Walburga Swetlin, and two other women.

However, on July 28, 1914, a month after a Serbian fanatic assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austria-Hungarian throne, Austria declared war against Serbia. A war between Austria and Serbia meant a war between Austria and Serbia's traditional enemy, Russia. Entangled alliances in 1914 ensured that any provocation would drag all the great powers into a worldwide conflict. That meant war between Russia and Germany, war between



Sisters who arrived in Humboldt in 1913. (L to R): Sr. Maria Seraphina Pfurtscheller (a novice), Mother Pulcheria Wilhelm (foundress), and Sr. Maria Walburga Swetlin.

Germany and France, and war between Germany and Great Britain and her empire, including Canada. In a flash, the whole continent was at war. By war's end, about 9.7 million military personnel and 6.8 civilians were dead and another 21 million were wounded.

In 1913, Abbot Bruno declared the new foundation in Humboldt a self-sustaining convent and motherhouse. The Sisters held their first General Chapter and chose their first canonically elected Superior General for the new Canadian Foundation. Mother Pulcheria was elected for a three-year term, which was ratified by Bishop Pascal on September 4, 1913. She was 60, she had been too ill to travel in 1911, and her health was still questionable. Her recourse in all difficulties was prayer and she wanted to draw the Humboldt Sisters to a life of genuine piety, to implant in them the true religious spirit.

The Humboldt congregation, short of money and personnel, was stretched tightly between staffing the hospital, tending the garden and the livestock to keep their patients fed, and providing kitchen and laundry services for the monks at the abbey. Short-staffed everywhere, the Sisters had little opportunity to follow the traditional, measured division of work, prayer and recreation that they had known in Klagenfurt. According to one Sister, prayer life often meant saying the rosary while peeling potatoes.

There was no consistency in a resident chaplain for the hospital. The Sisters had obtained the services of Fr. Wilhelm Hein, OSB. However, in September, 1913, he had to return to the U.S. because his health was failing, and he died of tuberculosis in August 1918. Fr. Peter Fisher took his place until early October 1913, when Abbot Bruno appointed Fr. Boniface Puth, OSB, of Muenster to the post. He stayed until 1916.

Sr. Augustina was acutely ill and was obviously dying. The number of patients continued to increase and the hospital was proving to be too small. According to Sr. Mary Elizabeth, "Although the Canadian foundation was close to her heart, Mother Pulcheria did not really feel at home in the local situation."

In spite of her strong faith, Mother Pulcheria must have spent many sleepless nights as she faced all these practical and present difficulties, while wondering and worrying about her country and the Sisters she had left behind in Klagenfurt. There would have been absolutely no way to send or receive letters or any news from home.

The situation in Canada was heating up. In August 1914, under the War Measures Act, the Canadian government's Order in Council called for registration and sometimes internment of the people they classified as aliens of "enemy nationality." This included more than 80,000 Canadians who were formerly citizens of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. These individuals had to report to local authorities on a regular basis. Twenty-four "concentration camps," later called "internment camps,"

were established across Canada. In theory, the camps held enemy alien immigrants who had contravened regulations or were considered security threats. In fact, people of certain nationalities could be interned if they failed to register, failed to report monthly, travelled without permission, or wrote to relatives in Austria. Other less concrete reasons given for internment included acting in a very suspicious manner and being undesirable. By the middle of 1915, 4,000 of the internees had been imprisoned for being indigent. A total of 8,579 Canadians were interned between 1914 and 1920. Only 2,321 could be classed as true prisoners of war who were captured carrying arms or belonging to enemy reserves. The rest were all civilians.

The Sisters were loved and respected in Humboldt but the emotional pain and stress for a community of Austrian Sisters must have been almost unbearable. Emotional stress is now recognized as a factor in physical health. Clinical studies show that “Persons under stress throw off the balance of their immune system. Certain immune cells become overactive and prevent other ones from functioning as they should. The communication among cells is broken down, and the entire immune system becomes unstable and ineffective.” (David B. Beaton, Rochester Institute of Technology, 2003.)

As Sr. Augustina’s health continued to deteriorate, Mother Pulcheria developed undiagnosed stomach problems and could barely keep down food. By the end of 1915, she was so sick that she travelled to Winnipeg to consult with Dr. Mckenty, the best doctor available. He diagnosed cancer of the stomach, saying that only an immediate operation could prolong her life.

Dr. Mckenty came to Humboldt on February 4, 1916. Assisted by Dr. Barry, Dr. Cox and Dr. McCutcheon, he performed an operation which appeared to be successful. However, rejoicing lasted less than a day. By early morning on February 5, Mother Pulcheria began to fail. She died later that day, exactly four weeks after Sr. Augustina, having first left instructions regarding her coffin and her exact burial spot.

The funeral service was held on February 8 in St. Augustine’s Church, with Prior Peter Windschiegl officiating.



**Sr. Euphrasia Weiss, second elected Superior**

Abbot Bruno conducted the final absolution and burial. Straightforward, modest and unpretentious, Mother Pulcheria had envisioned the new foundation and had worked long and patiently to bring her dream to fruition. She was buried beside Sr. Augustina, in the Sisters' cemetery in the new country she had tried hard to adopt.

Sister Walburga, the vicar at the time, assumed the position of interim superior until elections could be held. On April 2, 1916, under the presidency of Bishop Pascal, Sister Euphrasia (Anna Weiss) was elected superior for a three-year term. Born in Steiermark, Austria, she entered the convent in Klagenfurt in 1896 and came to Humboldt in 1912. Described as both a good cook and a business manager, she was chosen to pioneer the opening of St. Joseph's Hospital in Macklin in January 1922. She also served three terms as local superior in Macklin, 1922-23, 1929-30 and 1934-35. She died in Muenster on December 6, 1935.



**St. Rochus Hospital, the isolation hospital**

The new superior was immediately faced with two new projects. The increasing number of patients made expansion an urgent necessity. There was also a pressing need for an isolation section. A brick structure was built in 1916 and named St. Rochus Hospital in honour of St. Rochus (1295-1327) who, while on a pilgrimage to Rome, spent his time caring for victims of a plague. He became known as the patron saint of invalids, including those suffering from "pestilence" and infectious diseases.

The Sisters also built a new 26 by 32 foot, two-storey brick building that housed the laundry in the basement, a workshop and sewing room on the ground floor, and the Novitiate on the second floor. The former laundry room in the hospital became the Sisters' refectory.

The congregation continued to grow during the war years. On October 4, 1917, Sr. Elizabeth Lopinski, Sr. Benedicta Yungwirth and Sr. Theodora Sieben made their





**This building housed the Novices on the top floor, the sewing area and workshop on the ground floor, and the laundry in the basement.**

temporary vows and Sr. Aloisia Heisler, Sr. Hyacintha Senger and Sr. Pulcheria Poth received their habits. Bishop Pascal conducted the ceremony with the sermon delivered by Abbot Bruno. Sr. Aloisia left the order in 1934.

The year 1917 marked an important advance for the Elizabethan Sisters in Humboldt. The Saskatchewan Nurses Registration Board granted registration by a waiver clause to persons who had experience in nursing. Sisters Gertrudis Bergles, Philomena Jug, Clementina Possenig, Salesia Scheriau, Theodora Sieben and Celestina Radomsky all received their registration.

In January 1918 the Sisters bought another 58 acres of adjoining bush land on the west side of their property. Even with the addition of the laundry house and the isolation building, the hospital was still too small, and more property was going to be needed.

This fact was borne out later in 1918 with the declaration of an armistice on November 11. Soldiers began to return to Canada. Unwittingly, they brought the Spanish flu with them, first on troop ships then out to Saskatchewan via the transcontinental railways.



## Chapter 11

# Growing Despite Scarcity and Loss

During the First World War, 65,000 Canadian soldiers died, in battle, from wounds, or from illness. In the two years following the First World War, 50,000 Canadians died, victims of the Spanish flu. The two-year duration of the world's most deadly epidemic killed almost as many Canadians as the country lost during four years of world war.

The flu was first recorded in Spain in May 1918. It spread to the British trenches in France and from there to the German trenches. By September 1918, the flu arrived in North America with returning soldiers. The disease was hardest on healthy 20- to 40-year-olds; their survival rate was less than 50 per cent.

The flu officially reached Saskatchewan on October 1, 1918, carried by soldiers who disembarked from troop trains in Regina. More than 3,000 Saskatchewan people died in the first three months of the pandemic. The November end-of-war victory celebrations simply served to spread the disease. The medical profession did not understand the basic nature of viruses, but knowledge would not have helped. There was no vaccination, no cure. Doctors called for bed rest. The population called for alcohol, a problem with prohibition in effect in Saskatchewan. Only two pharmacies in the province could legally distribute alcohol medicinally.

There was a shortage of everything, particularly doctors. Ten per cent of Saskatchewan's doctors were in the military and doctors at home were getting sick and dying from the flu. There were few hospitals in rural areas and most people died at home, the last survivor attempting to bury the rest of the family.

In November 1918, the provincial government called upon the residents of Saskatchewan to visit their neighbours frequently to render such assistance as they were able, and to report illness to the proper authorities. Municipal reeves, overseers, councillors and other persons holding public office were commissioned to encourage co-operation among their citizens.

On the other hand, the official information on the flu came with strict injunctions. Separate the sick from the healthy. This was especially important in the case of first attacks in the household. The sick must not, on any account, mingle with other people for at least 10 days from the commencement of the attack. In severe cases, they should remain away from work for a longer period.

In Saskatchewan, by 1920, when the flu had run its course, more than 5,000 people had died.

Dr. Elliott was Medical Health Officer for Macklin and for the RM of Eye Hill. At the very outset of the epidemic he insisted that the town authorities enforce strict isolation measures. Any train passengers allowed off the trains could go only to the restaurant or hotel. People phoned in their grocery orders and picked them up outside the stores. Schools were closed, meetings not permitted. Not one of Dr. Elliot's patients died from the flu. However, the epidemic convinced him that Macklin needed a hospital.

In Humboldt and around the colony, the first warnings about the flu spreading west, and reaching Regina, were reported in *St. Peter's Bote* in early June 1918. By the end of October, all public buildings – church, theatres, and poolrooms – had been closed temporarily. The elementary school closed for 10 weeks.

As early as 1917, it had become obvious that St. Elizabeth's Hospital was not big enough. In a facility designed to accommodate 18 patients, 329 had been admitted in 1916 and that number rose in 1917. Now, with flu victims adding to the numbers – by mid-July there were 25 patients in the hospital – more space was desperately needed.

The two isolation buildings at the hospital held 21 patients. By early November, St. Peter's Abbey had supplied the hospital with a number of beds. At month's end, the Humboldt Public School became an emergency hospital, housing 14 more patients. Meanwhile, the monks and Sisters were also fighting the flu, although none of them died. Abbot Bruno postponed Confirmation.

The numbers kept piling up and *Der Bote* continued to report them every week. The paper was published in English from October 1918 to the end of December 1919, by order of a Dominion Order-in-Council. By the end of November, 98 flu patients had been treated at St. Elizabeth's with nine deaths. Although the number of patients continued to grow – 108 by December 15 – the emergency hospital at the school closed in mid-December after treating 36 flu patients. *Der Bote* reported that most of the patients were now coming in from rural areas, possibly an indication that, after many home deaths, family members were risking the trip to the hospital in the hope that the Sisters could save lives.

“The influenza took the lives of two daughters of one Muenster family . . . twelve hours apart. Seven Franciscan nuns working in the hospital had the malady. Another three priests and six nuns were recovering from it. The priests received calls every day to visit sick parishioners,” Abbot Bruno wrote in one of his letters.

During 1918, the hospital admitted 625 patients. One hundred and nineteen had the flu though, remarkably, only 11 died. A 24-year-old woman died shortly after giving birth. Most people believed that the flu was responsible as she had been ill with it some time earlier. There was a second round in 1919, first reported in April, with reports coming in from Muenster, Dana and Dead Moose Lake. In Humboldt 50



**St. Elizabeth's Hospital with the 1919 additions.**

cases were reported. The 1919 epidemic was short-lived – by the end of April it was almost over – but there were still deaths, including, as was so typical, a 32-year-old man who died 24 hours after he first showed symptoms.

Even as the Sisters and the community struggled with the epidemic, work started on a 37 by 68 foot addition to the hospital. By the spring of 1919, construction had begun in earnest and by the following winter, the structure was under cover. The new wing was completed in April 1920. In May, two verandahs were added to the first and second floors, both on the south side.

The two-storey addition, designed to double the capacity of the hospital, had 18 rooms, including a suite for the chaplain and a room for the Bishop, personally furnished by him. Benefactors furnished the private rooms. The attic contained 12 cells for the Sisters with a Way of the Cross in the hallway. The basement held a steam-heat furnace and two more rooms. The construction cost more than \$60,000. Private donors contributed the money.

It was not easy. There was a shortage of workers. The war had just ended and not all the soldiers were back. Because of the labour shortage, costs had gone up. There was also a stack of unpaid bills.

On July 2, 1919, Sister Walburga Swetlin, the superior, tried to make the point while being as tactful as possible. “The Sisters of St. Elizabeth’s Hospital at Humboldt,” she wrote for *St. Peter’s Bote*, “wish to thank all those most sincerely



**Sr. Walburga Swetlin, first superior general of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth.**

who by their generous financial support helped them to undertake the construction of the new addition to their hospital. But they also feel obliged to remind a number of former patients, entirely too numerous, who put off indefinitely the payment of their bill at the hospital. The amount thus due to the Sisters of St. Elizabeth runs up to several thousand dollars. It will easily be seen what appreciable service they would render the Sisters who at the present time are compelled to undergo such heavy expenses, if they would make it their duty to remit what after all is a just debt.”

Possibly her message did not have the immediate response that the Sisters needed. There was a second reminder in *Der Bote*, this one in January 1921 in a review of the previous year. “The nursing Sisters can look

back on a great performance again last year. The number of patients was considerably larger than in 1919. While the burden of debt weighs heavily on their shoulders, it is becoming more and more evident how necessary the addition was. The maintenance of this big building, especially the heating, will require much money. The Good Lord, in whose honour the hospital was constructed, and the good people of St. Peter’s Colony, who look upon this institution as a great blessing, will continue to help the Sisters with this burden. May the blessing of God always rest upon St. Elizabeth’s Hospital and its sacrificial nursing Sisters.”

With the new hospital barely completed the Sisters faced the loss of one of their clerical advocates. Bishop Pascal had appointed Abbot Bruno his vicar general and, later, administrator of the diocese. He had also obtained permission from the Holy See for the Abbot to administer the sacrament of Confirmation. In the fall of 1918, Abbot Bruno’s plans for Confirmation had to be curtailed because of the flu but by June 1919, when Bishop Pascal went to France for his health, the Abbot was ready for a tour starting in Saskatoon. He became ill there during Mass although he was able to finish confirming 25 people. He had suffered a heart attack and wanted to get back to St. Elizabeth’s Hospital for his health. He died there on June 12 at the age of 52.

Said Sr. Walburga, the superior at the time, “It was in the afternoon, about 4 o’clock, as Sr. Marianna and I were with the Abbot to fix up his bed. He remarked that

it was like being in purgatory to be lying down in that heat. I asked him whether our work had made him more comfortable and he answered in the affirmative. Then Sr. Marianna and I left his room. After about a quarter of an hour, he called again. The Sister in charge went to see him and he asked for me. I went immediately. He said he wanted to draw a few points to my attention. We were having a pleasant exchange when, suddenly, he reached for his heart with his right hand and breathed so painfully that I was frightened. I asked him whether he were not feeling well. He gave no answer and, at that moment, appeared to be struggling for his last gasp. We called Fr. Schmid immediately to give him extreme unction. In a quarter of an hour, he was a corpse.”

The older Sisters clothed him and, with lighted candles, carried him into the small house. The other Sisters followed. “Our pain was as big as the ocean,” Sr. Walburga said.

Abbot Bruno was succeeded by Michael Ott, OSB, an American who was Sub-prior of St. John’s Abbey in Minnesota. Chosen on July 23, 1919, his solemn blessing took place at Muenster on October 28. When he was named, while still in the United States, he wrote the Sisters, promising that he would do all he could in his power to alleviate their heavy loss.

There was some sunshine on the horizon. Given that the hospital had doubled in size, more help was needed, and hired help would have been too expensive. The Sisters were working for no pay. In the summer of 1919, Mother Walburga wrote to Klagenfurt asking for reinforcements. An escort would not be a problem. Fr. Tharcisius Schmid had been appointed as hospital chaplain on September 20, 1916.

Fr. Schmid was exactly what a group of over-stretched Sisters needed. He was as concerned about the Sisters’ temporal well-being as he was about their spiritual state, and was as willing to do chores for them as he was to offer advice. He had been particularly helpful during the hospital construction and was now willing to go to Klagenfurt to accompany Sisters on their trip back to Canada.

Fr. Schmid had already planned a trip to France, to travel back with Bishop Pascal who had been there for health reasons. However, this was less than a year since



**Abbot Michael Ott who replaced Abbot Bruno Doerfler**



**Archbishop Dr. Hefer of Klagenfurt**

the end of the war. Travel was unreliable and, in Klagenfurt, the yearning for things American had definitely cooled.

The letter from Mother Walburga appeared to rekindle interest in the Humboldt foundation. Immediately, some Sisters agreed to come. However, Klagenfurt had no money. The post-war currency had been devalued and the convent had suffered wartime losses. In Humboldt, the authorities agreed to defray the costs of the trip and Fr. Schmid left for Europe in January 1920, arriving in Klagenfurt in the latter part of February.

Fr. Schmid had received permission from the Canadian government for 10 Sisters to enter the country. He had also received very rare permission from the Klagenfurt Bishop to move freely through the cloistered part of the convent, rather

than just keeping to the hallways. He made an excellent impression on the religious at the convent and was so well considered by the clergy that the Bishop invited him for lunch. However, only four Sisters and two candidates accepted the invitation to move to Humboldt. Other interested Sisters had been dissuaded from making the trip, in spite of Fr. Schmid's best efforts.

The group left on March 2, 1920. At 4 a.m., Fr. Schmid said Mass and all the Sisters received communion before they celebrated a final community breakfast. Bishop Hefer had provided his limousine for the drive to the railway station and this transportation was supplemented by the convent carriage. The travelling group included Fr. Schmid, Sr. Mary Elizabeth Premru, Sr. Christina Drexler, Sr. Rosalie Brunner, Sr. Alexia Jantschge, and two candidates, Rosina Luschen and Maria Christoeffl. Rosina became Sr. Clara. Maria, who became Sr. Margaretha, left during her novitiate and returned to Austria.

Sr. Mary Elizabeth provided an account of the last portion of the trip. The group had stayed over in Winnipeg and attended Mass at St. Joseph's Church in the morning, then waited for the evening train. "In the company of Fr. Hilland, the Winnipeg pastor who hosted the stopover, we went to the railway station as evening approached to begin the last stretch of our journey. With fear and yearning we set out for Humboldt, the long-desired goal. The closer we came, the more fearful we were.





May 10, 1920 (L to R): Sr. Alexia Jantschge\*, Sr. Jacoba Schober (came in 1922 because of illness), Maria Christoeffl (candidate), Fr. Schmid, Sr. Christina Drexler, Sr. Mary Elizabeth Premru, and Sr. Rosalia Brunner\*. Not in the picture is Rosina Luschin who became Sr. Clara. Maria Christoeffl who became Sr. Margaretha returned to Austria during her novitiate. (\*Lay Sisters)

“In Muenster, two of the local Sisters stepped into the train to join us. In Sr. Benedicta we saw the first Canadian sister. At the Humboldt station, three Austrian Sisters were waiting for us. We had known these before and had lived with them at Klagenfurt. With the welcoming committee there was also the first Canadian religious, Sr. Marianna. From some letter, I had learned that Sr. Marianna wore glasses. As I was under the impression that she was the only one in Canada who wore them, I greeted her like an old acquaintance. She was much astounded that I should already know her. Later I explained the mystery to her. Once we had greeted those Sisters we knew and those we did not know, we felt quite at home and fearless.”

Then the Sisters lost another of their clerical supporters. On July 13, 1920, Bishop Pascal died in France, his homeland, and was buried there. His wish had been to spend his last days with the Elizabethan Sisters and he had furnished his own room in the hospital. However, with his health in decline, he had gone to France to recuperate, intending to travel back with Fr. Schmid and the new group of Sisters. He had been a strong supporter of the Sisters from the very beginning, donating \$5,000 to the new foundation.

However, Abbot Michael did not forget his promise to support the Sisters. In 1921, the Benedictine Abbey of St. Peter and its surrounding parishes became the Diocese of Muenster (St. Peter's Abbacy or Abbey Nullius). Abbot Michael and Fr. Schmid assisted the Sisters in a revision of their constitutions to bring them in line with the 1917 Code of Canon Law, church regulations, and the circumstances of life in Canada. The constitutions from Klagenfurt, being no longer relevant, were abandoned. In 1922, the Abbot added instructions on alterations to the Sisters' veils.

## Chapter 12

# A Prairie Shepherd

From the beginning, when he was first appointed hospital chaplain and Father Confessor to the Elizabethan convent on September 20, 1916, the Sisters knew that they could count on Fr. Tharsicius Schmid, Oblate OSB. He was a deeply religious man who was concerned with the Sisters' spirituality, but he was also very practical and more than willing to help with the work. Generous with his skills, ready to serve, he spared the Sisters many dollars through his little repairs and maintenance jobs around the house. He was also the architect and director of the construction of the Grotto to Our Lady built in the Sisters' cemetery in 1921.

While a hired man and Sr. Euphrosia helped with the construction, he bore the costs. His wish was that one day he would rest in that grotto, at the feet of the Mother of God, whom he loved and revered.

Fr. Schmid knew what type of stone was necessary for the grotto and he arranged to have local farmers haul it for him. All the rocks were cemented into place. The completed stonework is 12 feet high, 24 feet across and 20 feet deep; brick-lined niches on three sides are designed to hold small statues.

At the front of the grotto is an altar which was built behind gates. Beneath the altar a glass-fronted tomb holds a plaster statue of the body of Jesus. The niche to the right of the altar contains a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, to whom Fr. Schmid had a special devotion. A tall crucifix stands in front of the shrine and benches invite visitors to linger a moment or two for contemplation and meditation.

The grotto was designed with iron pipes to carry away water that collected on the flat top. At the back, a flight of stone steps leads up to the bell tower. The shrine was dressed with a rich growth of Virginia Creeper and lush green ground cover.



Fr. Tharsicius Schmid, Oblate OSB, chaplain to the Sisters from 1916 to 1926.



**The grotto in the Sisters' cemetery in Humboldt about 1922. Fr. Schmid financed the grotto and did much of the work along with a hired man and Sr. Euphrasia.**

That was not Fr. Schmid's only major project. In 1921 he planned and directed the planting of many pine and spruce trees around the hospital. The following year saw the construction of a big summer house near the cemetery.

Working with Abbot Michael, Fr. Schmid shared the responsibility of reworking the Sisters' constitutions, consulting with Mother Walburga and her councillors to ensure that the revised constitutions would conform to the new Code of Canon Law and the circumstances of the community. The constitutions were approved by Abbot Michael and put into effect immediately. Fr. Schmid also served as escort for the 1920 group of Sisters who came from Klagenfurt.

In the spring of 1924, he suffered two strokes in quick succession. He recovered slowly, remaining somewhat paralyzed, although he regained enough strength to celebrate Mass. At first, he could have Mass only in his room. However, he gradually regained more strength and, later, was able to be wheeled into the chapel. He celebrated his Silver Jubilee in the chapel, surrounded by friends, on March 2, 1926.

In her chronicle of the congregation, Sr. Mary Elizabeth described his final days: "A few weeks before his death, he felt strong enough to undertake a trip to our Sisters at Scott with the intention of remaining there a few days. On Sunday, July 18, he gave the Sisters in Humboldt a conference on the topic suggested by the Sunday's gospel, 'Give an account of thy stewardship.' The next day, he asked to be driven to Scott.

"On Wednesday, he gave the Sisters at Scott a conference and said Mass on Thursday as he had done the two previous mornings. During the day he was very gay and relaxed. He told the Sisters that he liked Scott very much and asked Sr. Philomena, jokingly, whether he could stay on a little longer. Toward evening, he felt ill and asked to go to bed. It was then that he suffered a stroke which left little hope. He said to the attending Sister, 'I am ready to die.' He received the Last Rites

and then lost the power to speak so that he was unable to go to confession or receive communion. With a tremendous effort, he said, 'To Humboldt, or whatever you think.' Shortly afterward, he lost consciousness and suffered repeated convulsions every quarter of an hour all night.

"On Friday morning, he was supposed to be brought to Humboldt. However, the train ran behind schedule and it would be impossible to make connections with the Humboldt train out of Saskatoon. Fr. Schmid had to be taken, instead, to Saskatoon, to St. Paul's Hospital where he grew steadily worse. By Sunday morning, death seemed near. Mother Walburga, who had come in from Humboldt, and Sr. Christina, Sr. Philomena, Sr. Salesia and Sr. Theresia knelt at his bedside. He died shortly before noon, peacefully and quietly on July 25.

"He was dressed in his priest's robes, transported to Humboldt, and laid out in the little parlour which had a window opening up into the chapel. The Sisters kept watch day and night until Wednesday when the body was taken to St. Augustine's Church in Humboldt for the solemn Mass for the dead with a funeral oration by Prior Peter Windschiegler, OSB, from St. Peter's Abbey. A long procession followed the coffin to the grotto which Fr. Schmid himself had built and there he was buried, the only man in the Sisters' cemetery."

Tharsicius Schmid was born on August 2, 1873 in Aaran, Switzerland. He briefly attended school in Freiburg, Switzerland then, as a boy of eight, was sent to France to a "gymnasium" (college). He attended a seminary in Paris and was ordained on March 2, 1901 in Cannes, France. Although he began his priestly career as Vicar at Menens (Freiburg) in Switzerland, a year later he was in Western Canada.

Fr. Schmid was a canon-regular of the Order of the Immaculate Conception, founded by Dom Grea. In 1909 the congregation was dissolved and Fr. Schmid became a diocesan priest. He immediately joined the ranks of the clergy in the Prince Albert diocese, serving as pastor at Wakaw, Duck Lake, Carlton and Bonne Madonne.

He became a member of the diocesan council in 1912, and after the death of Bishop Pascal in 1920, he was administrator of the diocese. He came to Humboldt on September 20, 1916 and remained chaplain of St. Elizabeth's Hospital until his death on July 25, 1926.

When he died, he left everything he had – about \$2,000 – to the Sisters. Fr. Schmid is buried between the crucifix and the grotto. The grotto remains as his memorial. The novices were responsible for the care of the shrine, washing it down, keeping the area clean, providing fresh flowers, weeding, clearing away cobwebs. Mass was celebrated at the site once a year.



Fr. Tharcisius Schmid dressed for labour.



Scott, 1926. Fr. Tharcisius Schmid visited Scott just before his death. In this picture are – Front Row (L to R): Sr. Walburga Swetlin, Fr. Schmid, & Sr. Philomena Jug. Back Row: Srs. Marianne Schmidt, Theodora Sieben, Josepha Senger, & Xaveria Motschilnig.

## Chapter 13

# Ten Years on the Prairies

In 1921, the Humboldt Foundation was 10 years old, and there were two more reasons for celebration. Mother Walburga marked her silver jubilee of profession, the first for the Humboldt community. On the same day, April 20, three postulants, Maria Catharina Mainzer (Sr. Augustina), Anna Schmid (Sr. Franziska), and Rosina Luschin (Sr. Clara), were invested.

On November 1, 1922, the final group of Klagenfurt Sisters came from Austria in the company of Fr. Joseph Wickel. There were three choir Sisters – Margaretha Gruthschnig, Jacoba Schober and Philomena Esenko, and three lay Sisters – Martina Ratz, Ottilia Niederwiesser and Serafina Spath.



Taken November 1, 1922 this is the last group to come from Klagenfurt. They are: Back (L to R): \*Sr. Serafina Spath whose name in Humboldt became Sr. Bonaventure, Unknown Sister who did not come to Humboldt, \*Sr. Ottilia Niederwiesser, \*Sr. Martina Ratz, Sr. Maria Esenko. Front (L to R): Sr. Margaretha Gruthschnig, Rev. Mother Anastasia who did not come to Humboldt, Sr. Jacoba Schober. In 1923, Sr. Martina Ratz and Sr. Bonaventure Spath returned to the motherhouse in Klagenfurt. (\*Lay Sisters)

Regarding the distinction between choir and lay Sisters: in most orders of the era, Sisters were divided into two groups. Lay Sisters were usually employed in the household duties and other manual work. Although they made the traditional vows, they did not recite the Latin Office, replacing it with vernacular prayers. Choir Sisters were provided with more education and could read and pray in Latin. The Humboldt Sisters changed that rule in 1950.

By 1922 there were 34 Sisters, some of them from the local district. Even with increased numbers, the Sisters were stretched thin, and the scope of their ministry seemed to grow faster than they could add numbers to the community. In their non-profit voluntary hospital, the Sisters spent more money for patient care than they received in fees. They fed both patients and themselves from their own farm, and found time outside their regular duties for begging missions to supplement hospital fees.

In 1921, St. Peter's College opened at the abbey with an initial enrolment of 39. According to Sr. Mary Elizabeth, "It was in 1912, after seven Sisters came over from Klagenfurt, that two of these took over the kitchen duties as well as the washing for the Benedictine fathers. When the college was built, the Sisters moved in and took on the same duties they had assumed at the monastery. Now more Sisters were needed. Of these five or six religious, Sr. Christina was the first superior. At the beginning of 1923, there was a request from Muenster for two more Sisters to set type in the print shop. When a type-setting machine was procured by the college, the Sisters' services were no longer required for the press but they remained in the college. Because of the growing enrolment, the amount of work had increased. As time went on, there was always the need for one more Sister until the total stood at nine. The agreement was that the Sisters would be paid \$1,500 annually for their services. The number of Sisters did not matter so long as the work in the kitchen and the laundry was always done. The fee was paid in three instalments, and Prior Peter was always sure to bring it to Humboldt himself, even a few days ahead of time."

In 1915, Rev. Francis Palm, OMI, first asked the Sisters to open a hospital in Macklin to serve German immigrants from Russia. However, until the final group of Sisters came from Klagenfurt in 1922, it was not possible to consider the idea.

On January 2, 1922, Sr. Euphrasia Weiss and Sr. Marianne Schmidt travelled to Macklin. In order to provide for a hospital, they went on begging missions. They bought a frame house from the estate of Frank Shaw, who had died in 1921, and turned it into a temporary hospital with a laundry built in the basement. The new well cost \$1,300. In March, they were joined by Sr. Seraphina Pfuertscheller, Sr. Alexia Jantschge, and Sr. Theodora Sieben. Sr. Euphrasia was the first local superior and administrator of the hospital.

Dr. F. L. Eid, a surgeon who had come to Macklin from Rosenheim, Germany



served the hospital. A very popular doctor, he brought in patients in increasing numbers. The house quickly proved to be too small. Through the help of Bishop Prud'homme, the Sisters were able to secure two loans and the new brick Macklin hospital opened in 1927.

Meanwhile, as the need for hospitals increased, the Sisters were in great demand.

In 1924, the Sisters took over the administration of St. Francis Hospital in Scott. Sister Philomena Jug, superior, and Sisters Theodora Sieben, Gertrudis Bergles, and Helen Karnicar, arrived at Scott on July 1, 1924. In December, Sisters Euphrasia Weiss and Benedicta Yungwirth moved to Cudworth to establish the fourth hospital of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth.

There were joyful moments and sadder times. In 1923, two lay Sisters, Martina Ratz and Serafina Spath, who had come to Humboldt in 1922, returned to Klagenfurt. On July 25, 1924, Sisters Euphrasia Weiss and Agatha Loibneggar, OSE, celebrated their silver jubilees of profession. Abbot Michael resigned his office in 1926, due to ill health. The Chapter of the Abbey chose as their Abbot Fr. Severin Gertken, OSB, a monk of St. John's Abbey in Minnesota.

While the work continued to increase at all the hospitals, so did the expenses in Humboldt. The first X-ray machine, bought in 1922, cost \$6,000. There was need for a new brick isolation unit. When that was built, one big room was added and renovations were made to the old house so it could be used as a nurses' home. The root cellar built beside the laundry house was an absolute necessity if the Sisters were going to conserve vegetables for the winter. It cost \$3,000. When a verandah was added to the third floor, the Sisters' section of the hospital-convent complex, Dr. Fleming paid for the labour while the Sisters paid for the material. The new sterilizer for the operating room was \$1,827 and the new operating table was \$800. As patient numbers increased, the Bishop's room had to be converted into a hospital room. The community also had to meet the costs involved in bringing Sisters from Klagenfurt and supporting the Klagenfurt community after the war (*see Appendix III Letters: Post World War I*).

The \$1,500 a year the Sisters received for their work at the Abbey did not go far. They depended on their support systems – the farm, garden produce and the orchard



**Abbot Severin Gertken came from Minnesota to replace Abbot Michael Ott who resigned in 1926.**

– as well as donations from the surrounding community. Little wonder that they were not about to waste anything.

“It so happened one day,” Sr. Mary Elizabeth recorded, “that the hired man was so busy making hay in the neighbourhood of Muenster that he had no time to bring the hay back to Humboldt. Sr. Alexia said, ‘I will go fetch the hay’ and Sr. Seraphina, the superior at the time, responded with ‘I will go along.’ The hayrack was hitched up and the Sisters were soon on their way to Humboldt. It was not long before they realized that the hay rack had not been properly attached to the wagon. About four miles out of Humboldt, the rack tipped and the whole thing, including the occupants, tumbled to the ground. The horses ran away with the wagon, leaving the rack and the Sisters behind.

“Sr. Seraphina walked to the nearest house and asked the homeowner to please phone the next farmer down the road to ask him to catch the horses and tie them up somewhere. The man did just that. As well, he phoned the hospital to report what had happened. The Rev. Mother immediately had a car sent to the accident scene with instructions to bring the Sisters back but they refused to return without the hay. They persuaded the driver to help them reposition the rack and to help load it. While the driver drove back to Humboldt alone, the Sisters arrived triumphantly, with the rack and the hay.”



The Community of Sisters in 1921. Front Row (L to R): Srs. Salesia Scheriau, Gabriela Lex, Walburga Swetlin, Philomena Jug, Mary Elizabeth Premru. Second Row: Srs. Franziska Schmidt, Antonia Bohl, Elizabeth Lopinski, Benedicta Yungwirth, Agatha Loibnegger, Pulcheria Poth, Josepha Senger. Back Row: Srs. Aloisia Heisler, Helena Karnicar, Clara Luschin, Gertrudis Bergles, Clementina Possenig.

## Chapter 14

# Expansion, Financial Constraints, and Controversy

It was now 1928 and the Sisters, who in April had elected Sr. Seraphina as their new superior, were about to undertake a major project. Because the number of patients was steadily increasing, Sr. Seraphina, in consultation with the hospital board, began to make plans for a complete makeover of the old hospital building and the construction of a new wing which would include a bigger chapel.

There were disquieting signs floating around the Canadian economy. The “Big Three” industries – automobile, housing, and steel – were all in decline and jobs were disappearing. Of more consequence for Saskatchewan, wheat prices had dropped drastically. Immediately after the First World War, a bushel of wheat was worth \$2.45 on the world market. By 1928, that price had fallen to \$1.29 a bushel.

However, Humboldt needed a bigger hospital. As is common in construction, costs were higher than initially estimated. The remodelling of the old building was as necessary as it was expensive. All the basement windows were finally enlarged. The old wooden steps were torn out and replaced with terrazzo. The surgery department was updated. The X-ray equipment was installed in the former chapel. An electric elevator was added at a cost of \$3,360. The entire old building was rebuilt at a cost of \$4,000. Other renovations included a Sisters’ refectory and separate dining rooms for priests, for the nurses, and for visitors. With the addition of the new wing, the hospital now had a capacity of 48. The original plan had called for a completely fireproof structure but the necessary materials were unavailable. The change in plans saved about \$2,000.

Initially, Abbot Severin had agreed only to a \$45,000 loan for the new building and \$10,000 for remodelling the old building. In the end, the loan was \$60,000 and even that was not enough to cover costs. The Abbot allowed an additional loan on one condition – that the Sisters would, in a few years, open a hospital in Watson to prevent another unnamed order of Sisters from coming into the colony. The Sisters made the promise though they had no enthusiasm for the idea and, in fact, the hospital was never opened. Watson was too close to Humboldt. Anyone wishing to go to Humboldt could do so. Costs rose beyond \$60,000 but the Sisters could not get another \$20,000 loan.

And then there were two bright spots. In March, the Sisters received a \$1,000



**St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Humboldt, showing the original building at the left of the picture, the second wing in the middle, and the three-storey 1928 addition at the right.**

donation from Elizabeth Massinger to cover the costs of purchases for the chapel. When Sr. Alphonsa's brother saw the chapel, he was so impressed that he contacted the celebrated artist, Count Berthold von Imhoff, who agreed to decorate the sanctuary at no cost except for the paint. He drew up designs over the winter and painted the following summer.

There were, however, other costs, a growing collection of small things. In the summer of 1929, the Sisters needed a new icehouse. At the same time, they added a shop for carpentry and mechanical work. In September, the chicken coop was partially destroyed by fire. It was restored in 1930 and, at the same time, a slaughter house was built.

By January 1930, it was obvious that the country – in fact, the world – was in the grip of the Great Depression. As jobs disappeared, income shrivelled and the Sisters had to borrow money from the bank.

Times were tough across the country. The federal Department of Labour set the poverty line for a family at \$1,200 to \$1,500 a year. However, 60 per cent of men and 82 per cent of working women made less than \$1,000 a year. The gross national product fell to \$3.5 billion in 1933 from \$6.1 billion in 1929. The Depression was accompanied by a drought that turned much of the prairies into a dust bowl; in Saskatchewan that era became known as "The Dirty Thirties." Although the Humboldt area was not much affected by the drought, the local farmers suffered from plummeting wheat prices which, by 1932, had dropped to 34 cents a bushel.

Just like everyone else, the Sisters struggled with the economic constraints of the 1930s. Because they could not afford to hire lay staff, their nursing hours were long. As well, they were running a farm, very aware that skilful management of their garden, orchard and livestock was absolutely essential if the patients, as well as the Sisters, were going to be fed. Patients had no money. They offered produce or livestock as payment or members of the family worked for the hospital to pay off debt. There were few medications and no antibiotics. Nursing procedures, and care and recovery depended largely on basic, time-consuming nursing treatments. The Sisters were responsible for total patient care, including the environment. They cooked, served meals, washed dishes, did laundry, and cleaned. The work was difficult and demanding. The Sisters relied on prayer to sustain themselves and their patients.

Despite their meagre income, the Sisters persevered in their efforts to provide adequate and efficient services to the sick in their hospitals. They did not turn anyone away.

However, there were serious problems with St. Francis Hospital in Scott. On February 26, 1932, the superior general sent a letter to Dr. J. Jardine in Scott. "We take the liberty to inform you that we have finally decided to close our hospital in Scott. As you know, we had intended to do so two years ago, but at the insistent request of the municipality and of some of the priests, we gave it another trial. The municipality at that time had promised to assist us but they have not been able to live up to that promise on account of the present Depression. The patients are so few, especially in the winter, and the income is so small, that we are scarcely able to cover our expenses, not to speak of any salary to the Sisters. Besides, the hospital, if we were to continue, would need extensive repairs and renovations which would necessitate the taking up of a loan and incurring a debt, a thing we are absolutely unable to risk in the present hard times. We will therefore close the hospital by the end of April. We regret to do this but we cannot see any other way out of this difficulty. We take this opportunity to express our sincerest thanks to you for the kind and valuable assistance you have given us and we assure you that your help has been highly appreciated by us. We hope that you will understand our position."

Possibly Dr. Jardine did understand the Sisters' position. However, there were other voices to be heard. On April 20, Fr. Joseph H. Prud'homme, Bishop of Prince Albert and Saskatoon, wrote the superior general, Sister Seraphina Pfurtscheller in Humboldt.

"The Reverend Fathers Bieler and Krist shall present to you a report of the meeting of the Oblate Fathers of the Tramping Lake district. It expresses their views, and it is the echo of the feelings of all Catholics and non-Catholics. When you wrote to me giving me the decision of your council, I was under the impression that your decision had been accepted by all parties concerned, although with sorrow. Not being



**St. Francis Hospital in Scott. The Sisters began operating the hospital in 1924. The Sisters left in 1932 and the hospital was closed in 1946.**

consulted, I had to accept it without a comment on my part. But now I find that all parties concerned in the Tramping Lake district resent it and are deeply perturbed. If in any way possible, please leave the hospital open at least until such time as other communities may replace your Sisters. It is with tears in our eyes that we see our dear Franciscan nuns leave Scott.”

Sister Seraphina responded three days later. She reminded the Bishop that the Sisters had made their first decision to leave Scott in 1930 and had reversed their decision only because of the insistence of the Oblates. They had agreed that, when Scott was closed, the Sisters would take over the kitchen and laundry services at St. Charles Scholasticate, a minor seminary established at Battleford by the Oblates of St. Mary’s Province.

“From your reply,” she wrote, “we took it for granted that you had no objection to this. Now, on April 21, to our surprise, Fathers Krist and Bieler came to Humboldt with a letter written by Your Excellency, from which it appears that you do not seem to be giving your consent to the closing of the hospital in Scott.”

Sister Seraphina explained that the council had unanimously requested that the hospital be closed, and requested Bishop Prud’homme not to refuse its closure. One of the reasons for closing was that the repairs mandated by the government could cost up to \$10,000.

“We would be obliged to borrow this amount, a thing absolutely impossible to us in these present hard times, when we are already overburdened with debt at our hospitals at Macklin and Humboldt, with interest and other expenses going on but income getting continually less, so that we do not know how to make ends meet if the times will not soon improve. And we would not like to run into bankruptcy, and surely Your Excellency would not wish us to do so.”

Sister Seraphina said St. Francis Hospital was being patronized very little. In winter, the Sisters hardly had anything to do. “Through lack of work they get accustomed to idleness, which as we know from experience has a bad effect on the spiritual life and character of these Sisters, most of whom are very young and have been only a short time in the novitiate. Besides, the majority of patients are maternity cases and it is not our vocation to run maternity hospitals, especially when we have to do this with such young Sisters because we have no older ones to send there. And as there are quite a number of other hospitals in the neighbourhood, the people in that district will hardly miss our Sisters.

“There are other reasons for closing the hospital at Scott, which we cannot state here but which we will submit to you privately. We hope that Your Excellency realizes that it is only with a heavy heart that we are giving up this hospital at which our Sisters have worked so long and we would not do so if we had not very urgent reasons. We humbly request that in your charity and kindness which certainly also has the spiritual and temporal welfare of the Sisters at heart, you will no longer withhold your approval.”

Sister superior did not mince words. “The Revs. Krist and Bieler have not failed to make every effort, from persuasion to insult and threats, to have us give them our promise to keep the hospital in Scott going. But as we could not come to an agreement with them, nor state all our reasons for closing the hospital, we could only tell them that we would inform them of our final decision in writing. As they insisted to have our answer soon, we would humbly request Your Excellency to grant us your consent to the closure of the Scott hospital at your earliest convenience. It is only after long and mature deliberation that we are taking this step. We cannot do otherwise.”

A few days later Fr. Bieler wrote to Bishop Prud’homme. “The Mother Superior arrived at Macklin Saturday evening, and Sunday morning the Superior at Scott was notified by telephone that the Scott hospital should be closed immediately and all preparations taken to abandon the place. So the case seems hopeless. I do not think that we will be successful in interesting another religious community in a small country hospital like this. To buy, repair and furnish the hospital would at least involve the capital of \$15,000. If, however, Your Excellency could obtain a free transfer of the property, this might considerably increase our chance for continuing the hospital.”

