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THE SISTERS OF CHARITY  
AND ST. VINCENT'S HOSPITAL:  
AN AMPLIFICATION OF SISTER MALLON'S JOURNAL

SYTHA MOTTO

As I read the first part of Sister Catherine Mallon's Journal (NMHR, April 1977), I came to the realization that other readers might benefit from additional information about the Sisters of Charity and St. Vincent's Hospital, which formed the central part of Sister Catherine's life. In addition, I feel that some further discussion of the journal itself might be helpful.

I was pleased to receive a photostatic copy of Sister Mallon's handwritten journal with other materials, and a letter granting permission to have it published, in 1964 from the Archives of the Sisters of Charity at Mt. St. Joseph, Ohio. I used part of it in my book *No Banners Waving* (1966). The *New Mexico Historical Review* chose Mr. Richter to edit the diary. The original of the diary still resides in the Ohio archive.

The journal, in the form of a letter, went from Sister Catherine to Sister Blandina Segale from Pueblo, Colorado, on September 9, 1901. Sister Blandina was writing a book (*At the End of the Santa Fe Trail*, Columbus, Ohio, 1932) and she had asked Sister Catherine to help refresh her memory. At that time, Sister Catherine was in the midst of her efforts at the hospital she founded in Trinidad. Both sisters belonged to the Sisters of Charity, a community founded by Mother Elizabeth Bayley Seton at Emmitsburgh, Maryland, on February 2, 1812. The first Motherhouse of the Sisters of Charity in Ohio was at Mt. Harrison in Cincinnati (also called Mt. St. Vincent) in 1854. The sisters moved to Cedar Grove in 1857 and to the present Motherhouse at Mt. St. Joseph in 1869.<sup>1</sup>

Sisters Vincent O'Keefe, Catherine Mallon, Theodosia Farn and Pauline Leo left Cincinnati and the safe shelter of the Motherhouse on August 21, 1865, to brave unknown dangers and what they feared was certain death to answer the call of Santa Fe's Bishop Jean Baptiste Lamy to minister to the sick, the poor, and the homeless. Archbishop John Baptist Purcell of Cincinnati, a very dear friend of Bishop Lamy's, advanced the money for the sisters' fare to Santa Fe, which Bishop Lamy repaid in February 1866.<sup>2</sup>

Sister Vincent O'Keefe was the first of the Charity postulants to be received at Cincinnati, so she became the first Superior at St. Vincent's Hospital at Santa Fe.<sup>3</sup> Sister Vincent was small, gentle, and courageous; she and Sister Theodosia had nursed wounded soldiers all though the war just ended. The four sisters arrived in Santa Fe on September 15, 1865, and were welcomed and made comfortable by Sister Magdalen, Superior of the Loretto Academy where they spent the night. The next day Bishop Lamy called for them and conducted them to the old Episcopate (Bishop's residence) north of St. Francis Cathedral, as Sister Catherine describes in her journal.<sup>4</sup> The Bishop reserved two rooms for himself and his students until the new Bishop's residence was completed south of the Cathedral in what was known as the Bishop's Garden; otherwise, the Sisters of Charity had the entire building to themselves for a hospital.

The first patient was one of the Bishop's students who suffered from typhoid. Sister Catherine describes how he was shot by a madman who entered the hospital on Christmas Eve. The student recovered from both the sickness and the wound. The second patient was a Mrs. Mary Herbert. The first orphan sent to the Sisters was a little Navajo girl picked up on a battlefield by General James Carleton. The number of orphans soon increased to eighteen.

For the first six months of the hospital's existence, the sisters received no money. The Sisters of Loretto saved some of their food and gave it to the Sisters of Charity. The Bishop furnished some wood, meat, and flour, for which contribution he and his

students received their meals. Some of the military also boarded with the sisters, for which the sisters were permitted limited commissary supplies.<sup>5</sup> Sister Catherine, as she describes in the second part of her journal in this issue of the *Review*, went on begging trips for funds, sometimes accompanied by other sisters, by whatever conveyances upon which she could catch a ride, and most often by foot.<sup>6</sup>

Bishop Lamy helped teach the sisters Spanish and assisted them in many ways. They always spoke very highly of him and were very grateful for his kindness and generosity, especially for permitting them to use the old adobe building for a hospital without charge. He never demanded anything of them; yet when the Rev. Stephen Avel, who died in Mora, bequeathed three thousand dollars to the Sisters of Charity for a hospital, the Bishop accepted on behalf of the archdiocese two thousand dollars as payment in full for the old adobe hospital building and the land on which today rests the entire St. Vincent complex.<sup>7</sup>

In 1876 the old adobe building was remodeled. New floors, and large windows and doors replaced the old small ones, a second story with a covered porch all around appeared, and a pitched roof was added.<sup>8</sup> In that same year, Sister Blandina Segale arrived in Santa Fe from Trinidad, Colorado, and Sisters Augustine Barron and Louise Barron came from the Motherhouse.<sup>9</sup> Sister Augustine, like Sisters Vincent and Theodosia, had been a Civil War nurse, and had been Assistant Mother for the Community. She was Superior of St. Vincent's from 1876 to 1878.

