

177-003 Account of Foundation of Loreto in Perth

Transcript

Loreto Convent

Perth

W. Australia

Early in 1895 Dr Gibney, Bishop of Perth, visited Mary's Mt and asked Rev. Mother Gonzaga Barry for a foundation in West Australia – refusing to give her his blessing until she made a promise to comply with his request. This promise she was unable to fulfil till 1897.

In Sept 1896 she, with M.M. de Sales Field and M.M. Aloysius Macken, sailed for Albany. Whilst they were on sea a telegram from Dr Gibney arrived in Mary's Mt saying that he would wait no longer and the nuns need not sail! [question mark in the margin]

On their arrival, however, he thawed and extended a hearty welcome to them [question mark in margin] as also did the kind Sisters of St John of God who offered them hospitality at their little Convent in Adelaide Terrace.

With the Bishop they visited S. Perth and Subiaco both of which we considered unsuitable for a High School.

Rev Mother then asked the Bishop if he had land in Claremont. He said he had and would take the nuns to see it. He, there and then, presented six acres of his property there on which the future Boarding School was to be built. In less than a week a [start bracket in margin] Perth solicitor, Mr Horgan, who was a friend of our nuns, secured the deeds and handed them over to Rev Mother on the Feast of her special patroness St. Teresa. As in the case of all Institute properties, the deeds were made out in Rev. Mother's name. This greatly displeased His Lordship who, up to this time, had been sole proprietor of all Church properties in West Australia. [end of brackets in margin]

As there was no immediate prospect of opening a school in Claremont it was decided to make a beginning in Perth. Rev Mother considered that "The Bracken", Dr Whaylen's former residence in Adelaide Terrace, was the most suitable place, which however was not "to let".

[beginning of brackets in margin] She then asked Mr J. Quinlan to be on the look out for a suitable house as she and her companions had to return to Ballarat to make preparations and arrangements for the new foundation. Mr Quinlan was, evidently, influenced by his Lordship (who was still wrathful about the deeds) as no effort to fulfil his promise was made. On the contrary, as afterwards transpired, negotiations were set on foot to secure a community of the New Zealand Notre Dame des Missions nuns in our stead. One of these religious as the Aunt of Mr Quinlan. [end of brackets in margin with note – It would be unwise to present this.]

Thanks to an old Loreto girl, Lily Healy, a house was at last secured. About the middle of January 1897 she telegraphed to Rev Mother the news that the Vanzetti family intended to set out on a six months' tour and were willing to let their furnished residence for six months. Ren £10 a week! It was a fine two-storied house in Adelaide Terrace. This offer was accepted.

Jan 29th 1897. M.M. de Sales and her Community bade adieu to Mary's Mt (By our old friend Dean Hoyne it was pronounced to be "The best Team that ever left Mary's Mt!") The Community comprised Mother M Leo Breen, Mother M. Dosithea Felkin, M.M. Teresa Cussen, M.M. Peter Leeson and two Sisters Sister Columba Fahey and Sister Laurentia Marnell. The future needs of the new foundation were well provided for and were packed away in twenty-two trunks, case, etc! each one marked with a large blue star (which called forth congratulations from busy stewards and porters en route). For years after everything missing from Mary's Mt was accounted for by the conclusion that it had gone to Perth in one of those twenty-two boxes.

Jan 30th. In those days Perth seemed to be very far away and the travellers were regarded as real missionaries. At 11.45 a.m. Rev Mother assembled them in the Albert Park Chapel where she consecrated them to the Sacred Heart, Our Lady and St Joseph and earnestly invoked God's blessing on their future work. As the Angelus rang, Rev Mother and her companion accompanied the travellers to Port Melbourne to board the little French boat 'Polynesian'. The tiny second class cabins were none to luxurious and there were no pleasant anticipation for the voyage. When the boat had moved out M.M. de Sales suggested that the Fifteen Mysteries should be our first Community duty. So before experiencing the troubles that "The Rip" is responsible for, we sat on deck and began a practice that was faithfully kept up every day for at least three years. The voyage was uneventful.

Feb. 4th. Arrival in Albany and hospitably entertained by the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition. The McDowell family showered kindness on the travellers providing comforts, of all sorts, for the rest of the journey. At 5 p.m. they boarded the train for Perth. During the night the bush seemed illuminated (in their honour). Bush fires had been raging for days and the burning trunks and branches of the huge gums were to be seen on all sides and were duly admired in spite of the intense heat.

Feb. 5th Arrival in Perth about noon. Not one person on the platform who looked interested in our presence! Two went off to the luggage van to look out for twenty-two blue stars the rest stood and waited. At last Lily Healy and Fr Duff appeared, and, in cabs, drove us to St John of God's Convent where the heartiest of welcomes awaited us. Dear M.M. Antonia was specially good to us. After having dined and rested we proceeded to our new home which, we found, was just a few doors further down the Terrace. The Sisters of Sr. J. of God invited us to come to Mass in their little Chapel for a few days, an offer of which we fully intended to avail ourselves.

