

37-002

Loreto Portland

Written by a member of the IBVM [M. Mildred Dew]

This Loreto owes its foundation to Dr. James Moore, successor to Right Rev. Dr. O'Connor, first bishop of Ballarat RIP.

Mother M. Gonzaga Barry (first Provincial) had a serious illness from which she recovered very slowly and the delicate state of her health caused the Community much anxiety. Rest and change being recommended, Dr. O'Connor wished the nuns could spend the summer vacation in Portland as he had benefited by its bracing air and spring water.

In January 1883, M.M. Gonzaga and some of the Community spent the vacation the presbytery to accommodate the nuns and the townspeople gave them a cordial welcome. They visited them often during their stay and brought presents of fruit, vegetables, shells and seaweed. They also expressed the hope that they would come back and found a Convent and teach their children.

The rest and health-giving ozone had desired effects as Mother Provincial and her companions returned to Ballarat much improved in health early in February, but the Bishop's health failed and he died on the 14th February, 1883. His death was a heavy cross for the Community to whom he had been a kind father and benefactor RIP.

1883 – Dr. J. Moore was appointed his successor and consecrated on Sunday, the feast of the Good Shepherd. A resident of Portland who was returning from the annual excursion to Melbourne in September, called at Mary's Mount to see Mother Provincial and the nuns whose acquaintance she had made in Portland, when she was leaving her little daughter, aged four, put a penny into Mother Provincial's hand for the Convent. When relating the incident to the Community at recreation, Mother called it her luck penny.

The nuns that had spent their holidays in Portland often expressed a wish that a house would be founded there and prayers were offered during the year for that intention.

1884 – A house was secured in Bentinck Street on a fine site overlooking the Bay within easy reach of the beach, and Mother Provincial and five members of the Community booted, gloved and wearing communion veils as substitutes for cloaks, left Mary's Mount for Portland on 27th December, 1884. They had a reserved carriage, and as the train steamed into the various stations, the blinds were lowered and silence observed; they arrived at their destination at 7pm, and were met at the pier station by Father O'Donohue. He gave them a hearty welcome and accompanied them to the future Convent. Three former pupils of Mary's Mount stood at the door to receive them (the Misses Hudson). They had spent the day putting the house into order, and assisted by Fr. O'Donohue's house-keeper. Miss McKeever had prepared a high tea for the travelers. The Pastor heard one of the girls confide to Mother Provincial, that the bedding etc. ordered from Melbourne had not arrived, and he hurried down to the Presbytery, and returned while the nuns were at tea with a feather mattress which, he said, was to be used by the Rev. Mother. The wire-spring mattresses were considered a luxury; at the time had a grey blanket spread upon to do duty for a mattress; they were used on stretchers on palliasses laid on the floor. Some of the Community

unaccustomed to spring mattresses, felt an inclination to mal-de-mer when the bed had not the upper mattress.

The Community heard Mass in All Saint's Church and as the grass of the grounds, through which they walked, had not been mown, wet or damp garments were the result in rainy weather.

Mother Provincial had the Church vestments, etc. renovated, the sanctuary lamp and the candlesticks cleaned and polished, and cruets which were broken, renewed.

The Convent, a six-room cottage, with a lean-to at the back consisting of a small room and kitchen, had to be adapted to its future requirements and during the ours between devotions and recreations, which were taken on the beach, the Sisters occupied themselves in re-arranging the rooms, papering painting etc. There were many privations and inconveniences, but Mother's presence and bright cheerfulness lightened al.

During the holidays Sisters requiring change of air, came to spend a fortnight or three weeks at the sea, and as the new arrival necessitated additional accommodation, various were the substitutes devised by resourceful minds, which, if they lacked style and comfort, caused much merriment and Mother Provincial used to say she liked the houses she founded to experience poverty, as it made them more like the Holy House of Nazareth and ensured future blessings.

The community was under obligation to many kind friends and benefactors. Mrs J. Buckley of Melbourne and her two daughters, Pupils of Mary's Mount, spent a week in Portland and assisted the nuns in arranging the parlour, hanging curtains etc. and they gave handsome valuable presents. The Misses Twomey, former pupils of Mary's Mount, donated a silver lamp for the Sanctuary, and a Parian marble holy water font for the Chapel.

Cliff Cottage, situated on a high cliff overlooking the Narrawong beach, was rented for a month, as some of the boarders, whose parents lived at a distance spent the holiday in Mary's Mont, and Mother Provincial wished them to have the advantage of the sea bathing, so they occupied the Cottage for a month.

1885 – Before returning to Ballarat for the re-opening of schools, Mother inaugurated a meeting of the women of the parish in All Saints' School and had them enrolled in the Arch-Confraternity of Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, by Rev. G. Doyle of Ballarat in the absence of Fr. O'Donohue, who was at Condah. After the ceremony Mother gave them instructions.

The school which had been taken over by the nuns was opened the last week in January 1885 and Mother M. Hilda Benson remained till Easter to organize it.

