



A PORTRAIT OF MOTHER TERESA
By Veronica Inez Rodrigues, OSF

Mother Teresa O'Neil, OSF, is honored as the founding mother of the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany, NY. At the invitation of Fr. Pamfilo da Magliano, OFM, in 1859, a young Mary Anne O'Neil left NJ and travelled to Allegany, NY, where she joined two other women, who had also responded to an invitation by Fr. Pamfilo. Thus began a Congregation of Franciscan sisters that continues to this day. The Congregation, still centered in the little town of Allegany, now has sisters in Bolivia, Brazil, Jamaica and the US.

What follows in this booklet is a snapshot of the life of Mother Teresa, as written by Sister Veronica Rodriguez, OSF. Mother Teresa did not keep much of her own correspondence so there are not many documents written by her about the joys and trials of life in the early days of the Congregation. As you will see, Sister Veronica used many sources to put together a picture of the life of Mother Teresa which gives us insight into the woman herself, her faith, her courage and her style of leadership.

*Sister Veronica's text, *A Heritage: History of the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany, NY* (1979), was never published or widely distributed. When we rediscovered this section on Mother Teresa, we decided to share the story as told in a more personal way than in other histories of the Congregation.*

We hope you will enjoy reading about her and perhaps find in her life inspiration for the way we are being called to live today.

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Mother Teresa had not been well for some time before her death on May 12, 1926, but she was active until the last few months of her life. Father Edward Blecke in a letter dated January 19, 1922, from Rome to Mother Teresa referred to the suffering she endured from rheumatism in her right arm. However, Sister M. Dominica Enright in her letter of October 30, 1925, to Sister M. Alma Maguire wrote: “Reverend Mother left for New York on Thursday evening with Mother Genevieve [Mahany] and Sister Blanche [Dolet] who were here [at the Motherhouse] for a few days. Mother looks real well and feels almost like her old self.”

Not long after, Mother Teresa was confined to her room for a rest and on Ash Wednesday of 1926 she slipped on a carpet in her room and fractured her right thigh. This prolonged her period of inactivity, but on St. Joseph’s Day that year she waited hopefully for Dr. T. B. McLoughlan to come and give her permission to leave her room. His answer was a negative one and she never again resumed her activities in the Congregation. Sister M. Crescentia Joyce was Mother Teresa’s nurse during the period of her illness which terminated in her death. During her confinement to her room, Mass was offered on a temporary altar in the hall outside her room. On May 12, 1926, Father Denis Robinson, O.F.M., anointed her for the last time and while the noon Angelus was ringing Mother Teresa quietly went with Sister Death to meet her Spouse whom she had served as an Allegany Sister for more than sixty-six years of her life.

Following is information from her death certificate:

Death Certificate
Mother Mary Teresa O'Neil,
Main Street, Allegany

Date of death: May 12, 1926.
Age: 82 years, 4 months, 12 days.

Born: January 1, 1844¹

Occupation: Principal of St. Elizabeth Academy

Father: John O'Neil born in Ireland;
Mother: Bridget Williamson born in Ireland.

Medical Record: Doctor attended February 16 to
May 12, 1926. Last saw her alive May 10.

Death at noon.

Cause: myocarditis for several years.

Contributory - fractured right thigh near hub.

No operation, no autopsy.

Signed. T. B. McLoughlan, M.D.

May 14, 1926 Olean

Burial - May 17, 1926

Undertaker - John T. Heenan, Olean.

On Monday, May 17 at 9:00 a.m., the body was taken to St. Bonaventure's Church which was then on the college campus where the Franciscan clerics and seminarians chanted the Office for the Dead. The Solemn High Mass was celebrated at 10:00 a.m. by Father Gerald McMinn, O.F.M., assisted by Father Timothy Monahan, O.F.M., as deacon, and Father Robert O'Hea, O.F.M., as subdeacon. In the sanctuary were priests of the area, friars from New

York and New Jersey, and Father Anselm Kennedy, O.F.M., Provincial of Holy Name Province. Six Franciscan clerics served as pallbearers. In the procession from the church to the cemetery were Allegany Sisters, Sisters of St. Joseph, Sisters of Mercy, Poor Clares, Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, students, friars, clerics, priests, Academy girls, and the Alumnae. Mother Teresa's relatives at her funeral were her sister, Mrs. M. Leonard of New York City and her husband, and a nephew, Frank O'Neil of St. Louis, Missouri. Mrs. Leonard was Mother Teresa's younger sister, Sarah Jane, who had studied at St. Elizabeth Academy in the 1860s. Her brother John had worked as a conductor on the trolley which ran through Fort Lee, but in 1909 he had left there and undoubtedly Frank O'Neil was his son.²

Out of respect for Mother Teresa, the stores in Allegany were closed between 10 and 11 a.m. In this civic and religious funeral there were no cars or carriages--all walked in the procession stretching from St. Bonaventure's Church to the chapel in the cemetery. The civic community paid her tribute for she was one of Allegany's teachers and the Catholics owed to her efforts one of the finest Catholic academies in the country.