Also in 1876, General Carleton gave one thousand dollars from the so-called "California-Fund," appropriated to him for the care of those left destitute by battles with the Indians. In that same year, the territorial legislature passed a bill allowing St. Vincent's one hundred dollars per month for the care of the indigent.<sup>10</sup>

When Sister Blandina arrived at St. Vincent's she was appalled by the conditions of extreme poverty and the lack of most everything, especially for the thirty-five sisters housed in the "L" shaped adobe building with its metal roof that stood adjacent to the Cathedral, and in the red brick building in the rear. School

was conducted by the sisters in a one-room adobe that had formerly been used for storage. There were, of course, no blackboards, no desks, and only two textbooks. The refectory contained two fifteen-foot long tables, no chairs or utensils save spoons, a broken ironstone china cup, and a plate, which for some meant an old pie tin. Each girl was served a piece of bread with coffee for breakfast, a piece of bread with water to drink for dinner, and a piece of bread with weak tea for supper.<sup>11</sup>

Sister Blandina applied to the school board for a teacher's salary, which was granted her since some of the wealthier residents paid tuition for their daughters. The remainder of the money, plus some of Sister Blandina's salary, was used to purchase books and supplies for the school.<sup>12</sup> A man she had befriended in Trinidad, who later had a carpenter's shop in Santa Fe, offered the work and material for installing blackboards and for repairing the floors and windows.<sup>13</sup> The sisters also used produce from their small nearby vegetable garden to help eke out the scanty hospital fare, but of course this was not available during the fall and winter months.

At one time, the sisters were faced with the problem of feeding seventy-two patients, thirty-five orphans, and sixteen sisters with little food and no money to purchase any. Undaunted, Sister Blandina raided the Bishop's garden where the vegetables, buried head down for winter use, were kept. After delivering enough vegetables for several days, she went to the Bishop and made her confession of theft. Instead of being angry with her, Bishop Lamy ordered the gardener to give her all of the vegetables that remained in his garden.<sup>14</sup>

In June 1878 work was begun on an industrial school for orphan girls. This was a tremendous undertaking, since the work was begun without a cent in sight to guarantee completion. Plans were drawn for a three-story brick building, facing Cathedral Place. It had a mansard slate roof including a cupola, a sewer system, running water, and was heated and lighted by gas; in a city and territory where there was neither a gas nor a water works! The building was completed according to plan in December 1880.<sup>15</sup> In

practice, the Industrial School was still a dream. The greater need was for more and better hospital facilities, so the completed building became an adjunct to St. Vincent's and continued as such until it burned to the ground.

In 1882 a two-story red brick building was constructed facing west, south of the original adobe hospital building, to be the sisters' convent. Like the Industrial School, however, the new convent went to a higher purpose; as late as 1936 this building (later named Seton Hall) was used for ambulatory tuberculosis patients and for aged and infirm clergy.<sup>16</sup>

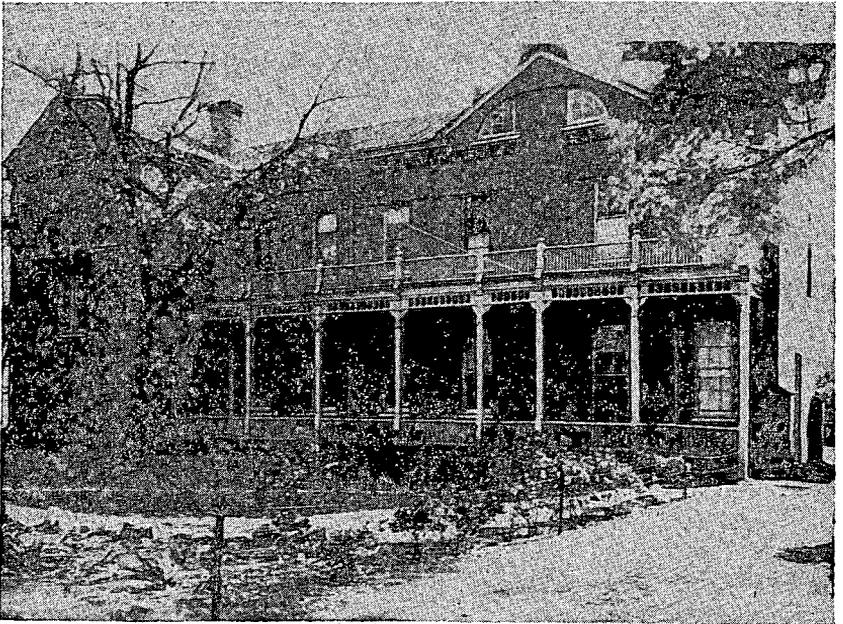
By 1886 the demand for private rooms became so great that the erection of another hospital building was determined upon. Under the direction of Sister Sebastian Shew the two-story red brick building was begun. Sister Sebastian was recalled to the Motherhouse to assume the duties of Mother Assistant of the Order before the building was completed. Sister Sebastian was replaced by Sister Gabriel who after six months because of ill health, turned over the work of construction to Sister Magdalena who continued the construction and succeeded in having it ready for occupancy in August 1887. This was the "old Hospital" on Palace avenue which was razed in 1948 to make room for the present structure.<sup>17</sup>

