

When autumn winds sweep by, and frost's light touch
has robbed the woods in splendour, year by year
The children of the Holy Child who claim
much loved home at Eboron, have been wont
with all their hearts to welcome from the west
our dearest Everend Mother. But this year
the glorious season brings us double joy...
with the dear Mother, whom our grateful hearts
we know and loved so long, another comes.
So whom we should be half afraid to show
The little we raydo, knowing so well
that she has seen much better - were it not
that soft and sweet a gentle murmur floats
as tho by angel voices whispered low,
You need not fear. Wherever the Holy Child,
our gracious King, is Easter - in what heart
never he has made his chosen throne -
Love for his little ones will surely be.
Therefore, dear Everend Mother General,
in deed, but frightened now no more,
is children come before you and entreat
our kind indulgence while they strive to do
Their little best to please you. Could they greet
your ear with fairy melodies, or songs
such as the mermaids in their caves of pearl
bapt to the music of the deep sea waves -
When might they cast o'er every sense a spell
to sleep your soul in harmony. Lay!
O fairy powers are theirs. They know no spell
save that which love and earnest good intent
no heart felt gratitude can weave. We pray
our nails over you that spell to throw,
our Everend Mother General.

WESTWARD HO!

WESTWARD HO!

Photographic Exhibition

of the

Beginnings of the

J.P.C.F. Mission to the West

Address

When autumn winds sweep by and frost's light touch
Has robed the woods in splendour year by year
The Children of the Holy Child who claim
A much loved home at Sharon have been wont
With all their hearts to welcome from the west
Our dearest Reverend Mother. But this year
The glorious season brings us double joy
With the dear Mother whom our grateful hearts
Have known and loved so long another comes
To whom we should be half afraid to show
The little we can do, knowing so well
That she has seen much better—were it not
That soft and sweet a gentle murmur floats
As tho by Angel voices whispered low,
You need not fear. Where'er the Holy Child,
Our gracious King is Master—in what heart
Soever He has made His chosen throne—
Love for His little ones will surely be.
Therefore, dear Reverend Mother General,
Timid indeed, but frightened now no more,
His children come before you and entreat
Your kind indulgence while they strive to do
Their little best to please you. Could they greet
Your ear with fairy melodies, or songs
Such as the mermaids in their caves of pearl
Chat to the music of the deep sea waves,
Then might they cast o'er every sense a spell
And steep your soul in harmony. Alas!
No fairy powers are theirs. They know no spell
Save that which love and earnest good intent
And heartfelt gratitude can weave. We pray
Our Angels over you that spell to throw,
Dear Reverend Mother General.

Unknown SHCJ Autumn 1903

Cover Commentary

This illuminated manuscript was acquired by Wayne Graddon, SHCJ from the “please take” table following the death of Mother Mary Celestine, SHCJ in Harrogate. Sr. Wayne retrieved the piece for use in her teaching of art; she brought it with her when she came to the U.S. in 1988. The original is currently hanging in the living room of Casa Cornelia in San Diego, California and was something of an enigma until a visit from Caritas McCarthy, SHCJ in April 1995. Caritas studied the text and upon her return to Philadelphia wrote of the Address:

M. M. Walburga White went to the “west” twenty-six times between 1882 and 1903, very often in the “autumn”. She had been superior of Sharon, Mistress of Novices and taught in Sharon high school—could be the “dear Mother we have known and loved so long.”

In “autumn” 1903 she accompanied Mother Gonzaga Snow, third Superior General on a visitation of the SHCJ in “the West” and returned with her to Sharon before November 30, 1903 when Mother Gonzaga Snow returned to England.

Thus it is plausible that the “Address” was given to these two. A further point adds to the plausibility. Gonzaga Snow was not totally pleased with all she found in the U.S.. Could this account for “we should be half afraid to show the little we can do?”