During the period of the wake and for a long time after, many recalled the early years when the fledgling Congregation was struggling to survive, as well as the recent past. Mother Teresa was very much a part of the history of Allegany, for since the fall of 1859 she had spent almost all of her sixty-six years in the Congregation in Allegany. The two years (1874-

1876) she was missioned in St. Anthony's in New York City were the only years she was not in Allegany. She had been the first teacher in the Town School, but for most of her time in Allegany she was teacher and principal of the Academy.



BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF ALLEGANY, NY. PICTURE POSTCARD, C. 1900. OLD ST. ELIZABETH'S MOTHERHOUSE IS VISIBLE IN THE BACKGROUND AT RIGHT. ALLEGANY TRAIN STATION VISIBLE IN THE FOREGROUND AT RIGHT.

Mary Anne O'Neil had come in 1859 to Allegany, a teenager, from a comfortable, protected, loving home in which she had learned about her Christian heritage and practiced the tenets of the Catholic Church. Her two seniors in the Congregation were old enough to be her mother and when she first came they performed for the fifteen-year old girl a task which had been her mother's. Mrs. O'Neil had made her daughter's dresses with a long row of buttons in the back and Sisters Mary Joseph and Mary Bridget buttoned her up and unbuttoned her every day until she received the habit.

Her first request was to ring the rising bell because she found it very difficult to get up early in the morning. She kept this charge for sometime after her arrival.



VERY REVEREND PAMFILO DA MAGLIANO, OFM, FOUNDER OF THE FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF ALLEGANY, NY.

According to tradition, Sister Mary Michael McFall found the young candidate very obedient, diligent, and quick to grasp what she was taught. Under the tutelage of Sister Mary Michael and Father Pamfilo she acquired a knowledge of Franciscan spirituality, and her keen intellect was developed by the learned and pious friars who were her teachers. She was but seventeen years old when she went with Mother Mary Joseph to solicit in Quebec and Montreal. At eighteen she was appointed Mistress of Novices and she was just twenty years old when she was appointed Superioress of the convent. The following year at the first election in the

Congregation (July 5, 1865) ten sisters out of twelve voting cast their ballot for Sister Mary Teresa O'Neil as Superioress of the Congregation.

The early years were a time of great trials for all--the Civil War with its heavy toll of death, suffering, and privation spared no one. The sisters found it necessary at times to ask their neighbors in Allegany for food and Mother Teresa shared with the sisters the task of begging from the farmers and carting home in the wheelbarrow the produce given them. Allegany residents noted that Mother Teresa would never ask from the homes where there was little or nothing to spare. With the sisters she shared the laundry work done at the public washhouse which was near a spring on the present golf course. In the convent all shared the household tasks: sweeping and dusting; keeping lamps clean, filled with oil, and wicks trimmed; cleaning stoves and disposing of ashes; chopping wood for fuel to supplement the coal supply; and emptying and cleaning commodes.

Food was prepared simply and not only the regulations for fasts and abstinences but the income of the sisters limited the amount as well as variety of the food served. There were times when empty serving dishes were placed on the table and covered to make the table look less bare. Mrs. Enright came one evening with a pot of tea and freshly baked biscuits when the sisters had finished saying grace and were about to sit down to a table devoid of food. However, the boarders never went without adequate meals, even when the larder was rather bare. Years later, Mother Teresa admitted that as a young sister she could never satisfy her appetite, and when she was assigned to take a tray to a sick sister she would on returning

to the kitchen stand outside the door and devour all the food left on the tray.

Allegheny winters are usually long and very cold. In those by-gone days only certain rooms were heated. Specific mention is made of classrooms and the boarders' recreation room having a large stove fueled with coal or wood. Very likely the sisters' community room and refectory were heated with a stove in each room, but the sleeping quarters and the chapel were not heated. Water was brought in from the wells on the property but when they ran dry barrels of water taken from the Allegheny River were brought to the convent.

Academy Alumnae recalled that as students they shared with the sisters many of the household chores such as cleaning lamps, hanging out laundry, chopping wood on the hill behind the convent, and bringing in water from the well on the grounds. Mrs. Bertha Flynn remembered that the sisters kept a few chickens and once they had some turkeys, but just before Thanksgiving the turkeys were stolen. Sisters M. Clotilda O'Donnell and M. Immaculate Mitchell related that as novices, after hanging out sheets in the backyard in the winter, they would give each other sleigh rides in the empty baskets over the frozen ground. Indoors, they found that the dumbwaiter from the kitchen to the dining room could be used for riding as well as conveying food and dishes.

Life for the students in the Academy was not only studying, practicing music, and helping the sisters with chores. Many recall rides in the hay wagon in summer and in the sleigh in winter with Brother Jerome to Cuba, Hinsdale, Olean, and to St. Bonaventure College campus for entertainment. Brother Jerome O'Connell, who was born at

Newcastle, Ireland, in 1841, was received in the Immaculate Conception Custody in 1881 and for the thirty four years following worked on the farm at St. Bonaventure, Allegany. Besides carting barrels of water up to St. Elizabeth Convent and taking the Academy girls on rides to the various places in the area, he taught catechism to the Town School children on Sundays and drove the priests to their missions outside Allegany and on sick calls.

