Iowa Site Inventory Form **State Inventory Number: HP-00144346, 96-0024975____ X☐** New ☐Supplemental

State Historic Preservation Office 9-Digit SHPO Review & Compliance (R&C) Number: ____
(January 2016) ☐ Non-extant Year: ____

***Read the Iowa Site Inventory Form Instructions carefully**, to ensure accuracy and completeness before completing this form. The instructions are available on our website.*

● Property Name

A) Historic name: **Immaculate Conception Academy**

B) Other names: **Sisters of Mercy Convent, Academy of the Immaculate Conception, The Sisters School, Old St. Benedict's School**

● Location

A) Street address: **408 John Street, Building #2 (Note: There are two buildings included as part of this address.)**
B) City or town: **Decorah** (☐ Vicinity) County: **Winneshiek**
C) Legal description:
Rural: Township Name:____ Township No.: **98** Range No.: **8** Section: **15** Qtr:____ of Qtr: ____
Urban: Subdivision: **Otis & Stevens Addn to Decorah** Block(s)**: 7** Lot(s)**: Lots 6,7,and W33' L 8, S37'L 5, S37' of W23' L4, W139' Vacated Alley & W139' L13**

● Classification

A) Property category: *Check only one*

☐X Building(s)
☐ District
☐ Site
☐ Structure
☐ Object

B) Number of resources (within property):

If eligible property, enter number of: Contributing		Noncontributing		*If non-eligible enter number of:*
1	Buildings	__	Buildings	__ Buildings
__	Sites	__	Sites	__ Sites
__	Structures	__	Structures	__ Structures
	Objects			Objects
1	**Total**	__	**Total**	__ **Total**

C) For properties listed in the National Register:
National Register status: ☐ Listed ☐ De-listed ☐ NHL ☐ NPS DOE

D) For properties within a historic district:
☐ Property contributes to a National Register or local certified historic district.
☐ Property contributes to a potential historic district, based on professional historic/architectural survey and evaluation.
☐ Property *does not* contribute to the historic district in which it is located.

Historic district name: ____ Historic district site inventory number: ____

E) Name of related project report or multiple property study, *if applicable:*
MPD title *Historical Architectural*
Data Base #
____ ____

● Function or Use *Enter categories (codes and terms) from the Iowa Site Inventory Form Instructions*

A) Historic functions
06D02 Convent **06C01 - Religious Academy or School**

B) Current functions
01B02 Apartment building

- **Description** *Enter categories (codes and terms) from the Iowa Site Inventory Form Instructions*

A) Architectural classification
05G Romanesque (Romanesque Revival), 06D Tudor Revival

B) Materials

Foundation (visible exterior): **04C- Limestone**

Walls (visible exterior): **03- Brick**, **04C- Limestone**

Roof: **08A - Composite shingles**

Other: **None**

C) Narrative description ☒ *SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS, WHICH MUST BE COMPLETED*

Two wood frame buildings at 408 John Street housed the original 1885 Immaculate Conception Academy and Convent. The convent burned in 1907 and was replaced in 1908 (fully completed in 1909) by a three story brick structure, used initially as a convent and later as additional classrooms. (Photo 1) The 1885 school is "hidden", remodeled in 1972 into an apartment building (Photo 2 and photos in Continuation Sheet 1). This Site Inventory focuses on the 1908-1909 brick convent.

Location and Neighborhood Character
The 1908-1909 three story brick building, originally the Immaculate Conception Convent and then remodeled to become additional classrooms for the Immaculate Conception Academy, is located in the fourth block of south John Street in the Otis & Stevens Addition to Decorah, facing west. It is approximately 4 blocks east of Fareway Meat & Grocery, 4 blocks west of the Winneshiek County Fairgrounds, 5 blocks east of the commercial district, and approximately 4 blocks south of Water Street.

The building is currently divided into four apartments, along with a third story apartment operated as a short-term rental, accessed from an upper level parking area that serves the entire building. The two story, wood framed building to the north is also part of the property and divided into four apartments, with a parking lot on the north side.

The building on the north was the original school, built in 1885. It was modernized and remodeled into apartments in 1972. A second floor passageway connected the 1885 wood frame school to the original wood frame convent/inn and also the 1908-1909 brick convent. (*Ossian Bee,* August 14, 1885*; Decorah Republican,* September 3, 1885; *Decorah Republican*, May 28, 1908; *Decorah Public Opinion*, October 13, 1909)

Photo 1: **Originally the 1908-1909 Immaculate Conception Convent,** west elevation. BeaconSchneider website

Photo 2: **Originally the 1885 Immaculate Conception Academy,** west elevation. BeaconSchneider website

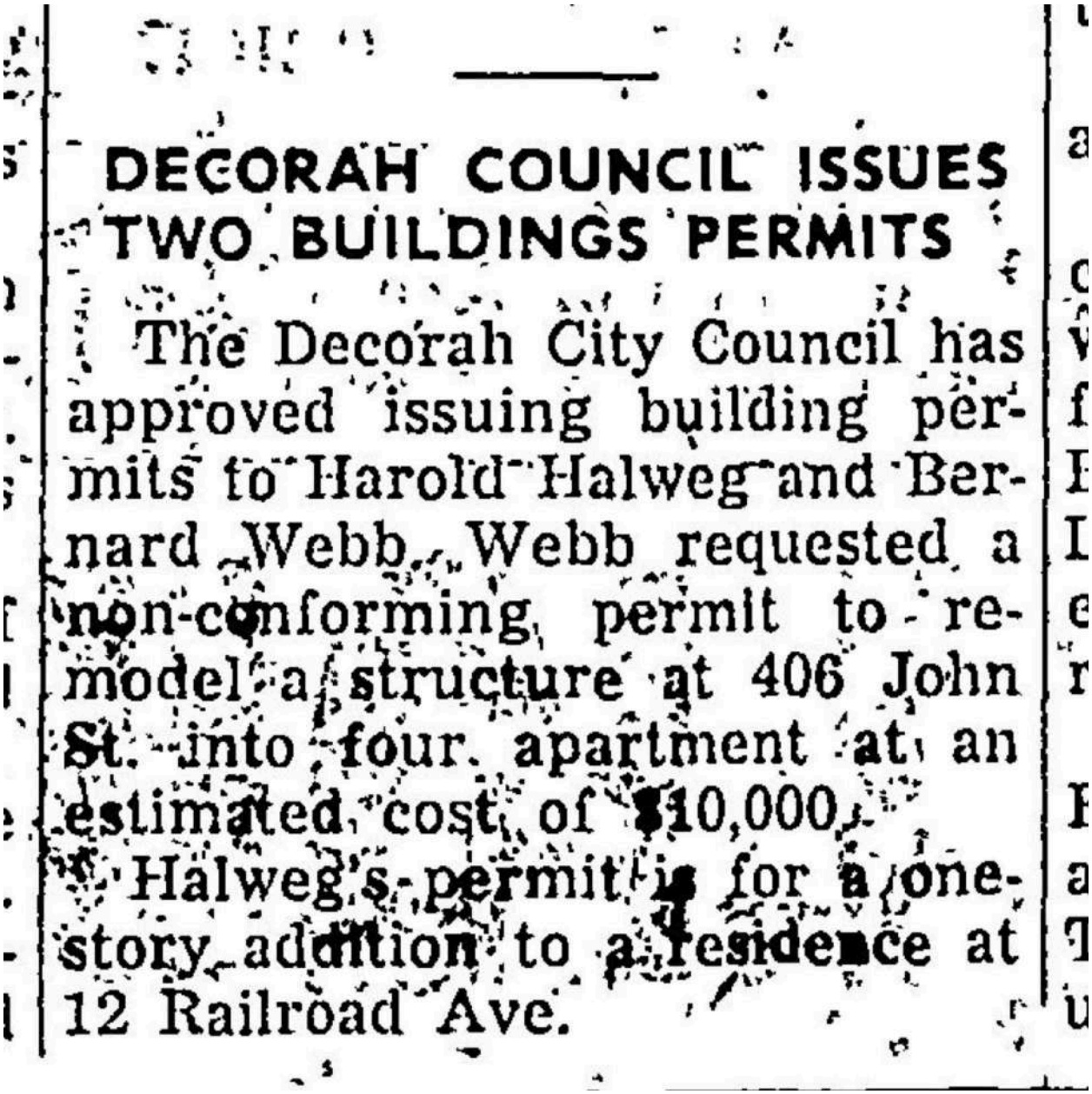
The neighborhood is a mixture of older vernacular houses, American Four Square, and a few houses built within the last 10 years.

Site
The site is located at the base of Pleasant Hill on a steep slope and measures approximately 0.65 Acres, or 28,352 square feet. There are a few mature trees on the property, with a sidewalk running the entire length of the property on the west side and a wooded area to the northeast.

According to title records in the Winneshiek County Assessor's Office, the land was originally owned by M.H. (or M.E.?) Howard, Edwin Adams, and John Finn. The property transferred to M.E. Howard and her husband, who sold it to Chas. G. Howard on February 24, 1880. Chas. G. Howard and his wife sold the property to Peter Garrahan (sic) (Father Peter Garraghan) in 1882, and in 1885, Garrahan sold the property to John Hennessy as "church property". Archbishop James J. Keene sold the property to St. Benedict's Church on March 29, 1912.

A portion of the property was sold by St. Benedict's Church to Arthur E. and Ruth E. Smith on November 12, 1948, with the majority of the property, including the 2 parochial school buildings, sold to Bernard Webb and Curtis Nordheim on November 26, 1965. In 1967, Curtis A. and Eileen W. Nordheim sold their share of the property to Bernard and Clara A. Webb. The City of Decorah vacated an alley on the property to the Webbs in 1992.

Decorah Public Opinion, February 12, 1968



DECORAH COUNCIL ISSUES TWO BUILDINGS PERMITS

The Decorah City Council has approved issuing building permits to Harold Halweg and Bernard Webb. Webb requested a non-conforming permit to remodel a structure at 406 John St. into four apartment at an estimated cost of $10,000.

Halweg's permit is for a one-story addition to a residence at 12 Railroad Ave.

The Webbs sold the property to James J. and Nancy A. Ulring on April 30, 2002, with the Ulrings selling the property to Janet M. and Jon B. Christianson on June 1, 2017. The Christiansons sold the property to Dustin D. and Kathy J. Hager on February 18, 2022, and the current owners are Dustin D. and Kathy J. Hager and Mitchel A. Luttchens, effective March 1, 2022.

1908-1909 Brick Structure

The brick building is solid 8 inch brick masonry construction with Indiana Limestone trim blocks and a random rubble native limestone foundation, retaining its original exterior structure and window openings. The 1,800 square foot building has asphalt shingles, and the hip roof with wide wood overhang includes a half timber central wall dormer on all four sides.

