1956

The First Decade of the Sisters of Saint Felix in America, 1874-1884

Mary Theophania Kalinowski

Loyola University Chicago

Recommended Citation

THE FIRST DECADE OF THE SISTERS OF SAINT FELIX IN AMERICA, 1874-1884

by

Sister Mary Theophania Kalinowski, C.S.S.F.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

August

1956
LIFE

Sister Mary Theophania Kalinowski was born in Mobile, Alabama, March 19, 1910.

She was graduated from Good Counsel High School, Chicago, Illinois, 1927 and from Rosary College, June 1941 with a degree in library science. From 1942 the writer taught English at Good Counsel High School and four years later became teacher-librarian at Saint Joseph High School, Chicago. Since September, 1954, she has been head librarian and teacher of journalism and history at Pomona Catholic High School, Pomona, California.

During summers 1949-51, the writer registered as a special student in the University of Minnesota and Marquette University Schools of Journalism. She began her graduate studies at Loyola University in October, 1951.
PREFACE

The object of this study is to present a thorough and accurate account of the first decade of the Felician Sisters' activity in America.

A special effort has been made to obtain original source material and to set down facts in conformity with the required historical procedures. Secondly, attempts have been made to weave into this work a study of the social environment of the people among whom Providence has cast the lot of the Congregation.

This study could not have appeared without the impetus given by Mother Mary Hermana, Provincial Superior of the Congregation and Sister Mary Sanctoslaus, Dean of Studies, who have followed this work to its final stage with deep interest, and have provided the necessary leisure and financial means. For help in collecting much material relative to the history of the far-flung missions of the Congregation, the writer is indebted to numerous members of her Community in different parts of the United States, to all of whom she makes grateful acknowledgement.

The writer is under obligation to the Franciscan Fathers of Green Bay for photostats of pertinent
material in the Chancery Archives of Green Bay Diocese; to Father Edward Roche, archivist in the Chicago Archdiocesan Chancery, who set aside his arduous duties to answer every request; and to Sherman J. Sword, City Editor of Stevens Point Journal, for transcribing and forwarding required data from back copies of his Journal.

Very special thanks are due to Mr. Kenneth Jackson under whose direction the thesis has been undertaken and completed.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE COMING OF THE FELICIAN SISTERS TO AMERICA</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for a religious teaching Congregation—An appeal for sisters by Father Joseph Dombrowski to the Generalate of the Felician Sisters in Cracow—Origin and early history of the Congregation—Journey to America—Arrival in Polonia, Wisconsin—The first &quot;convent&quot;—Establishment of the first school—Sister Mary Cajetan—Her devotedness to the cause of education.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRIKING THE ROOTS OF THE AMERICAN FOUNDATION</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destruction of the convent by fire—Soliciting of funds for a new convent—Institution of the first novitiate—New convent and church demolished by fire—Months of trial—Second convent dedicated to Saint Claire—Interest in the Indians of the vicinity—The first investiture—Establishment of an American province of the Congregation—Administration of Mother Mary Monica—Her contributions to the early spirit of the Community.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

vi
IV. GROWTH AND EXPANSION OF THE COMMUNITY TO 1884


V. CONCLUSION

Casual survey of eighty years.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The first decade of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Felix in America is an epic of sacrifice and struggle. Like thousands of other sowers of seed seeking to bring new souls to Christ, they braved the rugged pioneer days, sharing the roughest of manual toil to build a little school and convent in the wilderness of Wisconsin. These years enclose the most superb chapter in the annals of the Congregation.

Today a twenty-four foot crucifix, rising above the crossroads which lead into the tiny hamlet of Polonia in Portage County, Wisconsin, marks the site on which the Congregation first established its American foundation. The scene around this landmark is that which a fertile and prosperous farming country presents—comfortable cottages, long stretches of pasture lands and richly cultivated fields of wheat and corn. It shows a marvelous change from the day in 1874, when five sisters of the Congregation were conveyed to this site by special appointment of Divine Providence to revive and sustain a
holy faith of an immigrant population which had settled here twenty years before. Few apostles in later years excelled in zeal and fidelity this band of pioneers or endured greater hardships in obedience to their divine call.

The first years of the Congregation in America spanned the unfortunate days in Portage County when corruption and demoralization were rampant in a large segment of the immigrant population. The circumstances, spawned in times of spiritual deprivation, cried out for fervid souls who would dedicate a lifetime to the neglected immigrant. The story of these people whose plight lured the Congregation to the American shores has trickled into the annals of the Community and bears discussion here.

In 1855 six families of Polish Catholics from Canada migrated to Portage County and established the first Polish settlement in Wisconsin. The land, purchased from the Fox River Company, was dotted with hundreds of tree stumps, huge boulders and rocks of every size. It was only after many months of patient and backbreaking labor that clearings, upon which crops could be planted, were made by the settlers.¹ They were drawn to this

¹ The Catholic Church in Wisconsin; A History of the Catholic Church in Wisconsin from the Earliest Time to the Present Day, Milwaukee, 1898, 714.
comparatively wild region, not for economic reasons, but because they had learned that Rev. John Polak, a priest of Polish ancestry, was at that time pastor of a parish in the nearby town of Stevens Point.

Soon after the arrival of the Polish group, families of German nationality came, and together they established a settlement at a place known as "Ellis Corner" in the town of Sharon. Here they built a small church which they dedicated to Saint Martin. For the next eight years, 1855-1863, Father Polak paid occasional visits to these people and ministered to their spiritual needs. Throughout these years, the parish was never thoroughly unified and harmonious. Differences in language and custom made it soon apparent that separate foundations would effect a happier situation.²

The population of "Ellis Corner" grew rapidly. The presence of a German Catholic bishop³ in Wisconsin gave the territory wide publicity in the Catholic states


³ Rt. Rev. John M. Henni was appointed the first bishop of the Diocese of Milwaukee in 1844 and remained at the post until his consecration as Archbishop in 1875 at which time Milwaukee became an archiepiscopal See. Rt. Rev. Joseph Melcher succeeded him as Bishop of Milwaukee.
of Germany and Austria and attracted thousands.\textsuperscript{4}

In 1863 the Polish Catholics, having increased to forty-four families, petitioned Rt. Rev. John Henni, Bishop of the Diocese of Milwaukee, for official approval to found a new parish. The following year Father Bonaventure Buczynski was sent to organize the congregation and begin the erection of a church. Within a year, a new church under the patronage of Saint Joseph was completed on a site not far from Saint Martin Church. This move tended to widen the breach between the two national groups.

Quite unfortunately, at this time, an unruly group of agitators infiltrated the German-Polish community and was instrumental in arousing feuds and trouble between rival groups.

The crux of the matter revolved around three saloons that had sprung up in the immediate vicinity of the newly built church.\textsuperscript{5} The unchecked and unlimited

\textsuperscript{4} According to Shaughnessy, the foreign Catholic immigration reached 741,000 in the 1860-70 decade, and since facilities for reaching the Northwest by railroad had then vastly increased, "emigration poured into the West as a mighty stream."--Gerald Shaughnessy,\textit{ Has the Immigrant Kept the Faith}, New York, 1925, 153.

\textsuperscript{5} Green Bay Diocesan Archives, MSS. \textit{Historia Coloniae Poloniae in Polonia}, n.d. (unpaged).
sale of liquors led to brawls, assaults and petty riots. Church services were frequently interrupted. The pastor used every means at his disposal to check the evil, but after two and a half years of unsuccessful effort he resigned his pastorate and returned to Milwaukee. His successor, Father Francis Wenglikowski, also labored arduously to subdue the chaos, but after a three year attempt, he abandoned the parish. Three subsequent pastorates ended in failure. As a result of this, the parish was placed under an interdict from 1868 to 1870.

Into this factious community, seething with anticlericalism and unrest, Bishop Melcher sent the newly-ordained Father Joseph Dombrowski in December, 1871. This priest was destined to play an important role in the foundation of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Felix in America.

Father Joseph Dombrowski, soldier, pioneer, educator, was born in Lublin, Poland, in 1842 of an illustrious Catholic family. All accounts agree that

---

6 Details of conditions in the town were given by John Bigalka in a personal interview. Mr. Bigalka, age 89 (1954), still in full possession of his faculties, spent his entire life in the parish and is perhaps one of the best informed residents in early Polonia history.

7 MSS. Historia Coloniae Poloniae.
young Dombrowski was a singularly gifted and pious child accustomed to the adulation generally showered by wealthy families upon their first born. Until his twelfth year, Joseph was educated at home under the tutorship of a local teacher and of his father, who was the embodiment of the culture and traditions of the old Polish aristocracy.\(^8\)

The father's association with disgruntled noblemen, smarting under Russian domination, filled his young mind with the determination to champion the cause of Poland. The events of his normal boyhood can be passed over with a single remark--he was moved by two convictions: his interest in things mechanical and scientific, and a longing for a military career.\(^9\)

At twelve, Joseph was sent by his widowed mother to a finishing school in Lublin and later to the University of Warsaw. When the Polish insurrection of 1863 broke out, Dombrowski joined a regiment comprised of faculty members and students from the University of Warsaw and fought bravely under General Stanislaus Mieroslawski. The General recognized in the young student marked qualities of leadership and placed him in command of a company

---

8 Aleksander Syski, Ks. Jozef Dombrowski; *Monografia Historyczna*, Orchard Lake, 1942, 23.

9 Ibid., 29-36.
of men. After a short time Mieroslawski, realizing that continued resistance would be suicidal, disbanded his regiment. Dombrowski, one of the hunted leaders of the stormy uprising, fled to Germany after a number of hairbreadth escapes.10

After journeying from place to place, the young exile spent some time in Frankfort and Saxony, and later proceeded to Switzerland.11 Dombrowski's bent of mind toward the sciences finally led him to the University of Lucerne where he completed his studies in technology, physics and mathematics.12 His natural talents and industry enabled him to acquire at this time a liberal

10 A personal account of Joseph Dombrowski's participation in the insurrection of 1863 and his harrowing experiences connected with his escape into Germany was given to a newspaper reporter by the priest himself, the year of his death in 1903. The complete story was published in Detroit Journal, January 6, 1903, 5.

11 Chronology of Father Dombrowski's life during this period is inaccurate and a number of discrepancies occur in biographical material. According to Syski, the dearth of source material renders it impossible to state anything with certainty regarding his life abroad. Community chronicles containing data pertinent to his life during this period confirm the facts stated in this study. --Community Archives, Livonia, Michigan, MSS. Zapiski Siostry Urszuli, n.d.

12 Francis Bolek, Who's Who in Polish America, Grenville, 1940, 38.
education and a fund of useful knowledge which proved valuable to him in his future career.

The hardships of his self-imposed exile wrought a change in the interests and attitudes of Dombrowski, and it is at this time that he began to experience a sincere desire to dedicate his life to the Church. In 1867 he set out for Rome where he began his training for the priesthood in the newly-established Resurrectionist Seminary, the Collegium Polonicum. Here the cleric's earnestness, his scholarship and genuine piety won the approval of his instructors. In 1869, after an urgent appeal by Pope Pius IX to the Polish clergy for spiritual aid to the Polish people in America, he volunteered his services and sailed for the American shores late in 1869.13

For the twenty-nine year old priest it was a glorious opportunity to do the work of a missionary among his own compatriots and he embraced the prospect with ardor. Upon his arrival in the United States, Father Dombrowski presented his credentials to Bishop Melcher of Green Bay, Wisconsin and placed himself at his disposal. After a year's residence at Saint Francis Seminary near

Milwaukee, he was appointed pastor of Saint Joseph Church in Sharon, December, 1871.\textsuperscript{14}

If Christian fortitude was the virtue par excellence to be inculcated, Father Dombrowski found ample opportunity to cultivate it in his new environment. Brought face to face with the crushing hostility of the malcontents of "Ellis Corner," the young priest was determined to lean heavily upon God's supporting grace to conquer the problems which vanquished his five predecessors.

Radiating the spirit of faith and zeal, combative and militant by nature, he was well suited to defend Christian morality in a neglected community of immigrants whose moral sense had become hopelessly dulled. Father Dombrowski's sharp intellect appraised the situation at the very outset. The saloons\textsuperscript{15} within a few

\textsuperscript{14} MSS. \textit{Historia Coloniae Poloniae}.

\textsuperscript{15} These were years of strong temperance sentiments. Laws making vendors of liquors responsible for intoxicated persons, Wisconsin Bond Law of 1850, the Graham Law of 1875 and numerous lodges of Sons of Temperance were evidence of Wisconsin's struggle for sobriety. "All over southern Wisconsin there were total abstinence societies, missionaries who were starting churches were frequently zealous temperance crusaders."--Milo M. Quaife, \textit{Wisconsin, Its History and Its People}, 1632-1924, Chicago, 1924, 596-601.
hundred feet of the church building were centers of vice and corruption and served as a rendezvous for demagogues. Sunday church goers, who had come long distances of ten to twenty miles, were lured into the establishments by various devices so that there was scarcely a male worshipper in the church during the Mass.16

The distressed priest made persistent efforts to check the evil and persuaded sympathetic parishioners to join him in the moral crusade. But the owners of the taverns, who depended on the churchgoers as their main source of income, mobilized their adherents and conducted a constant agitation to resist the priest's reform activities. Gambling, brawls and petty riots continued. Church services were irreverently interrupted. After every approach to the solution of the problem had failed, Father Dombrowski resorted to a drastic scheme—to place his devoted flock beyond the reach of the degrading influence of the taverns.