Sister M. Clotilda O'Donnell, who knew Mother Teresa from her student days in the Academy and later when she entered the Congregation, described her as tall with white skin and "high color." She noted that Mother Teresa had a good voice but was not a musician. Many who knew her for many years observed that her eyes were a very bright blue and even in her old age were remarkable for their intensity when fixed on any person or object. An Allegany Sister related the following incident:

Mr. Thomas Coyle, a younger brother of Sister M. Coletta, arrived by train early one morning to visit his sister. On his way in he met Sister Teresa, a tall, beautiful young Sister shoveling a path for the Franciscan Father who was to say the Community Mass that day. Mr. Coyle was so impressed by her beauty that he still enjoyed the memory of it in his old age.

On another occasion Mother Teresa's brother, John, visited her and seeing her sweeping the path outside the convent looked sadly at her and remarked, "Mary Anne, have



ST. ELIZABETH'S MOTHERHOUSE AND ACADEMY, C. 1898

you come to this?" Unfortunately, her answer (if there was one) was not recorded.

To the students she taught in St. Elizabeth Academy, Mother Teresa was a firm, very thorough teacher, and quite approachable when a student needed guidance. When a sister sent one of her pupils to her because of misconduct in the classroom, the culprit received a reprimand, not soon forgotten which effectively curbed tendencies to misbehavior. Animosity between students was not tolerated and those who were sent to her office for such an attitude were convinced that they had to resume a normal relationship. On the other hand, she was quite understanding about the talkativeness of girls and they appreciated the fact that she would rattle her beads as she approached a classroom or study hall where there was a considerable amount of non-permissive chatter going on. When she did appear at the door, all within were occupied with their work and not a whisper could be heard.

Among the students of the earliest years were the children of the Lyons family: Thomas who was the sisters' errand boy, Anna, and Margaret who became Mrs. Murray. Mrs. Murray's daughter, Bertha married Edward Flynn and their daughter became Sister Aileen Marie Flynn. Mrs. Bertha Flynn's grandfather, Patrick Murray, and her great-uncle, Walter Clare, were among the farmers in the area who donated their teams and time to the building of the first convent in 1861. Mrs. Flynn estimated that at least twenty-five descendants of Patrick Murray and Walter Clare attended St. Elizabeth Academy and most of them were pupils in the Town School. From the quarry on his farm, Mr. Clare donated stones for the building of the first St. Bonaventure College

and for the retaining wall of St. Elizabeth Convent property.

One of the graduates of St. Elizabeth Academy in 1882 was Florence Walley (Flora to the sisters and girls at the Academy but always Florence to Mother Teresa who disliked all short forms and nicknames). Flora married Michael Patrick Clare, an undertaker, to whom Mother Teresa often turned in cases of emergency. Their four daughters, eight granddaughters and a great-granddaughter attended the Academy.

At the Town School, John and Michael Colligan were among Mother Teresa's pupils. Their uncle, Cornelius Colligan, had worked on the first convent building and later the two nephews who were in the construction business donated bricks for the building which replaced the first one. John and Michael Colligan throughout their lives maintained a great admiration and respect for Mother Teresa. When John's daughter, Mary Catherine, entered the congregation in 1910, he warned Mother Teresa that if she sent his daughter to Jamaica she would have to accompany her. The children of the Colligans attended the Town School and several of the girls, including Mary Catherine (Sister M. Angela), graduated from the Academy.

In an article in *Regnum Regis* in 1943, John Colligan reminisced about Mother Teresa as he had known her in the Town School.

Mother Teresa was a wonderful teacher. She made even the slowest ones want to learn. Some of the boys were pretty big by the time they got to her class, way over her head, although in those days she was a tall

woman. (That probably seems strange to you younger Sisters, who saw her only when she was very old and seemed so little.) She had remarkable eyes--blue, as blue as could be! They could look right through a boy, yet they always seemed to be kind and gentle.

In those days we used to sit on wooden benches, no backs to them and no desks. I tell you those benches got pretty hard after a long morning of sitting, and the Sisters had to put up with plenty of squirming from the youngsters. Reading, writing, arithmetic and spelling were our subjects and, of course, Catechism. We had to know every word of the Catechism, just as it was in the book. No changing the words!

The biggest event of the year used to be the May party in the grove. The grove used to be at the top of the hill where St. Bonaventure Golf Course is now. There were plenty of trees in those days, a deep woods, and a clearing in front of the woods. The people drove in from all the farms around. Everyone was invited, fathers, mothers and children. Some of the men brought boards and fixed up picnic tables. The women used to help the Sisters get the table ready. The Sisters supplied the food . . . in a couple of clothes baskets, filled right up. Nothing fancy ... great, brown loaves of home-made bread, jam, cookies and lemonade. Plenty for everyone, full and plenty and more than enough. The Sisters made wonderful bread! The cookies were big, fat, ginger cookies that you could sink your teeth into! And white sugar cookies! The boys

used to eat as much as they could manage, play tag for awhile and then show up for another round.