Decorah masonry expert Kevin Lee calls the 1908-1909 Immaculate Conception Academy "A wonderful example of diverse masonry elements. A rare find with a stable veneer." Lee questions whether the construction is solid brick. The information on the BeaconSchneider website states it is “solid brick—8 inches”.

Possible architect is **Fridolin J. Heer (1834-1910)**, a well-known Dubuque architect, who designed the following Decorah area religious buildings: Plymouth Rock Catholic Church (originally part of St. Benedict Parish) and the brick parochial school at St. John’s Catholic Church in Fort Atkinson (*Decorah Republican,* February 8, 1906).

- According to an article on the cornerstone laying ceremony, (*Decorah Republican*, May 28, 1908), Kornmeyer Brothers had the contract for supplying the brick for the building. The K Brothers Brick Company was founded in Decorah in 1900 by brothers Bernard and Charles Kornmeyer. The company existed for nearly thirty years and produced almost one million bricks per year from three separate production kilns. The kilns were located by a natural clay pit near the intersection of Highways 52 and 9. Their father, Bernard Sr., emigrated from Germany in 1861 and settled in Decorah in 1863. He had his own brick kiln on what is now Luther College property.
- Decorah contractor George Brunner built the 1908-1909 structure, with brickwork by Charles Wilson and lumber provided by Decorah lumberyard owner G.F. Baker.

1908-1909 Building Exterior Features

The building is an eclectic blend of **Romanesque Revival** and **Tudor Revival** architectural styles. **Romanesque Revival** is a style that began in the mid-19th century, inspired by 11th and 12th century Romanesque architecture. However, Romanesque Revival buildings feature more simplified round arches and windows, heavy masonry, and massive, often fortress-like structures. The style was particularly popular for churches, public buildings, and large institutional structures.

Tudor Revival is an architectural style that models the look and feel of Tudor-era buildings in England, especially from the 15th and 16th centuries. Popular in the United States from 1890 to 1940, its peak was the 1920s and 1930s. Some of the key characteristics include half-timbering, steeply-pitched roofs with multiple gables, dark trim, and patterned brickwork or stonework.

The 1908-1909 brick Immaculate Conception Academy, an architectural mixture of Romanesque Revival (heavy masonry with limestone and brick detailing) and Tudor Revival (half-timbering in wall dormers, patterned brickwork and stonework), is unique to Decorah. There are two other structures, the Hacker Nelson and Company building at 123 W. Water Street and the residential property at 601 Center Avenue, that include Romanesque Revival elements.

The first story on the west elevation has decorative arched limestone work around all windows. Wide stacked limestone on all four corners include stylized brick cross inserts. The door is centered on the front facade, with a wood frame pediment supported by large wood corbels. Decorative limestone work surrounds the front door and there is a narrow limestone waist on three sides between the first and second story. Two windows flank the door on the front facade, each with a six light above, one light below the central window and narrow four over four light windows on either side.

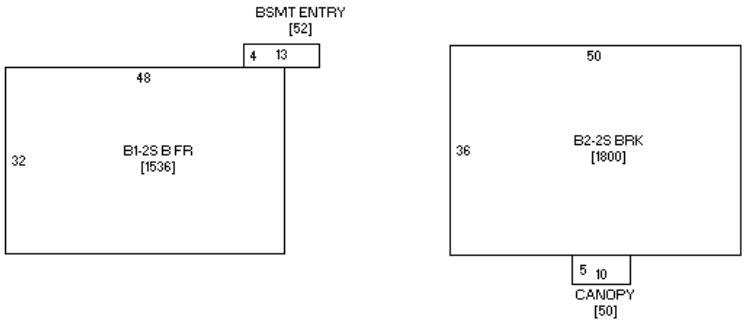
The second floor windows mirror the first floor windows, with the addition of a narrower one over one light window above the front door, flanked by narrow one over one light windows. Large limestone corner blocks, narrow limestone rectangles, and keystone, along with eight small limestone squares evenly spaced on the other three sides, surround the two larger second floor windows. The central window has

six small limestone squares spaced evenly on three sides, with a keystone and smaller corner blocks. The west third story wall dormer includes three one over one light windows.

The first story on the north elevation includes two sets of two one over one light windows, plus a smaller set of two one over one light windows. The second story windows mirror the first, except that there is a smaller one over one light window on the northeast. All the windows have the same decorative brick and limestone elements as described on the west elevation. The third story wall dormer has three one over one light windows.

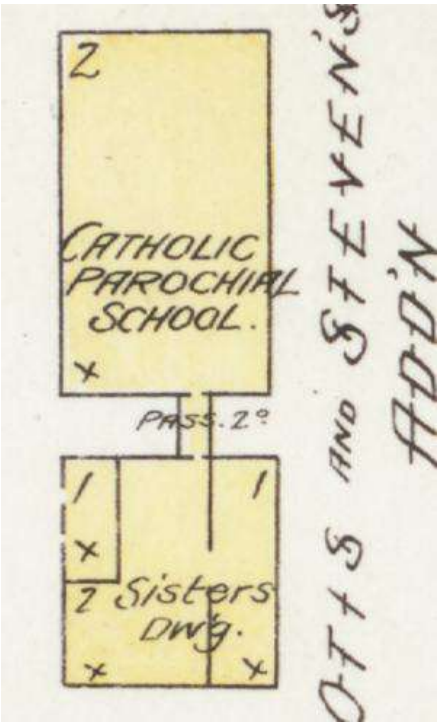
The first story on the south elevation includes three evenly spaced six over one light windows, set into the limestone foundation. The second story mirrors the first story, with the addition of a fourth one over one light window on the southeast. The south third story wall dormer includes three narrow four over four light windows. All the first and second story windows on the south have the same decorative brick and limestone elements as described on the west elevation.

The first story of the east elevation includes two one over one light windows set into the limestone foundation. The second story includes a back entry door plus two small one over one light windows to the north of the door. The third story includes an entry door set in the wall dormer plus three small lights to the upper right of the door. The entrance to the third story is accessed by a two story wood exterior staircase. The east elevation is the back of the structure, and does not include the decorative brick and limestone elements used on the south, west and north sides.



Sketch by www.camavision.com

The building on the left is the original 1885 Immaculate Conception Academy, remodeled in 1972 into four apartments (noncontributing). The building on the right is the 1908-1909 brick Immaculate Conception Academy, remodeled in 1968 into five apartments, but retaining the original exterior and much of the interior central staircase.



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Decorah, Winneshiek County, Iowa, January, 1894 (each building is wood frame, denoted by yellow color)

1908-1909 Building Interior Arrangement

There are currently four apartments on the two floors, plus a short-term rental on the third floor. Much of the original 1908-1909 woodwork has been retained, especially on the staircase (Photos 16-19).

Documented 1885 Building and 1908-1909 Building Alterations

The second story passageway between the original 1885 wooden frame school building on the north and the 1908-1909 brick convent/school no longer exists. The current outside back stairway to the third story of the 1908-1909 brick convent/school is not original, according to Mark Webb, son of owners Bernard and Clara Webb. It was added when the third floor was turned into a short term rental, according to next door neighbor and researcher Dr. Ruth Kath. Webb lived with his family in a house on Oak Street while his parents converted the building into apartments in the late 1960s. (See Continuation Sheet 1 on the alterations of the 1885 and 1908-1909 buildings into apartments.)

Site Number: ___ Address: ___ City:___ County:

- **Statement of Significance**

A) Applicable National RegisterCriteria:*Maryouropinionofeligibilityafterapplyingrelevant National R*

Criterion A: Property is associated with significant events.	☐x Yes ☐ No ☐ More research recommended
Criterion B: Property is associated with the lives of significant persons.	☐x Yes ☐ No ☐ More research recommended
Criterion C: Property has distinctive architectural characteristics.	☐x Yes ☐ No ☐ More research recommended
Criterion D: Property yields significant information in archaeology/history.	☐ Yes ☐x No ☐ More research recommended

B) Special criteria considerations: *Mark any special considerations; leave blank if none*

X☐ A: Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
☐ B: Removed from its original location.
☐ C: A birthplace or grave.
☐ D: A cemetery
☐ E: A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
☐ F: A commemorative property.
☐ G: Property less than 50 years of page or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

C) Areas of significance
1908-1909 brick Immaculate Conception Academy: 05G Romanesque (Romanesque Revival), 06D Tudor Revival

D) Period(s) of significance
Enter categories from instructions

27B - Catholic	**1885-1968**
02 - Architecture	

E) Significant dates

1908-1909, 1968	
Construction date	*Complete if Criterion B is marked above*
_____ ☐ *check if circa or estimated date*	_____
Other dates, including renovations	

F) Significant persons
The Sisters of Mercy teachers, Sister Mary Patricia Smith, Sister Mary Teresa Salmon, Sister Mary Bernardine Goulding (novice), Sister Mary Andrew Fallon, and Sister Mary Zita Murphy, who in 1885 established the first Sisters of Mercy parochial school outside of Cedar Rapids, at the direction of Mother Superior Sister Mary Agatha Mullaney.

G) Cultural affiliation

H) Architect/Builder
Complete if Criterion D is marked above
Architect: Possibly Fridolin Heers
Builder/contractor: George Brunner (builder/contractor); Charles Wilson (brick work)

I) Narrative statement of significance ☒ *SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS, WHICH MUST BE COMPLETED*
The 1908-1909 Immaculate Conception Academy brick and limestone building is an example of an early Decorah religious academic building that remains in good condition today, though its use is no longer educational but residential. For 55 years, the building was continuously connected to the Decorah Catholic community, first as a convent, housing the Sisters of Mercy who taught at the 1885 Immaculate Conception Academy, as well as housing female boarding students, and later providing additional classrooms. It replaced the original wood frame convent after a fire destroyed it in 1907. A photograph of the original convent has proven elusive.

Not only is the exterior of the 1908-1909 brick Immaculate Conception Academy well-preserved, but the interior entry woodwork, doors, and window casings, as well as decorative woodwork on the interior three-story staircase, are original and well-maintained. (Photos 4-19)
St. Benedict Church was officially established by the Diocese of Dubuque in 1857, according to the 1992 *A History of St. Benedict Parish*. Prior to that, early Catholic pioneers in the Decorah area from 1851 on were visited by missionary priests. One of these missionary priests, Father Edmund Farrell, became the parish's first pastor and helped erect a log church near Bluffton, 12 miles northwest of Decorah. The parish included Bluffton, Plymouth Rock, and territory as far west as Granger.