He secured the sanction of his plans from Bishop Melcher, assembled his parishioners after Sunday's Mass, and proposed the drastic move—to transfer the church building to a more suitable location. Enthusiastic

16 Statement of John Bigalka; personal interview.
approval of the plan was unanimous. Numerous volunteers pledged their services, and the work of dismantling the church began in the early hours of the following day.17

Farmers from all parts of Portage County rode into the parish square equipped with axes, picks, hammers, team horses, wagons and carts. Plank after plank, as well as complete sections of the building, were carefully loosened and hoisted downward. Muscular arms stacked the materials on readied wagons and the cavalcade rolled away to a hill-top two miles east of the old site. After one week of exhausting labor, no trace of Saint Joseph Church remained in "Ellis Corner."18

The land to which the church was transplanted had been donated by John McGreer,19 a wealthy farmer of Portage County. In order that a recurrence of the "Ellis Corner" tragedy might be prevented, the deed20 contained a

17 The Catholic Church in Wisconsin, 714.
18 Ibid. Details gleaned from personal interview with John Bigalka.
19 A Welsh Protestant who befriended Father Dombrowski numerous times and remained to the end of his life the priest's staunchest friend, admirer and benefactor. Parish records show that the entire McGreer family was converted to Catholicism in 1873.
20 Community Archives, Livonia, Michigan, MSS. Document of Purchase, December 23, 1892.--The original deed in which the land grant was made perished in the first rectory fire. In the document cited above, reference is made to all previous land transactions with John and Hannah McGreer.
clause in which the "construction of any non-religious building within a quarter mile of the church" was forbidden.21

Immigrants, whose experiences in the wilderness of Wisconsin would overshadow the imagination of famous authors, did not shrink from the task of rebuilding their shattered temple. With the spirit with which the great cathedrals of medieval Europe were built, they set to work reconstructing the church. Within a few weeks the building, resembling the original in every detail, was completed. In the spring, a small rectory was constructed along side the church.22 On September 12, 1872, the church was solemnly blessed by Bishop Melcher and placed under the patronage of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The site on which the church had been re-assembled was named by Father Dombrowski, "Polonia."23

The joy of having escaped the persecution of the malcontents in "Ellis Corner" was short-lived. Not long after the removal of the church, the liquor business succumbed to the young priest's strategy. The Sunday

21 Ibid.

22 Syski, Ks. Jozef Dombrowski, 72-74.

23 Polonia today is a post town in Portage County with a population of 256 (1950). It is a little over ten miles northeast of Stevens Point, the closest town.
patronage dropped off sharply, regular customers gradually dwindled away and public sympathy, awakened by the heroic efforts of the long-suffering pastor, began to manifest itself. Enraged at this unexpected turn of events, the owners of the taverns filed a lawsuit against Father Dombrowski, charging him with conspiracy to ruin their establishments, and against Bishop Melcher for sanctioning the move. The prosecutors, after having lost in the local court, appealed the case to the supreme court in Madison where the decision of the local court was upheld.

For a number of years the hostility of this evil element continued and was a source of suffering and hardship to the pastor and his faithful parishioners. The old anti-Catholic sentiments of the 1840's which had given birth to Know-Nothingism and all its violent outbursts, were not dead but showed up again and again. The spirit had found an echo here in the deeds of the alien community.24

Father Dombrowski believed that it was not viciousness and malice so much as ignorance that accounted for the discord and dissension of the alien society. Its

ideals had become perverted because it had lost the guiding star of truth. For the young pastor, it was a heartbreaking experience to see falsehood and vituperation used so effectively as to make weak Catholics ashamed of their faith, cause them to abandon its sacraments and cast aside respect for its ministry.

Keen, zealous, intelligent, he penetrated the network of the circumstances surrounding him and determined upon a course of action. He would reclaim these people through the education of their children. It was at this time that Father Dombrowski made plans to find workers who would aid him in the accomplishment of his purpose.

From his knowledge of the racial characteristics of the Polish people, and his wide grasp of their religious and social needs, the young pastor was convinced that their future welfare lay in their education and training by a religious community of their own nationality. He appealed, therefore, to the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Felix, resident in Cracow, Poland, for aid in his educational and missionary work.

Thus, destiny shaped the circumstances which inscribed in the annals of the Congregation the name of an intrepid pastor in a Wisconsin wilderness parish, who was
destined by the Providence of God to establish the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Felix on American soil, and who is reverently referred to in the chronicles of the Community as "the Founder."
CHAPTER II

THE COMING OF THE FELICIAN SISTERS TO AMERICA

Like other frontier towns, the area around Sharon, where the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Felix established their first American foundation, was off to a slow start in its organization of a public school system. The problems related to the language and religion of the German and Polish immigrants in this area caused any satisfactory solution to be postponed for some time.¹

Many schools at this time were conducted by various denominations. In Catholic, as well as Protestant settlements, the minister or the priest was the teacher. So it was with Father Dombrowski. He had not been long in the United States when he began to realize the needs of his scattered, isolated and religion-famished brethren. Consequently, soon after becoming pastor of Sacred Heart Church, he set aside the largest room in the rectory for a school in an attempt to meet

¹ Peter J. Johnson, Centennial Essays for the Milwaukee Archdiocese, Milwaukee, 1943, 36-37.
the educational needs of the children until he could secure the services of a religious community. It was here that the Catholic children of the vicinity first plodded through the three R's under the direction of Miss Mary McGreer, the scholarly daughter of a neighboring farmer.2

In the summer of 1874, Father Dombrowski received permission from Rt. Rev. Joseph Melcher, Bishop of Milwaukee, to send an appeal for sisters to the Generalate of the Felician Congregation in Cracow, Poland. In a letter3 to Mother Mary Magdalene, Superior General of the Congregation, he presented the lamentable plight of his tiny settlement. By his stress on the necessity for Catholic teachers for the spiritual needs of the children, he so appealed to the zealous minds of Mother Mary Magdalene and her council that they were prompted to accept his invitation to labor in the vineyard of the Lord in the new world.

Foolhardy as the enterprise seemed, the sisters were convinced that Providence was directing the movement. On August 15, 1874, Mother Magdalene presented the matter to the Fifth General Chapter of the Congregation where the

2 Syski, Ks. Jozef Dombrowski, 76.

3 The letter has since been lost but biographers and subsequent correspondence shed a light on its contents and tenor.
momentous decision was made—five sisters were to be sent on the Community's first missionary venture to America. 4

The Congregation to which Father Dombrowski appealed was still in its infancy, founded only twenty years before on November 21, 1855 in Russian-held Warsaw, as a branch of the Third Order of Saint Francis. The foundress was Sophia Camille Truszkowska who, moved by the plight of the destitute of the city of Warsaw, Poland, established a small settlement for the homeless children and abandoned aged. This twenty-nine year old woman of wealth and culture, for whom corporal works of mercy served as a diversion and past-time, was destined by Divine Providence to rally a numerous family under the banner of the Poverello of Assisi.

With the financial aid of her father, a wealthy and influential official of the city, Sophia was able to expand her settlement in order to accommodate the rapidly-increasing number of destitute that flocked to her assistance. The local Vincent De Paul Society began to support

4 Father Dombrowski met the Felician Sisters for the first time shortly after his ordination while visiting his cousin, Sister Mary Wenceslaus, a member of the Congregation. He admired the Community spirit and Franciscan ideal and stated at that time that should a need arise, he would ask the Congregation to staff his parish school in America.
her project and young women volunteered their services as angels of mercy.

It was in 1855, about the time that Madam Truszkowska's institute was gaining recognition, that she first conceived a desire to found a religious community to perpetuate the works of charity that she and her band of devoted women performed in the slums of Warsaw.

Two years later, with the approval of ecclesiastical authorities, Sophia and her companions donned the religious garb and enrolled the incipient Community under the protection of Saint Francis of Assisi. The investiture of Madam Truszkowska and the young women associated with her institute took place on Good Friday, April 10, 1857. Sophia Truszkowska received the name of Mother Mary Angela and became the first Superior General; her society came to be known as the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Felix.

The growth of the newly founded sisterhood was rapid. Its ever-widening field of activity carried its members to far off rural towns and cities as teachers, catechists and friends of the poor.

This growth and expansion were not to continue without God's stamp of approval--the seal of the Cross. Within the first decade of its foundation the young
sisterhood found itself confronted by one of the severest trials in its history—the suppression of the Congregation by the Russian government.

In 1863, when the Poles in the city of Warsaw made an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the Tsarist regime, the sisters ministered to the wounded and dying victims of the uprising. With genuine charity they tended not only their own countrymen but the enemy troops as well. They carried on their work in no less than twenty-five emergency hospitals, set up in their own institutions, and in private homes appropriated by the Russian government. Countless soldiers, reconciled to God through the aid of the sister nurses, passed to eternity.

Shortly after the rebellion was crushed, the Community that had labored so arduously for the social welfare of the city became the victim of repressive measures adopted by the Tsarist government in retaliation for the uprising. Charged by the government with collaborating with the insurrectionists, the Congregation was ordered to disperse on December 17, 1864. Many sisters

5 Origin of the Congregation was summarized from Historja Zgromadzenia SS. Felicjanek na Podstawie Rekopisow, Krakow, 1932, I, 4-13; Francis A. Cegielka, The Pierced Heart; Life of Mother Mary Angela Truszkowska, Milwaukee, 1955, 9-13.

6 Historja Zgromadzenia, I, 293, 332.
returned to their families. Others, garbed in civilian attire, sought refuge in Austrian-held Cracow where they operated as an "underground Congregation," assembling for community prayers and performing works of mercy.7

Bitter as the trial was, it did not last long. The Congregation was re-established by Mother Mary Angela after an imperial decree of the Austrian Emperor, Francis Joseph II, granted civil recognition to the Sisterhood, September 8, 1865.8

An amazingly rapid revival of the Congregation followed. Cracow became the headquarters, and here the Generalate of the Congregation was established. Dispersed members returned to continue their work, offers of new foundations poured into the Mother House from all provinces of Austria, and an increasing number of candidates applied for admission. At the time that Father Dombrowski's request reached Cracow, the resurrected Community had forty flourishing mission houses in many sections of Austria and Galicia.

The year that the Congregation received its first Papal decree of approbation, June 1, 1874, five

7 Ibid., 306.
8 Ibid., 334.
sisters sailed for America to begin a new milestone in their work of Christian mercy. The following comprised the pioneer band: Sister Mary Monica Sibilska who was later to become the first provincial superior of the American foundation, Sister Mary Cajetan Jankiewicz, Sister Mary Wenceslaus Zubrzycka, Sister Mary Vincentine Kalwa and Sister Mary Raphael Sworzeniowska.9

In a letter to Mother Mary Magdalene,10 dated August 27, 1874, Father Dombrowski gave minute instructions for the journey to America. Enclosed was a donation of two hundred dollars which Rev. Edward Dems, Administrator of the Green Bay Diocese, made to defray part of the expense of the journey.11

Notes and diaries of the founding sisters, from which particulars concerning the voyage to America might have been gleaned, have not been preserved. However, community chronicles, written by the earliest members, portray


10 Reprint in *Historia Zgromadzenia*, II, 275-80.

11 After the death of Rt. Rev. Joseph Melcher, December 20, 1873, Rev. Edward Dems was appointed to administer the Diocese of Milwaukee until the successor, Rt. Rev. Francis X. Krautbauer was consecrated, June 29, 1875.
poignant scenes of the last tender farewells at the time of the departure, as well as hardships en route to America.

Following an early Mass in the convent chapel, the sisters, destined for America, set out by train for Hamburg. There, during a three-day delay, they were most graciously assisted by a certain Mr. Maynberg, a member of the Saint Raphael Society. This was a social service group organized for the purpose of serving as guides for emigrants and bewildered wayfarers. Mr. Maynberg assumed complete management of the sisters' itinerary, secured necessary information, arranged for lodging and continued in the role of "personal guide" until he saw the sisters aboard the steamer headed for Glasgow. 12

On November 13, 1874, after a stormy two-week journey, five Felician Sisters beheld for the first time the new land in which they would erect a foundation of the Community they represented. In New York, they were befriended by a "Franciscan order that staffed a local hospital." During these days Mother Mary Monica, the superior of the little band, was nursed back to health after a serious illness resulting from the oppressive

12 Community Archives, Livonia, Michigan, MSS. Wspomnienia Naszych Matek o Pierwszych Latach Zgromadzenia, Plymouth, n.d. 16-17.
voyage. 13

The sisters left no record of their first impressions on landing, nor details of the journey to Wisconsin. Stranded in a strange land with no knowledge of the English language and only very meagre means, it might be assumed that they would have trustfully followed the instructions sent to them by Father Dombrowski. That he took every precaution to preclude any confusion or hardship on the last stretch of the sisters' journey is evident from the following extract:

In New York notify Mr. Zolkowski (Chatham Street No. 43). . . . From here please send a telegram addressed to me (Jos. Dombrowski - Stevens Point - Wisconsin.) After you arrive in Milwaukee, contact Mr. Rudzinski (Reed Street No. 100) I shall meet you here personally. . . . The above mentioned persons had been notified about the arrival of the sisters and given the necessary directives.