Late in the afternoon came the crowning of the May Queen. The boys and girls used to vote for the Queen. Sometimes there was a bit of electioneering on the side: "Vote for Mary," "Naw, vote for Annie! Vote for Annie!"

Finally Sister Teresa announced the name of the girl chosen. The girl used to stand on a little knoll and one of the other girls put a crown of wild flowers on her head. Then we sang a song. That was always the end of the party, and we started down the steep hill to the Sisters' convent, each one carrying something to "help the Sisters." Before we left, everyone got a peppermint stick to take home. May Day was over, but the Sisters had certainly made us happy youngsters.

The Sisters were always trying to make us happy. I guess that was why they did so much for us. They didn't have much, but whatever they had was ours if we needed it. They had to work hard, but they seemed to enjoy it. They were grand women, those early Franciscans! And, (he added, with his characteristic slow smile and twinkling eye), so are the Franciscan Sisters now, fine women, all of them.³

The 9:00 a.m. High Mass on Sundays was the "Children's Mass." Instructions given by Sister M. Clementine Donahue followed in St. Bonaventure Church where the Mass was celebrated and afterwards choir practice under the direction of Sister M. Immaculate Mitchell was

held in the convent parlor. Sister M. Clementine held the Sodality meetings in the old St. Nicholas Church. On Sundays the girls who attended the Town School would go to the convent to borrow books from the small library in the parlor just left of the front door of the old convent. Sister Mary of the Five Wounds Stack who was portress for many years was considered “a wonderful old Sister” and helped the girls select books. No guest, even young boys who brought things to the convent, left without a cup of hot tea brought by Sister Mary.

Joseph Norton who served Mass at the convent recalls that at Christmas and Easter time while they were having breakfast after Mass in a small room near the chapel, Mother Teresa would come in and give each altar boy one dollar as a gift. Mr. Norton’s father was the Postmaster of Allegany Post Office and also the manager of the town movie house. Young Joe would be sent to the convent with a movie, after it had been shown to the public, for the sisters to enjoy. Mother Teresa loved movies and was always there in the front seat of the room enjoying each one.

Father Maurice Scheier, O.F.M., born and bred in Allegany, attended the Town School and his special task was to deliver the mail twice daily to the convent. The sisters who were at the Motherhouse then recall that he always came regardless of the weather. As a boy he served Mass at the convent and at the time of Mother Teresa’s death he was a cleric in Allegany and had the opportunity of attending the funeral. In later years when he was on the faculty of St. Bonaventure College he was chaplain at St. Elizabeth Motherhouse.

From her earliest years in the Congregation, Mother Teresa practiced charity as St. Francis of Assisi had requested his brothers. One day when she was Superioress, a man came asking for alms. The convent funds had been reduced to one dollar but she sent a sister to a neighbor across the highway for change. Into the hands of the man she placed fifty cents. That evening two men brought their daughters to be admitted to the Academy and left the money for their board and tuition in advance.

During the time that Sister M. Barbara Cusick was in charge of the laundry in the Motherhouse, she noticed one morning that the baskets were not in the places she had left them and the following morning she found the gas lit. She was quite certain that she had not left the gas lit and decided to investigate. Her search led her to a first floor closet whose door did not reach the floor and looking down she saw two feet protruding from under the door. Quietly she walked upstairs and called the police who found a young man. He had entered and exited from a door which led directly from the laundry to the outside; it was quite easy to gain entrance and leave undetected at that spot. When Mother Teresa learned that he had come from New York City and, having no place to live nor money to pay rent, had sought shelter in the convent, she admonished him not to get into such a predicament again and then handed him \$10 for his fare back to his home.

Mother Teresa has been described as an austere, dignified, formal person; a woman of sincerity and simplicity; a charitable religious; a gentle yet firm teacher. It was said that she was the “essence of correctness” but not averse to be seen carrying laundry baskets, trundling wheelbarrows,

begging for the needs of the Congregation, or sweeping walks. As Mother General, she helped in the laundry and was not infrequently seen in the dish washing room “towel in hand to dry dishes.” Sister Marianna McKinlay in her account of Mother Teresa wrote: “The Mother Teresa that we knew could converse on any topic, teach any class, and was every inch a genuine lady.”

She was a gracious lady, also. It was related that at the time of Mother Paula’s Golden Jubilee in Jamaica which Mother Teresa attended, a dinner was given to the inmates at the Poorhouse in Kingston. Many of the dignitaries of Church and State were there. When the English governor of the island offered his arms to Mother Teresa and Mother Paula, the former graciously accepted his arm and walked along with him, but the French-convent-trained Mother Paula put her hands in her sleeves and walked alongside.