By 1902 the hospital buildings were filled as more and more tuberculars were coming to Santa Fe. By 1907 the need for a sanatorium was urgent. The plans for it were made and work begun on a new "L" shaped, seventy-five bed hospital and sanatorium, that faced Palace Avenue, just west of the old 1886 hospital. The three-story fireproof brick building had a tiled roof, and steam-heated enclosed glass and screen porches, that were built for out-of-door sleeping as well as living. On the first floor were the business and doctors' offices, clinical and x-ray laboratories, and examination and drug rooms. Also included were a large cheerful living room with fireplace, a well-stocked library, a billiard room, a spacious lobby, an attractive dining room, airy white-tiled kitchen, bakery and special diet kitchens and a sisters' dining room. (When the nurses' training school opened in 1921,



*Above:* St. Vincent's orphans in front of the old orphanage, 1890.

*Below:* The orphanage for girls, 1891. Photos courtesy of Sytha Motto.



this dining room was used by the student nurses.) On the second floor were the comfortable home-like bedrooms, with baths and sleeping porches, and a chapel. The third floor was well equipped and reserved for hospital patients, with diet kitchen, baths and thoroughly up-to-date operating and delivery room equipment.

Throughout the entire building, now known as Marian Hall, are beautiful, sometimes elaborate, mosaic floors. In 1886, after the "Old Hospital" was built the first old adobe hospital building became the sisters' quarters and in 1921 the upper floor rooms were occupied by the student nurses.

When Sister Blandina came to Santa Fe, the "L" shaped one story, adobe orphanage housed thirty-five orphan girls. By 1890 it was sheltering seventy. Obviously the sisters felt the necessity of providing more comfortable quarters for the orphans but the losses suffered by fire and the debts incurred for the construction of the hospitals were so great that the assuming of any further obligation seemed imprudent. But, when in 1890 the Rev. Father Thomas A. Hayes gave a large sum of money to build an orphanage, they were relieved of their embarrassment and began the construction of a large two-story brick building that could accommodate sixty or seventy orphans or indigent girls. They were fed, clothed, and instructed in the usual branches of education, cooking, baking, sewing, and the customary household duties. The new orphanage consisted of a dormitory, baths, kitchen, dining room, and classrooms.<sup>18</sup> The old orphanage was used for storage until 1921 when it was remodelled by tearing down the north "L". A metal hip roof was put on, the outside and inside walls were repaired, and the inside of the building was remodelled to contain two bedrooms and baths, a class room and recreation room for the student nurses.

#### NOTES

1. Sister Blandina Segale, *At the End of the Santa Fe Trail* (Milwaukee, 1948), p. 285.
2. Archbishop Lamy to Archbishop Purcell, February 1866, Archives of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana.

3. Segale, *Santa Fe Trail*, p. 288.
4. "Sister Catherine Mallon's Journal," ed. Thomas Richter, *New Mexico Historical Review*, 52 (April 1977): 142-43.
5. Segale, *Santa Fe Trail*, p. 93.
6. "Mallon's Journal," ed. Richter, *NMHR*, 52 (July 1977): 237-48.
7. Segale, *Santa Fe Trail*, p. 86.
8. Sisters of Charity Archives, Mt. St. Joseph, Ohio.
9. Segale, *Santa Fe Trail*, p. 79.
10. Segale, *Santa Fe Trail*, p. 105.
11. Segale, *Santa Fe Trail*, p. 93.
12. Segale, *Santa Fe Trail*, p. 94.
13. Segale, *Santa Fe Trail*, p. 95.
14. Segale, *Santa Fe Trail*, pp. 144-45.
15. Sytha Motto, *No Banners Waving* (New York, 1966), p. 93.
16. Motto, *No Banners Waving*, p. 98.
17. "St. Vincent Sanatorium" (Santa Fe, [1924]).
18. Sisters of Charity Archives, Mt. St. Joseph, Ohio.