Erection of the sisters convent had already begun. When completed, it will be a large two-story building made of materials about which I had written in my previous letter. 14

After a seven-day journey from New York, the sisters reached their destination--Sharon, Wisconsin.

13 Ibid.

The first building that they entered was the Church of the Sacred Heart. Here, in a wilderness Church, began the saga of courage and consecration. From here they were to go forth in God's name until the entire land became the scene of their exploits—praying, teaching, dispensing mercy. Referring in her diary to this memorable moment, Mother Mary Monica stated:

... We arrived in Polonia Friday evening, November 20, on the very day of the founding of the Congregation nineteen years before.
... We have re-dedicated our lives on this memorable day to our Beloved Spouse and His Mother, beseeching them to nurture and cultivate the seedling sown in this distant land. 15

In spite of Father Dombrowski's desperate efforts to complete the erection of the convent, it was still under construction at the time the sisters arrived. Built by Father Dombrowski, with the assistance of neighboring farmers and their sons, the structure rose slowly, for the necessary finances and equipment were lacking. The immigrant farmers came with strong arms and a willingness to work, but as a general rule there was little money. Before the work was completed, winter with sub-zero temperatures set in and work on the building had

15 Extract from Diary of Mother Mary Monica. Reprint in Historja Zgromadzenia, III, 11.
to be discontinued. The convent was ready for occupancy six months after the sisters' arrival, April, 1875.16

Meanwhile, the young priest converted his rectory into a temporary convent which the sisters occupied on the evening of their arrival. His own living quarters, according to Community chronicles, he transferred to a small cabin on the premises in which he had stored a small printing press and other equipment.17

The day following the arrival—the feast of the Presentation and the anniversary of the founding of the Congregation—Father Dombrowski celebrated a High Mass of thanksgiving in the tiny rectory chapel, and interred the Blessed Sacrament there. That, he told the sisters, "will serve as a Reservoir from which you must draw solace and fortitude in the trying days ahead."18

"At their first opportunity" Mother Mary Monica and Sister Mary Cajetan called on the Administrator of the Diocese, Rev. Edward Dems, to ask his blessing for the work they had already begun in Polonia, and to offer their

16 Ibid., 11-12.
17 From a sheaf of "Recollections" in Community Archives, Livonia, Michigan.
18 Historja Zgromadzenia, III, 11.
services for the Catholic Church in America.19

The arrival of the sisters caused quite a stir among the Polish Catholics in Portage County and its environs. When parishioners of the Sacred Heart Church were told after the next Sunday services that a school would be established, the board of trustees at once set about furnishing "temporary facilities" and organizing committees. During the next two weeks parents from Sharon, Plover, Milwaukee, Stevens Point and outlying areas, some from distances of fifteen to twenty miles, came to enroll their children.

Crowded as they were, the sisters converted two small rooms of their living quarters in the rectory into schoolrooms, retaining only as much of the house as was absolutely indispensable for their needs. This was their first school on American soil; this, too, was their first home. Here, they moored their anchor to a bedrock of poverty and suffering. Hardship, inconvenience, want, seem to have roused rather than dampened the apostolic urge of the founding sisters, and two weeks after their arrival, plans for the opening of their school were complete.

On December 3, the sisters began their teaching apostolate in America with an initial enrollment of thirty children. In this makeshift foundation, laid in the rectory of the Sacred Heart Church, the sisters conducted their school and attempted to lead a convent life until their living quarters were completed four months later.20

At the outset, the sisters realized that a boarding school was indispensable in a wilderness where children traveled long distances in bitter cold of a Wisconsin winter. Shortly after the school opened, accommodations for a number of children were found in private homes of nearby farmers until winter's end, when the building, which was to serve as convent and school, was completed.21 Occasionally, too, the hardy "little pioneers" enjoyed the experience of a night spent on pallets by blazing fires in the classrooms when blizzards cut off all possibility of reaching their homes.

Records of the beginnings at the Sacred Heart School at Polonia are a bit blurred. From fragments of data found in community chronicles, it can be gathered that the school was ungraded, and that the "girls were

20 Historja Zgromadzenia, III, 11-16.
21 Syski, Ks. Jozef Dombrowski, 86.
taught the usual subjects of reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic, geography and the study of the Bible. Besides this, they were tutored in ornamental needle work and embroidery.\(^{22}\) Mary McGreer continued to teach English, not only to the children, but to the sisters as well.

The administration of the first school was assigned to Sister Mary Cajetan, who continued to hold the responsibility of superintending educational establishments of the Congregation during its formative years in America. Her training and background gave her leadership an impetus which shaped the character of the Congregation's schools for more than a quarter of a century.

Sister Cajetan (1839-1907) was the only daughter of a wealthy family of the old Polish nobility of Warsaw. As was customary in the upper stratum of Polish society, her early training was entrusted to a governess, continued in a finishing school and completed in the University of Warsaw.

The first great sorrow that entered her life was the premature death of her father. Fast upon this blow came another, the death of her mother; and a few

\(^{22}\) MSS. Wspomnienia Naszych Najstarszych

Matek, 23.
months later, that of her beloved brother.

After the loss of her family, she secured a teaching position and returned to the University of Warsaw to continue her education as a part time student. More and more she withdrew from the society in which she moved. Frequently, she sought the solitude of the parish church, and it is here that she conceived a desire to give herself to God in religious life.

In 1868, at the age of twenty-nine, she heard of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Felix, their social work and their love of the poor, and she decided to embrace the life. No allurements of pleasure, comfort, social standing or protests of friends could sway her from her determination to become a religious. She entered the Congregation on the feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1868 and took her habit on January 16, 1871. Three years later she sailed for America and became one of the "founding five" of the Felician Congregation.23

More than anyone in the settlement, Father Dombrowski was able to assist Sister Mary Cajetan.

23 Community Archives, Livonia, Michigan, MSS. Matka Maria Kajetana, Plymouth, n.d. 1-8.--All data regarding Sister Mary Cajetan has been based on an eighty-two page sheaf of papers containing notes and comments drawn from interviews of sisters who had known her personally.
Intelligent and alert, he surveyed the circumstances in which his compatriots had been mired. His counsel, enriched by experience and wisdom garnered in the first tragic years of his residence in America, gave her educational policies direction and purpose.24 "Vast fields of labor await the sisters in America," he wrote to Mother Mary Magdalene before the coming of the sisters. "To them belongs the great apostolate of instilling the truth and beauty of our holy religion in young minds and hearts and teaching them to apply these in their everyday living."

In answer to Mother Mary Magdalene's question regarding the type of schools the sisters were to conduct in America, he stated among other things: "We shall try to conform to the educational patterns established in the public school systems in this country. . . . Moreover, we certainly cannot allow our schools to become inferior to those of the Protestants of this vicinity, who maintain very high standards of education."25

Sister Mary Cajetan soon became keenly aware of the evils rampant among immigrant Catholics attending


25 Letter from Father Dombrowski to Mother Mary Magdalene, September 22, 1874. Reprint in Historja Zgromadzenia, II, 277, 278.
public schools. Totally ignorant of the English language, the children found adjustment difficult. Truancy was the order of the day. Moreover, "control of the public schools had been taken over in many instances by Protestants who looked upon these schools as seed-beds for their own convictions. This drove the Catholic children out of public schools, sometimes by their own conscientious objections to the method of instruction, sometimes through the machinations of bigoted superintendents."27

Sister Mary Cajetan was convinced that the parish school must join the front ranks in the conquest of these problems. Despite the fact that facilities were hopelessly inadequate, she sought out the children of Polish Catholics and urged their attendance at the Sacred Heart School.

With the anti-religious tenor of the society which its members had come to serve, with hostility and poverty everywhere, it certainly was not a propitious time for a religious order to launch out into its first educational venture in America.

26 MSS. Matka Maria Kajetana, 9.

The year ahead--1875--was to be a time of trial and anxiety. And as each month came and went, the tremendous reverses which the pioneering band faced would have shaken the faith of the most stout-hearted. But the sisters brought with them the courage of their noble foundress. Their Franciscan habit was cruciform. The seal of the Congregation carried the pierced hands of Christ and Saint Francis. All this served to impress upon them the thought that inevitably they would command some share in the crucifixion.
CHAPTER III

STRIKING THE ROOTS OF THE AMERICAN FOUNDATION

From the very inception of the American foundation, Father Dombrowski's idea was to have the Felician Sisters establish an American province with a novitiate and a teacher-training school. His first efforts in this direction found expression in his letter of September 22, 1874 to Mother Mary Magdalene: 1 "It is my prayerful hope that some day a novitiate will be established here so that all demands for teachers in future years can be supplied from the American foundation." 2

Mother Mary Monica, too, saw the necessity of opening a novitiate, for the field of labor was extensive and already a number of candidates sought admission. However, a blow was to fall which shattered not only her plans for the immediate future, but also every achievement and adjustment the sisters had made in a four-month effort.

1 Reprint in Historja Zgromadzenia, II, 278.

2 Adhering to this policy for over eighty years, the American provinces have remained self-sufficient, never recruiting teaching members from Europe beyond those in the pioneer band of five.
Early on March 16, 1875, a devastating fire destroyed the "rectory"-convent and practically all its contents. The blaze, supposed to have been caused by a defective flue, spread between the walls of the frame building and burst into the open with a sudden fury. It took a few minutes to convince the sisters that the building was doomed, so the little time remaining was devoted to removing whatever could be reached. Father Dombrowski, battling with desperate energy against the flames, was able to rescue the Blessed Sacrament from the chapel. Two hours after the fire had begun, the "first convent" and school of the Felician Sisters in America was reduced to a smoldering heap. More than two hundred carefully-chosen books which had been brought by the sisters from Europe, irreplaceable cloth for habits, records and precious keepsakes were destroyed by fire.

Stripped utterly of all possessions, the pioneer band stood on the threshold of their future faced with a long period of bitter disappointment, utter want and physical and moral suffering which would try their faith and endurance to the breaking point. The only recorded comment we have from the distraught sisters was Mother Monica's act of resignation, "Love seeks
sacrifice."

It was necessary to close the school and disband the children. Those boarding in nearby farmhouses were sent home. The only shelter left on the parish premises was the hut in which Father Dombrowski had established his living quarters during the sisters' occupancy of the rectory. Now this, too, he offered to them as a temporary refuge. Convinced from the first moment of their arrival that he was the heaven-appointed guide of the sisters, he decided to stand by them no matter how great a sacrifice this would entail. In chronicling the events of these critical times, Sister Mary Pancratious stated: "Justly the sisters revere him as the founder of the Congregation in America."

The townspeople manifested their generosity and a true Christian charity to the homeless sisters. A number of farmers volunteered their assistance and offered their homes as a shelter. The McGreer estate, with all its accommodations, was immediately turned over by the owner to the sisters for an indefinite period. The sisters accepted the offer of a residence closest to the

3 Community Archives, Livonia, Michigan, MSS. Matka Maria Monika, Plymouth, n.d. 9-10.

4 MSS. Wspomnienia Naszych Najstarszych Matek, 36.
parish church, that of Andrew Sikorski, the organist in the parish and the postmaster of the town of Sharon. Here they arranged sleeping quarters for the night, while the cabin on the parish premises served as a "convent" during the day. Father Dombrowski accepted the hospitality of Martin Kiedrowicz, a kindly old man who lived with his elderly sister in a nearby farmhouse.5

Soon after the fire, Mother Mary Monica sent Sister Cajetan and Sister Wenceslaus to Rev. Edward Dems, Administrator of Green Bay Diocese, to report the tragic event and to secure permission for the soliciting of funds. Moved with compassion, he not only granted the required permission but made the first contribution—a sum of one hundred dollars.6

While the two sisters were out begging for alms Father Dombrowski vigorously pushed the completion of the

---

5 Incident reported by Joseph Sikorski, personal interview. Seventy-seven years old at present, Mr. Sikorski is still in full possession of his faculties. His father's comments and stories of which he appears to have a clear recollection, and his own experiences in the town of Sharon during the period under study have been an aid in verifying statements found in Community records. Joseph Sikorski lives, at present, on a thirty-seven acre farm which his father had procured under the Homestead Act of 1862. The remodeled farmhouse is the one that sheltered the sisters after the destruction of their convent and school.

6 Historja Zgromadzenia, III, 30.
new convent, the building of which he had been forced to forego during the severe cold of the winter months. Accounts lead us to believe that the priest and the sisters themselves did all the interior work and helped considerably with the heavier construction. Using donated materials, they provided the convent with crude furniture and other necessities.7

In the midst of these trials, the first postulant was admitted, April 16, 1875. She was Valeria Reczek from Winona, Wisconsin. Her appearance was entirely unexpected, and although she had come a long way, the sisters urged her to return and enter after the completion of the new convent, but she insisted on remaining with them and sharing their privations.

Meanwhile, the sisters soliciting funds were kindly received by generous benefactors everywhere. According to community chronicles, they reached out as far as Cincinnati, Chicago and Milwaukee. Recommendations and lists of names, suggested by sympathetic friends, led the sisters to generous Catholics who not only made substantial donations but provided transportation and lodging as well. After two months, they returned with more than

7 MSS. Wspomnienia Naszych Najstarszych Siostr, 15.
eight hundred dollars in cash donations, besides such necessities as books, clothing and chapel linens.8

Sister Mary Cajetan and Sister Mary Wenceslaus were taken aback at the progress made in the construction of the convent during their absence. The walls had been plastered, and furniture was being made and moved into the building.