*All of this information is from M. M. Walburga (White), SHCJ
by M. M. Mechtilde McGrath.*

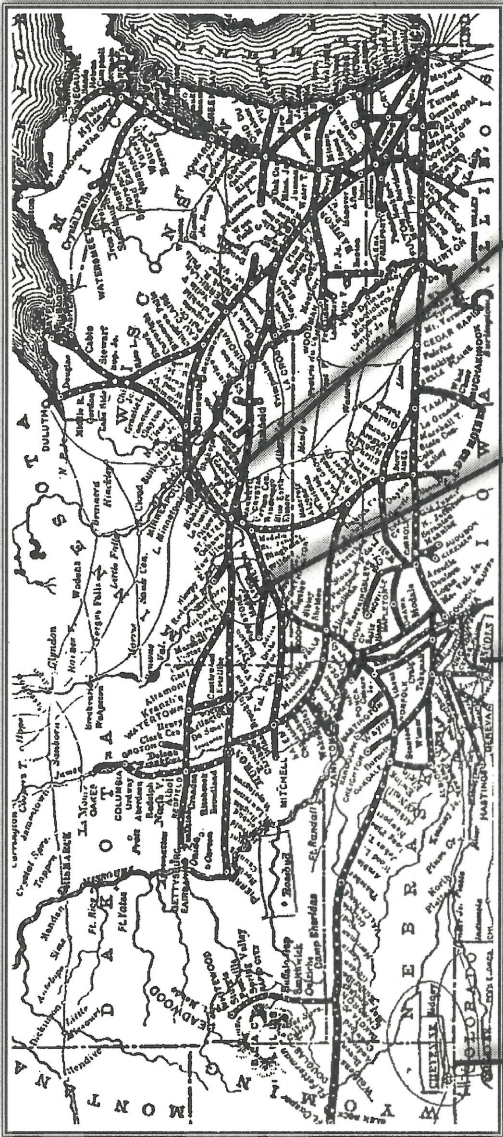


M. M. Walburga White

The period between 1880 and 1886 was one of expansion [for the Society in America]... In these years the American population was moving to the West in great numbers, and the Church was anxious to continue to provide for the education of Catholics among them. Foundations were established in Lincoln, Nebraska; Avoca and Waseca, Minnesota; and Cheyenne, Wyoming. At that time M. M. Walburga wrote:

After almost 21 years of residence in the Diocese of Philadelphia, the Society is called by God to labor in the far West! May we bravely, and prayerfully work for the greater glory of God in the field of education, which the Church has confided to us.

*History of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus,
Issue VII, page 25*



Cheyenne

Lincoln

Avoca

Wesaca

Westward expansion in the United States was spurred on by the railroads. Often the railroad companies offered land grants to homesteaders. These settlers were encouraged to put down roots and build towns along the rail lines. As settlers increased, there was a need to provide for religious care. So, in 1878, Bishop John Ireland founded the Catholic Colonization Bureau of Minnesota. He purchased a land grant of 53,000 acres and decided that he would call the town Avoca. By 1881 Avoca had grown in population and a proper church was built. Bishop Ireland appealed to the Sisters of the Holy Child to open a Convent School in Avoca and on August 21, 1882 M. M. Walburga set out from Broad and Filbert Street Station for the purpose of opening a new foundation in one of the Western states.

Dorothy Cropper, SHCJ
Our Roots—Avoca

Avoca

1883-1890

The sisters celebrated their first anniversary with a day of recreation. They had survived the long winter, but now in May 1884 they had to assess their condition. There were still too few pupils. A few days later, Bishop Ireland found a solution. He told them that he “was going to send to this mission fifty Indian girls.” His wish was that “Avoca would grow rapidly, and become a well known resort for useful and solid education.”

The second school year began in early September but the children were needed at home to bring in the harvest. Money worries were soon eased with the signing of the contract to educate Indian girls.

On their arrival, the Indians spoke no English, but an entry in the Journal of Epiphany 1885 reads, “The children entertained the community with a farce. It is their first attempt in English.” After six months with the sisters, the Indian children were putting on plays and singing in the Parish Church.

