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THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF MADONNA CENTER
A CATHOLIC SOCIAL SETTLEMENT

By

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Social
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INTRODUCTION

This study comprises an attempt to trace the history of Madonna Center through its development into a social settlement, and to do so through the record of its contribution to the social, material and spiritual life of the community it serves. Emphasis has been placed upon the environmental setting, the cultural patterns of the people served, the underlying philosophy which motivated those responsible for its establishment, and the varied contributions to the community which have been realized through the succeeding years by those engaged in the work of the Center.

Use was made of pertinent material available in book and pamphlet form, in the form of records, reports, neighborhood surveys, settlement scrap books incorporating clippings from the local press, minutes and correspondence. Data from these sources were supplemented by personal interviews, especially with the Resident Directors.

The study was divided, for purpose of presentation, into three sections. The first of these described the location and physical characteristics of the community, the different racial groups who were resident there, community resources and living conditions, and the changes

in such respects as indicated the need of a social center. The second section described the beginnings of the Center, from a first attempt to supply the spiritual needs of the residents to the attempt to supply also the intellectual, social and material needs. The third section described the administration and activities of the Center as a social settlement, incorporated as a legal entity. It is hoped that the description in its entirety will serve to show the contribution made by Madonna Center to a needy community through years marked by significant social and economic changes.

CHAPTER I

THE COMMUNITY

The community served by Madonna Center is one long familiar to Chicagoans. To the early chronicler it is the area of the Great Conflagration of 1871, while succeeding generations, including contemporaries, refer to it as the "Ghetto" or Hull House area.

At the turn of the century it comprised the Great West Side of Chicago, and extended from State Street on the east to Newberry Avenue on the west, about one mile in length, and from Polk Street on the north to Twelfth Street on the south, approximately one-third of a mile. The hub of its activity was Halsted and Taylor Streets. In the succeeding years the district extended itself westward, at the same time receding because of the ever-growing industrial section which developed along its east end and the great hospital center to its west. Today the new super-highway along Congress Street is cutting its way along the periphery and buildings long uninhabitable, yet occupied, are falling to the blows of demolition crews.

Madonna Center is about one mile west of its original location, and the immediate community which it embraces extends from Harrison Street on the north to Grenshaw Street on the south and from Racine Avenue on the east to Ashland Avenue on the west, though many who formerly enjoyed its

friendliness and engaged in its activities come from as far west as Melrose Park.

The great West Side had, by the early nineties, degenerated from the suburb inhabited by Americans in moderate circumstances into a crowded immigrant neighborhood. The Irish, the Germans and the Americans had moved on and were replaced by the Italians and the Jews. The Halsted Street of earlier days, with its few scattered cottages looking out over the garden prairies, had been transformed into an avenue of shops of all kinds, retail clothing stores, delicatessens, restaurants, cigar stands where liquor was sold, and was literally lined with saloons. The thoroughfares parallel to Halsted Street were semi-business streets littered with cheap tobacco stands, sordid fancy shops and saloons which totaled eighty-one west of the river alone.¹ Several factories with a few small dwellings sandwiched among them completed the setting. The cross streets were for the most part covered with small frame houses built for one family but occupied by several. Often these served a dual purpose of residence and place of business as well, bakery, saloon, restaurant.

These flimsy wooden dwellings and dilapidated sheds, spared by the Great Fire, had been added to on all sides until they covered nearly every inch of the "shoe-string" lot, shutting out all avenues of light, and leaving little or no yard space. Again, two or three of these shacks were located on one lot, the additional ones brought there on rollers as their original sites were usurped by a factory. In many cases, the only

1 Richard T. Ely, Ed., Hull House Maps and Papers, New York, 1895 4.

source of water was a faucet in the back yard; there were no fire escapes; garbage and ashes were placed in wooden boxes fastened to the street pavements. The proportion of wooden buildings to brick was about two to one, with the possible exception of the south side of Polk Street where it ran four to one and Ewing Street (Cabrini Street) where it reached five to one. Italians were solidly packed into front and rear tenements, the latter forming the core of the district. The better houses were located on DeKoven, Bunker (Grenshaw), Taylor and Forquer Streets (Arthington Street).

Although the City Ordinance of 1894 outlawed privy vaults where sewers were possible, the City Home Investigators in 1901 found 1,581 privies in the forty-four blocks east of Halsted Street used by 10,886 individuals in 2,308 families. Forty-five per cent of the families were dependent upon these archaic, illegal and dangerous toilet accommodations.² A provision incorporated in the New Building Code of 1898 required "separate water closets in separate compartments within each apartment," of all new tenement houses. In December, 1902, the Building Code was amended, making replacement of privy vaults mandatory.

Alleys were both unpaved and uncared for; refuse and manure often accumulated undisturbed. Many of the streets which had old cedar block pavements sank in certain sections forming deep holes and pools of water after a heavy rain. Cleanliness was impossible and filth and vermin were

² Edith Abbott and Sophonisba P. Breckinridge, "The West Side Revisited", The American Journal of Sociology, Chicago, XVII, July 1911, 16.

common. The lower floor of the rear houses was frequently used as a stable and outhouse, while upper rooms served the entire family for living quarters.

Overcrowding prevailed within and without the houses. Writing in 1895, a contemporary Hull House resident described conditions as follows:

Little idea can be given of the filthy and rotten tenements, the dingy courts and tumble-down sheds, the foul stables and dilapidated outhouses, the broken sewer-pipes, the piles of garbage fairly alive with diseased odors, and of the numbers of children filling every nook, working and playing in every room, eating and sleeping in every window-sill, pouring in and out of every door, and seeming literally to pave every scrap of "yard".³

Social conditions of this district could not have been worse.

"This third of a square mile east of the river [most Italians are west of the river] includes a criminal district which ranks as one of the most openly and flagrantly vicious in the civilized world, and west of the same stream the poorest, and probably the most crowded section of Chicago."⁴

Since Chicago had no compulsory education law, children of the immigrants romped and loitered around the streets and cafes. In fact, the streets of the neighborhood served as the parlors for these children, nearly every word they heard and every action they saw corrupting their minds and destroying their innocence. These same children formed a large contingent to the army of bootblacks and newsboys who left their homes at 2:30 each morning to secure the first editions of the morning paper. They sold each edition as it appeared while they tossed pennies, blacked boots and played tricks in the streets.⁵ Jane Addams describes them as "ill-housed, ill-clothed, illiterate

³ Ely, Hull House Maps and Papers, 5.

⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁵ Ibid., 54-55.

and wholly untrained and unfitted for any occupation." Late into the night they were seen in the streets, emaciated, ragged, hungry, sometimes soaking wet, a few papers in their hands, begging passers-by to buy them, for they dared not go home until all were sold.

Community resources were conspicuously absent at the beginning of this century. Hull House, the world famous settlement house, was still in its infancy, and the Henry Booth House had just opened its doors on Newberry Street south of Twelfth Street. The public school in the vicinity was named for the great Italian poet, Dante. Wedged in between the Irish on the West and the Slavs on the South, the Italians were served by the Jesuit Fathers of the Holy Family Church and by the Bohemian Church of St. Wenceslaus, when they found it too far or too difficult to attend the Italian Church of the Assumption on the North Side. In 1899, Guardian Angel Church, 717 Forquer Street (Arthington Street) was founded by the Reverend M. Dunne. This soon overflowed its boundaries, however, and within a decade it was necessary to divide the parish, and Our Lady of Pompeii parish was founded a little farther west. There were no public recreational facilities, public parks or playgrounds.

Adjacent to "Little Italy" to the south on Twelfth Street were many Germans, old parishioners of St. Francis German Catholic Church at Twelfth and Newberry Streets, while Russians and Polish Jews clustered along Polk and Twelfth Streets on the edge of the "Ghetto" extending south beyond the corner of Twelfth and Halsted Streets. The better streets surrounding this intersection were occupied by the Bohemians. To the north-

west, the French-Canadians gathered around the French Catholic Church of Notre Dame near Vernon Park, while Irish and first generation Americans resided to the north.

Early in the twentieth century the Greeks began to invade the neighborhood settling south of Harrison and west of Halsted in the better class tenements. Blue Island Avenue became the main thoroughfare of this colony. Everywhere Greek names and faces appeared. Greek characters appeared on every window -- "Minerva", "Atlas", "Olympia" recurred again and again in the signs of the business establishments. It has been said that the section was "more typically Greek than some sections of Athens."

The neighborhood has changed little since the early part of the twentieth century; its most salient features at the end of the first decade continued to be those of decline and decay. When investigators of the sociological department of the University of Chicago revisited the area in 1910 they found the territory between Halsted Street and the river and from the south branch to the north branch awaiting the business invasion. According to their findings eighty-six per cent of the houses were built before 1902; only five per cent of the houses had been built since the passage of the 1910 law, which required private toilet facilities for each apartment; forty-six per cent of the buildings were frame, many slowly disintegrating, rickety porches, stairs and sheds literally falling to pieces; while only twenty-one per cent of the buildings were found in good repair. The atmosphere was one of general neglect. The filth from the stables and

yard closets filled the yards together with decaying garbage and rubbish of every description. These same yards still served as homes of various animals and playgrounds for little children.⁶

Needed repairs on old houses, the proper building of new ones, improvements of every kind were postponed because of the current belief that the entire territory was to be taken over for industrial and commercial uses, and while landlords and dealers waited, poor people continued to live in unsanitary houses, and children grew up in dark, ill-ventilated rooms without proper space to play.⁷

The predominant nationality in the district was still Italian; seventy-two per cent of the families were of this race, with the Greeks second in number making up thirteen per cent of the total. The remainder represented twenty-seven different nationalities.

Factories and business houses continued to move across Canal Street into the heart of the district. The Juvenile Court and Detention Home have replaced some of the old houses on Ewing Street (Polk Street), and farther down on the same street the new Dante School and its playground marked further improvement. The Holy Guardian Angel Mission continued to meet every spiritual and social need of its children.

World War I marked the first decrease in the population of the

⁶ Natalie Walker, "Greeks and Italians in the Neighborhood of Hull House", American Journal of Sociology, Chicago, XXI, Nov., 1915, 297.

⁷ Abbott and Breckinridge, "The West Side Revisited" AJS, XVII, 286.

district. This was due both to the falling off in immigration and the desire on the part of the second generation to marry and move "out among the Americans." Ties with the mother country were gradually broken, and fewer old people desired to return to Italy; rather they became naturalized and as far as possible Americanized. The district continued to be one of vice, delinquency and poverty. A feature writer of the Daily News writing on this area in 1922 captioned his article "Chicago 'Bad Lands' Reclamation is Near" and defined his use of 'bad' to mean bad economically as well as morally.⁸

By the end of the first quarter of the century the colony extended as far west as Paulina Street, and from Van Buren Street south to Roosevelt Road, and was served by two Italian Catholic parishes, Holy Guardian Angel and Our Lady of Pompeii on MacAllister Place (Cabrini Street). It contained almost all the total Italian population of the city, was heterogeneous in character, and represented all parts of Italy, particularly the South Italian villages, Apulia, Basilicata, Campania, and the Abruzzi; also small groups of Tuscans, Lombards, Romans and Venetians. Certain blocks were representative of a particular Italian village or countryside. Forquer Street (Arthington Street), for example, between Des Plaines and Halsted was distinctly Neapolitan. Only a few oxen were needed to complete the illusion of an inland Companion village.

⁸ Harry M. Beardsley, "Chicago 'Bad Lands' Reclamation is Near", Chicago Daily News, Chicago, March 25, 1922, 10.

The next decade was marked by a continued falling off in population, due both to the encroachment of business and industry and disuse of buildings no longer inhabitable. With the exception of the Jane Addams Housing Project the physical characteristics of the neighborhood had not improved. The Housing Project led to an exodus from the neighborhood that lost the Center many of its old time families because the renting rate in it was too high for the majority of neighborhood housekeepers.⁹ The remaining housing, now years older, displayed the general decadence to be expected.

Writing at the time, Edith Abbott described it thus: the "district is only a gaunt remnant of a tenement area, a few scattered groups of houses largely in poor repair, jostled by factories, warehouses, freight depots, and business property of all kinds."¹⁰ While the population is still predominantly Italian, their number has diminished due to restriction in the immigration laws, the tendency of the second generation Italians to improve their economic status, and to the constant encroachment of industry.¹¹ To some extent their places have been taken by Negroes and Mexicans.¹² A few more community resources were made available, however, in the immediate environs of Madonna Center: Vernon Park of the West Park System, the recreational center in the Jane Addams Housing Project, patronized for the

9 Minutes, Board of Directors Meeting, November 13, 1936.

10 Edith Abbott, Tenements in Chicago 1908-1935, Chicago, 1936

11 Minutes, November 12, 1935.

12 Ibid.

most part by occupants of the project, and the Catholic Youth Center operated by the Catholic Youth Organization, each striving to fulfill some unmet need of the community.