On 2nd February, M.M. Boniface, a young Sisters and the Misses McNanamny, nieces of Dr. Moore, arrived and later Mary McPhee, whose parents had removed from Ballarat to Melbourne; they were the first boarders.

The largest room which had been used by the nuns during the holidays was the children's school-room and refectory, the desks being at one side and the dining table opposite.

When the schools were in working order in Ballarat, Mother Proicnial and M.M. Aloysius spent a month in Portland and during that time, walks were made in the Church and Convent grounds, and corrugated iron fences enclosed the Convent grounds from the Chruch and Prebytery. Permission was obtained from the authorities to put gates in the fence opposite the Convent, opening a way to the beach across the bluff and railway, and steps were cut in the cliff to make the descent easier for the children. The nuns kept the keys of the gates, but of late years they are open to the public.

1885 – On the 12th March, the first Mass was said by Fr. O’Donohue in the little oratory. Mother Provincial and M.M. Aloysius lined the tabernacle and prepared the temporary altar; the sacristan and others helping, laid the vestments etc.; it was long past night when all was finished.

M.M. Boniface Volker was appointed Superior, and Mother gave her minute directions as to how she was to provide for the safety of the Sisters in case of an invasion: there was a Russian scare at the time. During her stay, she gave instructions to the members of the Confraternity on Sunday afternoon – and there was Sunday school for the children. Mother Provincial and M.M. Aloysius returned to Ballarat before Easter. In October she visited Portland again accompanied by M.M. de Sales Field, and the foundations of a new wing, which provided a school-room, refectory and dormitories were laid with the usual ceremony.

The building was finished before Christmas and the Novices and their Mistress, M.M. Stanislaus Mulhall spent the 1886 holidays in Portland, and the members of the community in Mary’s Mount.

The boarders increased during the year and M.M. Raphael Galavan was appointed Mistress of School, and had charge of the Confraternity and extern Children of Mary, a Branch of the Sodality having been established in the parish, and Sunday School for the children.

Mother Provincial’s visits were looked forward to by the adults and children, and it was a joy to see her on the beach surrounded by the little ones, looking as if she had cast aside all care, so interested was she in the specimens of shells, coral or seaweed they found and brought to her for examination; sometimes she set them running races, and distributed prizes to the winners.

1887 – Classes for German and French were formed, as the German governess (Mrs Soufle), who had been engaged by the Principal of a private school in Henty Street, was about to remove to Melbourne, arranged with the Superior that her pupils would continued their German and French studies with her. One of the students (Blanch Messer) daughter of the Principal, secured a pass at the Matriculations. Extern music pupils increased in numbers also.

Permission was obtained from the Council to erect bathing boxes on the beach for the use of nuns and children.

The members of the Confraternity and Children of Mary had a social evening every year, and sometime before the date fixed for it, usually the 8th September, tickets were given to the members who had been regular during the year.

Al Saints’ School was turned into a hall for the occasion, the desks were removed, the walls decorated and trestle tables arranged round the room for the party. After tea, the fun of the evening commenced; the tables were removed from the hall, and the old ladies led off the dances with jigs and reels – the young people played cards or danced the lancers, quadrilles or waltzes; song and dialogues varied the programmes. Refreshments were handed round before good nights were said.

1891 – On the 2nd February, M.M. Boniface celebrated her Silver Jubilee in Mary’s Mount and as her term of office had expired she was replaced as Superior in Portland by M.M. Emilian McGrath. About this time an exhibition of school work was held in Melbourne and Hamilton and the boarder and day-pupils entered for the prize competition and were awarded a medal for plain sewing and for kindergarten work.

1892 – M.M. Emilian’s health gave cause for uneasiness, and as change of air was recommended, M.M. Aloysius Macken relieved her of charge for a year; during that time a bathroom was built, ant

he stable, that had belonged to the Pastor before the ground became the nuns' property, was converted into a dairy and coachhouse into a trunk room, the loft became a gloryhole for storage.

189 – M.M. Emilian resumed office and was succeeded by M.M. Philomena Doherty in February, 1896.

1897 – During the autumn, Mother Provincial and M.M. Xavier spent a month in Portland. The boarders were eight in number, as the senior pupils did not return after Christmas. Mother Provincial called them the 'Eight Beatitudes' and told the 'Fifteen Mysteries' when she came again.

At midwinter her words were made good. It was during this visit that she designed the doll's house, which gave much pleasure to the little ones. The model was made with match-boxes, and when it came from the carpenter's shop, the children papered the rooms and furnished them.

As the numbers steadily increased and accommodation became insufficient, 'Seaview Cottage', adjoining the Convent was rented for some months, and a gable house at the corner of Bentinck and Eyre Streets, when 'Seaview' had occupants.

1900 – The foundation stone of a new wing was laid on the 29th April by Rev. J. O'Donohue and the Mayor, Mr. J. Hanlon, Father O'Donohue addressed the audience assembled for the occasion, but he did not live to see the building finished. The account of the building was published in the local paper, 'Observer'.