Pressure was coming from everywhere. The village of Scott and the municipality urged the Sisters to continue operating. The secretary-treasurer of the RM of Tramping Lake at Scott wrote to the Sisters on May 7. "We express to the Sisters of St. Elizabeth our appreciation for their services to the people of the district, and we respectfully petition them to continue to operate their hospital at Scott." In discussing the resolution, he said, councillors had noted that many ratepayers were unable to purchase licenses for their cars and were unable to pay train fares to other hospitals. "The closing of the hospital will mean the loss of our doctor in Scott and possibly the closing of our drug store. This will work a severe hardship on the people of the district who faithfully supported St. Francis Hospital in good times."

The Town of Scott went directly to the Bishop. "We express our thanks to the Sisters of St. Elizabeth for their courtesy to the residents of Scott and surrounding district, and we earnestly petition them to continue to operate the St. Francis Hospital at Scott," they wrote.

On April 27, Bishop Prud'homme responded to Sister Seraphina. "I have nothing more to say, since the decision of your community regarding the closing of the Scott hospital is a foregone conclusion. I have to accept by force the inevitable, dear Sister, since you have given orders to your Sisters at Scott, last Sunday, to close at once the hospital. At least this is the information I received this morning from the Reverend Father Bieler. You will, pursuant to this, dispense me from giving any consent. I do not wish to take any responsibility in the matter, and I leave it to you and your council.

"You may rest assured that I shall not show any sign of animosity toward your community. I have been doing my very best for years to see everything in the light of God. I accept in the same light the trial of the hour. I am afraid, however, that the withdrawal of your Sisters from Scott is going to endanger the prestige of the Church, and the good name of your community, and as a consequence ill dispose the clergy and laity of the St Joseph's Colony against your society, with the result that the recruiting shall suffer. I shall pray that it shall not be the case. You will pardon me, however, for opening my heart to you.

"I shall with pleasure visit your hospital in Humboldt next month but I would ask you as a favour not to mention the happenings of Scott in my presence as it would shroud all my pleasure with pain. I bless you all most heartily and thank you most sincerely for all the good done in Scott, which I hope the clergy and laity shall remember when they are tempted to criticize your action."

Sr. Seraphina wrote the secretary-treasurer of the RM of Tramping Lake: "Replying to your letter of the 7th, we regret that we are unable to see our way clear to keeping open the hospital at Scott. With regard to your remarks about the financial condition of your ratepayers, we are unable to see just why we should be expected



to keep going at Scott when we are not taking in enough to pay expenses and would point out that we have three other hospitals which are barely able to keep going. From past years we have a large volume of outstanding accounts at Scott which we are unable to collect even in part. When it is impossible to collect accounts or to obtain payment for current patients, it means that we must either close up or go into debt to keep going. We must again express our regret at being forced to close the hospital at Scott, but we are unable to see how we can change our decision at this time.”

The hospital was closed in June. Meantime, a report on the new St. Charles Scholasticate in Battleford showed that in March 1932, “a gradual dribbling in of Fathers, Scholastics, Brothers and Sisters began. They will serve as the pioneer group for the new institution.”

June 6 brought its share of excitement when Sisters Philomena Jug, Frances Schmidt, Johanna Huber, Catherine Haensgen, Magdalena Walter, and Hyacintha Senger arrived from Scott with five truckloads of belongings, including a cow with calf, and some chickens.

How viable was the Scott hospital during the Depression? John Grill, who became mayor in 1933, wrote an account that was published in *Memories of Scott*, a commemorative book on the occasion of the Canadian Centennial in 1967. Shortly after he became mayor, Mr. Grill contacted Tim Ryan, Reeve of the RM of Tramping Lake, and tried to come to some agreement in order to reopen the hospital. Because of the Depression, the town of Scott was under the Local Government Board and there was no interest in becoming a partner in the hospital. “Being idle for a number of years, the building needed repairing. Furnishings, light, water, heat and repairs were free of cost to the RM ratepayers, though their council agreed to pay \$7.50 per person per year for the use of the hospital and doctor.

“The RM of Tramping Lake paid the Sisters \$1,500 for the hospital. It was like pulling teeth to collect enough to keep it running. In 1942, the town and RM decided to get out from under management of the hospital. A co-operative was formed and the fee to the ratepayer was set at \$35 a year for a family of more than four.”

St. Francis had opened originally in 1911 as the Scott Municipal Hospital. The RM had agreed to provide a grant of \$400 a year toward the hospital, provided the town did not charge them for indigent patients. “It was tough going,” said Mr. Grill. “No money, no taxes coming in, and the schools had to be kept open. In 1936-37, with 296 families in the municipality, 286 were on relief.”

The hospital, Mr. Grill said, was condemned and closed in 1946.

— One final post script: Early records from Scott Municipal Hospital showed the cost of staying in the hospital and related expenses were token amounts compared to modern costs. In October 1919, the hospital submitted an invoice to the RM

for patients who were hospitalized during the month. A four-day stay cost \$8. An operation was \$5. A bill for 12 days, including \$3 for an operation, was \$12. The largest bill was \$27 for a 21-day stay, including an operation. Total cost for seven patients for that month was \$190.



Sisters sitting on the front steps of the convent in Scott, 1926. Front (L to R): Srs. Philomena Jug, Walburga Swetlin, Elizabeth Lopinski. Back: Srs. Frances Schmidt, Bernadette Wald, Antonia Bohl.



St. Francis Hospital & Convent before renovations to the roof and the front of the hospital.

## Chapter 15

# Rosthern: Pulling and Tugging

The Great Depression of the 1930s was hard on everyone, and the Sisters were not immune to the same financial struggles experienced by the rest of the population. Cash-strapped local governments compounded their problems. People had apparently slipped back to the earlier belief that Sisters did not need to eat.

The Scott hospital was not the only example.

In June 1925, C. M. Holz, the secretary-treasurer of the Rosthern Board of Trade, wrote to Msgr. J. H. Brodeur, thanking him for consenting to have the Sisters of St. Elizabeth of Humboldt assume and operate St. John's Hospital in Rosthern, which was owned by the Episcopal Corporation of Prince Albert. He promised the co-operation of the Laird and Fish Creek municipalities and suggested that they could provide a yearly grant of \$15,000 to \$18,000. Duck Lake would co-operate, too, he said. The doctors were on side.

"I am writing today to the Sisters, advising them that you have been so kind as to consent to have them assume the hospital if they wish to do so, but I would ask you to kindly give the Sisters your advice, and if necessary, some encouragement, which the Board of Trade would accept as a great favour."

A year later, Mr. Holz tried again. Writing to Msgr. Brodeur, he said the Board of Trade was still looking for the Monseignor's assistance in interesting a community of Sisters to reopen and operate the local hospital at Rosthern. "I might mention



St. John's Hospital in Rosthern was operated by the Sisters from 1935 to 1938.

that I have also communicated with the Sisters of St. Elizabeth,” he wrote. “I was informed that they could not spare any of their Sisters at that time. Perhaps if you were to propose that they endeavour to bring some of their Order from Germany, I am sure that the Rosthern Board of Trade and the municipality would render all possible assistance in so far as their transportation charges from Germany are concerned.”

There, as far as the Sisters of St. Elizabeth were concerned, the matter rested. The Grey Nuns operated the hospital from 1927 to 1935.

In early December 1935, Mr. Holz, now secretary for the St. John’s Hospital board, wrote to Bishop Prud’homme to explain that the board had been reorganized “for the purpose of showing better co-operation and to obtain more financial assistance for St. John’s Hospital.”

“The people here fully realize that the Sisters of St. John’s Hospital have done splendid work to assist the sick and they also realized the hospital has not been getting the financial assistance they should have had for the good treatment of the many patients.” Mr. Holz went on to assure the Bishop that the board, the reeve, and all the councillors were prepared to work together to assist the hospital, financially and otherwise, and that the surrounding towns, villages and municipalities would do the same to save the hospital, which he said was “the pride of the people of Rosthern.”

A few days later, Sr. Philomena, the superior general, wrote the Bishop to say that Abbot Severin had given his conditional consent for the Sisters of St. Elizabeth to take over the operation of the Rosthern hospital. The contract was to be for one year only, with no obligation to stay. Only four Sisters would serve the hospital. The rest of the staff would need to be lay help. Sr. Philomena continued, “We regret also to state that it is the wish of Father Abbot that each Sister is to receive \$15 per month as wages.” The Bishop accepted the agreement.

Sr. Philomena wrote the Bishop again at the end of October in 1936 to ask whether “the Sisters’ work has been found satisfactory and whether it is your Lordship’s wishes that they remain at Rosthern hospital during the year 1937.” 1936 had been a busy year. The Sisters had admitted 621 patients representing 5,003 days of treatment.

On January 29, 1937, Bishop Prud’homme was appointed Titular Bishop of Saldae in Algeria. Msgr. Reginald Duprat, OP, was appointed Apostolic Administrator for the Diocese of Prince Albert and was named Bishop in 1938.

By April 1937, the Sisters were talking seriously about withdrawing from Rosthern. At this point, Abbot Severin wrote to Msgr. Duprat. Final discussions about the proposed departure, he suggested, should wait until after the upcoming election of a new superior at the Motherhouse. “As to the more favourable terms which you stand ready to propose to the Sisters, I would suggest you propose them in writing or in person.”

However, Abbot Severin continued, there are “rather certain inner difficulties which made the withdrawal advisable,” and there was another problem.

“You may not know that the indebtedness of the Humboldt Sisters is such that they are not in a position to offer charity as they have done as a special favour to His Excellency, Bishop Prud’homme. That small community carries but little less than one-third the debt of the Episcopal Corporation, all alone. Their life is at stake, more so than they may realize sometimes. It is my conviction that if the Sisters are seriously thinking of withdrawing from Rosthern, the reason is not lack of goodwill and a charitable spirit but dire necessity.”

The election was called because Sr. Philomena was seriously ill. Sr. Seraphina was elected as the new superior general in April and wrote to Msgr. Duprat to explain that the Sisters would vote on their continued presence in Rosthern and she would have an answer in July. He responded swiftly.

“I deem it my sacred duty to beseech you with might and main not to withdraw your Sisters from the hospital but to carry on with the management of such a vital and necessary institution in the district and vicinity. From every angle, official sources take pleasure in telling me that the work accomplished by the Franciscan Sisters is excellent.”

He had two offers for the Sisters: “I fully realize that a Congregation cannot exclusively rely upon the devotedness and charity of its members.” He first suggested that the Sisters take over fully as administrators of St. John’s. The conditions, as described, however, did not give the Sisters full powers to use their own judgment in matters of money. They would need permission in writing from the Ordinary of the Diocese for any disbursement over \$100. Their salary and the costs of hospital would be covered by “ordinary and extraordinary sources of income of the hospital.” At year’s end, any surplus money would be forwarded to the Episcopal Corporation. “Under such conditions,” Msgr. Duprat wrote, “I feel satisfied that the material interests of your Community will be widely safeguarded. Furthermore, knowing the clever ability and the religious zeal of your Sisters, the interests of the Episcopal Corporation will also be safeguarded in as much as can be expected under the present circumstances.”



**Sister Seraphina Pfurtscheller.**

His other suggestion was that the Sisters could buy the hospital for \$20,000, without interest, the principal to be paid by yearly instalments if possible. "The instalments will be figured out by your Community according to its financial standing. The cost of \$20,000 may at first sight seem excessive, but the conditions offered to you bring it back to a very inferior amount. Moreover, having neither any interest to pay, nor a determined yearly instalment to meet, you will still be in a position to take the Sisters' full salary, to pay for the operation and upkeep of the hospital, and even make the urgent repairs deemed necessary by your Community."

A majority of the Sisters voted to leave Rosthern. Sister Seraphina wrote Msgr. Duprat in May 1937 to inform him that the Sisters would stay only until the end of the year.

Msgr. Duprat responded: "I readily understand your reasons for leaving the field of apostolate which had been entrusted to your care by His Excellency Bishop Prud'homme, but at the same time I feel very embarrassed and words fail to express the depth of my sorrow. However, I must abide by your decision with the sincere hope that the Divine Providence will come to my rescue in the troublesome hours I have to go through as I try to solve a problem of great import."

In mid-December, Sister Seraphina wrote again to Msgr. Duprat. "Father Abbot has taken up the matter with His Excellency Archbishop Monahan (of the Diocese of Regina) and has asked us to inform you that our Sisters will continue their services at the Rosthern hospital until July 1, 1938."

Then she described the "rather certain inner difficulties" alluded to by Abbot Severin. "One of the reasons, besides others, for recalling the Sisters is that, every year, there are so many abortion cases admitted and treated in the hospital against the prevention of which the Sisters are powerless. This, of course, is a very bad record for a Sisters' hospital. Then, again, the hospital requires a great deal of repairing, with a proper sewage system and water closets which, of course, would run up a great deal of expenses but without which the hospital could not be kept in operation any longer."

It was not over. Msgr. Duprat wrote in January, "Your decision is final and it is fully decreed that you are leaving. I give myself into the hands of God and I entirely submit myself to His Holy will with the earnest hope that Divine Providence will provide. Needless to mention that your decision leaves me in a very embarrassing situation. May I be permitted to thank you for the good work you have accomplished in Rosthern and to ask you for a memento in your daily prayers."

Mr. Holz was writing letters for the St. John's Hospital Board. He wrote to Msgr. Duprat: "The hospital board, the urban and rural municipalities of Rosthern would appreciate, indeed, if you would assist us as much as possible to keep the Sisters of St. Elizabeth at Rosthern to operate the St. John's Hospital. I feel confident that satisfactory arrangements can be made with the urban and rural municipalities."

He also wrote to Abbot Severin. "We all know that it would be very difficult for us to find other Sisters to operate the hospital after these Sisters have left. I can say now that the people of Rosthern and surrounding districts are very anxious to see the Sisters stay. The Sisters are highly respected here by the people, irrespective of religion or origin. I have been instructed to communicate with you as to whether any satisfactory arrangements could be made to keep the Sisters here. Indeed, if you would alter your decision, and have new arrangements made, I would appreciate hearing from you as soon as possible. We are willing to interview you personally as soon as the automobile roads are open and we feel confident that satisfactory arrangements can be made."

Abbot Severin responded in a letter directed to the St. John's Hospital board. "In reply to your letter of February 22, 1938, in which you urge me to reconsider my decision that the Sisters of St. Elizabeth, who have so faithfully and disinterestedly administered the affairs of St. John's Hospital, Rosthern, are to relinquish the charge by July 1 next, I wish to make it clear to you that this was not my decision at all, but the free decision of the Sisterhood given in secret ballot a year ago. When they informed me of their decision and presented the facts which led to it, the only reasonable course open to me was to approve it.

"Self-preservation is nature's first law. The financial burden upon this Sisterhood is such that they must first provide for the safety of the several hospitals which they have built in various parts of the province. Under the circumstances, I cannot reasonably ask them to divide their forces in order to continue the services at the Rosthern hospital, which, after a careful trial, they have found beyond them in several ways.

"It was a very kind and generous concession on their part to give a full year's notice of their decision to leave Rosthern in order to provide time to find others who might continue the work. You say it will be very difficult to find other Sisters to take over the hospital. You might try to save the services of the hospital to the community which you represent by trying to rent it from the Diocese of Prince Albert for the purpose of conducting it as a community enterprise. That should help to stimulate public interest a good deal, and it would also lead to a more general understanding of the measure of the services rendered to your district by the Diocese of Prince Albert in constructing St. John's Hospital and by the various Sisterhoods who have conducted it so far.

"Let me say, in conclusion, that, in my opinion, it will serve no useful purpose for you to undertake the long journey here for an interview with me concerning this matter. Further negotiations, if desired by you, had best be undertaken with the owner of the hospital, the Diocese of Prince Albert, in the person of the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Reginald Duprat, OP, Administrator of the diocese."

The board was not about to give up that easily. The next letter was directed at Sister Seraphina. "Ever since we received the news that the Sisters will leave we have been observing very closely the citizens of Rosthern and surrounding districts in order to conclude whether the people are strongly in favour to have this hospital operated by the Sisters, taking into consideration that the population of Rosthern and surrounding district are mostly non-Catholic. We can now conscientiously say that the people of Rosthern and surrounding districts are very anxious to see the Sisters stay here and to continue to operate the hospital. The Sisters have endeared themselves to all through the sacrifices they have made to help their fellowmen when there was need for help.

"A short time ago we communicated with the Rt. Rev. Severin Gertken, asking him to assist us in this matter. He said he could not assist us as the decision was made by the Sisters through a secret ballot. We also know that you alone cannot alter the decision; you have to have the consent of the congregation. We would like to know what grant or support you expect from the Town of Rosthern and the Municipality of Rosthern. We are well aware of the fact that the Sisters could not continue with the support they have been getting.

"The best way to come to a conclusion would be to arrange with you for a personal interview. The hospital board here would be only too pleased to make a trip to Humboldt in order to come to a decision, if it is inconvenient for you to honour us with your presence here."

Sr. Seraphina replied promptly, saying she regretted having to give another negative answer and wishing the board well in their search for some fresh hospital personnel. She concluded by saying, "We now advise you to communicate with the Apostolic Administrator of Prince Albert and probably arrangements can be made to continue the operation of the hospital with lay nurses and lay help."

One last try was made from a member of the board, and another letter to the Apostolic Administrator: "The grant which will be offered to the Sisters has to be permanent. That is, the people of Rosthern and Rosthern municipality have to vote in order to establish a permanent law for the Sisters so that the different councillors cannot change from one sum to another. I had a good deal to do with getting the first Sisters here, and at that time it was the intention to establish the grant permanently, but some certain men, who did not know the value of the hospital operated by the Sisters started an intrigue, and this intention was destroyed. But it is different now. The very same men who lobbied against granting the Sisters a permanent grant are very anxious to see them stay."

By now, Msgr. Duprat was Bishop of Prince Albert. On June 3, 1938, he sent a letter asking for a delay of three months "because previous efforts and the lack of time have not permitted me to obtain a solution of any kind for the problem that confronts me concerning the hospital. That would mean until the first of October."



Sr. Seraphina responded, "As we cannot go against your Excellency's wishes, we herewith wish to inform you that our Sisters will remain at Rosthern until the first of October, being as expressed in the letter, your Excellency expects to find ways to fill in the vacancy of our Sisters at Rosthern by then."

The Bishop thanked Sr. Seraphina "for conforming so gently and willingly to my request when I was compelled to make it."

On October 1, 1938, St. John's Hospital, the Sisters' mission in Rosthern, was closed.



The Rosthern staff included four Sisters. Back L-R: Sr. Ambrosia Pediger, Sr. Crescentia Joachim. Front L-R: Sr. Theodore Sieben, Sr. Pulcheria Poth.



## Chapter 16

# Macklin: A Bright Prairie Lily

Not all the hospital stories were as filled with difficulties and disappointments as Scott and Rosthern. Most often what the Sisters built became a permanent facility. St. Joseph's in Macklin was one such success story.

The founding of St. Joseph's Colony goes back to the mid-18th century. Because of wars and rumours of wars, people of German ancestry along the Black Sea in Russia began looking for a new home. The stories of far-off Canada with land that was available for the asking were intriguing, but the first settlers did not arrive until April of 1905.

The congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate was the driving force behind the establishment of St. Joseph's Colony. Bishop Albert Paschal, OMI, gave permission for the venture. He belonged to the same order as Bishop Emil Legal, OMI, of St. Albert, Alta., who had requested aid from Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier to found the colony. With the approval of Rome, St. Joseph's Colony, comprising 77 townships, was settled by German-Russian immigrants who developed flourishing parishes.

Macklin was founded in 1905, incorporated as a village in 1909 and elevated to the status of town in 1912. Macklin was part of a triangle within St. Joseph's Colony, joining the towns of Wilkie and Kerrobert. Located midway between Saskatoon and Edmonton on the CPR line, Macklin had a dozen trains a day including four passenger through-trains and a branch that connected with Moose Jaw and intervening points. The population grew to about 650 by 1955 and then levelled off at about 1,000 residents.

One of the first priests, Fr. Francis Palm, OMI, is credited with building a church and the hospital. In 1915, he asked the Sisters of St. Elizabeth to open a hospital in Macklin – an impossible request for Sisters who were already stretched too thin. Until the fourth group of Sisters from Klagenfurt came to Saskatchewan in 1920 and Canadians began to enter the Order, the Sisters could not consider a new venture. Finally, at the urging of Fr. Palm and Fr. William Brabender, OMI, who became the first hospital chaplain, two Sisters came to Macklin in January of 1922. The first two were Sr. Euphrasia Weiss, and Sr. Marianna Schmidt. A hospital was urgently needed. There was none in the area, and all nursing and all operations were performed in private houses. In order to raise funds, the Sisters went begging door to door. According to a history of the hospital, "Most people were generous and hospitable to the Sisters. A



The Shaw house became the first St. Joseph's Hospital in Macklin in 1922. Three Sisters are on the verandah and a patient is looking out of the upstairs window on the left.

few, however, closed the door and turned them away." Still, the record says, "Catholics as well as other denominations vied with each other in support of the new venture." The Sisters bought a large house owned originally by the late Mr. Shaw, converted

it into a temporary 15-bed hospital, and lived in crowded conditions in the basement. Because the spread of communicable diseases was a serious concern, they organized a separate building to isolate and quarantine patients, as they had done in Humboldt. One Sister at a time provided 24-hour service in the isolation unit, caring for the sick and sleeping in a room within hearing distance of patients. Food was brought to the unit from the hospital kitchen."



Dr. F. L. Eid, a Germany-trained doctor, served St. Joseph's Hospital and the community of Macklin from 1924 to his death in 1968.

The immensely skilled and popular Dr. Frederick L. Eid of Rosenheim, Germany, arrived in 1924. He attracted patients – 172 were treated in the little hospital



**The official opening of St. Joseph's Hospital, Macklin, May 17, 1927.**

during the first six months of 1925. The total by the end of the year was 584. "The good Sisters were taxed almost beyond their strength," according to one source.

The 15 beds quickly proved to be inadequate, but the financial difficulties inherent in the building of a new hospital were great. Through the help of Bishop Prud'homme, the Sisters secured an initial \$100,000 loan, followed by an additional loan of \$25,000. Construction started in 1926 with a contract price of \$35,000 and an expected overall cost of \$75,000 for a fully equipped facility. Although the Sisters had garnered only \$2,500 from their begging tours for the building fund, they purchased a quarter section in 1926 and that summer the cornerstone was laid for a new brick building. The hospital was officially opened, blessed, and put under the protection of St. Joseph on May 17, 1927. After the new building was completed, Dr. Eid bought the old hospital and converted it into his clinic and a residence where he and his family lived until his death in 1968. At present this structure serves as the Macklin museum.

The new hospital had a capacity of 35 patients. Patients were moved to the new facility, but it was immediately overcrowded and plans were soon underway for a new wing. This was added in 1928, bringing the bed capacity to 45.

There was always an abundance of work. Money, on the other hand, was in short supply, in particular during the Depression. During that time, the Sisters often wondered if they could realistically carry on, but they always managed, somehow, to cover interest charges, debentures and capital, while still maintaining high standards of care.

It was obvious that strict economy would be required to provide health care at a cost that the people of the district could afford. The Sisters received no pay for their services and they provided for the daily needs of the hospital by their own hands. They had a large vegetable garden, grew raspberries, chokecherries and other fruit,



**St. Joseph's Hospital with the 1928 addition.**

and ran a dairy barn, a chicken coop, a hog sty and stables for the horses that were used to till the garden, haul supplies and provide transportation. With the assistance of one or two hired men, the Sisters served as the sole labour force.

The charge for ward accommodation for adults was \$2 a day. Private rooms were \$2.50 though that rate was later raised to \$3. During the Depression, many people could not even afford the \$2. Nobody was denied care. Farmers paid with grain, beef, vegetables and other farm produce. Some who were unable to pay eventually had their debts cancelled. Through it all, the hospital maintained quality care.

In 1932, with the Depression raging, every angle had to be explored to raise money for St. Joseph's. On Hospital Day on May 12, Macklin held a unique lottery at 25 cents a ticket. First prize was one year of free hospital stay, including a private room and everything the hospital offered, except for medications which came from the drug store. Second prize was a free medical or surgical treatment, given exclusively at the hospital by any of the resident doctors. Prizes were not transferable, other than within the same family.

Although money was tight, in 1932 the Sisters built a large park with gravel walks and flowerbeds. A stone Lourdes Grotto graced the northern border with a tennis court on the east side. The annual Corpus Christi procession in May or June,

honouring the Blessed Sacrament, wound its way from St. Mary's Church to St. Joseph's Hospital and the grotto in the park.

On July 5, 1952, St. Joseph's Hospital celebrated its 25th anniversary. The newly-consecrated Bishop F. J. Klein of Saskatoon sang High Mass and addressed the crowd in the afternoon. "In glowing words," according to the *Macklin Times*, "he paid tribute to Fr. Francis Palm, OMI, long since deceased, through whose untiring efforts and invaluable foresight in those days so long ago the whole project was started. And the wonderful spirit of Christian charity shown in the co-operation of the community, without which the whole thing would not have been possible. The hospital stands as a memorial. We have looked back. Let us look around. We see a hospital here that is quite modern, excellently equipped, spotlessly clean, constantly cared for and improved. Words are not necessary. See for yourself."

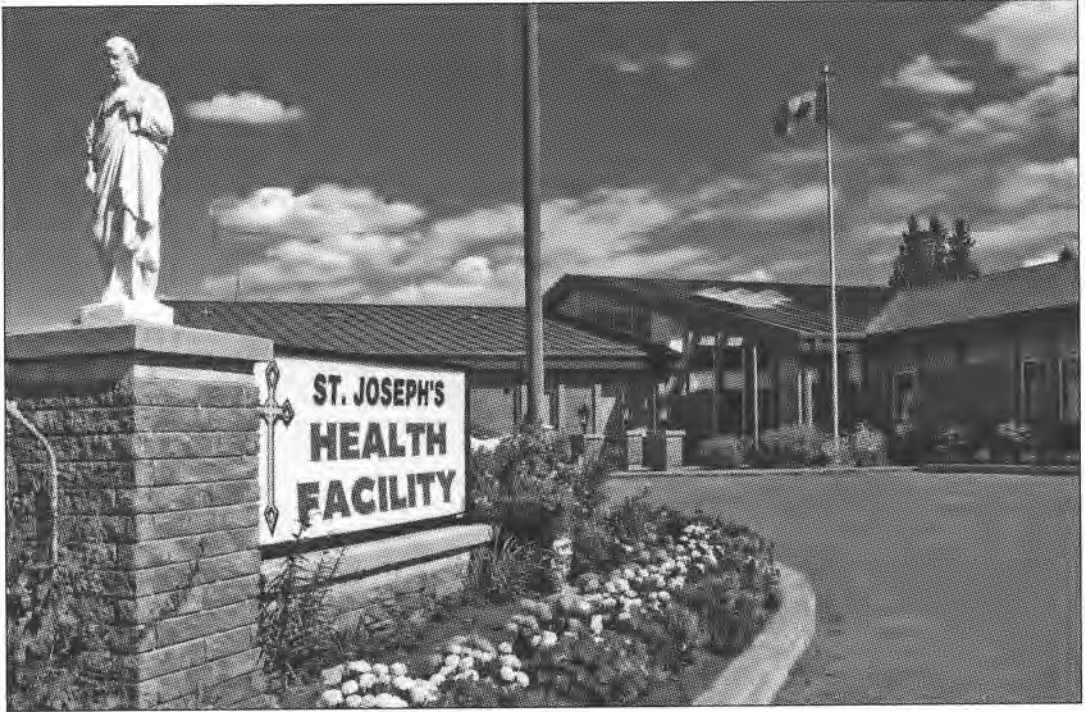
Dr. Eid took another direction in his remarks. "The continued existence of the hospital is due to the Sisters' efforts, their persistence, their sacrifices, their hard and good work. The contribution the Sisters made to this community through the erection and the management of the hospital which has now given services for more than a quarter of a century to all, without discrimination of race, religion or social or financial standing, is truly enormous." He went on to say that, almost from its inception, the hospital was first on the list of the American College of Surgeons as having the highest standards in the country. "May God grant to the physicians who work in this hospital humility, vision, courage and skill to lift at least part of the burden of suffering fellow men, and to the Sisters, the gifts of true charity, kindness, understanding and sacrifice should be the marks of all hospitals."

St. Joseph's Hospital had its own water and sewer system. In November 1960, the hospital hooked up to the town's utilities, but the Sisters retained their independent water supply for use in an emergency.

Now a convent was in the plans. The Sisters were living in rather crowded quarters in the northwest section of the hospital and this would provide them with a residence. At the same time, some of the service areas in the hospital needed more space. The outpatient area was inadequate and renovations were inevitable. A contract for the building of St. Anthony's Convent was awarded in 1961. The convent was blessed in 1962.

A year later, after Sisters Agnes and Marie Therese had organized a successful home nursing class for local girls, the Sisters approached the Town of Macklin and surrounding municipalities about building a new clinic in Macklin. By November 1963 the medical clinic was under construction. At the same time the federal and provincial governments agreed to cover two-thirds of the costs of renovations of the hospital. Estimates for renovation of the hospital had reached \$85,000.

To facilitate the renovation some Sisters moved into tight quarters on the ground



**St. Joseph's Health Facility in Macklin was opened by the community in 1996. It provides long-term care and emergency services.**

floor of their convent while others moved to the employee residence, giving over the rest of their home as an emergency hospital. Most of the ground floor became public areas – the parlour was converted into an admissions office and information desk, the assembly room became the men's ward, the library was the children's ward. The first floor became women's, maternity and nursery units.

By mid-June, the newly renovated hospital was almost ready for an official opening. On June 20, before lunch, 14 adults and three newborns were transferred back to the hospital. A joint celebration for the medical clinic built by the Town and the renovated hospital was held on June 24. The final cost of hospital renovations was about \$140,000.

On Sept. 30, 1993, the provincial government designated St. Joseph's an emergency centre. The hospital, one of 52 that had funding reduced to zero, effective Oct. 1, 1993, lost acute care. Until 1996, St. Joseph's functioned as an emergency centre but the people of Macklin and district were not satisfied and began negotiations for a new health centre. The old three-storey hospital could not be renovated easily to meet the health needs of the people.

The people of Macklin and district raised \$3 million and, with government approval, built a long-term care facility with emergency services. The first residents came from Golden Twilight Lodge which had been designed for about 30 level one and level two clients most of whom had progressed over the years to level three and



level four care. The new facility, with 22 long-term care beds, two observation beds, a respite bed, a palliative care unit, emergency X-ray and medical laboratory services, was officially opened in November 1996. Two physicians served the area. According to the bylaws, the governing board was composed of representatives from the towns and municipalities and congregational or Sisters' appointees. The superior general was an ex-officio member.

Once the health facility opened, the old St. Joseph's Hospital was demolished.

When the government established health districts, St. Joseph's Health Facility became an affiliate member of the Heartland Regional Health District, retaining its own administrator and board of governors.

Several Sisters devoted many years to St. Joseph's. In 1965, Sr. Marianne Schmidt, one of the first two Sisters in Macklin, celebrated her golden jubilee of religious profession. Sr. Agnes Schachtel was honoured on her 61st birthday in 1965 after giving 15 years to St. Joseph's.

Sr. Johanna Huber spent 16 years at St. Joseph's Hospital, working in the laundry and garden, and taking care of the chickens. Her first contact with the Sisters was on a cold, wet, windy April day in 1927. The building crew was putting the final touches on the new hospital. There were traces of mud mixed with plaster, paint and wood shavings everywhere. Louise Leibel, Johanna Schweers and Sr. Johanna, then Franziska Huber, began the cleanup job. They slept in the new building but had to go to the old hospital in town for their meals. On their way back to the new building they carried baskets of supplies. On April 11, Franziska Huber went to Humboldt with Sr. Euphrasia to apply for admission to the Sisters of St. Elizabeth. As she left, Sr. Seraphina said, "When you are a Sister, you can come back and help us." In 1929, after making her vows, Sr. Johanna did just that.

Katharina Senger, a student nurse at St. Joseph's Hospital in 1926, was another aspirant to the Sisterhood who returned to Macklin. She completed her nurse's training in Humboldt and came back to Macklin as Sr. Wendelina.

In 2010, the Sisters were in the process of handing St. Joseph's Health Facility over to the Saskatchewan Catholic Health Corporation. The sole remaining sister, Sr. Donata Rolheiser, who has been connected with St. Joseph's in Macklin since 1986, said she would stay as long as she could. This is her home town. Her family lived in St. Donatus Parish 40 km south of Macklin and she was born in the old St. Joseph's. She volunteers at the health centre, the church and Villa Maria, serves as Lay Presider when the parish priest is away, and sits with the sick and dying. "Everything is volunteer work, but it's like a full-time job," she says.

The Catholic hospitals that were run by the Sisters were respected and appreciated by patients of all faiths. Many of the Canadian girls who entered the Sisters of St. Elizabeth's came from areas where their families had been cared for, or

had worked, in one of the Sisters' hospitals. Of the almost 200 women who entered the congregation, 54 came from St. Joseph's Colony and 47 from St. Peter's Abbacy, locations where the presence of the Sisters was maintained the longest.



**Fr. William Brabender, OMI, the first chaplain for the Sisters at St. Joseph's Hospital, 1922.**

## Chapter 17

# Cudworth: A Joint Prairie Effort

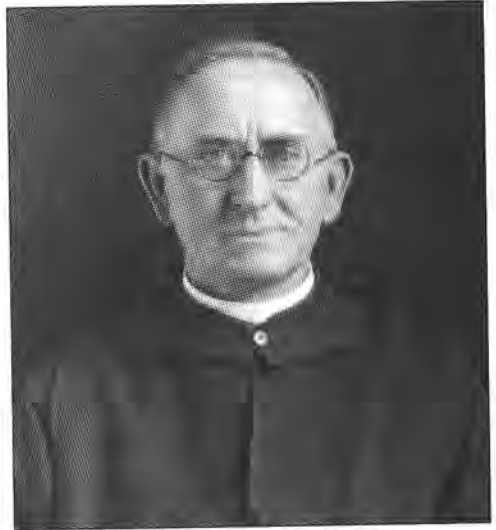
The Sisters' involvement with St. Michael's Hospital in Cudworth is an equally positive story.

The first German settlers arrived in the general area in 1903, settling in Leofeld, seven miles southeast of Cudworth which was established as a village in 1911. The rail line ran through Cudworth and, as a result, that village grew while Leofeld began to shrink. Dr. Gregory Longault established a small hospital in a house, the common practice for the day.

Fr. Casimir Cismowski, OSB, assigned to St. Michael's church in 1924 saw the need for nursing care and approached the Sisters of St. Elizabeth. The two Sisters assigned to Cudworth, Sr. Euphrasia Weiss and Sr. Benedicta Yungwirth, took over the hospital from Dr. Longault on December 1, 1924.

Theresia, daughter of Herman Yungwirth and Agnes Hamburger, had come to Canada with her parents who, in 1903, settled on a farm in the Leofeld district. Theresia joined the Sisters of St. Elizabeth in 1915, receiving the religious name Benedicta. She pronounced her vows in 1917, trained at St. Elizabeth's Hospital School of Nursing, and became an RN in 1926. She cared for the sick for many years at Cudworth, Humboldt and Macklin as well as serving in St. Ann's Home in Saskatoon and St. Charles Scholasticate in Battleford. She celebrated her Diamond Jubilee in 1977, retired to St. Elizabeth's Convent in Humboldt because of failing health and died on April 23, 1980.

With these two Sisters providing nursing services for the small hospital, the facility quickly and steadily filled, and the community realized the need for a larger facility. Dr. Longault offered to donate \$10,000 to build a hospital in Cudworth. The Order secured a loan of \$25,000, another \$5,000 was collected from private individuals, and by mid-June of 1926, Anton Stadelman of Englefeld had been



**Fr. Casimir Cismowski identified the need for nursing care in Cudworth and invited the Sisters of St. Elizabeth to provide it.**

engaged as contractor, while volunteers began digging the basement. St. Michael's Hospital, a 24-bed brick building, was ready for occupancy by early December and a four-bedroom isolation unit was later built near the hospital. The hospital was blessed by Fr. Casimir on December 12 and solemnly blessed in May 1927 by Abbot Severin.

*St. Peter's Bote* reported that "Cudworth and its surrounding area feel happy to have a Catholic hospital in their midst." However, it was so cold that patients could not be transferred until December 16 and 17. Cudworth residents showed their pleasure at having a hospital by helping to transfer patients and equipment to the new building. Most patients were transported by car and truck although some were carried in their beds.

Cudworth's local residents must have done much of the actual building of the hospital in order to reduce construction costs. There is no mention on record of money borrowed more than one time. By contrast, between May 1926 and April 1928, the Motherhouse provided collateral for a \$25,000 loan to St. Joseph's in Macklin until the hospital could take over the mortgage once the addition was functioning and two more loans followed, for \$50,000 and \$15,000. The Abbot gave permission to collect \$10,000 privately and Macklin was told they could take a bank loan. Cudworth had 24 beds while Macklin had 35.

In May, after Anton Stadelman, the contractor from Englefeld, looked over the site for the new hospital with Fr. Casimir, *Der Bote* referred to "a lot of activity," which was increased in June. "The work of digging the basement for the new hospital was started in all earnest on June 16," *Der Bote* reported. "The members of the parish take part alternately in this work and also see to it that all building material is brought in. In united action a lot can be done in a short time."



St. Michael's Hospital completed in December 1926. This building served until 1965.

Over the next two months, *Der Bote* continued to celebrate the quality of the community involvement. "The brick work on the new hospital is now finished; it took less than two months. The Sisters of the hospital are making the appeal to all their friends to bring them or to send them the feathers of all fowl that they can spare. They will be very helpful to them." *Der Bote* speculated that the hospital would be ready before winter.

The paper was close. All the work was completed by early December. At that point, *Der Bote* had one last word regarding the

community's attachment to the new hospital: "On Sunday the ladies of the parish will make a so-called 'shower' for the hospital Sisters at the occasion of the solemn opening, in order to furnish them with the necessary things."

The Sisters had the grounds near the hospital landscaped and Sr. Jacoba Schober erected a small Lourdes Grotto. In 1952, Dr. J. Schropp donated a statue of Our Lady of the Pines for the grounds. For many years, the Sisters staffed the hospital, sometimes assisted by girls who worked in the kitchen, in the laundry, in housekeeping and as nurses' aides to help pay hospital bills. As the Sisters could afford to pay salaries, they hired lay people, but in order to feed their patients, the Sisters ran a farm which provided most of the staple foods.

The hospital saw many changes in medical staff. Dr. J. A. McDonald joined the staff in 1924. Dr. Longault left Cudworth and was in Bruno when he died in 1937. Subsequent doctors were Dr. A. A. Genereux, Dr. E. V. Kershaw and Dr. H. M. Bigelow, who was resident until 1942, when Dr. J. Schropp came to St. Michael's. Dr. Schropp was the only resident physician in Cudworth during the 1940s and 1950s, with doctors from Wakaw providing services in his absence. He left Cudworth in 1961, shortly after the death of his wife, moved to Alberta, remarried and continued to practise medicine until his death in 1979. Dr. Zygmund Kondzielewski replaced Dr. Schropp in 1961.

By then, the physical structure of the hospital was proving inadequate to serve the ever-increasing advances in medicine. In consultation with the local Lay Advisory Board, the Regional Hospital Council, and the provincial government, the Sisters



The Grotto south of St. Michael's Haven was planned by Sr. Jacoba Schober, OSE, shortly before she died in 1940.



**The new St. Michael's Hospital replaced the original structure in 1965 and remained a hospital until 1998. After renovation it became St. Michael's Haven and came under town and rural municipality ownership in 2009.**

decided to build a new facility rather than renovate the old one. The Lay Advisory Board had been organized to assist the hospital in financial matters and in dealings with municipal and provincial governments. This group of local laymen supported St. Michael's for many years.

Wells Construction was chosen as contractor with Mr. Webster as architect. Construction began early in 1964 and was completed on schedule by April 1965. The hospital achieved a high standard of care and in 1973, under Sr. Margaret Prediger as administrator, St. Michael's obtained provincial accreditation. Full accreditation was received in 1974.

Following the long-term service of Dr. Schropp, the medical staff of St. Michael's changed several times. Dr. U. Schakerel stayed for two years; Dr. T. Nunan came to Cudworth in 1965 and stayed for a year. Dr. M. O. Opseth came in 1966 and stayed for five years but both he and Dr. Kondzielewski left in 1971. Dr. F. Oosman was the only physician for four years. When he left for Humboldt in 1975, three doctors, C. Colin, S. Tanna and D. Tanna, took over the medical services but the Tannas left in 1977, and Dr. Colin continued as the sole physician.

The 1990s in Saskatchewan saw a series of closures of small town hospitals. In 1998, the Saskatchewan government closed St. Michael's. A year later, the old

St. Michael's Hospital was renovated and remodelled into an assisted living facility, known as St. Michael's Haven, governed by a board of directors but still owned by the Sisters. After discussions with the Catholic Health Corporation of Saskatchewan, the Sisters transferred the facility to the Town of Cudworth and the RM of Hoodoo in 2009.



Sisters at St. Michael's, Cudworth. Back Row (L to R): Srs. Theodore Sieben, Mary Irene Sitter, Marie Callista Walaska, Ancilla Dobmeier & Hyacintha Senger. Front: Maria Esenko, Gertrude Boser, Colette Kloppenburg, Otilia Saretzky.



Fr. Laurence and a group of children pray in front of the grotto at St. Michael's Hospital in Cudworth.



## Chapter 18

# Hospital Auxiliaries: Buzzing Beehives

All of the hospitals run by the Sisters of Elizabeth – in Humboldt, Macklin, Cudworth, Scott and Rosthern – were supported by vibrant, non-denominational Hospital Ladies' Auxiliaries.

The Ladies' Auxiliary of St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Humboldt was founded in 1912. The year the hospital was completed, five women met in the Presbyterian Church and elected Mrs. Archie Power the first president. Four members attended a meeting at Mrs. Driver's home in 1915, the year of the earliest available minutes. Membership grew from 22 in 1920 to 84 in 1966 and remained fairly stable at that number.

From the beginning, the auxiliary was non-denominational, non-partisan and non-racial. Alice Telfer, Mrs. Robert Telfer of Humboldt and a member of Westminster United Church, was president from 1930 to 1956. According to the constitution, the main aim of the auxiliary was "to unite all the women in the district served by the hospital in order to render any assistance to the hospital which may lie within their power".

As their major responsibility, the auxiliary began fund-raising for a wide range of equipment for the hospital, each project requiring the approval of the hospital governing board. Purchases ranged from sterilizers and incubators in the first years to heart monitoring equipment. Auxiliary members furnished a wing in the hospital. They bought chairs and linens and blankets.

Auxiliary members also provided front-line services. They ran a canteen cart, visited with patients, donated magazines, provided gifts and fruit for patients in the hospital over Christmas and flowers for patients during the summer. They also gave Christmas gifts for student nurses, organized the graduation program, and provided entertainment for the nurses on that day.

By 1937, the need for an elevator at St. Joseph's Hospital in Macklin had become obvious. An elevator shaft had been built in 1927 as part of the original building, but it had been closed in and the area was used for storage. St. Joseph's Hospital Ladies' Aid volunteered to raise the money, setting a goal of \$5,000. Members started with a drive for donations of wheat in 1937 at a time when wheat was worth 51.5 cents a bushel. Estimated cost of the elevator was \$15,000. The Depression, the drought and the years following the Second World War were not the best of times financially; consequently, donations were small. The project continued, however, and any money raised was deposited in the bank. By 1952, the elevator was installed.

When St. Anthony's Convent was blessed on June 19, 1962, St. Joseph's Hospital Ladies' Aid assisted in preparing a banquet in the assembly room for some 80 guests. On June 24, the Sisters held an open house at the convent for the public. The Ladies' Aid provided guided tours and served tea and dainties. About 400 people toured the building.

In 1924, when the Sisters arrived in Cudworth, they were immediately supported by local women who wanted to help the new hospital. By 1933, they had organized as the Hospital Guild though they later changed the name to St. Michael's Hospital Ladies' Auxiliary.