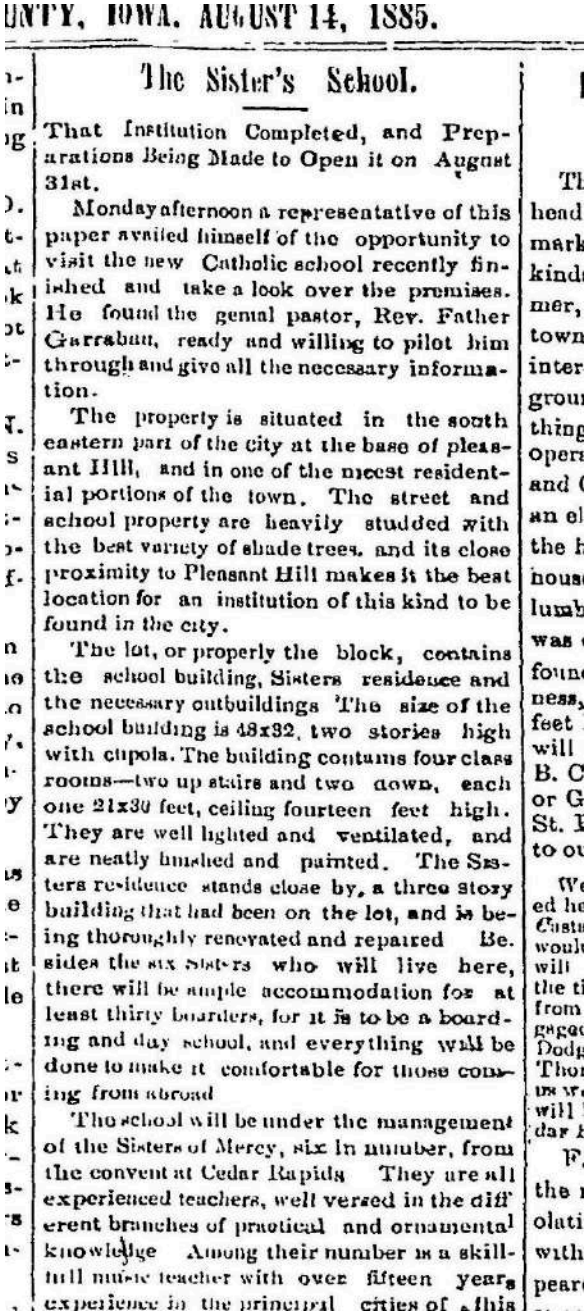
The first St. Benedict Church building in Decorah, located at 512 East Broadway, was built of stone hauled by horse-drawn wagons from McGregor, Iowa, 50 miles away, with construction supervised by Father Clement J. Lowery. He celebrated the first Mass there in October, 1864.

By the turn of the century, the congregation had grown so rapidly that a new church was begun in 1916 on the corner of Court and Main Streets, even with the uncertainty of World War I. The church was designed by renowned French American architect E.L. Masqueray, St. Paul, Minnesota. The first Mass was celebrated in the new church on June 23, 1918 by Father Martin Hogan. St. Benedict Catholic Church was last remodeled in 2018.

In September of 1885, the Sisters of Mercy opened their first school outside of Cedar Rapids, Iowa on John Street, at the invitation of Father Peter Garraghan, fifth pastor of St. Benedict Church in Decorah. Five sisters were sent to Decorah: Sister Mary Patricia Smith, local superior and music teacher; Sister Mary Teresa Salmon, sole high school instructor; Sister Mary Andrew Fallon and Sister Mary Bernadine Goulding (novice), who jointly taught the elementary grades; and Sister Mary Zita Murphy, who was in charge of the kitchen, according to the current St. Benedict's School website. However, *The Ossian Bee* article below indicates there were six Sisters, and the first day of school was August 31, 1885.

The Sisters of Mercy lived in the converted inn/convent from 1885 to 1907, along with up to 30 female boarding students. (Photo 21) The convent reportedly was haunted.

The Ossian Bee, August 14, 1885



UNTY, IOWA, AUGUST 14, 1885.

The Sister's School.

That Institution Completed, and Preparations Being Made to Open it on August 31st.

Monday afternoon a representative of this paper availed himself of the opportunity to visit the new Catholic school recently finished and take a look over the premises. He found the genial pastor, Rev. Father Garraghan, ready and willing to pilot him through and give all the necessary information.

The property is situated in the south eastern part of the city at the base of pleasant Hill, and in one of the nicest residential portions of the town. The street and school property are heavily studded with the best variety of shade trees, and its close proximity to Pleasant Hill makes it the best location for an institution of this kind to be found in the city.

The lot, or properly the block, contains the school building, Sisters residence and the necessary outbuildings The size of the school building is 48x32, two stories high with cupola. The building contains four class rooms—two up stairs and two down, each one 21x30 feet, ceiling fourteen feet high. They are well lighted and ventilated, and are neatly finished and painted. The Sisters residence stands close by, a three story building that had been on the lot, and is being thoroughly renovated and repaired Besides the six Sisters who will live here, there will be ample accommodation for at least thirty boarders, for it is to be a boarding and day school, and everything will be done to make it comfortable for those coming from abroad

The school will be under the management of the Sisters of Mercy, six in number, from the convent at Cedar Rapids They are all experienced teachers, well versed in the different branches of practical and ornamental knowledge Among their number is a skillfull music teacher with over fifteen years experience in the principal cities of this

experience in the principal cities of this state

It is also a parochial school, for the benefit of the Catholic children of this parish, and it is the teaching of that church, that whenever there is such an institution, it is obligatory on the part of communicants to send their children to that school. This Reverend Father Garrahan is determined to carry out to the letter On the whole, it is an institution that the city of Decorah may well feel proud of in addition to our already excellent educational facilities, and Father Garrahan is deserving of much credit for his enterprise in materializing such a worthy project.

Everything is being made ready, the sisters will be here and the school opened on August 31st, 1885.—Journal & Press.

Decorah Republican, September 3, 1885

Opening of the Immaculate Conception School.

The new school recently built by Rev. Father Garrahan commenced its first session Monday morning, under the direction of the Sisters of Mercy. All the English branches, from the elementary to the highest, are to be taught; and special attention will be given to book-keeping and higher mathematics. Piano, Guitar, Harmony and Voice lessons; also Painting, Drawing and Fancy Work will be taught. A boarding department for young ladies, where every home comfort will be found, is another advantage of the school. Under the mild vigilence of the Sisters, young ladies will be as safe as under the paternal roof. They will be taught to cultivate those virtues which make happy homes, and aided to acquire those accomplishments which will render them ornaments to society.

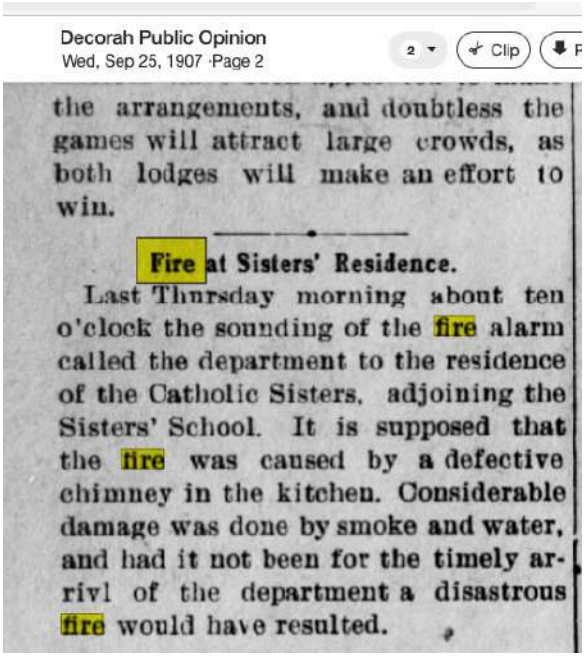
All irrespective of religious belief will be most cordially received. 4t

In September, 1907, the Sisters of Mercy's wood frame convent was heavily damaged by fire, and a new brick building was opened in 1908. It was fully completed in 1909, according to the *Decorah Public Opinion,* October 13, 1909: "The convent building was begun last year but not entirely finished until a short time ago." It also included a connecting second floor walkway between the 1885 school and convent.

Fundraisers for the new brick convent included bazaars at the Steyer Opera House, donations at weekly Catholic Ladies Sociables, and a musical instrument contest open to all, with an emphasis in newspaper articles on young ladies. Participants sold bricks for ten cents each, entitling each seller to one entry per brick sold. Prizes included a mandolin, violin, and piano from Marsh's Music House. See *Decorah Journal* May 12, 1908 article below "Better Than a Gold Brick*".*

Below are articles from the Decorah Public Opinion, Decorah Republican, and Decorah Journal, showing a timeline from the September, 1907 convent fire to the fully completed convent in 1909.

Decorah Public Opinion, September 25, 1907



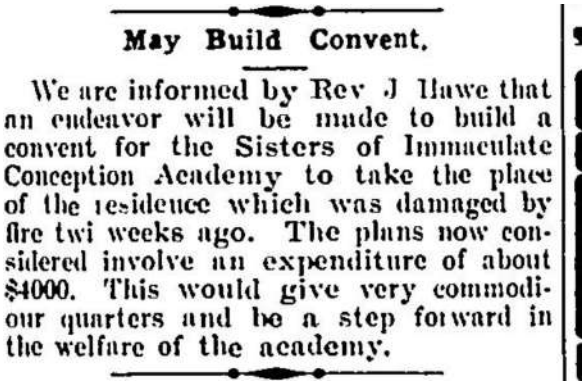
Decorah Public Opinion
Wed, Sep 25, 1907 ·Page 2

the arrangements, and doubtless the games will attract large crowds, as both lodges will make an effort to win.

Fire at Sisters' Residence.

Last Thursday morning about ten o'clock the sounding of the fire alarm called the department to the residence of the Catholic Sisters, adjoining the Sisters' School. It is supposed that the fire was caused by a defective chimney in the kitchen. Considerable damage was done by smoke and water, and had it not been for the timely arrivl of the department a disastrous fire would have resulted.

Decorah Republican, October 3, 1907



May Build Convent.

We are informed by Rev J Hawe that an endeavor will be made to build a convent for the Sisters of Immaculate Conception Academy to take the place of the residence which was damaged by fire twi weeks ago. The plans now considered involve an expenditure of about $4000. This would give very commodious quarters and be a step forward in the welfare of the academy.

Decorah Public Opinion, November 6, 1907

6, 1907, page 2 - Decorah

www.newspapers.com/image/

1 of 3 matches

Decorah Public Opinion
Wed, Nov 06, 1907 ·Page 2

day on Thursday afternoon. The children enjoyed themselves immensely, and left numerous remembrances of the occassion.

The Catholic ladies entertained quite a large company at their weekly sociable at the home of Peter McCaffrey on Thursday, the proceeds of which will be devoted to the new Sisters' residence. This week the sociable will be held at the home of H. C. Jennisch.

Decorah Public Opinion, November 27, 1907

Luren sang several selections, Capt. Amundsen acknowledging with thanks the honor conferred upon him. Lunch was served and all enjoyed themselves until a late hour.