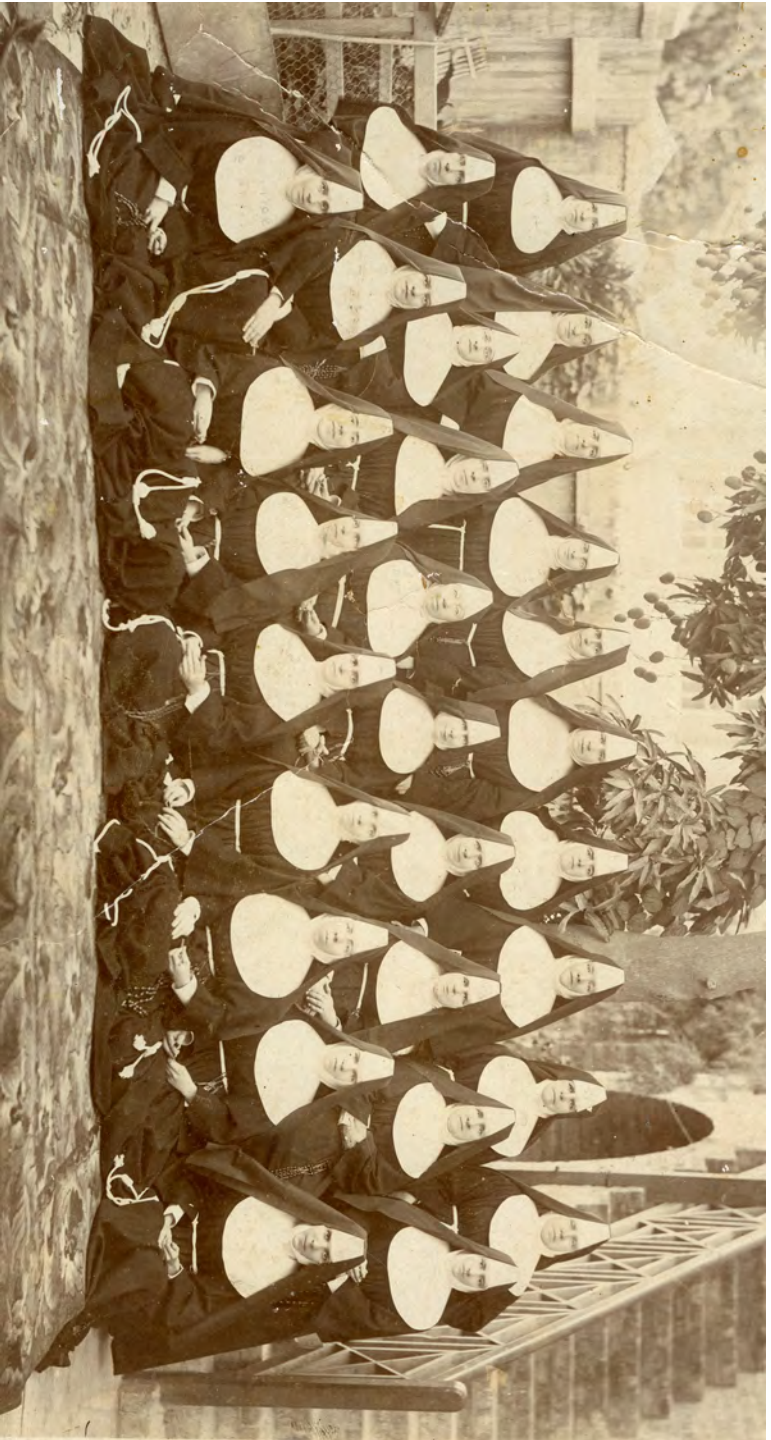
Although she was very strict with the sisters, she was very thoughtful. Sister M. Helen Kennedy related that Mother Teresa always sent a box of chocolates or bonbons for the sisters who were marking Regents papers. Sister M. Dorothea Connolly recalled that when she helped with accounts, Mother Teresa would place nearby a dish of popcorn to be started by the first to finish a column of numbers. Once Sister Dorothea rang the rising bell in the middle of the night and had to notify each sister of the error. When she arrived at Mother Teresa’s room, the Mother General accompanied her on the embarrassing mission.

Mother Teresa’s kindness was remembered by sisters and former Academy students. The sisters related that as postulants and novices they would be stopped in tasks by

Mother Teresa and asked if they were very tired, if they found the retreat hard, or if they needed help with their studies. Long after they had graduated from the Academy, former students recalled that every night Mother Teresa would come to their dormitory when they were little girls and kiss them goodnight.

Each morning before morning prayers Mother Teresa visited the sick sisters and at the age of eighty-one she was still climbing four flights of stairs to visit a sick novice or postulant. During the year Sister M. Francita Phillips spent in Jamaica, substituting for Sister M. Dorothea who had returned to the United States for treatment, her father died. Sister Francita's mother had died when she was a child and she did not want to be far away from her father who looked forward to her annual visits home; her nearness to him gave him great comfort. Sister and her father were looking forward to her returning from Jamaica and when he died while she was still in Jamaica she was very much distressed. Mother Teresa who understood Sister's grief wrote her two very compassionate letters which helped greatly to console her for her loss. Mother Teresa dwelt on the fine qualities of Sister's father and his good Christian life which ensured him a life of happiness with his Lord. Sister Francita ever remembered the touching expressions of sympathy and consolation offered in the letters and the thoughtfulness of Mother Teresa.