Auxiliary members organized an annual Hospital Day with tea and sandwiches, along with bingo and raffles in the basement near the kitchen. In the early days, women would drive from farm to farm collecting cream, goose feathers and chickens to use for the tea, raffle and auction that were part of Hospital Day. This was the big fund-raiser. The money went toward mattresses, lamps, refrigerators, suction pumps, woolen blankets, curtains and floor coverings.

The Hospital Auxiliary held an annual Fall Dance, one of the few times when everyone, including single young women, paid admission. Wedding dances were free at the time. Income from the dances was \$100 in 1947 and \$69 in 1957. In 1958, the Guild sponsored a bazaar which netted \$869 with that number quickly climbing over \$2,000 by 1965. The Fall Dance was discontinued.

In the 1960s the Auxiliary furnished the maternity ward, the nursery and the delivery room of the new hospital and had money left over to buy a record player and toys for the smaller patients. The staff was not left out. The Auxiliary bought a davenport and chair for the boardroom as well as other chairs and tables. By the 1970s, the Auxiliary was covering much of the costs of the ambulance while buying an anesthetic table, instruments for the operating room and a heart monitor.

In 1964, the Auxiliary sponsored a program of volunteer workers known as "Michaelettes." These girls were organized by Sr. Hildegard with the help of the Auxiliary. Sr. Hildegard conducted a course in Junior Red Cross Nursing and the girls had the opportunity to practise what they learned at the hospital. Between 1964 and 1984, about 150 students took the course. The Auxiliary provided the uniforms worn by the girls as well as certificates and awards for their hours of volunteer service.

The auxiliaries were not the only lay people officially to support the Sisters' hospitals.

For 34 years the Sisters attempted to carry on alone. From 1911 to 1913 the St. Elizabeth's Hospital board consisted of the Sisters and Prior Bruno Doerfler, OSB, and some of the Benedictine fathers as advisers. Sr. Pulcheria Wilhelm was elected the first Superior General in 1913, and the Sisters formed the first hospital board consisting of the Superior General and her administrative council. From 1913 to 1955

all the Sisters living in St. Elizabeth's Convent-Hospital worked for the hospital as well as the convent which was their Motherhouse.

By 1945, the Sisters realized that the time had come to appeal to the public for support. As a privately owned hospital, the Sisters could not levy taxes nor did they receive tax assistance from the government. By then, they were faced with the immediate need for a central heating plant and laundry while they were struggling with the indebted position of the hospital. The Sisters called a meeting of citizens representative of the district on April 4, 1945. Besides the superior general and her administrative council, 22 local citizens attended, representatives of the clergy, Town of Humboldt, Board of Trade, Royal Canadian Legion, medical and dental staff, Knights of Columbus, the villages of Muenster and St. Gregor and the rural municipalities of Humboldt, Wolverine, LeRoy, Viscount, Three Lakes, St. Peter's and Lake Lenore.

As a result of that meeting, an advisory board was organized under the chairmanship of P.B. Murphy, with reeves of rural municipalities and town, village and organization officials as members. Besides the new heating unit, the hospital also needed a new laundry facility and equipment. St. Elizabeth's Hospital was showing signs of wear, and there was growing evidence that the entire building would need to be replaced before long. The finance committee launched a campaign to raise \$40,000 which, with the full support and co-operation of the citizens of the town and district, was very successful. The following year, the board undertook collections for many of the old, outstanding accounts the Sisters had on their books. This also was a success.

By early May 1947, the hospital board began giving serious consideration toward a new hospital. At the annual Advisory board meeting, the board members expressed full support for this project and committees were set up to study the size, plans, costs and methods of financing.

In 1948 the name of the organization was changed to St. Elizabeth's Hospital Advisory and Public Relations Board. In November 1951 a delegation from the board presented a brief to the provincial government, requesting approval of a 100-bed hospital. In 1952, the government finally approved construction of a 75-bed hospital. At the 1953 annual meeting, the board pledged to raise from \$120,000 to \$150,000. This was to be the amount remaining after grants, debentures and contributions by the Sisters and proved to be \$120,000, spread over a 10-year period starting in 1955.

The board raised the required \$12,000 to \$13,000 each year by soliciting grants and donations from rural municipalities, towns and villages, individuals and organizations, with other board-sponsored fund-raising events covering any shortfall.

In Macklin, from 1922 to 1966, and in Cudworth until 1970, the superior general of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth and the general council formed the Governing Board

of St. Joseph's Hospital. The local superior who was also the administrator, and the Sisters' local council formed the executive committee responsible for the day-to-day operations of the hospital.

A Lay Advisory Board, consisting of representatives of the towns, villages and rural municipalities of the district, assisted the board in financial matters and building projects. As the use of public funds and taxation increased, the Sisters expanded lay representation on the board by changing the bylaws to make it possible to appoint lay persons to all their hospital boards as well as have representatives of the towns, villages and RMs surrounding each hospital serve on the board of governors.



The good work done by Auxiliaries requires effort and organization. The Humboldt Auxiliary is shown at a planning meeting. Back Row (L to R): Pat Witt, Colleen Hill, Velma Leier, Elaine Delaney, Alice Germann, Nora Dagenais. Middle Row: Annette Engele, Liz Trach, Lois Wempe, Rose Watts. Front Row: Helen Saretsky, Marilyn Brecker, Thelma Wempe, Ann Niebrugge.



Auxiliaries also celebrated together. Shown above is part of a group celebrating Christmas. (L to R): Sophie Tremblay, Dorothy Kunaman, Hedy Ogilvie, Loretta Stryjek.

## Chapter 19

# School of Nursing, School of Life

There was absolutely no question that, from the very beginning in 1911, the Sisters were respected, admired and much in demand. Patients liked them. Some doctors claimed they were better nurses than officially trained staff, but the Sisters had a problem, and it was serious. They wanted to open a hospital in Humboldt, they did not have the money to hire registered nurses, and without properly qualified staff, the hospital would not receive the government's daily patient grant of 50¢.

None of the first three Sisters who had come to Humboldt had an official diploma from either Austria or Canada. They wanted to enter hospitals where they could learn English and acquire clinical experience. However, they were in demand locally for home nursing and Prior Bruno would not give them permission to leave, even though the superior at the Sisters of Sion Convent in Prince Albert had offered to take them in, provide free accommodation, and allow them to live according to their own Rule. Nurses training would be provided at Holy Family Hospital. Prior Bruno was asking for enough Sisters to come from Klagenfurt to staff the hospital completely, and he said he was looking into Saskatoon as a possibility for training once the hospital was under construction. Ultimately, Sr. Philomena and Sr. Gabriela spent a winter – from September to March – at the Benedictine Sisters' hospital in Duluth, Minnesota, where they were able to get some clinical experience and take courses at the School of Nursing. Prior Bruno assured Mother Pulcheria that there would be no problem with certification of the Sisters, that the Health Commissioner said that he did not have specific programs for the nurses to follow, and that he made his decisions based on whether he felt the nurse knew how to do her job.

By the time the hospital opened, none of the Sisters had a diploma from the Saskatchewan government, although they were



**Sr. Gabriela Lex, one of the three original pioneers, and one of the Sisters who obtained her nursing diploma in 1926.**

doing all the nursing. Sr. Philomena and Sr. Gabriela had their bit of training from Duluth and two Sisters from the next group, Sr. Salesia Scheriau and Sr. Clementina Possenig had completed courses in Klagenfurt. In 1914, Sr. Seraphina Pfurtscheller was sent to the Sisters of Sion in Prince Albert for six months, to learn English and to gain some nursing experience at Holy Family Hospital.

Humboldt was not the only town in Saskatchewan with a hospital and a growing demand for nurses. The Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association had been formed in 1917. Seven Sisters who had been nursing in and around Humboldt took the opportunity to become registered in the province of Saskatchewan through a waiver clause made available by the SRNA in 1917.

Sr. Gabriela (Anna Lex) entered the convent of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth in Klagenfurt on May 30, 1897. She volunteered to go to Canada to open a new mission and left Klagenfurt on April 30, 1911, arriving in Muenster on May 14, 1911, one of the three pioneer Sisters. She worked immediately in the Abbey kitchen when not nursing the sick. Sr. Gabriela obtained her nurse's registration by waiver in 1917 and her diploma in nursing in 1926.

Sr. Gertrudis (Julianna Bergles) entered Klagenfurt in 1910 and came to Canada

as a novice with the second group of Sisters in 1912, one of the first two Sisters to pronounce their vows in the newly erected convent in Humboldt in 1913. She had studied pharmacy before coming to Canada.

Sr. Philomena was another of the pioneer Sisters. She received her waiver in 1917 and served in many positions in her community before her death in 1943, including local superior and administrator at St. Joseph's Hospital in Macklin and local superior at St. Francis Hospital in Scott.

Sr. Clementina (Rosa Possenig) entered the convent in Klagenfurt and was prepared as a nurse there before she came to Canada in 1912. She served as local superior at St. Michael's Hospital in Cudworth for nine years.

Sr. Salesia (Angela Scheriau) had entered the convent at Klagenfurt in 1906 and had gone to Nursing School in 1908, receiving her diploma and RN before coming



**Sr. Gertrudis Bergles, pharmacist and nurse, came to Humboldt in 1912.**

to Canada in 1912. She was director of Nursing from 1924 to 1931 and, with Dr. H. R. Fleming and Miss Rose Godin, she helped set up the St. Elizabeth's Hospital School of Nursing. She returned to Klagenfurt in 1931.

Sr. Theodora (Anna Sieben) was born in Russia, came to Canada in 1907 with her parents, and entered the Humboldt convent in 1915. She was sent to the Grey Nuns hospital in St. Boniface where she earned her diploma on December 1, 1917 and her Saskatchewan registration on December 18. She nursed in Humboldt, Cudworth and Macklin, trained as an X-ray and lab technician, served as Director of Nurses from 1932 to 1936, and was a long-standing instructor in the St. Elizabeth's Hospital School of Nursing.

Sr. Celestina entered the Humboldt convent in 1913. She was registered as a nurse in 1917, trained at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, and received a diploma. In 1919, she was granted an indult of secularization, married, and lived in Bruno, continuing to care for the sick.

A year later, Sisters Philomena, Salesia and Clementine received their official diplomas as registered nurses.

Meanwhile, the population of Humboldt had been growing and the increase in population brought a greater patient load. The time had come for the Elizabethans to provide their own professionally trained nursing staff. In 1923, with the help of Dr. H. R. Fleming, the Sisters established St. Elizabeth's Hospital School of Nursing in Humboldt. Dr. Fleming's wife was



Sr. Theodora Sieben was a member of St. Elizabeth's congregation from 1915 to 1964.



April 22, 1915 – Back (L to R): Sr. Celestina Radamsky, Unknown, Sr. Salesia Scheriau. Front: Mother Pulcheria Wilhelm, Sr. Clementina Possenig. Taken on a ceremonial day! Sisters Clementina & Salesia took their vows of perpetual profession; Sr. Celestina took temporary vows. The unknown person centre back was a bridesmaid for Sr. Celestina. Srs. Celestina, Salesia & Clementina were granted nursing certification in 1917.

a dietetic instructor in 1928. Rose Godin was the first director of the school, from 1923 to 1925, and the only laywoman to hold the position. She was followed by Sr. Salesia Scheriau.

The school opened in September 1923 with six Sisters, Antonia Bohl, Elizabeth Lopinski, Augustine Mainzer, Mathilde Pfurtscheller, Marianne Schmidt, and Benedicta Yungwirth. There were also two lay students, Beatrice Woodcock and Alma Crackel, in the first class. Years later, Alma described life as a student nurse, and how she started with "two blue uniforms, four aprons and bibs, collars and cuffs and black shoes and white cotton stockings."

"The day started with prayers, breakfast, then onto the ward. Lectures were given by the doctors. We took notes and did our studying at the residence. There were 68 beds and this included baby cribs which were in the wards with the mothers. There was no housekeeping staff and meals were served on the wards. The food was pulled up on a lift and was kept hot on the electric stove. The trays and dishes had to be cleaned after every meal and be ready for the next. We were called out to go with the doctors in the evenings to help with home deliveries.



Alma Crackel (left) and Beatrice Woodcock (right), the first two lay graduates of the St. Elizabeth's School of Nursing pictured with Sr. Salesia, the Director of the School. June 15, 1926.

"There was also the Isolation House for patients with such diseases as scarlet fever, typhoid and erysipelas (otherwise known as "Holy Fire" or "St. Anthony's Fire," an acute streptococcus bacterial infection resulting in inflammation). This house was separate from the hospital and the nurse needed to keep the fires going, make the patients' meals, keep them clean, and attend lectures if possible. There were also dressings to make, so if you sat down it was a rule to make the various dressings for the wards and also for the operating room and case room. Then there was the visitors' book. We entered the visitors' names and who was visited. Sunday was a relaxing day and we could write our letters."

In 1925, the nurses' residence in Humboldt, the original little wooden



convent, burned down two days after Christmas. "We were moved above the laundry," wrote Alma Crackel. "This was not too good as the dampness caused us to get colds and sore throats. Two nurses could go out, but the rest of us stayed in as there were not enough clothes to go around." Graduation was June 15, 1926. The exercises were held in the sewing room, above the laundry.

The aim of the school, which provided a three-year diploma course, was "to foster personal development and the strength of character to think and live nobly at all times." The Sisters' aim was to provide a Christian moral and spiritual influence, and a curriculum with a twofold purpose, to prepare competent nurses to serve with the charity to the sick and needy exemplified in the lives of St. Elizabeth of Hungary and St. Francis of Assisi.

With the Humboldt school established, there was time to look to a solution for another problem confronting the Sisters' hospitals.

In 1927, one of the main drawbacks to rural hospitals, such as St. Joseph's in Macklin, was finances. Another was a shortage of nursing personnel to care for an increasing number of patients.

The Sisters provided voluntary services. However, there were not enough Sisters and not enough cash to hire nurses. The logical solution seemed to be the establishment of a school of nursing in Macklin where young ladies would provide services while receiving clinical experience, an apprenticeship type of training with doctors, Sisters and other available lecturers providing theoretical instruction.

When Dr. Fred Eid approached the provincial government about establishing a nursing school in association with St. Joseph's Hospital, he encountered some resistance. After much contact with the Minister of Health, Dr. Eid learned that the main obstacle was that St. Joseph's had only three medical doctors, Drs. F.B. Elliott, H. Chapin, and Eid, on staff. According to provincial regulations, to establish a nursing school, four resident doctors were required. A compromise was finally reached. St. Joseph's Hospital would be permitted to train nurses provided they arranged for affiliation with some larger hospital training school. The girls would take the first two years at St. Joseph's Hospital and move to the larger hospital for their final year.

The government provided a list of hospital nursing schools. Most of them declined. Finally, St. Elizabeth's agreed to accept the students. To provide living quarters, the Isolation Hospital was moved from the cottage hospital to a new site, remodelled to provide four rooms as well as the basement, and provided with running water, sewage and steam heat from the main building.

The government accepted the new arrangements and the joint St. Joseph's-St. Elizabeth's Hospital School of Nursing was launched. The school ran successfully until 1938. When a combination of SRNA requirements for provincial registration and the government requirements for schools of nursing meant that this arrangement



**(L to R) Srs. Elizabeth Lopinski, Marianne Schmidt & Theodora Sieben with a group of student nurses in Macklin.**

was no longer legal, and attempts to affiliate with another school of nursing failed, the government grant was withdrawn and St. Joseph's Hospital School of Nursing closed.

The Humboldt school also faced changes and new requirements. Until tuberculosis nursing and psychiatric nursing were introduced, students at St. Elizabeth's took their entire three years of training at Humboldt. However, in 1953, centralized teaching was introduced. Students took their initial four months of theory at a central school located in Saskatoon. In 1969, the initial centralization was expanded to a two-year program taught under the auspices of the Kelsey Institute of Applied Arts and Sciences (KI-AAS) in Saskatoon. Hospital nursing schools were phased out.

The St. Elizabeth's Hospital School of Nursing operated for 46 years. During that time, the school graduated 468 nurses, and provided as many or more stories which were recorded in the St. Elizabeth's Hospital School of Nursing alumni book.

1927: "In training, we really learned what life was all about. We worked 12-hour shifts and had two hours off if we were lucky. If we were busy, we stayed on. We didn't have too much bookwork, but a lot of keeping our wards clean. I enjoyed every bit of my training."

1939: "I began my training at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in the spring. We earned wages of \$5 per month the first year, \$8 the second and \$10 the last year. We had to pay for breakages, (any piece of china or equipment such as thermometers) which often left us in the red."

1940: "It was the time of the "Hungry Thirties" with no money and no work. If and when I obtained a job, my wages were \$5 per month. When I was out of a job, mother brought a letter to me from the Sisters of St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Humboldt, stating that I was accepted as a student in training for a nurse. It seemed like

an impossible dream. Those were some of the best years of my life. I'll always be grateful to the good Lord for this wonderful opportunity."

1944: "Days spent at St. Elizabeth's were very different, I'm sure. We worked 12-hour shifts, 7 to 7, getting a half-day off a week. We were given \$5 a month, but out of that came breakages. To entertain the troops, we put on a play under the direction of Dr. Ogilvie and went to Lanigan. We had one 11 p.m. late leave a month and often went to a movie, walking all the way downtown. Our treat was a lemon butter tart with meringue for 10¢ at a Chinese restaurant.

1953: "As one of the 10 or 12 Protestant students in a Roman Catholic setting, many of our experiences were new to us. We attended special celebrations of the Roman Catholic faith. Sundays would find the Protestant students walking downtown to our respective churches. I'm sure we were invaluable for the continuity of patient care during "Retreat," when we worked the 12-hour shift. After the eight-day retreat, the Sisters had a thank you party for us with ice cream and cake."

"In the early 1950s (the practice continued for many more years), it was standard practice for nurses to stand when a doctor entered the chart room. We answered when we were spoken to and were very dutiful in running and chasing at their command."

1955: "Registration at the nursing school was at the beginning of September. We were met by the director, Sr. Hildegard, who welcomed us warmly. The nurses' residence was a two-storey building with green trim and it was to be my home for the next three years. In 1974, we returned to Humboldt. The nurses' residence was gone. It seemed as though a part of me was gone. The tree that grew in front of the residence, that we used to touch each day, was gone. That tree knew more about us than anyone else. Rest in silence."

1958: The switch to the Central Teaching Program: "We reported to Ellis Hall at the University of Saskatchewan. When our turn finally came, we were assigned to private homes where we would live for our first four months. Even though many of us lived a fair distance from the university, we had to eat all our meals, including on our day off, at Saskatchewan Hall on campus. Since most of us couldn't afford bus fare and didn't have cars or bikes, we walked. If you were late, you missed your meal. Many nursing students joined the Newman Club at St. Thomas More and met other young people. Sr. Rufina kept in touch with us by letter, as well as by coming to visit us once or twice. She also kept tabs on our progress and gave us encouragement as needed. On January 2, 1959, we moved into the nursing residence of SEH. We were welcomed back to the School of Nursing by the Sisters by being invited over to the convent for tea."

1961: "We had our special house mother who stayed up until the last student came in and then locked the doors. Martha Ilnitski was our housemother. She was



**Sr. Theresa Fisher working as the pharmacist in St. Elizabeth's Hospital.**

also the lady who did the cleaning of the residence. We were responsible for cleaning our rooms. Martha kept everything else spotless and well waxed. We used to say she kept the old building together with wax. We all loved Martha dearly and she was a very special lady with a beautiful singing voice. Occasionally, we would get her to sing a song for us, but it took much encouragement.”

Also 1961: “Sr. Theresa was the hard-working person in Pharmacy. This lady was a living example of WASTE NOT, WANT NOT. Supplies would not be replenished unless proof of need. Not a roll of tape was dispensed unless the empty cardboard roll accompanied the request. Thermometers were not replaced unless the broken pieces were present. If this Sister had been the Canadian Minister of Finance, Canada would not be in a recession.”

1968: “I remember the girls piling in a taxi to reduce the fare, which was 10 cents from St. Paul's Hospital to King Street, the companionship at the residence in Humboldt, washing clothes in that basement and Martha chasing the boys away with her broom.”

Martha Ilnitski, the house mother, was born in Ukraine, and married a lawyer who was arrested by the Soviets as a political prisoner at the outbreak of the Second World War. He was deported to a labour camp and Martha learned from the Red

Cross that he had died in 1942. Assisted by Fr. Jerome Laskewich, the Ukrainian Catholic priest at Cudworth, Martha came to Saskatchewan. Fr. Laskewich brought her to St. Elizabeth's Hospital and asked the Sisters to employ her in any capacity or line of work available.

Martha was employed at the hospital laundry for a few years but when the new wing at the Nurses' Residence was completed in 1949, Sr. Hildegard Koenig, the director of the School of Nursing, asked Martha to take the position of House Mother at the residence, a position she held until the School of Nursing closed in 1969. During that time, she was mother and friend to the student nurses.

In 1969, she was offered a job in the housekeeping department of St. Elizabeth's Hospital. When the School of Nursing closed, she was permitted to continue living at St. Francis Convent with the Sisters. She retired in 1972 and was 74 when she died.



**The St. Elizabeth's Hospital School of Nursing residence in Humboldt.**



Martha Initski (pictured at left and also at right between Srs. Bernarda Gallinger and Perpetua Haag) was house mother at the Nurses' Residence from 1949 until the School of Nursing closed in 1969.



Alma (Crackel) Diesbourg, first lay graduate of the St. Elizabeth's School of Nursing, at the 75th anniversary celebration for the Sisters of St. Elizabeth in 1986. Nursing, Humboldt.



A nursing class at St. Elizabeth School of Nursing, Humboldt.

## Chapter 20

# Sr. Philomena: Reluctant, Honest, Beautiful

Anna Jug, daughter of Valentin Jug and Margareth Dovjass, was born on June 14, 1877, at Zell, Karnten, Austria. She entered the convent of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth, Klagenfurt, Austria, on December 27, 1897, and was given the name of Sr. Maria Philomena of the Mercy of God. On April 14, 1902, she made her solemn vows.

Sr. Philomena cared for the sick at the Sisters' hospital in Klagenfurt and was a self-admitted reluctant volunteer when the call came to begin a Canadian mission at Muenster.

One of the three pioneer sisters, she nursed the sick in their homes before the Humboldt hospital was built. When the first patient was admitted on October 25, 1912, with surgery slated for the next day, Sr. Philomena joined Sr. Salesia, staying up all night, making dressings, cleaning the operating suite, and sterilizing the instruments.

She received her Saskatchewan nurse's registration by waiver in 1917. In the Elizabethan community in Humboldt, she served as nurse, novice directress and vicar. She also served as local superior at St. Joseph's Hospital in Macklin, St. Francis Hospital in Scott, and St. Charles Seminary in Battleford. She also performed domestic duties in the kitchen and the laundry. Sr. Philomena left a diary that she labelled as letters to her brother, a series of essays that describe, in some detail and with great honesty peppered with a large dose of good humour, the challenges faced by the three pioneering Sisters.

According to that diary, Sr. Philomena was truly a reluctant pioneer, feeling strongly that there were other Sisters who were much better suited to such a complete

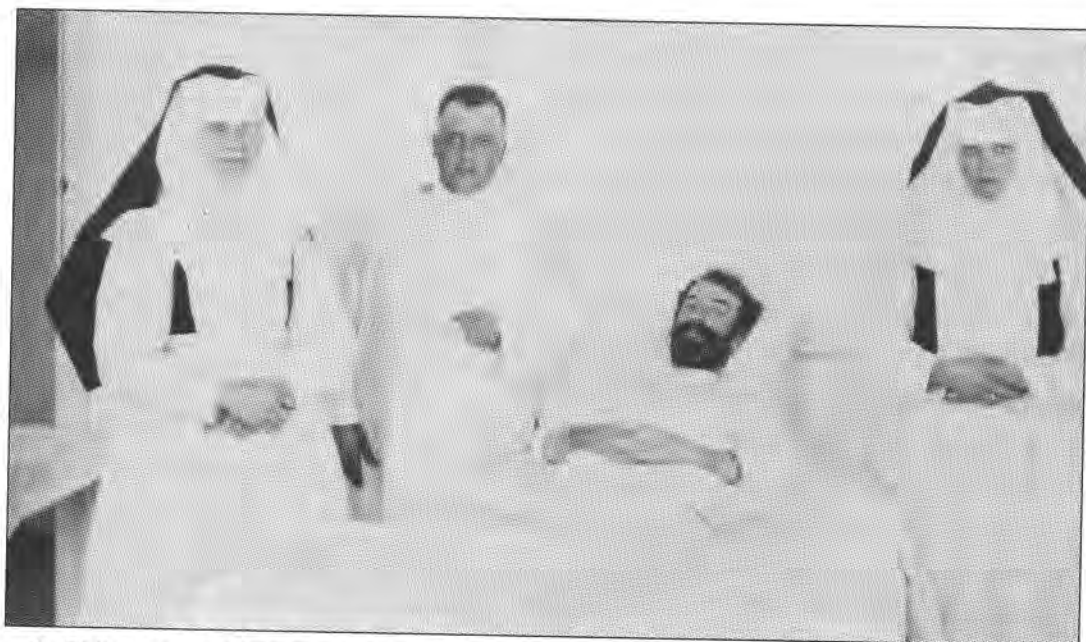


**Sr. Philomena Jug, one of the original pioneer Sisters**

life upheaval. However, another Sister worked on her guilt until she managed to make Sr. Philomena feel ashamed for not offering. She wrote a reluctant note saying she would go if it were God's will. Until the week before departure, she felt secure that God had other plans for her. However, one of the designated Sisters withdrew at the last moment, and, in the rush of packing, Sr. Philomena was able to give her family almost no warning about her impending departure. In the rush of leaving for the train station, she did not say goodbye to her mother.

Fortunately, in 1931, Sr. Philomena was assigned to accompany a Sister who was returning to Klagenfurt. Sr. Salesia and Sr. Agatha decided to return to the former motherhouse. Sr. Salesia went to Cudworth to recuperate somewhat before going on the trip. Sr. Agatha, however, changed her mind in the meantime and the plan was now for Sr. Salesia to go alone. When Sr. Philomena found out, she wrote to the Rev. Mother, begging permission to go along. The reasons she gave for the trip were twofold: to accompany Sr. Salesia out of sisterly love and to visit her aged mother in Austria. She hoped her relatives in Austria would pay for the trip. The plan was submitted to the abbot who gave his permission on the grounds that Sr. Philomena promise to return to Canada.

On October 23, Sr. Philomena and Sr. Salesia left Humboldt in the morning, spending the day at the College. They caught the train to Winnipeg and continued from there to Montreal and New York. On October 30, they embarked on the steamer *Europe*, landing in Bremen on November 6, travelled through Vienna and arrived in Klagenfurt on November 9. Sr. Philomena returned to Humboldt on January 28, 1932.



Sr. Philomena Jug, Dr. Gray, Mr. Parker and Sr. Salesia Scheriau in St. Elizabeth's Hospital.





**Sister Walburga's funeral procession passing through the gardens and the farm between the hospital and the Sisters' cemetery.**

On September 17 of that year, Sr. Walburga died. Sr. Philomena, then the superior in Battleford, was named to replace her as vicar. In October, under the instructions of Abbot Severin, the Juniorate was placed under the direction of its own Mistress. The superior general was no longer to hold this office. Sr. Philomena, as vicar, was named to the position. In 1934, she was named superior general.

In January of 1937, Sr. Philomena became seriously ill. She had a slight stroke and recovered slowly and then only partially. When elections were held in April, Sr. Seraphina, who had been serving as Vicar, was chosen Superior. When, a few months later, Sr. Philomena was well enough to attend the community exercises regularly, she was named vicar of the house.

The physical demands of the early years took their toll. Her legs, swollen during the train trip to Muenster, were further damaged by unrelieved days of home nursing during which she was never able to sleep in a bed; on one occasion, after three weeks of being on her feet or sleeping in a chair, she had developed phlebitis and had to be carried out.

She was a quiet woman who believed in prayer and fasting. When she was sick, her bed was moved to the larger recreation room and an altar was set up at the request of Bishop Prud'homme, a personal friend, so that he could say Mass for her. Her courtly manners and her love of music were described by Sisters who knew her as "very much Austrian." Deeply loyal to the royal house of the Kaiser, one of her greatest joys was a visit by the exiled Kaiser Otto to the Sisters in Humboldt in 1941. In spite of her initial reluctance to leave Klagenfurt, Sr. Philomena carved a niche for herself at Humboldt. She was described as warm, loving, open, hospitable, a woman who made friends easily and who was sensitive to the feelings of others. The people outside the community called her "the lady with the golden heart." Sisters who remembered her described her as stately, tall, very cultured, gracious and courtly, but

someone who liked to laugh and who enjoyed singing at recreation. She involved young Sisters in drama, and developed the convent choir, trying the voices of candidates to see whether they sang soprano, alto or second alto, and encouraged singing in harmony. She was a dynamic leader, with a mother's concern for the Sisters entrusted to her care and a particular feeling for the welfare of the young Sisters and candidates. Whenever she travelled to another house of the community, she would bring back small gifts – candy or holy pictures – for the candidates. She would stop candidates in the hall, just to say a word or two with them.

Sr. Philomena had a fine sense of humour which she could put into words, filling page after page of her diary with accounts of the mishaps of three city Sisters trying to cope with a primitive rural environment. She was not the least bit loathe to tell stories on herself.

She also considered work a blessing. She was a fine seamstress who made vestments and altar linens. Her cross-stitching was magnificent, but she also spent considerable time in mending, a major part of the convent seamstress's work because of the quantity of hospital linen. She did not like waste.

Sr. Philomena was sick for a number of years before she died. She suffered several strokes and died on July 15, 1943. She is buried in the Sisters' private cemetery in Humboldt.



**The exiled Kaiser Otto of Austria at the main entrance to St. Elizabeth's Hospital and Convent on a visit in 1941.**

## Chapter 21

# Sr. Gabriela: God's Prairie Flower

The year was 1912. The second group of Sisters and two laywomen had arrived from Klagenfurt. Rain delays were halting the construction of St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Humboldt. So Sr. Gabriela, the third of the pioneer Sisters who had arrived in Muenster in 1911, took time to write a letter back to the Motherhouse.

"Dearest Sisters!

"I finally have to follow the wishes of some of the Sisters and send a sign of life of my humble self. I especially greet everyone that still remembers me, since I thought I was already forgotten. Mother Isabella suspects that I am still ill, but that is not so, thanks be to God. I am again quite well and happy and satisfied and can't thank our dear Lord enough for the great favour he granted me by being able to work along on this undertaking.

"We just finished a three-day retreat. The lectures were short but very good. The Reverend Father told us that our decision to come here was a great and heroic action and we should work diligently not to lose but multiply any gains so that one day we can die in peace and serenity.

"Mother Superior wrote you our thanks but I cannot omit my own thanks to



Sr. Gabriela Lex and Sr. Philomena Jug celebrate their 25th anniversary in Canada in 1936.

Mother Josefa, Mother Isabella, Mother Stanislai and a few more, I can't name them all, for their kindness and love and for the trouble on our account. But it also hurts very much that some can't give us their trust and confidence, after all so many strangers in this country give us that generously. An unshakable trust in providence never failed and we also hope that our undertaking can go forward without further help from the motherhouse. Of course it will be a lot harder because the interest rate is much higher here.

"The Sisters who arrived here are cheerful and content. Meta is also well-behaved and satisfied. Her homesickness is just about over. Sr. Clementina had to go nursing for a few days during our retreat. Sr. Xaveria also goes every day to a sick woman and takes care of her meals. Lately I had to go to a family living three miles from Humboldt and prepare their deceased daughter for burial. The mother could find nobody to help and she was too heartbroken to do this herself. The mother told me they would donate furnishings for a room at the hospital and the husband will donate to the hospital over and above.

"I can't think of any more news, except we are having much rain this year and the weather poses problems during the building of the hospital. I also would like to explain the reason for not writing more often. First, writing letters is quite costly and we are careful with every cent. Second, it is hard to write, when we know that some have little or no faith or trust in us. Third, I have really very little time.

"Following are many greetings to Mother Bernardina, Mother Josefa, Mother Isabella, Mother Angelina, Mother Stanislai and many, many more and I ask you all for prayers for myself and all the Sisters that God will bless us abundantly because God's blessing means everything.

"Please forgive my poor writing, I wrote in a hurry. Goodbye. Farewell. And so I remain through the loving heart of Jesus your loving and grateful Sr. Gabriela" (*Translated by Karen Redemann of Humboldt*)

Anna Lex was born at Maria Wörth, Carinthia, Austria, on June 28, 1879. She entered the convent of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth in Klagenfurt on May 30, 1897 and was given the name Sister Maria Gabriela of the Annunciation. She pronounced her first vows on May 5, 1903, and her perpetual vows three years later, on May 8, 1906. She volunteered to go to Canada to open a new mission and left Klagenfurt on April 30, 1911, arriving in Muenster on May 14, 1911, one of the three pioneer Sisters.

Almost immediately, she began working in the abbey kitchen. When she was not out in the community, doing home nursing, she was back at the abbey. Sr. Philomena recorded in her diary that, during the second week after their arrival, Sr. Augustina and Sr. Philomena went to care for the sick in Dr. Barry's hospital.

Sr. Gabriela, a cook, helped the two elderly people in the Muenster monastery kitchen. In September 1911, Sr. Gabriela and Sr. Philomena went to Duluth to learn English and American nursing methods. They came back to Humboldt in March, in time for Easter. On Holy Thursday, just after they had returned from Duluth, Sr. Philomena also noted, "Dr. Barry came to our door at 11:00 p.m. from Humboldt to ask for two Sisters to care for two very sick persons." She and Sr. Gabriela went, discovering to their shock that they were being split up and assigned to two separate locations in Humboldt.

Sr. Gabriela obtained her nurse's registration by waiver in 1917 and her diploma in nursing in 1926. She nursed for many years. She was Mother Vicar from 1924-1928 and she was on the general council from 1922 to 1938. From 1930 to 1940 she was the mistress of novices. She was local superior at St. Peter's College and, from 1928-1929 and from 1940-1946, she was local superior and administrator at St. Joseph's Hospital in Macklin. She was also procurator for the community for many years.

Physically, Sr. Gabriela was a little woman, small in stature, but there was nothing small about her spirit and talents. She had trained as a cook and seamstress in Klagenfurt. She was known for her pastry and for her ability to turn food into works of art. She was in charge of the convent kitchen for many years and passed on many customs from Austria. For feast days, she made butter lambs by moulding a pound of butter into the shape of a lamb. She made fancy cakes, cream-filled cones, and a special type of torte baked on a rod before the open fire of a furnace, then iced with chocolate to give it the appearance of a knotted log. One Sister suggested that "only the Austrians would take the time to do something like that." It was not all just for show. On feast days, Sr. Gabriela was the one in the kitchen at 3 a.m., carefully and neatly filling roasters with the meat she had prepared for the dinner, working early so she would be finished in time to attend Mass. She was very concerned that meals were well prepared and served at their best. According to Sr. Gabriela, "Whatever is worth doing for God is worth doing well," and she would have seen everything as being done for God.

To the young Sisters in her care, she taught cleanliness, order and neatness and the importance of co-operation. As a trained cook from Austria, she knew how to preserve by canning and passed this knowledge on to the other Sisters in the kitchen.

She was a humble woman, blessed with a deep sense of the presence of God. She always trusted that God would provide and she maintained a pure simple faith in St. Joseph. She would take a small empty purse, lay it at the feet of St. Joseph's statue, and tell him to take care of it. This was her way of telling St. Joseph that the Congregation was in debt.

However, there was nothing simple about Sr. Gabriela. She was, by all accounts, a remarkably capable and intelligent woman who served as procurator (business manager) and bursar for the community for many years. She used her knowledge, gained partly from her extensive reading, to keep the community running smoothly in a time of poverty. She was a wise woman with insight and foresight who was able to keep the community on its feet, no matter the prevailing economic conditions. Entrusted with the management of the temporal goods of the community at a time of dire poverty, she knew how to make ends meet. She was sparing in the use of material goods and spoke of them as "God's gifts to the community." During the hard times, she preserved eggs in lime and butter in saltwater. She made jam from pear peelings and laundry soap from lard with a little gasoline added to make it foam.

She also understood herbal medicine. She picked vast quantities of herbs – chamomile, shepherd's purse, horsetail, crossroot, wormwood – dried them in the convent attic, packed them in large boxes and bags, and sent them to the missions. Chamomile and shepherd's purse were steeped as tea for stomach ailments. Woodworm was used for earache.

She was austere in her personal life, making do with a minimum of necessities for herself. Her room contained only a bed, a chair, a bare table and bandages for her legs, damaged during the long train ride from New York to Muenster and during 24-hour stretches on her feet while home nursing.

However, she loved music. She did not sing, but she encouraged others to do so. She enjoyed humour and fun, especially the skits and plays done by the young Sisters and aspirants. She loved to laugh.

She had high blood pressure for a long time and had an unnamed heart condition, but in semi-retirement, she managed to keep busy and productive, in particular doing some sewing. She died on June 16, 1952, and is buried in the Sisters' private cemetery in Humboldt.

## Chapter 22

# Breaking Loose (In God's Service)

On August 30, 1913, Abbot Bruno declared the new Humboldt foundation independent of the motherhouse in Klagenfurt. Mother Pulcheria had recently come from Austria, and, in the election that followed, she was chosen Superior General. The Community at Humboldt was now a self-sustaining convent and Motherhouse. The arrival of candidates who wished to join the Elizabethan Sisters forced the community to become independent because that is the only way they could accept candidates – unless of course they sent them for formation to Klagenfurt which would have been out of the question.

In 1921, St. Peter's Abbey was raised to the status of *Abbatia Nullis*, a territory in the charge of the Benedictine Fathers and directly subject to the Holy See. According to the abbot's directions, work was begun on constitutions for the Sisters to conform to the new Code of Canon Law, which had come out in 1917. They would also take into account the life of the day. The abbey's sub-prior and Fr. Tharsicius Schmid were chiefly responsible for the writing of the constitutions, in consultation with the superior and her councillors. The new constitutions went into effect as soon as they were approved by Abbot Michael Ott in 1923.

In November 1932, a copy of the new rule and constitutions arrived from Klagenfurt. This rule had been approved by Pope Pius XI for the Third Order Regular and the Statutes for the Sisters of St. Elizabeth in Klagenfurt. This copy was submitted to Abbot Severin with the request that steps should be taken to adapt these statutes to the Humboldt community as much as conditions permitted and then acquire approval for the latter. This work was immediately undertaken and, in due course it was completed. When it was submitted to the Abbot, he suggested that it be translated into English, given that Bishops in all the dioceses in which the Sisters worked had a right to a copy, and the Bishops of Saskatoon and Prince Albert could not read German.

The text was translated by Fr. Augustine Nenzel, OSB, with the help of one of the Elizabethan Sisters. Abbot Severin declared the translation unacceptable and asked that Fr. Sittenauer do the translating. Although the Sisters were given regular assurances that the project was moving forward, by 1943 the work had not been completed. With no other alternative available, the Humboldt-based Sisters continued to follow the old 1923 statutes.

As well as having the final word on such matters as the English wording for the

community's constitutions, Abbot Severin chose to be very involved in the day-to-day activities of the Sisters and the internal governance of the convent. In 1931, he gave directions on a few points which he felt needed attention. These included:

- Silence, in particular the grand silence.
- Charity. The older Sisters should be careful to give good example to the others and win them by their affection.
- Young Sisters should not be sent to a branch house but be kept under surveillance for the whole three-year term, so they could acquire the real spirit of the Order.
- The reading period in the novitiate should be transferred to another time of day because during the first hours of the afternoon people are usually tired. He suggested holding the recreation period in the afternoon and the reading in the evening. He also said that there should not be much work expected of the novices and the postulants, so that they could have more time for spiritual exercises and learn more about the religious life and its duties and perform them, for this was, after all, the main purpose of the novitiate.
- Constitutions should be observed strictly, both in the motherhouse and in the branch houses.
- The superior of a branch house should not allow a subject of hers to visit her relatives without the express permission of the superior general.
- In the branch houses no gifts should be made to private persons but all the handicrafts not needed in the particular house should be forwarded to the superior who would dispose of them as she thought fit. All such articles should be made at recreation only, and not during working time or on the wards.

Meanwhile, new needs were emerging within the congregation. As the number of Canadian candidates increased, it became evident that the language and some of the traditions of the missionaries from Austria had to be abandoned or adapted.

Tension was mounting as the Sisters attempted to be faithful in their service to the sick while maintaining a monastic lifestyle. Planning and progress were seriously hampered because all decisions in financial and administrative matters required the permission of the local abbot.

Sister Florianne Kohlman, first Canadian superior general, was elected in 1949 and served a total of 15 years in that capacity. She was born in Grosswerder near Primate, Saskatchewan in 1907, entered St. Elizabeth's Convent and made her first vows in 1926, then did practical nursing at St. Michael's Hospital in Cudworth. She began her nursing training in 1931, graduating in 1934. She nursed in Humboldt and taught O.R. technique and anaesthesia until 1946, when she became local superior



at Macklin. She had been on the general council from 1936 to 1946.

“I knew the problems we had,” she said during a lengthy interview. “We had problems. We were asked why they should go away to school. We were told they can stay here, they know enough. But according to the government, we had to get the Sisters educated in order to keep our training school. And then we had to get permission all the time for everything. Sounds awful, but it was. When I wanted to go out of the province I had to get special permission from the abbot. You could not plan; you could not make arrangements, because you never knew if he was going to say ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ So, I went to Abbot Severin and told him we would like to have new constitutions and have changes made in our community. He said, ‘Why? Keep what you have got and you will go to heaven.’

“I went on my own. I went to Saskatoon to see Bishop Pocock because he was a canonist. I told him my situation. I told him that I felt we had to do something with our community. We could not go on the way we were. The Sisters were pinned down so tight we could not do anything, could not go anywhere. So, he gave me a whole lineup of what had to be done, and said, ‘I cannot do it because I am the Bishop here and I cannot interfere with the Bishop there. I cannot do it, but I can advise you.’ So I told him, too, about our Franciscan life. The statutes and constitutions were from Klagenfurt. They were kind of revised by each abbot as they came, and they always drifted away more and more from the Franciscan life. He said I should get in touch with a canonist and try to get as much information from other Franciscan sisters as I could. First of all, before we started, we thought we had to get things in English because how could a canonist help us if he could not read what we had. So from there we started.

“Sr. Seraphina was the vicar at the time and Sr. Pulcheria was treasurer. Sr. Mary Elizabeth was secretary and there was another Sister, I think, Sr. Johanna. We got together every day to translate the statutes, the customs, the prayers and get them into English. We had a little opposition, too, from the older Sisters. Once it was translated they knew well enough we were going to use it. We had to because some of our Sisters could not even speak German. We had to do something. It was not fair.



**Sr. Florianne Kohlman, the first Canadian born superior general, served a total of 15 years in that office.**

So, that took us almost a year, the translation. We had to have it re-read by one of the priests or one of the Ursulines who put it into better English. Then I wrote to Fr. Michael Harding because he was a Franciscan.

“I got in contact with him through Bishop Pocock. He also gave me the names of a whole bunch of Sisters. I wrote five or six and got their constitutions from the States. There were none in Canada. We got those, and we studied them, made notes on which ones we would like and which we felt would fit our community so we were ready for Fr. Michael as far as we could be.

“Then I had problems with Abbot Severin. He did not want to hear of it, and I had to have permission from him to have Fr. Michael come into the diocese and work with us. I do not know how many times I went there. I followed the footsteps of St. Francis. I went in at the front door and out the back door and came back in at the front door until he broke down and said, ‘Well, try it.’ So that is what we did. Fr. Michael was here weeks at a time. Then he would come again. We used a little bit of our old constitutions, but it was pretty well starting from scratch. We had all the other constitutions there and we built on Franciscan life. Then, when Fr. Michael was ready to speak to the Abbot, the Abbot would not see him.