Dorothy Cropper, SHCJ
Our Roots—Avoca

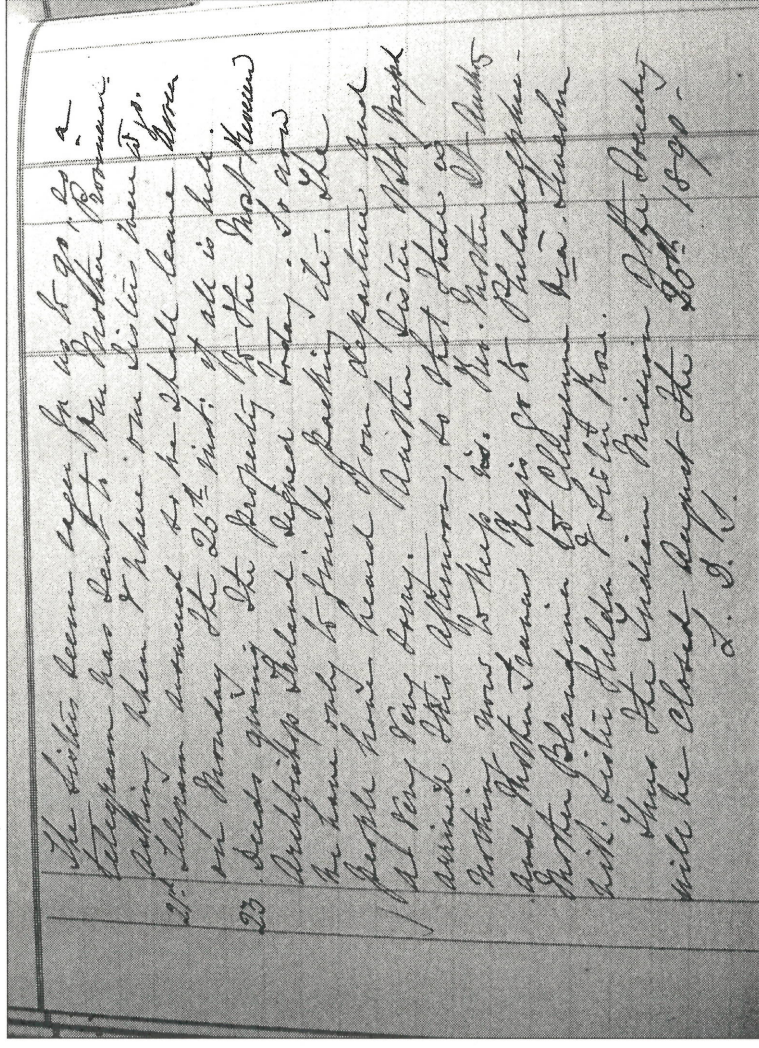
The government allowed the children to visit home only after completing three years at school. This journal entry describes the SHCJ accompanying the children home.

"The traveling across the prairies was truly dreadful. No trees, sand and hilly soil, crossing creeks and streams over which there was sometimes a bridge and sometimes none, in which case you go through the water. We were now in the Reservation Land of the Sioux Indians. We had a dreadful storm. The lightning was more vivid than I had ever seen and the hailstones large as hens' eggs. The horses were terrified and jumped about so much, that the driver had to jump off the wagon and hold them. The trip took 16 days."

Journal August 1888.
Dorothy Cropper, SHCJ
Our Roots—Avoca

The SHCJ learned to adjust to the hot summers, and long, dreadfully cold winters. They also adjusted to the rhythm of farm life and they loved the Indian girls. The Journalist wrote in 1888, "... Rev. Mother St. Anthony has charge of their clothings, [sic] and to work for 57 and keep them supplied is no small task. M. M. Aloysia is Prefect, and if you could see her training these children to do homework, it would amuse you. Sister Hilda, 'our cultivator-in-chief of the potato field' dug up 700 bushels of potatoes with the help of the children."

A year later word came from the General Chapter which decided that "as Avoca, after a six year trial, offered no prospect of affording other work to the SHCJ than that done in the Indian and parochial schools... and as the position of the place is isolated to a degree and the sisters needed elsewhere..." [the Society would leave Avoca within a year].



Journal Entry August 23, 1890

"Deeds giving the property to Most Reverend Archbishop Ireland signed today. So we only have to finish packing, etc... The people have heard of our departure and are very, very sorry. Another Sister of St. Joseph arrived this afternoon so there is nothing now to keep us. Rev. Mother St. Anthony and M. Francis Regis go to Philadelphia, Mother Blandina to Cheyenne via Lincoln with Sister Hilda and Sister Rose."

Final Entry

"Thus the Indian Mission of the Society will be closed August 25, 1890. L.D.S."