Decline, decay, disintegration continued to be the salient features of the neighborhood at the approach of the World War II period. However, arresting this deterioration, the seven-hundred block on South Loomis Street, the block in which Madonna Center is located, stands out. Owners of the neighboring houses, following the example of the Center, make an effort to keep up the exteriors of their buildings, and some effort is put forth to cultivate the lawns. The Defense Program made possible a better than marginal standard of living by these people.

Women as well as men were able to obtain jobs and, interested as the Italians are in their homes, the first income was used to improve the interiors. The purchase of washing machines was followed closely by electric refrigerators, new bedroom sets and other household furnishings. Kitchens have been linotiled; many bathrooms are now covered with plastic tile, and arched doorways, so inherent a part of Italian culture, are common. Modern furniture, congoleum rugs and venetian blinds complete the appointments. A few of the larger apartments have been converted into smaller units and are rented furnished. According to the last available Census figures, one hundred and fifty one dwelling units in the area are still without private bath and thirty without private flush toilet. One dwelling is reported as having no running water.¹³

¹³ Population and Housing, Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940

Scarcely a week passes that two or three families do not move away. This is due to the increased purchasing power which has resulted in a westward movement or is mandatory because of eviction notices issued by the City Condemnation authorities, for the neighborhood is once again being cut into, this time to make way for the new superhighway along Congress Street.

CHAPTER II

THE BEGINNINGS OF MADONNA CENTER

Before 1850 only a few Italians came to the United States. According to Census figures they numbered less than 100 annually between the years 1820-1850 and, of these, few remained long. Between 1880, the year of marked Italian immigration to Illinois, and 1914, the beginning of World War I, those Italians who did come migrated from the rural districts and small towns of Southern Italy, where the mass of the population is engaged in agriculture. Feudalism, absentee landlordism, insufficient rainfall, the ravages of malaria, lack of roads and other means of transportation--each contributed its share to make South Italy an undesirable habitation, and to make immigration to America attractive.

No one knows exactly when the Italians came to Chicago's West Side, but the largest of Italian groups was settled there when the housing studies began. Having no church of their own, they attended either the Church of the Assumption on Illinois Street, St. Wenceslaus (Bohemian) or Holy Family Jesuit Church. In 1892, an Italian Jesuit attached to St. Ignatius College founded Guardian Angels School on Forquer Street for his countrymen of the neighborhood, whose numbers were continually increasing. Later, the Servite

Fathers of the Church of the Assumption celebrated masses every Sunday in a large hall in the Forquer Street neighborhood. They were the pastors in 1898 when the lay apostolate among the Italian Americans had its beginning.

In May, 1898, two rooms on the second floor of Guardian Angels School were placed at the service of a committee; while friends, acquaintances and prominent citizens were appealed to for assistance, both material and spiritual.¹ The response was gratifying and the first Sunday school class, conducted before Mass, numbered between thirty and forty children. Within a few weeks this number increased to seventy-five, and before long attendance increased so rapidly that the space became totally inadequate for the nucleus of a Sunday school that later became the second largest Catholic Sunday school in the United States.

The Mission so far had no permanent spiritual director, but had been served for a few Sundays by one and then another of the Jesuits of St. Ignatius College. Then one day the Reverend Edmund M. Dunne, a friend of the Original Director, agreed on a visit to the Mission to serve as pastor and, thereafter, came to the Mission to say Mass for the Italian-American congregation each Sunday, and made his home there.

On the death of the pastor of St. Columbkille's, Father Dunne resigned as assistant and devoted all his time to the increasing demands of the Mission. To the saying of Mass he added catechetical instruction, leading the choir and playing the organ, and organizing sodalities and clubs.

¹ Annual Report of Sunday School at Guardian Angels Italian Mission, 1904.

He became a Notary Public and saw to the procuring of marriage licenses. He was prompted to this by the misunderstanding of civil marriage regulations on the part of Italians who grew up under the Italian Government's requirements that a civil ceremony of marriage be performed before the religious.²

Father Dunne's aims and efforts were representative of the aims and efforts of Sunday school teachers who came from all parts of Chicago to conduct the growing classes. From the beginning, discussions were held relative to the more thorough grading of the children and the necessity for an increased corps of teachers. In-Service classes were held for teachers in which attendance, home contacts, and need of supervision outside the Sunday morning sessions were discussed. These In-Service classes became part of the regular program, and were held one evening each month. For increased instruction in the work of teaching Christian Doctrine, the members were addressed by clergymen skilled in catechetical methods--a different speaker being chosen for each of these meetings during the first year.³ An attendance of forty grew to four hundred, then seven hundred fifty, and by 1903 it numbered 1,433 in the classes and children's sodalities.

After a few months a church building became a necessity. Friends furnished part of the funds required; the remaining was supplied through a large mortgage. The building was simple in design, but architecturally it served as a reminder of native Italy. Adjoining it were three rooms which served as living quarters for the pastor, as well as classrooms for cate-

² Kate Gertrude Prindiville, "Italy in Chicago," Catholic World, Volume 78, July, 1903, 458.

³ Minutes, Guardian Angels Sunday School Teachers' Association, September 28, 1902.

chism and prayer classes, for sewing classes and library, the latter at first having only three small shelves of books. So great was the continued Sunday School attendance, that every available space was utilized, including organ loft and boiler room.