CATHOLIC BAZAAR A SUCCESS.

Large Crowds Enjoy Hospitality of Catholic Ladies and Participate in Contests.

The bazaar given by the Catholic ladies at Steyer's opera house last week was a success both socially and financially, the ladies realizing about $850, which amount goes towards erecting a new Sisters' residence. Supper was served to a large crowd each evening commencing at five o'clock, and at several places about the hall were beautifully decorated booths from which various articles were sold. On Thursday evening a large number of articles including some valuable prizes were given away and the remaining articles which had not been sold were offered at auction. E. A. Waterbury officiated as auctioneer and filled the position in a very entertaining manner with his clever jokes which kept everybody interested from start to finish. The contest for the most popular girl between Miss Bernadine Shea of Decorah and Miss Bessie Carolan of Bluffton, for a handsome life-sized doll, resulted in a victory for the former with a total of 544 votes against 476. The bazaar closed with a dance on Thursday evening and was very largely attended, music being furnished by Helwig's orchestra. Had it not been for the inclement weather Wednesday evening the receipts would have been much larger and the committee in charge deserve special credit for their careful management and the handsome sum realized from the undertaking.

Decorah Public Opinion, January 15, 1908

Decorah Public Opinion
Wed, Jan 15, 1908 ·Page 6

will doubtless be a fast game, as both institutions have good teams.

A Handsome Calendar.

The handsomest calendar we have seen this year comes from the R. J. Becker Realty Companies at Calmar. It is one of the finest Murphy productions, a work of art, and is an ornament to any office or residence.

Contract for Sisters Convent.

Father Hawe informs us that the contract for the building of the new convent building for the Sisters will be let on Feb. 4th. Plans and specifications may be seen at the residence of Father Hawe this week.

Decorah Public Opinion, February 5, 1908

Decorah Public Opinion
Wed, Feb 05, 1908 ·Page 2

Geo. Brunner Secures $5,490 Contract.

The contract for the erection of the new Sisters' convent in Decorah was awarded yesterday to Mr. Geo. Brunner, Decorah's well known contractor. A great many bids were offered by local as well as outside firms, and it is pleasing to note that a Decorah man secured the contract, and one who will fulfill it to the letter, as Mr. Brunner's reputation as a contractor and builder is of the highest order. The building will be 36x50 feet, two stories of brick with a basement of stone, and the plans call for a very beautiful building.

The brick work on the building will also be done by a Decorah man, Mr. Chas. Wilson, and it is an assured fact that it will be done right, as Mr. Wilson is one of the best in his line.

Kornmeyer Bros. will furnish the brick and with the high grade work they do, a building that will not only be a credit to them but to the city as well will be the result.

The lumber will be furnished by G. F. Baker, and of course it will be right as to grade and price, as his lumber always is.

Decorah Journal, May 12, 1908

Better Than a Gold Brick.

A contest has been inaugurated by the people who are interested in the building of the new convent to accommodate the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception Academy. In order to increase the fund necessary for the erection of the building, a Musical Instrument Contest has been started You will be permitted to purchase bricks at 10 cents each to be donated to the building. Each brick will entitle the purchaser to a vote for an elegant $375 Crown piano, as first prize. A $25 violin is offered as second prize, and a $15 mandolin as third prize. The instruments may be seen at Marsh's Music House. The contest is open to any young lady and the one who does the most hustling gets the piano.

Decorah Republican, May 28, 1908

Corner Stone Laid.

Last Sunday afternoon at four o'clock occurred the ceremonies attendant upon the laying of the corner stone of the new convent at Immaculate Conception Academy After the stone was placed in position Rev. Father Lechtenberg of Ossian pronounced the blessing and the choir followed with a selection. Father Lechtenberg then delivered the address. Owing to heavy roads many from the country were deterred from being present For a short time work on the superstructure will proceed slowly The wet weather is delaying Kornmeyer Brothers, who have the contract for supplying the brick.

Decorah Journal, June 9, 1908

Excavation of the basement for the New Sisters convent will be commenced next week. Any one wishing to bid on the work call on Rev. Father Hawe.

Miss Priscilla Bridge has given up

Decorah Public Opinion, September 2, 1908

Sisters Convent Finished.

The new Sisters Convent building of the Immaculate Conception Academy is now completed and it is one of the handsomest buildings in the city. The building will cost about $6,000 Geo. Brunner had the contract; he finished it in his usual expert manner. The building is three stories, the basement of stone and upper part brick Chas. Wilson did the brick work and of course that means good work. It will be a fine home for the Sisters, and it will also give accommodation to thirty boarders.

Decorah Republican, November 12, 1908

Catholic Bazaar.

The Catholic bazaar which has been in progress during the past two days will close to-night with an auction sale of a number of articles and a dance. The bazaar has been very successful so far and promises to reap a nice sum to go toward payment of the balance due on the convent built during the summer.

Decorah Public Opinion, June 16, 1909

very artistic plan of decorating, executed by A M Kelly.

—Fred Carlson has been doing some fine cement work about the Catholic Convent and the home of B J. McKay on Day street

—Decorahians will be interested

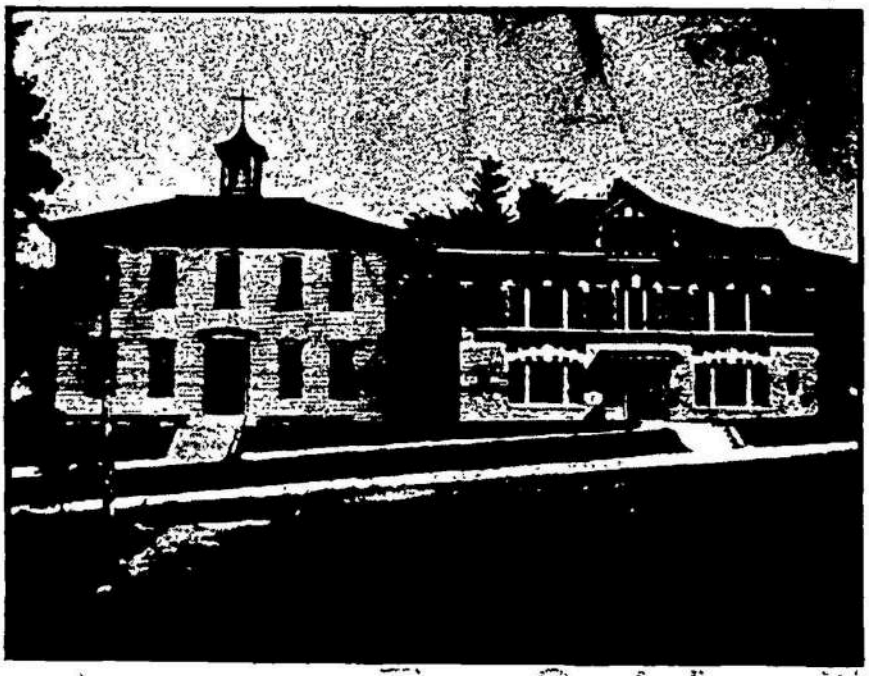
NEW CATHOLIC CONVENT.

Handsome New Convent and School Building of the Immaculate Conception Academy.

We are pleased to present to our readers this week a cut representing the new convent building and school building of the Immaculate Conception Academy of this city. The convent building was begun last year but was not entirely finished until a short time ago. This building replaces the frame structure destroyed by fire last year. The buildings are located on John St., at the foot of Pleasant Hill. They stand on an elevated point and command a magnificent and extensive view of the city and surrounding country.

The academy is conducted by the Sisters of Mercy and is under the immediate supervision of the pastor. The most approved methods are employed to aid in the development of the natural talents, and thoroughness in every branch of study is conscientiously insisted upon. Special attention is given to the social, moral and religious training of the students.

The new building, 36x50 feet, three stories high, is joined to the school by a corridor on the second floor. The entire building is absolutely modern. Its massive walls and double-decked roof makes it proof against the cold of winter and



MMACULATE CONCEPTION ACADEMY SCHOOL AND NEW CONVENT.

extreme heat of summer, while its interior arrangement is such as to secure the best hygienic results. The school building has been remodelled, and both the school and the academy are heated by steam and thoroughly ventilated.

'Not only the buildings, but also the grounds have been beautified. The improvements were made at a cost of upwards of $10,000. It was the hope to have the entire amount raised last year, but owing to the financial depression, caused by the hail storm, there still remains $4,500 to be raised, which amount they are making every effort to decrease as fast as possible. The proceeds of the coming Catholic Fair are to be used for this purpose.