After experiencing the incredible hardships of being homeless for nearly six months, the sisters were indeed relieved when the convent was completed. On May 4, 1875, the new convent was blessed by Father Dombrowski and placed under the patronage of Saint Francis. This building became the Congregation's first novitiate in America.

Crude, bare and poorly furnished, the convent was a veritable paradise, another Nazareth where communion with God and Christ-like charity rendered sweet the hours of community life. Rules and ordinances, which the sisters found impossible to observe in their "nomadic state," were again inaugurated and religious life began taking on an

8 Historja Zgromadzenia, III, 30-31. Interesting details also found in folio of notes, recollections and memoirs of the earliest members of the Congregation.
aura of normalcy for the first time since the sisters' arrival in America.

With renewed vigor, the little Community began to reshape its affairs after the devastation and chaos of the fire. Its members struggled against great odds to assemble equipment and to procure the necessary books for the reopening of school in the fall. The convent was divided and organized to provide accommodations for boarders and an academy where young girls, seeking admission to the Sisterhood, would be trained. First steps in that direction had already been taken, and eight girls had been enrolled. By this time, another aspirant had been added to the Congregation's religious family, one Xaviera Wroblewski from Cincinnati, Ohio, who had met the sisters during their fund-raising mission a few weeks before.

It was too late in the year to reopen the parish school. However, the sisters assembled the children for catechism instructions and prepared them for their first Holy Communion. In short, the infant Community was beginning to emerge from the dark hours they had known since their entry into the new land six months before. But their joy was short-lived. Two weeks after the dedication of the new convent, the blow fell.

On the evening of May 18, during Benediction services in the church, the sisters and the congregation
were aroused by one of the parishioners who had seen flames and smoke bursting forth from the roof and windows of the recently-built convent. In the frantic excitement that followed, desperate efforts were made by the worshipers to salvage a few precious items, but the fire blazed so furiously that entry into the building would have been suicidal.  

There was no fire apparatus within ten miles of the building, so the farmers drove in from all quarters to form a bucket and pitcher brigade to protect the church in the event that the convent blaze spread. But a wind arose and caught up showers of charcoal sparks and burning shingles, carrying them to the roof of the church with a

9 Data regarding the destruction of the parish unit has been constructed from the following sources: Mr. John Bigalka, personal interview. Mr. Bigalka is the oldest resident of Sharon, age 93, at the time of the interview (1954). He had known Mother Mary Monica personally and witnessed the fires. His daughter, with whom he lives, alleges that the story of the destruction of the convent and church has been discussed so frequently by townspeople, that the event is lodged firmly in the minds of the residents.

Interviewees report that either explosives or highly inflammable liquid had been poured on the roof of the church and convent. This explains the sudden burst of flames and the intensity and swiftness with which the blaze spread. Other sources are: Historja Zgromadzenia, III, 32, 33; Ks. Jozef Dombrowski, 38.
terrible effect. In a short time it, too, was a flaming mass. The townspeople worked desperately to quench the flames that were destroying the church they had transplanted and rebuilt with their own hands three years before, but the water could not be hoisted to the roof fast enough to check the flames and within a half-hour the situation was hopeless.

All expectations and hopes were brought to nought by this wholly unforseen deviation of fortune. It was heart-rending to see the panic-stricken and confused pastor, moving from place to place clutching the Sacred Species which he had rescued from the church before the interior burst into flame. Parishioners finally led the distraught priest to the home of Mr. Martin Kiedrowicz, where a repository was prepared for the Blessed Sacrament.

In community chronicles particular attention was called to the bells in the steeple of the church. The roof around the belfry was set on fire by a burning fragment of wood. The flames, being carried up through the open space to the eaves, set the bells whirling and ringing out on their frame with a weirdness that remained in memory for many years.10

10 MSS. Matka Maria Monika, 10.
The little band of religious and the intrepid pastor watched in helpless silence as the flames devoured the buildings erected within the last three years with superhuman patience and toil. They were utterly crushed. The stamina and courage that marked the character of the thirty-four year old priest in war and exile now gave way, and he fell unconscious to the ground. He was carried to the home of Mr. Kiedrowicz by compassionate town folk where he remained during a long convalescence.

The convent and church were but a mass of burning embers scarcely two hours after the fire had begun. The sisters were left without a home for the second time in two months, and stripped of everything they had accumulated after the first fire, including the cash donations they had received from benefactors during their fund-raising tour.

All source materials agree that the fire was the work of incendiaries. The old feud which existed

11 The local paper, Stevens Point Journal, May 29, 1875, in an article entitled "Probable Work of an Incendiary," estimated the loss at 12,000 dollars; insurance coverage--4,000 dollars. "From another source we learn," the article continues, "That the printing press was burned, and that part of the loss consisted of 2,500 dollars in cash, which was deposited in the house or church."

12 Syski, Ks. Jozef Dombrowski, 88.
between the parish priest and the hostile element of "Ellis Corner," had not entirely died out. A local newspaper reported the incident and a previous attempt on the life of Father Dombrowski in a rather caustic article:

The sisters had left the house, however, not more than ten minutes before it was discovered to be wrapt in flames, and when they left it, there were but a few coals in the kitchen stove. Immediately after the fire had been discovered, a boy or a young man was seen running across the field from the direction of the house, which gives the incendiary theory a bright tinge of probability. But this is not the first attempt (if attempt it was) that has been made to pull Mr. Dombrowski down. The first one was made two or three years ago, and was a most diabolical one. Some devil in human form bored a large hole in a stick of stove wood, filled the cavity with powder, and placed the stick on the priest's pile. This in due course of time was carried into his house and put into the stove. Fortunately, however, when the terrific explosion which followed occurred, shattering the stove into pieces, he happened to be in another room, and therefore escaped the hellish plot that had been laid against him. Such plots as these would intimidate a more irresolute man than Mr. Dombrowski, but the words "give up" do not appear in his vocabulary.13

Feeling that they could not abandon a mission on which Providence had sent him to the new world, the five valiant nuns decided to start again. And just as Father Dombrowski had been a tower of strength to the

13 Stevens Point Journal, May 29, 1875.
sisters in the previous disaster, so again the young priest rose to new heights of self-sacrifice unapproached by any other figure in the Congregation's history.

The weeks following the fire, he worked from eight to twelve hours each day on the construction of parish buildings—a frame house to serve as a temporary convent which later was to be converted into a rectory, and a church and convent, both to be built of stone.14

Meanwhile, supplies of food, household articles and offers of lodging poured in from kindly farmers in the vicinity. Public school officials, moved by the plight of the homeless sisters, placed a one-room rural school at their disposal after the children had been disbanded for the vacation months. Loath to impose on the generosity of local farmers who themselves struggled to eke out an existence, the sisters established their "convent" in the public schoolhouse during the summer. From this time on the schoolroom was used as a "multiple-purpose" room. It served as a church in which the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was offered on a portable altar in

14 The Stevens Point Journal reported May 29, 1875, that "he [Father Dombrowski] had already commenced rebuilding his house and will commence work on the church as soon as insurance matters are adjusted."
the early hours of the morning; then was converted into a community room, dining room and chapel later in the day. Sleeping quarters were again established in the homes of the sisters' loyal standbys, the McCreer and the Sikorski families.

In a desperate effort to supply a convent for the sisters and a place of worship for his parishioners, Father Dombrowski continued to push construction of both buildings simultaneously during the bitterly cold winter months. News reports pertinent to the parish building program which appeared in the winter issues of the Stevens Point Journal are an evidence of this.15

While the buildings were being erected, the lives of the sisters were an epic of incredible hardships and of heart-rending struggle as they moved from one shelter to another—the rural public school to the basement of the unfinished convent and finally to a temporary shelter in the newly-completed rectory. By the third of October, 1876, the sisters were finally able to move into

15 Stevens Point Journal, January 1, 1876—"One hundred cord of stone have been laid in the walls of Father Dombrowski's new church which raises them only about five feet." In another issue, February 12, 1876, "Father Dombrowski has about fifty teams employed drawing stone for his new church."
the new convent—a combination convent-school building made entirely of stone.

On the feast of Saint Francis, October 4, 1876, the convent was dedicated by Father Dombrowski and placed under the patronage of Saint Clare. A gift of altar linens, vestments and sacred vessels, valued at more than one thousand dollars, was received from the Generalate in Cracow, and reached the convent on the eve of the dedication.

In September, 1876, Mother Mary Monica received an official authorization from the Generalate at Cracow to open a novitiate. The first investiture took place in the convent chapel on November 21, the feast of the Presentation, the date associated with the important milestones of the Congregation's history.

16 Bishop Krautbauer, in laying the cornerstone, September 29, 1875, mistakenly called it the Convent of Saint Clare instead of the name the sisters intended for their first foundation in America—Saint Francis of Assisi Convent. The sisters decided to retain the error.

17 The shipment was sent out immediately after the news of the first fire reached Mother Mary Magdalene in Cracow. These gifts would have perished in the second fire on May 18, had not the precious cargo, for some unexplained reason, been providentially marooned in a New York port for more than eight months. It was only after a petition was sent by Mother Mary Monica to ecclesiastical authorities in New York, requesting the investigation of the matter, that the shipment was "found" and sent on its way. Officials were not able to explain the delay.
Three sisters received the habit: Frances Wroblewski was given the name of Sister Mary Felix; Rosalie Teclaw, Sister Mary Clara; and Athanasia Czajkowski, Sister Mary Francis. Father Dombrowski was delegated by Bishop Krautbauer to perform the ceremony. Five clergymen from Milwaukee, Chicago and Stevens Point participated in this first religious ceremony in the new convent. Crudely plastered, unpainted, and furnished with roughly-hewn pews, the chapel was a silent testimony of the stark poverty of the infant Foundation. Most appropriately, Father Dombrowski used poverty as the theme for his investiture sermon. "How singularly Almighty God has favored you, my beloved sisters," he said, "that he has allowed you to experience, in this land of plenty, the joy of supreme poverty which your holy Father Saint Francis so loved."

During these first eighteen tragic months, the field in which the Felician Sisters had come to labor was by no means allowed to lie fallow. Although they were stranded without permanent housing, the children continued

---

18 Community Archives, Livonia, Michigan, MSS. Księga Spisowa Siostr Zgromadzenia Św. Feliksa, 1874-1894. (unpaged)

19 Historja Zgromadzenia, III, 43.
to attend the school.\textsuperscript{20} Wherever it was possible, accommodations were made— in the rectory, unfinished convent, and in the open fields during fair weather.

In order to revive the faith and raise the moral standards of the society they had come to serve, Mother Mary Monica organized the women of the parish and environs into discussion groups and societies. She presided personally at the meetings, read to them, taught catechism and discussed matters "pertinent to faith and morals." She became their confidant, their counselor and aid. In this, the most trying year in the history of the Congregation in America, Mother Mary Monica continued her social work, established the Sodality of Our Lady and the Rosary Society for the younger women of the parish and the Altar Society for the older group. Besides this, together with Sister Cajetan, she conducted discussion and prayer sessions on Sundays and holidays. Convinced that it was only through the Blessed Sacrament that the faith of the Polish Catholics could be renewed, she urged the establishment of the "Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament" for the men

\textsuperscript{20} Community records contain no reference to the enrollment of school children for the year 1876. Stevens Point Journal, February 12, 1876 reports the "150 children were registered at the convent school."
of the parish. 21

In spite of the material adversities, the sisters prospered in other ways. The hostile element in "Ellis Corner" was becoming less troublesome, and the ruthless conspiracy to ruin the foundation began to wane. The patient endurance of the religious, after the destruction of the convents, awakened the consciences of the stray flock and slowly they trickled back into the true fold.

In various ways the sisters also helped their Founder in his work among the Indians, 22 who reverently called Mother Monica the "Black Robe's Squaw," and loved her for the small gifts she generously gave them. 23

Father Dombrowski's activities among the local tribes is a fine example of Catholic missionary effort. A blind Christian Indian who spoke English acted as interpreter, and with his help the versatile clergyman learned the Winnebago dialect and wrote and edited a small Indian

21 MSS. Matka Maria Monika, 12.

22 The tribes with which the sisters came in contact were the Winnebagoes, Menomonees, greatly reduced in the course of time by wars, and a small clan of the Ojibwas. In the period under study, "The aggregate number of these bands would seem to have hardly exceeded one thousand."--Rev. Edward Jacker, "Catholic Indians in Michigan and Wisconsin," American Catholic Quarterly Review, Philadelphia, 1876, VI, 404.