In 1902 the Sunday school teachers organized themselves into the Sunday School Teachers Association in order "that a regular organization might prove advantageous in furthering the work of the Sunday school by affording an opportunity for an interchange of ideas and experiences, and in many ways mutually helpful and encouraging."⁴ Classes ranged from those for very small children to those in advanced catechism and Bible courses. A model lesson plan for one of these early years is given:

Lesson Plan Guardian Sunday School
Grades I through VII⁵

- Grade I Beginning sign of cross and simple prayers
- Grade II Advanced Prayer Class
- Grade III First Communion Class - Lessons 1-6 and part of 7
- Grade IV Confirmation Class - Lessons 8-9-13-15 and questions 1 and 2 lesson 16
- Grade V Beginning First Communion Class - Lessons 7-10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23
- Grade VI Advanced First Communion Class - Lessons 24, 29, 30 for (teachers) 31, 32 (for teachers) 33, 34-35, 36
- Grade VII Graduates, review lessons 10-24 very thoroughly; 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 32, 37

⁴ Minutes, Guardian Angels Sunday School Teachers' Association, September 28, 1902.

⁵ Secretary's Annual Report Guardian Angel Italian Mission Sunday School for year ending June, 1906.

Classes were graded and assigned to teachers. Classes were provided for the slow learner, as were examinations each month for the better than average pupil. A great many pupils were prepared each year for First Holy Communion and Missions were conducted annually for the boys.

Although the religious aspect of the work had always been the Mission's most important feature, the intellectual, social and industrial sides of the child's nature were not neglected. Library, Saturday sewing classes, boys' clubs, were always considered a necessity. These were the nucleus for the social activities later developed at Guardian Angel, radiating out into spiritual, mental and social forms of helpful assistance.

It is difficult, in looking over the early records, to determine precisely when the Mission grew out of a Sunday school and took on the character of a social settlement. A circular letter of appeal, sent out in 1900, records 175 children in kindergarten or sewing circle, and it is from this year that Madonna Center dates the beginning of the social work. One of the Sunday school teachers writing in 1904, at which time there were approximately three hundred fifty in the sewing school, states that "many of the teachers of Sunday morning are the sewing teachers of Saturday morning, and that it was the endeavor of the Mission that "industrial accomplishment should follow thriftily in the path of spiritual advancement."⁶

The Annual Report of 1904 gives the quantity of work completed in the sewing classes and emphasizes the importance of work that is capably,

⁶ Prindiville, "Italy in Chicago, " Catholic World, 457.

carefully and neatly done. More than five hundred seventy articles of clothing were completed, and the girls permitted to take them home. By 1906, seven teachers were engaged in conducting these sewing classes, and yet it was necessary to turn some of the children away. During the same year it became necessary to discontinue the classes for want of sufficient materials. What material was furnished was cut and basted where there was great need. In 1907 there were over two hundred in the classes, and this average was maintained for the next five years.

One of the first needs recognized was that of a club room where the boys could read, study and play games. One was opened in the parish house, in conjunction with a library, on October 31, 1901. The earliest reference to the Evening Club for Boys appears in 1905. The members were boys from eleven to seventeen years of age. Many of them were newsboys who came with the grime of the street upon them and with no supper but a cake or two bought at some bakery.

There is no accurate information as to just when the Boys' Club was moved to larger quarters on De Koven Street, but the move probably occurred early in 1909. By that date the clubs were reported as well organized and the average attendance was one hundred. The De Koven Street Club comprised a reading room, library and magazine room, and a game and gymnasium room. It was open on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday evenings from seven-thirty to nine o'clock, and on Sunday afternoons from two-thirty to five o'clock. Every effort was made to attract the older boys who had drifted

away and had found interest in the nearby poolrooms.

In 1911 the advisability of discontinuing the baseball team and undertaking a new club was discussed. It was proposed that, should a new club be organized, a man be engaged for the purpose of directing it. The Archbishop favored the idea of clubrooms, but funds necessary to establish a settlement house were not available, and the committee began a search for a location that could be used for both boys and girls, with a hall available to rent when needed.

The establishment of a permanent circulating library was one of the earliest achievements. The first meeting held after the Sunday School Teachers Association became an actuality, in 1902, was devoted to this project. Three hundred books were accumulated, and teachers were urged to continue collecting them. In time, the library became one of the very important features of the work of the Mission. Books were distributed on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, and the eagerness of the children to read them inspired further effort on the part of the committee.⁷

An appeal was made to the Public Library and an additional 125 books were added, bringing the total to about 475. In 1906 it became necessary to open the library for the working boys on Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings. Between three and four hundred waited their turn for books. Horatio Alger's books, with their alluring titles of Luck and Pluck, Sink or Swim, Paul the Peddler and Phil the Fiddler, were prime favorites with

⁷ Secretary's Annual Report, Guardian Angels Italian Mission, year ending June 30, 1906.

some readers. Fosdick, Stratemeyer and Adams also had their groups of admiring readers among the older boys. The young asked for fairy tales and history stories.

The year 1907 brought many new additions, including contributions from the publishing companies, bringing the total number of volumes to 1,300. An average of 386 books were taken out every Saturday. Both the library and its circulation continued to grow until in 1911, the number of volumes exceeded 1,600 and the average weekly circulation was two hundred. There was also a decided improvement in reading tastes: histories and other more serious books were now being called for. Public school teachers began to recognize the value of the library and frequently sent in lists of books for their students.

In "Little Italy" the people clustered together in solid clans of Neapolitans, Calabrians and Sicilians and were therefore slow to learn English, adopt American manners or assimilate new customs. Some of the older people never learned English. Their need was brought to the attention of the Director of the Mission one day when a young man in his twenties came to her and begged her to teach him English and coach him in a few short business phrases so that he could qualify for a job as teamster. He was the first of a small army of Italian-Americans who appealed to the Mission to teach them the language of their new country.

The Director, in turn, appealed to the Board of Education for the use of one of the rooms of the Dante School for adult night classes in Eng-

lish, hoping that the Board would supply the necessary textbooks, as she herself was prepared to supply the teachers. However, funds were not available for this, so, with the aid of the Superintendent of the Sunday school, who at this time was also Principal of the Dante School, she offered classes in English reading and writing, and in elementary Civil Government, in the basement classroom of the Mission. Teachers were recruited from among the Sunday school teachers, only the very best being chosen. School books and stationery, and even blackboards from the walls of the rectory, were donated by the Sunday School Association. On opening evening 110 men registered.

The following summer the Board of Education, at the request of the Mission, opened the Dante School as a vacation school for children, including those of a very early age. About 650 children registered on the opening day in July, and those who could not be accommodated at once awaited the first vacancies.