“We had something – an investiture or something, and the abbot had to come to say the Mass. I told Fr. Michael to stand in the hall and grab him when he came out. That is what he did. He dragged him into his room, and he spoke to him. I do not know what they said because I did not go near. But the abbot finally said yes. When Fr. Michael came back, the first thing I asked was if we could become pontifical.”

In order to have greater freedom and authority over their own affairs and not have their plans always subject to approval by the local church authority it was necessary that the community gain pontifical status. One of the chief requirements to obtain this status was that a congregation had to be working in five different dioceses and submit a letter of support from each Bishop.

“We had no houses except the one which we had started in Battleford in 1932 and that was under the Prince Albert Bishop,” said Sr. Florianne. “The Saskatoon Bishop had Macklin. Fr. Alphonse Claude-Laboissiere, OFM, a Franciscan, asked us about taking over the kitchen at the Mount St. Francis Retreat House in Cochrane, Alberta. We sent a group of Sisters to St. Anthony’s College in Edmonton to staff the kitchen. It was in the 1950s that we went to Cochrane and the Sisters worked there during the summer months. Then when school started in Edmonton, we went there. Of course, every time before we opened a house I always went to see the Bishop. Bishop Carroll was in Calgary and I asked him if we could come into his diocese and work in the retreat house. In Edmonton, I went to Bishop Jordan to get permission to work at St. Anthony’s College. So, by that time I had five Bishops. They supported us and wrote their letters of recommendation.



**St. Anthony's College in Edmonton, Alberta. The Sisters worked in the kitchen here from 1950 to the mid-60s.**

"I got together my letters that the abbot would not give me. I had to go back to him and tell him that the bishops all gave us this and we had to have his especially because the Motherhouse was here. He kind of broke down and gave it to me. We were on our way. That is where we got our constitutions and the way we became pontifical. By that time, it was time for me to retire.

"When Fr. Michael was here, he said that Lay Sisters could be changed to Choir Sisters. He said it was in canon law. There must have been changes in the church law about it because that came from way, way back. When he said it could be changed, we had it changed as fast as we could."

In 1950, there were 72 Choir Sisters and 22 Lay Sisters. Some had come from Klagenfurt. The Sisters of St. Elizabeth were, generally, unsure about the reason for the difference in rank. Said Sr. Clarissa Winters, "When I was working as a lay person at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, 1946-1953, I observed that the Lay Sisters were involved in kitchen work, cooking, baking. During canning time, they did all the canning of fruit. They were working in the laundry and did the cleaning and sewing. The Choir Sisters were the nurses, supervisors, office workers, pharmacists and lab technicians. After the evening meal, the Lay Sisters stayed back and finished up the work while the Choir Sisters went to pray in the chapel." The distinction had been removed by the time she entered the convent. Sr. Viola Bens said, "The Lay Sisters did not pray with the Choir Sisters nor did they say the prayer of the Church. Instead they recited five Our Fathers, Hail Marys and Glorys for each of the 'Hours.' Lay Sisters did not have an opportunity to study or to enter into a profession. They took their rank after the Choir Sisters in terms of sitting in chapel and dining room as well as for other community events. I believe they were not allowed to have positions of authority such as local superior or supervisor. All of this was a source of division in

the community. The decision as to who would be a Lay Sister depended mostly on education but money and family of origin also played an important role – resulting in hurt sometimes even between siblings in the community.”

According to the “A Nun’s Life Ministry,” an online site, in the past (as far back as the Middle Ages), some religious communities had a kind of hierarchy of membership. Choir Sisters were educated women, perhaps from wealthy families, who could read Latin and chant and recite the Divine Office prayers. Typically they were teachers. The Lay Sisters were mostly from country areas, without wealth or education. Rather than the Divine Office, they said a certain number of Our Fathers. They did the heavy work and were not allowed to vote or to have a voice in community affairs.

In Humboldt, many of the Choir Sisters felt uncomfortable with the distinction and did not understand how the decision was made by superiors. “In the dining room, all the Lay Sisters were down in the end on one or two tables. Every Choir Sister who made profession today went over all those who were 60 or 70 years old. It was hard, and we felt it, too,” said Sr. Florianne. “I know I felt terrible when I was a young Sister and moved up over the other Sisters. Why should I? No, you felt you should not be, and I’m sure the others did, too.”

Abbot Severin applied to the Sacred Congregation, saying that it was the wish of the Choir Sisters of St. Elizabeth that the distinction be eliminated. Their request was granted on December 22, 1949 and the Sisters received the information on February 10, 1950.

“I think it went over very well that all the Sisters should be equal,” said Sr. Florianne. “The Sisters were all very happy. We told a few older sisters, like Sr. Agatha, that they did not have to change. They could pray their prayers with Our Fathers the way they did before, if they wanted to, but they were all in the rank of Choir Sisters and they all moved up in the dining room and chapel.”

Sr. Florianne had a tremendous influence at a critical time in the life of the Congregation. Some considered her as the second foundress of the Sisters in Humboldt. She was a woman of vision, insight, courage and action with a deep faith and profound prayer life. During her 12 years as superior general she sent Sisters to open seven new local houses as well as to Maceio, Brazil and northern Saskatchewan.

In the 1920s and 1930s many Sisters who entered did not have secondary education because the thinking in those days was that girls did not need to be educated. In her third term as superior general from 1963-1969 Sr. Florianne recognized that culturally this was no longer acceptable.

During this term of office she provided educational opportunities for the Sisters in temporary vows in Nelson, B.C. and Saskatoon and provided a residence in Saskatoon for nursing students for Sisters of different congregations. She allowed 17 Sisters to



The Sisters had a house of studies at Notre Dame University in Nelson, British Columbia from 1965 to 1967. They are (L to R): Sr. Marie Goretti Braungel, Sr. Paul Marie Hahn, Sr. Sida Hrbachek, Sr. Delores Wolfe, Sr. Emily Greter, Sr. Frances O'Lesky, Sr. Joan Baron, Sr. Eleonore Hanus.

enter into post-secondary education programs at universities and other institutes and some 20 Sisters to upgrade their educational status through correspondence courses and basic upgrading with the help of Sr. Emily Greter, a teacher in the community.

Her care and concern for the welfare of the Sisters was evidenced in that she always visited each place before sending Sisters to serve. She did love to travel! Sr. Viola Bens writes, "I remember her stamina when we first visited La Loche. Both Sr. Emily and I found the trip unbearably difficult over those rough northern roads through endless miles of forest. Sr. Florianne, however, took it all in stride and came home as she left – fresh as a daisy".

As superior general she was receptive to having her plans changed even if it was not easy for her.

In later years, when she was no longer superior general but was on the general council she was a good consultant and advisor but allowed the superior general to act freely in her own area of jurisdiction without interfering. She was very supportive, a good advisor, and had a good common sense approach to situations.

She was open to having advisors come, especially during preparations for the Special Chapter after Vatican II, who could help with the required renewal and help the Sisters understand the Vatican Documents.

She was very receptive to young people especially in the 1960s when so many came for vocation days or vocation retreats.

Her hands were never idle; she either fingered her rosary in prayer or was busy making bazaar items for the missions. She had the ability to inspire people to donate toward the missions.

Sr. Florianne died on December 11, 1998 at the age of 90 and is buried in the Sisters' private cemetery in Humboldt.



**Srs. Clothilde Gartner & Florianne Kohlman.**

## Chapter 23

# Universal Health Care: Relief at Last

Overcrowding, which was already a problem at the St. Elizabeth's Hospital prior to 1947, became acute after the Saskatchewan Hospitalization Plan came into effect. It was the rule, rather than the exception, to house 65 patients or more in a building with a rated capacity of 48 beds. The hospital had neither the facilities nor the equipment to handle such a load, and good patient care under such overcrowding was next to impossible. Therefore, a new hospital was an absolute necessity, not just a convenience.

This was one of the results of some dramatic changes in hospital funding and medical care, implemented first in Saskatchewan and then nationally.

Two innovative pieces of legislation, both firsts for North America, had given rise to the number of rural hospitals in Saskatchewan. The Municipal Hospital Act in 1916 provided payment for the hospital services obtained by residents of a municipality to come from general revenues and, later, personal taxes. The Union Hospital Act in 1917 allowed rural municipalities, villages and towns to form local authorities so they could pool their resources to establish and maintain hospitals. However, as private hospitals, St. Elizabeth's and the Sisters' other hospitals were not able to raise money through taxation. They had to rely on the 50¢ a patient per day grant from the federal government and any money the Sisters could raise on their begging rounds, an activity that they would never have even considered back in Klagenfurt but which was absolutely necessary in Saskatchewan.

During the early years, and in particular during the years of the Great Depression, the hospital charge was only \$2 a day but, said Sr. Florianne, many patients could not manage that. "Lots of people brought us eggs and cheese, butter and meat, chickens and stuff, because they had no money. In the very early days, the municipality paid for those who couldn't. We used to call them indigents and we sent the bill to the municipality. But during the 1930s, the municipalities weren't getting taxes and they said if people cannot pay taxes, we cannot pay you." The 50¢ grant was not covering costs, the Sisters were not receiving any salaries, and the bulk of their income came from their collection rounds, from the generosity of the Ladies' Auxiliary fundraising, and from other benefactors.

When he took office in Saskatchewan as premier in 1944, Tommy Douglas recruited Dr. Henry E. Sigerist, a professor of medical history at Johns Hopkins University who had expertise in public health, to review the provincial health

conditions and to make recommendations. Dr. Sigerist recommended that all residents of Saskatchewan be provided with universal hospitalization. As a beginning, the Saskatchewan government began to provide construction grants and loans for new hospitals.

On January 1, the provincial government passed the third health care-related bill. The Hospital Insurance Act ensured no-fee hospital care for everyone, and provided payment for hospital services to all hospitals, public or private, that met government criteria. Families paid inexpensive premiums because Premier Douglas knew that the province would need some revenue from the plan, and because he felt that people would feel more ownership of the plan if they had some cash involvement. Municipalities earned a five percent commission for collecting the premiums, so everybody won. Saskatchewan doctors backed the plan immediately because they now had the freedom to admit patients when it was necessary, not just when the family could afford the costs. There was no cost for services for hospital patients.

That act was the single most influential event of the 1940s as far as hospitals such as St. Elizabeth's were concerned. Once each facility was approved, the hospital was ensured a reliable source of income. At that time, the government requirements for eligibility for payment under the act were minor in comparison to the benefits to



**Sr. Pauline Thacyk working in the laboratory in St. Elizabeth's Hospital.**



the hospital. The Sisters, who now had a guaranteed source of income that was much more realistic, were able to provide improved services to their patients and to hire more lay staff. At last, the burden they had carried for so long was eased. With their working conditions improved, the Sisters were able to take the advanced courses they needed to remain qualified.

Meanwhile, Sisters had to be trained as nurses. The hospital income could not cover the cost of training. "If you had a training school you had to have someone qualified. You had to hire people. We could not afford it. The doctors were demanding more services. Sr. Elizabeth Sonntag went away and took the laboratory technician course because they wanted all kinds of tests. It was difficult because you had to go and beg for everything. You can't exist and you can't plan. You couldn't ask if they could go to school tomorrow or next week. You had to apply a year before," said Sr. Florianne.

In 1948, more funds for hospital construction were made available when national health grants were established to provide federal funds.

Plans for a new St. Elizabeth's, a 75-bed hospital, were finalized in the fall of 1952, and the nurses' residence was enlarged to accommodate more nurses. The T-shaped, four-storey fireproof hospital, constructed of reinforced steel and concrete with variegated brick facing, was completed on schedule in 1955 at a cost of \$900,000. It was financed through construction grants, funds from the Motherhouse, a substantial loan and generous donations from organizations and individuals in Humboldt and the surrounding area. Patients were transferred to the new hospital on August 12 and the formal opening was celebrated on September 7, 1955. The premier called the building a fitting Saskatchewan Golden Jubilee monument to the pioneers who had practised charity, co-operation and mutual helpfulness.

In 1955, the new St. Elizabeth's Hospital became separate from the convent. The Sisters were then able to use the old hospital building as their convent. The local superior of the hospital was also the administrator of the hospital. The superior general and her council still constituted the hospital board.

In 1959, Premier Douglas announced the second phase of his medical reform, a universal Medicare plan. This was one of Saskatchewan's defining moments, with part of the population strongly in support of the idea and almost all the doctors and their supporters completely opposed. The Sisters almost automatically backed the doctors. The fierce opposition led the new premier, Woodrow Lloyd, who had replaced Tommy Douglas, to delay implementation until July 1962. The delay did not calm the waters. On July 1, 1962, 90 percent of Saskatchewan's physicians and surgeons went on strike. It did not last long. By mid-July, some of the doctors were back at work and the strike ended on July 23 when the government called in a mediator and some amendments were made to the bill.



St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Convent and Farm complex near the peak of its development. This aerial view clearly shows the layout of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth holdings at about the midpoint of the 20th century. The Sisters' cemetery is visible about midway up the picture on the extreme left. The farm extends from just behind the cemetery to the right centre of the picture.

The newly built 1955 hospital dominates the bottom centre of the picture and the large heating plant chimney is visible behind the hospital. The hospital parking lot borders a very short 12th Avenue with its two houses and 9th Street that provided access to the hospital. The large wooded area on the right (east) side of 9th Street became the parking lot after a further addition to the hospital was completed in 1968.

The complex of buildings in the centre of the wooded area shows a little summer house nestled in the trees, the Novitiate building, and the original hospital and convent with its additions.



**The reception desk in St. Elizabeth's Hospital, 1955.**

After the initial aversion to the plan, by 1965, most doctors favoured the continuation of Medicare and in 1984 universal health care was established nationally when the Canada Health Act was passed unanimously by the House of Commons.

The implementation of Medicare had a profound effect on the Sisters of St. Elizabeth and all their hospitals. From the moment of their arrival in 1911, the Sisters had worked for free, depending on the small per-patient hospital grant, the generosity of their patrons, and their own extensive farm and gardens to manage the hospitals and to keep everyone fed. With the advent of Medicare, the government paid salaries, according to an established budget, to the Sisters as well as to other employees.

The 1960s saw other big changes to the way the Sisters provided for their hospitals. Shortly after St. Elizabeth's was opened in 1912, the farm was established with Jacob Platzer, brother to Sr. Augustina, as organizer and manager. He had a degree in agriculture from Klagenfurt. The farm was expanded in 1941 to include an orchard south of the original hospital. More workmen were engaged although the hospital could not afford to pay them, offering free room and board instead. The Sisters also took an active part in the farm operation, taking charge of the chickens and other fowl, helping with butchering and sausage-making, tending gardens, and harvesting produce.

However, Humboldt was growing and houses were getting too close to the farm. The end of an era came when the provincial government ordered, in 1960, that

testing be done on all produce fed to the patients. The cattle were sold at auction. The barn and chicken coop went to nearby farms and the butcher house was moved to Waldsea Lake Regional Park and became the Sisters' summer cottage. When the old St. Elizabeth's Hospital-convent was demolished in 1969, the remaining farm buildings were torn down.

The year 1965 saw the enactment of the Hospital Revenue Act, which required representatives from the municipalities to be part of the governing boards of hospitals. The hospital revenue tax act stated: "A hospital is eligible to receive payment only if there is included in the membership of the board of the hospital at least two persons each of whom is considered by the hospital to represent at least one rural municipality or a portion of the RM that is in the general vicinity of the hospital and in which the hospital revenue tax is being levied." The law was repealed as obsolete in 1997 once health reforms were implemented.

The functions of the advisory board were taken on by the hospital board. The hospital bylaws were revised and approved by the Minister of Health. By provisions of the Hospital Revenue Act, the superior general remained an ex-officio member of the board. The superior general and her council appointed a certain number of persons to the board according to the hospital bylaws. Municipalities elected their representatives to the board. The first representatives appointed by the advisory board to the St. Elizabeth's Hospital board were Isidore Puetz, reeve of the RM of St. Peter's, and Jim Daniels, mayor of Humboldt. This made it possible for the hospital board to negotiate a mill rate with the towns, villages and municipalities served by the hospital.

The first meeting of St. Elizabeth's new Board of Governors was held on September 11, 1969. T.E. "Ed" McConnell was appointed the first lay chairman of the board. Other members were Sr. Clothilde Gartner, superior general, and Sisters Mary Irene Sitter, Perpetua Haag, Mary Clare Felton and Bernarda Gallinger who were members of the corporation; Henry Honatzis, representative of the urban municipalities; Isidore Puetz, representative of the rural municipalities, and Andrew Fohse, representative of the town of Humboldt. Don A. Wassill was appointed the first lay administrator and became secretary of the board without voting power. He served as administrator until 1976 when Sister Bernarda was appointed.

In Macklin, in 1966, when the Lay Advisory Board was dissolved, it was established as the Public Relations Board, and included three lay members on the board to represent the town of Macklin, one representative from the rural municipalities, and one representative from the urban municipalities of the district. The name was changed again in 1971 to Public Relations Advisory Council.

In Cudworth, until 1970, the Sisters formed the Board of Governors for St. Michael's with the Lay Advisory Board to assist and advise them. In 1971, lay members

were added to the board. Representatives from the urban and rural municipalities were appointed by their respective bodies while the Sisters maintained the balance of the board from the congregation and local citizens whom they appointed. Later, the Board formation was four Sisters, four lay persons, and a chairman.

The next major change came in the 1990s. On April 15, 1993, Saskatchewan's Minister of Health announced that the provincial government was closing 52 rural hospitals, including Macklin. Twenty-eight hospitals were closed on September 30, and the other 24 were shut down early in 1994. All of the large city hospitals were downsized at the

same time. St. Joseph's functioned as an emergency centre until 1996. St. Michael's in Cudworth was closed by the government in 1998, renovated, and reopened as an assisted living facility, known as St. Michael's Haven.

In 1995, the Sisters of St. Elizabeth, following the example of other religious hospitals, established the Elizabethan Health Services, bringing their three hospitals at Humboldt, Cudworth and Macklin under one umbrella, and providing an entity that would allow for new projects to be developed in conjunction with community groups.

On May 15, 2000, the Sisters transferred ownership of St. Elizabeth's Hospital to the bishops of Saskatchewan through the Saskatchewan Catholic Health Corporation. Seven years later, in October 2007, St. Elizabeth's Hospital lost its Catholic identity, becoming a publicly owned and operated hospital.



**Don Wassill was the first lay person who administered St. Elizabeth's Hospital from 1969-76.**



Sr. Viola Bens (right) presents a gift to Sr. Florianne Kohlman (left) for chairing the elections in 1989. In the background are Srs. Bernarda Gallinger, Loretta Bornowsky, & Angela Stang.

## Chapter 24

# Reminiscing on Change

A century of living brings change. While both subtle, slow change and profound upheavals affect institutions or organizations, change has an equal or greater effect on the individual people who, collectively, create and support those institutions. So it was with the Sisters of St. Elizabeth. Here, in their own words, are some of the Sisters who responded to interviews in the 1980s and again about 25 years later.

### The Novitiate

Sr. Wendeline Senger entered in 1926. "It was very poor compared to what we had at home. We couldn't have milk. In the winter they had only one cow, maybe two. We had canned milk but we didn't like it. Everything was down to the bare necessities. We had instructions for one hour in the afternoon and in the evening we had prayers and Mother Mistress would read to us and tell us things about the Order. It was all German. We had a little altar. We'd kneel down for prayers and then she'd instruct us. Of course, a lot of the Sisters didn't know Latin and she'd have to teach us.



A group of young ladies in various stages of their training to become Sisters pose on the front balcony of the Novitiate building. The year is unknown.

We had to know enough Latin to pray along. Naturally we heard it all the time but we didn't understand it well. We were supposed to study it on our own but, oh, heavens, we didn't have enough time."

Sr. Lucy Stang entered the convent in Humboldt in 1929: "There were a lot of girls at that time. I think we were 21 in the novitiate. That was novices, postulants, and the girls who were going to school. Many times we were homesick and the whole works of us were crying. But Sr. Christine Drexler knew how to get around us and she would cheer us all up again. Sr. Mary Elizabeth was the junior mistress. She was a lot of fun and was a woman who did a lot of reading. Our books were different than they are now. It took a long time before we ever started using the Bible. It seems it was not for us to read the Bible. There were too many bad stories, especially in the Old Testament, and we only got it when Fr. Schneider was very instrumental. He used to assist with the Sisters and he insisted that every one of us be given a New Testament.

"Another thing I was going to say about our novitiate is how we looked after the dead. There was no funeral home yet and when I entered we would dress all the little babies who died or we would have to go to the hospital and take them to the morgue, and wash them and dress them and lay them in their little coffins. Sometimes the people would make their little coffins, and sometimes they would buy them.

"Silence was very strict. We had silence from morning till night. We were only allowed to speak when there was necessity to speak. We usually had to talk in a silent tone. It meant silence with everything. Closing doors or any noises were supposed to be avoided. On staircases and in the hallways we were never allowed to talk. And prayers, it was Prime and Matins and vespers and night prayers, all the "Hours." The first "Hours" was said early in the morning – that was Prime. Then, around ten o'clock, everybody went to chapel. At noon was "None," I think. There were always community prayers during meals at noon and in the evening, the Miserere and table prayers and after meals we went in procession to chapel saying the Miserere on the way up the stairs to chapel. Then the cross prayer with arms outstretched, seven Our Fathers and Hail Marys."

### **A very special Jubilee**

Sr. Anne Brost: "The greatest event in my own life in this community was my Golden Jubilee in 1981. I was just standing there in awe. It's not a feeling. You felt lifted up above everything that went before. I saw people gathering and a lot of priests and Bishop Mahoney. It was a very solemn event for the whole congregation because there were seven Sisters who entered and went on together to the 25th Jubilee and on to the 50th Jubilee and we are all seven together yet. Moreover, they said it was something that had never happened in the community before, not here and not at Klagenfurt or any other place that seven persevered and lived 50 years together. For retreats





Two Sisters (back row left) celebrated their 25th jubilee. The other seven all celebrated their 50th jubilee. The pictured Sisters are – Back Row (Lto R): Srs. Clarissa Winters, Dolores Jansen, Lucy Stang, Amelia Sieben, and Martina Gramlich. Front Row: Srs. Ludmilla Wagner, Tecla Gartner, Anne Brost and Monica Sperling.

sometimes there would be four or five of us together and we always looked each other up and recalled what happened 25 years ago and so forth. In my estimation, it is an encouragement, a very great encouragement, to see they had all persevered. It is an actual grace that was there.” The Sisters who celebrated Jubilee with Sr. Anne were Sr. Martina Gramlich, Sr. Lucy Stang, Sr. Isabelle Zoller, Sr. Veronica Schmidt, Sr. Ambrosia Prediger, and Sr. Ludmilla Wagner.



Sr. Florianne Kohlman was the first Canadian to hold the position of superior general.

### **Major changes in the School of Nursing**

Sr. Florianne Kohlman, the first Canadian superior: “There was a need to send the Sisters farther away for education. It happened in the early 1940s. Before I came on as superior some of them had gone already. That is when I knew we had to change. There was difficulty because you had to go and beg for everything. You could not go out of the province. But it was kind of you had to go. If you had to keep a training school, you had to have someone qualified. I do not know who went first, but there

were Sr. Perpetua Haag and Sr. Josephine Brost and Sr. Elizabeth Sonntag, who took the laboratory technician course. There were always two gone at a time. They went to Toronto, to St. Michael's Hospital. The Sisters of St. Joseph had a house, a students' residence, and that's where they stayed. All of them had taken correspondence to bring up their high school. A couple of them went to Bruno, some to Prud'homme to the Sisters to finish high school. Some of them had only Grade 9 or 10 when they came. I think Grade 12 was recognized everywhere in Canada."

### **The change from Latin and German to English**

Sr. Wendeline: "When the Office changed from Latin to English, it was good, but it was kind of hard to swing into it. We knew that Latin so well. It did have the translation on the opposite page but we did say it in Latin."

Sr. Evelyn Kirtzinger entered in 1947: "When I started I didn't know a word I was praying. I even read in German in the dining room and didn't know a word I was saying. Sr. Patricia Trainor did, too."

Sr. Colette Kloppenburg entered in 1931: "I remember the time we switched from German to English, maybe 1952. Someone asked me, 'Do you want English?' So, I said yes. I sure want it. How can you expect the others to learn when everything is in German?"

In 1954 some community prayers were said in English although some Latin was used until the 1960s. The table and other common prayers were said for the first time in English in 1965. On March 19 that same year, the first Mass was said in English in the Sisters' chapel.

### **Changes to the habit in 1968**

Sr. Wendeline: "I didn't like it, not at first. It was just like you were taking off



Left to Right: Sr. Margaretha pictured in the habit worn when the Sisters first came to Humboldt. Mother Clementina Possenig in the first change in style and Sr. Augustina Mainzer in the most recent form of the habit.

too many clothes. You felt you should be bundled up. It didn't feel right. I felt sort of naked. But later on, I was glad."

Sr. Colette: "I don't remember when we didn't have our large head piece any more. In a way it was too radical when everything was new, with the garb and no silence. The young ones, that was overboard, too. 'Why can't we wear red and green?' I didn't like colours because in the Old Country, colour was not noble. Nobility isn't colourful. As religious we should have better taste."

Sr. Martina Gramlich entered in 1929: "They put me in the hospital in Humboldt from 1960 to 1968 to sew. Then in 1968 we went to the new habits and I helped sew those. There was a rush because everyone wanted to be the first one. It was a lot of old habits to rip and cut into the new style. It was time consuming. There were many nights spent until 2 a.m. cutting."

## Vatican II

Sr. Colette: "We got our English prayer books. I must say that was nicer. And we didn't have to go in one tone anymore. In those days, in our prayers, we had to make the pauses and the height of the tone, and so you couldn't pray anymore at all. You had to go in one tone. You couldn't change it at all. That's the way we had to pray. And even the reading – when we were reading in the refectory you didn't make a pause for the comma. I don't know where that came from. It was like when the priest sings the Gospel in church, all in one tone. Our Sisters used to be cloistered nuns and I think it came from those days."

Sr. Salesia Zunti entered in 1937: "A lot of things have changed. Now we are all free to do our own readings, our own meditations, our own prayer. We are free. To me, sure, I like the Office prayers but afterward I don't remember. All I remember, throughout the day or through my prayers, is the love of God. I want to see all the members as another Christ that I can enjoy, be it in a game of Scrabble or cards, to enjoy the Sisters."

Sr. Florianne Kohlman: "I would say that there were only minor changes in the 1953 constitutions until Vatican II. We would call it revising and that happened at every chapter. Maybe there were some proposals. Some were done, some were not. Some were approved, some were not."



Sr. Otilia Saretzky praying in the chapel.



**Sisters at Mass in the Convent chapel in the old St. Elizabeth's Hospital.**

“I noticed that in 1965 that’s when community prayer started in the vernacular and there were changes in the Mass, the priest facing the people. The first session was over and the Vatican II books came out and you had to study those. The information about the Mass and the vernacular, that came through the Bishops.”

Sr. Joan Baron: “In the late 1960s there was a big thrust that everyone should go for upgrading and some of them went into retraining for other kinds of work. And that is when Sisters started to go for their year of renewal. In the later years, when we were finishing off our university, there were at least five or six Sisters at 901 University Drive in Saskatoon. We were taking upgrading.”

Sr. Salesia: “Because we were a nursing community we did no such thing as art-work. The only thing that was different from nursing was domestic work, seamstress and cooking. But when times changed in the community, so that we could go for



**A group of Sisters in adult education in 1968. They are (L to R): Srs. Mary James (teacher), Leopoldina, Caroline, Raphael, Tecla, Notburga, Bernadette, Imelda, and Cecilia.**

studies and for art, I think in that respect the community had come a very long way to have recognized the potential of each member. I took a correspondence course in art. Later I upgraded myself and took my BA with a major in art. The way St. Francis had said, he wants all his members to be what they know God wants from them in their hearts. And now I have done windows for several places. When I paint, time ceases to exist, that it be for the glory of God, even if I don't think of God at the moment when I am so concentrated on painting. I'm happy that I'm able to give a few art classes but I see that my main purpose was to be a religious."

Sr. Viola Bens: "We changed our habits, constitutions, and many customs such as the Chapter of Faults, prayers and daily schedules. The impact was huge. Many Sisters entered educational institutions such as university, high school or training schools. There were many opportunities to attend lectures in theology, scripture or religious life and personal growth. Most Sisters were offered a year off to attend a renewal program."

Sr. Imelda Gartner: "There was a change of habits, veils, dress. Most of us are now more or less in lay clothes. Some still wear their veils or a special dress. You need to be more responsible for yourself in planning what you really want to do in serving God more precisely. It was hard at first. It felt like a new beginning. For example, I wanted to take a course and I had to decide for myself whether I wanted to follow the schooling in a day course or an evening course. At age 70, I had my first experience of sleeping out in a tent with two younger Sisters. I kept up with them. After a few days, the rain came and everything got wet. The water came too close to our campsite and eventually we decided to close up for there were little worms swimming around us. But it was great fun."

Sr. Justina: "Great documents on religious life helped me to realize that I am a spouse of the Lord. Wonderful meditations and reflections. Vatican II was a great opening and I was so excited. I finally studied the life of Mother Apollonia. The changes were hard on some Sisters. I want to be known as a Sister in the world. It was hard to accept others in plain dress. We were involved in a lot of plays, and developed a very enjoyable playful spirit."

Sr. Helen Kirchner: "We were allowed home visits. The clothes, the habit changed. It went too fast. The rules around prayer became less strict."

Sr. Salesia: "When the community changed so that we could go home, that was a big, big step forward. The most significant part of my life was that I was able to participate with my family again, to go to the funerals. To my regret, I was not allowed to go to my mother's funeral. It was only later I could go to my dad's funeral. And now, as the time went on, we were allowed to go to the nieces' and nephews' weddings."

Home visits were granted in 1952. Sisters from Europe were able to visit their relatives. In 1962, the Sisters also began eating with lay people.



Sisters and the public enjoy a luncheon and celebration in St. Augustine's Church Hall honouring the Sisters' gift of caring from 1911 to 2007.



## Chapter 25

# Other Missions, Other Ventures

While the Sisters of St. Elizabeth will forever be associated with their hospitals in Humboldt, Macklin and Cudworth and St. Elizabeth's Hospital School of Nursing, this small group of women shared their wisdom, talents, caring attitudes and devotion to those in need through a wide array of services in Canada as well as in foreign missions. The Canadian Congregation of St. Elizabeth was never large; the largest numbers were between the years 1957 and 1963 when there were 120 perpetually professed and temporary professed Sisters and eight Novices. On the other hand, their dedication, faith, determination and reliance on hard work and prayer was enormous.

The Elizabethan Sisters were nurses, teachers, counsellors, dietetic consultants, administrators, secretaries, massage therapist, artists. They owned and operated group homes, assisted living facilities and retreat centres. They worked in Public Health and Home Care, were pastoral visitors, retreat and spiritual directors, served with the Marriage Tribunal and as Catechists for St. Peter's Abbey and Keewatin Diocese.



Sr. Alphonsa Schneider and an unknown sister at work in the kitchen at St. Peter's Abbey in Muenster. Note the number of stoves and the sizes and quantity of the pots.

Some of their lengthiest missions were as domestics, cooking, doing laundry, sewing and mending for St. Peter's Abbey and College from 1912 to 1990, for St. Elizabeth's Hospital and Convent from 1911 to the present, for St. Charles Scholasticate in Battleford from 1932 to 1977, and St. Thomas College in North Battleford from 1951 to the mid-1969s. Meanwhile, individual Sisters developed their unique gifts to share in the many and varied types of handwork and crafts.

During the 1980s, several Sisters were interviewed about their early experiences.

The Sisters worked at St. Peter's Abbey from 1912 to 1990. In 1957, they moved into their new residence, St. Scholastica's Convent at the Abbey. Sr. Salesia Zunti: "There was no time for reading or praying. We did that in common while we peeled the potatoes or did the vegetables. When we peeled potatoes for 100 people, we had to have a tub full. That is when we had spiritual reading and the rosary. When it came to say evening prayers we were so beat that one time when the Angelus was ringing at 6 p.m. I woke up, startled, and didn't know if it was morning or evening. And you think it was a dreary life but we had our joy. We had our living for God and that only makes sense. Only our faith in God makes sense. And when it came to a feast day, like St. Elizabeth or St. Francis, we could relish more enjoyable food. And it was surprising how happy we were."



Sr. Helena Karnicar with a pail of potatoes gathered at the harvest.

Sr. Gertrude Marie Twordik: "In Muenster, we each had our own room in the new convent. I was in the old one as a candidate. They didn't have enough help there so Sr. Superior, Sr. Seraphina, said I should go out there and help in the kitchen. We had rooms where we had to sleep together. We had curtains in between. We didn't have any cupboards. We had apple boxes, one apple box on top of the other. That's where we put our clothes. We were really poor there but it was warm. We worked hard but we had fun. You know, we were young then. When you're young, everything is funny."

The farm and the gardens at Humboldt, Macklin and Cudworth fed everyone.





**Sisters Agatha Loibnegger, Hyacintha Senger & Josephine Senger taking milk and other farm produce to the hospital from the farm.**

Sr. Lucy Stang, describing the farm and the gardens that kept the Sisters and their patients fed:

“The first Sisters knew about farming. They had a farm in Klagenfurt. Later they moved it out to Rosenbiechel. They still have Rosenbiechel – it is their summer resort – but they get all their milk and butter from there.

“The farm was small when I entered in 1929. Sr. Agatha and Sr. Alexia had the chickens – there was a large chicken barn. That was the meat for the patients.



**An elevated view of the farm showing the collection of buildings. The chicken barn in the foreground and the cattle barn at the left are clearly visible.**

There was a cow barn. Sr. Agatha and Sr. Alexia helped milk the cows. They were all milked by hand, but there was usually a man or two looking after the cattle. There was a man who looked after the swine. The beef was butchered. There was a special butcher house out there where they used to butcher and cut the meat. They would bring it in and there would be six people in the kitchen because all that beef and all the pork had to be worked up.

“The Sisters looked after the gardens, too. There were fields of potatoes. There were some men who would always help. When they put in potatoes they had a plough and you had to lay down the potatoes after the plough. When they were ready for harvest, they would dig them out with the plough and we would all go out and pick potatoes. We had a large root cellar. It was there when I came. It kept the vegetables year round. That was the food for everybody, patients and everybody. There was no buying of food from the store like now. When the local stores got a little bigger, they would bring in a lot of fruit (in the fall, for preserving). There was lots of canning done in the first years, when I was younger. Hundred and hundreds of sealers of fruit were put up. They canned vegetables, too, but we had a lot that was kept fresh, like the turnips and onions. I think there was enough to go around the year. It was a very good root cellar. The potatoes kept until the next year when there were fresh ones and the carrots and cabbage kept, too.

“I remember the eggs. They would lay the eggs in chalk, barrels and barrels of eggs. They were not frozen, but they were kept in this chalk. It was a special preparation and the eggs could stay fresh for months. They brought them out for scrambled eggs. They were nice for frying and for cooking. We had a grain farm, too. There was wheat and oats and all that was made into chop for the chickens.

Sr. Delphine Berschiminsky: “During the summer months, the Sisters would preserve garden produce – peas, beans, corn, beets and carrots – and make pickles and relishes. Some dill pickles were made in 36-gallon barrels; other varieties of pickles were put up in glass jars. We also preserved large amounts of fruit from the orchard, to be used for the Sisters, staff and the hospital patients.

“The Sisters would get together in the main kitchen to peel and prepare the fruit which was put in 2-quart jars with sugar water and sealed. The canning was done during the night when the stove was not in use for preparing meals. Sometimes we would prepare as many as 90 standard boxes of pears and peaches, plus prune plums, crabapples, cherries and raspberries. We also made many jars of jams and jellies. Even the pear peelings were used – we made them into jam.

“In mid-October, the men on the farm would butcher about 35 pigs and the Sisters would cut up the meat. The bacon and hams were put into barrels of brine and would hang in the smokehouse for a few hours to be smoked in wintertime. The Sisters also made their own sausages – liver sausage, breakfast sausages, smokies,



**Sisters Margaret Marie, Mary Elizabeth, and Seraphina in the orchard located south of the Novitiate building.**

summer sausage and bologna. From the rinds, the tallow and the scraps, the sisters would cook soap for washing the laundry.”

In 1949, after the introduction of hospitalization, the farm and the hospital accounts had to be separated. Food from the farm had to be “bought” by the hospital.

### **Hospital work in the early days:**

Sr. Lucy: “There were quite a lot of girls training for nurses and that was a great help to the nursing staff. Most of the nurses worked on shifts. It was never a constant day and it was always a broken shift. They worked a few hours and then they went off and came back again when it was time to help do up the patients. You learned a lot on the floors. There were so many different little things to be done. There were usually compresses or fomentations. There were mustard plasters and linseed poultices, especially for pneumonia cases. They made these bags and filled them with linseed – you had to cook that and put it in the bags. That took a lot of time and you could not leave it on too long or you would burn the patient. I would say there was more bedside care. I do not know how many times a day the beds were straightened up. Maybe the mattresses were not as soft as they are now and they had these heavy rubber sheets on them. All that helped to cause bed sores. The patients received back rubs.”

### **St. Michael’s Retreat House in Lumsden**

Stories were recorded by an unidentified diarist: “For the first several weeks, the Sisters’ laundry room served as a kitchen with two hot plates to cook three meals



**St. Michael's Retreat House is situated near Lumsden in the picturesque Qu'Appelle Valley.**

a day. The same room was also used for a dining room. The Sisters used a supply cart as a portable table, making it convenient to move the whole meal to almost any room should someone come along. On July 23, the supply of dishes and dining room equipment started piling up in abundance.

In 1964, 63 students from Notre Dame College in Wilcox took the Sisters by surprise. They were scheduled for dinner so thanks to "instant times," instant potatoes were prepared along with instant pudding, hamburger was purchased at the neighbouring butcher, and by noon, the boys were enjoying a banquet dinner. On another occasion, 62 Sisters from different orders arrived for an eight-day retreat. The load was heavy with only three Sisters but as soon as the visiting Sisters discovered the Elizabethans were shorthanded, dishwashers were plenty."

Sisters of St. Elizabeth who provided domestic services at St. Charles Scholasticate in Battleford and St. Thomas College in North Battleford had stories to tell:

Sr. Gertrude Marie: "The first place I served was in Battleford. I worked in the laundry with Sr. Lucy and in the kitchen, baking. The house wasn't built well. You could see right through the cracks. It was very cold. Sometimes the pipes froze. The baking room also was cold and for the bread it has to be warm, so we mixed the dough and carried it into the priests' dining room and set it on the pipes where it was warmer. The bread never turned out the way it should."

Sr. Lucy: "I was five years at Battleford and that was during the first years. The Oblates were extremely poor. They had no income either, and the boys paid very little.

They did not do any work except to clean up their dorms. All their laundry was done by the Sisters and they all ate there. The Oblates had a little bit of a farm already but it was only later, in the 1940s, that they had a bigger farm and sufficient food for everyone. I was there in the Depression years. There was very little meat, and very little of anything. One year the garden just went. They had army worms and they ate everything. It was all black and there was nothing. I remember



**Four unidentified sisters at the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) house in North Battleford.**

Fr. Hugo Lorna. They brought in milk for over 100 people. He said, 'Pour enough water in until it goes around and fill the pitchers.' That went on cereal and on everything. He'd bring butter from town, too. We made a lot of homemade butter, but it always had to be formed. It was cut into very thin slices for each table, only a little bit to spread on your bread. Then, of course, the crops started getting better and the boys started paying a little more because people could afford it. As time went on, things got better. Sr. Augustine and Sr. Bernadette and Sr. Hemma were there until the car accident in 1973. That ended that house. It was in that accident that Sr. Hemma was killed."

Sr. Magdalena Walter worked at St. Peter's and Battleford, coming back to Battleford in 1939: "Things had changed. It was better. There were more Sisters and I was not in the kitchen any more. I was helping in the laundry, patching stockings, mending 200 pairs of socks and putting them together. It was enough work, but not such hard work. We had to wash the first stockings by hand, Sr. Frances Schmidt and myself. We washed them once and then we washed them again, turned them around and rinsed them and hung them up. It was nice going out for fresh air. Sometimes we went out on a big hill and looked up and down. Then we had our supper afterward. In the evening when the sun went down we could see three mountain peaks. It looked so nice, like snow on top."

Sr. Martina Gramlich: "In Battleford I did sewing and made quilts and curtains but not habits. The spirit in Battleford was very good. The Fathers appreciated the Sisters though the priests couldn't pay as much as they should have."

Four Sisters took charge of housekeeping and kitchen duties for Mount St. Francis Retreat House in Cochrane, Alberta in the early 1950s. They considered buying a large house and four lots in Cochrane, with a view to establishing a hospital there



**St. Elizabeth's Convent, left, and Mount St. Francis Retreat House at Cochrane, Alberta. The Sisters worked there from 1950 to 2000.**

later on but, for reasons unknown, the hospital was never built. At the retreat house, the Sisters lived in a small stone house known as "The Stable."

The Sisters took charge of the kitchen for the Franciscan Friars and students of St. Anthony's College in Edmonton on July 12, 1950. They lived in a private house in Edmonton and undertook the domestic work during the school year. In 1959, during the summer, the Sisters preserved 3,584 quarts of vegetables from the college garden and 1,325 quarts of fruit. The Sisters left the college in 1967.

The Sisters operated St. Ann's Nursing Home in Saskatoon from 1953 to 1979. A home for the aged and infirm, St. Ann's was the only facility of its kind in Saskatoon at the time.

Sr. Martina Gramlich: "St. Ann's opened in 1953. I replaced Sr. Benedicta in 1954. I was superior then and did the bookkeeping. I had never looked at a cheque before. I got my letter [from the superior general] at dinnertime to pack and come the next day, from the sewing machine to the adding machine. Besides keeping the books I also cleaned up and looked after the patients' affairs. There were 27. Those who couldn't handle their money, I had to have a separate bank account for them.

"There were fun times. Sr. O'Brien phoned one morning and asked if we had room for a Catholic man who was picked up by the police and held in jail for the night. We took him and he always said, 'The police brought me here and I'm not leaving.' He thought he was in a good jail and was glad to stay here. He had nobody when he died, only the Sisters. We were the closest to him. At that time, they got only \$40 pension. This was sent to St. Ann's Home and all he needed was supplied by St. Ann's. When he died we found in his shoe a little letter to a relative in Winnipeg. It



The interior of the original St. Ann's Home on Clarence Avenue. The Sisters in the picture are L-R: Srs. Hemma, Augustine, Martina, Hyacinth, Angelina, & Gertrude Marie.



The Sisters of St. Elizabeth operated St. Ann's Home from 1953 to 1979 when the new St. Ann's was built. The Sisters continued serving on the board of directors until 2005.

said to come and get his pension – it must be somewhere. He also had a receipt for \$200 which he gave to a priest for his burial. That receipt was his proof that he was Catholic and entitled to a Catholic burial.”

Sr. Gertrude Marie Twordik: “I helped with nursing at St. Ann’s. We really had a lot of fun with the old people and we loved them. The house was small, just like a home. We had some grannies who always came to our dining room so we allowed them to eat with us. Bishop Klein used to come in to visit with the patients. He loved listening to them. These old people, they would tell him about their lives and how they lived.”

Sr. Valerie Scheiber: “I came to St. Ann’s in 1955. We felt very close to the sick. We were like one great big family, like you were taking care of your grandmother, and I really enjoyed my stay there. I was there when they moved to the other St. Ann’s. That was September 27, 1957. We moved out one door and the Seminarians and Fr. Bob Ogle moved in the other door. Some of us went to the new place to set up the beds. We had beds but no chairs. We had tables but no dining room. We had all these 27 patients to move over. It wasn’t finished yet. The doors for the guests and their washrooms had no locks so you can imagine the kind of fun we had with that.”