23 Historja Zgromadzenia, III, 27.
dictionary for the use of the sisters.

On one occasion, the sisters prepared baskets of food which friends of the Congregation had donated and with these gifts, they paid a "good will visit" to the Indians. They surprised and delighted the Winnebagoes by using a bit of their dialect which they learned from the dictionary and Father Dombrowski's interpreter. The venture was a "diplomatic success," and their friends of the forest exhibited their art work and prepared a feast for the general good cheer—a canine favorite, slaughtered and roasted over an open fire for the occasion. 24 "Love is an eloquent language that speaks without words to the hearts of even the most untamed," Mother Monica told the sisters upon the termination of that visit. 25 The sisters so won the good will of the Indians with their friendly interest, that a number of them volunteered their aid in the construction of the convent. 26

24 MSS. Wspomnienia Naszych Najstarszych Matek, 1. (insert).

25 Ibid., 34.

26 According to Shea, the Indians of this area were a well-disposed, quiet and peaceful people with marked qualities of Christian influence. "As early as 1860, when Bishop Henni visited the reservation of the Chippewas and the Winnebagoes on the Oconto River, 900 were Catholic and he had the consolation of confirming 230."--John Gilmary Shea, History of the Catholic Church in the United States, New York, 1892, IV, 639.
The harvest was great indeed in the year of greatest trials. Baptismal records, still extant, reveal that thirty Indians of the Winnebago and the Menomonee tribes were baptized by Father Dombrowski in November, 1876 and sixty-seven, ranging in age from fifteen to seventy-five years, received the sacrament in December of the same year. Mother Mary Monica, according to these records, became the godmother of more than one-third of the Indians listed.\(^{27}\) When the academy in the new convent was opened in December of 1876, two fifteen-year old Winnebago girls began attending the school. Special attention was lavished upon them by the sisters with a hope that someday they would keep the spark of Christianity alive in the hearts of their own people. They were beginning to make excellent adjustments, but when their people were forced to migrate, the girls left the academy.\(^{28}\)

\(^{27}\) *Baptismal Register*, MSS. Sacred Heart Church, Polonia, Wisconsin.

\(^{28}\) Community chroniclers refer to the migration of Indians in the vicinity of the convent in the 1870's. In connection with their reports it might be noted that the Menomonees had been tricked into yielding the area around Green Bay to the United States government. A number of stray Indians, however, remained there after the tribe had evacuated. In 1871, Congress passed a joint resolution appropriating fifteen thousand dollars for the forcible removal of these stray Indians. No action on the matter was taken until after 1873, when a special agent, with the aid of the United States troops from Fort Snelling, coralled the Indians and succeeded in transporting between
In this period of continued hardships, 1875-1877, the Community grew in membership from five to seventeen sisters. In December, 1876, four girls joined the pioneer band as postulants: Antonina Zarach, from Sharon, became known in religion as Sister Mary Joseph; Mary Wojak, also from Sharon, became Sister Mary Therese; Rosalie Maduralska, from Chicago, was given the name of Sister Mary Columba; Maryanne Bezler, from Prussia, received the name of Sister Mary Hyacinth. 29

The following year, five more postulants entered the novitiate. They were: Frances Andryczek, who became Sister Mary Angela; Anna Rezezab was given the name Sister Mary Nepomucene; Brigid Pyterek, from Dunkirk, New York, was named Sister Mary Catherine; Margaret Wasilewski, from Chicago, received the name of Sister Mary Marcella; and Mary Andryczek, from Prussia, became known in religion as Sister Mary Martha. 30

700 and 800 to Nebraska, where 240 died and the rest found their way back to Wisconsin in the spring of 1874. This is probably the group of Indians that settled in the vicinity of the town of Sharon and to which historical sources of the Congregation refer—History of Northern Wisconsin, Chicago, 1881, 728-30.

29 Location cited for each member is place of birth, not place of residence at the time of admission.

30 MSS. Księga Spisowa. (unpaged)
In 1877, Mother Mary Monica received an authorization from the Generalate in Cracow to establish a province of the Congregation in the United States, and was named by the General Council the first Provincial Superior. At this time, Mother Monica transferred her social work to Sister Cajetan so that she could devote her energies to the spiritual advancement of the Congregation in her offices of Provincial Superior and Novice Mistress.

The ceremony of the first profession took place for the first time in the American province on November 21, 1877. Novices--Sister Mary Felix, Sister Mary Clara and Sister Mary Francis pronounced their vows and became the first professed sisters recruited from American homes.

The woman who was to shape the spiritual pattern of the new American province for the next twenty years was a religious of great strength of will who had the courage of continuing under adversity and distress without being overcome. Mother Mary Monica's biographers point out that in her early years she was a precocious child "with a quickness of perception far beyond her years." 31

31 [Sister Mary Tulia Doman], Magnificat, A Centennial Record of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Felix, Detroit, 1955, 22.
Born into a home of wealth and refinement in Warsaw, she received her education at the famous Warsaw Institute of Madame Guerin, an exclusive finishing school for girls. After completing her education there she married Boleslaus Sybilski, a man with whom she spent the most unhappy years of her life. The death of her husband, ten years later, terminated the unfortunate marriage and left her with her nine-year old son. In spite of financial security and the sincere interest of friends and relatives, she was restless and unhappy. Frequently she sought consolation in prayer, and more and more her thoughts turned toward embracing the religious life. With the approval of her spiritual adviser, she made provisions for the rearing and education of her young son and applied for admission to the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Felix. She was accepted, and took the habit on September 14, 1861.32

Mother Mary Monica (1824-1911) was fifty years old when she transplanted the Congregation to American soil. In her zeal to keep untarnished the spirit of the Congregation in the young American Community, she was unduly harsh and severe and most unsparing in her exactions.

32 Ibid., 21-22.
In this regard she departed somewhat drastically from the wishes of the saintly Foundress of the Congregation, Mother Mary Angela, "in whose life the most tender love and gentleness marked her associations with her spiritual daughters." 33

There was nothing effeminate in Mother Mary Monica's administration. Most severe in enforcing the rule of the Order, she often resorted to extremities in her tactics and almost impossible demands. 34 To her, quality of membership, not quantity was of paramount importance. In the first ten years Mother Mary Monica expelled thirty-three professed sisters and frequently sent away postulants whom she deemed unqualified. 35 This rather harsh austerity gave the first years of the Foundation in the United States a visage never intended by the saintly Foundress of the Congregation.


34 Community Archives, Livonia, Michigan, MSS. Sheaf of letters and impressions of the oldest members of the Community who have known her personally.

35 MSS. *Ksiega Spisowa*. 
Perhaps one of the most unfortunate circumstances in the history of the American Community is, that from the foundation days in the United States, the sisters had no direct communication with the Foundress of the Congregation, Mother Mary Angela. More than anyone, she could have shaped the contours of the Community with the ideals of which she was the incarnation—charity, benignity, reparation. From 1869 until her death, thirty years later, Mother Mary Angela, having been replaced by Mother Mary Magdalene as Superior General, remained in retirement at the command of her spiritual adviser, Father Honorat Kozminski, a Capuchin. He dominated the policies and developments of the Congregation after Mother Angela's resignation.

During the first thirty years, therefore, the American community was deprived of what seemed to them a kind of spiritual birthright. Mother Mary Angela's gentleness and kindness, diffused in her letters written before her resignation, testify that she was for each individual a mother who gave wise counsel in difficulties and consolation in sorrow.36 Her government of the

36 See letters of Mother Mary Angela reprinted in Historja Zgromadzenia, II.
Congregation was firm and kind. Wherever Mother Angela went, there she carried a new light. Every characteristic of her great soul shone in her association with others—strength, wisdom, goodness. Her re-election to the office as Superior General, in spite of Father Honorat's advice to the contrary, proved the personal devotion of the sisters.

It was at her bidding that the five intrepid souls set forth to the new land to face new conditions. In those days, the name of Mother Angela was enshrined in the memory of each of her daughters. And yet, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Congregation, November 21, 1880, a three-thousand world congratulatory letter, addressed to the entire Congregation by Father Honorat, contained no reference whatever to the Foundress, her spiritual ideals or contributions. The annals of the Congregation record no message to the

---

37 Cegielka, The Pierced Heart, 23, 65.
38 Reprint in Historja Zgromadzenia, III, 153-61.
39 Father Honorat, spiritual director of Mother Mary Angela, was charged with the spiritual interests of the Congregation after it had been founded by Mother Mary Angela in 1856. Gradually he assumed authority in the temporal as well as in spiritual matters over the Community, claiming jurisdiction in the appointment of subjects, revision of ordinances and in the government of the Congregation.
Community from that remarkable woman. Certainly, it does not take more than an ordinary imagination to enter into the feelings of Mother Angela's anguished mind as she silenced her prolific pen in this great hour of triumph for her Congregation. Through thirty years of enforced silence, Mother Mary Angela continued as a living act of reparation for her Congregation and for the Church in the fullest manner.

It was Sister Mary Cajetan who walked in the spirit of the Foundress. Sensible and practical, Sister Cajetan possessed a deep spiritual insight and a gentle and loving demeanor which stood out in bold relief against the background of Mother Monica's administration. In striking contrast to the Superior, there was about Sister Cajetan a maternal benignity that found expression in a tender solicitude for the sisters' happiness and welfare. There was something undefinable gracing her personality, something kind, charitable and winning which drew the sisters to her in their moments of distress.

To Sister Cajetan's tact and zeal the young Community owed much of its success. She was a balanced

40 Sister Mary Tulia Doman, Magnificat, 22-24.
idealistic, her heart was in heaven but her feet were firmly on the ground. Well educated and possessing a keen mind, she exerted, together with Father Dombrowski, the most profound influence on the Felician Sisters' educational activities. She was able to perpetuate in her own personality, and in that of the sisters whom she trained, the traits and the spirit of the saintly Foundress.

For over thirty years she devoted her splendid energies as organizer and principal of a number of schools, as a teacher of postulants and young sisters, and she left nothing undone to train the sisters for their teaching apostolate. She knew, as did the Foundress, that the Felician Sisters' life was to be most laborious and energetic, spent for a noble cause. But it was also to be a life of ceaseless prayer, for the motive behind all their busy striving was a spiritual one.

41 All MSS. sources are conspicuously laudatory about Sister Mary Cajetan. The resume given above has been constructed from the impressions gleaned in reading folios of letters and impressions of the founding sisters, manuscript Memoirs of Sister Mary Catherine; MSS. Wspomnienia Naszych Najstarszych Siostr; unpublished biographies Matka Maria Monika; Matka Maria Kajetana.
CHAPTER IV

GROWTH AND EXPANSION OF THE COMMUNITY TO 1884

The Congregation did not remain hidden in the Wisconsin wilderness for long. In 1877, the sisters were offered their first school outside Polonia, and in quick succession thereafter, new missions were opened.

During formative periods of institutes, the impress of certain individuals inevitably becomes fixed in the ideals and traditions of the establishment. So it was with Sister Mary Cajetan and Father Dombrowski, who fashioned the mold in which were cast the educational ideals of the Congregation in its first ten years. It was Sister Cajetan who bore the responsibility of teacher preparation as it passed through the crises of the early years. Wilderness-bound in the tiny hamlet of Polonia, this devoted nun and priest were the only available teachers, besides Mary McGreer,\(^1\) qualified to prepare the sisters for their educational work. It was obvious that visiting teachers could not be lured to the convent of

\(^1\) Donated her services as an English teacher at intervals for more than ten years.
Saint Claire, isolated as it was more than ten miles from the nearest town of Stevens Point. 2

After the sisters had accepted their first mission in La Salle, Illinois, demands for teachers became greater than the Community in Polonia could supply. Despite these pressing requests, both Sister Cajetan and Father Dombrowski insisted that the sisters remain in the Mother House until adequate training was received. In view of this, instructions were given to postulants as well as novices. During the five emergency years, 1879-1884, the novices were not only initiated into the life of the Congregation and trained in the spirit and ideals of the religious life, but they were also required to study and substitute as teachers of the small children in the orphanage after it was established in Polonia. Later, in order to accelerate the education of the teachers, Father Dombrowski organized summer courses so that the sisters could more readily meet the demands in the schools in which they were invited to teach. 3 (Through more than a quarter

---

3 After 1887, when the Diet of Baltimore placed great stress on the training of teachers, he was adamant in his insistence that the sisters procure teacher's certificates.
of a century of his association with the Congregation, Rev. Joseph Dombrowski was ever at the helm, as it were, steering the course of those whom Providence confided to his care.) This devoted clergyman, justly regarded as the Founder of the American Community, has left his cultural impress upon hundreds of spiritual daughters as director, educator and counselor.

At the time the Congregation was beginning to extend its influence Sister Cajetan, with characteristic thoroughness, organized courses of study and shaped the curricula of the schools conducted by the Congregation along the lines of current trends. Faced with new conditions in her adopted country, she kept in touch with every movement that stood for intellectual and religious advancement. The first printed course of study for the parochial schools under the direction of the Felician Sisters was published in 1894. Stray records of the Community reveal that, prior to that year, the program of studies in schools taught by the Felician Sisters included the regular subjects of arithmetic, spelling, reading,

4 MSS. Siostra Maria Kajetana, 7-13.

5 Sister Mary Charitine Hilburger, Writings of the Felician Sisters in the United States, Chicago, 1955, 15.
geography, history, catechism and the study of the Bible. Besides these, art, sewing and ornamental needlework were taught. At Saint Claire Academy, special stress was laid not only on religion and sacred scripture but also on science. Father Dombrowski, himself, absoringly interested in the latter field, taught at one time or another zoology, chemistry, physics, and natural science. To the delight of the sisters and the girls of the academy, he constructed a sun clock which is still preserved as a cherished heirloom of those early years.6

Since neither the parents nor the children of the immigrant Poles spoke English, the instruction in the first years was conducted in Polish. Text books in that language were not available in this country. Therefore, the printing press which Father Dombrowski had installed in a cabin on the parish premises in his first years at Sacred Heart Church was put to good use. Under the direction of the versatile priest, books written by Sister Mary Cajetan were printed and bound by aspirants and postulants with "very little secular help."7

6 Information regarding the school in Saint Claire Convent has been assembled from various records in the Archives of the Community, and the manuscript memoirs of Sister Mary Catherine, who was a student at the academy in 1877.