One of the teachers of the Sunday school was appointed Principal of the summer school, and, again, the practicality and thoroughness of the catechism classes were demonstrated. Recognizing the need of adaptation to American standards and culture in the home life of those new to things American, she immediately instituted a course in Home Economics. Her plan was built around three classrooms by fitting them into a combined sitting and dining room, a bedroom and kitchen. In this practical way the girls learned the principles of domestic science and the necessary chores of bed-making.

scrubbing and ironing. The course of study included sewing classes, where dresses for themselves and curtains for the windows were made, and where table and bed linen was hemmed. In addition to the sewing and domestic science classes, there was a millinery class and an intensive course in personal hygiene and infant care. The program was rounded out by manual training and handicraft classes. Recreation was not neglected, for simple picnics and hikes to the lake front were engaged in from time to time.

While the Mission continued to meet each material need as it presented itself, it persistently continued along spiritual lines. The 1906 Report shows that daily preparation of children for First Holy Communion was the most important work of the year, while members of the several sodalities receiving Holy Communion on the first Sunday of the month regularly filled the Church. A mission for the older boys brought an attendance of 276, and the nucleus of a new sodality was formed.

Thus the work of the Mission continued spiritually through Sunday school, intellectually through the library privileges, and materially through the sewing school, to improve and elevate the living conditions of the children of one of the most wretched districts of the city. At the end of its first decade it had made marked contributions to both Church and society. One of the first Mission boys was now a student in the American College at Rome; another was in the Christian Brothers novitiate; a third was studying medicine at St. Louis University; another, law at Chicago University; still others were in St. Ignatius College.⁸

⁸ "Catholic Settlement Workers," Extension Magazine, Volume IV, May, 1919, 7.

Financing this project was achieved in many ways. Every available source was tapped, from the socially elite to the children themselves. Regularly, the society columns of the daily papers devoted space to preparations for fundraising events, and photographers of the same dailies recorded these events when they became an historical fact. Entertainment for the purpose of fund raising ran the gamut from society balls and grand bazaars to simple lectures, and to dances and plays put on by the children themselves.

With the opening of the school year, 1909-1910, volunteers were already recruited from among the students of St. Ignatius High School and St. Mary's High School. Jesuit scholastics, Christian Brothers and Sisters of Mercy also aided in the work of helping the people of the community adapt themselves to the customs of the new country and make themselves practicing Catholics and truly American citizens.

The possibility of transferring the Center to a religious community of women was considered in 1911. Recognizing that the continuous growth of the Mission had already exceeded the efforts of a volunteer staff, the Director invited the Helpers of the Holy Souls to take charge.

...the enthusiastic interest and spontaneous outburst of zeal of a corps of young volunteer assistants are scarcely equal to the opportunities for faithful and continued and unfaltering efforts that such glorious opportunities (coupled with such difficulties as our Mission presents) call for....so far, it has practically been a settlement work minus an actual settlement house and a resident worker.⁹

9 Agnes Ward Amberg, Correspondence, November 2, 1911.

Her letter ends with a plea to the Sisters to take a responsibility that had grown too heavy for her to carry without assistance.

In asking the Sisters to take over the responsibility, she was not undervaluating the interest and the labor of the volunteers who had thus far assisted her. Rather, she appreciated the stability and regularity that would result from having the Mission under the care of an established religious community. The Sisters could depend upon continued interest and support from those who had greatly contributed to the Mission's success thus far. This success was seen not only in things spiritual, such as the provided catechetical instruction, but in a substantial library, in clubs, practical instruction in Home Economics--all steadily raising the tone of a district which the Director referred to in her letter as one of "poverty" and with a "crying need" for just such help as the Mission aimed to give.

CHAPTER III

A SOCIAL SETTLEMENT

The letter written by the Director of the Mission to the Helpers of the Holy Souls was detained at the Chancery Office because the Archbishop wished to give the matter further consideration. During the period of delay the Executive Committee of the Mission reasoned that perhaps, after all, this work could be performed by the laity, and they decided to apply for a charter, making the Mission a legal entity. The certificate of incorporation was issued on November 28, 1913, under the name of "Guardian Angels Center." The object of the corporation was "to add to the moral, physical, educational and social welfare of Catholics in its neighborhood."¹ Article VIII of the By-Laws provided for a Managing Director.

In the meantime, early in 1912, the Mission had located accommodations in St. Francis School on Newberry Avenue. These accommodations consisted of two large rooms and a large assembly hall which could be rented for entertainments and lectures. One of the rooms was to serve as a library and reading room and the other as a poolroom for the Boys' Club. Rules for the Boys' Club, including the age range, were decided before the new club

¹ Articles of Incorporation, Guardian Angels Center, November 28, 1913.

rooms opened. Each member of the Executive Committee pledged his service one night a week.

The Mission's new quarters opened on the evening of Monday, March 11, 1912. All boys and girls over thirteen years of age who were members of the sodalities were admitted. Boys who were no longer in Catechism classes but who continued to attend Mass after leaving the sodality were to have access to the club quarters on Friday evenings. The club was to be open every evening--Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday for boys; Tuesday and Thursday, for girls. Girls were allowed to entertain their men friends one evening; on another evening the boys could bring their girls. Almost immediately, Saturday afternoon sewing classes were formed and a very large attendance was reported.

By the beginning of 1913 the Mission offered a craft class, fancy and folk dancing, cooking, embroidery and dressmaking. Attendance in the sewing classes totaled 250. Story-telling groups were formed for girls; a debating club, in which they were permitted to select their own subject, was offered for boys. The girls' club doubled its membership in a month's time; the Social Club for older boys and girls had seventy-five members. The library consisted of fifteen hundred volumes, with a weekly circulation of five thousand.

The Director who had, single-handed, carried on almost all the affairs of the Mission for fifteen years felt herself unable to continue longer in that responsibility. Her daughter,² who for several years had acted as

2 Mary Agnes Amberg, Head Resident, Madonna Center

Assistant, was appointed Managing Director at the first meeting of the Directors of the new Center held on February 12, 1914. During this first year at the new Center it became clear that a permanent Resident was necessary if all opportunities for service were to be met, and on December 26, 1914, the Managing Director and a friend became the first Residents. One of the large classrooms in St. Francis School was arranged into a four-room apartment for their occupancy.