Lincoln, Nebraska

1889-1907

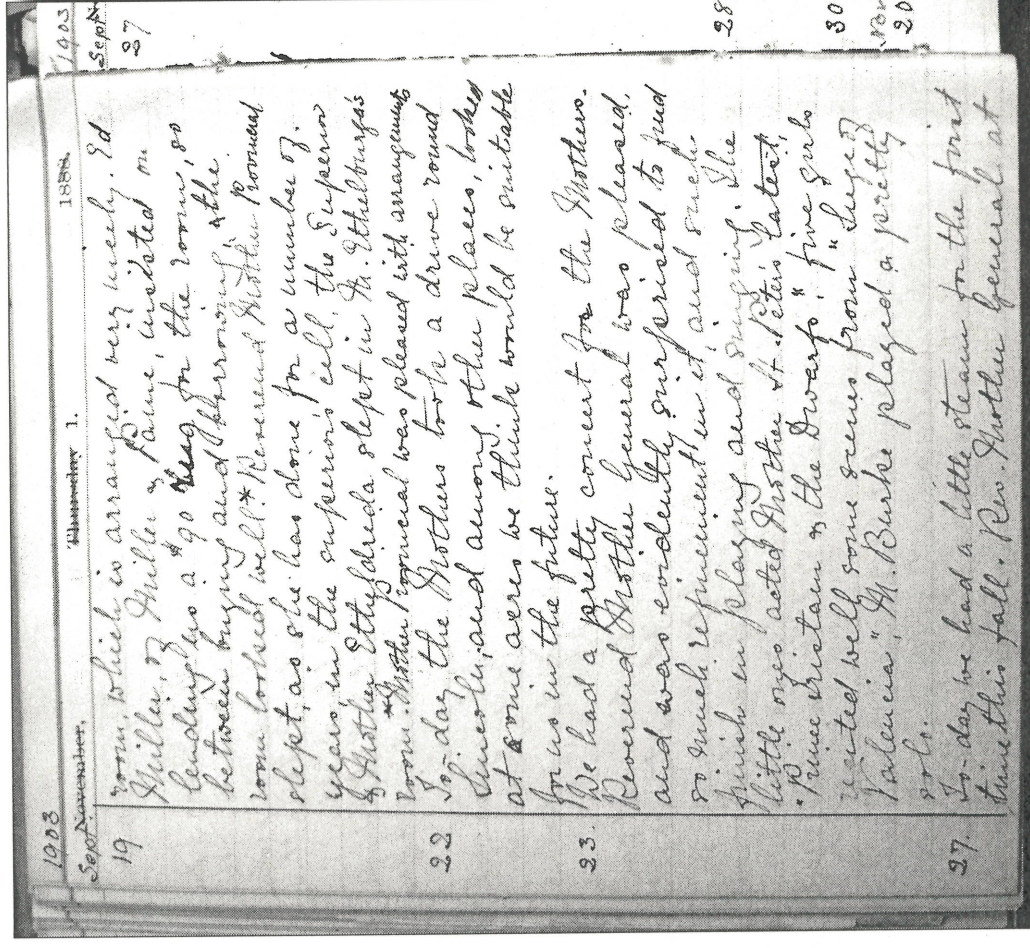
Lincoln was the Society's second western foundation. An old friend of the Society, James O'Connor traveled from Omaha to Sharon to ask for the Sisters of the Holy Child. His diocese included what are now the states of Nebraska and Wyoming. Three of the five founding SHCJ had been in Towanda, so pioneering was not new to them.

Problems arose in the community in the early 1890s when the superior, M. St. Paul, without informing the community, left the Society and eventually married her widowed brother-in-law, M. St. Paul had been much beloved by the sisters but in the years immediately preceding her departure, she had been under severe strain caused by serious financial problems and the disaffection of a major benefactor. Nevertheless, her abrupt departure was a severe shock to the community. The journal simply records: "... The superior left—a beautiful soul before its fall."

History Society of the Holy Child Jesus
Issue III: Ministries (Part II)

The school in Lincoln struggled from the beginning because the bishop had put constraints on the recruitment of boarding students. In 1893, ten years after its founding, only seven boarding students were registered. Nevertheless, hopes soared as the city grew and by 1895 the academy was prospering. There was even talk of building a new school.

By 1903, when the Superior General, M. M. Gonzaga Snow and M. M. Walburga came on visitation, the bishop had already given permission to build a much needed new convent.