As Mother General, Mother Teresa made several trips to Jamaica to visit with the sisters, and she always met the sisters returning from the island and accompanied to the boat those who were going there. She never failed to send with the Jamaica-bound sisters three five-pound boxes of



SISTERS AT NUNS' PEN, KINGSTON, JA, C. 1908. MOTHER TERESA SEATED IN 2ND ROW, 5TH FROM RIGHT.

chocolates -one each for the Jesuits, the Sisters of Mercy, and her own sisters there. On her Feast Day, each Allegany Sister in Jamaica received a letter from Mother Teresa. Her last visit to Jamaica was in 1910 and during that visit she sat for a picture which was copied and is now considered the best one of her. On the table in the picture is a large crucifix on a stand. Mother Mary Anne Brennan had given that crucifix to Mother M. Veronica Murphy when she left for Jamaica in January 1879.

A sister who lived with Mother Teresa for seventeen years noted that in all those years the only sign of relaxation she ever saw Mother Teresa indulge in was, “When a trip to the city, New York, was in the offing there was an air of pleasant anticipation and a sweet little smile as she kissed us all goodbye.” On the train she would read, relax, and pray; to mortify herself she would close the book at the most interesting part. Her companion was at times a young sister or Sister M. Margaret Morris who worked in the kitchen and could be spared when the schools were in session. She took the opportunity to talk to the young sister about the significance and importance of the habit she wore. Her “tips” on the journey were always generous and she frequently reminded the sisters to be very generous to those who served them. During her stay in New York, she would take her companion on shopping trips, walking from St. Anthony’s Convent on Sullivan Street up to the stores on 14th and even 34th Streets. She would reserve the two nickels for the fare back to the convent but probably would have walked if she were alone.

When the automobile replaced the horse and buggy,



PORTRAIT OF M. ELIZABETH BUCHER, OSF, C. 1903,
WEARING THE OUTDOOR BONNET

many sisters realized that the bonnet with the large circular veil worn outside the convent was not practical. Mother Teresa was among those who favored a change to a long straight veil similar to the one worn indoors, and when a sister made one for her she wore it to New York. But Mother M. Celso McKenna, Superior at St. Elizabeth Hospital in New York, disapproved of the change, and Mother Teresa who had a very high regard for Mother Celso's opinion returned to Allegany with a bonnet instead of the veil she had worn when she left the Motherhouse. Eventually, the change was made from the restrictive bonnet to the straight veil and even



PORTRAIT OF M. ALICE HENRY, OSF, C. 1906,
WEARING THE STRAIGHT VEIL.

Mother Celso was convinced of the need for change.

Among those who knew Mother Teresa, there is a general agreement that she was an austere religious. She wanted the young sisters to have a strong foundation in spirituality before making their perpetual profession and until then they did not study for degrees as a rule. Sisters who were admitted with some college work or whose assignments required a degree did go on for higher education. A young sister remarked that Mother Teresa's early rising was an inspiration to her for she thought, "If such a little old lady could do it, surely I should be able to do it." Mother Teresa

was always on time for prayers in chapel and always knelt erect. The Admonitions of 1908 reflect what she expected a sister to be: decorous in speech, manner, walk, and dress at all times; friendly without being familiar; mortified, conscientious in all respects; in fact, a strict observer of the Rule and Constitution. A sister related: "A young sister invited out to dinner was advised in no uncertain terms, to refuse intoxicating drinks if served."

Mother Teresa had a very strong devotion to the Rosary. Every day after dinner she and Mrs. Dolan who resided in the convent would recite the prayers together before the altar of the Blessed Virgin in chapel. Mrs. Dolan was the mother of Father James Dolan, O.F.M., who was an only child and when she could no longer live alone, Mother Teresa provided accommodation for her in the convent. After Mrs. Dolan's death, Sister M. Barbara Cusick became Mother Teresa's companion in this devotion. The Rosary was recited daily in common at 1:15 p.m. in the Motherhouse chapel.

The events of the years between 1900 and 1913 were years of strain and stress for Mother Teresa. The change of status from a Congregation under Franciscan friars to one under the jurisdiction of the bishops of the dioceses where the Congregation had apostolates caused her great concern. For over forty years she had known only the direction of the friars of the Immaculate Conception Custody; she had accepted the friars of the Holy Name Province without any difficulty for they were Francis' sons. Also, the majority of the friars at St. Bonaventure in Allegany were Americans who had transferred to the new province and remained there. Father Edward Blecke, the new Provincial, appreciated the work done by

the Congregation in the United States as well as in Jamaica and accepted his role with respect to the sisters under the new Constitution. Archbishop Falconio, later Cardinal, was a great pillar of support throughout the ordeal of the Italian affiliation and the final approbation of the Congregation and the Constitution. The devastating earthquake in Jamaica was a severe setback in that mission but with the help sent from the Motherhouse as well as from other places, and the courage and devotion of the sisters there the restoration proceeded at a good pace.

Father Thomas Plassman, O.F.M., President of St. Bonaventure College for many years and a former Provincial of Holy Name Province, has left us an excellent account of Mother Teresa whom he knew well. He noted that she had a “great and truly motherly love for her Sisters. They were her all. Frequently I saw her embrace a Sister. ... It was an expression of genuine love and affection. ... [She] would beam with joy when praise came to her Sisters, but if a criticism was offered her answer would be: ‘We are still breaking ground and our duties are numerous, but once our Sisters have the time and the money for these enterprises, they will soon be ahead of them all.’”