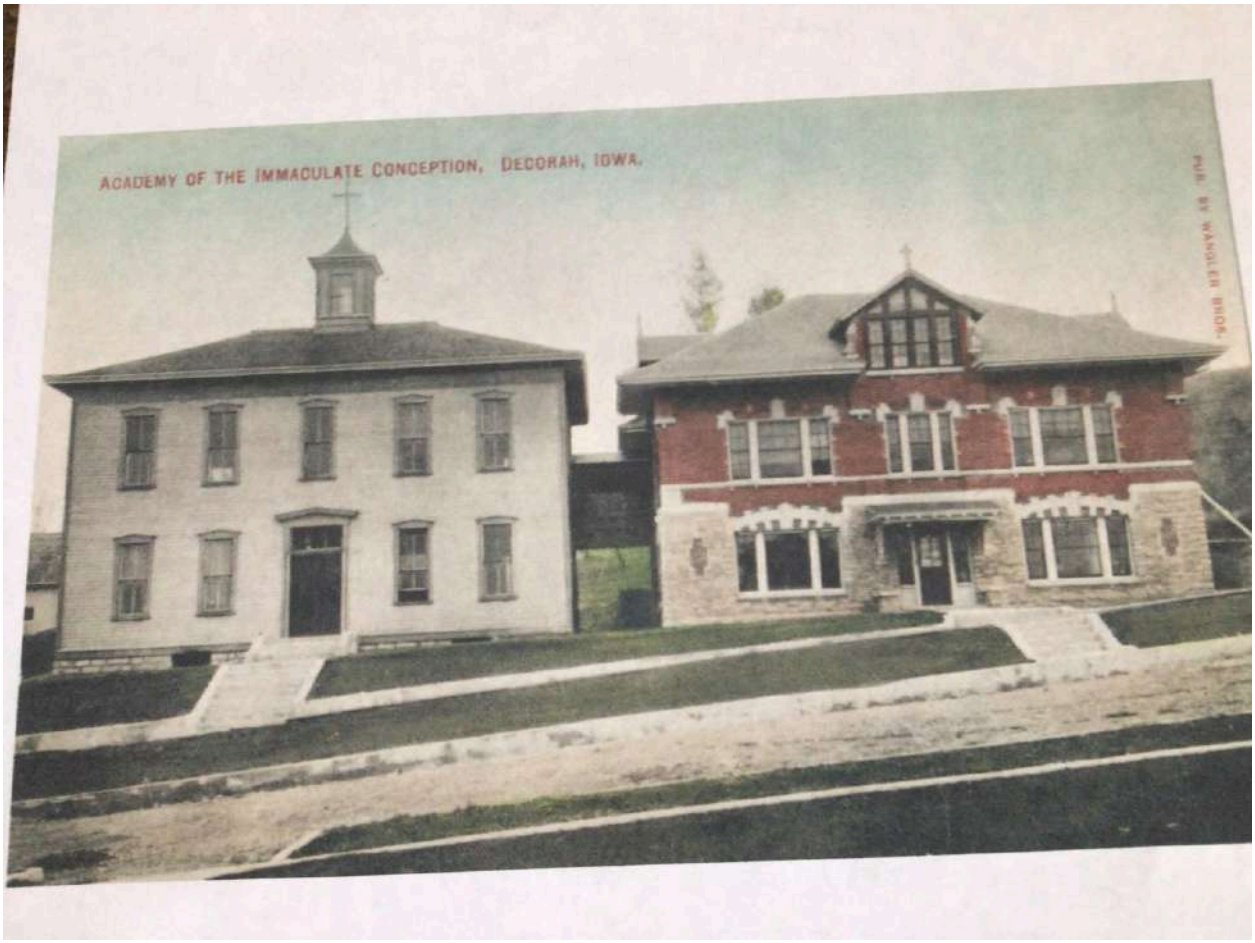


Photo 3: Postcard of Academy of the Immaculate Conception, Decorah, Iowa, published by Wangler Brothers Drug Store, circa 1930s. (Note the second story passageway between the two buildings.)

In 1885, there were 200 students enrolled in the Immaculate Conception Academy, with education provided to students in Grades 1-12. The enrollment plummeted to around 100 students by 1919. Because of low numbers of high school students, the high school was discontinued in 1919. School enrollment among younger students increased, and the Sisters eventually relocated to a new convent at 303 West Broadway in the early 1950s, near St. Benedict Catholic Church.

The 1908-1909 brick convent, which also contained a chapel and music instruction and practice rooms, was remodeled in the early 1950s for use as classrooms. Improvements were also made to the hillside playground to the east. Ten years later, the lack of adequate space was again a problem due to increased enrollment, and plans were made to build a new school.

Undeveloped property was purchased on the southern edge of Decorah, with construction of the new facility completed in 1964. The new St. Benedict School was dedicated on August 11, 1964 by the Most Reverend Archbishop James J. Byrne of Dubuque, and the first day of class was September 1, 1964 (*Decorah Public Opinion*, August 10, 1964). The school, designed by Decorah architectural firm Altfillisch, Olson, Gray, and Thompson, is located at 402 Rural Avenue and currently remains in operation. The original split-level building included eight classrooms, a multi-purpose room, chapel, library, music room, kitchen, and offices. The total cost of the original project was $268,000.

- **Bibliography** ☒ *See continuation sheets for the list research sources used in preparing this form*

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Lee, Kevin. January 21, 2012 description of The Sisters School; Circa 1953 photo of family members at 502 John Street, with 1909 brick Immaculate Conception Academy in background.

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Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Decorah, Winneshiek County, Iowa, January, 1894.

United States Library of Congress Prints and Photographs division. Panoramic View of Decorah taken from Pleasant Hill, September 28, 1908 by Brunt and Parman, Decorah drug and jewelry store, Digital ID pan.6a05165.

Webb, Mark. Photos and remodeling information of the 1885 and 1908-1909 Immaculate Conception Academy buildings by parents Bernard and Clara Webb, May 1, 2025 interview

Wikipedia, "Fridolin Heer", 31 January 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fridolin_Heer

- **Geographic Data** *Optional UTM references* ☐ *See continuation sheet for additional UTM or comments*

	Zone	Easting	Northing	NAD		Zone	Easting	Northing	NAD
1	__	_____	_____	_____	2	__	_____	_____	_____
3	__	_____	_____	_____	4	__	_____	_____	_____

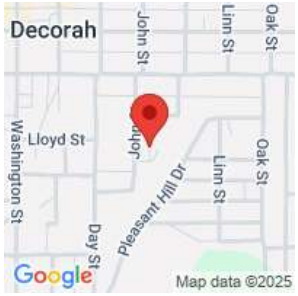
- **Form Preparation**

Name and Title: **Kathy Buzza, Decorah Historic Preservation Commission** Date: **November 24, 2025**
Organization/firm: **Decorah Historic Preservation Commission, City of Decorah** E-mail: **historicpreservation@decorahia.org**
Street address: **400 Claiborne Drive** Telephone: **563-382-3631**
City or Town: **Decorah** State: **IA** Zip code: **52101**

- **ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION** *Submit the following items with the completed form*

A) ***For all properties, attach the following,*** *as specified in the Iowa Site Inventory Form Instructions:*

1. Map of property's location within the community.



https://maps.app.goo.gl/t7YgqR2S26JYfVvd9?g_st=ic

2. Glossy color 4x6 photos labeled on back with property/building name, address, date taken, view shown, and unique photo number.

Photo 4: Immaculate Conception Academy, 408 John Street, view of west and south elevations. Photo by Jim Buzza, February 26, 2025.

Photo 5: Immaculate Conception Academy, 408 John Street, view of south and east elevations. Photo by Jim Buzza, February 26, 2025.

Photo 6: Immaculate Conception Academy, 408 John Street, view of east (back) elevation. Photo by Jim Buzza, February 26, 2025.

Photo 7: Immaculate Conception Academy, 408 John Street, view of north elevation. Photo by Jim Buzza, February 26, 2025.

Photo 8: Immaculate Conception Academy, 408 John Street, view of random rubble limestone foundation. Photo by Jim Buzza, February 26, 2025.

Photo 9: Immaculate Conception Academy, 408 John Street, west pediment with corbels and dentil work. Photo by Jim Buzza, February 26, 2025.

Photo 10: Immaculate Conception Academy, 408 John Street, decorative brick work and window arches. Photo by Jim Buzza, February 26, 2025.

Photo 11: Immaculate Conception Academy, 408 John Street, close up of second story window arch and third story wall dormer above west entrance. Photo by Jim Buzza, February 26, 2025.

Photo 12: Immaculate Conception Academy, 408 John Street, first and second story window details on west elevation. Photo by Jim Buzza, February 26, 2025.

Photo 13: Immaculate Conception Academy, 408 John Street, back stairway to third story short-term rental. Photo by Jim Buzza, February 26, 2025.

Photo 14: Immaculate Conception Academy, 408 John Street, first story decorative brick and masonry work on south elevation, with cement and masonry wall sloping from east to west. Photo by Jim Buzza, February 26, 2025.

Photo 15: Immaculate Conception Academy, 408 John Street, brick and stone decorative detail of second story windows and third story wall dormer on south elevation. Photo by Jim Buzza, February 26, 2025

Photo 16: Immaculate Conception Academy, 408 John Street, interior main floor entry with original doors and staircase. Photo by Jim Buzza, February 26, 2025.

Photo 17: Immaculate Conception Academy, 408 John Street, interior staircase detail. Photo by Jim Buzza, February 26, 2025.

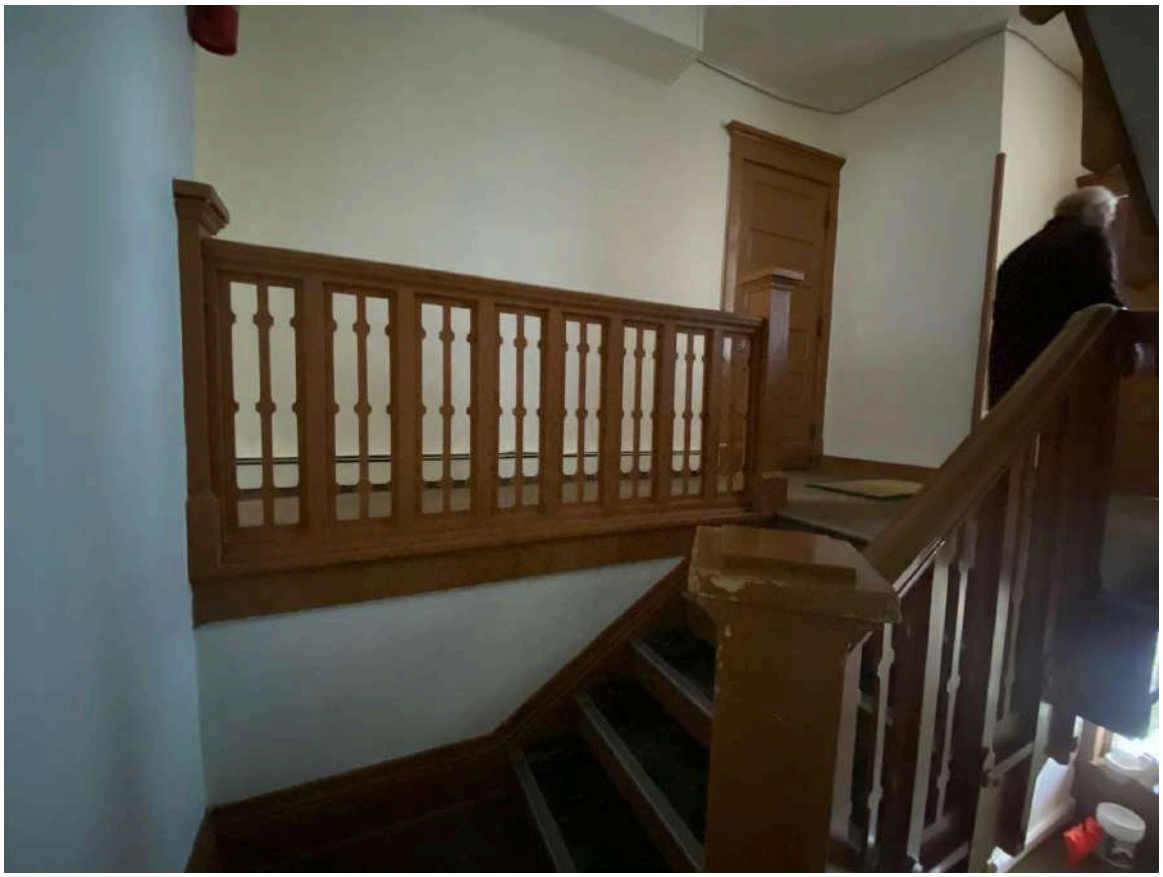


Photo 18: Immaculate Conception Academy, 408 John Street, second floor interior staircase detail. Photo by Jim Buzza, February 26, 2025.