7 Historja Zgromadzenia, III, 93.
The first decade of the Felician Sisters in America witnessed the spread of their educational work to distant fields of labor. The pioneer nuns watched their membership grow from a band of five, struggling against want and hardship in the wilderness of Polonia, to more than twenty times that number conducting schools and orphanages in the states of Illinois, New York, Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Maryland.

Appeals for teachers came mainly from bishops and pastors in areas where rapidly-growing Polish settlements were being founded, and parishes organized. Shortly after the establishment of the school in Polonia, the first request for teachers reached Mother Mary Monica from Father Kandyd Kozlowski, pastor of Saint Hyacinth Church in La Salle, Illinois. His request was complied with.

In September, 1877 a convent, dedicated to the Holy Cross, was opened with a staff of three teachers assigned to Saint Hyacinth Parochial School: Sister Mary Cajetan, superior, "another professed sister and a postulant." Records are few and information scanty about the

---

8 In the post-Civil War period some two million Poles streamed into the United States seeking more favorable conditions than those which prevailed in their partitioned homeland.--Matthew Haiman, "Poles in the United States," Slavonic Encyclopedia, New York, 1949, 985.
Sisterhood’s first mission. Community chronicles reveal, however, that the school was ungraded and that "children from ages of seven to sixteen enrolled." The building was crowded in a short time and the basement of the church was pressed into service for additional classrooms. In this second foundation, as with other missions opened later in her lifetime, Sister Mary Cajetan went first, learning the problems attendant upon the work, bearing the first heavy burdens and injecting into the whole that sense of sacred consecration that ennobled all that she undertook.

About this time, Mother Mary Monica was approached several times concerning the establishment of a child-care institute for orphaned and abandoned children. The first request came from a distressed father seeking a home for his two-year old daughter whose mother had died aboard a ship en route to America. Another appeal came from a resident of Pine Creek, Wisconsin, in a letter to Mother Mary Monica seeking temporary care for a three-year old child whose mother had become insane. These and other pitiful cases, having been brought to the attention of the

sisters from the first month of their arrival, caused them to consider the establishment of an orphanage in 1877.10 About this time Father Kozlowski, being informed about eight cases requiring temporary placement, urged Mother Monica to build an orphanage on a tract of land near Saint Hyacinth Church which he generously agreed to donate.

After plans for the establishment were made, Father Vincent Barzynski, of Saint Stanislaus Church in Chicago, was deputed to present a petition to Archbishop Thomas Foley of Chicago for a canonical permit to establish the institution in La Salle. At the same time the sisters set out to beg for funds; parishioners of the Sacred Heart Church in Wisconsin, Saint Hyacinth in La Salle and Saint Stanislaus in Chicago contributed generously, and with this money construction of the orphanage began.

On October 16, 1878, the dedication of the building took place with an impressive ceremony in which the societies and pastors of three La Salle parishes—Czech, German and Irish—participated. Father Barzynski of

10 MSS. Wspomnienia Naszych Najstarszych Siostr, 59-61.
Chicago performed the dedication ceremony and placed the institution under the patronage of Saint Casimir. At that time nine children ranging in age from two to eight years, had already been registered at the institution.\(^{11}\)

The efforts of Sister Cajetan and her little band met with success both in the school and the orphanage, the latter receiving generous support from parishes in Chicago, Milwaukee, Stevens Point, and La Salle. The pioneer hardships affecting the everyday lives of the sisters in the past two years receded, somewhat, but another and more insidious trial was to beset their efforts in their first mission. Here they were treated with a general lack of cooperative respect on the part of the pastor.

Records are not too explicit about the disension in the La Salle parish and the consequent withdrawal of the sisters. The crux of the matter, however, appears to have revolved around the constant overtures made by Father Kandyd Kozlowski for the separation of the American unit of the Felician Sisters from their Generalate in Cracow. Moreover, his constant interference in the internal administration of the Sisterhood and his insistence on the

\(^{11}\) Ibid., Historical sketch in *Historja Zgromadzenia*, III, 91-92.
modification of the Ordinances of the Congregation met with opposition from the superiors. In consequence, the sisters were denied, intermittently, the spiritual care to which they were entitled.

For four years the Community in La Salle carried on its work under most trying circumstances which eventually brought about conditions humiliating and painful to those to whom the honor of the Congregation was sacred. Intervention on the part of Rt. Rev. Francis Spaulding, Bishop of Peoria, failed to ameliorate the conditions. There could be, therefore, but one course to pursue in regard to the foundations in La Salle--withdrawal of the sisters. In spite of Bishop Spaulding's pleas to the contrary, Mother Mary Monica, realizing the anxieties caused by the strained relations in the parish, was finally able to secure canonical permission to close the La Salle school and institution.

Mindful of the hardships the disbanding of the dependant children would entail, the sisters abandoned the building but took the children, forty in number at this time, and made room for them in Saint Claire Convent and Academy, June 24, 1881. 12

12 Details about this parish have been gathered from scattered bits of information, given in the unedited memoirs of Sister Mary Pancratius; MSS. Matka Maria Monika: Historia Zeromadzenia, III, 94-95.
Within a short time, so well were adjustments and adequate accommodations made for the children in Polonia, Mother Monica and Sister Cajetan decided to establish there permanently.

After the removal of Father Kozlowski from the pastorate of Saint Hyacinth parish in 1884, requests came from the new pastor, Father Stanislaus Baranowski, for the return of the sisters. It was only at the insistence of Bishop Spaulding that Mother Monica finally relented and agreed to send three teachers to resume charge of the parish school.

When the sisters, headed by Sister Mary Angela, arrived August, 1884, they were given a heart-warming reception. Parish societies led by the recently-appointed pastor met them at the station with enthusiastic greetings and conducted them to a combination convent-school building, newly converted from the abandoned orphanage.13

Today, ten Felician Sisters conduct the school with an enrollment of over three hundred children. During the seventy-two year tenure, some of the most useful members of the Congregation, more than fifty-four in all, have

13 Ibid.
been recruited from the parish.14

Early in 1879, a request for sisters came from Father Augustine Sklarczyk, newly-appointed pastor of a church in Bay City, located near the heavily wooded expanse of northern Michigan.

Mindful of the importance of the parochial school in the moral and religious development of his parish, Father Sklarczyk set about making plans for the erection of a school building immediately after his appointment to the pastorate. With plenty of lumber in the vicinity and the help of many willing hands, he required little time for the completion of a two story structure. The upper story contained accommodations for the sisters' cloister and chapel, while the lower floor was divided into three classrooms.

The building was completed and furnished at the time that four sisters arrived from Polonia to take charge of the school, January, 1879. Sister Mary Cajetan was again called upon to establish the foundation and to regulate the Community life as the local superior. Others assigned were: Sister Mary Joseph, newly professed; Sister Mary Felix, the first religious of the American Community to

14 Records of Holy Cross Convent, La Salle, Illinois.
pronounce her vows; and Sister Mary Francis. All three sisters were young, recruited from American homes and trained with unselfish devotedness by Sister Cajetan and her faithful co-operator in the education of the sisters.

The entrance of the sisters into Bay City was spectacular. They were met at the station by a blaring band and a large delegation of parishioners who accompanied them to their convent with all the fanfare of a parade. Sister Joseph noted in her memoirs how she fidgeted with embarrassment at the sensational reception and how Sister Mary Cajetan reproached her with a glance of disapproval for her lack of poise.

At the dedication, January 14, 1879, the school was placed under the patronage of Saint Stanislaus Kostka, and the convent under that of Saint Felix of Cantalicio. The school originally had an enrollment of over 120 children and a curriculum which did not extend beyond the sixth grade level. Today there is a capacity enrollment

15 Sister Francis died after eight years of exemplary life as a teacher and religious. Hers was the only death in the American Community during the first decade. Necrologium, 1874-1894. Community Archives, Livonia, Michigan.

16 Taken from folio of unedited letters, memoirs and notes of the oldest members of the Congregation. Community Archives, Livonia, Michigan.
of 850 children taught by sixteen members of the Felician Order.

One of the largest and most challenging undertakings of the Congregation in the early years was Saint Albertus School to which Bishop Borgess of the Archdiocese of Detroit invited the Sisters of Saint Felix in 1879. This school was located in the heart of a heavy concentration of Polish immigrants who had settled there shortly after the disastrous revolution of 1863 in Russian-dominated Poland. Describing this Catholic element, a Diocesan weekly painted a realistic picture of the Polish immigrant of the 1870's:

Fresh from the soil they sought homes where they might have access to the soil to make a living in the intervals between the jobs of manual labor which they so diligently sought and so laborously accomplished. They were a more serious-minded people than the Irish. Work under the difficulties of strange customs, a strange language, and masters inclined to get the last penny-worth of labor out of these new willing workers made life serious to them.17

During the 1870's, the Polish Catholics formed the largest immigrant group in Detroit. Saint Albertus, the first Polish parish in the city, had opened a parochial school in 1871, and six years later, there was an enrollment

of more than three hundred children in classes conducted by lay teachers.\textsuperscript{18}

When Father John Wollkowski, a one-armed veteran of the Polish wars, was appointed to the pastorate by Rt. Rev. Casper H. Borgess, Bishop of Detroit, he found the parish in a demoralized condition. Convinced that a religious teaching order in his school would be the first step toward a solution of the problem, he wrote to Mother Mary Monica asking for sisters to direct the school. No teaching sisterhood in the diocese could have been of any service in dealing with this immigrant group that clung so tenaciously to its language. It was providential, therefore, that he heard of the newly established Polish order in Polonia, Wisconsin.\textsuperscript{19}

About the time the request reached Mother Mary Monica, preliminary plans were being advanced to transfer the Mother House in Polonia to a more suitable site, and since Detroit was being considered as a possibility, she accepted the offer of the parochial school in that area. Teachers were not available. Consequently, Sister

\textsuperscript{18} George Pare, \textit{The Catholic Church in Detroit}, Detroit, 1951, 648.

\textsuperscript{19} Saint Albertus Church; \textit{Diamond Jubilee, 1874-1947}, Detroit, 1947. (unpaged)
Josephine was withdrawn from Bay City, and together with Sister Cajetan and two postulants, she arrived in Detroit, December, 1879.

Sister Mary Cajetan again led the way, performing the duties of a local superior temporarily until her plans for development of the school should be matured and the religious life in the convent give evidence of stability.

A series of regrettable disorders had kept the colony in ferment, and when the sisters arrived, they encountered a somewhat hostile community that only reluctantly allowed the newcomers to staff the school.20 With characteristic graciousness and tact, Sister Cajetan succeeded in gaining the good will and confidence of the hostile group. Under her influence, the parishioners began to join the various parish organizations and gradually take interest in parish activities. After a few months, the sisters completely won the confidence and loyalty of the children and their parents.21

With the assistance of lay teachers who continued on the staff for a short time, the sisters directed

20 Historja Zgromadzenia, III, 99.
21 MSS. Matka Maria Kajetana, 28-31.
the school and performed some social work in the parish. Flourishing at first, then passing through varying periods of struggle and discouragement due to the unrest and changing conditions in city and the parish, the school maintained a continuous existence from 1879 to its present prosperous state. The enrollment reached its peak in 1916 when 1,300 children attended grades one through eight. The seventy-seven year history of the school records names of graduates who have become distinguished as leaders in the civic and business organizations of the city, and unfolds an impressive list of eighty-three girls who have embraced the religious life, seventy-three of these in the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Felix. Thirteen young men have become diocesan priests and eleven have entered religious orders.

Though the Congregation was growing in number, the increase was not in proportion to the demands made on

22 The troubled conditions and internal dissen­sion in Saint Adalbert Parish did not involve the Congre­gation directly, but caused the sisters stationed there profound grief as they helplessly watched the developments. For complete coverage of the events see: Detroit News, November 25, 1885; December 2, 1885; The Michigan Catholic, January 21, 1886.


24 Diamond Jubilee, 1874-1947. (unpaged)
Mother Mary Monica for sisters. In 1880, seven candidates sought and obtained admission to the Congregation; in the same year, two postulants received their habit. They were: Anne Gora, whose name in religion became Sister Mary Brunona; and Josephine Pukowiak, Sister Mary Joanne. The following year, according to membership records, eleven candidates were admitted, while seven postulants received their habits and began their novitiate, August 2, 1881. The latter were: Mary Ostrowska, named Sister Mary Isadore; Josephine Dudzik, Sister Mary Benigna; Cecilia Oswaldowska, Sister Mary Agnes; Frances Konopacka, Sister Mary Pauline; Agnes Kowalska, Sister Mary Cunegunda; Anasthasia Bronek, Sister Mary Magdalene; Cecelia Frydryczek, Sister Mary Christine.25

After 1880 the Sisterhood slowly gained strength, and Mother Mary Monica more readily began accepting invitations to institute new foundations. Between the years 1880-1882, four more small establishments were added in the states of Indiana, Maryland and New York to the Congregation's rapidly expanding field of labor. The first of these was organized at the insistence of Father Louis Machdzicki, pastor of a newly-founded parish of Saint Mary

25 MSS. Księga Spisowa, 1874-94.
in Otis, Indiana. Zealous and energetic, he built a modest one-floor building and invited the Felician Sisters to organize a school.26

On August 22, 1880, two sisters took possession of the building and in September the school opened with an enrollment of eighty children in two classes conducted by Sister Mary Nepomucen, superior, and Sister Mary Columba.27 Both were young sisters who had entered in the first two critical years of the Congregation and had received their training under Sister Mary Cajetan and Father Dombrowski. From these two teachers they absorbed the spirit of devotion to duty and solid intellectual attainments which carried them through their first months of inexperience. Community annals make a note of the competence and the salutary results that accompanied the efforts of the two young teachers in their first educational venture.28

Being the only Catholic school in the area, Saint Mary has exerted a quiet, yet forceful influence on the life of the farming community during its seventy-six

26 MSS. Wspomnienia Naszych Nastarszych Matek, 67.

27 Seventy-five Years of Service in the United States, Detroit, 1949, 7.

28 Historja Zgromadzenia, III, 100-1.
year history. Today it is listed as the smallest school staffed by the Congregation with an enrollment of approximately sixty children.\(^{29}\)

The year 1881 witnessed the establishment of the Felician Sisters in the Diocese of Buffalo. There, at the invitation of Father John Pitass, Pastor of Saint Stanislaus Church, Sister Catherine and Sister Nepomucene were sent from Polonia, November 24, to take charge of the education of the girls at the parish school. In contrast to their first experiences in Wisconsin, the sisters sent to the East in nearly every instance entered well established parishes with comfortably built schools. In most cases, classes for boys and girls under lay supervision had been in operation before the arrival of the sisters. Such was the case in Saint Stanislaus School.