He observed that Mother Teresa’s manner was generally earnest and serious but she had a “fascinating smile”; she enjoyed witty remarks and jokes and had a wit of her own; and her disapproval could be discerned by the “little cloud on her forehead.” He found that when she was faced with any question or difficulty “her answers and decisions were brief, clear-cut, and to the point. She could size up a situation or a problem in few but sharply edged words. I never

knew her to make an unkind remark but in matters of truth and justice she was adamant.”

From his own experience, Father Thomas learned that she was attentive to the small needs of people and he illustrated with an incident which occurred when he used to go to the Motherhouse for lectures in the evenings. When Mother Teresa discovered that he had walked in the dark she provided a lantern to guide him home. After his first retreat to the sisters in the Motherhouse, she came to the sacristy and said to him, “We had a fine Retreat.” To him it was as if an infallible decision had been handed down.

Mother Teresa had a great reverence for all things Franciscan and a strong adherence to tradition. She kept a small notebook and when any matter had to be decided she would consult it to ascertain how things were done in the past. Then she would say, “That’s the way it was done, and that’s the way it will be done.” On his last visit to her, Father Thomas spoke of future plans but smiling kindly she said, “No, I am going home soon.” She died shortly after.

One who summarized her personality wrote that she had a deep faith in God, a great love of God and neighbor, resignation to the will of God, and respect and reverence for the clergy. It was said that she imitated Christ as Francis had in his day. She respected the Rule and Constitution given by Father Pamfilo and gave strict adherence to the traditions of the Order and the Congregation. Her good business sense was not overlooked. Her biographers have noted that when her sisters achieved, she rejoiced with them and she consoled them when they were not successful or in distress. Her pupils spoke with love and admiration for the knowledge and

counsel she gave them. Her charity was universal; she urged her sisters to love one another especially. To the novices she gave copies of the “Golden Hail Mary” to be recited daily to help them to grow more charitable. Mother Teresa has been described as a loyal, patient, stern, and tender mother to her sisters.

During her years in the Congregation, she had served as Mistress of Novices; Vicar of the Congregation; teacher at the Town School; teacher and principal of St. Elizabeth Academy; superior and principal at St. Anthony School, New York City; and Mother General of the Congregation. Father Pamfilo had appointed her Superioress of St. Elizabeth Convent in 1864 and 1866; she was elected to that office every year in the annual elections of 1865 to 1868, 1870 to 1873, 1876 to 1877. In the triennial elections, she was elected in 1879 for three years, and from 1885 she was elected every three years until 1908. Under the Constitution of 1907, the terms were six years; a Mother General could hold the office for two consecutive terms, but for a third term a dispensation from the Holy See was necessary. Mother Teresa was elected in 1908, re-elected in 1914, and received a dispensation to serve from 1920 to 1926. Her death came shortly before the expiration of the third term.

When Mother Teresa died, she was the one hundred eighteenth sister to die in the Congregation. There were 325 professed sisters, 36 novices, and 29 postulants; 470 sisters had made profession in the Congregation since its beginning. Following is a list of the houses and Local Superiors at the time of Mother Teresa’s death:

St. Elizabeth Motherhouse, Allegany, NY	Mother M. Irene Crandall
St. Margaret Convent, Winsted, Conn.	Mother M. Loretta McVeigh
St. Clare Convent, Buffalo, NY	Mother M. Immaculate Mitchell
St. Anthony Convent, New York, NY	Mother M. Raphael McAuliffe
Immaculate Conception Convent, Kingston, Jamaica	Mother M. Alacoque Donihee
St. Elizabeth Hospital, Boston, MA	Mother M. Rose Enright
St. Elizabeth Hospital, New York, NY	Mother M. Felicita Crooks
St. Maria's Home, Providence, RI	Mother M. Leo McCarthy
St. Margaret's Home, Providence, RI	Sr. M. Ursula Corrigan (in charge)
St. Patrick's Home, Lowell, MA	Mother M. Damian Fitzpatrick
St. Clare's Convent, Pittsburgh, PA	Mother M. Benita Dorson
St. Vincent's Home, Woonsocket, RI	Mother M. Celestine Gilooly
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Convent Buffalo, NY	Mother M. Dolores McGrane
St. Elizabeth Convent, Croghan, NY	Mother M. Jerome Keim
Immaculate Conception Convent Pittsburgh, PA	Mother M. Bernardine Coyle
St. Joseph's Villa, Catskill, NY	Mother M. Genevieve Mahany
St. Clare's Convent, New York, NY	Mother M. De Chantal Nelson
St. Joseph's Convent, Niagara Falls, NY	Mother M. Leonarda O'Neill
Holy Cross Convent, Bronx, NY	Mother M. Huberta Smith
St. John's Convent, Dunellen, NJ	Mother M. Winifred Cuffe
Mt. Carmel Convent, Mt. Vernon, NY	Mother M. Regina Reid
Holy Cross Convent, Callicoon, NY	Mother Mary William McOsker
Mt. Alvernia Convent, Montego Bay, Jamaica	Sr. M. Theophane Fortier (in charge)