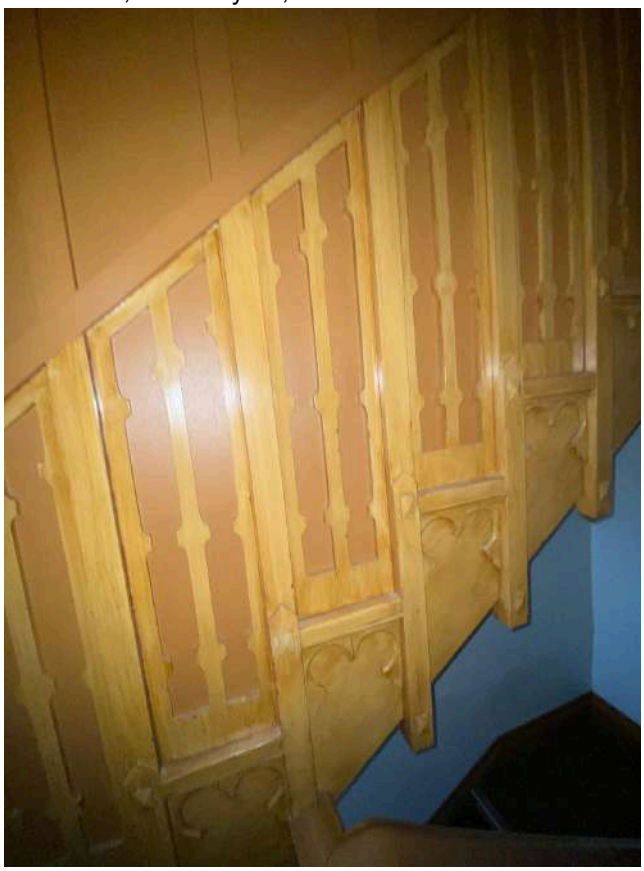


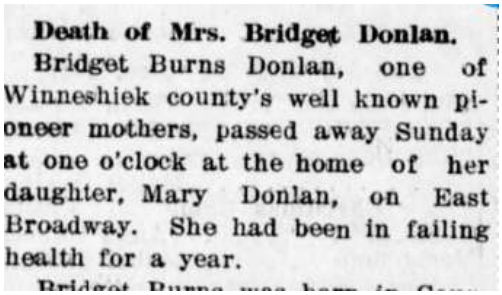
Photo 19: Immaculate Conception Academy, 408 John Street, additional interior staircase detail. Photo by Jim Buzza, February 26, 2025.

Photo 20: Decorah stonemason Kevin Lee's paternal grandfather, Knut Knutson Lee, with Kevin's sister Laura Jean Lee (left), cousin Linda Tyler (back right), and cousin Steve Tyler (right) at 502 John Street, with **1909 brick Immaculate Conception Academy** in background (note bike racks) and barely visible cupola of the **1885 Immaculate Conception Academy.** All individuals are living except Kevin's grandfather. Kevin's maternal grandfather, Loyde Christen, lived at 502 John Street. Photo by unknown photographer, circa 1953.

Photo 21: Dining room of Immaculate Conception Academy Convent/Boarding School, featuring girls at the boarding school, circa 1910, unknown photographer.**From left to right: Pearl Elizabeth McCauley (1902-1989), Mabel Agnes McCauley (1902-1952), (Catherine) Stella Carolan (1899-1993), Rose Caroline Antionette Zweibohmer (1891-1968), (Mary Jane Genevieve Jane) Jennie Drew (1896-1990), (Catherine) Ann Lydon (1898-1974), (Elizabeth) Bessie Carolan (1894-2001), (Bridget Florence M.) Bea Drew (1898-1995), Loretta Drew (1899-1993), Emma Zweibohmer (1894-1939), (Catherine) Katie Carolan (1902 -), Lucille Klopp.**

From photo album of **Bessie Carolan O'Brien**, who attended the school, standing back right in white cap. One of her duties was to serve meals to boarders. Bessie was born in Madison Township, Butler County, Iowa in 1894. Her father, Phillip Carolan, moved the family to a farm in Canoe Township outside of Decorah. Bessie lived with her maternal grandmother Bridget Burns Donlan and single aunt Mary Donlan while attending Immaculate Conception Academy (Photo 22). Bessie Carolan O'Brien is Chris Frana's great aunt; Chris, who provided the photo, is Luther College Director of Advancement Services and Systems Administrator in Decorah.

Photo 22: Mary Donlan and **Bridget Burns Donlan** at their home on East Broadway in Decorah, where granddaughter **Bessie Carolan O'Brien** lived while attending the Immaculate Conception Academy. Unknown date and photographer. Photo provided by Chris Frana (see also Photo 21).



Death of Mrs. Bridget Donlan.

Bridget Burns Donlan, one of Winneshiek county's well known pioneer mothers, passed away Sunday at one o'clock at the home of her daughter, Mary Donlan, on East Broadway. She had been in failing health for a year.

Photo 23: Notice of **Bridget Burns Donlan's** death in 1916**.** She is buried in St. Bridget Cemetery, Decorah. Unknown publication and date, provided by researcher Dr. Ruth R. Kath.

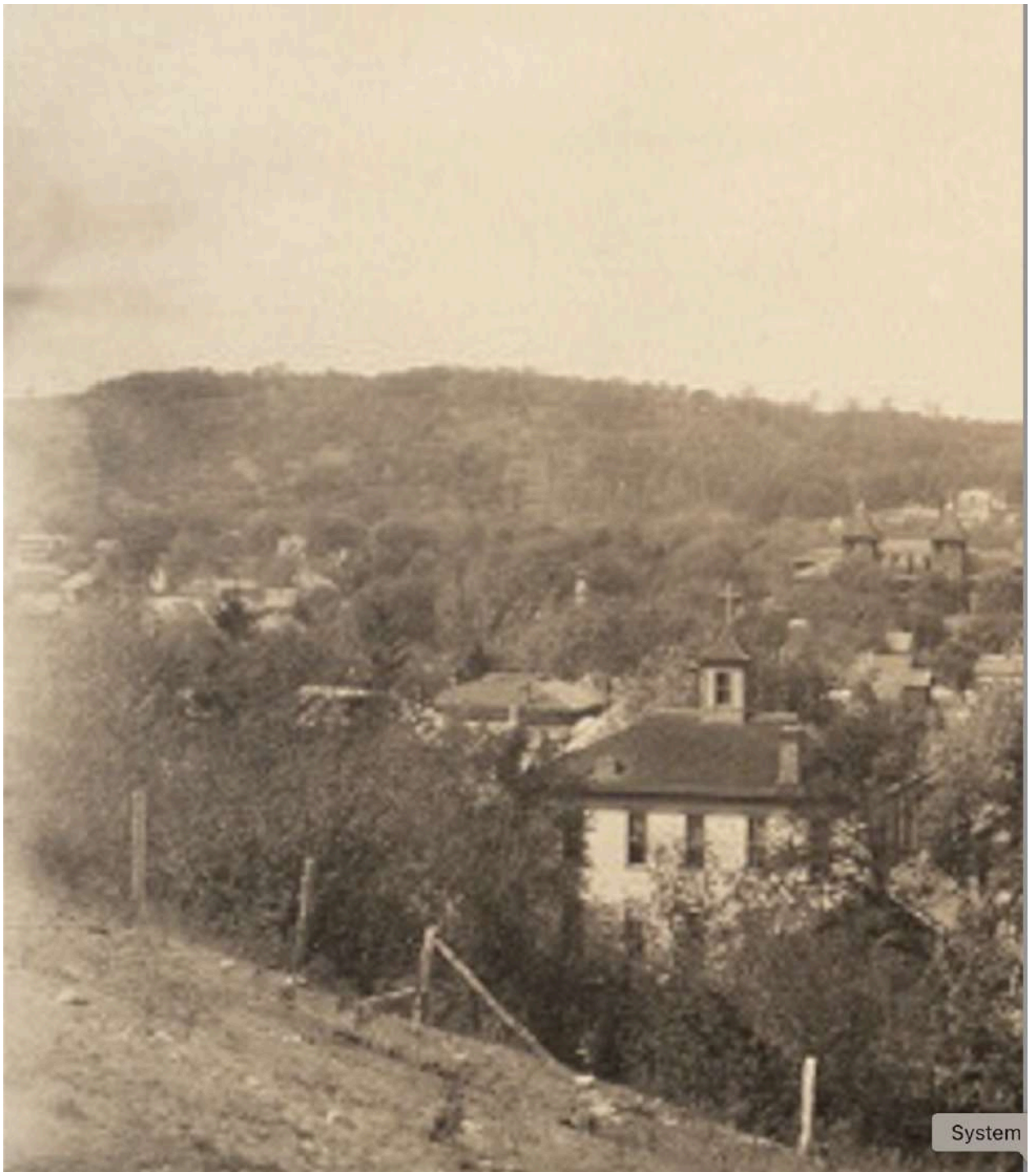


Photo 25: Portion of Panorama of Decorah taken September 28, 1908 from Pleasant Hill, showing east side of 1885 Immaculate Conception Academy in foreground and towers of 1896 Eastside School in background. Photo by Brunt and Parman, Decorah drug and jewelry store, from the United States Library of Congress Prints and Photographs division, Digital ID pan.6a05165.

3. Photo key showing each photo number on a map and/or floor plan, using arrows next to each photo number to indicate the location and directional view of each photograph. Not provided.

4. Site plan of buildings/structures on site, identifying boundaries, public roads, and building/structure footprints.

Immaculate Conception Academy, photo from BeaconSchneider website. Total GBA is 6,672 SF. The north building at the top of the property is the wood frame two story, remodeled 1885 Immaculate Conception Academy, now a four unit apartment building,1536 SF. The south building is the three story 1908-1909 brick Immaculate Conception Academy Convent/School, 1800 SF, now a four unit apartment building plus third floor short-term rental.

B) ***For State Historic Tax Credit Part 1 Applications, historic districts and farmsteads, and barns:***
See lists of special requirements and attachments in the Iowa Site Inventory Form Instructions.

State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) Use Only Below This Line

The SHPO has reviewed the Site Inventory and concurs with above survey opinion on National Register eligibility:

☐ *Yes* ☐ *No* ☐ *More research recommended*

☐ *This is a locally designated property or part of a locally designated district.*

Comments: _____

_____

SHPO authorized signature: _____ *Date:* _____

Continuation Sheet 1 - Remodeling of the 1885 and 1908-1909 Immaculate Conception buildings into apartments, based on May 1, 2025 interview with Mark Webb, son of Bernard and Clara Webb, previous owners of 408 John Street property.

According to Winneshiek County records, the two Immaculate Conception Academy buildings and property at 408 John Street were sold to Bernard Webb and Curtis Nordheim in November,1965. In 1967, Curtis A. and Eileen W. Nordheim sold their share of the property to Bernard and Clara A. Webb.