A new "co-instructional" arrangement was inaugurated in November after the arrival of the sisters. An annex to the school was built for the accommodation of the girls under the direction of the sisters, while the education of the boys continued under lay instructors in the old section. Sister Mary Nepomucene, the twenty-four

\(^{29}\) Records: Office of the Dean of Studies, Livonia, Michigan.
year old principal, had been transferred from Saint Mary School in Otis to prepare the way for the success of the girls' school in Buffalo. Under her competent direction, the progress of the girls won encouraging approval of the pastor and parents; the institute prospered and seemed to promise gratifying results.30

Before long, Father Pitass seeing the marked improvement in conduct and scholarship of the children directed by religious teachers, dismissed one lay teacher after another and asked Mother Mary Monica to fill the vacancies with sisters. By 1887, twelve sisters staffed the school and a new building was constructed to meet the needs of an increasing enrollment. The segregated plan was later abandoned, and the sisters taught both boys and girls in combined classes. The average attendance in the last decade has been 870 in the elementary grades with seventeen teachers.31

By this time, Saint Claire Convent was becoming too small for the growing Community; besides, it proved

30 Historja Zgromadzenia, III, 101; Community Archives, Livonia, Michigan, MSS. Folio of notes and memoirs.

inadequate from the standpoint of location. As new schools were being opened in the East, a change of some kind was imperative, and a more centrally-placed site for the Motherhouse and novitiate was being sought.

In 1880, a location was finally selected in Detroit on what is today Aubin and Canfield Avenues. Mother Mary Monica first saw the possibility of Detroit as the new site when benefactors of the sisters and the pastors whose schools the Congregation had staffed in the East proposed a transfer to this area.

With some difficulty Mother Mary Monica secured permission from Bishop Krautbauer for the transference of the Mother House to another diocese. It was only after he had learned that Saint Claire Convent would be converted into an institute for homeless boys, and that the sisters would not abandon their schools in his diocese that Bishop Krautbauer permitted the transfer and sent the official recommendation of the Congregation to Bishop Borgess of

32 Saint Claire Convent was located in a tiny hamlet of Sharon on the southern fringe of the Wisconsin pineries and in the midst of vast stretches of prairie. The roads during winter and rainy seasons were practically impassable. The distance to the nearest town, Stevens Point, (population, 1880,--569) was more than ten miles. History of Northern Wisconsin, Chicago, 1881, 733. Polonia today is still an isolated post town with a population of a little over two hundred people.
Detroit.33

After the transfer was officially sanctioned, Mother Mary Monica and Sister Caietan at once began making plans for the new building in spite of the most discouraging financial outlook. They lost no time in communicating with the Generalate in Cracow for necessary permission to buy land and enter into negotiations for the erection of a new convent.

When these were secured, Father Dombrowski left for Detroit to purchase "enough land for the convent and gardens," in the heart of the city. A substantial part of the purchase was an outright donation by the owner, John Kuhn.

Through the efforts of Sister Mary Nepomucene and Sister Vincentine, who begged for funds for the erection of the convent, and the business acumen of Father Dombrowski, sufficient money was raised to begin building. The erection of the new Mother House was directed by Father Dombrowski and progressed rapidly until lack of funds caused a short delay. During this time another fund-raising device was tried--the sale of "gold-brick

certificates"—the proceeds of which brought in thirty thousand dollars within a period of less than one year.34

Construction of the new Mother House was at once resumed with a promise to have the building ready for occupancy in mid-September, 1882. The interest of the sisters stationed at Saint Adalbert School, nearby, deepened as they watched yard after yard of red brick wall emerge from the hands of builders.

In the last week of September, Mother Mary Monica and Sister Mary Cajetan took possession of the convent and began preparations for the arrival of the novitiate. A few days later Sister Mary Cunegunda accompanied the novices and the postulants to Detroit. The leave taking from Saint Claire Convent was touching as sisters whose friendships were forged from the hardships of pioneer days told their final farewells. To those left behind in charge of the home for orphaned boys, this departure brought nothing but sadness; to those leaving, a spirit of enthusiasm, for there was in this new foundation the seed of the Community's fullest development.

Upon their arrival, the sisters devoted themselves to the immediate preparations for the forthcoming

———

34 Historja Zgromadzenia, III, 104.
dedication. This took place quite appropriately on October 4, 1882, the seven-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Saint Francis. In the presence of a large concourse of Clergymen and friends of the sisters, the diocesan Vicar General \(^{35}\) blessed the convent under the title of The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

This convent served as a nursery of the Sisterhood in America, became the training school of its teaching body, retreat center, and the home of the novices and postulants where they were schooled in the ideal of the Foundress—contemplation, the well-spring of active life. Here also was established the home for orphaned girls transferred from the Saint Claire Home in Polonia.\(^{36}\) The Congregation at this time numbered fifty-three members, and though scattered in six dioceses and nine states, to them Presentation Convent became home for all the missions of the Community.

---

\(^{35}\) The name of the presiding prelate has not been preserved. In a letter from Bishop Borgess to Sister Felicia (no such name in the Community register at that time) he writes: "You may call on our Very Rev. Vicar General for the blessing of your convent as soon as you can agree on the time." September 7, 1882.

\(^{36}\) From this humble beginning the orphanage has grown to be an important department of the Sister's work. For the first twenty-five years children were admitted from all parts of the United States, but from 1907 admissions were restricted to Michigan.—Records, Guardian Angel Orphanage, Detroit, Michigan.
Memories of the solemn dedication ceremonies had hardly died away when on December 13, 1882, Father Dombrowski presided at the first ceremony of investiture in the new Presentation Chapel. Four postulants were clothed in the Franciscan habit, namely: Maria Lasieniecka was received as Sister Mary Barbara; Mary Kolodzinska, Sister Mary Delphine; Frances Radkowski, Sister Mary Elizabeth; Justine Palom, Sister Mary Cyrilla.37

Throughout the early years of the Congregation, Father Dombrowski always officiated and assisted at the receptions of novices and at their professions. These ceremonies took place, not on specified days as became the custom later on, but whenever the postulants or novices completed their term of probation or noviceship.

In 1882, the first Chicago foundation of the Felician Sisters was located in a section of the city called Bridgeport. An elementary school was established on August 26 when, at the request of the pastor of Saint Mary of Perpetual Help Church, two sisters arrived to organize classes in a two-story frame building which served as a church, school and convent combined. The Founding

37 Historja Zgromadzenia, III, 109.
sisters were: Sister Mary Clara and Sister Mary Joseph.

The difficulties inevitable in foundation days were encountered but there was an encouraging interest in the school on the part of the people. The transfer of the pastor, Father John Zylla, and the subsequent installation of Father Stanislaus Nawrocki brought about some changes. Due to the strained relations between the pastor and the sisters, Mother Mary Monica recalled the sisters in June 1894, after twelve years of fruitful labor.38

The first mission of the Congregation in Pennsylvania was in Shamokin, to which Mother Mary Monica sent two sisters in 1882, at the request of Father Florian Klonowski.

38 Records regarding this parish are inextricably conflicting. Arch-Diocesan Archives, Mundelein, Illinois disclose the following data: The Catholic Directory shows the Felician Sisters at St. Mary of Perpetual Help, 1885-1893. The latter date is undoubtedly wrong. In the Diocesan Archives of Annual Reports the year ending December 31, 1892, states: "Felician Sisters; 8 nuns, Sister Albina, Superior." Year ending December 31, 1893, states: Sisters of Saint Francis. Both reports are signed by the pastor, Rev. Stanislaus Nawrocki. There is absolutely no comment on the change of Orders. There are no records in the Archives for 1885-87. In volumes of Annual Reports for those years, neither Perpetual Help nor Saint Adalbert's could be located. The latter belongs in the picture because Perpetual Help was originally a school of that name, operated by the Parish of Saint Adalbert as a mission of Saint Mary of Perpetual Help in 1885. Jubilee Book says first baptisms were recorded at the Mission in 1884 and "before that, there was a school." Perpetual Help became a separate parish in November, 1886, with Rev. John Zylla as pastor.
On August 12 of the same year, a school dedicated to Saint Stanislaus Kostka was opened with an enrollment of sixty-five children, taught by Sister Mary Angela, superior, and Sister Mary Christine.39

In the summer of 1883, the sisters from mission homes close enough to justify the journey assembled for the first time in the new Mother House in Detroit to make their annual retreat. Following this, on August 2, twelve postulants became novices and received names in religion. They were: Frances Stolzman, who became known as Sister Mary Innocenta; Margaret Wasilewska, Sister Mary Marcella; Catherine Andryczek, Sister Mary Virgilia; Julia Bassman, Sister Mary Petronella; Marcia Michalska, Sister Mary Augustine; Mathilde Prague, Sister Mary Stanislaus; Augusta Freda, Sister Mary Symplicia; Eva Frydrychowicz, Sister Mary Ignatius; Julianne Budnik, Sister Mary Sabina. All of the sisters received, pronounced their vows the following year.40

39 Community records contain no significant data on the history and the subsequent development of the foundation. Book of Appointments MSS. Community Archives, lists personnel assigned to the school as given above.

40 List given in Historja Zgromadzenia, III, 110, has been checked against Księga Spisowa (membership records) and revised. The above represents the revised list.
About this time another school had been offered the Felician Sisters in Detroit. A large concentration of Polish Catholics, living on the west side of the city, led Bishop Borgess to urge the organization of the area "west of Woodward Avenue" into a parish under the pastorate of Father Paul Gutowski. His efforts resulted in the erection of a temporary church and school building which were dedicated to Saint Casimir on April 21, 1883.41

Two months later the second mission of the Felician Sisters in Detroit was instituted on the invitation of Bishop Borgess in Saint Casimir parish. Two sisters were sent from the Mother House in Detroit: Sister Mary Brunona, superior, and Sister Martha.

After the school was organized, the parish expanded, and the young and energetic pastor soon found means of erecting a larger and more imposing school building. From an enrollment of 182 children in 1883, the school grew to 1,170 in 1923-24.42 Today fifteen Felician sisters staff the Saint Casimir elementary and high schools with an average attendance of 590 students.43

41 Pare, History of the Catholic Church in Detroit, 550.
42 Golden Jubilee of Saint Casimir Parish, Detroit, 1932. (unpaged)
In November, 1883, Mother Mary Monica sent a community from Detroit to begin the Order's first parochial school in the Baltimore Diocese. Father Peter Kuncz, pastor of Saint Stanislaus parish, appealed to Mother Mary Monica for teachers to staff his two-room parish school. Sister Mary Cajetan was sent from Presentation Convent to organize and conduct the school with the assistance of Sister Mary Francis and Sister Mary Martha.

In the tenth anniversary year of the American Foundation, 1884, thirty-five young women joined the ranks of the Congregation as humble followers of the Poverello. That year, on the feast of Our Lady of the Angels, investiture ceremonies were conducted for the following postulants: Dorothy Bastuba who became known in religion as Sister Mary Colette; Catherine Dybalaska, Sister Mary Samuela; Stanislava Rakocy, Sister Mary Longina; Mary Orlowska, Sister Mary Liguoria; Theophila Orlowska, Sister Mary Procopia; Josepha Orlikowska, Sister Mary Bogumila; Mary Karczeska, Sister Mary Veronica; Mary Kosterka, Sister Mary Victoria; Angela Kosterka, Sister Mary David; Julia Cwiklinski, Sister Mary Thaida and Anna Murawska, Sister Mary Casimir.

The growing reputation of the Community was a source of gratification to Mother Mary Monica and Sister
Mary Cajetan. Encouragement and assistance were not wanting, and in this atmosphere of good will, there was a steady progress in all that made for the general good of the Congregation. In the tenth anniversary year of the American foundation, 1884, thirteen sisters were sent from Detroit to institute new foundations in Toledo, Grand Rapids, and Lemont.