At the time of her Golden Jubilee, Mother Teresa was given public recognition of her services to the town of Allegany, the Church in the United States, and the Congregation of which she was a member. The St. Elizabeth Academy Association was particularly generous on this



ST. ELIZABETH'S HOSPITAL, NEW YORK CITY, C. 1904.
THE BUILDING LATER BECAME ST. CLARE'S HOSPITAL.

occasion. In 1919 her sixty years as a sister was celebrated with much less ceremony and the only memento of this jubilee in existence in the Motherhouse Archives is a very beautiful Spiritual Bouquet presented by the students of the Academy. Each spiritual offering is artistically printed and illuminated with floral designs done in exquisite pastel

shades. Mother Teresa's feast day, October 15, was celebrated annually at the Motherhouse with a sung High Mass, a special menu, entertainments by the sisters and the students. Spiritual Bouquets, Mass Offerings, and material gifts were offered by the sisters at the Motherhouse as well as those on the missions. October 15 came to be called "Founder's Day" in recognition of Mother Teresa's long, competent, and devoted service to the Congregation. Each year, long after her death, the tradition was kept of noting Mother Teresa's Feast Day in some special manner.



THE GROTTTO OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES STILL STANDS TODAY ON THE SITE OF THE OLD MOTHERHOUSE, NEAR ST. BONAVENTURE CEMETERY.

The Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes on a small elevation behind the Motherhouse, erected by St. Elizabeth's Academy Alumnae, was dedicated on December 8, 1926, as a memorial to Mother Teresa in gratitude for her work. It is a replica of the Grotto at Lourdes. There is a statue of Our Lady as she appeared to Bernadette, and Bernadette kneeling before the pool filled by the stream flowing from the rock. Father

Isidore O'Brien, O.F.M., wrote a lovely reflection on the significance of the Grotto and it is reproduced below:

The grotto will tell us of Mother Teresa and the virtues she loved. For just as the sanctuary speaks of her love for the priesthood, so the fifteen steps remind us that on every day of her long life she recited the fifteen mysteries of the rosary. And, as the grass plots lying like carpets on the floor of the terrace tell of her humility and submission to the Will of God, so the circular pool with its rippling waters speaks of her ever ready charity.

The grotto will tell too of the Alumnae and friends of St. Elizabeth Academy and of their devotion to the memory of Mother Teresa. The activities of our lives call for our time and interest, they call clamorously and insistently. But when life's activities shall have slowed down, when we find ourselves finally edged into eddies that swirl unnoticed by the side of the current life, we shall come back in thought to the place where our first hopes and love dawned. We shall think back across the years to a figure that guided our first aspirations upward.

When things darken in life, we shall come again to Mother Teresa, and taking her hand, we shall climb the steps up to the sanctuary in the Grotto which our love built to her memory; and under the eye of Mary, we shall see again in vision our girlhood, seeking Mother Teresa for help and guidance. We shall see life as it promised to be and life as it was and resting on

the rustic bench, beneath the pines, Mother Teresa will point again, as she pointed once before to the figure of Mary--the Ideal of all womanhood and the Model she taught us to copy.

Mother Teresa will receive us kindly, for we did not forget her in the midst of our cares. But we built a monument to her name, a fair white monument whose every flower and blue stone steps keep alive the memory of the virtues that Mother Teresa loved and taught us to love.

Miss Margaret Flynn of Allegany was president of the Alumnae when the project was carried out. The alumnae went to various stone masons requesting donations of stone for the Grotto. One of them was known to be anti-Catholic but when he learned that the stones were for the grotto in honor of Mother Teresa, he said, "I'll donate some stones, for a finer woman never lived."

The spelling of Mother Teresa's surname has been questioned since it appears as "O'Neill" and "O'Neil" in many letters, accounts, and records. Mother Teresa usually did not sign with her last name but an original recommendation given by her to a Julia Gavin who had attended St. Elizabeth Academy for one term was dated March 23, 1866, and signed: "Sister Mary Teresa O'Neil, Principal." On her tombstone the spelling of the surname is 'O'Neil' and 'O'Neil' is on her death certificate. A search was made with the Municipal Archives and Records Center of New York City since Mother Teresa was born in the City, but birth records were not kept by the City prior to 1847. Evidently she was not concerned about

the spelling of her surname. Most of the letters Mother Teresa received are not extant because she destroyed them after she had read them. Business and official letters were preserved for necessary records and very few personal ones and souvenirs were kept, but these few remaining and the memory she left with those who knew her serve to construct a very clear understanding of her personality.

Endnotes

1 This date is not accurate, The Certificate of Baptism of Mother M. Teresa O'Neil gives December 30, 1843, as the date of her baptism. Records of births were not kept by New York City before 1847.

2 John O'Neil, born September 16, 1841, was baptized in St. Joseph's Church, New York City, on September 27, 1841.

3 Walter Hammon, O.F.M., The First Bonaventure Men (New Jersey, 1958), p. 40.



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