About 5 p.m., and whilst we were exploring our house, His Lordship arrived to bid us welcome. As he was leaving (about 6 o'clock) he quite casually announced that he, himself, would be down in the morning to say the first Mass for us! Without delay, the weary travellers had to set to work to transform one of the heavily furnished Italian bathrooms into a Chapel. Carpets had to be taken up heavy wardrobe, brass mounted bedstead (fully 6ft wide) marble toilette table, etc etc had to be removed and then trunks unpacked for Mass requisites. It was far into the small hours before all was done and, by that time, some of the workers had already collapsed. M.M. de Sales and M.M. Peter remained up all night to guard the luggage, the heavy portion of which was still in the open.

Saturday Feb. 6th. The First Mass. His Lordship arrived at 7 o'clock carrying in his hands altar wine, altar breads etc and was greatly surprised to find everything in readiness, even to the extra candles for a

Bishop's Mass! As we wanted to have the Blessed Sacrament reserved from the very beginning the tiny safe we brought with us was in position and greatly surprised the Bishop.

He noticed, when speaking to the nuns after Mass, that they all looked very tired. He insisted that they should take a week's rest before opening the school and kindly offered £100 to help defray expense of rent etc. The 'rest' took the form of dismantling and rearranging the rooms for their future use – no light work when the heavy Italian furniture is taken into consideration. The heat was intense.

[opening bracket in margin with question mark]

Feb 7th Sunday. His Lordship mounted the pulpit of the Cathedral at the 11 o'clock Mass and expatiated on the excellence of the Loreto nuns and of the Perth Community in particular! Just beneath the pulpit were rows and rows of Mercy nuns, who up to that time, had been the Catholic teachers of Perth, and the diocese!

[closing of brackets in margin]

Feb. 15.

The Day School opened with two pupils, Eileen Lundor and Josephine Dooley. When introducing the nuns to them M.M. de Sales took special pains to stress the "Mary" in each name. She wished that, from the beginning, the children should be trained to give the nuns their full title thinking it would insure greater respect. For nearly twenty years this good practice was faithfully kept up by all our Western children.

Feb 19th The three Handran-Smiths, Vickie (now Mrs M. Desmond), Ida and Dora came to swell the numbers so the first week ended with five. Mrs Handran Smith was one of the truest and most generous friends that the nuns met in the West. The buggy, bringing the children to school, was daily laden with gifts of all kinds, fruit, vegetables, milk, flowers etc etc.

Feb 22nd. Mena and Beatrice Boladeras (now Mrs W. Bryan) arrived. Holy week brought the first Boarder, Muriel O'Meehan. On Holy Saturday, about 11 o'clock, the bell rang violently and, on opening the door, the portress beheld His Lordship in full pontifical with four acholytes in scarlet robes and surplices. No word of greeting was exchanged but, as soon as the door opened a shower of Holy Water was propelled from a large brush as the Bishop repeated the words, "Asperges me hyssops" etc. and without any explanations the procession moved forward. Every room was blessed and most of them were very untidy and far from fit for episcopal visitation! The St John of God nuns were much amused by our experience and warned us to be ready on all future Holy Saturdays as His Lordship was very faithful to the observance of this custom. Needless to state we took good care to have our tidying up all done during the early hours of future Easter Eves.

[opening bracket in margin with note – It would be unwise to mention Mr Quinlan's mistakes as he has amply atoned for them.]

During the first weeks in Perth Father Patrick Gibney, brother of the Bishop, called to ask if some members of our large Community would be allowed to go to North Perth and work up the school for the Sisters of Notre Dame des Missions! He was told that nothing could be done without the Rev Mother's permission – a permission which, needless to say, was never given.

Evidently help was found elsewhere for the school was well worked up before their arrival and they began work with thirty pupils!

[end of brackets in margin]

During the six months spent in Vanzetti's much was done in the way of producing, at the least possible cost, necessaries for the next house. Even the foundations of a farmyard were laid. The Sisters of St John of God who were always on the look out for opportunities to help had presented a fine rooster also a hen and chicks. Later, when poultry, prepared for the table, was sent along by other kind friends, the poulterer was asked to exchange them for live birds which he kindly did, and in this way the farmyard continued to grow. Even on M.M. de Sales feast this exchange was made and so the dinner was quite in keeping with the festal breakfast – Toast buttered with dripping and brown bread made of bran!

M.M. de Sales and her ever willing assistants produced, from apparently nothing, chapel benches and keelers, a priedieu for the sacristy, a credence table (made of bits of flooring board and three broom handles round which was twisted the cane that held together a bale of kapok from which eider-downs were made for the nuns as well as future boarders. A tabernacle (the one now in Adelaide Terrace Chapel) was also painted and decorated whilst in Vanzetti's by M.M. Teresa. The altar itself was done int 'The Bracken'.