Children came early and stayed late at the Center. Parents recognized it as their children's refuge from over-crowded homes, and as an opportunity to procure more wholesome amusement than the Halsted Street type of entertainment. Additional rooms were needed to provide meeting places for the new clubs. The sodalities served as a nucleus for three new girls' clubs to provide for the various age groups. Even the social club had two new rival organizations. So rapidly did attendance grow that the original two rooms were expanded to eight. Within a few months, 250 children were affiliated with the Center by clubs, and classes were in regular attendance. Many others dropped in to read or chat, play billiards, exercise in the gymnasium, or even to play the phonographs.

The work of the Center grew so rapidly because of the community's dependence on it for instruction and recreation that, by the spring of 1915, it was necessary to consider ways of securing a steady yearly income to extend its usefulness and ensure its successful continuance on a sound financial basis. The Dean of the School of Sociology of Loyola University³ was

³ Rev. Frederic Siedenburg, S.J.

invited to address the Directors and was made chairman of a campaign committee to raise funds. Out of his efforts evolved the Guardian Angels Auxiliary.

By March, 1916, the Center occupied all the school building except the rooms on the second floor, which were occupied by a community of religious. There was no possibility of expanding further because of conditions both external and internal, and the Board of Directors turned their consideration to another location and a new building where the Center could be carried on to better advantage. Impetus was given to this decision when word was received from the Archbishop, during the summer of 1917, that the old school building would have to be put into condition, without delay, for strictly school purposes. It thus became necessary to lease temporarily two small stores and a small apartment located at 927-931 West Polk Street.

Despite curtailed space and inadequate working conditions, the activities were carried on for a period of more than four years, which included the period World War I. Red Cross units, working on surgical bandages, maintained an excellent record in handling surgical dressings. Throughout the war the Center maintained contact with its boys by issuing monthly the Guardian Angels Bulletin, which contained excerpts of letters received from the war areas. It was during this time also that the Columbus Council of the Knights of Columbus developed from one of the boys' clubs. Boy and Girl Scouts continued their regular meetings. With the coming of 1919, the total registration of 1,404 children and young people reflected continued growth. Over six thousand books were circulated by the library on Saturday

afternoons, a total exceeding that in some of the branches of the Public Library. At this time the average daily attendance at the Center was reported as 215, a large number for cramped quarters.

Most activities progressed satisfactorily. The Red Cross now conducted four classes: Home Hygiene, Home Care, Surgical Bandages and First Aid. The afternoon sewing and embroidery classes, as well as the play clubs and evening activities, continued despite the crowded facilities. However, the Billiard Room, operated in an adjacent building, had to be closed because the property was sold in 1921.

In October of that year the Board of Directors approved the purchase of a new site and, early in 1922, the Center moved into its present quarters at 712 South Loomis Street. The new site included two buildings; a large residence to be used for the activities which had come to be known as "The Big House", and a two-story structure which served as an office and residence for the workers. A close friend⁴ of the Resident Director who had been a frequent visitor ever since the Mission had moved to St. Francis School, and who had associated herself with the work of the settlement, became one of the Residents. In the course of time she was appointed Associate Head Resident.

Through the years the advisability of a change in name for the Center had come up for discussion because several other institutions in the

⁴ Marie Palamondon

city had similar names. It now seemed an appropriate time to bring this matter to the attention of the Board of Directors. The name "Madonna Center" was chosen, partially because of the connotations that the word "Madonna" held for the Italian people.

Located in its new home, the Center was able to look to the future with a feeling of security. Its program continued to be progressive and comprehensive, in the sense that, once a child came into its kindergarten, there was always a group of which that child might become a member. On entering school these children enrolled in the after-school-hour play group for boys and girls six to ten years of age. The boys, when ten years old, passed from the afternoon play clubs to afternoon gymnasium activities or became Boy Scouts and, as the years moved along, entered the evening clubs, camping or hiking clubs. The girls, at ten years of age, were graduated to sewing, domestic science classes or dancing, and at fifteen years of age they entered high school, home or business girls' groups, supper clubs or gymnasium classes. Children were encouraged to choose their activities; but continual restless rotation from one activity to another was discouraged.

The kindergarten was staffed by a graduate of the Chicago Kindergarten College, who several years before had organized and developed a kindergarten at the Center. For the first year, 625 hours of kindergarten were reported, an average of sixty-seven in daily attendance. A mid-morning luncheon of milk and crackers was served. The kindergarten service was discontinued temporarily, in the summer of 1924, because of curtailment of funds.

In 1924 there were eleven sewing classes, two dressmaking classes and one embroidery class. The cooking class was under the supervision of instructors skilled in domestic science; the members of the sewing class, under equally capable supervision, made their own clothing. The Red Cross units attracted 132 women and girls. The baseball nines were taught techniques of the Big League with insistence on sportsmanship and fair play.

A considerable decrease in library circulation was noted at this time, but it was attributable to an exodus from the eastern section of the district. Religious education also tapered off, because of the entry of Sisters into the parochial field at Guardian Angels Parish. The spiritual continued, however, to be the dominant note of the Center.

To familiarize herself with the rudiments of scouting, the Associate Resident completed a course of sixteen lessons in leadership offered at Girl Scout headquarters. In 1921 she received permission from the Archbishop to activate a Girl Scout Troop. Forty-one girls responded. This new activity rounded out the entire scheme of usefulness the Associate Resident had charted for the girls, and correlated all their activities.

No activity by which a close relationship could be established with the people of the neighborhood was overlooked. Friendly visits were made, medical and hospital care provided, employment secured and, when necessary, financial assistance was given. A pre-natal clinic was established and staffed by volunteer workers from the Loyola University School of Medicine. For the next several years activities remained more or less stable.

The Center became a member of the Social Service Exchange from the start, to offset duplication and as an aid to more effective cooperation with other agencies, and it used this service for clearing its appeals for relief.

By 1925 the boys were formed into a baseball team, outfitted by the Center, and entered in the National Catholic Baseball League. This year also marked the beginning of the Annual Communion Breakfast, which became a tradition at the Center.

So steadily did the work of the Center progress that 1927 marked a banner year for all activities. It was almost more than a staff of volunteer workers could manage: a registration of one hundred in kindergarten; the regular sewing classes continuing four afternoons; the circulating library open on Fridays; two groups of boys meeting in the gymnasium each afternoon, their number at times totaling seventy-five; the organization of two new clubs for older boys. Registration for the year was 1,049 children and older boys and girls. In 1928 a "Friendly Visitor" was hired and the Mothers' Club formed. Talks were given to this club by the Health Nurse, Kindergarten Director and others. The boys' work was expanded so rapidly that an assistant was requested for the Director of the Boys' Club.