St. Ann’s opened in 1953 in a house. The six Sisters operating the home were the first to support the project financially when each Sister pledged \$17 of her \$80 a month salary for 20 months. By 1956 the provincial fire commissioner had branded



**Sisters serving residents in St. Mary's Villa.**



the home unsafe for elderly residents and the social welfare department had more than once threatened to close it down. The new St. Ann's was ready for occupancy in one wing by 1957. The Sisters were in another wing. According to the diarist, when the Sisters were able to move into their private living quarters at Christmas, it was a blessing. "Talk about the privacy they had in St. Francis' Wing. Why, the doors to their rooms did not even have door knobs and one could expect a visitor both day and night." Bishop Klein, who officially opened the Home in 1958, said in a newspaper interview, "The newly-built St. Ann's Home is not for the exclusive use of Roman Catholics. The home has housed a fair percentage of non-Catholic senior citizens since it was opened."

### **St. Mary's Villa**

From the report written by Edward Novecosky in 2003: "In a letter dated March 25, 1958, the provincial government suggested to the Humboldt Board of Trade that

the Sisters of St. Elizabeth be invited to participate in any proposed home for the elderly. The Sisters were in charge of operating the new seniors' home when it opened its doors in 1963. Sr. Wendeline Senger, the RN living at the Villa, was on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week except when someone was able to take her place for a few days. In 1974, lay nursing staff and aides took over nursing care; work performed by the Sisters was essentially on a volunteer basis. Sr. Colette Kloppenberg had the original "Eden Alternative" idea. She felt that residents need beauty and enjoyment and normalcy in their lives. The flowers inside the building and the gardens were outstanding. She also added a few pets in cages and two bantam roosters in the area



**Sisters Ludmilla Wagner & Alphonsa Schneider prepare coffee in St. Mary's Villa kitchen.**



**Sisters singing at the St. Mary's Villa Christmas party in 1964.**

behind the Villa. They were greatly enjoyed by the residents. Residents planted their own garden. Part of the plentiful harvest was stored in a new \$2,500 root cellar. Lady residents made a patchwork quilt and sold raffle tickets to raise money to purchase a refrigerator.”

### **The Third Order Secular**

St. Francis founded Three Orders, the third a secular order whose members make promises of commitment and remain in their own homes, motivated and formed by the same spirit of Saint Francis to fulfil the ideals and responsibilities of their state of life within the faith community of the Church.

In 1964, Sr. Crescentia Jocham was instrumental in starting a Fraternity of Secular Franciscans at St. Mary’s Villa and she was appointed their spiritual assistant. In 1984, Sr. Joan Baron revived the Humboldt Fraternity and guided them until Sr. Imelda Gartner replaced her. While Sr. Immaculata Saretzky and Sr. Anne Marie Lange served as spiritual assistants, the Fraternity flourished to the point where they

were able to help establish a Fraternity in Saskatoon with Sr. Frances Schnurr as spiritual assistant. The Humboldt Fraternity continues to meet monthly at St. Elizabeth’s Convent under the direction of Sr. Viola Bens. Their outreach includes contributing to “The Poor Fund,” contributions to the Food Bank and other charities in the Humboldt community. They visit shut-ins, the sick in hospital, and residents at St. Mary’s Villa, volunteer at the Good Neighbour Store, help with funeral lunches, and serve in other parish ministries.



**Sr. Crescentia Jocham pictured in the gardens outside the original St. Elizabeth’s Hospital.**

### **Sr. Salesia gave stained glass lessons**

Sr. Salesia Zunti began working with leaded glass in 1977. Using the traditional channeled lead, known as lead came, which is stretched, fitted around the pieces of

glass and soldered at the joints, she designed and created two stained glass windows which were installed in the front entrance of St. Elizabeth's Convent in March 1981 to honour the 750th anniversary of the death of St. Elizabeth and the 800th anniversary of St. Francis' birth. She also created eight windows for the convent chapel and windows for St. Ann's Home, St. Mary's Villa, several Regina and Saskatoon churches and institutions, St. Peter's Abbey Church, and Watson United Church. Also in 1981, she began teaching the first class in stained glass held in Humboldt. Thirteen students attended an introductory course sponsored by Carlton Trail Community College that was held in the convent day room.



Stained glass window in the dining room at St. Elizabeth's Convent was created by Sr. Salesia Zunti.

### **Volunteer activity program at St. Elizabeth's Convent**

In 1981, Sr. Joan Baron and Jan Kroll, a VON nurse (the Victorian Order of Nurses is a charity providing home and community care) developed a rehabilitation and therapy program for St. Elizabeth's Convent for the Sisters and for Humboldt seniors. A physiotherapist and a nurse practitioner volunteered their services and by the end of July 2001, 10 volunteers led daily exercises. The Humboldt Telemiracle van, donated by the Kinsmen, provided transportation for seniors from town. The program was extended to include outdoor activities at the Sisters' summer house and local excursions. Sr. Anne Marie Lange, local superior at the convent, started a quilting program in the winter of 2001. In February, she asked for volunteers who would stitch quilts to be finished by April and this activity evolved into a quilting program and a group who called themselves "Havin' Fun While Doin' Good." They made a quilt for Relay for Life, a cancer fundraiser, and made quilts for distribution by the Kinnettes at Christmas. They made 80 quilts a year for local distribution, and, when they heard about the work done at the Teen Challenge Drug Treatment Centre, they made a quilt for each graduate of the program. When St. Elizabeth's Hospital became publicly owned, the volunteers saw the Sisters' sadness and, after some discussion between the Sisters and the volunteers, the group started making Healing Quilts to



**Blessing the Healing Quilts at a ceremony in the St. Elizabeth's Convent chapel in June 2008.**

be given to any patient in need of one as a legacy to the Sisters. On each quilt is inscribed: "Healing Quilt, a legacy to the Sisters of St. Elizabeth. You are remembered in their daily prayers. Made with love and prayer by Havin' Fun While Doing' Good Quilting Group." The first Healing Quilt was blessed by Fr. Emile April and given to Sr. Bernarda Gallinger.

### **Sr. Patricia Trainor – from ward maid to canon lawyer**

Sr. Patricia Trainor was born in 1927 in a teacherage near Cudworth in Leofeld parish. She completed Grade 11 and began working as a maid on the St. Elizabeth's Hospital wards. She took music theory, piano lessons and singing lessons in Grade 12 then joined the Sisters of St. Elizabeth in 1944. She switched from nursing supervisor to teaching and taught in the School of Nursing. She was the first member of the congregation to work as a public health nurse, after a Department of Public Health bursary ensured a BSc in nursing in 1970. The bursary required that she work where needed for one year or repay the money so, at 43, she learned to drive and took a course in rehabilitation nursing. In 1971, she was assigned to the Outpost Hospital in Sandy Bay, a mostly Cree settlement. She was in an isolated community that had been without a nurse for several months because no nurse was willing to take the position. She was treating 300 to 400 people a month. During a leave of absence she tendered her resignation, entered Newman Theological College in St. Albert, Alberta, obtained a BA in Theology, followed by a two-year program in canon law in Ottawa and a master's degree from the University of Ottawa. She worked with the Vancou-

ver Regional Tribunal and later in the Kamloops diocese as an auditor on all types of marriage cases. Elected to the general council of her congregation, she moved back to Saskatchewan and worked with the Regional Marriage Tribunal of the Archdiocese of Regina as a Defender of the Bond, a position she held until her untimely death in 1988.

**Sr. Joan Baron – Saskatchewan’s first Home Care**

Sr. Joan entered St. Elizabeth’s Convent in 1962. She obtained a BA, a BSc in nursing, and a master’s degree in Pastoral Counselling from Newman Theological College and St. Paul’s University in Ottawa. At St. Elizabeth’s Hospital, she initiated the Pastoral Care Department, and the hospital board of governors later provided the opportunity for her to initiate a Home Care program for Humboldt and area. As the program developed, the Saskatchewan government introduced Home Care throughout the province with Humboldt serving as the model. She died of cancer in 2003.

Sr. Joan on developing Home Care: “This apostolate has made me intensely involved in all the activities of the civic community. This has demanded much time, for meetings and travelling, away from my religious Community. The Community has had to be tolerant with my tight schedule and frequent absences. This apostolate has taught me many things, not the least of which is a deep trust in God. Development is not an easy job. I could identify with our foundress, Mother Apollonia, many times in her efforts to respond to the needs of her time.”

**Sr. Justina Wirachowsky, full-time volunteer**

In 2009, at 84, Sr. Justina was working full days twice a week and half-days the other three, an unpaid volunteer at St. Mary’s Villa and St. Elizabeth’s Hospital. She grew up, she said, in a happy family with a good spiritual life and lots of singing and learned about patience and hope because her childhood was spent during the Depression and her teen years during the Second World War. After taking a com-



**Sr. Joan Baron pictured at her Investiture.**



**Sister Justina Wirachowsky provides pastoral care at St. Mary's Villa.**

mercial secretarial course she briefly entered the Sisters of Service in Brosseau, Alberta, and was sent to Toronto and Montreal to work with immigrants and young girls. She eventually joined the Sisters of St. Elizabeth in 1954. She completed a pastoral care visitors' course in 1979 and besides caring for clients, she carried a travelling library with her – books, tapes, prayers and videos. She worked in Home Care until 1997, when she switched to volunteer service.

Sr. Justina, writing about the Home Care apostolate: "I feel healthier and stronger with the fresh air I receive on my visits from home to home. The short visits I make to bring God's loving care to my people is compatible with our religious life. It makes it possible for me to be home for meals and for me to observe my spiritual duties in the prayerful atmosphere of the convent."

### **Sr. Delphine Berschiminsky – Remedial Massage Therapist**

At 83 in 2010, Sr. Delphine Berschiminsky feels she will practice massage therapy two more years; then, at 85, she will retire so that she can spend more time reading and praying. She was the first Remedial Massage Therapist in Humboldt, opening a clinic in 1980 when she was 53. Sr. Delphine had known almost all her life that she wanted to enter the convent and she did so at 16, working on the convent farm and in the kitchen, before she got her accreditation as a Certified Nursing Assistant. However, she quickly discovered the effect her back rubs had on patients and, she said, "I thought then that I should register for the



**Sr. Delphine Berschiminsky pictured outside her massage therapy clinic in St. Elizabeth's Convent, Humboldt in 2010.**

course.” Even though massage therapy was not covered by health insurance, nevertheless she took the four-year massage therapy course at the YMCA in Regina.

Massage therapy, if it is going to have an effect, is hard work but Sr. Delphine says that is not a problem. “It was about 10 miles by road to school but we walked 3 1/2 miles cross-country. There were chores on the farm and when I entered the convent in 1944, I worked on the hospital’s farm,” she said.

She lives by these lines from the Liturgy of the Hours: “Wait for the Lord to lead, then follow in his ways. Teach me goodness and Holy Wisdom for I put my trust in your guidance. The Lord is my strength and I shall praise Him forever for He is my salvation. Alleluia.”

### **Sr. Philomena Dobmeier – the dietician and the auditor**

Sr. Philomena loved food service so she followed her degree in Home Economics with a one-year dietary internship at Royal University Hospital in Saskatoon and taught Home Economics at Humboldt Collegiate Institute while working at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital. She entered St. Elizabeth’s Convent in 1951 when she was 16, without completing high school. “I knew I wanted to serve God and people,” she said. While she was at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital, she was challenged by an auditor who saw the price for a meal and questioned what the Sisters were serving patients. “He said there had to be something wrong. The price was much too low. He said we were

going to get into lots of trouble,” Sr. Philomena said. “At that time, our farm supplied the food for the hospital and the Sisters; we virtually lived off the farm. And we conserved everything – one day we made jam from pear peelings. We worked 10 to 12 hours a day canning. Another time we worked through the night. We supplied all the food for the hospital yet we were never paid for that either. No one knows what the Sisters went through.”

She was asked to be a dietary consultant to the Saskatchewan Health Association, now SAHO and, over four years, visited 141 of 143 hospitals in the province. She left consulting in 1977 when she was asked to take a posting at Ile-a-la-Crosse. “I never minded working up North. It was an adventure, a real challenge,” she said. She



**Sr. Philomena Dobmeier served several communities as a dietician, hospital administrator, and consultant.**

left the North in 1985 when she was chosen Health Care Co-ordinator for the Sisters' three hospitals. She was a founding member of the Saskatchewan Catholic Health Corp., an umbrella group established by the bishops in 1977 to take over threatened Catholic hospitals. She uses her dietitian training to organize meals and dietary planning at St. Elizabeth's Convent.

### **Sr. Viola Bens – teaching takes many forms**

When Sr. Viola entered the convent in 1954 after completing Grade 8, she expected to do domestic work. However, she took Grades 9, 10 and 11 by correspondence and attended Sion Academy in Saskatoon for Grade 12. She assumed she would go into nursing, but she was missing a necessary science class. Her superior asked if she would like to be a teacher and, if so, she could accompany Sr. Emily, another woman who wanted to enter the convent as a teacher.

Over the next several years, after attending Teachers' College and partly while teaching and doing catechetical work, Sr. Viola earned her BA and BEd from the University of Ottawa and Saskatchewan and a BRED, a bachelor's degree in religious education from St. Joseph's College in Edmonton and, finally, her MEd from Boston College in Massachusetts. She served in St. Peter's Abbacy and in Edmonton before she went north as regional director of Religious Education for the west Keewatin



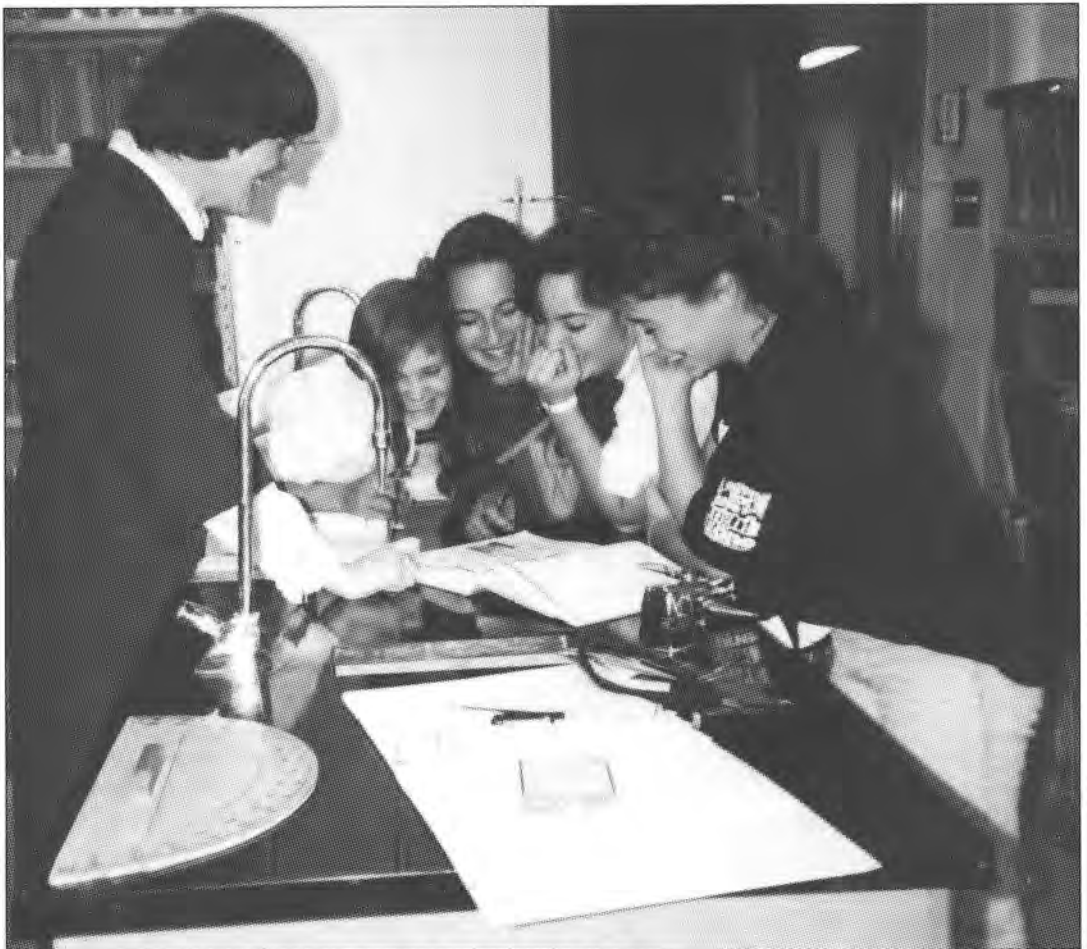
**Sr. Viola Bens, surrounded by eager students, taught in several communities and was director of Religious Education in St. Peter's Abbacy and West Keewatin Diocese.**



diocese, based in Ile-a-la-Crosse. Yet teaching covers many fields. After a sabbatical year in 1989 she worked in retreat and spiritual direction ministry for 16 years. She continues to offer spiritual direction through Queen's House in Saskatoon. After four years of training, Sr. Viola was accredited as a T'ai Chi Chih teacher in 1998. Tai Chi Chih is a gentle 35-minute moving meditation that enhances physical, spiritual and mental well-being. Her love of working outdoors in the soil led her to become an accredited Master Gardener in 2000.

### **Sr. Dianne Turner – the last to stay**

One of the last to enter St. Elizabeth's Convent and the last to stay, Sr. Dianne Turner is a teacher. Raised in a United Church family, she converted at the age of 19 after a friend told her that what she wanted in life was in the Catholic Church. She entered the convent in 1977, stayed about 2 ½ years, left to finish a degree in biology and a BEd at the University of Saskatchewan, and came back to the order in 1983 as a teacher. With a yearning for religious study, she devoted 15 years of summer breaks



Sr. Dianne Turner teaching science at Our Lady of the Assumption school in Calgary, Alberta.

to classes at Newman Theological College in Edmonton and completed her Master of Divinity degree in 2004 during a year's sabbatical. She remains enthusiastic about the future of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth. "I am the youngest in the order (54 in 2011). I am waiting for young women to come. Things are going on in religious life, especially an upswing in the United States."

## Chapter 26

# Reaching Beyond Borders

Although the first three Sisters came from Klagenfurt with the sole intention of founding a mission in rural Saskatchewan, the outreach of the Elizabethan community spread well beyond the borders of western Canada.

In 1964, the Sisters responded to a request from the Catholic Health Association of Canada to staff the 35-bed Holy Infant Hospital in Hoven, South Dakota, after the Benedictine Sisters were recalled to their motherhouse in Philadelphia. According to the Benedictines, they were leaving because their community was shrinking. Hoven was almost entirely Catholic and closing the hospital would cause great hardship. There were no financial problems, just a lack of Sisters. The mayor of the town was so eager to keep the hospital that he offered to pay transport for anyone interested in coming to Hoven to check out the hospital.

Sr. Florianne Kohlman and Sr. Irene Sitter visited Hoven and were amazed at how fully equipped they found the hospital. Six Sisters appointed to the Hoven mission were installed by June 1. They very quickly discovered the real problem. There



Holy Infant Hospital in Hoven, South Dakota, USA. The Sisters of St. Elizabeth provided services here from 1964 to 1969.



Srs. Henriette, Leonardine, Marcella, Lorraine, and Anna Marie receiving their United States visas to work at Holy Infant Hospital.



Srs. Lorraine, Leonardine, Mother Florianne, Srs. Marcella, Henriette, and Anne Marie just before they left to begin work in Hoven, South Dakota. August 14, 1964.

was no doctor in town. The Benedictines had been looking for four months with no success and Sr. Florianne said that if they could not find a doctor within two weeks, the Elizabethans would be recalled.

Undaunted, the Sisters, taking turns, made a novena of the Way of the Cross from noon through the night. The hospital committee held an emergency meeting, deciding to find a doctor, regardless of the cost. The Sisters began a novena of Masses in honour of Our Blessed Lady. They heard there was a doctor in Rome who might be interested. He was. He and his wife visited the hospital. The Sisters kept an all-night vigil.

There were still challenges. The doctor's licence was not transferable without Basic Science Board exams. Two of the Sisters and the mayor visited the Attorney-General and arranged for the doctor to write his exams immediately. He passed.

Unfortunately, the doctor's conduct was somewhat unacceptable and it was with mixed feelings that the Sisters accepted his resignation in February 1966. The hospital closed until another doctor was found in July. He was Irish and had trained at the University of Saskatchewan and practiced at St. Joseph's Hospital in Macklin. He left in March 1967. The Sisters found their third doctor in July and reopened the hospital.

Renovations were needed to comply with federal health programs. The plan, at a cost of \$450,000, included a 25-bed nursing home along with a 25-bed hospital unit. However, word came in January 1969 that the Sisters were being withdrawn. A delegation from Hoven travelled to Humboldt to meet with the community, but the decision was final.

Ownership and control of the hospital was transferred on December 15, 1969 to a non-profit corporation known as the Holy Infant Hospital Inc. The Sisters left for



Abbot Jerome Weber, OSB; Sr. Jerome Pulvermacher, OSU; and Mother Florianne Kohlman, OSE leaving for a one month inspection tour in Brazil.

a variety of reasons. They were needed at home and in other ministries, the hospital was suffering from insufficient funds and, most problematic and the chief cause, the difficulty in finding and retaining doctors.

The mission of the Humboldt Sisters stretched beyond North America. They became a vibrant part of one successful international mission and investigated another.

During the Vatican Council II in Rome, Archbishop Dom Adelmo Machado of Maceio met with Abbot Jerome Weber, OSB, and, in response to Pope John XXIII's request to send missionaries to Latin America, discussed the possibility of a Brazil mission. In 1965, Abbot Jerome, Sr. Florianne Kohlman, OSE, and Sr. Jerome Pulvermacher, OSU, travelled to Brazil and subsequently decided to send a team of priests and Sisters to work in the archdiocese of Maceio.

On January 27, 1967 two Benedictine priests, Fr. Alvin Hergott, OSB, and Fr. Sylvester Vredegoor, OSB, became pastors of the parish of Sao Jose (St. Joseph) in Trapiche da Barra. They were followed in 1968 by Fr. Leander Dosch, OSB, and four Sisters: Marcella Haag, OSE, Dolores Jansen, OSE, Bernadine Fetter, OSU, and Imelda (Maria) Doepker, OSU, chosen from a number of volunteers from three religious communities in St. Peter's Abbacy. Sr. Marcella, Sr. Dolores, Sr. Bernadine, Sr. Imelda and Fr. Leander took six months of missionary training studies at the Latin



The last breakfast before leaving for Brazil. L-R: Sr. Perpetua Haag, Sr. Marcella Haag, Abbot Jerome Weber, Sr. Petronilla (Dolores) Jansen, Sr. Florianne Kohlman, Sr. Marianne Schmidt, and Sr. Angelina Kratchmer

American Institute in St. Mary's, Ont., including 17 weeks of Portuguese language study and 12 weeks of socio-cultural orientation in history, sociology, social psychology, economics, cultural anthropology and pastoral theology.

Later, Fr. Bernard Stauber, OSB, Sr. Clair Novecosky, OSU, and Sr. Sida Hrbachek, OSE, worked with the team while two priests from the diocese of Saskatoon, Fr. Don Macgillvray and Fr. Emile April, worked in the nearby parishes of Novo Lino, Colonia Leopoldina and Uniao dos Palmares.

### **Brazil through letters from the Elizabethan Sisters:**

#### **Sr. Dolores Jansen:**

Sr. Dolores was one of the first Sisters in Brazil. She returned to Humboldt in 1991.

"We were making some parish visits to the poor. This was in the fishermen's village. The first lady we visited lived alone in a little palm-thatched hut with holes in the roof and walls, a mud floor, and with dogs, cats and chickens going in and out at liberty. When we entered she greeted us cheerfully. She was having some noon lunch which consisted of beans sprinkled with farinah (something like cream of wheat). The meal was served on an old tin plate and she was eating with her fingers in grand Brazilian style. Cutlery is unheard of in the homes of the poor. They simply eat with their birthday forks." – November 1971

#### **Sr. Sida Hrbachek:**

"On January 6 a little boy of eight years came to our back yard where I was having my meditation and asked to talk to the priests about being put in an orphanage. He said he was living on the streets and that his mother didn't want him any more as she was living with another man and expecting a baby. He stayed with us for breakfast and after we went to check out his story and sure enough it was just as he had said, his mother didn't want anything to do with him. We got him some new clothes and scrubbed him up and later that afternoon we were able to get him into an orphanage for young boys. He was such a sweet little fellow with huge brown eyes, always smiling and was able to talk a mile a minute. It was hard to believe that his mom wouldn't want him.

"The health system here in Brazil is something else. I started work at the tropical disease hospital on January 21 as a volunteer. There is such a shortage of equipment, few nurses for the heavy patient load. Many of the meningitis patients have convulsions. There usually is no one with them. At home we usually sit with them and check their vital signs. The syringes and needles are the non-disposable and some of the needles are dull as fence posts. Don't know if they are ever sharpened." – February 1975

**Sr. Marcella Haag:**

One of the first sisters to go to Brazil, Sr. Marcella, returned to Humboldt in 1991. Excerpts from letters she wrote from Brazil after she left Maceio to work in Salvador in 1976 read:

“The three days in Miami were well spent just resting and getting a good tan. People in Brazil were surprised at the colour of my skin when I arrived. There was nobody at the airport in Manaus as my letter arrived a day after my arrival. Phoned Fr. Dixon but, because he lives on his boat, two social workers and catechists came to pick me up, and took me to the Convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Fr. Dixon uses his boat to go up and down the Amazon River to his various communities.

“We went for a general bath in the river, and also washed clothes. We got bathing suits, soap, towels and the dirty clothes and paddled to a spot where the water looked a bit cleaner than at the shore. One doesn’t go into the water for two reasons: the strong current and certain types of fish. It is a daily ritual to take a bath.” – June 1976.

“I am in Salvador two weeks already and time has passed quickly. I have no time to be lonesome. I am already on duty and can truly say there is a need for my servic-

es here. The Fathers are building a large centre with the church on top. On the main floor is a medical centre. There is a large room for giving typing classes, one room for sewing lessons, one for hair dressing and care of nails, and a kitchen, plus one large room for meetings and catechetical classes. The construction is going slowly because they build as the money becomes available. Last week a few of the ladies of the parish had a shower for me at my house. It was different than the ones at home. I was impressed to see how happy the people were to share even the little they have with somebody else. Our house is small and simple. It is about one block from the Oblate Fathers. I eat my meals with them.” – July 1976

On July 26, 1976, after taking basic missionary training, Sr. Im-



**Sr. Marcella Haag at work in St. Elizabeth's Hospital.**



maculata Saretzky joined Sr. Marcella in Salvador. Sr. Marcella continued to write letters back to Humboldt:

“It is almost a year since I began working in Salvador. Fr. James Hellman has moved into the interior where the Fathers have been serving four small parishes. To date the only complaint we have is that we have had no official Chapter minutes of any kind. The beautiful Easter services are over. It was a meaningful Pascoa for us. Every day we spent two hours preparing the liturgy. We tried to apply the life, death and resurrection of our Lord to fit into real situations of today. For example: The Passion of our Lord was translated into the language of the people with an attempt to make them feel the presence of Him as He is being treated today in the poor. A group of young people read the revised Passion and acted some of the parts. Many people cried. The washing of the feet also was impressive. Sr. Immaculata went to Maceio but I had two young American volunteer workers spend a few days with me. We carried the washing of feet to our house. It was the most impressive and meaningful Easter I can recall.” – April 1977

“The grant from Misereor in Germany is rapidly drawing to an end. We are attempting to set up or establish some kind of a co-operative, some kind of a sharing system by which the middle class will contribute. We are basing the project on the Gospel. We met an American family in church. The man works for an American oil company. Of their seven children, three are with them and the older ones are in the States. They became friendly and one day invited us to dinner. We were picked up in a black Cadillac with a private chauffeur. When we arrived at the house I thought it was a huge apartment block but discovered it was their private home. The meal was strictly American as is the furniture. When we left, again in the Cadillac, the man slipped me an envelope. When we opened it at home we found a substantial donation – \$700.

“A week later a poor lady asked us to spend a weekend with her relatives in the interior. We took the slowest, the oldest and the cheapest boat to the island where they live. It took close to three hours. When we arrived we discovered that one member of the relationship had an empty house close to the beach which could be used by any member of the family for weekends or rests. We left early Saturday morning and were to return Monday morning. By noon Sunday they were out of money to buy food, not to speak of return tickets. The lady asked us for money which we were prepared to give. Monday morning we discovered the boat wasn’t going but nobody got excited. They found an old fisherman with an old canoe who offered to take us to the nearest point on the highway where we were able to take a bus to the ferry boat going to Salvador. The canoe ride took three hours. It was fun because during that time there was a heavy downpour. We arrived home none the worse except I was blistered on nearly all exposed areas of my body. We are ready to go again at the first opportunity”.

– September 1977

“Christmas 1977 is already history. The Nativity scenes in our churches are primitive. In one of our chapels some of the figures were cut out of magazines so one sees figures with printing on them. This was the first time I saw a twin baby Jesus. Somebody, in their piety, put an extra Infant in the crib. However, all is done in good faith. This week the Fathers moved into a smaller house in a rather poor section of the parish. They want to live like, and be closer to, the poor. Their house has been rented to the diocese to house the School of Catechetics.” – January 1978

**Sr. Immaculata Saretzky:**

Sr. Immaculata arrived in Salvador on July 28, 1976 and returned to Humboldt in 1991. She visited and worked with the poor. She started the “House of Hope” with the help of her sister, Tillie Zyp of Edmonton. She wrote several letters:

“A blessed Easter to all. I am very well and keep myself busy. Believe it, I sewed 16 pairs of shorts for our poor. I have some more cut, ready to sew. The other day I walked into a hut to visit a sick woman. She was covered with open sores from head to foot. I went back two days later and brought her a sheet and pillowcases, soap to wash clothes and toilet soap. She has eight children. There was no food for them in the house so I brought some for them, hoping and praying that someone else will bring some.” – March 1978

“This is my second Christmas in Brazil. Time goes by very quickly. We had a novena in preparation for Christmas, each evening in a different hut. They were well attended with 50-60 people in a tiny room; we were like sardines in a box. We later held a Christmas party at the community centre. The children received a gift-wrapped Christmas present, an article of clothing and a small toy. For the mothers I got a towel and a bar of soap. We served lunch of sandwiches, cake dainties and soft drink. This was made possible for me from donations received from my family, relatives and friends. Did they ever eat! Many of these people go to bed hungry.” – January 1978

**Lizzies enriched Brazilians: An article by Fr. Paul Ehle, OMI, Padre Paulo Ehle, Brazil, August 2008**

“Sr. Marcella Haag, and Sr. Immaculata Saretzky, arrived in 1976 for “a few years” but stayed 15. To everyone’s surprise they rapidly gained a working knowledge of Portuguese, allowing them to serve the poor of Salvador, Brazil.

“Each morning, Marcella went to the parish health centre where she would do anything from attending the patients with her friend, Maria Jose, to counting the Sunday collection . . . those dirty cruzado notes which no one wanted to touch. In her spare time she visited families and attended parish meetings.

Immaculata found her niche in a nearby favella. She would take her shopping bags of “goodies” for the needy, and worked hard at setting up “The House of Hope,”

a community centre. Active in the parish, Immaculata (Mac) was a member of the Altar Society and a family visitor.

“In prayer groups the Sisters did not ‘take over and run things’ but empowered people to enter into the renewed spirituality of Council Vatican II.

“Marcella and Mac brought a much-needed feminine touch to the Oblate team. To Fr. George Fetsch and myself, the “Lizzies” were great friends. Occasionally we would ‘take the girls to supper’, giving Marcella a chance to get dolled up and Mac to wear her brown Franciscan dress. What laughter and fun we had. Their little house was always open to us. They placed their sewing and cooking talents at our service. Soon rarities like apple pie and even sauerkraut began to appear.

“When health issues indicated a return to Canada, the people wept to see them go. So did the Oblates. Most of all, Marcella and Immaculata enriched us through their unpretentious Franciscan spirituality and their deep love for the poor. We thank the Elizabethan Sisters for having blessed us in the persons of Marcella and Immaculata.”

In 1973, the Elizabethans also investigated the possibility of a medical mission in Africa. Sr. Elizabeth Sonntag received permission from the superior general and general council to participate in the medical mission of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters in Cameroon, West Africa. Following their European trip, granted after 25 years of profession, Sr. Elizabeth and Sr. Loretta Bornowsky flew from Dusseldorf, Germany, to Geneva, Switzerland and on to Douala, Cameroon on October 11, 1973.

Their ultimate destination was the Shisong Hospital compound, reached by a long and treacherous road with big potholes, a narrow track that wound up steep mountains with the car frequently near the edge of the road. The mission had been established in 1935 and was run by Sr. Camilla Geier who had been there from the beginning: five Sisters from Italy, and 60 African Sisters. Also in the same area were Irish Sisters who taught in the nursing school of St. Joseph. They helped out wherever needed, especially in the outpost clinics.

Sr. Elizabeth helped in the laboratory doing blood work, cultures and other lab procedures. Sr. Loretta took the opportunity to observe the delivery of babies and also helped bathe the babies in the nursery.

Sr. Loretta returned to Canada on November 15 and Sr. Elizabeth remained until June 1974. She had hoped that the Elizabethan community in Humboldt would also participate in the mission to Africa but this was not to be.

From Sr. Elizabeth Sonntag, writing in June 1974: “I worked with Sister Brunhilde, the chief midwife. A little later she was in charge of the laboratory. Sr. Eva Maria, medical technologist and a member of the Shisong community, returned from Germany and studies overseas. Sr. Claudia came at the same time from Brixen, South Tyrol, to teach home economics. My services as a result were not needed at Shisong anymore.

“Adjusting to the climate was not a big problem at Shisong which is in mountainous terrain. During the day the temperature was around 75-82F and at night it did get properly chilly, especially during December, January and February. A bigger problem for me was trying to get the upper hand on the bacteria and viruses.

“I have great respect for the community of Franciscan Sisters – about 120 in total, of whom 65-70 are at Shisong. This included aspirants, postulants and novices. The European Sisters are from South Tyrol, now part of Italy. They have really given their ‘all’.

“Africa, including Cameroon, is becoming more and more independent. A temporary commitment is open at Nguti, Cameroon, limited likely to two people. This is a catechetical centre, that is, catechists are trained here. The language is Pidgin English. Here is an example. We say, “Have a nice trip”. In Pidgin they say, “now walka fine”. Bishop Paul Verdzekov of Bamenda diocese and Bishop Pius Awa of Bueu diocese both send their catechists here. The bishop would like me to organize credit unions, women’s co-operatives and teach public speaking here.

“There is a hospital at Nguti which is operated by some Spanish religious brothers. I would request a companion if I should return. The second Sister could probably help teach catechetics but I am not certain about it. The particulars would still have to be worked out. Any volunteers, please communicate with Sister Clothilde. The climate in Nguti is tropical, hot and humid, not at all like Shisong. It is essential to take a siesta in the afternoon. Malaria is quite common year-round. Be that as it may there surely aren’t many mosquitoes as in Saskatchewan.”

According to Sr. Loretta, “After making many inquiries of other religious communities and with their own observations, it became increasingly clear that the prospects of beginning a medical mission were not good. The African countries were becoming more independent and were less in need of outsiders’ help. Sister Elizabeth retained a great love of the people and country of Cameroon all her life even though she was not able to continue there as a missionary.”

## Chapter 27

# Heartache in the Prairie Flowers

In 1961, the Sisters established corporations designed to separate each of the hospitals into its own corporation. The Sisters became the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis of Assisi and each institution now operated under its own legal structure. Each hospital had its own bylaws and was an isolated unit with its own board. The separation was created so that the private, personal life of the Sisters' community would not be open to the government when they checked into the congregational and hospital finances. Universal Medicare in Saskatchewan was on the verge of becoming legislated.

In 1995, Elizabethan Health Services was established to coordinate the efforts of the Sisters' three hospitals at Humboldt, Cudworth and Macklin. Many changes were needed due to the health reforms introduced by the province of Saskatchewan, including the implementation of health districts.

EHS provided administrative and other services on a contractual basis, and kick-started new projects in conjunction with community groups. It also started a numbered company that could eventually generate funds for charitable projects that no one else would support.

Financially self-sufficient, that company transferred from St. Elizabeth's Hospital to Elizabethan Health Services in 1996 and became EHS Care Inc. The changes were part of a process initiated in the pre-reform days when the Sisters saw that sweeping changes in health care were on the horizon.

Humboldt was assigned to the Central Plains Health District; for the first time the hospital ran a deficit because the District did not



**Sr. Philomena Dobmeier presents a farewell gift to Mrs. Deborah King in appreciation of her services as administrator of St. Joseph's Hospital, Macklin.**

provide sufficient funds. Also, St. Elizabeth's was instructed to close their Transitional Unit, designed for older people who were waiting to get into nursing homes. The unit had an RN serving as director of activities – physiotherapy, baking to keep the ladies active and other programs. The District refused to provide funding and the Transitional Unit was closed.

When the hospital had funding reduced the first year, board members said, “We can't keep fighting. Let's just give them the hospital.” The Sisters explained that was not possible. The hospital was church property. Then the government closed 52 hospitals, including St. Joseph's in Macklin. The people of Macklin were devastated. All the hospitals found the situation very difficult. Again, the administrator of the lay board suggested giving the hospital to the Health District. The Bishops said no, explaining that was why the Saskatchewan Catholic Health Corp. was in place.

“We had to find ways and means of helping people who were falling through the cracks,” said Sr. Philomena Dobmeier, superior general of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth in a February 1998 interview in the *Humboldt Journal*.

The first gap was in seniors' services, after the provincial government closed Level 1 and 2 special care homes. The Sisters, through EHS, stepped forward to provide help to three communities wanting to establish non-profit assisted-living projects for seniors in LeRoy, Kerrobert, Macklin and Cudworth. Developing projects involved planning, local fundraising, negotiating, developing the service and ongoing support for as long as the community required.



St. Joseph's Health Facility was opened in 1996, just four years after the hospital was closed by the government. About \$3 million was raised for this long-term care facility which also houses emergency services.



**Sr. Donata Rolheiser jokes with staff at St. Joseph's Health Facility in Macklin.**

The Sisters were interested in providing services and when a community wanted to assume control, EHS would bow out. Although the Sisters were then not in a position to provide project-funding, fundraising was not a problem when the community was behind a venture. For instance, the community of Macklin managed to raise \$3.5 million to build an integrated health centre with long-term beds after St. Joseph's Hospital no longer received government funding for acute care.

Rehabilitation was another need. Consequently, EHS Care Inc. opened a non-profit rehabilitation clinic in Humboldt to fill a gap in the need for secondary rehabilitation therapy not provided by St. Elizabeth's Hospital. The intention was to start more rehabilitation clinics in Saskatchewan where these services were not provided by hospitals.

In February 1998, EHS Care Inc. announced its intention to create a non-profit medical clinic in Humboldt in response to a need for more physicians in the area. Controversy erupted over this initiative because of the relationship between the Sisters' organizations and overlapping representation on the various boards of directors that oversaw these operations. This resulted in an investigation which was released in April 1999 by Saskatoon lawyer Ted Priel. He was appointed by Saskatchewan Health to act as a fact finder/facilitator and to investigate the Humboldt doctors' concerns about the relationship between the Sisters' publicly funded hospital and their two private, non-profit health care organizations.

EHS Care Inc. borrowed \$300,000 from St. Elizabeth's Hospital and \$80,000 from the hospital foundation. The Sisters loaned EHS Care and Elizabethan Health Services sufficient funds to repay the two loans. They were used to pay start-up costs.

The Priel report recommended that the Sisters, as long as they remained owners of the hospital, should not directly or indirectly own a medical clinic planned for the Humboldt Mall. "St. Elizabeth's Hospital controls the granting of hospital privileges to physicians in the district. It can, under its medical staff bylaws, discipline medical staff. If it directly or indirectly through another corporation operates a medical clinic, it is in a clear conflict position."

Mr. Priel said he found no evidence that the Sisters had set up the separate corporations secretly or to confuse the public or to hide anything. "There are, I believe, valid business and legal reasons justifying the existence of separate corporations given the purpose for the incorporation of each of the companies," he wrote in his report. "The introduction of a District Health Board was approached with a healthy sense of scepticism about the motives of the district and a certain lack of trust generally of health reform as well as the intention of the Department of Health and the district."

During the early 1990s, health reform changes and cuts to acute care funding deepened the sense of anxiety that the hospital felt in relation to the district, Mr. Priel found. In the mid-1990s the Sisters set out to find a way to continue to meet the health needs of the people without the restrictions placed on them by what they perceived to be a less-than-supportive district board.

In general, the Priel Report recommended that the district board enforce its lead role in health, and the hospital consult with the district, provide them with information requested, and obtain approvals for contracts. Mr. Priel also noted that the doctors had dealt with the issue in an emotional rather than a business-like manner, and urged the hospital and physicians to treat one another with dignity and respect.

Elizabethan Health Services eventually declared bankruptcy, and an auction sale of equipment was held in the year 2000.

In 2000, the Elizabethans transferred ownership of St. Elizabeth's Hospital from the Sisters of St. Elizabeth to the Bishops of Saskatchewan through the Saskatchewan Catholic Health Corporation, now known as the Catholic Health Ministry of Saskatchewan.

A repeated pledge that the healing ministry of St. Elizabeth's Hospital would continue marked the transfer ceremony. "Today marks a milestone in the history of the hospital but the transfer also marks the continuation of the ministry," said Sr. Philomena Dobmeier, superior general. Now the Sisters were simply passing over the sponsorship of the hospital, so that they could continue their ministry in other areas such as assisted living at St. Michael's Haven in Cudworth.

Jean Mahoney, chair of Saskatchewan Catholic Health Corp., said she was



pleased to accept the transfer of the hospital. The caring presence that was characteristic of St. Elizabeth's Hospital "will energize the corporation", and SCHC wants to continue the legacy and build on it, she said.

Bishop James Weisgerber said SCHC was formed so that the local community could take ownership of the values that motivated health care, that the whole person was looked after and spiritual care was included. "This change of ownership and sponsorship means nothing will change in the kind of care offered, that all the Gospel-filled values will continue," Bishop Weisgerber said.

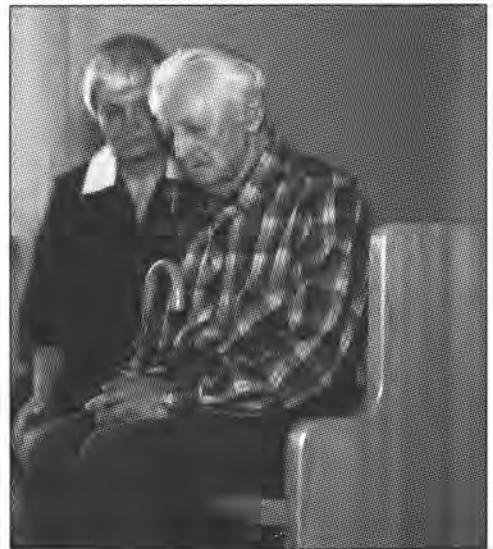
"The transfer of sponsorship of the hospital has not been easy for the Sisters but it had to be done sometime," Sister Philomena said. "The community has grieved and will continue to grieve but we are letting go in hope because the work will go on," she said. "It was OK to transfer it to the Catholic corporation because that was the Bishops'. It felt like it was still ours and it was still Catholic."

The big blow came in 2007 when, on October 31, St. Elizabeth's was declared a public hospital. There were rifts within Humboldt and the surrounding area. Doctors were threatening to leave if the hospital remained Catholic. A community survey indicated a two-thirds majority in favour of removing the Catholic status. The Sisters felt as if the hospital had been taken away from them.

"It felt like a death in the family," said Sr. Philomena. "The Sisters felt betrayed. There were lots of meetings. It shows the resilience and faith of our Sisters that we could go from bitterness to acceptance. The last meetings regarding the changeover and acceptance of change were in 2007," she said.