In a May 1, 2025 interview with Mark Webb, son of Bernard and Clara Webb, he stated his parents always planned to remodel the two buildings into apartments. They started with the 1908-1909 brick Immaculate Conception Academy in the late 1960s. Bernard Webb was a carpenter, construction supervisor, and self-taught engineer, who did cement work, foundations, roofing, and remodeling in the Decorah area, He built three houses on the south side of Terrace Street, at the base of the Immaculate Conception Academy property.

Webb remembers attending first and second grade at the 1908-1909 brick building, prior to the opening of the new St. Benedict School at 402 Rural Avenue in 1964. When his family started remodeling the 1909 brick building in 1966, the entire family, including Mark and his three siblings, worked on the remodeling. Eventually all five apartments were completed in early 1968. Each classroom became a one or two bedroom apartment, and a fifth, larger apartment was created on the third floor.

Webb has photos from February, 1968 of the remodeling of the 1885 wood frame school building into apartments (photos 25-32). The building was about twelve feet higher than the current twenty foot high apartment building. The roof was removed and second story lowered, reducing the original twelve foot ceilings to nine feet, with a second floor stub wall, smaller windows, and new roof added. The eight foot long second story walkway between the 1885 and 1908-1909 buildings was removed.

While remodeling the first floor, the Webbs discovered a wooden gym floor complete with markings for a basketball court. The first floor also had twelve foot high ceilings, which were lowered.

The basement was dug out on the north side, removing the coal chute and boiler, to create space for tuck under garages. The building was then jacked up and put on skids, with a cable secured around the building, to move it twelve feet to the north. The move created more space and better drainage between the 1885 and 1908-1909 buildings.

In 1969, the Webb family moved from their house on Oak Street to the 1885 building, living in the building while working on each apartment. Clara Webb finished woodwork, painted rooms, and supervised both apartment buildings. The remodeling was completed in 1972. Bernard Webb designed and built a house on the south side of Terrace Street, and the family moved there in 1975. Webb also built two other houses on the south side of Terrace Street.

Webb hired an excavator to level the steep slope to the east of the Immaculate Conception Academy buildings, creating fill for the houses he built on Terrace Street and removing the school playground and softball field.

Webb stated that his dad grew up during the Depression and never wanted to throw anything away. He would take down buildings to salvage the materials, obtaining a lot of useful building supplies. Webb thinks the roof materials from the 1885 building were reused during the building's remodeling. "My dad was a very practical person. He wanted to do things in a conservative and smart way."

Renters were often school teachers, and Webb said his parents wanted to keep rent reasonable for them. He remembers rent at one point was $75 per month.

The City of Decorah vacated an alley on the property to the Webbs in 1992.

Continuation Sheet 2 - Decorah Journal newspaper clipping received from Therese Mosorjak, archivist with the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Archives, Belmont, North Carolina.

Decorah - St. Benedicts Decorah Journal 6-29-1979

Another FIRST uncovered for Decorah

By Bill Hart

Decorah has another FIRST that has been "sort of" under cover for the past 94 years. This happened in 1885 when the Sisters of Mercy opened their first school outside of Cedar Rapids and located it in Decorah. The school, which later became St. Benedict's Parish School, was known as Immaculate Conception Academy.

The history of St. Benedict's School dates back to that memorable day in August 1885 when the first little group of Sisters were sent out from the 10-year old house of St. Joseph's Academy in Cedar Rapids to Decorah, "the picturesque town among the hills of northeastern Iowa."

Father Peter Garrahan was the pastor of St. Benedict's parish in Decorah. He came here in 1872 and served the parish until 1897. A parochial school building had been completed in early 1885 and the Cedar Rapids Sisters of Mercy had been asked to send Father Garrahan teachers to staff the school.

However, Mother Mary Agatha was hesitant to open a school until the young congregation in Decorah had more members, but she finally was assured by the zealous Father Garrahan that the parish was growing and she agreed to send Sisters in September of 1885.

Assembling the Sisters in sufficient numbers to open a Decorah House meant no little hardship to the Cedar Rapids Mother House. The Mercy Order was not large and even the withdrawal of five from the Order would leave vacancies in its ranks which would take time to refill as postulants were slow in enrollment.

The separation of the Order would be keenly felt by those who were called upon to take their first leave from the Mother House. Up until this time the little Order had all the advantages of a large, well-knit family. Theirs was a work of common interest with feelings of

The light entered the rooms from three sides and there was no disputing it, they were bright and sunny.

Back in 1908 when the new convent was built, the four rooms were used for girls' dormitories. When the new convent was built, sleeping quarters were provided for resident students on the third floor of the new building and the old dormitory was converted into school rooms.

All during the first months that the Sisters lived in the Convent, they feared it was haunted and many were the nights the good Sisters would lose sleep, until one of them finally made this observation, "This house isn't haunted, Sister, but the attic is full of rats."

Then one night after the rats had been dispersed, Sister Mary Connelly awoke and in a muffled whisper said, "There's someone in this house!"

"It's Sister Benedict downstairs," spoke up Sister Kearney.

"No, it's right here in this room. Will someone get a light?"

Just as Sister Mary de Sales reached for a match to light the kerosine lamp, her blood-curdling scream rent the air, followed by another scream near the door of the room from Sister Mary Philip. All the other Sisters added to the din with their screams and above this the voice of one Sister was heard to say, "Who are you? How dare you come in here?" Then came the order from another Sister, "Ring the bell!", followed loud and clear through the darkness by a deep sounding voice saying, "I'll shoot if you do!", and he was gone.

When calmness was restored, the Sisters closed and bolted the dormitory door, lighted a kerosine lamp and saw something lying on the floor. One Sister held up a pair of man's shoes, the man's price of freedom.

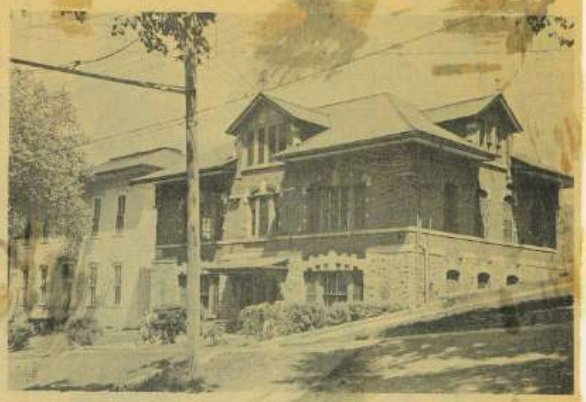
Father Ed. Lechtenberg is now the pastor of St. Benedict's with Father Russell Meyerhofer as the associate pastor. Before that time, St. Benedict's had 14 pastors over the years. They are as follows:

Fathers C.J. Lowrey, Thomas Lenhihan, Joseph Butler, James McNulty, P. Garrahan, John Hawe, Martin Hogan, M.E. Nolan, Leo O'Connell, Daniel O'Sullivan, Thomas O'Toole, J. Robert McDonald, William P. Mullen and Al White.

Over the years the Sisters assigned to the school lived in the two buildings that housed the school. The first building was of wood. The Convent and new building were built in 1908. The first school building came down to provide playground space.

During the years from 1958 to 1960, Father J. Robert McDonald initiated the plans for the new St. Benedict's school and began the fund drive in December 1961. Contributions, Memorial offerings and special gifts were brought in for the school fund.

A building committee was selected by members of the parish and voted into office. They were: Judge Joe Keefe, Chairman, A.R. McKernan, Tom Donlon, Leo



THE BUILDING on the left was the first school, Immaculate Conception, built in Decorah around 1885 or 1886. The building on the right was erected in 1908 and was the St. Benedict's school until 1963. The right building has been remodelled into apartments and still stands on upper John Street.

Bruening, Lawrence Munkel, Leonard Karnik, Frank and Harold Holland, Louis Eipert, Tom Phillips, Richard Henely, Mrs. Ken Johnson, Mrs. Allan Sampson and Mrs. Robert Houlihan.

A tract of land east of Pleasant Hill, now on Rural Avenue, was purchased and the school was erected in 1963 for a total cost of $267,930.83.

For the 1978-79 year Sister Rosemary Jewell and Sister Mary Brian Kelley were the only two Sisters in the school.

For the coming year of 1979 and 1980, the following staff will be at St. Benedict's: Sister Mary Francesca of Immaculate Conception in Cedar Rapids will be the new principal. Sister Mary Brian will be back and teach first grade.

Other staff members are as follows: Second Ginny Meyer, third Lauri Blough, fourth Marjarie Peterson, fifth Michael Meyer, specialized in the teaching of gifted children, sixth Karen Crookshank, seventh Mrs. Lois Jordahl and eighth Mrs. Susan Franzen. Fathers Lechtenberg and Meyerhofer will teach religion.

Special teachers in the school are Mrs. Mary Fallon, remedial math; Sue Franzen, physical education; John Getman, music; Gene Haugo, remedial reading; Arlene Houlihan, health, with Caroline Weis. Teachers aide: Dolly Kirchner. There are numerous volunteers.

Hot Lunch, Imogene Macal and Bunny Schrader; Secretary, Doris Malek; Aide, Pat McCormick, custodian, Carl Pankow and Librarian, Loretta Philips.

The separation of the Order would be keenly felt by those who were called upon to take their first leave from the Mother House. Up until this time the little Order had all the advantages of a large, well-knit family. Theirs was a work of common interest with feelings of loyalty seldom found outside the precincts of humble pioneering.

The first Sisters to be sent to Decorah were Sister Mary Goulding (novice), Sister Mary Teresa Salmon, Sister Zita Murphy and Sister Mary Andrew Fallon, all under the guidance of Sister Mary Patricia Smith as Superior. They set out from Cedar Rapids on that August day by train and finally reached Decorah, where they were graciously received by the good Pastor, Father Garrahan, and quite a group of Decorah people.

With this fine welcome, the good Sisters soon forget their misgivings about coming to a new area and found their new environment much to their liking. As it was said at the time, "The Sisters were buoyed up by the realization that this little field that lay before them was the particular corner in the great vineyard where God wished them to labor."

You must be informed that the Sisters of Mercy had migrated from Ireland 10 years before 1885 and this was their first venture from the Mother House mission.

The school was then located at the top of John Street and consisted of eight grades plus a high school and boarding facilities for students. The high school was suspended in 1919, but the continued growth of the grade school warranted the building of the larger St. Benedict's School in 1963.

In 1885 duties were delegated among the little band of Sisters as follows: Sister Mary Patricia Smith not only served as Superior, she taught music and was soon looked upon as one of the most proficient music teachers in and around Decorah.

Sister Mary Teresa Salmon was the solo instructor in the high school section and had that zeal for the training of minds and hearts of young people which was characteristic of her.