While the usual activities continued, helping with material assistance now became the outstanding work of the Center, as it had of all settlements and agencies. Home investigation of destitute families, referrals to other agencies, distribution of clothing, and legal, medical and hospital

aids were the outstanding services rendered. Lewis Institute sent students to gain practice in domestic science. Columbia School of Expression placed a cadet teacher to assist with the story-telling. Wishing to avail itself of every opportunity to help, the Center in 1929 became a branch headquarters for the Elizabeth McCormick Memorial Fund in behalf of undernourished children of the Mothers' Pension group in the Center's district. Clinic was held twice a week with a physician in attendance. The average attendance was fifty-eight; over one hundred were examined.

A professional social worker, a graduate of Loyola University Department of Sociology, was appointed to the staff, which now numbered twenty-six active workers. A series of fourteen lectures, planned by the Director of the Social Service Committee,⁵ and sponsored by the Center with particular attention to the needs of its own workers, was given at Loyola University.

The Center, which had adopted Scouting in 1915 as one of the earliest Chicago groups to do so, by the fall of 1930 had two Boy Scout troops registered, one of them entitled to special insignia because of over ten years' service. Several of the Center's young men attended a university course in the field to assist with the Center's Scout program. At this time also an Inter-Club Council was organized with two representatives from each club. The Center was represented on the Advisory Committee of the Mary Crane District of the United Charities and at the Board of Education neigh-

5 Rev. Frederic Siedenburger, S.J.

borhood agencies' meetings.

During the years of the depression the Center furnished material and psychological support, as well as its traditional spiritual aid and encouragement, to all who came to it, irrespective of creed. The year 1931 brought recognition to the Head Resident from the Italian Red Cross in the name of the Italian Government for her years of work among the Italians and their children in Chicago. Attendance at the Center increased, the average daily attendance totaling 225, and sometimes reaching three hundred. Staff workers now numbered forty-five. Six or seven new workers had been recruited for the Play Group department; seniors from Immaculata High school had taken over an afternoon period of instruction and storytelling.

Funds received by the Center from the Governor's Commission on Unemployment Relief were used to distribute fifty loaves of bread, spread with jam or syrup, to the children each afternoon. But the Center itself felt the pinch of the depression directly. For the first time in its history salaries had not been paid in full. When it was suggested to the employees that they might prefer to seek employment elsewhere, they volunteered a reduction in salary.

The picture was not altogether dark. Fifty-eight of the seven-to-nine year olds from the Play Group sang in the Music Festival presented by the Music Division of the Chicago Association of Settlements, of which Association the Center was a charter member. A Center baseball team won the Championship Cup of the West Side Amateur Baseball League, and the Scouts

LEWIS TOWERS

won a Catholic Youth Organization trophy for indoor baseball for which over one hundred troops competed. The Intermediates carried off the American Amateur Federation Basketball Championship, a citywide tournament.

A report⁶ submitted to the Directors by the Chairman of the Center's Social Service Committee called attention to the great increase in the strength and service of each department. It pointed out the fact that the Center cooperated with sixty-two social agencies in 306 family cases that year. Clothing was distributed to 242 needy infants; two hundred new garments from the Needlework Guild went to other children. Approximately 3,000 pieces of second-hand clothing were also distributed. Five hundred Thanksgiving dinners were served; seventy-eight Christmas baskets were distributed. An average of thirty-one friendly visits--advisory or family case visits--of 1,531 visits to homes and hospitals were made.

The newly organized Mothers' Club, numbering ninety-seven mothers of Kindergarten and Play Group children, had these new activities in addition to the social: Home Care of the Sick, Sewing, English. About forty mothers also attended several cooking lessons offered at the Center by the Elizabeth McCormick Fund to instruct in ways of serving the County rations appetizingly and differently.

Funds became so limited in 1932 that it was necessary to discontinue the Kindergarten after seventeen years of functioning. The decision,

⁶ Minutes, Nineteenth Annual Meeting of Madonna Center, October 21, 1931.

made reluctantly, meant a saving of \$1,000 or more a year on expense items which included the salary of the Social Worker, supplies, and the need for heating the "Big House" until later in the day.

With its many activities and its many aspects of social work, the Center was not unmindful of the changing economic order and psychological approach to Social Work. Its over-all view was given by the Director of Social Service,⁷ when he called attention to the sudden and extraordinary change which came with the depression in 1929. It was his conviction that the world would never go back to anything like what it knew just before that eventful year, and that the change that would come would be by evolution, not by revolution. His reason for this belief was founded in great part on what the world thought of such social projects as Hull House, the University of Chicago Settlement and, the Northwestern University settlement. Since the new order would mean, among other things, a shorter work day, he believed that training in the better use of leisure time was of paramount importance. This was something of which Madonna Center has always been mindful and he believed that, with the new order, the work of the Center would be appreciated even more, and would bear its best fruits.

The Center's Little Girls' Choral Group participated in the Federation of Settlements' Chorus at Enchanted Island, Century of Progress, while another group presented a phantasy, "The First Spring", and Italian fairy

7 Rev. Frederic Siedenburg, S.J.

tales. By 1933, membership in the sewing classes had grown to 309 girls ranging in age from ten to fifteen years. Under the supervision of nineteen volunteer assistants they made blouses, dresses, pleated skirts, all up to date in design, attractive in color and made by hand. A retreat for ninety young women conducted at the Sacred Heart Convent on the North Shore, and the Easter Morning Communion in May, when 122 senior boys and girls breakfasted at the Center, gave evidence of the strong spiritual purpose of the Center.

Recreation was always recognized by the Center as one of the necessary "R's." Effort was always made to provide a varied program of entertainment. For example, the annual Christmas parties conducted for the children since the Center's first Christmas in 1900 were supplemented by frequent trips, hikes, picnics, and other entertainment. Even through the period of the Depression, parties were continued at Christmas time, St. Valentine's Day, and St. Patrick's Day.

It was necessary to engage the services of five salaried workers to supplement the volunteer staff, bringing the total membership to sixty-five. Individual registration was 997; total registration in all departments was 1,577, and the total attendance 54,202. The work of the Center, as suggested by these figures, is all the more pronounced in that it was accomplished in the neighborhood chosen for study by the "Children's Leisure Time Service"⁸ because of the high delinquency rate in the neighborhood.