The Sisters are still involved in pastoral care but have no ownership in the hospital, which is run by a lay administrator. They had the option of appointing someone to the board but have chosen not to. They still own the property between 9th Street and 12th Street, about two blocks deep by one and one-half blocks wide. The Sisters have provided for the demolition of the hospital and the land is to be returned to them in an environmentally sound condition once the new Humboldt and District Health Centre opened in 2011.

"The hospital is gone, but not the mission or the legacy," said Sr. Philomena. "As the Sisters have been withdrawing from the hospital itself, we retained our great need to be of service to the laity. What can we do



**Sr. Louise Krupka talks with Mr. Spenrath, a patient, in the chapel of St. Elizabeth's Hospital.**

for the people? Our mission will carry on in all the places where we have been. On the Feast of St. Elizabeth, every year, the staff at the Humboldt Hospital gives us a dozen roses and serves bread and jam. It is a tradition. They still do it.” The bread and roses are a reminder of the charity of St. Elizabeth for the poor. Due to pressure from his relatives who feared the depletion of the treasury, the husband of St. Elizabeth objected to her work with the poor. He confronted her one day as she was distributing bread, demanding to know what she was carrying. When she opened her cloak, roses fell out.

There are other legacies, including a formal Legacy Wall, planned for the new hospital. “The pictures will keep the spirit alive,” said Sr. Philomena. “As well, certain of the Sisters’ artifacts will go to the Humboldt museum and will be on display for the 100th anniversary. They will keep our treasures. They will be guardians of our treasures,” she said. “There is no fear about our legacy.”



**Sr. Adele Schell offers pastoral care to a patient in the old St. Elizabeth’s Hospital.**

## Chapter 28

# Community Life: The Inside Story

Living in a religious community before Vatican II – which is when most of the Sisters were initiated into it – meant living a highly structured and disciplined life where nothing was left to chance and personal decision making. Everything, from the daily schedule to the formulas said when congratulating jubilarians or asking for prayers, was regulated. The convent itself was strictly cloistered. This meant that no one other than the Sisters was allowed entry. The cloister was a place of almost complete silence. When it was necessary to speak it was done in a subdued voice. Work was also done silently. Contact with lay people was restricted to those with whom the Sisters worked. However, Sisters were not allowed to converse with them except when necessary for the work being done. Visits from family or friends (a rare occurrence) were restricted to four times a year and then for only a certain specified period of time. Letters had to be given to the superior unsealed and those received could be opened by the superior. Today this may sound rather dismal or even shocking. However, up until the mid-1960s religious life was considered to be a calling which required one literally to “leave the world” in order to seek a life of perfection through the observance of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and service to the sick and poor. The religious vocation at that time was thought to be a “state of perfection,” “a higher vocation” than any other and a sure path to eternal salvation. Cloister, silence and separation from the laity were all means to achieve this perfection.

One can only imagine how difficult it must have been for the pioneering Sisters who left such a structured life to come to Canada where one lived from moment to moment in response not to a superior but to Prior Bruno, and to the needs of the laity who had no concept of this form of life. The Sisters responded to this situation with such a pioneering spirit that on one occasion when Sr. Seraphina needed to buy a cow, the farmer said she could have the cow for free if she helped with the haying. Sr. Seraphina did just that and that night slept in the same bed with the husband and wife. She was against the wall and the wife was between her and the husband. The next day when the haying was done, Sr. Seraphina returned home with the cow.

Some of the more interesting religious observances practiced in the convent in those days were:

- while kneeling, asking at the beginning of the week for kindness and patience of the Sister in charge and thanking her at the end of the week for her kindness and patience

- kneeling before the Sister in charge if something was broken, spilled or soiled and asking pardon
- three meatless days per week
- silence during meals with someone reading a spiritual book
- instead of using sinks the Sisters used wash basins that were placed on a canvas mat on the floor, with toiletries and the mat gathered up each morning and stored in the basin
- novices received only hand-me-down clothes until their profession, although they did receive a new habit at investiture
- a monthly ritual called Chapter of Faults in which the Sisters admitted their failures to follow the rules and house customs
- before going on retreat the Sisters gathered in the Chapter room to ask each other's pardon for offences and to beg for prayers and at the close of the retreat they thanked each other for prayers and asked the superior for general permissions
- Novices and younger Sisters visited certain older Sisters to receive corrections to improve their behaviour – often the older Sisters would give them a treat such as candy after the admonition.

While these practices have been changed since Vatican II, some Sisters continue the practice of asking each other for pardon and prayers before retreat.

Feast days continue even now to be occasions for celebration. In the past Christmas, Easter and other liturgical feasts of Mary and Christ and those of St. Francis and



Mother Seraphina's Silver Jubilee supper in 1938.

St. Elizabeth were celebrated with the greatest solemnity and joyous singing. Meals were special at which the Sisters wore their pleated white aprons.

While Sisters' jubilees are still an occasion for celebration with formal congratulations and singing, in the past there would also be a specially decorated gift table for things the Sisters made for the jubilarians, decorations in the dining room and elaborate plays, skits, singing and recitations at the evening program. In later years Sisters' families were invited for 25th and 50th jubilees and for investiture and profession of vows.

In the past, when there was so much silence, there were many occasions on which there was a day of "recreation" (when talking was allowed all day) such as every Tuesday, 26 designated saint days, three days before Advent and Lent, days of investiture and profession and the day following, and the superior general's feast days. Sundays and liturgical feasts were days of recreation, with no reading during meals, a relaxed work schedule, and no mending during the evening hour of "recreation." In summer, prayers were often said early so the Sisters could enjoy an outdoor meal with games and singing. On other community feasts such as Foundress Day on May 14, 22 minor saint days, name days and profession anniversaries of the Sisters or when Sisters from other houses were visiting, there would be a shorter reading at meals and then "recreation" at one meal.

A day of hard work butchering or potato picking was usually an occasion for relaxing the silence rule and for a relaxing outdoor picnic meal that was always fun. Some Sisters found creative ways to make special treats and have parties in their places of work after hours.



**A photograph of achievement marking the end of a fruitful harvest.**

The Sisters' comments on community life before and after Vatican II reveal the contrast as the community changed from a monastic to an apostolic form of life. "It was hard because a person had to reform your life completely; after Vatican II again you had to reform and think of being responsible and mature." "Visitors and letter writing were restricted. There was not as much freedom as we enjoy today. I had two sisters working at the hospital and I couldn't socialize with them when we met in the hallway. After, it was much easier to live religious life with more freedom to choose the apostolate that best suited the gifts of the Sisters. Sisters recognized more the needs of our society as in Brazil, Home Care, Pastoral Care, Catechetics, public health, marriage tribunal work and so on." "It was easier after the Council because you had to take more responsibility for your life and we learned a more wholesome way to live poverty, chastity and obedience." "Through the documents we obtained a deeper understanding of the great gift of the Consecrated life in its three aspects of consecration, communion and mission." "It was much less stressful and rigid"; "Now we can express our thoughts about things;" "I found it easier before Vatican II because there were not as many distractions and we had a much stricter routine."

The Sisters' lives were and still are defined by prayer. In community prayer, priority is given to daily Eucharist, Liturgy of the Hours and meditation. Other daily prayers include the rosary, spiritual reading, novenas, the Cross prayer, and the Stations of the Cross. Once a month the Sisters observe a day of "recollection" in which silence is kept and the Sisters spend time in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Once a year the Sisters make a six-to-eight day retreat. When a Sister is dying she is supported by the Sisters who watch and pray with her day and night. Prayer is the first resort during times of crisis and decision-making. Once a year they each draw the name of another Sister for whom they pray through the year. There is a monthly Mass and daily prayers for friends, relatives and benefactors. At daily Mass the Sisters pray for the needs of the local community and society. The deceased Sisters are remembered in prayer on their death anniversaries and each Sister's special days are remembered by prayer.

Prayer in the lives of the Sisters anchored them securely in their faith. It was like the "spring and autumn rains" that softened hearts in times of conflict, comforted in times of loss and trial, gave the courage needed to make difficult decisions and helped them to embrace the demands of the Gospel in all aspects of life. The style, content and times of praying have changed over the years but not the substance. Now that the Sisters are elderly, prayer has become their "work."

When asked how religious life helped them grow as a person, the Sisters' responses reflect the importance of prayer again. "Prayer, retreats, workshops, meditating on Sacred Scripture and hearing of God's love for me and others and how to live life have helped me mostly," states Sr. Louise. Sr. Imelda echoes her words, "I have



**Sisters praying together in the Convent chapel in the old hospital.**

grown by prayer, seeking to be more spiritual, and being responsible in serving others in my work.” Others respond similarly:

- “Prayer life, communal living and apostolic activities have given me a greater capacity of love, concern and compassion for my Sisters in community and those I minister to.”
- “Jesus became my friend by talking and sharing with him my daily life and experiences. In religious life I see Jesus in the Sisters even in their sickness and struggling.”
- “I have through prayer and meditation made an effort to see Christ in every person as difficult as it sometimes is.”
- “The daily meditation and reading spiritual books helped me a lot. But also the yearly retreats and speaking and asking questions of other religious.”
- “My faith has deepened by the practice of daily Eucharist, communal prayer, personal prayer, spiritual reading and recreation with the Sisters. This has given me a greater awareness of the presence of God in my life.”
- “Number one is my prayer life.”

What is it like living in a household of women? “That’s the only thing I’ve ever known”, writes Sr. Viola Bens. “It’s always been a challenge for me and still is. In

the past there was so much uniformity in dress and daily routine. We couldn't question anything; everything about our way of life was handed down and was taken as the will of God. Since the mid-1960s things have changed drastically. There is more freedom in decision making, individual expression in dress, times of prayer, type of work, and so on. For many this was and still is difficult. As in all groups we have our share of differences, disagreements and spats but we always get over them and start over. I've often heard it said that a good sense of humour helps to get through some of the drama that can come from misunderstanding or just plain craziness as a community of women negotiate living together. Through it all we somehow grow close to each other as a community even if not as close personal friends to all. To me this is a sign of the health of a community, when we can allow each other the space to be as she is, develop closer bonds with some more than others and yet care for each one."

Other Sisters reflecting on living in a household of women make the following comments: "We had lots of fun in playing tricks among ourselves, joys in singing at recreation time, walking, skating, and taking part in practising for a concert. I laughed a lot and had to beg for pardon many a time. We were young and alive;" "My greatest joy times were at our cabin. There was conflict also but now it is getting better."

"We need to practise a great deal of patience and try to accept Sisters for who they are rather than for what they do. We have to be willing to sacrifice personal preferences for the common good, promote mutual trust and friendship, and create an environment of love that fosters growth and have enduring loyalty to each member regardless of her shortcomings." "It has been a real risk and challenge because I entered at a very young age. There has been great joy in working with so many different people, coming together with my community for the retreats and celebrations. Putting up with the idiosyncrasies of some characters is difficult though it has become easier because of trying to look at my own peculiarities and gaining self-knowledge."

"For me it is a very difficult situation to live with so many different characters. It has required me many a time to hold back when I wanted to say something;" "Although we are religious, we all have human nature. Everyone came from different family backgrounds, different nationalities. We have to learn to accept each other for who we are and overlook the foibles. We all have a sunny side and a shadow side which we learn to accept and cope with. Jubilee celebrations, community get-togethers and love of my work have given me much joy." "I feel good living in community. The more we get along with one another the happier we shall be! I think every community has its ups and downs. You try to do the best you can."

"For me community life has been a support in my vocation of discipleship, which comes from seeing the faithfulness of other members and how they handle difficulties and make changes in their lives (or not)," reflects Sr. Viola. "Then there



is the support when one suffers disappointments, misunderstanding, doubts, or loss. As I look back over 50 years in community I see that recourse to prayer has been the sustaining force in my life – praying the Liturgy of the Hours together several times a day with its rhythm of psalms and scripture, daily meditation on scripture. Eucharist and spiritual reading have gradually over the years shaped my understanding of the spiritual life and myself, helping me to develop an acceptance of others and circumstances. Prayer, our common struggles, work and calling is the glue that holds us together to the point where I believe there is not one of us that wouldn't be ready to die for any of the others.

“Religious life is not a one-time choice but a choice that keeps growing as one comes to know oneself at more profound levels; it is not about being a religious or lay or married person – not higher or better than the choice to marry or stay single – but about following the passion of the heart – that which gives energy to one's life and leaves one feeling a sense of joy, accomplishment, wholeness and commitment. Living in a religious community has given all of us the opportunity to develop a rich and deep spiritual life which grows gradually over the years with the discipline of the daily routine, convent practices and through years of study, prayer, community living and work. The early years of much silence and a more cloistered lifestyle helped focus the heart on that which would always be most meaningful in life – a growing relationship with Christ through prayer and service to others. Even now when the Sisters no longer have all the works and activity they used to have, this is the one thing that remains.”



The sanctuary of the St. Elizabeth's Convent chapel in the 1930s.



Sisters carolling in the hallway of St. Elizabeth's Hospital in 1960.

A group of novices and postulants enjoying a game of outdoor volleyball.



Novices and postulants playing crokinole and marbles during free time.

A happy group of novices, postulants, and Sisters enjoying singing together accompanied by piano and guitar.



Srs. Veronica, Isabelle, Tecla and Elizabeth Sonntag having a laugh in the Convent cafeteria, 1988.

L to R: Srs. Josephine, Edwina, Valerie, Rose, Donata and Leonardine sitting in the Sisters' park behind St. Anthony's Convent in Macklin.



## Chapter 29

# Gospel Roots in Prairie Soil

The three pioneer Sisters, armed with nothing but complete faith in God and their understated courage, vision and foresight, and often holding baskets for donations at the back of churches, faced seemingly insurmountable challenges. Undaunted, they built and staffed the first hospital in Humboldt, and set the stage for a century of service that would include hospitals, nursing homes, a nursing school, missions in Brazil and Africa, pastoral care, colleges, retreat centres, and community outreach, always countering ongoing challenges and frustrations with little successes, with joy, with new possibilities.

One hundred years later, the remaining Sisters face much different obstacles with the same indomitable spirit. The pioneers understood all too well that facing enormous change would present a difficult challenge. They had moved to a new land, a new language, a new culture. The Sisters of St. Elizabeth in 2011 are also facing major lifestyle changes. It is not easier. Declining numbers create questions about the future. Ducking them would be easy, but that was not the attitude that built their mission. Nor is it the attitude that will carry the remaining Sisters, pioneers of the 21st century, into their future.

“At our General Chapter in May 2010,” said Sr. Viola Bens, “we committed ourselves to embrace the challenges that have come our way because the old ways no longer work – we looked at our diminishing numbers, at our aging membership, the burden of our possessions and the governance of the congregation at our age, and the need to make changes. These challenges scare us but nonetheless we made a commitment to embrace them and take the necessary next steps in the coming years. In the first years the Sisters held total governance of the hospitals and Congregation. In time they realized the necessity of lay advisory boards and lay hospital boards and they made the necessary adjustments. While we have always sought counsel from trusted laity, we now have a lay advisory committee for the Congregation to help us look at options for the future and to help us make wise decisions regarding the same. We have decided to divest ourselves of all properties and are looking forward to the day when even the management of all financial transactions will be handed over to others. This will free us totally for the ministry of prayer, ministry to each other and ministry to others with whom we are in contact.”

On November 23, 2010, the Sisters gathered for another meeting to explore

their future mission. As they talked together, exploring their options, they looked to the past as well as the future. The Sisters' Chapter theme was "Journeying together to embrace the challenges of the future with hope." The Sisters' reflections in November mirrored that theme.

Sr. Justina Wirachowsky: "After the example of Mother Apollonia, Servant of Love, we will love and serve one another and others as much as we are able, with great trust in our young generation, who show such enthusiasm for the faith. Our prayer is that they, too, will be great Servants of Love in our world today."

Sr. Clothilde Gartner: "We have to live in faith like the first Sisters who came over to Canada. We are walking the way of the Cross with the crisis in the Church: family breakdown, small families, crisis in faith, materialism. Health care as we knew it is ended. We have seen the end of an era, but there is hope. We may be asked to move into new areas of need. Getting rid of things will free us to have a look at new beginnings. We need to pray that wherever God leads us, we will be able to go. We may die as we are presently living. Where there is death there must also be a resurrection. The charism of St. Elizabeth will not die."

Sr. Eleonore Hanus: "Our legacy will be carried out in the areas we were known for – teaching, nursing, looking after the sick and needy. That's how the charism of St. Elizabeth began and how we began in Canada and have continued until now. Our project could have collapsed in the tough years but through Divine Providence it continued and is continuing. So Divine Providence will carry us into a future that might mean we move into a residence that has the services we require, in a place where all the medical and physical needs are available."

Sr. Imelda Gartner: "We cannot tell what our future would be, but change might allow us to move to a shelter where we would be cared for by others. There would be no worries about gardens, maintenance, food, or staff. Instead, there will be new opportunities, thanks be to God. Our future ministries can include praying together, offering up our sufferings, everything, including meals that do not agree with us, being co-sharers with Jesus."

Sr. Gertrude Boser: "We do not minister in our hospitals anymore. However,



**Sr. Eleonore Hanus**

we can still minister in the Church in our own community by visiting the sick in the infirmary, to do acts of charity, to do little kind deeds for each other and especially to pray with the Church and to pray for the community, for the salvation of souls and for the whole world. Prayer is so very important in our ministry.”

Sr. Frances Schnurr: “The Lord will not let our community die out. There were three Sisters at the start, so why not a new spring-up of a new group?”

Sr. Louise Krupka: “Constitution #2 says live the Gospel life. This is our gift now, to live the Gospel in love. Our commitment helps the people who see us believe that there is a God. Constitution #32 – our apostolate is to live the community life and show forth Christ in our life. Constitution #2 and 3 – Gospel living is to respond and follow Christ by prayer and community living.”

Sr. Donata Rolheiser: “I would like to see us express that we move forward in peace, joy and gratitude, knowing that God is walking with us. Prayer ministry is something most of us can do. I believe that is the most important ministry. We have been looking after God’s people in many parts of Saskatchewan and in other places. Perhaps God wants us to look after each other now. Some of us can visit people in the nursing homes – they are very lonely people and there are a lot of them. I am grateful to all the people who have touched my life. Through it all I have become a better person. We look forward to the future with joy and thanksgiving. We thank God for all the blessings and opportunities to serve others. We don’t know what it will be, but you never know, God may have a few surprises for us yet.”

Sr. Philomena Dobmeier: “There are still many things we can do. I am looking forward to the day when I am relieved of burdens to be free to pray and to minister to others. We still need to minister to each other. There will be difficult times. We will succeed. We have done so in the past and we will in the future. Community life was an important factor in Chapter decisions, to show the Gospel, how Christians can live together. We can go together in love and with the people we work with.”

Other Sisters: “The founding Sisters gave us a good example of acceptance and living by faith and hope. There will be new opportunities, to visit the elderly, be at the bedside of the dying and pray for them and with them, to be a cheerful presence, joyful to people. We can move into the future with gratitude for our past, accepting whatever the future brings without complaining. The Lord is with us until the end of time. We should be grateful for what has happened in the past and never forget our benefactors for we would never have been able to do it without them.”

Sr. Viola: “A charism is a gift given by the Holy Spirit to a person or persons who see a desperate need in society around them that urges them to act – to do something about it. Charisms are still being given. This is what sent our Sisters here to Canada. Mother Pulcheria was made aware of the desperate need for health care in a new German settlement in Saskatchewan. Today health care is no longer a desperate

need. There are other needs. Others will take up these challenges, whether or not as a religious community, as long as they are meeting a need and responding to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to act on behalf of the poor and desperate in their society. This is a real hope that our story will inspire others to meet those real needs, to take up the challenge as our Sisters have over the years, to minister to those in need. This is what Mother Apollonia did. She saw the needs of the poor and took care of them. Our book will be read by others – my hope is that it will be an inspiration for others to follow.”

Yes, the crocus does still blossom abundantly. The prairie landscape has changed, but in the ongoing story of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth, there is still much room for joy and singing.



**Srs. Martha Fleischmann & Colette Kloppenburg in costume in St. Elizabeth's Convent, Humboldt.**



The Community of Sisters, 1936. Front Row (L to R): Srs. Fidelis Deibert, Rita Adrian, Felicitas Haag, Marcella Haag, Margaret Marie Prediger, Zita Rolheiser, Martha Fleischmann. Second Row: Srs. Barbara Hofer, Lazarina Stroh, Hyacintha Senger, Mary Elizabeth Premru, Helena Karnicar, Clementina Possenig, Seraphina Pfurtscheller, Elizabeth Lopinski. Third Row: Srs. Mary Clare Feltin, Josephine Brost, Cecilia Klassen, Colette Kloppenburg, Mary Magdalena Walter, Antonia Bohl, Immaculata Saretzky, Marianna Schmidt, Theresia Fischer, Imelda Gartner, Augustina Mainzer, Benedicta Yungwirth, Veronica Schmidt, Stephanie Brost, Johanna Huber, Bernadette Wald, Perpetua Haag, Dolores Hauk. Fourth Row: Srs. Armella Koenig, Tecla Gartner, Justina Stang, Angela Stang, Severina Ollenberger, Mary Irene Sitter, Fridolina Markus, Leonie Baumgarten, Melania Sahadyk, Rosalia Brunner, Frances Schmidt.



The Community of Sisters, circa 1956. Front Row (L to R): Srs. Annie Reineke, Leonie Baumgarten, Celine Dobmeier, Benigna Baier, Alexia Jantschge, Colette Kloppenburg, Cecilia Klassen, Edwina Hepp, Eleonore Hanus, Helen Kirchner, Rose Kloppenburg, Barbara Hofer, Ottilia Saretzky, Valerie Scheiber, Carmelita Schnurr, Anne Marie Lange, Lucy Stang, Crescentia Jocham, Aloysia Gallinger. Second Row: Srs. Josephine Brost, Angela Gramlich, Hemma Bermel, Monica Sperling, Tecla Gartner. Third Row: Srs. Regina Dobmeier, Clementina Possenig, Mary Magdalena Walter, Martha Fleischmann, Perpetua Haag, Bernadette Wald, Julianne Gallinger, Ambrosia Prediger, Isabelle Zoller, Ancilla Dobmeier. Fourth Row: Srs. Pulcheria Poth, Mary Clare Feltin, Hildegard Koenig, Delphine Berschiminsky, Walburga Brodner, Veronica Schmidt, Alphonsa Schneider, Bernarda Gallinger, Patricia Trainor.





Sisters of St. Elizabeth, 1961. Fifty Years of Service.



Sisters of St. Elizabeth, 2010. Approaching a Century of Service.



Sisters of St. Elizabeth, 1986. Seventy-five Years of Service.

## Appendix I

### Timeline 1571 – 2011

- 1571** – Apollonia Radermecher is born on September 9, 1571, the daughter of a wealthy official in Aachen. She is baptized Apollonia.
- 1622** – At the age of 51 she takes over the management of the “Gasthaus,” the Aachen Poorhouse. Apollonia, a member of the Third Order Secular of St. Francis, founds her own congregation of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth. Her convents and hospitals have been founded in the following places:
- 1622** Aachen, Germany
  - 1650** Dueren, Germany
  - 1671** Luxembourg, Luxembourg
  - 1690** Graz, Austria
  - 1709** Vienna, Austria
  - 1710** Klagenfurt, Austria
  - 1719** Prague, Czech Republic
  - 1736** Breslau, Poland
  - 1745** Linz, Austria
  - 1748** Kadan, Czech Republic
  - 1749** Straubing, Germany
  - 1750** Munich, Germany
  - 1753** Cieszyn, Poland
  - 1754** Brunn, Germany
  - 1758** Bratislava, Slovakia
  - 1840** Neuberg, Germany
  - 1850** Jablunkov, Czech Republic
  - 1863** Muensterberg, Switzerland
  - 1911** Humboldt, Canada
  - 1945** Kissinger, Germany
- 1910** – The Klagenfurt community celebrates 200 years and decides to establish a mission in appreciation for the two centuries of faithfulness. Through Prior Bruno Doerfler, OSB, of St. Peter’s Monastery in Muenster, Saskatchewan they hear of the need for a hospital in the newly-formed German settlement around Humboldt and Muenster, Sask.
- May 14, 1911** – Sisters Augustina Platzler, Philomena Jug, and Gabriela Lex, arrive in Muenster by train

- May 15, 1911** – The Sisters meet Mayor O. W. Andreasen of Humboldt to obtain a site for the hospital
- May 16, 1911** – Humboldt Town Council meets the Sisters to discuss the hospital
- May 17, 1911** – The Sisters go to Prince Albert, Sask. with Prior Bruno who serves as translator to meet Bishop Albert Pascal, OMI, and obtain authority to build a hospital and establish a religious community in Humboldt
- June 13, 1911** – A total of 7 ½ acres are purchased from Philip Flory for the site of the hospital at \$50 per acre
- June 21, 1911** – Prior Bruno asks Mother Pulcheria in Klagenfurt if she can send some Sisters to take over the kitchen services at St. Peter's Abbey. After the group of seven Sisters arrives in July 1912, full kitchen services are taken up at the monastery on August 1, 1912.
- Local families provide collateral so that the Sisters can take a loan to start building the hospital in Humboldt. Mr. Albrecht of Prince Albert is the designated contractor. Masonry contractor is J. Hanson of Prince Albert
- August 16, 1911** – Excavation starts on the new hospital. The contract is awarded on September 19 when the provincial government approves the plans. The Sisters do extensive home nursing before the hospital is opened. Dr. Barry sets up a temporary hospital in a private house where the Sisters are serving until St. Elizabeth's Hospital opens
- September 14, 1911** – Sr. Augustine goes on her first begging tour to collect money for the hospital
- September 18, 1911** – Sisters Philomena Jug and Gabriela Lex travel to Duluth, Minn. to learn English and American nursing methods. They return on March 14, 1912. Sr. Augustina remains in Humboldt to nurse at the hospital and in homes as well as travel around the area begging for alms
- October 18, 1911** – Prior Bruno becomes the first Abbot of St. Peter's Abbey. A severe winter delays the construction of the hospital until spring 1912
- 1912** – *St. Peter's Bote* tells of persons admitted to St. Elizabeth's Hospital as patients when it opens. The ladies organize and assist the Sisters in furnishing the hospital. The Sisters are dedicated to the care of the patients
- July 26, 1912** – A group of seven Sisters arrives from Klagenfurt: Sisters Euphrosia Weiss, Salesia Scheriau, Clementina Possenig, Helena Karnicar, Xaveria Motschilnig, Agatha Loibnegger, and Gertrudis Bergles, a novice. Among the lay people who travel with the Sisters from Klagenfurt are Margaretha Schellander and Fridolin Baumgarten. Abbot Bruno accompanies the group to Muenster
- August 1, 1912** – The Sisters now do the laundry for the monks and students of St. Peter's College, as well as sew the monks' habits, do their mending and patching

- August 5, 1912** – Bishop Pascal erects a novitiate at Muenster until it can be transferred to Humboldt
- October 25, 1912** – The first patient is admitted to the hospital despite construction not complete
- October 30, 1912** – Bishop Pascal blesses the first hospital of St. Elizabeth. The hospital has a bed capacity of 18
- November, 1912** – The first Canadian candidate, Agnes Schmidt, enters the convent in Humboldt
- April 19, 1913** – Sr. Gertrudis Bergles makes her profession of vows for three years
- July 14, 1913** – Another group of Sisters from Klagenfurt arrives. Among them is Mother Pulcheria Wilhelm, who had missioned the first three Sisters to come to Canada and is considered the Canadian founder. The others are Sr. Walburga Swetlin and Sr. Seraphina Pfurtscheller, a novice and Elizabeth (Lizzie) Ehrenreich, a lay person who remains with the Sisters, living in a small room in the hospital basement until she dies in the early 1950s
- August 20, 1913** – The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth obtains its independent status as a canonically erected religious congregation. The novitiate is transferred to Humboldt
- August 30, 1913** – The Sisters hold their first General Chapter and choose their first canonically elected superior general for the new Canadian foundation. Mother Pulcheria Wilhelm is elected for a three-year term, which is ratified by Bishop Pascal on September 3, 1913
- 1913** – In order to supply the hospital and Sisters with food, the Sisters, with the assistance of Jacob Platzer, begin the operation of a farm with chickens, geese, cows, pigs and horses. Hired men work the farm and the Sisters take care of the gardens, chickens and geese. (St. Joseph's Hospital in Macklin and St. Michael's Hospital in Cudworth also operate farms after they open in the 1920s)
- November 24, 1913** – Agnes Schmidt is invested with the habit and receives the religious name Sr. Maria Anna of Divine Providence. Sr. Seraphina Pfurtscheller makes her perpetual profession of vows on November 24
- January 20, 1914** – Mother Pulcheria writes to Dr. Hauser, director at the Klagenfurt Hospital, asking for certificates for Sr. Salesia Scheriau and Sr. Clementina Possenig who have passed written examinations after studying nursing under his care. It is Mother Pulcheria's hope that these will qualify the Sisters as nurses in Saskatchewan
- January 21, 1914** – Mother Pulcheria writes to Dr. Schmidt in Klagenfurt asking him to write out certificates for Sisters Philomena, Augustina, Gabriela and Euphrasia stating that all these Sisters have successfully been nurses for years under his supervision. She explains that the Ministry of Health in

Saskatchewan is making demands that there be certified nurses at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Humboldt

- 1914** – Sr. Seraphina is sent for six months to the Sisters of Sion in Prince Albert to learn English and gain nursing experience. The contract for installation of waterworks and sewage at St. Elizabeth's Hospital is awarded
- February 10, 1915** – The first Canadian candidate, Sr. Maria Anna (Agnes Schmidt), makes her profession of vows for three years and perpetual vows in 1918. Several other women have entered the convent by 1915
- 1915** – The Saskatchewan Legislature grants legal incorporation to the Sisters as The Sisters of St. Elizabeth's Hospital
- 1916** – Sr. Augustina Platzler becomes ill, and dies January 8 at the age of 44. Mother Pulcheria Wilhelm has serious abdominal surgery and dies February 5 at the age of 63. They are interred in the private cemetery on St. Elizabeth's Convent grounds in Humboldt
- 1916** – Sr. Euphrasia Weiss is elected as superior general for three years
- May 3, 1916** – Sisters Elizabeth Lopinski, Theodora Sieben and Benedicta Yungwirth are invested with the habit in St. Augustine's Church, Humboldt by Bishop Pascal
- 1916** – Because of the many communicable diseases an isolation house, St. Rochus Hospital, is constructed. In later years this hospital becomes a home for the elderly, an employee residence for women and a home for a refugee family in the early 1950s until they are established
- September 20, 1916** – Fr. Tharsicius Schmid, Obl. OSB, comes to Humboldt to be chaplain for the Sisters. He also serves the hospital in Humboldt as an all around handyman and helps to landscape the grounds and build the grotto
- 1917** – The laundry building is erected in September. A large root cellar is constructed. The floor above the laundry provides work space for the Sisters and the upper floor serves as the Novitiate
- 1917** - The Saskatchewan Nurses Registration Board grants registration by a waiver clause to persons who had experience in nursing. The following are registered in 1917: Sisters Gertrudis Bergles, Philomena Jug, Gabriela Lex, Clementina Possenig, Salesia Scheriau and Theodora Sieben
- October 4, 1917** – Sisters Elizabeth Lopinski, Theodora Sieben and Benedicta Yungwirth make their profession of vows for three years
- 1917** – Sisters Philomena, Salesia, Clementine and Theodora receive their official diplomas as registered nurses. Prior to receiving the habit, Sr. Theodora had gone to the Grey Nuns' Hospital in St. Boniface for training
- 1918** – The hospital is expanded and an addition completed in 1919 brings the bed capacity to 35

- 1919** – Sr. Walburga Swetlin is elected superior general for three years
- June 1919** – Bishop Pascal returns to France for health reasons and Abbot Bruno is placed in charge temporarily of the Prince Albert diocese
- June 12, 1919** – Abbot Bruno Doerfler dies
- January 1920** – Fr. Schmid travels to Europe and arrives at Klagenfurt in mid-February. He has permission from the Canadian government to bring 10 Sisters to Humboldt from Klagenfurt. Because of the First World War, the Sisters experience delays
- May 10, 1920** – Only the following six Sisters come: Sr. Mary Elizabeth Premru, Sr. Christina Drexler, Sr. Rosalia Brunner, Sr. Alexia Jantschge, and two candidates, Rosina Luschin and Maria Christoff
- May 1920** – Verandahs are added to the south end of the hospital to the first and second floors
- July 13, 1920** – Bishop Pascal dies in France
- 1921** – The Grotto is constructed in the Sisters' cemetery. Father Schmid is architect and foreman and bears most of the cost. He is helped by Sr. Euphrasia and a hired man
- April 20, 1921** – The first silver jubilee of profession is celebrated by Sr. Walburga Swetlin. On the same day three postulants are invested: Maria Catharina Mainzer (Sr. Augustina), Anna Schmidt (Sr. Franziska), and Rosina Luschin (Sr. Clara)
- May 6, 1921** – St. Peter's Abbey is raised to the status of Abbey Nullius. Abbot Michael Ott, OSB, and Fr. Schmid assist the Sisters in a revision of their constitutions to bring them in line with the 1917 Code of Canon Law, Canadian life and Church regulations. Up to this time the Sisters were using the constitutions they had brought from Klagenfurt
- November 16, 1921** – St. Peter's College opens. The Sisters cook the first meal and subsequently five or six Sisters are employed to cook, sew, do laundry and mend for the monks and students
- January 1922** – At the request of Fr. Francis Palm, OMI, who had been asking for Sisters every year since 1915 for St. Joseph's Colony, Sisters Euphrasia Weiss and Marianna Schmidt move to Macklin to establish a hospital. They purchase a house to serve as a hospital and call it St. Joseph's Hospital
- April 18, 1922** – The first official council minutes are recorded
- 1922** – A large summer house is constructed near the cemetery by Fr. Schmid with hired help
- 1922** – Sr. Walburga Swetlin is re-elected superior general for a second three-year term
- September 8, 1922** – The Sisters simplify their headdress

- November 1, 1922** – The final group of Klagenfurt Sisters comes from Austria in the company of Fr. Joseph Wickel, OSB. There are three choir Sisters, Srs. Margaretha Gruthschnig, Jacoba Schober, and Philomena Esenko who receives the name Maria at Humboldt, and three lay Sisters, Srs. Martina Ratz, Ottilia Niederwieser and Serafina Spath whose name in Humboldt becomes Sr. Bonaventure. 27 Sisters have arrived from Klagenfurt, three returned and about 12 entered from Canada, bringing the total number of Sisters to 36 at the end of 1922
- 1923** – With the help of Dr. H.R. Fleming, the St. Elizabeth's Hospital School of Nursing is established. Rose Godin is the first director of the school, followed by Sister Salesia Scheriau. The Sisters who had been caring for the sick for several years also are given the opportunity to graduate and become registered in Saskatchewan. The small St. Joseph's House in Humboldt, originally used by the first Sisters, becomes the nurses' residence. Two Sisters return to Klagenfurt: Sisters Martina Ratz and Serafina Spath, also known as Sr. Bonaventure
- June 1, 1923** – The Abbot challenges the Sisters to change from two to one class of Sisters. The practice in Europe is to have Lay Sisters and Choir Sisters
- June 1923** – The Oblates of Mary Immaculate ask the Sisters to take over the dietary services at St. Charles Scholasticate in Battleford. The Sisters offer voluntary services to assist the Oblates to set up the Scholasticate
- July 1, 1924** – The Sisters take over the administration of St. Francis Hospital at Scott. Sr. Helena and Sr. Gertrudis go to Scott to clean up and prepare for opening. Sr. Philomena goes as local superior
- July 3, 1924** – The Sisters decide not to start a hospital in Watson because of insufficient numbers of Sisters and its close proximity to Humboldt
- December 1924** – Sisters Euphrasia Weiss and Benedicta Yungwirth move to Cudworth on Dec. 1, 1924 to work with Dr. Longault to establish a hospital. They care for the sick in a temporary rented house where Dr. Longault is already caring for the sick. On Dec. 14, 1924 Abbot Michael Ott blesses this house
- January 1925** – A root cellar is built beside the laundry at a cost of \$3,000
- March 7, 1925** – Humboldt town council offers to pay \$500 per year for the poor who need hospital care but are unable to pay. The Sisters agree to try this for one year
- July 21, 1925** – The Sisters decide not to accept the hospital in Banff since they cannot meet the conditions set by the Bishop of Calgary
- July 30, 1925** – A decision is made to construct a verandah on the third floor of St. Elizabeth's Hospital for the Sisters. Dr. Fleming pays for the construction while the Sisters pay for materials



- September 15, 1925** – Dr. Longault offers to donate \$10,000 to build a hospital in Cudworth.
- September 24, 1925** – Doctors at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital offer to pay for new floors in the operating room. The Sisters take on the cost of installing new floors in all the other rooms on the second floor.
- December 27, 1925** – The nurses’ residence (the first house of the Sisters) in Humboldt burns
- April 7, 1926** – The Sisters decide to build a new St. Rochus Hospital
- May 1926** – “Since the Sisters at Muenster are overworked with baking bread, Rev. Mother asks Fr. Abbot to get them more help. He refuses, saying that if the work is too hard for them, he can get other Sisters. Rev. Mother relays this to her council who agree unanimously to remove the Sisters from Muenster since all the missions [that is our other houses] are asking for help and the Muenster Sisters could provide that help” (Council minutes). In time some changes are made at Muenster and the Sisters remain there
- June 13, 1926** – “This month, they began to build the hospital at Cudworth. We held a meeting about Cudworth and decided we would keep Cudworth as one of our missions. Since we could not continue the hospital in the house we had, we had to build a new place. We were grateful that there would be no (financial) demands made on the motherhouse, Humboldt. Up until now Humboldt was not asked to be responsible for Cudworth. Rev. Casimir looked after everything. Once the hospital is constructed and there is a mortgage, then the hospital will assume the mortgage and they believe it can be done without help from Humboldt”. (Council minutes) Subsequently a loan of \$25,000 was taken
- June 1926** – Anton Stadelman of Englefeld is engaged as contractor for the Cudworth Hospital and volunteers are digging the basement. The hospital is ready for occupancy by early December. A four-bedroom isolation unit is later built near the hospital
- 1926** – Sisters Gertrudis Bergles, Seraphina Pfurtscheller, Marianna Schmidt, Elisabeth Lopinski, Benedicta Yungwirth, Antonia Bohl and Augustina Mainzer obtain nursing diplomas without having to write the provincial exams otherwise required. Dr. H.R. Fleming worked tirelessly to obtain this privilege for the Sisters who owe him a great debt of gratitude. After this no one could receive a nursing diploma without writing the provincial exams after three years of nurses training (Sr. Mary Elizabeth’s Diary)
- March 2, 1926** – Fr. Tharsicius Schmid celebrates his silver jubilee to the priesthood with the Sisters.
- July 25, 1926** – Fr. Schmid dies at St. Paul’s Hospital, Saskatoon. The Mass of Christian Burial takes place at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital on July 28, 1926. He is

interred in the Sisters' private cemetery in front of the Grotto which he helped build

**1926** – The contract for St. Joseph's Hospital in Macklin is awarded to the architect, Desrochers of Edmonton and construction begins. Dr. F.L. Eid, recruited from Germany, is very helpful in planning the new hospital

**1926** - Beatrice Woodcock and Alma Crackel are the first students to graduate from St. Elizabeth's Hospital School of Nursing

**December 9, 1926** – Sister superior informs the Sisters of the need for a new operating room table which will cost \$800. The old table will go to Cudworth

**December 12, 1926** – St. Michael's Hospital in Cudworth is officially opened. It has a bed capacity of 24. Because of the cold weather the patients cannot be moved until Dec. 16 and 17

**December 18, 1926** – A new sterilizer at the cost of \$1,827 is purchased for St. Elizabeth's Hospital

**1920s to 1930s** - Every year several candidates enter St. Elizabeth's Convent and receive the religious habit. They make their novitiate and, if suitable, make their profession of vows. During the 1920s the number of those entering increases so that some years there are as many as six or seven admitted to profession of vows. By 1930 there are about 50 or more Sisters in the congregation

**February 12, 1927** – "Since the \$25,000 was not enough to pay all the costs at Cudworth, we had to collect another \$5,000 from private individuals, for which sum the Ordinary was not notified. Therefore it all had to be done as soon as possible." (Council minutes)

In Humboldt: "Since there has been pressure of patients for some time especially men, we decided to use the Bishop's room for patients". (Council minutes)

**February 17, 1927** – The newly appointed Abbot Severin Gertkin, OSB, arrives at St. Peter's Abbey in Muenster

**May 12, 1927** – The new St. Joseph's Hospital in Macklin is opened with a bed capacity of 35

**May 27, 1927** – A new hot water tank is purchased for the laundry and novitiate. The cost is around \$1,300

**1927** – St. Joseph's Hospital in Macklin begins a training program for nurses

**1927** – An employee residence is built for St. Joseph's Hospital, Macklin

**November 27, 1927** – Humboldt town council offers to the Sisters an arrangement whereby they will charge only \$300 for water use if the Sisters use no more than \$500 worth

**1928** – Sr. Seraphina Pfurtscheller, is elected superior general for a three-year term, and is re-elected for another three-year term in 1931

- April 1928** – “Fr. Abbot was very unhappy that we were building a small wooden isolation house in Cudworth. The local superior at Cudworth explained to the Abbot that we would simply increase our debt and not be able to use the bigger house in a profitable way. He agreed to let us build a smaller one – a house with two rooms for patients, one room for the Sister and a kitchen” (Council minutes)
- May 10, 1928** – “This week the architect from Edmonton was here. We looked at a plan to renovate the Hospital in Humboldt. The entrance, the stairs and the washrooms and toilets in the old structure are to be renewed and made more serviceable. The cost is to be around \$10,000. There is also to be an addition to the hospital. The maternity department would be on the first floor and the chapel on the second floor along with a few rooms for the male patients. The chapel shall be two floors high. Then there shall be a section for the Sisters. The cost shall be around \$50,000. This was then submitted to the Abbot. However, he thought the size could be reduced to \$45,000 and \$10,000 for renovations. With that he gave us permission to take a loan of \$55,000 which Fr. Abbot himself will provide. However, he gave this permission with the condition that we would open a hospital at Watson in a few years when we had enough personnel” (Council minutes)
- August 1928** – An additional \$20,000 needs to be raised privately for St. Elizabeth’s Hospital expansion because it cannot be secured as a loan
- March 1929**– St. Elizabeth’s Hospital addition is completed, bringing the bed capacity to 48 but often there are 65 patients treated in the hospital at one time
- May 20, 1929** – “Because of the \$18,000 loan from Quebec the statue of St. Joseph will be turned toward the wall.” (It was a custom to have the statue face the wall until the money came through or for whatever other reason the Sisters were sending up urgent prayers)
- 1929** – Abbot Severin gives detailed instructions to the Sisters regarding silence, the time of recreation, novitiate, juniorate, constitutions and personally examines the candidates before investiture and profession. By order of Abbot Severin, the superiors of the other missions must belong to the central council with the superior general and her council
- 1929** – A new icehouse and a shop for carpentry and mechanics are built. The chicken coop is partially destroyed by fire
- 1930** – The Sisters have to borrow money from the bank due to the Depression
- 1930** – Count Berthold Von Imhoff offers to decorate St. Elizabeth’s Convent Chapel with paintings of saints. He completes the area of the sanctuary
- 1930** – The chicken coop is restored and a slaughter house is built
- 1931** – “Dr. H.R. Fleming offers a house to be used as an isolation house so that the

present isolation house can become an old folks home. He is asking for \$800, however he would be satisfied with a promissory note and that the Sisters could pay it off when it is possible to do so. He may even give it as a donation to the hospital. The house is available on August 10 at which time we need to pay \$150. The rest of the work entailed in preparing the house can be done by people who have been unable to pay their hospital bills. This way there will be little cost associated with the acquisition". (Council minutes)

**October 23, 1931** – Sr. Salesia Scheriau returns to Klagenfurt. She is accompanied by Sr. Philomena Jug who visits her family and returns to Saskatchewan in 1932