Three of this number were destined for Grand Rapids, Michigan, where at the request of Most Rev. Henry J. Ritcher they opened an elementary school in the parish of Saint Adalbert. A private home was remodeled into a convent and two rooms were set aside for classrooms. In September, eighty children enrolled in the school under the direction of Sister Mary Catherine, Sister Mary Ligouria and Sister Mary Antonina.

The school continued to advance in enrollment and efficiency, and on all sides the sisters won friends and patronage. Shortly after a new pastor, Father Simon Ponganis, was assigned to Saint Adalbert Church, difficulties arose over the pastor's objection to the withdrawal of Sister Mary Catherine, a competent and respected principal of the school. "Mother Mary Monica's lack of tact" in the subsequent handling of the affair set off a series of incidents which resulted in the removal of the sisters
from the Grand Rapids mission in 1892. 44

The first two foundations of the Congregation in the Diocese of Toledo were opened in 1884, on the invitation of Father Vincent Lewandowski. Of the preliminary steps in the institution of the schools, parish records contain the following memorandum. "Two parishes were organized by a combined group of French and Polish immigrants on the opposite ends of the town. The church on Nebraska and Junction Streets was dedicated to Saint Anthony of Padua on July 13, 1881; the other, a short time later, was established under the patronage of Saint Hedwig."

A one-room school was commenced in the basement of the Saint Anthony Church and conducted by lay teachers. In February, 1884, the pastor secured a building for a parochial school and at his request five sisters were sent from Detroit to take charge of both schools. Three sisters were assigned to Saint Anthony School: Sister

44 Material from which the history of the mission has been constructed is scanty. Fragments of information had been found in Historja Zgromadzenia, III, III; MSS. Wspomnienia Siostry Marji Katarzyny (unpaged). Data found in community records does not correspond with a reliable secondary source in reference to beginnings of the foundation. According to McGee, "in 1885, the Felician Sisters from Detroit arrived at St. Adalbert's and opened the first school at Grand Rapids. There were 250 pupils."—John W. McGee, The Catholic Church in the Grand River Valley, 1833-1950, Grand Rapids, 1950, 425-6.
Elizabeth, superior, Sister Delfina and Sister Rozalia; two others, Sister Agnes and Sister Pelagia were sent to direct Saint Hedwig School. The latter sisters established temporary residence at the Saint Anthony convent and commuted via horse and farmer's "carriage" to Saint Hedwig School until their convent quarters in their school were completed.45

Two fires within three years at Saint Hedwig School, started by lighted vigil lamps in the church, destroyed parts of the building in which the classrooms were located. While the necessary repairs were being made, Mother Mary Monica ordered the sisters to return to the Mother House and in a few weeks notified the pastor that they would be withdrawn permanently. A number of appeals for the return of the sisters, sent to Mother Monica by Father Lewandowski and his successor, Father Simon Wieczorek, were disregarded.46 Finally, in 1887, the school was transferred to the Franciscan Sisters of Rochester, Minnesota who direct the school at the present time.


46 MSS. Wspomnienia Naszych Najstarszych Siostr, 78-9.
Saint Anthony of Padua School continued under the direction of the Felician Sisters with an average enrollment of 330 children taught by seven sisters.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study has been undertaken in the hope that a sympathetic understanding of the hardships which beset the Community in its beginnings might lead to greater appreciation of its achievements in later years. The thesis is a record of ten years of striking root, of feeling the way in the darkness, of uncertainties and unexpected difficulties, of failures here and there, and of ventures into the twilight.

Most of what has been written refers to the Congregation's external development, to things visible, tangible. However, the Congregation's spirit has permeated the whole of its apostolate, ennobled all the activities of the Sisterhood. No part of the Congregation stands alone. There is no distant mission of the Order that is not deeply concerned with the saga of its growth, and there is no Felician Sister who has not shared in its toils, its hardships, triumphs and the legacy of its Foundress--Franciscanism, deep devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, love of Mary, reparation.
A casual survey of the records of the eighty-year history of the Congregation in America from the small beginnings at Polonia, Wisconsin, 1874, to the present network of institutions will tell the story of which epics are made. It is a story in which it is told how hundreds of young women, impelled by the love of God and neighbor, have consecrated their lives to religious education, to the care of the sick, the aged and to so many others unable to provide for themselves.

That Providence has prospered the Congregation's activities in the United States is evident in the numerical growth from five to nearly four thousand members in an eighty year span. Within the same period of time, the expansion in the variety and scope of their work has also been remarkable. Today, the Congregation extends its apostolate through twenty-seven states, fifteen archdioceses and forty-eight dioceses. Educational institutions staffed by the Sisterhood comprises: 260 elementary schools, twenty-eight high schools, three junior colleges and one senior college, with a total enrollment of more than ninety-nine thousand students. In the last ten years, establishments have been opened in Ontario, Canada and Brazil.

Simultaneously with their educational apostolate in the United States, the Felician Sisters have
undertaken specialized child care in Delaware, New York, Illinois and Michigan. During these eighty years, more than 87,400 children have found a temporary home in the ten day nurseries and orphanages which the Sisterhood conducts.

The Congregation's works of mercy extend also to the abandoned aged, the largest foundation being Saint Mary Home for the Aged in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, dating back to 1887; and the Saint Andrew Home recently built in Niles, Illinois. Hospital work forms an important phase of the Congregation's activities today, with large establishments in Philadelphia, Illinois, Maine, Iowa, Texas and Wisconsin.

The rapid growth of the Congregation has led to the organization of seven provinces in the United States, each independent of the other and under the jurisdiction of a respective Provincial Superior. All the provinces, however, are united in their dependance on the Superior General, at present Mother Mary Simplicita, who resides at the Generalate of the Congregation in Rome.

Thus is perpetuated the labor of love and sacrifice which a pioneer band of five inaugurated in a barren Wisconsin hamlet in their efforts to co-operate with their Divine Exemplar in the salvation of souls.
"All through the Heart of Mary, in honor of the Blessed Sacrament, in the name of Jesus Crucified."
--Motto of the Congregation.
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

I. MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

A. Community Archives:

The principal manuscript sources for this work are in the Community Archives at Livonia, Michigan. They consist of:

1. Folios of letters, personal narratives, memoirs and impressions written by contemporaries and covering much of the period between 1874-1884. This unedited material, though used with caution, furnished interesting glimpses of pioneer hardships and a penetrating insight into the spirit of the Community in the early years.

2. Annals, documents and records.

3. Edited collections including a series of interviews of the earliest members of the Congregation and edited under the title of Wspomnienia Naszych Najstarszych Matek o Pierwszych Latach Zgromadzenia, Plymouth, n.d. The most complete MSS. collections of contemporaneous material are: [Sister Mary Pancratius Czehuta, ed.], Notatki Siostry Marji Pankracji, Livonia, n.d. and [Sister Mary Ursula, ed.], Zapiski Siostry Marji Urszuli, Detroit, n.d. Both works contain narratives drawn from reminiscences and memoirs covering the period under study with notes and an attempt at interpretation. Two MSS. biographies which disclose new angles on the personalities of the founding sisters are: [Sister Mary Josephine, Midura], Matka Maria Monika, Livonia, n.d., a candid picture of Mother Mary Monica as told to Sister Josephine, by sisters who knew her personally, and [Sister Mary Pancratius, Czehuta], Matka Maria Kajetana, Jankiewicz Ze Zgromadzenia Siostr Felicjanek, Plymouth, 1947, a biography constructed from a collection of notes and recollections of contemporaries. Other important sources of biographical information are: Necrologium, 1874-1894; and Księga Spisowa Siostr Zgromadzenia
Swietego Feliksa, 1874-1894, a membership register containing crisp comments about each member.

B. Diocesan Archives:

From the archives of the Diocese of Green Bay were obtained: Photostats of official correspondence of Father Dombrowski; Inventories and "status pecuniae" from which can be gleaned an appraisal of the poverty and the changing fortunes of the convent and parochial unit in which the Sisterhood first struck root; and an extensive work, Historiae Coloniae Poloniae in Polonia, anonymous, undated. The work appears to be a very old copy, handwritten possibly by Father Dombrowski and disclosing material hitherto published in Community Annals. A few items of historical interest are housed in the Chicago Archdiocesan Archives in Mundelein, Illinois, and in the Diocese of Grand Rapids, Toledo, especially in connection with schools which later had been abandoned by the Congregation.

C. Parish Records:

Chief value of parish records is in the useful material found in annals and baptismal registers while a variety of historical items yield a few significant morsels helpful in constructing the history of the Community's activities in the respective parishes.

II. PUBLISHED WORKS

A. General Works of the Congregation:

The chief historical source of the Congregation, 1855-1931, is Historja Zgromadzenia SS. Felicjanek na Podstawie Rekopisow, 3 vols., Krakow, 1929-1932. Drawn almost exclusively from primary source material, the work is valuable for its reprints of unedited letters, diaries and documentary items, housed in the Community Archives at the Generalate in Rome to which the authors had free access. An excellent summary of a hundred years of the Congregation's activity, and including numerous statistical tables is the centenary memoir volume, Sister Mary Tulia Doman, Magnificat: A Centennial Record of the Sisters of Saint Felix, Detroit, 1955. While the best
bibliographical reference work is Sister Mary Charitine, Hilburger, *Writings of the Felician Sisters in the United States*, Chicago, 1955, which is a listing of both published and unpublished materials including pamphlets and magazine articles written in American and foreign languages.

B. Biographical Works:

Excellent general information is brought together in a biography of the American Founder: Ks. Aleksander Syski, Ks. Jozef Dombrowski, *Orchard Lake*, 1942, which is useful for reprints of letters not found in other secondary sources. Notable also are two other interesting biographical works: Rev. Francis Cegielka, *Pierced Heart; The Life of Mother Mary Angela Truszowska*, Milwaukee, 1955, an absorbing story of the foundress of the Congregation; and Sister Mary Tulia Doman, *Mother Mary Angela Truszowska, Foundress of the Felician Sisters*, Livonia, 1954, a study of the life of the foundress in the light of the historical development of the Order. Both works contain valuable allusions to the history and spiritual development of the Sisterhood.

C. Church Histories:

D. Local Histories:

Related material pertaining to the social, civic and economic setting in which the drama of the Congregation's evolution took place, can be gathered from: A Standard History of Portage County, Wisconsin, 2 vols., Chicago, 1919; Milo M. Quaife, Wisconsin Its History and Its People, 1634-1924, 2 vols., Chicago, 1924; and Benjamin Blied, The Catholic Story in Wisconsin, Milwaukee, 1948. History of Northern Wisconsin, Chicago, 1881, derived from stories of eyewitnesses and obscure documents, handles brilliantly accounts of settlement development and growth of counties, cities and villages in Northern Wisconsin. Readable general histories of the locale are William F. Raney, Wisconsin, A Story of Progress, New York, 1940; and George W. Peck, ed., Wisconsin: Comprising Sketches of Counties, Towns, Events, Institutions and Persons, Arranged in Cyclopedic Form, Madison, 1906. Stefan Nestorowicz, Poles in Toledo, Toledo, 1903 is a synthesis of the social and economic situation in Polish Catholic society of this region. A valuable survey in respect to religious adherence, moral standards of immigrant society is in Gerald Shaughnessey, Has the Immigrant Kept the Faith, New York, 1925. The study contains excellent statistical tables and interpretative comments.

III. COMMEMORATIVE VOLUMES

Presenting a somewhat different type of material are the commemorative volumes useful for their surveys and statistical information. Having a rather wide sweep and containing numerous statistical tables is the Felician Sisters' Seventy-Five Years of Service in the United States, Detroit, 1949. Other commemorative volumes of the Congregation containing relevant historical data are: Villa Saint Felix; Memoir, Detroit, 1937; Diamond Jubilee of the Felician Sisters, 1855-1930, Milwaukee, 1930. Some related material is included in souvenir books of parishes in which the Congregation conducts schools, among the most notable are: Bernard M. Skulika, Historia Parafii Sw. Jacka w La Salle, Illinois, Chicago, 1900, a reliable commemorative history of the first parish school staffed by the Congregation; Album Pamiątkowe na 50-letnia Rocznice Zalozenia Parafii Sw. Wojciecha w Detroit, Michigan,
IV. PERIODICAL ARTICLES AND NEWSPAPERS

Related indirectly with this study and serving as a background source is Louis C. Brace, "The Rapid Increase of the Dangerous Classes in the United States," American Catholic Quarterly Review, Philadelphia, 1880, IV, important for its commentary on the moral and social conditions in which early immigrants were mired. A number of mid-west historical societies have published noteworthy articles dealing with particular immigrant elements, pertinent to this study is Albert H. Sanford, "Polish People of Portage County," Wisconsin State Historical Proceedings, Milwaukee, 1907, LV, 259-288. The subject of the removal of the Indians in Wisconsin is given sympathetic treatment in Edward Jacker, "Catholic Indians in Michigan and Wisconsin," American Catholic Quarterly Review, Philadelphia, 1876, I, 404-420.

Contemporary local newspapers carrying brief notices announcing the arrival of the sisters, construction of the convents, as well as news items and editorials of varying length pertaining to the subject under study are: Stevens Point Journal, 1874-1881; The Detroit Free Press, 1880-1884; The Michigan Catholic, 1880-1885; Detroit News, 1880-1884; Detroit Evening Journal, 1880-1884.
APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Sister Mary Theophania Kalinowski, C.S.S.F. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of History.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

[Signature]

Date: 3/5/7

Signature of Adviser