⁸ One of the early projects of the Chicago Leisure Time Service program sponsored by the Illinois Emergency Relief Commission.

According to the investigators the delinquency rate had been thirty-nine to fifty per cent per hundred boys in contrast to other areas.

With the inception of the Works Project Administration, the Center benefited by the workers allotted to it. There were eleven workmen in all, with a total of 458 hours per month. This allotment was based on every 300 hours of work the Center was willing to give to persons receiving relief. The most important aspect of the work of the Social Service Department was that of giving comfort, advice and assistance during the final years of the depression, and interpreting to them the necessary delays and apparent misunderstandings which Public Assistance entailed. With the establishment of the Illinois Emergency Relief Commission, the medical work carried on by the Center was lessened, since medical service to relief clients was to be arranged by the medical departments of the relief agency.

In 1936 the program of the Center was expanded. Three Children's Leisure Time Service appointees, former Center boys, were added to the gymnasium staff. Students from Immaculata High School worked with the very small children and several Mundelein College students completed field work assignments under the Social Service Director. Psychology students at Loyola University conducted Saturday morning clinics over a period of several months, administering Stanford-Binet tests. An internal medicine clinic was conducted by the members of the staff of Loyola University School of Medicine. Courses in maternity care in the home were extended to the Center through the cooperation of Lying-in-Hospital. With all this very prac-

tical care and instruction, the Center, nevertheless, continued with its spiritual and recreational activities.

The years of World War II brought many variations in the Center's work. Membership in the Boys' clubs was necessarily affected by Selective Service. The Center had over 200 boys in Service in all parts of the world. There were times when as few as two members continued in attendance in a club and evening work was seriously affected by the war. Senior clubs were depleted, some even being discontinued because of the absence of boys, and because senior girls and young women were engaged in defense work. Even the Mother's Club had only a skeleton attendance.

The Center's role in Civilian Defense consisted of offering its Assembly Hall for the District Office of Civilian Defense, for block and community meetings, First Aid and Home Nursing classes. Two members of the staff attended a twelve-week training course for volunteers held at Civilian Defense headquarters. Three Group Work students from Northwestern University completed their supervised field work placements at the Center during late 1944. The members of the Red Cross Surgical Dressing Unit, although few, were keenly interested and enthusiastic and completed 36,869 surgical dressings. Worthy of mention also in this connection is the assistance given by the staff of the Center to those who were unable to cope with governmental forms which multiplied during the war. They assisted relatives of men in the Armed Forces to complete forms for allotments; they

gave direction on Office of Price Administration applications and on income tax forms; and interpreted disputes between landlords and tenants.

With the coming of the post-war years, the children's need for instruction and recreation grew tremendously. Immediate attempts were made to answer the need. A new sewing group was formed of little girls who were interested in outfitting their dolls. For older girls, table games and Friday afternoon dancing were offered as new opportunities for recreation. On the more serious side, remedial reading classes were established for boys and girls of various ages who were retarded in school because of their slow reading ability. These classes were under the direction of a professionally trained and experienced teacher, and were designed to supplement rather than supplant the work of the regular school.

Like the other settlements, Madonna Center suffered a marked falling off of attendance among the teen-age girls. But the jubilee year of 1950 saw the Frata Club for boys marking its twenty-fourth year, and the Crusader Club its seventeenth year. The Director of the Boys' Work had then been associated with the Center for over twenty-five years from the time that he was nine years old. The jubilee year also saw the Center devoting most of its time to the Play Groups, which were larger than ever. Volunteers were recruited from among the seniors at the Convent of the Sacred Heart and St. Catherine of Sienna High School. A small part-time staff of experienced teachers directed the after-school groups. The kindergarten had been modernized during the previous year and had an enrollment of some forty children. Attendance in all groups reached the gratifying total of 55,160 for the year of jubilee.

CONCLUSION

From its beginning, Madonna Center recognized the importance of taking into consideration the cultural patterns of the people of the community it served. Its success is to be explained to a very great extent by its respect for these cultural patterns and by the skill with which it adapted traditional tastes and practices to the American way of life.

This successful adaptation was realized through the use of spiritual, intellectual and material forces with an awareness of the value of a recreational atmosphere. Its service in the area of the spiritual was shown by its attention to religious observances and instruction; its attention to a fundamental, intellectual need was well illustrated in the emphasis placed upon its library. In the practical arts it prepared girls of the community for the duties of adult home life by such classes as those in cooking and sewing. By cooperation with those professionally trained in medicine and psychology, the Center proved its awareness of the importance of health of mind and body; in Scouting, both for boys and girls, it brought home to the young not only the importance of physical well-being and of service to others, but also the fact that these things can be combined with pleasurable recreation.

The success of the Center is to be explained also by the readiness

with which it met the demands made upon it by changes, sometimes drastic, in social and economic conditions. Two such changes were those resulting from the depression and from World Wars I and II, as well as from the post-war periods with their irregularities and uncertainties. Though its own resources were taxed at such times, staff and volunteer members increased their exertions, both to continue the customary service to the community and to augment that service in meeting new and varied needs. The Center became a referral agency in the community, as well as a settlement house and, by giving service along the pattern of its past it met an important need and justified its continued existence and support.

APPENDIX I

FOREWORD TO SCRAP BOOK

From the date of the founding of Guardian Angels' Mission in 1898 to the Present Time (June 1910) there had been no systematic effort to preserve all the various items of printed matter and correspondence which would have made a complete historical scrap book.

During the early years many articles were preserved in scrap book form by the first pastor of the Mission, Reverend Edmund M. Dunne, D. D., afterwards Chancellor of the Archdiocese and now Bishop of Peoria, who has them in his possession.

This collection of "odds and ends" necessarily incomplete has been arranged chronologically and gives but a meagre outline of the activities of the Mission Workers for the first twelve years of its existence.

(Signed) W. A. Amberg

Mackinac Island, Mich.
June 24, 1910.

APPENDIX II

COMMUNITY AREA SERVED BY GUARDIAN ANGEL'S ITALIAN MISSION

1898

APPENDIX III

COMMUNITY AREA SERVED BY MADONNA CENTER, 1950

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