**June 1, 1932** – The Sisters withdraw from administering St. Francis Hospital in Scott

**October 1932** – Despite the Abbot's wishes that the temporary professed Sisters remain at the motherhouse for three years, the Sisters adopt a ruling whereby they return to the motherhouse for six months before perpetual vows

**November 1932** – The Sisters receive a copy of the Rule and Constitutions from Klagenfurt which had been approved by Pius XI in 1927. These are approved for use by the Sisters in Canada after Abbot Severin adapts it and insists that it be translated into English. He never accepts this translation and therefore the Sisters have to continue using old Klagenfurt constitutions of 1923

**April 15, 1934** – Sr. Philomena is elected superior general for a three-year term

**December 1935** – Bishop Henry Prud'homme, OMI, of Prince Albert Diocese asks the Sisters to take over the administration of St. John's Hospital in Rosthern, which had been administered by the Grey Nuns who are leaving. The Sisters consent to take charge on January 1, 1936

**1937** – Sr. Philomena becomes seriously ill and on April 15 Sr. Seraphina Pfurtscheller is elected superior general

Mr. Imhoff completes decorating the rest of the chapel at St. Elizabeth's Hospital. Mr. Knittig, Sr., donates \$500 toward the project. Mr. Imhoff dies in 1940. (Before the old building is demolished, the paintings are removed and mounted on frames and displayed in the Sisters' Museum at St. Elizabeth's Convent)

**October 1, 1938** – The Sisters withdraw from St. John's Hospital in Rosthern because they do not agree with some medical procedures taking place there

**1938** – The nursing program at Macklin is never approved. The students had begun their training in Macklin and completed it in Humboldt. The program is discontinued and the students from now on take three years at St. Elizabeth's Hospital School of Nursing

**1939** – 400 fruit trees are planted south of the hospital in Humboldt

Five Sisters leave in perpetual vows and two in temporary vows in the 1930s

**1940s** – Sisters attend the University of Toronto to upgrade their qualifications as instructors at the School of Nursing. Sisters Perpetua Haag, Hildegard Koenig, Loretta Bornowsky and Mary Clare Feltn receive certificates in teaching and supervision in nursing. Sr. Josephine Brost receives her degree as a dietician. Sr. Elizabeth Sonntag qualifies as a laboratory technician. Sr. Perpetua Haag takes another year at the University of Ottawa and receives her BSc in Nursing. Sr. Fidelis Deibert becomes qualified to teach elementary school and teaches in Lake Lenore from 1943-1945

Three Sisters in perpetual vows leave the congregation in the 1940s

**1946** – Sr. Clementina Possenig is elected superior general for three years. She is the last of the Klagenfurt Sisters to hold the office

**1947** – Following the Second World War, Theresia Roessler, as Sr. Maria Franziska, who is a refugee from Czechoslovakia and had been expelled in 1945 because of her German origin, joins the Sisters of St. Elizabeth in Vienna. After checking her credentials she is admitted to the Canadian congregation as a professed member on October 26, 1948

**1947** – Saskatchewan Hospital Services Plan is established

**1949** – From now on, the superior general, general, councillors, general treasurer and general secretary are elected by the Sisters at a General Chapter for a term of six years. The term is reduced to four years after Vatican Council II

**1949** – The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth's Hospital is legally incorporated by the Government of Canada

**April 5, 1949** – Sr. Florianne Kohlman is elected superior general. She is the first Canadian-born member elected. With her election the Congregation embarks on a course of major administrative and lifestyle changes. Rev. Michael Harding, OFM, a canonist, is engaged to help in this transition period. Fr. Harding encourages the Sisters to open missions in other dioceses. Up to this time the Abbot of St. Peter's Abbey had restricted the movement of the Sisters to the Abbey and the Diocese of Prince Albert

### **1949 – 1952 Activities of the Congregation**

Superior General: Sr. Florianne

Members: 97 perpetually professed Sisters; 3 temporary professed; 5 novices; 5 postulants; 2 deaths

Houses Opened since 1949:

- Mount St. Francis Retreat, Cochrane, Alta. June 1950 to serve during summer months. In 1952 the Sisters begin serving there all year around
- St. Anthony's College, Edmonton, Alta. Sept. 1950 for the school year
- St. Thomas College, North Battleford, Sask. Oct. 1951

#### Successes Obtained in the Works of the Congregation:

- December 22, 1949 – The Choir Sisters present a petition to the Sacred Congregation in Rome requesting permission from the congregation to eliminate the practice of having two classes of Sisters – Choir and Lay. All Sisters are then classified as Choir Sisters. In 1950 this request is granted by the Sacred Congregation, and a sanction is granted to the Lay Sisters to become Choir Sisters
- The congregation is legally aggregated with the Order of Friars Minor in 1951 – all share in indulgences granted by the Pope to the Order of Friars Minor
- The constitutions of the congregation are revised and rewritten in English
- Approval of the revised constitutions is obtained from all local Ordinaries (Calgary, Prince Albert, Saskatoon, Edmonton, and the Abbacy) by 1952. The constitutions are sent to Rome for definitive approval but take effect immediately for the Sisters of the congregation
- First Quinquennial report sent to the Holy See at the end of 1952 as a preliminary step to obtaining Pontifical Rite status as opposed to Diocesan Status
- German is replaced with more English especially for prayer since candidates are not all of German origin or are not able to read or speak German. Work begins on a new manual of prayers for the Congregation
- The Congregation sponsors refugees from Europe

#### Lifestyle and community custom changes:

- A dowry is required from candidates
- Home visits are allowed once every six years; once a lifetime for overseas; also for ordination of a brother, golden jubilee of parents, and other exceptions as decided by the general council

### **1952 – 1955 Activities of the Congregation**

Superior General: Sr. Florianne

Members: 96 perpetually professed; 8 temporary professed; 4 novices; 1 death; 1 left at the expiration of temporary vows

Houses Opened since 1952:

- St. Ann's Home, Saskatoon, Sask. Aug. 1953

#### Successes Obtained in the Works of the Congregation:

- On May 23, 1954 the congregation receives the Degree of Praise from Rome approving the revised constitutions. Each Sister receives a copy either in English or German
- July 12, 1954 – The community adopts English prayers while retaining some Latin until the 1960s. The Latin Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Breviary is adopted

- The congregation becomes an Institute of Pontifical Rite – March 1953
- Construction on the new St. Elizabeth's Hospital begins in May 1953 to be completed in May 1955
- A home visit "travelling fund" is set up
- Intensive study of the new Constitutions takes place
- 1954 – Sr. Immaculata Saretzky is appointed as the first local superior of the motherhouse in Humboldt. Up to this time the superior general had been the only superior at St. Elizabeth's Convent. She also had been the administrator of the hospital until 1955.

### **1955 – 1957 Activities of the Congregation**

Superior General: Sr. Annunciata

Members: 100 perpetually professed; 7 temporary professed; 4 novices

Houses Opened since 1955:

- The old St. Elizabeth's Hospital becomes St. Elizabeth's Convent in August 1955 when the new hospital is opened

Other:

- The custom book of the congregation is revised

### **1957 – 1963 Activities of the Congregation**

Superior General: Sr. Perpetua

Members: 107 perpetually professed; 4 temporary professed; 8 novices

Houses Opened since 1957:

- King Street Residence for nursing students in Saskatoon 1957
- St. Mary's Villa, Humboldt – Sisters serve in all capacities from 1962-1985 and continue as pastoral visitors to the present - 2011

Successes Obtained in the Works of the Congregation:

- Cardinal Protector is named for the congregation to give advice, defend against litigation, help in time of need
- Separate acts of incorporation for the Sisters' three hospitals and for the congregation are obtained from the Saskatchewan Government 1961

Lifestyle and community custom changes:

- White habits are permitted to be worn for work
- Local superiors have not found it possible to give the Sisters a day off
- Tertianships for those 10 years professed are introduced. This is a week of renewal with a Franciscan Friar giving talks. In contrast to a retreat, the Sisters can engage in conversation. At times there are close to 30 Sisters attending at one time
- Sisters from overseas are allowed home visits every 10 years for six weeks

- Others may visit their families every six years for 10 days rather than seven days
- Relatives are not expected to pay travel expenses as previously
- Visits are allowed if a brother or sister is seriously ill
- Teaching in schools is permitted when and if Sisters become available and trained for this profession

### **1963 – 1969 Activities of the Congregation**

Superior General: Sr. Florianne

Members: 104 perpetually professed; 6 temporary professed; 1 novice; 4 deaths; 1 leaves in temporary vows; 3 leaves at the expiration of temporary vows and 4 leave in perpetual vows

Houses Opened since 1963:

- St. Michael's Retreat House, Lumsden 1963
- St. Mary's Villa, Humboldt 1963
- Holy Infant Hospital, Hoven, South Dakota 1964
- Nelson house of studies, Nelson B.C. 1965-1967
- Brazil missions, Maceio 1968
- Elliot Street Residence for Temporary Professed Sisters in Saskatoon 1967-1968
- 901 University Drive house of studies, Saskatoon 1968

Houses Closed:

- King Street Residence, Saskatoon 1966
- Nelson house of studies, Nelson 1967
- St. Thomas College, North Battleford
- St. Anthony's College, Edmonton

Formal Studies:

- Winona, Minn. 2 years – one Sister
- St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia 2 years – two Sisters
- University of Sask. – one Sister
- Teachers' College – one Sister
- SIAST food supervisor – one Sister
- Divine Word Centre for missionary training – two Sisters
- Allegany, New York – one Sister
- University of Sask. Nursing – four Sisters
- Providence Hospital Moose Jaw Nursing 3 years – one Sister
- SIAST Grades 11-12 – one Sister
- Humboldt Collegiate – Grade 12 – four Sisters
- St. Elizabeth's Convent – Upgrading with Sr. Emily part time – eight Sisters



- High School correspondence courses – one or more subjects – eight or nine Sisters
- Correspondence Courses – Hospital Administration – five Sisters

#### Renewal Activities:

- Tertianships – two summer sessions
- Catholic Centre, Saskatoon – three weekly sessions each a year long with Fr. J. Bisztyo
- Community study groups of Vatican II documents weekly sessions and one series of five weekly sessions
- Recruitment workshops with young women – one each year
- Extensive and intensive Studies on Renewal and Adaptation in preparation for the special chapter of 1968

#### Lifestyle and community custom changes:

- Wearing of mantles optional – coats introduced
- No more lowering of veils in chapel
- Wearing of Franciscan rosary optional
- Letters to be received and sent out unopened
- Wednesday and Saturday abstinences abolished
- More liberal use of TV and radio
- Religious garb is changed in 1968
- Monthly House meetings are introduced

#### New Ministries:

- Sr. Viola teaches at St. Michael's School 1964-1966. Sr. Emily and Sr. Viola teach in Humboldt 1966-1968 and in La Loche and Patuanak, Sask. 1968-1971
- Juniorate program introduced in Nelson – eight Sisters 1965-1967
- Sr. Marcella Haag and Sr. Dolores Jansen begin mission work in Maceio, Brazil as part of St. Peter's Abbey Mission Project 1968. Sr. Sida Hrbachek joins them from 1974-1976

#### Construction and new buildings:

- New St. Michael's Hospital opened
- Summer Cottage at Maryville, outside Saskatoon
- Blessing of site for an addition to St. Elizabeth's Hospital
- Plans for new motherhouse completed and construction begins

#### Houses and land closed/sold:

- Convent farms discontinued at Cudworth, Macklin and Humboldt 1967
- Land sales of property in Humboldt, Macklin and Cudworth

#### 1968 Special Chapter of Affairs:

- Each Sister participates in one of nine study commissions set up to study all

- aspects of religious life – its spiritual and temporal welfare – in preparation for rewriting the Constitutions and renewing the religious spirit of the congregation
- Public Image survey is conducted with 500 questionnaires and Public Image Panel
- New experimental constitutions are drawn up
- Divine Office in English replaces the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin

### **1969 – 1973 Activities of the Congregation**

Superior General: Sr. Clothilde

Members: 94 perpetually professed; 5 in perpetual vows leave; 7 deaths

Houses Opened:

- 942 Saskatchewan Drive Residence, Saskatoon 1972

Houses Closed:

- Hoven, South Dakota – Holy Infant Hospital 1969
- St. Charles Scholasticate, Battleford – after the Sisters who work there are involved in a fatal car crash
- St. Elizabeth's Hospital School of Nursing is closed. The nurses' residence becomes St. Francis Convent
- 901 University Drive Residence, Saskatoon 1972

New Ministries:

- Sr. Patricia Trainor, accompanied by Sr. Delphine Berschiminsky, does Public Health nursing in Kamsack and Sandy Bay, Sask. 1970-1975
- Sr. Hedwig on teaching staff of Centralized Teaching program for Nursing students in Saskatoon
- Sr. Philomena teaches Home Economics at Humboldt Collegiate 1969-1971
- Sr. Hildegard serves as matron of Northland Pioneer Lodge in Meadow Lake, Sask. This is the first time a Sister is sent on mission on her own
- Pastoral Care St. Elizabeth's Hospital 1971-2005

Other:

- The Sisters move into the new motherhouse
- The first lay person is hired at the motherhouse
- The dining area is shared with lay staff for the first time
- First lay administrator of St. Elizabeth's Hospital is hired
- About 25 Sisters make a 30-day retreat in Lumsden

## 1973 – 1977 Activities of the Congregation

Superior General: Sr. Clothilde

Members: 89 perpetually professed; 5 deaths; 1 in perpetual vows and 1 in temporary vows leave

Houses opened:

- The Generalate is transferred from the motherhouse to 1020 College Drive, Saskatoon 1973
- Ogilvie Residence for Handicapped, Humboldt 1974. Residents moved to Alverna Home in 1980
- Rental house in St. Albert, Alta. for OSE students at Newman Theological College
- New St. Francis Convent
- Sr. Sida Hrbachek serves in the Maceio, Brazil mission for two years
- Sr. Marcella Haag and Sr. Immaculata Saretzky serve in the missions in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil

Houses/land sold:

- Elliott Street house, Saskatoon
- 12 lots sold in Cudworth

New Ministries:

- Dietary Consultant for Saskatchewan Hospital Association 1973-1977
- Director of Religious Education in St. Peter's Abbacy 1973-1978
- Sr. Joan Baron is Humboldt and District Community Services Co-coordinator – later this is called the Provincial Home Care Plan
- Sr. Frances Schnurr homemaker for Family Services Bureau in Saskatoon 1973-1976
- Sr. Justina Wirachowsky and Sr. Cecilia Klassen provide Home Care services in Humboldt 1973-1982
- Service to the Handicapped in Humboldt
- Mission service in Salvador, Brazil 1976 and Shisong, Cameroon
- Pastoral care and pastoral visiting
- Sr. Annie Reineke teaching elementary school in Lloydminster, Coderre, and Swift Current, Sask. 1973-1980
- Pastoral Care in City Hospital, Saskatoon

Renewal/studies:

- 25 Sisters over a period of five years for a year in theological studies or personal renewal
- 6 Sisters at a renewal program in Ottawa
- Pre-retirement institute - one Sister

- 10 local superiors at a workshop in Ontario
- Workshop on discernment - five Sisters

Other:

- Debt written off for Hoven Hospital – \$75,221
- New Liturgy of the Hours with Franciscan supplement introduced
- ARCC Abbacy Religious Collaboration Committee begun for the Religious in the Abbacy
- New method of accounting introduced
- The book *Servant of Love* – about the foundress of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth, Mother Apollonia Radermecher, printed and made available to each Sister
- New vocational literature printed *Our Franciscan Life* booklet

### 1977 – 1981 Activities of the Congregation

Superior General: Sr. Eleonore

Members: 80 perpetually professed; 8 deaths; 1 perpetually professed left

Houses Opened:

- 10 bed infirmary added to the motherhouse 1976
- New chapel, library and guest suite added to motherhouse 1976
- 1325 East Center Residence, Saskatoon

Houses Closed:

- 942 Saskatchewan Crescent 1978

Ministries:

- Sr. Viola Bens teaches at Newman Theological College one year 1978-1979
- Sr. Marie Therese Belak nursing at St. Martin's Hospital, Demarais, Alta. 1977-1980
- Sr. Philomena Dobmeier is administrator of St. Joseph's Hospital, Ile-a-la-Crosse, Sask. 1977-1985
- Sr. Sida Hrbachek nursing in St. Martin's Hospital, La Loche, Sask 1977-1985
- Regional Director of Religious Education Keewatin Diocese, Ile-a-la-Crosse, Sask. 1979-1984
- Sr. Patricia Trainor does marriage tribunal work in Vancouver and Kamloops, B.C. 1979-1985
- Sr. Ann Brost does volunteer work at Friendship Inn, Saskatoon
- Sponsoring a family of refugees from Vietnam
- Sr. Philomena hired as administrator of St. Joseph's Hospital, Ile-a-la-Crosse, and St. Martin's, La Loche on behalf of the Saskatchewan Catholic Health Council of Saskatchewan 1977-1985. Sr. Imelda Gartner works in St. Joseph's Hospital medical records 1977-1980

### **1981– 1985 Activities of the Congregation**

Superior General: Sr. Eleonore

Members: 79 perpetually professed; 2 novices; 1 death; 1 perpetually professed leaves;

Houses Opened:

- Alverna Home for Handicapped Women 1980
- Massage Clinic Humboldt 1981
- The Generalate moves to 1715-20th St. Saskatoon 1982
- 3055 Bank Road Kamloops in 1982
- 715-14th Street Humboldt – St. Clare’s Convent for Formation in 1983

Houses Closed:

- St. Michael’s Retreat House, Lumsden 1982
- Maceio, Brazil Mission 1982

Houses and land Closed/sold:

- Mobile home in Ile-a-la-Crosse
- 1020 College Drive Saskatoon

Other:

- First time meeting of bishops and major superiors of Saskatchewan 1982
- New constitutions, after several years of experimentation, edited and sent to Rome
- Ongoing professional services provided for spiritual and personal renewal
- Boston College Master’s degree in Education summer program 1979-1985 – 1 sister
- Centralized accounting procedures instituted for the Congregation
- Sr. Delphine Berschiminisky begins working as a remedial massage therapist 1980-present (2011)
- The Sisters help re-establish the Secular Franciscan Order in Humboldt
- Victorian Order of Nurses activity program at the Motherhouse begins in April 1984
- Parish ministry in Edmonton and Bow Island, Alta. and Fernie, B.C. 1982-1985

### **1985 – 1989 Activities of the Congregation**

Superior General: Sr. Viola

Members: 75 perpetually professed; 2 temporary professed; 1 novice; 1 exclaustation; 5 deaths

Houses Closed:

- Kamloops

Houses and land Closed/sold:

- Massage Therapy Clinic (transferred to the motherhouse)

Other:

- Hired lay staff in kitchen, infirmary, maintenance at St. Elizabeth's Convent
- First actuarial study of the congregation done in 1987 in order to set up a pension plan for those under the age of 65 and retirement plan for those over 65. The pension plan is later cancelled
- Sr. Delores Wolfe provides retreats and spiritual direction at the New Jerusalem Centre in Saskatoon 1989-1992
- A process of long-term planning is undertaken in 1987 with Marge Denis as consultant
- Sr. Eleonore Hanus works as an auditor of the Saskatoon Marriage Tribunal 1987-1997
- Sr. Caroline Sieben is pastoral visitor at Royal University Hospital 1986-2004
- Sr. Eileen Kirtzinger does nursing service with the Victorian Order of Nurses
- Survey of the Sisters' three hospitals is done with the help of the sociology dept. at the U. of S.
- Continue to offer programs of personal growth and renewal, more open communication and leadership
- Many Sisters attend courses and programs in pastoral care ministry and seven Sisters are enrolled in universities and Newman Theological College
- Many Sisters attend other upgrading classes in music, computer, communications
- Efforts to offer programs to hospital staff re: our mission and charism
- Celebration of the 75th anniversary of the congregation – two Sisters from Aachen, Germany visit Canada for the first time

New ministries:

- Sponsor refugees from Thailand in 1986 and 1989
- Teach English to immigrants in Saskatoon through the Open Door Society 1986-2000
- Marriage Tribunal work in Regina and Saskatoon 1985-1997
- Sr. Sida Hrbachek serves as psychiatric nurse St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto
- Sr. Dianne Turner teaches biology at St. Peter's College, Muenster 1986-1988
- Sr. Genevieve Falk serves as a housekeeper for one of the Benedictine priests who was in a wheelchair 1991-1995
- Sr. Philomena Dobmeier is appointed Health Care Coordinator to coordinate services between the three hospitals and to provide mission education to the boards and staff of these hospitals

### **1989 – 1993 Activities of the Congregation**

Superior General: Sr. Angela

Members: 67 perpetually professed; 6 deaths; 1 perpetually professed and 1 temporary professed left

Houses Opened:

- 1038-14th St. Humboldt and named St. Clare's Convent

Houses Closed:

- The former St. Clare's Convent 714-14th St. becomes a rental property
- St. Scholastica Convent Muenster 1990
- Brazil Mission in Salvador 1991
- 1325 East Centre, Saskatoon 1992
- Alverna Home 1990

Houses/land sold:

- Alverna Home 1992
- 1325 East Centre, Saskatoon 1992

Other:

- On-going formal and informal education and spiritual renewal programs attended by many Sisters
- Sr. Joan works as a social worker with Catholic Family Services in Prince Albert, Sask.
- Formal Formation program set aside
- One Sister on sabbatical at the Institute of Spiritual Leadership, Chicago
- Retreat and spiritual direction ministry Providence Renewal Centre 1991-1997
- One sister works with the Nightingale Nursing Group as a CNA
- Sr. Philomena is appointed executive director of Catholic Health Council of Saskatchewan to oversee St. Martin's Hospital in La Loche and St. Joseph's Hospital in Ile-a-la-Crosse 1990
- Lay person is appointed as health care coordinator for our three hospitals

### **1993 – 1997 Activities of the Congregation**

Superior General: Sr. Philomena

Members: 58 perpetually professed; 8 deaths; 1 perpetually professed left

Houses Opened:

- Manitou Resort in exchange for Maryville resort in Saskatoon which is closed by diocese
- St. Clare's Convent 714-14th St. reopens for three Sisters 1997
- Generalate moves to 1038-14th St. Humboldt 1997
- Franciscan Forest Sanctuary Retreat, Christopher Lake, Sask. 1997

Houses Closed:

- Sisters' residence St. Michael's Hospital, Cudworth 1993

Other:

- Sponsoring Vietnamese refugees 1994
- Sr. Sida Hrbachek employed at St. Joseph's Hospital in Ile-a-la-Crosse 1993-2001
- Elizabethan Health Services with a lay administrator set up in 1995 to bring the Sisters' three hospitals under one umbrella, to provide administrative and other services and to develop much needed facilities for Assisted Living in Cudworth, Kerrobert, LeRoy and Macklin
- Retreats, spiritual direction and counseling services are provided at the Sanctuary, Christopher Lake 1997-2006
- Parish ministry, Macklin 1996-present; Christopher Lake 1997-2006
- Centralized banking for the Congregation set up
- St. Joseph's Hospital closed by the government 1993 but the people of Macklin and the Sisters build a new St. Joseph's, an integrated health facility for respite, long-term, emergency and palliative care 1996

### **1997 – 2001 Activities of the Congregation**

Superior General: Sr. Philomena

Members: 50 perpetually professed; 1 novice; 8 deaths

Houses Opened:

- 10 Connaught Place Residence, Saskatoon, rented 1997-2004

Houses Closed:

- St. Michael's Hospital closed by government 1998 – reopened as St. Michael's Haven 1999
- St. Elizabeth's Hospital ownership transferred to Saskatchewan Catholic Health Corp. 2000
- Sisters withdrawn from Mount St. Francis, Cochrane, are reassigned to Saskatoon to do voluntary services and pastoral ministry in hospitals
- Between 1969 and 2001 nine Sisters work at various times and places in northern Saskatchewan in La Loche, Patuanak, Sandy Bay, Ile-a-la-Crosse, as nurses, teachers, catechists, hospital administrators, hospital office staff, public health nurses and companions in community

Property/ Houses sold:

- 1715-20 St. W. Saskatoon 1997

Other:

- Formation program reopens with three candidates at Macklin
- Host and participate in RCIA parish program, Macklin



- Sr. Viola is accredited in St. Paul, Minn. to teach T'ai Chi Chih 1998
- Contracted services from EHS to St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Living Sky Health District, Lanigan and St. Joseph's Health Facility, Macklin, are established in 1996 and discontinued in 2000
- Sr. Dianne Turner teaches school in Calgary at Our Lady of the Assumption, St. Francis High, and St. Mary's High 1989 – present 2011
- EHS Care Inc. created in 1998 to operate rehabilitation clinics in Humboldt and Lloydminster – terminated in 2000
- Process of revision of constitutions begins

### **2001 – 2005 Activities of the Congregation**

Superior General: Sr. Viola

Members: 38 perpetually professed; 14 deaths; 1 temporary professed leaves the Congregation

Houses Closed:

- St. Clare's Convent, Humboldt 2003
- Rental house in Saskatoon 2004

Sale of Property/houses:

- Manitou Cottage
- St. Clare's Convent
- Lot # 5 in Cudworth

Other:

- Sr. Clara makes temporary vows in 2002
- Revision of constitutions is prepared for Rome/approval received
- World Youth Day attended by Sr. Dianne Turner and Sr. Clara Plamondon
- Lawsuit by Humboldt Credit Union re: EHS launched in 2002 and withdrawn in 2006
- Continental conference on vocations attended by Sr. Dianne
- Three Sisters on sabbatical – one year Winnipeg; four months in Europe; one year Newman Theological College Masters of Divinity degree program
- Leadership formation workshops November – June attended by three Sisters
- Course on Canon Law for Religious attended by Sr. Viola Bens – three summer school classes
- Actuarial study prepared by Sr. Celia Turcotte, GSIC
- Several garage sales held at the motherhouse
- Lay administrator for staff at St. Elizabeth's Convent is hired
- Assessment of all properties done by realtors
- New bylaws written for the Congregation

- Lay couple from Melfort volunteer a year's service to the Franciscan Forest Sanctuary and live in
- Map of cemetery created and information of deceased Sisters placed on data base
- Offices of general administration moved back to motherhouse 2005

### **2005 – 2010 Activities of the Congregation**

Superior General: Sr. Eleonore (one year and then resigned); Sr. Bernarda

Members: 30 perpetually professed; 8 deaths

Houses Closed:

- Franciscan Forest Sanctuary, Christopher Lake 2006
- 1038-14th Street Humboldt 2007
- St. Michael's Haven transferred to the town of Cudworth and RM of Hoodoo 2009

Sale of Property/houses:

- Franciscan Forest Sanctuary
- 1038-14th Street Humboldt

Other:

- Some government funding obtained for non-professional infirmary staff
- Begin the process to transfer St. Joseph's Health Facility, Macklin, to Saskatchewan Catholic Health Ministries
- Call system installed in St. Francis Wing for at-risk Sisters
- Process of writing OSE history begins with the hiring of three lay committee members to work with three Sister committee members 2007
- School mentoring program with Big Brothers Big Sisters and volunteering with Partners for Rural Family Support in Humboldt one Sister 2006-2010
- Sr. Viola serves as spiritual director at Queen's House of Retreats 2006-present (2011)
- Waldsea Lake cabin destroyed in the flood of 2007
- Employee benefits expanded
- St. Elizabeth's Hospital becomes a public facility 2007
- From the 1960s to the present (2011) a number of Sisters serve as spiritual assistant to the Secular Franciscans in Humboldt and Saskatoon
- From 1911 to the present 2011 Sisters have engaged in informal and formal pastoral care in all our hospitals and nursing homes
- Domestic and administrative services to the community are ongoing from 1911 to the present (2011)

## Appendix II

# All who entered the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis of Assisi

<u>Baptismal Name</u>	<u>Religious Name</u>	<u>Years at St. Elizabeth Convent</u>
*Aloisia Wilhelm	Mother Maria Pulcheria	1913-1916
*Regina Grutschnig	Sr. Maria Margaretha	1922-1945
*Marie Platzer	Sr. Maria Augustina	1911-1916
*Maria Swetlin	Sr. Maria Walburga	1913-1932
*Anna Weiss	Sr. Maria Euphrasia	1912-1935
#Anna Ratz	Sr. Maria Martina	1922-1923
*Eva Loibnegger	Sr. Maria Agatha	1912-1950
*Anna Jug	Sr. Maria Philomena	1911-1943
*Elizabeth Niederwieser	Sr. Maria Ottilia	1922-1929
*Anna Lex	Sr. Maria Gabriela	1911-1952
*Maria Premru	Sr. Maria Elisabeth	1920-1962
*Anna Karnicar	Sr. Maria Helena	1912-1963
*Johanna Drexler	Sr. Maria Christina	1920-1948
*Theresia Schober	Sr. Maria Jacoba	1922-1940
#Angela Scheriau	Sr. Maria Salesia	1912-1931
*Anna Brunner	Sr. Maria Rosalia	1920-1963
*Elisabeth Motschilnig	Sr. Maria Xaveria	1912-1943
*Rosa Possenig	Sr. Maria Clementina (Clementine)	1912-1973
*Juliana Bergles	Sr. Maria Gertrudis	1912-1935
*Mathilde Jantschge	Sr. Maria Alexia	1920-1974
*Mathilde Pfurtscheller	Sr. Maria Seraphina	1913-1974
*Agnes Schmidt	Sr. Maria Anna (Marianne)	1912-1979
-Helena Radamsky	Sr. Maria Celestina	1913-1919
-Eva Radamsky	Sr. Maria Franziska	1914-1918
#Maria Spath	Sr. Maria Seraphina (Bonaventure)	1922-1923
*Rosa Lopinski	Sr. Maria Elizabeth	1915-1980
*Theresia Yungwirth	Sr. Maria Benedicta	1915-1980
-Agnes Heisler	Sr. Maria Aloisia	1915-1935
*Anna Sieben	Sr. Maria Theodora (Theodore)	1915-1964

*Magdalena Senger	Sr. Maria Hyacintha	1916-1978
*Theresia Poth	Sr. Maria Pulcheria	1916-1970
*Anna Esenko	Sr. Maria Philomena (Maria)	1922-1990
-Theresia Senger	Sr. Maria Josepha	1917-1932
*Kunigunde Schneider	Sr. Maria Alphonsa	1919-1965
*Maria Bohl	Sr. Maria Antonia	1919-1980
@Maria Christofl	Sr. Maria Margaretha	1920-1922
*Maria Catharina Mainzer	Sr. Maria Augustina (Augustine)	1920-1974
*Anna Schmidt	Sr. Maria Franziska	1920-1952
*Rosina Luschen	Sr. Maria Clara	1920-1979
@Elisabeth Ehl	Sr. Maria Barbara	1921-1923
*Jacobina Fisher	Sr. Maria Theresia (Teresa)	1922-1973
-Theresia Schlegl	Sr. Maria Pia	1922-1929
*Regina Haensgen	Sr. Maria Catharina (Catharine)	1923-1938
*Maria Walter	Sr. Maria Magdalena (Magdalene)	1924-1995
*Anna Maria Wald	Sr. Maria Bernadette	1924-1994
*Katharina Schachtel	Sr. Maria Agnes	1925-1998
-Helena Heisler	Sr. Maria Cecilia	1924-1933
-Anastasia Koenig	Sr. Maria Dominika	1924-1935
*Maria Kohlman	Sr. Maria Florianna (Florianne)	1924-1998
*Maria Kratschmer	Sr. Maria Angelina (Angeline)	1925-1977
*Barbara Fleischmann	Sr. Maria Martha	1926-1999
@Julia Kovach	Sr. Maria Veronika	1926-1927
*Maria Eva Stroh	Sr. Maria Lazarina	1926-1980
*Barbara Rolheiser	Sr. Maria Zita	1926-1969
*Franziska Huber	Sr. Maria Johanna	1927-1997
*Susana Adrian	Sr. Maria Rita	1927-
*Katharina Senger	Sr. Maria Wendelina (Wendeline)	1926-2002
*Elizabeth Hauk	Sr. Maria Dolorosa (Dolores)	1927-1991
-Barbara Kohlman	Sr. Maria Anastasia	1927-1933
*Maria Haag	Sr. Maria Perpetua	1926-1980
*Wilhelmina Koenig	Sr. Maria Hildegard	1926-2004
-Barbara Koenig	Sr. Maria Celine	1926-1942
*Bernardine Zoller	Sr. Maria Isabella (Isabelle)	1928-1993
*Katharina Prediger	Sr. Maria Ambrosia	1928-1987
*Paulina Schmidt	Sr. Maria Veronika (Veronica)	1928-1996
*Anna Brost	Sr. Maria Stefanie	1928-1945
*Anna Hofer	Sr. Maria Barbara	1928-1976
-Maria Katharina Sitter	Sr. Maria Mechtildis	1929-1930

*Anna Kloppenburg	Sr. Maria Rosa (Rose)	1928-1995
*Anna Brost	Sr. Maria Leopoldina (Anne)	1929-2003
*Bernadette Gramlich	Sr. Maria Martina	1929-1992
@Anna Oelkuch	Sr. Maria Laurentia	1929-1930
*Justina Stang	Sr. Maria Lucia (Lucy)	1929-1997
*Paulina Gartner	Sr. Maria Tecla	1929-1996
*Amalia Sieben	Sr. Maria Apollonia (Amelia)	1929-1985
*Maria Sperling	Sr. Maria Monica	1929-1997
*Franziska Wagner	Sr. Maria Ludmilla	1929-1984
-Rosa Schmidt	Sr. Maria Camilla	1927-1933
-Brigitta Haag	Sr. Maria Felicitas	1929-1942
*Mathilda Jocham	Sr. Maria Crescentia	1931-2002
*Emma Kloppenburg	Sr. Maria Coletta (Colette)	1931-1992
*Gertrud Twordik	Sr. Maria Scholastika (Gertrude Marie)	1930-
*Margaret Prediger	Sr. Maria Eleonora (Margaret Marie)	1928-
*Bertha Bornowsky	Sr. Maria Loretta	1928-
*Mathilde Haag	Sr. Maria Marcella	1930-
*Mary Feltn	Sr. Maria Annunciata	1932-1988
-Agnes Brickner	Sr. Maria Eugenia	1931-1940
*Catharina Koenig	Sr. Maria Armella	1931-1937
*Paulina Anna Brost	Sr. Maria Josephine	1931-1997
*Catharina Gartner	Sr. Maria Imelda	1932-
*Anna Maria Volk	Sr. Maria Celestina (Celestine)	1932-1970
*Angelina Deibert	Sr. Maria Fidelis	1932-2005
*Elizabeth Saretzky	Sr. Maria Immaculata	1933-2009
*Elizabeth Sonntag	Sr. Maria Hedwig (Elizabeth)	1931-2005
*Monica Klassen	Sr. Maria Cecilia	1933-2003
@Katharina Stang	Sr. Maria Justina	1934-1937
*Angela Stang	Sr. Maria Rufina (Angela)	1934-2010
*Maria Sitter	Sr. Maria Irene (Mary Irene)	1935-
*Olga Sahadyk	Sr. Maria Melania	1935-1966
-Helena Markus	Sr. Maria Fridolina	1935-1940
-Anne Ollenberger	Sr. Maria Severina	1935-1940
*Apollonia Baugarten	Sr. Maria Adolphina (Leonie)	1935-2003
-Apollonia Gertrud Stepan	Sr. Maria Armella	1936-1941
*Elizabeth Boser	Sr. Maria Gertrudis (Gertrude)	1936-
*Josephine Brodner	Sr. Maria Walburga	1936-
*Maria Gallinger	Sr. Maria Aloysia	1936-1997
*Elizabeth Saretsky	Sr. Maria Ottilia	1936-

*Anna Elizabeth Zunti	Sr. Maria Salesia	1937-1999
*Maria Walaska	Sr. Maria Callista	1937-2010
*Anna Hepp	Sr. Maria Laurentia	1937-1948
@Emma Bornowski	Sr. Maria Leonie	1937-1939
@Eva Birn	Sr. Maria Katharina	1938-1940
*Alovina Thacyk	Sr. Maria Paulina (Pauline)	1938-2009
*Elizabeth Bermel	Sr. Maria Hemma	1938-1973
*Anna Klotz	Sr. Maria Emilia (Emilie)	1938-1972
-Philipine Kosolofski	Sr. Maria Catharina (Catharine)	1938-1978
@Clara Zunti	Sr. Maria Leonie	1940-1942
*Annie Reineke	Sr. Maria Raphaela (Annie)	1941-2008
*Elizabeth Christine Hepp	Sr. Maria Edwina	1941-
*Anna Gallinger	Sr. Maria Bernarda	1941-
*Elizabeth Baier	Sr. Maria Benigna	1942-2002
*Maria Scheiber	Sr. Maria Valeria (Valerie)	1943-
*Appolonia Koenig	Sr. Maria Victoria	1943-2004
*Regina Berschiminsky	Sr. Maria Delphina (Delphine)	1944-
*Margaret Gartner	Sr. Maria Klotilde (Clothilde)	1944-
*Catharina Schaan	Sr. Maria Philippina (Catharina)	1944-2004
*Franziska Schnurr	Sr. Maria Margaret (Frances)	1944-
*Emilie Sieben	Sr. Maria Carolina (Caroline)	1944-
*Kathleen Trainor	Sr. Maria Patricia	1944-1988
*Josefa Lange	Sr. Anna Maria (Anne Marie)	1945-2007
@Anna Kalika	Sr. Maria Ludovika	1945-1947
*Veronika Gallinger	Sr. Maria Juliana (Julianne)	1946-2006
*Cecilia Dobmeier	Sr. Maria Regina	1946-
-Maria Dobmeier	Sr. Maria Ancilla	1946-1967
*Helen Kirchner	Sr. Maria Notburga (Helen)	1946-
-Maria Belak	Sr. Maria Stephana (Marie Therese)	1947-1969
-Viola Hauer	Sr. Maria Romana	1947-1969
*Evelyn Catherine Kirtzinger	Sr. Maria Tharcisia (Evelyn)	1947-1989
*Maria Pfefferle	Sr. Maria Canisia	1947-2007
*Theresia Roessler	Sr. Maria Franziska (Frances)	1951-1971
*Anna Maria Schell	Sr. Maria Adela (Adele)	1948-2005
@Angela Davis	Sr. Maria Stella	1948-1950
-Mary Schnurr	Sr. Mary Carmelita	1949-1967
*Eleonore Hanus	Sr. Mary Loyola (Eleonore)	1949-
-Elizabeth Koenig	Sr. Mary Louise	1949-1954
*Theresa Novecosky	Sr. Mary Leonardine (Theresa)	1950-

*Marie Rolheiser	Sr. Mary Donata	1951-
@Frances Dobmeier	Sr. Mary Bonaventure	1951-1953
*Josephine Dobmeier	Sr. Mary Philomena	1951-
*Hilda Falk	Sr. Mary Genevieve	1952-1995
-Veronica Dobmeier	Sr. Mary Celine	1953-1970
-Ruth Ann Goetz	Sr. Mary Lorraine	1953-1973
*Helen Winters	Sr. Mary Clarissa	1953-
*Dolores Jansen	Sr. Mary Petronilla (Dolores)	1953-1991
*Justina Ann Wirachowsky	Sr. Mary Jacinta (Justina)	1954-
*Hildegard Mary Bens	Sr. Mary Viola	1954-
-Angeline Kirtzinger	Sr. Mary Eileen	1955-1996
-Elvira Stang	Sr. Mary Louise	1956-1963
-Helen Lowe	Sr. Mary Bernadine	1956-1963
-Annie Van Langen	Sr. Mary Dorothy	1956-1973
*Louise Krupka	Sr. Mary Paschal (Louise)	1957-
-Friedel Kast	Sr. Mary Praxedis	1958-1968
-Dolores Stang	Sr. Mary Henrietta	1958-1971
-Norma Bens	Sr. John Marie	1959-1970
-Marie Hahn	Sr. Paul Marie	1960-1967
-Emily Greter	Sr. Mary James (Emily)	1960-1982
-Doreen Braunagel	Sr. Maria Goretti	1960-1966
*Sidonia Hrbachek	Sr. Mary Pius (Sida)	1961-
- Pauline De Souza	Sr. Mary Winifred	1961-1964
-Delores Wolfe	Sr. Mary Gerard (Delores)	1962-1992
*Joan Baron	Sr. Mary Fabian (Joan)	1962-2003
-Frances O'Lesky	Sr. Mary Michael (Frances)	1962-1973
-Geraldine Schimnosky	Sr. Mary Mildred	1963-1968
-Marie Ann Zimmerman	Sr. Mary Christine (Marie Ann)	1964-1980
@Donelda Teiber	Sr. Mary Damian	1965-1968
@Faith Litz	Sr. Mary Beatrice	1965-1968
@Celine Nolan	Sr. Mary Ellen	1965-1967
@Cornelia Rundell	Sr. Mary Adrian	1965-1967
@Marianne Felix	Sr. Mary Leone	1965-1966
@Elizabeth Hutchison	Sr. Mary Elizabeth	1965-1968
@Marie Schnitzler	Sr. Mary Loran	1965-1967
*Dianne Turner	Sr. Mary Dianne	1983-
@ Janet Thompson		1979-1979
@Silvana Borsato		1983-1984
@Carole-Dawnne Lamb		1985-1985

-Lauraine Saretsky	Sr. Mary Lauraine	1985-1990
@Kathleen Kearney		1992-1993
@Patricia Johanson		1999-2000
-Clara Plamondon	Sr. Mary Clara	1999-2004
@Marilyn Kloberdanz		1999-1999
@Janet Casey		2005-2006

*The above list includes all who ever were admitted to the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth of the Third Order of St. Francis of Assisi, Motherhouse at Humboldt, Saskatchewan. The total number is 190, from 1911 to 2011.*

*\* Indicates all those in perpetual vows who have remained in the Congregation until death or are still living in the Congregation as of today, January 1, 2011. There are 122.*

*- Indicates all those who made vows but left the Congregation voluntarily. There are 41.*

*# Indicates all those who had come from Klagenfurt, Austria to Canada but who decided to return to the Klagenfurt Convent. There are 3.*

*@ Are all those who had been admitted to the Congregation but were either dismissed or departed voluntarily as novices, postulants or candidates. There were 24.*

*(Regarding the names in brackets) In the 1950s when English replaced German many of the Sisters names were Anglicized e.g. Rosa to Rose and Maria to Mary. After Vatican II in the 1960s some Sisters returned to their baptismal names.*



## Appendix III

# Letters

### Correspondence about establishing a foundation in Canada 1910 – 1911

**1910:** Mother Pulcheria Wilhelm desired to make a new foundation as a perpetual commemoration of the Jubilee Year of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth convent in Klagenfurt. Fr. Alexander Berghold, confessor and spiritual director of the nearby Good Shepherd Convent, recommended Canada and wrote Fr. Bruno Doerfler, OSB, at Muenster.