Journal Entries at the time of the Superior General's Visitation

September 22, 1903

"Today the Mothers took a drive around Lincoln and among other places, looked at some acres we think would be available for us in the future."

September 23, 1903

"We had a pretty concert for the Mothers. Reverend Mother General was pleased and was evidently surprised to find much refinement in it and such finish in playing and singing...."

September 27, 1903

"Reverend Mother General at Spiritual Reading time spoke to us of the spirit of self sacrifice to do God's work and urged us to do all possible to improve our school and its work. [She] expressed herself later that she was pleased with the spirit (D.G.) and that in time it has a good outlook on the style of Blackpool...."

Despite this optimism, by 1906 it was evident that the school would not prosper without a greater number of boarding students and new buildings. The General Council decided to close Lincoln; a local newspaper wrote of the sisters' departure:

"The withdrawal of the nuns of the Holy Child Jesus from Lincoln was due to the fact that the building had become a fire trap. The old building looks gloomy and lonesome, and something like a soul has gone out of the north side of Lincoln since the good sisters have departed."

History: Society of the Holy Child Jesus
Issue III: Ministries (Part II) pp 68-70

1903

Sept. November,

Friday 2

1888.

27

Spiritual reading time spoke to us of the need of self sacrifice to do God's work, and urged us to do all possible to improve our school and its work. Reverend Mother General expressed herself later as pleased with the spirit (D.G.), and thinks that this will in time be a good school on the style of Blackpool. She urges us to be a better part of town.

Our dear Mother Provincial seemed fairly well during this visit, came to all meals but breakfast and was her own dear self to all. Though she did not see each one formally, yet each one watched her chance for a talk with her.

28

Our Mothers left for Cheyenne, via Omaha, at 7.45 A.M. Each year it is harder to say good-bye to our own dear Mother.

30

Ended the month with 27 boarders & about 90 day scholars.

Nov.

20

To-day, our pastor, Father Shins, baptized Catherine Free. She took the name of Mary and J. Harrington was her godmother.

Cheyenne

1884-1933

Bishop O'Connor also prevailed upon M. M. Walburga White to open a school in Cheyenne one year after the opening of Lincoln. Although the beginnings in Cheyenne were sparse, by 1885 under the charismatic leadership of M. St. Michael, the SHCJ moved into a new school and convent.

M. St. Michael was an impressive fund raiser. Judge Carey of Cheyenne was quoted as saying, "There was no business man in Cheyenne who had such power or organization. She was the best business man in Cheyenne." Unfortunately, the high altitude of Cheyenne took a toll on her health and she returned to Philadelphia after five years.

During the following decades life at Cheyenne went forward, its stability affected by the success or failure of crops. The Panic of 1893 when the gold standard was replaced by silver, badly affected the economy—and so the school. In 1912 M. M. Stanislaus confided in the newly appointed bishop that the school was having serious financial difficulties. He initiated a campaign to raise funds and by 1918 there were 225 children in the school and forty-two were boarders.

History Society of the Holy Child Jesus
Issue III (Part I) pp 70-72

House journals at Cheyenne dwell more on the joys of daily life than on the ever present financial worries. SHCJ enjoyed Wild West shows while sitting on their front lawn and boating on Sloane's Lake. Life for SHCJ in Cheyenne seems to have been a bit more relaxed than that of their counter parts in the east.

The SHCJ community was greatly loved in Cheyenne. M. M. Ignatius Carroll, later president of Rosemont College, wrote of her years in Cheyenne as second Prefect, "The Cheyenne community was very much a family. It had to be; its very remoteness threw it back on its own resources. Out there on the prairies, there could be no afternoon excursions to Sharon for the provincial's feast, no summer holidays at the seashore, no interchanges between communities. It was responsible for itself, for keeping up the "*Cor unum et anima una.*"

History Society of the Holy Child Jesus
Issue III Ministries (Part I) p 72

Journal Entries at the time of Superior General's Visitation 1903

October 3

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament but no retreat of the month as our Rev. Mothers are still with us.

Oct. 4

... the Rev. Mothers went for a drive after Mass and visited the cemetery. Mr. Keefe was most desirous of giving the Rev. Mothers a drive so they had that pleasure after Mass.

