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Laramie 1872-1883

Father Cusson and Laramie City, 1872-1879

Early in 1872, Father Cusson was requested by Bishop O’Gorman to move to Laramie City, a rapidly town because of the Union Pacific Railroad. Father Cusson’s experience in Cheyenne prepared him for the task of establishing a Catholic community in Laramie. He realized that it was necessary for him to acquire a secure title to property on which he could build a church. once again the officials of the Union Pacific Railroad Company came to the aid of Father Cusson when they issued “quit-claim deed to lots I and 2, block 190, generously donating this land to the Catholic Church (June 19, 1872)” (McGovern, 119-120). After acquiring the property, Father Cusson moved with dispatch and made the necessary preparations for acquiring those things needed for building a church. In due time a stone church was ready and was placed under the patronage of St. Laurence O’Toole, a twelfth century bishop in Ireland who became the first Irish Archbishop of Dublin.

Father Cusson had gained stature as a churchman who was interested in the welfare of the people of Laramie; one who was willing to help as much as he could to serve the needs of the people. Early in 1879, Bishop O’Connor, the second apostolic vicar who had entered his office in 1876, transferred Father Cusson to Nebraska City. The French-Canadian priest had merited well of the Church in Wyoming. He bequeathed a church, a school, and a hospital to his successor. Besides taking care of his flock in Laramie, he traveled widely in order to minister to the Catholics in an area that included South Pass City, Atlantic City, and the sites of the future towns of Lander, Rawlins and Evanston. He had accomplished much during his seven years as pastor of St. Laurence O’Toole in

Laramie, not the least of which was his invitation to the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth to come to Laramie to staff a hospital.

Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, 1876-1883

The idea of a hospital arose from a pressing problem confronted the officials of the Union Pacific Railroad Company who had established a rolling mill, that is, an establishment where metal, especially iron and steel, was rolled into plates and bars. In such a factory the incidence of serious accidents was rather high. The officials of the railroad had undertaken to open a small hospital but soon realized that it was too much for them to maintain. In their dilemma they, along with the county commissioners, asked Father Cusson if he could persuade some Catholic Sisters to open a hospital where they could nurse those injured in the mill. Not long after this request was made, Father Cusson traveled to Cheyenne on business. By a strange coincidence he met Mother Xavier Ross, foundress of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, on the platform of the railway station. After the exchange of introductions, Father Cusson asked Mother Xavier if she could send some Sisters to meet with the interested officials of the railroad and the county to discuss the feasibility of establishing a hospital in Laramie. After some discussion, the Sisters agreed to undertake the task of opening a hospital. In January, 1876, Sisters Joanna Bruner and Martha Meed arrived in Laramie where they were given "space in an old frame house belonging to the railroad and located near the tracks." On February 1, 1876, a twenty-four bed hospital was formally opened under the patronage of St. Joseph. Sisters Mary Agnes Toole and Mary De Pazzi Lane joined the pioneering staff. (McGovern, 121).

And Father Cusson persuaded the Sisters of Charity to open a school. The Sisters were well disposed to accept the challenge because teaching young people was one of the goals of their congregation. Fortunately, they were able to rent a building near the parish church and in

September, 1878 they were ready to accept students. Sisters Loretta Foley and Francis de Sales Cannan taught some eighty pupils distributed over the eight grades. (McGovern, 121) Encouraged by the initial success of the venture, the Sisters purchased a frame building on A Street in 1879, recruited more teachers, named the school St. Mary's Academy, and continued to teach an increasing number of students. By the year 1891, the academy accommodated one hundred and twenty pupils.>Lar1872>2

There seemed to be no limit to the involvement of the Sisters of Charity in the development of Laramie. In 1878, the Sisters decided that the facilities of St. Joseph's Hospital were no longer adequate for the number of patients that needed medical attention. The sisters purchased land east of town and under took the project of building a new hospital. They initiated a fund-raising campaign. Unfortunately, the campaign did not receive the support it deserved, in spite of the fact that the Territorial Legislature appropriated \$3,000 for the proposed hospital. Since the necessary funds were not forth-coming, the project was suspended until a more propitious time.

Finally in 1883, the new hospital in Laramie was ready to receive patients. It has been noted above that the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth had to suspend plans for building a new hospital in Laramie because they were unable, at that time, to liquidate some outstanding debts. They did not, however, entirely abandon the project and early in 1883 the new hospital was ready to receive patients. It was a three-story brick building which could accommodate some fifty patients. The pastor of St. Laurence O'Toole, Hugh Cumiskey, dedicated the new facility on January 25, 1883. Father M. F. Cassidy of Rawlins assisted at the dedication. Bishop McGovern wrote that John A. Hayes also assisted at the dedication. Father Hayes died on November 18, 1882. Did Homer nod? (McGovern, 122-123)

Notes

>Lar1872>1 Sister Julia Gilmore, S.C.L., *We Came North: Centennial Story of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth* (St. Meinrad, Indiana: Abbey Press, 1961), 49.

>Lar1872>2 Hoffmann's *Catholic Directory, Almanac and Clergy List, Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Milwaukee: Hoffmann Brothers, 1891), 394.