**May 20, 1910:** Prior Bruno wrote Mother Pulcheria, with a letter for Fr. Berghold, advising Humboldt as the location.

**June 12, 1910:** Before the matter was submitted to the Rt. Rev. Ordinary, Mother Pulcheria responded to Prior Bruno's letter:

*Very Rev. Fr. Prior:*

*I sincerely thank you for your letter of May 20 along with the newspapers and maps which came to me a few days later. May our Lord reward you for everything. Your Reverence put in a great deal of effort, and we really appreciate your sincerity and devotedness. Also, we are not afraid to undertake the work as long as we can obtain the guidance of your Reverence. We definitely need your expert advice as much on this matter in Canada as we have received from the Rev. Fathers here who were appointed by the Lord Bishop.*

*Perhaps you already know our circumstances through Fr. Berghold. He has definitely advised against going to Brazil, where the Rev. Abbot of Tanzenberg had wanted us. As it appears, the founding is not making much progress as the Order on the Tanzenberg has existed for only a few years. It was for this purpose that four of our Sisters had studied Portuguese for some time but gave it up since nothing seemed to come of the proposal.*

*I would, however, testify to the joy and willingness of the Sisters, and even to their developing a healthy common sense toward making a new foundation. Thus, if the doctors of the place, or whoever is the authoritative body, are satisfied with our qualifications we would be willing to come, but it must not be too soon. Time is required to make the necessary preparations and very likely to ask Rome's permission first. Therefore, it would only be possible to begin the building in the spring of 1911.*

*How nice it would be after so many years, to establish a little convent overseas, especially during our Jubilee year. But God's will be done in all things.*

*I remain, gratefully and respectfully yours,  
M. Pulcheria Wilhelm, superior*

**June 15, 1910:** Letter from Fr. Berghold to Mother Pulcheria, written from a restaurant at the station in Marburg:

*Very Rev. Mother:*

*After reading these letters several times I came to the conclusion that, if you would actually come to founding a hospital in America, you should seize the first opportunity as the best one.*

*Write to Rev. Prior B. Doerfler, OSB, at Muenster, Sask., without delay and tell him that you will be coming to look into the matter and will select whatever is most favourable. He could obtain a reduced fare to Canada for you and suggest the best route to take. I will write to him myself and give you a special recommendation. Am in a hurry. God bless you.*

*I remain, Yours respectfully, A. Berghold.*

*P.S. I will send a copy of my letter. Am ready to give the best advice possible for furthering your cause.*

A few days later, also from Fr. Berghold, writing from Mooskirchen:

*I am sending you another letter today, which had been sent to me from Canada, concerning the hospital project. You will note therein what influence my little letter has had. I told you that once I start something, it will go. My influence reaches out much further than is believed by those who know me here in Europe. And since I have started to use my influence to implement your plans, I would kindly ask you to put all your energy into the execution of them.*

*I had briefly stated my views a few days ago but forgot to mention that in this serious matter it would be advisable that all information acquired thus far be presented personally to the religious superiors, including the bishops, for their approval before anything decisive be undertaken. The blessing comes from above, Rev. Mother. If everything is done with determination and not sluggishly, and the good opportunity is used, then within 20 years you will have four hospitals of the best in Canada. Deal prudently and spare neither time, money nor energy. Iron must be forged while hot and not allowed to cool off.*

*I wrote to good Bishop Albert Pascal in Prince Albert to thank him for coming more than half way in advancing our cause and also the good Father Prior.*

*Against all expectations everything has turned out so very favourably in so short a time. In America there is more enthusiasm for good works than here in Europe, where one would have given me over a hundred objections against it by now, without one single penny toward it.*

*It would be best if you would go to Canada yourself with four other Sisters, around the beginning of September. These Sisters could probably help out in other hospitals and learn the English language while waiting for the completion of your hospital in Humboldt.*

*I would advise you to make copies of all letters you receive in this connection and send back my letters, that is, the ones that have been written to me. Whatever you write to the Very Rev. Prior Doerfler should also be copied and well studied. In completing purchases and making contract agreements, one should move slowly and carefully. Offers for support should be in writing. Promises should seldom be made. Show these letters to Dr. Quitt and ask him for advice regarding them. Now is the time seriously to consider the matter and then move forward energetically with much prayer and strong faith in God.*

*In all sincerity and deepest respect, yours devotedly,  
Alexander Berghold, Mooskirchen, Stiermark.*

**June 1910:** Mother Pulcheria wrote to Rev. Berghold, explaining that the Klagenfurt Ordinariate had a very negative view of the project.

**June 22, 1910:** Fr. Berghold responded:

*Your letter was like ice water poured upon my enthusiasm over the new foundation and I can clearly see that through this entirely erroneous interpretation of things at Klagenfurt one cannot count on any success.*

*I only ask that you calmly reflect on these few questions: What kind of advice can a bishop-ordinary give in matters entirely foreign to him? Klagenfurt is in Europe and Saskatchewan in distant North America. What great works can be undertaken without money? Is it possible to find, in any part of the world, a hospital completely furnished and finished, supplied with beds and patients, simply awaiting Sisters to come along and accept it as a gift? Did any holy person ever accomplish anything great just through cash money, without putting his trust in God and without a great deal of sacrifice? Where can you find people who will immediately respond with financial support to a statement such as this, "I want to go toward the interior of Africa and start something great!" Why want to start a hospital of 30-50 beds right away in some small place, when 20-25 beds would suffice for about 4-6 years? Why want to expend 150,000 kronen immediately when 1/3 of it would be sufficient for the purpose?*

*I would be agreed to have you submit this letter to the Rev. Fr. Trunk or to*

*anybody else for that matter. What I wanted to write I have already mentioned in the other two letters and am kindly asking you to return the two which I had received from Canada. You may be assured that the hospital will be built in any case, even though your Congregation would not undertake it.*

*Respectfully, your humble servant,*

*Alexander Berghold*

*P.S. My last word. "Let us pray for one another and let us not become despondent!"*

**July 16, 1910:** Prior Bruno responded to Mother Pulcheria's letter of June 12:

*Your esteemed letter of June 12 reached me on the Feast of Peter and Paul. Over the two previous days I also received letters from the Rev. Msgr. Dr. Klimach and Rev. Fr. Trunk from Villach and on July 1 I received one from Rev. Fr. Berghold, all pertaining to the future hospital at Humboldt. It gives me the greatest joy to know that these men are all so interested in this worthy cause.*

*Enclosed I am sending you a letter from his Lordship Bishop Albert Pascal in which he gives his approval to the proposed foundation, in the French language, not yet having command of the English. (The French was then translated into German.)*

*My Rev. Father*

*It gives me great pleasure to give my approval to the Sisters of St. Elizabeth from Klagenfurt for the erection of a hospital at Humboldt, the principal town of your colony in the diocese of Prince Albert and to wish them complete success. Would you inform them that I will be glad to welcome them into our diocese with the permission of Rome, for I am convinced that they will do well here.*

*With sincere greetings and kind remembrances to your zealous missionaries.*

*Yours devotedly and gratefully in the Sacred Heart,*

*Albertus, Bishop of Prince Albert.*

Prior Bruno continued his letter:

*Before we can do anything else from here, it will be necessary for you to come yourself or send some Sisters to investigate and then make a definitive decision on the founding of the hospital. We can definitely count on the consent of our own bishop and no difficulties will be made by Rome if your Very Rev. Bishop is agreed to it.*

*I remain respectfully your, devotedly in Christ*

*P. Bruno Doerfler, OSB*

**July 16, 1910:** Mother Pulcheria sent an urgent letter to Prior Bruno:

*The Rev. Fr. Trunk was prepared to leave on August 16 and had already shipped his luggage when he received a telegram on the 5th stating that the trip would have to be postponed for the time being because of a great stir up amongst the clergy. Msgr. Weiss, director and manager of Centralkasse had disappeared, leaving a great deal of disorder and debts behind. We, too, had part of our capital invested.*

*The investigation is not yet complete and so the clergy cannot leave. They hope to complete in October. It is remarkable how unforeseen circumstances occur, deferring our plans. Nevertheless, the greatest difficulties are often crowned with the greatest success. May this come true in the case of our endeavours.*

*The Rev. Fr. Trunk will come alone for the time being and as soon as possible. He will clarify things for you on our behalf. God willing, the Sisters may follow soon. We trust in Divine Providence and leave it all to its kind and wise guidance.*

*M. Pulcheria.*

Prior Bruno sent a short letter of consolation and condolence. Since he was just about to leave for the Eucharistic Congress in Montreal, he merely stated that he was commending the whole matter to the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

**September 9, 1910:** Mother Pulcheria wrote again to Prior Bruno:

*Rev. Father Prior, you will be receiving some newspapers which were brought to us at the convent. You will see, therefore, how we are faring here. The poor bishop! It was his kindness that brought this dilemma upon himself and us. He had asked us, in fact, begged us, to put our money into it. At present, everything is at a standstill. We thought we had practically reached our goal and were almost ready to leave but now the Lord only knows what will happen. Even if the matter would take a turn for the better, it would still be some time before we could get money again. To press the clergy would only make matters worse. The poor clergy can barely let themselves be seen on the street. They say that the bad ones are scolding and the good ones are being vexed and becoming discouraged over it. Then, too, there is a double cry: "Away from Rome!" May the good Lord intervene again. I ask your Reverence for assistance and advice.*

*Should we risk undertaking the project with the present means or should we wait? If you could not wait and would have to take other sisters, it would be an eventuality which we would deplore very much. On the other hand, who does not have to submit to the unavoidable from time to time? This undertaking has*

*caused us much suffering already. I have, however, always thought that a cause usually becomes anchored during a storm, and if it be God's will it will move again. Personally, I haven't changed my mind as to the undertaking.*

*M. Pulcheria.*

**October 6, 1910:** Prior Bruno responded to Mother Pulcheria's letters:

*I would have answered sooner but wanted to make more detailed inquiries as to what means were necessary for the erection of a suitable hospital in Humboldt. I discussed the matter more closely with the Catholic doctor at Muenster, Dr. Kourigan, and also with our Catholic doctor in Humboldt, Dr. Barry, and with our representative in Parliament, Dr. Med. Neeley. They were all of the opinion that if a hospital is to meet the needs for several years it could possibly be fully equipped with \$10,000 to \$20,000. One dollar is equivalent to a kronen and 88 farthings in gold.*

*Since the Sisters, as they mentioned, could bring along 15-18,000 kronen, or \$3100 to \$3600, and since the men here believe they could get at least \$1500 to \$2000 from private individuals within a short time, one would reckon that a debt of not more than \$5-\$7000 would be left on the hospital after its completion. The Sisters do not have to be concerned because wealthy Catholic people have assured us that they would vouch for the Sisters.*

*If there is an efficient procurator who knows how to manage so that the expenses can be kept as low as possible without depriving the patients of essential needs, there is no doubt that within a few years the institution will be free of debt. This would be true even though later on you would not be in a position to send further monies beyond the first 15-18,000 kronen. As you see from the above, I am of the opinion that the whole matter can still be brought about in spite of the extraordinarily great loss which you suffered.*

*If I thought your presence was not required at home on account of the difficulties created by Msgr. Weiss, I would advise you to come yourself and to get full insight into the situation. Under the present circumstances, I think the best thing to do would be to send the Sister whom you would eventually make superior here, along with another Sister of good judgment, in order to investigate the whole proposition. Then if you decide to make the foundation, these Sisters could get organized in a temporarily rented house and become engaged in nursing care. At the same time, they could familiarize themselves more closely with the situation and eventually make a reply to you by letter.*

*Should your decision be unfavourable for Humboldt, which I can hardly believe, they could then possibly look around elsewhere for another opportunity to make a foundation in this country or return to Europe. Should your decision,*

however, as I expect, be in favour of Humboldt, the Sisters would then already be here to make preparations for the commencement of construction while the other Sisters could come later. Naturally, I shall gladly assist the Sisters wherever possible. The same is true of our doctors, who are already rejoicing over the future hospital.

Dr. Neely has told me that the provincial government provides plans for hospital construction free of charge. He promised to write me regarding the Humboldt situation, and we hope that within 10 to 14 days I will have such writing in my hands. I shall then have an estimate drawn up by an architect and a construction company and inform you of the results.

*I remain yours very respectfully,*

*Servant in Christ Fr. Bruno Doerfler, OSB, Prior.*

**November 27, 1910:** Mother Pulcheria sent another letter to Prior Bruno:

*Rev. Father Prior:*

*I wish to communicate to your Reverence that a slight halt has again entered upon our undertaking and thus the delay in my more detailed writing. Sunday, Nov. 20, was the enthronement of our newly named shepherd, the Very Reverend Bishop of Gurk, Dr. Kaltner, Suffragan Bishop of Salzburg. This was an uplifting, touching ceremony.*

*Dr. Kaltner is a beloved dignitary. Since his predecessor was not able to carry on the affairs of the Church for some time now, Dr. Kaltner will, no doubt, devote his energy to correcting the situation in Corinthia, especially as it affects the clergy.*

*Rev. Dr. Klimsch advised me to submit the American project to our new Shepherd for approval. One of these days he will speak to His Grace about our project and show him your last kind letter. He will, as much as possible, speak favourably on our behalf. I will then report the result to you immediately. All preparations have been made so that we can go ahead, unless some unforeseen circumstances prevent us. So please bear with us a little longer. We still hope that everything will turn out for the best, in spite of all difficulties.*

*Asking your reverence for prayers and commending myself to one of your Mass intentions, I remain, respectfully and devotedly yours,*

*M. Pulcheria.*

**February 4, 1911:** Prior Bruno wrote, expressing his regret at the delay, and adding:

*In Humboldt, definite word about the Sisters coming is anticipated with impatience, particularly since recently a rumour was spreading that the Protestant doctors in Quill Lake, a station about 60 kilometres east of here, were planning*

*to build a Protestant hospital there. The people in Humboldt have become disturbed. The Catholic doctor in Humboldt stated that, if a definite statement was not soon forthcoming that some Sisters would soon come to examine the situation in Humboldt, and if things proved satisfactory, to remain here forthwith, he would approach a French community of Sisters who would be prepared, he thought, to build a hospital. The plan is to get ahead of Quill Lake and thus be assured that no competition could come from there. As I have mentioned before, there is a large German settlement in this community. For this very reason, it would be regrettable to see a group of French Sisters build a hospital here. Besides that, we have been negotiating with you for nearly a year, and it would pain me to see you miss this great opportunity to establish a house here.*

*Please let me know what the prospects are for having the Sisters come here soon. If the Most Rev. Prince Bishop has already, as I hope, given his permission for the new foundation and it is possible for you to send Sisters soon, please inform me of this by cablegram at my expense, at the following address: Doerfler, Muenster, Sask., Canada.*

*In the hope of having a favourable answer from you soon, I remain, with the highest regard, very devotedly yours in Christ*

*Fr. Bruno Doerfler, OSB, Prior*

**February 28, 1911:** Mother Pulcheria was able to inform Prior Bruno that the Sisters were thinking of setting out at the end of April or the beginning of May.

**April, 1911:** Prior Bruno wrote to Mother Pulcheria:

*Your kind message telling me that Sisters are coming at the end of April or the beginning of May was received with great joy and I thank you most heartily for the gladsome news. The dear Lord will certainly bless you and the good Sisters abundantly for the work you are planning to undertake. I will do all in my power to support your efforts, and the people of Humboldt will also do all they can to help in this Christian work of mercy.*

**April 30, 1911:** The first three Sisters left the Motherhouse in Klagenfurt to travel to Muenster.

**June 21, 1911:** Prior Bruno wrote Mother Pulcheria:

*Before all else I must thank you for having made it possible, in spite of all the difficulties, to have sent us Sisters. The dear Lord will certainly reward you abundantly, and certainly also bless your convent and hospital in Klagenfurt. I am firmly convinced that the new foundation will have a bright future, and that gradually this young sapling will grow to become a big tree. May the good Lord bless this good work.*



## Letters regarding the first hospital

**May 20, 1911:** The first three Sisters had arrived at Muenster on May 14. On May 20, Sr. Augustina reported back to Mother Pulcheria back in Klagenfurt:

*On Monday, the 15th of May, we drove with Rev. Fr. Prior to Humboldt; about two hours drive from here, to meet the mayor as well as other notable personalities of the town and to investigate possible building sites. We were well received by all the townspeople. A general meeting of the whole community of townspeople was held on May 16 to start negotiations for the building project and all that was reported to them really seemed to have produced an impression favourable to our cause.*

*Fr. Prior interviewed the architect who had built the Sisters of Charity hospital and he agreed to draw up a plan immediately for our hospital. Whenever his plan would be completed and accepted, it would be sent to the government for approval. After the requirements of the government would be met, we would receive 50 cents per day for each patient, i.e. 2 kronen, 40 heller. As soon as the plans return from the government, construction can begin on the new hospital and the same architect will direct the whole program. The Prior worked feverishly to get things moving as quickly as possible.*

**June 13, 1911:** Sr. Augustina reported again to Mother Pulcheria:

*We drove back to a place outside Humboldt, which we had visited frequently and where we acquired a nice piece of land with water supplied by pipe. The land site measures 7 ½ acres and is conveniently situated.*

*With regard to piped in water supply, this is not easy to obtain since the town does not have its own yet, but is only planning to install one. Therefore, the only source at this time is that of the railway company. The owner of the property, Mr. Philip Flory, could have had \$100 an acre for the land but he did not sell it. Now, for the purpose of a hospital, he was selling it for only \$50 an acre.*

*We had been offered other building sites – two of 10 acres each – by the government, completely free but Fr. Prior thought it would be better to accept other benefits from the government rather than this one since the land title would not be given outright to the sisters but only its use as long as the hospital stood on it. If, however, the hospital would be sold, or transferred to some other site, the ownership of the land would revert to the government.*

*There was also the offer of a wonderful plot of land, also 10 acres, and completely free, from one of the Humboldt doctors, Dr. Barry. This location was, however, quite far out of town and the other doctors, as well as the*

townspeople, were opposed to its acquisition. Fr. Prior felt it better to conform to the view of these people for fear of creating ill-feeling and jeopardizing future relationships with them as well as the possibility of receiving help from them.

A few days ago, we received the plans from the architect. They look rather attractive but we do have to make a few changes which would not require much time to do. Thus, we hope to be able to commence with the construction fairly soon. We had another prospective building site, 10 acres, five acres of which would have been given outright and the five others sold to us at \$30 an acre. But there was a mortgage against this land and it would take a few weeks to clear this up. When we told this man that we could not accept his offer, he broke down and cried, it hurt him so much to think that the hospital would not be on his land.

**June, 1911:** From a letter from Prior Bruno to Mother Pulcheria regarding Dr. Barry's offer of land:

*The spot was really attractive, out in the open it seems to me. But the other medical men would not allow the hospital to be built on Dr. Barry's land and since these men were influential people, it would be better not to rub them the wrong way.*

**June 13, 1911:** Sr. Augustina to Mother Pulcheria:

*As you have just seen, we have now a nice, well-situated construction site, provided with a supply of water. Although it is somewhat more costly than any of the other sites, Fr. Prior believes that in actuality the price is lower because of the water supply being included. The other site, although somewhat cheaper and well-situated, did not satisfy me completely. Its main advantage was the water supply but, apart from that, it was located on the other side of town and one had to cross the whole town to get to church. This location is about half a mile from the church and outside the town limits. Thus, there will be no taxes to pay. The taxes in the town are low at this time, but could go up.*

*Even in the event that the town would grow to the extent that the hospital would come within its limits, the tax-free status is something the Rev. Prior safeguarded immediately. He was also thoughtful enough to procure other benefits for us, such as the town providing grounds for landscaping, a sewage disposal system, and electricity. The town also agreed to look after the sewage disposal at present since there are still no sewage pipes provided.*

*Although the people favour the hospital project and are glad it is being built, most of our dealings are with business people and the government authorities, who speak only English. Still, the community is mostly German.*

*The building site was paid for immediately and now we have only \$20 in the cash box. If it is possible for you to send us some more, we would be very grateful. We ask you from the bottom of our hearts to pray for us, because we need it.*

**September 20, 1911: Prior Bruno to Mother Pulcheria:**

*There is no need to worry about the financial matter. Of course there will remain, once the construction is finished, a few thousand dollars debt but certainly they will not be burdened with a heavy debt. As I wrote to you in my last letter, it would certainly be a relief for the good Sisters if you in the Motherhouse in Klagenfurt could lend the remaining sum required to cover the costs of the building and furnishing after all the contributions have been totalled. But if the Motherhouse is not able conveniently to make the required loan, the Sisters here would have no difficulty in making it here. They would have to pay higher interest rate. Do not have any worries about these financial affairs. The good Lord has already shown that the new foundation is pleasing to Him and that He will not abandon them.*

*Now I will give you joyful news about the progress of the building. In August, the excavations for the building were completed at the cost of \$252. It took a long time, though, before the building itself was begun. The fault lay principally with the Health Minister of the Province, who took a long time to approve the plans which had to be submitted to him.*

*These plans were sent to him by the architect on July 10 and when I visited him in his office on August 6 he told me he had not yet seen them. Upon my insistence that there was some urgency in the matter, he promised to get at it immediately. At the end of August, I wired him to ask him to let me know how far the matter had advanced. His reply was that he had sent the plans with the sketches of the desired changes back to the architect. At the same time, I received a letter from the architect saying he had approved some of the alterations and then returned them to the Minister with a protest against the others because they represented no noticeable advantage and would only raise the cost considerably.*

*Finally the plans were approved and the architect announced he was ready to receive bids. Yesterday he brought the bids to Humboldt with the building contract for the walls and the cement work ready to be signed with the required formalities. The building contractor (the man, P. Hansen, speaks German) obliged himself to have all the cement work of the ground floor and the brickwork up to the roof completed by November 1, 1911.*

*At the bottom of the walls he will lay pipes to catch the moisture and*

drain it off, thus assuring dryness on the ground floor. Besides that, the basement will have a thick cement floor. Under this, on the walls of cement as far as they extend, will be a covering of asphalt to prevent all dampness from seeping through. For this he will receive \$8,200 (41,000 kronen). This sum will be paid in five instalments, the last of which to occur 32 days after completion of the job. With the bids for the subcontracts such as plastering, carpentering, ironwork, heating, water piping, bath and toilet facilities, electric fixtures, glasswork, the architect was not satisfied that the cost should be up to \$14,000. He hoped to receive other bids which would reduce the cost by a few thousand dollars. He believes the building can be covered with the roof at the beginning of the real winter's cold, so that work on the inside can proceed during the winter.

The hospital structure will have ground plan measurements of 40 x 56 feet (about 12  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 17 m), without taking in the projecting half-circular curve of the chapel and the operating room immediately above it. Also the two-metre projecting porch is not counted in. The ground floor has an open height of nine feet (about 3m) and holds the central steam furnace, wash machines, kitchen and dining room for the Sisters, living space for a hired man and cellar space. The ground floor is about 3/5m below the ground level. The first floor holds a nice, roomy chapel, a reception room, patients' rooms, bathrooms and toilets. On the next floor is the spacious operating room with overhead lighting, preparation and sterilization rooms, a room for the hospital chaplain, patients' room, bathrooms and toilets. On top, in a fireproof attic, are the living quarters of the Sisters.

All floors are well-lighted and provided with ventilation fixtures. The patients' rooms and wards have about 23-24 cubic metre space per bed. On the outside, a metallic sheltering roof will be constructed in front of the entrance in order to assure the transfer of patients from the ambulance without exposing them to the vagaries of the weather. Two iron staircases extend on the outside from the roof to the ground to provide escape in case of fire to the Sisters and the patients. As you can see, the building conforms in every regard to the highest standards which can be found in any modern hospital.

The total cost of the site and the building, according to the latest calculation, will come to about \$22,000 (110,000 kronen). Since this includes the central heating system, electric wiring, water piping, and fixtures, bath and toilet fixtures, as well as cupboards for clothing, linens and supplies, the additional inside furnishing and equipment will not be expensive. Under normal circumstances the hospital will have room for 18 patients, in addition to the Sisters, the chaplain, and a manservant. In case of necessity, this figure can be increased by one-quarter.

**September, 1911:** Sr. Augustina wrote to Mother Pulcheria:

*It is certain that we will not be able to complete the grounds this fall since, at the end of September, the weather is already very cold. We do, however, hope to have some more fine weather. Here they have what is known in Austria as "Old Women's summer". In Canada, they call it "Indian Summer". We have not completed three communities and have collected \$1,700. There are in all 23 settlements in the Colony. To the monastery we are very much indebted and still we received from it \$200 for the building fund. On September 24 and 25 we saw snow in America for the first time. An additional worry for us, concerning the water supply, such as it is.*

**October 6, 1911:** Sr. Augustina wrote to Mother Pulcheria:

*We had hoped to receive our supply of water from the railway company since their conduits run right by the hospital. But how long their supply would last, I do not know.*

*It is unfortunate that just this year the cold weather started so early. In three weeks the walls would have been finished and work on the inside could have proceeded. As you might have seen in the newspaper, I have bought an additional 2 ½ acres of land. It was, of course, very expensive, costing \$200. It was beautiful bush land contiguous to our property and within the town limits. The most Rev. Abbot thought we just had to buy it.*

**December 27, 1911:** Sr. Augustina wrote to Mother Pulcheria:

*Rev. Mother, you ask whether the Sisters should come in the spring even if the hospital is not ready. Yes, of course. Let there be many and let them be brave ones who come for there will certainly be enough work. If the good Lord grants a nice spring, the work will proceed rapidly. A good part is already completed and all the material is ready at hand.*

*About the debt, you need not worry too much. I am not alarmed by it. If we could have borrowed the money from outside the country it would have been preferable because of the high interest rate here, but that is seemingly not an easy thing to do since the citizenry is still suspicious enough even though there is no justification for it. Concerning the \$2,500 promised us from Humboldt, a meeting was held last week. Only 14 taxpayers in attendance. However the sum of 12,500 kronen is assured us.*

**March 30, 1912:** Abbot Bruno wrote to Mother Pulcheria, after he had agreed to serve as escort for a second group of Sisters:

*Since all the subcontracts have not yet been let, I cannot leave*

*immediately after Easter. By the middle of the month of April, things will have reached that stage. The wall construction, which has been stopped since All Saints Day because of the cold, will start again right after Easter. It will not be possible to take possession of the building before August 1 since the walls have to be allowed to dry thoroughly. Furthermore, I have the feeling that the architect is very slow and does not insist that things move as fast as possible toward completion.*

*The people of Humboldt were very sorry that the hospital could not have been opened last fall. Many told me they thought it could have been filled throughout the winter. We are beginning to fear that in a short time the building will prove to be too small.*

*Before leaving here I wish to be of help to the Sisters in making a temporary loan until the building is finished. After that, it will be easier to make one on the basis of a mortgage. As far as can be seen at this time, a loan of about \$15,000 will suffice. Last fall we took initial steps to procure a loan. But since construction had to be stopped early on account of the oncoming winter, we let these plans drop for the time being in order to avoid the Sisters paying interest for six months unnecessarily.*

**April 22, 1912:** Prior Bruno to Mother Pulcheria:

*My departure was delayed for a few days since I did not want to leave before all formalities connected with the loan were attended to. Now that all is in order, I will set out tomorrow, please God.*

**End of July, 1912:** Sr. Augustina writes to Mother Pulcheria:

*To our great joy, the dear Sisters arrived on the 27th of July. The hospital construction, during the absence of the Abbot, proceeded very slowly. But now we hope things will change. His Reverence, the Abbot, thinks the opening can take place on the first Sunday of October. We expect our new home through the Queen of the Holy Rosary. May God grant this. We and the whole surrounding community have been waiting with eagerness, and even impatience, for its completion.*

## Post-First World War between Klagenfurt and Humboldt

*Klagenfurt, March 1, 1920*

*Reverend Council Sisters*

*of the Convent of St. Elizabeth in Humboldt, Sask., North America.*

*In consequence of the enormous inflation and its accompanying depreciation of money we find ourselves in the sad situation of making use of all our fluid assets in order to buy the food stuffs and heating material that we need to live. We even found ourselves obliged to reduce our hospital to a small number of beds, since the amounts obtained from the foundations no longer cover the expenses in the least. And it is just in this time of inflation that there are so many poor people. We have even sold a few pieces of land and applied the proceeds to our daily needs.*

*We kindly beg you to help us, by paying us back 2,000 kronen out of the loan of 22,000 kronen that we made you then; moreover from Jan. 1, 1920, by paying us 5% interest on the balance of 20,000 kronen every half year.*

*And now we kindly ask you, when you pay back the capital to base your reckoning on the currency at peace time of 5 kronen to the dollar, and not to make bad use out of the Austrian misfortune of the present depreciation. In America the dollar has still the same value as before the World War, and who knows how long the G & A. depreciation of money will last, perhaps only a short time... We, therefore, kindly ask you to send us these 2,000 kronen by a cheque of \$400 directed to a G. Austrian bank.*

*As to the balance of 20,000 kronen, we beg you to hold this for us as a loan to you because in the present political uncertainty prudence cautions us to have a reserve on hand in case of need in the unforeseen future.*

*The Council of the Convent of St. Elizabeth in Klagenfurt*

*M. Ignatia Gross, Superior*

*M. Stanislai Schweinsger, Vicar*

*M. Franziska Trummer, Assistant*

*M. Margaritha Grutsching, Assistant*

[Brought from Klagenfurt on May 10, 1920 by Fr. Tharcisius Schmid, Obl. OSB]

[Response to letter brought from Klagenfurt on May 10, 1920]

*Praised be Jesus Christ*

*Dear Reverend Mother:*

*I am sorry to tell you that the letter that Rev. Father brought along has*

*offended us very much. Believe me, dear Reverend Mother that I know better than you how things were when our dear Mother Pulcheria started the foundation in America. She did nothing without first consulting. As the Bishop had given orders that a vote be taken among the Sisters, the Reverend Mother had told them: "Sisters, it is up to you; it will cost money and people", and a third part of the community voted in favour of the foundation.*

*Although we were children of the convent, we could take along only what we had brought from home. Of course I had no property from home, but I paid for all my travelling expenses with money that I had begged together from my people. But as far as I remember, Reverend Mother, no money was loaned from the convent. There must be some record there to show how it was. The Reverend Mother said: "I do not know exactly how much I gave", but there was never any question of lending, still less of interest.*

*The Reverend Mother could not send the Sisters over here without any money. Even in families, when the children leave their home and the parents make over to them some of their property, they do not say to them: we give it to you as a loan and you pay interest on it.*

*But you, Reverend Mother, couched your letter in such formal terms, of a so-called functionary, and on top of that the bitter word, "Of making bad use of the currency", oh, that did hurt us very badly, just as though we were altogether strangers to you, and had no insight in things at all. And so also, I suppose, they acted toward the four Sisters. Yes, if we would not raise our sights a little higher and tell ourselves, "we cannot leave our dear mother convent to starve of hunger, we want to help and will help as much as we can; we owe the precious mother convent so much gratitude for the only necessary spiritual life, but not for the money..."*

*Had Reverend Mother written to us and asked us to help you, that it is the duty of children to help their parents; O how gladly we would have done it; how much deeper would not the roots of charity among us have gone and we would have become one heart and one soul, in spite of the great distance that separates us.*

*We forgive you from the bottom of the heart and kindly ask, Reverend Mother, to make sure that our letter be read to the whole community. This is a matter of conscience. The younger Sisters should also know that there will be no more split in the future; love balances out everything.*

*We hope to send you a few hundred dollars in October; should your conditions become worse, let us know and we'll help as much as we can.*

*Your affectionate Sister in the heart of Jesus and Mary,*

*Sr. Walburga*



Klagenfurt, September 10, 1920

*Praised be Jesus Christ*

*Dear and Reverend Mother:*

*We gratefully received your letter on the 28th of August. Eight days before, on the 21st, we had election of superiors here in the convent and Reverend Mother Leopoldina became our new Superior. It is at her request that I am writing these lines. May our Lord grant that I express myself clearly enough that our dear Sisters in America do not misunderstand me.*

*In the first place, it seems strange that Rev. Fr. Schmid told us that your Sisters had commissioned him to find out all about the money question between the two convents, as they themselves do not know anything about it. They would gladly settle anything that still needed settling.*

*In the second place, you, Reverend Mother, tell us in your letter that you know better than we do how things stood when the late Mother Pulcheria started the new foundation in America.*

*In the third place, allow us to call to your mind, Reverend Mother, that we have the declaration, written by the late Mother Pulcheria, on June, 19, 1913, and that we are enclosing in this letter.*

*Besides the declaration, the late Mother Angelina told us repeatedly, "Mother Pulcheria made the request that our convent do not insist on the interest, at least not for the first years." This she told to the now deceased Mothers Benedicta and Isabella, and to the still living Mothers Franziska and myself.*

*This money matter was never mentioned among the young Sisters and so the former Superior did not know anything about it until she took over her post; this was also the case with the new Superior, Mother Leopoldina; she was surprised at your letter, and we had to explain the whole matter to her. This matter will be handled also in the future only by the councillor Sisters who rightly represent the convent, and not by the other younger Sisters.*

*We would be very pleased if this matter could be settled in a peaceful way. We cannot in good conscience cancel the debt, as we lacked then and still lack now, the Papal permission for that. The late Bishop Kaltner gave his approval only with that understanding (that it would be paid back later on).*

*We would not have come to make a formal demand if our convent had not been so deeply involved in the economic breakdown of the administration conditions of our country after the four years of war. The ever-increasing cost prices of things induced us to take this step; one should not, therefore, be too harsh in one's judgment.*

*Wishing you God's speed in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and sending you and all the dear Sisters many greetings.*

*Your loving and ever-mindful Mother Stanislai Schweinzger. May God bless you! Praised be Jesus Christ.*

### **Declaration**

*Herewith the undersigned declares that when she was superior of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth in the convent at Klagenfurt, she gave, in several instalments, the sum of 22,000 kronen toward the new foundation of the new convent hospital in Humboldt, North America, and this during the years 1911 and 1912.*  
Klagenfurt, June 1913 Pulcheria Wilhelm OSE

*Klagenfurt, October 9, 1920*

*Praised be Jesus Christ*

*Dear and Reverend Mother:*

*I have received your letter of the 28th of August. First of all, I must let you know that we had the election of a new Superior on the 21st of August and that our Lord let the heavy burden fall on me, the weakest one of all. I have no words to describe the feeling that presses on me day and night; I must openly admit that I prefer the long days of much bitter sickness to this cross that our Lord has now laid upon me. It is a nasty job to be Superior, but to be Superior in times when we can only face misery and all kinds of need, it is much worse and very difficult. The only comfort I have is to resign myself to the Will of God. You, Reverend Mother, must certainly sympathise with my situation, because you must have experienced it more than once.*

*Your last letter surprised me very much because I had no inkling of the whole matter. I had to have it all explained to me by the old executive. I feel very sorry about your having been offended and I have it very much at heart to have this money matter settled as God wishes and so as not to break up the friendly relations between us.*

*Mother Vicar, Mother Stanislai and other Councillors say that the money was only lent; they could not give it away without permission of the Pope, which they did not have. I have not any more to say on this score, except to point to the declaration of the late Mother Pulcheria, which is enclosed.*

*When you read that declaration, you, Reverend Mother Walburga, will readily understand how awkward it is for me to settle this matter. I have it much at heart to have God's will be done and to have the sisterly relations that exist between the two convents maintained.*

*It cannot be denied that it was God's will that the new foundation was made in America. We have only to look at the fruits it bore in so short a time. It is quite evident how God's blessing hovers abundantly over your field of action*

*and it is a joy for me to think about what you are doing in America.*

*But I am just as much depressed by the fact that we can do so little in our convent to help our poor people who are sick and in need—and there are so many, and that we cannot live up to our vocation as we would wish on account of the high cost of living. The Sisters who came from here still remember how bad things were already then, but the cost has risen considerably since then; for instance: 1 kg of meat costs 58 kronen; a small loaf of bread 4 kronen 30 heller; 1 kg of sugar 65 kronen; a manservant 200 kronen per month; 1 metre of wood 460 to 480 kronen; a wagon-full of wood 33 metres 16,000 kronen, etc.*

*The patients in the hospital are charged per day: 100 kronen in first class; 70 kronen in second; 45 kronen in third class. We cannot expect this from them, because most of them cannot pay, nor can we expect it from the parishes, because we have a private hospital.*

*Nowadays we just have to put our trust in God, otherwise, we would despair. I have given you a detailed picture of some of the high prices in order to let you, Reverend Mother, have a better insight into our present administration, and better to express our joy over the promise that you made to send us a few hundred dollars in October. With that, we hope to pay for the wood that we need for winter. It is only in these hard-pressed times that one realizes how much one needs just to survive, and what a great blessing peace times were. It is to be hoped that this trial period will soon come to an end.*

*Before I conclude, I wish to tell you yet that M. Franziska is Vicar; M. Stanislai, again Mistress of Novices; and M. Delphine is Bursar. Unfortunately, I had to send two Sisters, namely, M. Aloysia and M. Salesia, home to Steiermark, in order to convalesce; we are all in our Lord's hands.*

*Our commissary, the Rev. Martin Kovac sent a letter to your convent in May 1920; it was addressed Miss Elizabeth Massinger Meta; he received no reply. The dollar was exchanged for 115 kronen; out of this, six Masses were said, the rest was given over to the local hospital. In the letter he also appealed for one dollar packages; the letter seems to have been lost. He commends himself to the prayers of the Sisters and sends greetings to them all.*

*I conclude my letter in the hope that we can soon settle our affair in all mutual charity and that we help each other in our need.*

*I remain in tenderly sisterly love,*

*Your faithful, ever-mindful Sr. Leopoldina*

*Many greetings to all the dear Sisters, also to Sr. Maria and Sr. Rosina. Respectful greetings to the Rev. Fr. Chaplain from the sickly Sr. Leopoldina.*

*I ask for your prayers.*

Humboldt, September 10, 1920

*Praised be Jesus Christ*

*Dear and Reverend Mother:*

*First of all let us wish you God's abundant blessing on assuming the new burden. May He pour his boundless blessings on you, Reverend Mother; so that you become strong enough to carry your heavy cross for His honour and the well-being of the fellow Sisters. May you serve for many years to come the spouse of poor souls. It is no doubt a heavy responsibility; but when one does all that one is capable of doing – and God gave us that capacity and will not expect more from us. As long as love is not lacking, and as long as we ever seek for his love, then in my opinion Our Lord cannot deal harshly with us. Does not the proverb say, "Where faith, there love; where love, there peace; where peace, there blessing; where blessing, there God; where God there is no need." It might appear, on the surface of things, that you are in need but where the need seems greatest there God's help is the nearest.*

*Dear Reverend Mother, on the eighth of this month, we sent \$300 in the hope that you will receive it soon; it is about 50,000 kronen in your currency. Suppose we compare this with the debt of \$50,000 that we have, how much would that be in kronen?*

*We would also wish to congratulate you on your names day; our wishes are for all those that you would want to wish for yourself. Also Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.*

*It was not our fault that we waited so long to send the money; we did not dare send any money before we found out that the money we had sent for the home of the students had been received for sure.*

*Please dear Reverend Mother, do not write to us any more about a debt; we will help as much as we possibly can. Dear Reverend Mother, believe me that I am positive that in the year 1913 when we left Klagenfurt, our mother convent had half a million worth of fluid assets, and still, when asked by the late Mother Pulcheria and by the late Rev. Fr. Abbot to make us over here a loan of money, the convent refused. Abbot Bruno told us then that the convent would have done well if it had done so. It could now have claimed a lot from here and would have saved the Sisters here a lot of trouble. It would have been quite easy for the Mother convent then to get us a loan. How far could not our convent have been by now even with the 22,000 kronen (about \$4,000 in our money)? Many hardships could have been spared for us.*

*When Mother Pulcheria asked Mother Angelina for the loan, Mother Angelina told her, "Whatever we give, we will have to donate, because we will never get anything back."*

To what you, Reverend Mother, state in your letter and also Mother Stanislai in hers, that the money could not have been given without permission of the Holy See. I categorically say, "No, this is not the case." For then our convent was not yet separated from the Mother convent and therefore a papal permission was not needed. It was only on the 30th of August 1913 that our convent was canonically separated. It is quite probable that the Mother convent did not remember that the money was given and not lent. It was only later after the terrible war broke out and the horrible struggle between the heads of government [that things became desperate].

Oh, the poor, poor Mother Pulcheria, what did she not have to suffer! I could only console her with the thought, "It is the will of God. If it were not a good thing, it would not be so hard to get by. Every new foundation has its bitter experiences."

In some of those bitter hours, when she saw the nicely decorated chapel, she would say, "My dear Lord, you would not be honoured in this place if we would not be here – unbelievers would then be here." This was her greatest consolation. Yes, Reverend Mother, I could tell you so many things about her that would amaze you at what this woman had to go through. I am firmly convinced she had to be a saint; such a foundation was no child's play. Of course, she had her defects, but who has not – except the three persons in the Godhead. However, even the defects turn into good, when they make us humble. She had her humiliations in abundance and they made her think very little about herself.

Yet another observation, we did not ask Rev. Father Schmid to inquire about the money matter. When he read the letter of Mother Stanislai, he told us that it was of his own accord that he had inquired about the matter.

Reverend Mother, let us all be sincere friends to each other; that is my only wish, without any exception. Especially my two classmates must not think that I have forgotten them. Oh no, but I do not prefer any one of them; I really love all, all alike. I am very grateful to each one for the charity she has shown me. I would like to write to each in particular, if it were possible. I therefore kindly ask you all to forgive me if any feel offended by me not writing to them. I humbly beg you to say a prayer for me that our Lord be always with me and give me the strength to carry my cross which is by no means easy.

Your loving Sister in the hearts of Jesus and Mary.  
Sr. Walburga

Humboldt, November 28, 1920

*Praised be Jesus Christ*

*Dear and Reverend Mother,*

*It is with great joy for me to let you know that I am sending you not only 50,000 but 70,000 kronen. It may happen that they ask you in the bank how much you are to receive, and then you must tell them that we send you exactly 70,000 kronen and that you must get that much. We hope you will get it as a Christmas present.*

*According to appearances, we are not in for a severe winter – quite a boon for everybody. We would also be glad if the winter were mild because we bought six loads of coal in summer, but suffered a big loss thereby. On advice, I had the coal covered with poor straw and the great heat and the gentle rain thereafter ignited the coal and made them without much heating power. They can still be used but not without wood. The man who looks after the furnace is paid \$50 a month; the man who does the other kind of work gets \$60 a month. So you see, Reverend Mother, we also have our troubles.*

*Many greetings to you and with best wishes*

*Yours in the Heart of Jesus' loving*

*Sr. Walburga*

(Written to Sister Seraphina)

Klagenfurt 13th of May 1933

*Praised be Jesus Christ!*

*With great joy we received the little articles and also the money. A heartfelt "God reward you" for everything.*

*Most of all we are filled with joy that, with this one sees always again, you still think of us in heartfelt sisterly love.*

*Reverend Mother, I would also like to ask you something. You likely have read in our little Rule Book that our Convent is legitimately aggregated to the First Order of St. Francis. These were apparently the Vienna accounts written down without further research. Now that we have ordered from Rome three rituals with Latin text, the Priest Definiter General of the Seraphic Order has paid attention to us. In that particular action, he found nowhere a date or a record of the aggregation of our Convent to the First Order. After his answer we also searched here. We also asked the Archbishop's Ordinariate but nothing was found.*

*On April 24th we received ["we held"] the diploma of aggregation of our Convent to the First and Second Orders of St. Francis. Through this aggrega-*

*tion the Sisters of our Convent for all time and also those that are still coming here to enter participate in all graces and indulgences of the First Order; also our church has the same indulgences as the churches of the aforementioned Orders.*

*Mother Euphrasia, Sr. Rosalia, Sr. Maria and Sr. M. Elizabeth have also written which makes us very happy, when we keep up with individual Sisters who formerly shared our way of life. But we do not often notice where the Sisters are actually stationed. We are sending these little letters generally to Humboldt from where they shall be correctly addressed.*

*It is always going fairly well, God be thanked, only I almost believe, there is no money in the whole world. Thus worries sometimes press the spirit low. Though the beloved God knows everything and knows also what we need. Beloved Reverend Mother, let us hope in the Lord and our trust will not put us to shame.*

*Dear Reverend Mother, greet each and every one of the beloved Sisters in the love of our Lady's Queenship.*

*Sr. Delphine*





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Upon arrival in Muenster on May 14, 1911, after traveling by sea and train for two weeks, Sisters Augustina, Philomena and Gabriela looked around and saw nothing .... the prairie seemed barren .... and not a soul to meet them ...

100 years have passed. The Sisters of St. Elizabeth not only transplanted their European roots deep into prairie soil, but much like the prairie wildflowers they have flourished against all odds, laying vital foundations in health and home care, education and elder care, with the risen Jesus at the centre of their mind, heart and soul. *The Prairie Does Flourish* offers the story of their 100 years among us as Christ's healers and teachers, God's instruments of evangelization and service. To God be thanks and praise for their witness.



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