Oct. 5

Rev. Mothers left us this morning at 5:30 am. We were up very early to say goodbye....

Oct. 3, 1903.

Exposition of the B. Sacrament - but - as retreat of the month as our dear Rev. Mothers are still with us.

Oct. 4. The Bishops being away visiting the dioceses, we had two masses one at eight - and the other at half past ten. It being Sunday we all went to Chi eight o'clock Mass except - the Sisters whose turn it was to play in. The Rev. Mothers went for a drive after Mass and visited the cemetery. Mr. Keefe was most desirous of giving Rev. Mothers General a drive, so he had that pleasure after Mass.

Oct. 5. The Reverent Mothers left us this morning at 5:30 - we were up very early to say "Goodbye" - Rev. Mothers and Mother left. Then went to Chi station with them. Oct. 8. The Rt. Rev. Bishops said Mass.

The SHCJ community in Cheyenne were integrated into all segments of life in this frontier community.

"Just as we sat down to breakfast Indians arrived to say goodbye... So breakfast was postponed and all went to the vestibule to receive our interesting and distinguished visitors, for they were truly such being Chief Strong Talk, Black Eagle, the medicine man, and our old friend, John White Wolf.

After chatting with them a while, we took them into the chapel where they prayed aloud in their native tongue for at least ten minutes, at the end of which they stood up and sang a hymn to Our Lady and one to St. Joseph in the same tongue in melodious tones. Their attitude of reverence and devotion was most striking and made a lasting impression on all who saw them...."

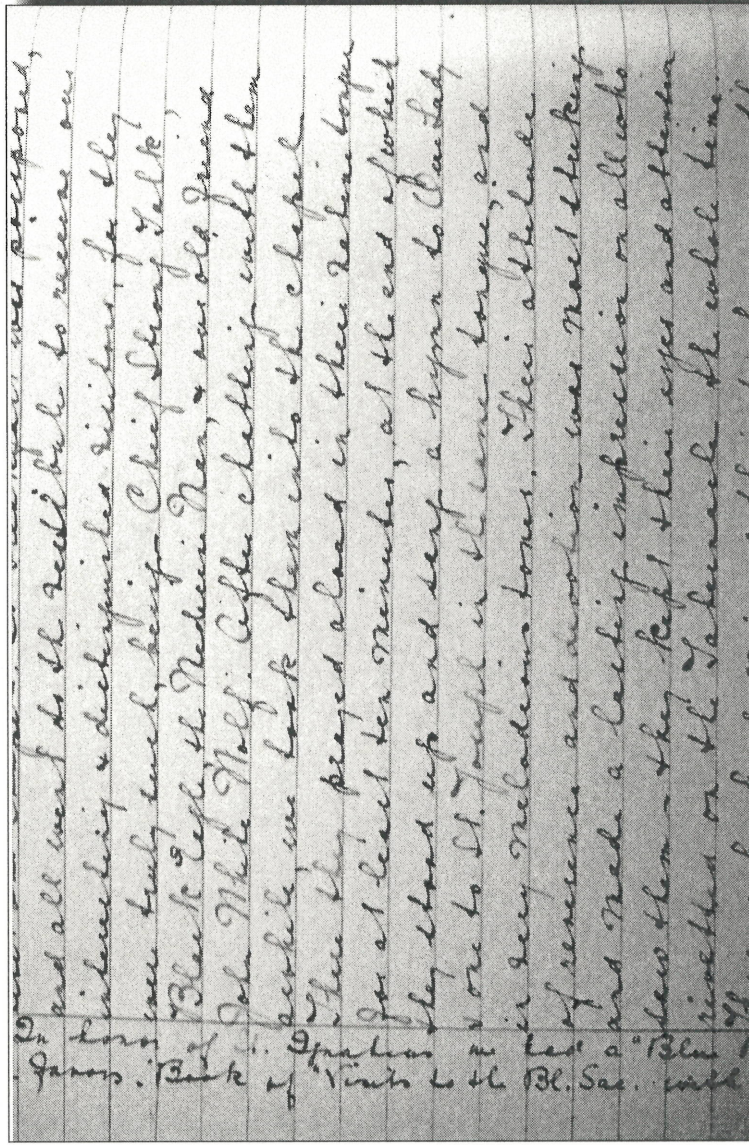
Journal Entry Cheyenne

Although the financial situation at Cheyenne had always been a matter of concern, few were ready for the announcement in April 1933 declaring that the school would close. Despite the apparent success of the school, a decision was made by the General Chapter that the sisters should close the convent and school and be dispersed to new assignments.