June 9th

Sister Columba [Columba Fahey], on her Feast developed a bad cold and Dr Kenny was called in. From that day till the day of his death he proved himself the truest of friends to the Community and never lost an opportunity of helping them and forwarding their interests.

On learning that we would have to vacate the house in August he, at once, set about trying to procure another in a suitable locality.

July 20th

With Dr Kenny M.M. de Sales and some of the nuns visited several houses in the city, all of which were pronounced unsuitable. Finally he took them to "The Bracken" which seemed most desirable from every point of view.

Dr Kenny negotiated for the purchase of it and interested other Catholic gentlemen in the affair, with the result that they consented to be guarantors for the required purchase money, £6,000/ These benefactors were, Dr Daniel Kenny, Mr John Handran Smith, Mr T.G.A. Molloy, Mr J. Moran, Mr Hugh McKernan & Mr Bridges, to all of whom, with the exception of Dr Kenny and Mr Handran Smith, the nuns were absolute strangers. But for them God only know what would have happened as no one else seemed the least concerned about their plight. At the time 'The Bracken' was bought, the lease of Vanzetti's house had only two weeks to run!

Aug 6th Friday

The children were given a holiday so that packing, etc might be done and the furniture all restored to original positions, work which occupied the whole day and the greater part of the next night.

Aug 7th

On the forenoon, M.M. de Sales and M.M. Dosithea went up to 'the Bracken' to take formal possession and found Dr Whaylen and Dr Kenny awaiting them.

Whilst the nuns were absent Rev Father Ryan O.M.J. called at Vanzetti's. His mood was decidedly pessimistic. From what he said, it could easily be inferred, that he would not be at all surprised to hear that the Perth Loreto Nuns were all excommunicated. With the next twenty-four hours! He

explained that we had incurred the displeasure of the Bishop by the purchase of 'The Bracken' during his absence in York, where he was recruiting after a serious illness. The poor nuns, already exhausted by their long hours of hard work were still further prostrated by this announcement. With heavy hearts they awaited the return of M.M. de Sales, who only laughed at their fears and seemed not in the least perturbed.

After partaking of light refreshments and putting finishing touches to the house, two religious set out for 'The Bracken' to meet the carriers when they arrived with the furniture. The rest followed later and, by 6 p.m., all were at least in a house of the Institute – that is supposing the excommunication not to materialize! At 7 p.m. kind Dr Kenny called to see if we were alright and to ask if he could do anything for us. *[question mark in the margin]* The next trouble was that, having incurred His Lordship's displeasure, it was quite possible we would be left without Mass next morning, (Sunday).

Aug 8th

As Mass time approached the front gate was anxiously watched. M.M. de Sales, who was about very early, had affixed a notice board showing our whereabouts. Much to our relief Fr Riordan came at the usual hour and warmly welcomed us to our new home. And so, after many tribulations and much opposition from all quarters, we felt that, at last, Loreto had secured a firm foot-hold in the Est. Later in the day M.M. de Sales communicated with His Lordship explaining that, on account of his illness, she had not wished to trouble him to come and inspect our purchase and bless the house.

On his return from York, he did so, and was most genial and friendly, thought a great bargain had been secured and expressed the wish that such a valuable property should never leave the Institute.

Hard work then recommences for all – wherever it was roughest and hardest M.M. de Sales would surely be found.

Aug 9th

School work resumed. Dr Kenny sent his two little daughters Madge and Kitty to swell the numbers which gradually increased and the year's work ended with a concert given by twenty-seven pupils. This concert was very favourably commented on and helped considerably to secure many applications for 1898.

In Jun 1898, Sr Columba was ordered to Ballarat by the Dr and M.M. de Sales accompanied her and brought back Sr Andrea [Andrea Moran].

Towards the end of the year there was an outbreak of measles. M.M. Dosithea and Sister Laurentia were laid low. Their work fell on the others and M.M. de Sales nursed them.

In 1900 the school building was erected. All the bricked paths were laide by the Religious!

[opening of brackets in margin with note – Mr Quinlan has not only allowed the windows to be put up since but has paid the expense of so doing.]

In 1899 Mr Quinlan had built his new house so close to us (not through any love for us) that we were obliged to close all our windows on the side. Even in our new school he would not allow us to overlook his property which accounts for the blind windows on one side. Since those early days, however, he had become a truly generous friend of Loreto. *[close of brackets in margin]*

In 1901 the Boarding School was transferred to Osborne. This well know pleasure resort was purchased for £12000.

Five of the original Community went to Osborne with M.M. de Sales and M. M. Emilian was appointed Superior of Adelaide Terrace.