Cheyenne had been a greatly loved mission and the secrecy surrounding the decision to close only added to the suffering of the SHCJ and the Cheyenne community.

The community left Cheyenne after the 49th and final Holy Child Annual Commencement on 5 June 1933.

*History Society of the Holy Child Jesus
Issue III Ministries (Part I) p.72*



Waseca

1886-1904

The Society was approached in 1883 to open a school in Waseca which was near Avoca by the pastor who claimed there were over 200 children in need of a Catholic education. Three years later three sisters arrived to begin the new mission. The promised new house was only partly finished and it would be two more years before it would be completed. The SHCJ community was not, however, without pupils and two more SHCJ arrived from Philadelphia and one from Avoca.

The first superior of Waseca, M. M. Antonia Gray, was a person of incredible energy and had a talent for making things go well amid inconveniences of the physical arrangements and the demands of the Minnesota weather. She was a zealous woman and an excellent manager. Besides bringing an atmosphere of well-being into school and community, M. M. Antonia's genial spirit reached beyond the SHCJ and children to the local community. On her death in 1896 the entire town, including the mayor, assembled to show their respect and appreciation for her years in Waseca.

"Far from her sisters and homeland, M. M. Antonia lies buried on the prairies where the winds sing one long hymn over her grave which bears the date 16 August 1896."

*History Society of the Holy Child Jesus
Issue III Ministries (Part D) pp 72-74*

There was much to which to adjust on the frontier. The bitter winters, the hot dry summers meant contending with the dirt and dust of the prairie. There was also the isolation, thousands of miles from homeland, thousands of miles from Sharon Hill. Very little in the pioneer culture was familiar, but the SHCJ embraced it all—and cheerfully.

There was, however, a limit to their accommodations—the lack of manners of the men and boys.

"M. St. Stanislaus replaced Sr. M. Dolores in the boys' classroom and instilled better order, teaching the young men to tip their hats to ladies and to stand in the presence of priests."

It is comforting to learn that despite all the challenges of beginnings the children's examinations results were also more than satisfactory!

*History Society of the Holy Child Jesus
Issue III Ministries (Part I) p 73*

Although the journal reflects a happy mutuality of affection between the SHCJ and the people, the parishioners did not always recognize the sisters' need for financial support. Often on their begging tours the sisters received donations in kind. They had no parish funding, nor support from the Society; the community was totally dependent on the donations of the farming community. By 1900 the SHCJ community was really feeling the pinch of poverty. Journal entries would read, "No coal."

Presumably the dire financial situation was apparent during the October 1903 General Visitation of Mother Gonzaga Snow and M. M. Walburga. It is speculated that the future of the mission was discussed with the community.

Journal Entry September

Nine months later, on June 8, 1904 the last sister of the Holy Child Jesus would leave Waseca.

The ending days at Waseca apparently were filled with tension. The bishop was not pleased that the SHCJ sold the contents of the school and convent. Pages for the early months of 1904 were torn from the journal and the closing entries reflect the feelings of a very weary community.

Journal Entry June 1904

"'Variety is the spice of life' but as M. M. Alexis once remarked regarding this motto, 'At times life gets entirely too aromatic.' It is so at the present."

June 3, 1904

"Now that the school has closed the children come back every day to help with the rubbish that cannot be sold. The house looks very dreary with scarcely a piece of furniture in the house... we are almost looking forward to the end of this very novel experience."

History Society of the Holy Child Jesus
Issue III Ministries (Part I) p.74

"Variety is the spice of life. but as M. M. Alexis once remarked regarding this motto, 'At times life gets entirely too aromatic.' This is so at present. Now that school has closed the children come back every day to help dispose of rubbish that cannot be sold. The house looks very dreary with scarcely a piece of furniture in the house. The cells some have a broken chair with a tin basin on it & very poor bed clothes. The cups in the refectory are all disabled in one way or another, & we are almost looking forward to the end of this very novel experience.