Sister Zita Murphy was the good,

hardship to the Cedar Rapids Mother House. The Mercy Order was not large and even the withdrawal of five from the Order would leave vacancies in its ranks which would take time to refill as postulants were slow in enrollment.

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With this fine welcome, the good Sisters soon forget their misgivings about coming to a new area and found their new environment much to their liking. As it was said at the time, "The Sisters were buoyed up by the realization that this little field that lay before them was the particular corner in the great vineyard where God wished them to labor."

You must be informed that the Sisters of Mercy had migrated from Ireland 10 years before 1885 and this was their first venture from the Mother House mission.

The school was then located at the top of John Street and consisted of eight grades plus a high school and boarding facilities for students. The high school was suspended in 1919, but the continued growth of the grade school warranted the building of the larger St. Benedict's School in 1963.

In 1885 duties were delegated among the little band of Sisters as follows: Sister Mary Patricia Smith not only served as Superior, she taught music and was soon looked upon as one of the most proficient music teachers in and around Decorah.

Sister Mary Teresa Salmon was the solo instructor in the high school section and had that zeal for the training of minds and hearts of young people which was characteristic of her.

Sister Zita Murphy was the good, holy and hard working Sister whose post was very important to the House, that of the kitchen. She kept the other Sisters with her fine meals which enabled them to carry on their strenous work.

Sister Mary Andrew Fallon and Sister Mary Bernadine Goulding were responsible for the teaching in the eight grades and were never heard to complain of being overworked in the schedule. In addition to her teaching in the grades, Sister Mary Bernadine gave lessons in oil painting. It was said at that time by a woman, and not an impressionable girl, that she would gladly pay the price of an art lesson just to get a glimpse of Sister Bernadine's beautiful face.

When the Decorah school opened, the house which was to serve as a convent was an old inn, built against the side of Pleasant Hill and facing John Street from the East. The old building was believed to be haunted.

this the voice of one Sister was heard to say, "Who are you? How dare you come in here?" Then came the order from another Sister, "Ring the bell!", followed loud and clear through the darkness by a deep sounding voice saying, "I'll shoot if you do!", and he was gone.

When calmness was restored, the Sisters closed and bolted the dormitory door, lighted a kerosine lamp and saw something lying on the floor. One Sister held up a pair of man's shoes, the man's price of freedom.

Father Ed. Lechtenberg is now the pastor of St. Benedict's with Father Russell Meyerhofer as the associate pastor. Before that time, St. Benedict's had 14 pastors over the years. They are as follows:

Fathers C.J. Lowrey, Thomas Lenihan, Joseph Butler, James McNulty, P. Garrahan, John Hawe, Martin Hogan, M.E. Nolan, Leo O'Connell, Daniel O'Sullivan, Thomas O'Toole, J. Robert McDonald, William F. Mullen and Al White.

Over the years the Sisters assigned to the school lived in the two buildings that housed the school. The first building was of wood. The Convent and new building were built in 1908. The first school building came down to provide playground space.

During the years from 1955 to 1960, Father J. Robert McDonald initiated the plans for the new St. Benedict's school and began the fund drive in December 1961. Contributions, Memorial offerings and special gifts were brought in for the school fund.

A building committee was selected by members of the parish and voted into office. They were: Judge Joe Keefe, Chairman, A.R. McKernan, Tom Donlon, Leo

A tract of land east of Pleasant Hill, now on Rural Avenue, was purchased and the school was erected in 1963 for a total cost of $287,920.83.

For the 1978-79 year Sister Rosemary Jewell and Sister Mary Brian Kelley were the only two Sisters in the school.

For the coming year of 1979 and

Brian will be back and teach first grade.

Other staff members are as follows: Second Ginny Meyer, third Lauri Blough, fourth Marjorie Peterson, fifth Michael Meyer, specialized in the teaching of gifted children, sixth Karen Crookshank, seventh Mrs. Lois Jordahl and eighth Mrs. Susan Franzen. Fathers Lechtenberg and

The article by Decorah Journal writer Bill Hart is a retrospective of the St. Benedict schools, with a focus on the Immaculate Conception Academy. Actually published June 21, 1979, it includes a number of errors. “Back in 1908 when the new convent was built, the four rooms were used for girls’ dormitories.” “When the new convent was built, sleeping quarters were provided for resident students on the third floor of the new building and the old dormitory was converted into school rooms.”
Note: The old wood frame convent that included rooms for student boarders burned in 1907, which is why the 1908-1909 brick convent was built.

”Over the years, the Sisters assigned to the school lived in the two buildings that housed the school.The first building was wood. The Convent and new building were built in 1908. The first school building came down to provide playground space.”
Note: Only one building, the brick convent, was erected. There is a question about when the convent was completed. An October 13, 1909 Decorah Public Opinion article features the opening of the new convent but states “The convent building was begun last year but not entirely finished until a short time ago.”

The January, 1894 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows only two buildings on the property, the Immaculate Conception Academy and the Sisters of Mercy Convent. The first school building (1885) was never taken down, but remodeled into apartments in 1972.

Note: The digital copy of this article in the Digital Archives of Winneshiek County Newspapers has areas that are blurred. The above copy, though yellowed, is much clearer.

Continuation Sheet 3 - Sisters of Mercy–1885 Pioneers of Immaculate Conception Academy, Decorah, Iowa

Sister Mary Patricia Smith, (1856-1940) Superior and music
Sister Mary Teresa Salmon, (1860-1928) high school grades (sole teacher)
Sister Mary Bernardine Goulding (novice),(1860-1921) elementary grades and painting
Sister Mary Andrew Fallon, (1854-1932) elementary grades
Sister Mary Zita Murphy, (1845-1921) kitchen / cook

Photo added by Bonnie

Add Photos Request Photo

Sr Mary Patricia Smith RSM

BIRTH 1856

DEATH 14 Mar 1940 (aged 83–84)

BURIAL Sacred Heart Cemetery
Davenport, Scott County, Iowa, USA *Add to Map*

PLOT Row M, Grave 16

MEMORIAL ID 15322541 · View Source

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Inscription

REQUIESCAT IN PACE

Photo added by Gail Wenhardt

Add Photos Request Photo

Sr Mary Teresa "Mary M" Salmon

BIRTH 6 Nov 1860
Ganges, Allegan County, Michigan, USA

DEATH 27 Apr 1928 (aged 67)
Manchester, Delaware County, Iowa, USA

BURIAL Mount Calvary Cemetery
Cedar Rapids, Linn County, Iowa, USA *Add to Map*

PLOT Sisters' Circle

MEMORIAL ID 70065395 · View Source

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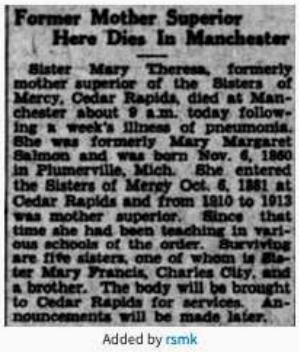

Former Mother Superior Here Dies In Manchester

Sister Mary Theresa, formerly mother superior of the Sisters of Mercy, Cedar Rapids, died at Manchester about 9 a.m. today following a week's illness of pneumonia. She was formerly Mary Margaret Salmon and was born Nov. 6, 1860 in Plumerville, Mich. She entered the Sisters of Mercy Oct. 6, 1881 at Cedar Rapids and from 1910 to 1913 was mother superior. Since that time she had been teaching in various schools of the order. Surviving are five sisters, one of whom is Sister Mary Francis, Charles City, and a brother. The body will be brought to Cedar Rapids for services. Announcements will be made later.

Added by rsmk

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Family Members

Parents

Owen Salmon
1821–1886

Ellen Salmon
1835–1915

Siblings

Sr Mary Frances "Ellen F" Salmon
1863–1930

William Owen Salmon
1872–1932

Emma Jane Salmon
1875–1960

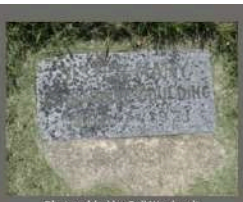

Photo added by Gail Wenhardt

Add Photos | Request Photo

Sr Mary Bernardine "Maria" Goulding

BIRTH 1860
New York, USA

DEATH 25 Mar 1921 (aged 60–61)
Cedar Rapids, Linn County, Iowa, USA

BURIAL Mount Calvary Cemetery
Cedar Rapids, Linn County, Iowa, USA Add to Map

PLOT Sisters' Circle

MEMORIAL ID 70065554 · View Source

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MEMORIAL | PHOTOS 2 | FLOWERS 0

SISTER MARY BERNARDINE IS DEAD FROM PNEUMONIA

Sister Mary Bernardine died, at 3:20 a. m. today at Mercy hospital, of pneumonia contracted some time ago, which was complicated by other illness. She was nearly sixty years old. She had been a sister since 1893, and was instrumental in starting schools at De Witt, Decorah, Manchester, Charles City, Marion and other Iowa cities. Her name originally was Goulding, and she is survived by two brothers H. A. and W. B. Goulding, and a sister Lillie in Luzerne, and a brother L. R. Goulding in Denver. Another brother, P. J., died in 1918. He was chairman of the Oklahoma state capital commission.

The funeral will take place Monday at 9 a. m. from Sacred Heart Academy.

The Rev. J. J. Toomey will conduct the services and burial will be in Mt. Calvary cemetery.

Added by rsmk

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Family Members

Parents

James Goulding
unknown–1895

Anna F. *McGlaw* Goulding
1840–1918

Siblings

Patrick J Goulding
1862–1918

Patrick J Goulding
1862–1918

sr Mary Evangelist "Anna" Goulding
1865–1907

Amelia E Goulding
1870–1952

Henry A Goulding
1874–1942

Flowers

In their memory

See more Goulding memorials in:

- Mount Calvary Cemetery
- Cedar Rapids
- Linn County
- Iowa
- USA
- Find a Grave

Flower Delivery

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Records on Ancestry

Iowa, U.S., Death Records, 1880-1968

Iowa, U.S., State Census Collection, 1836-1925

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U.S., Find a Grave® Index, 1600 | Sr Mary Andrew "Ellen" Fallon (1

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Photo added by Gail Wenhardt

Add Photos | Request Photo

sr Mary Andrew "Ellen" Fallon

BIRTH 1854
New York, USA

DEATH 17 Sep 1932 (aged 77–78)
Cedar Rapids, Linn County, Iowa, USA

BURIAL Mount Calvary Cemetery
Cedar Rapids, Linn County, Iowa, USA Add to Map

PLOT Sisters' Circle

MEMORIAL ID 70065226 · View Source

SHARE | SAVE TO | SUGGEST EDITS

MEMORIAL | PHOTOS 1 | FLOWERS 0

Beloved Sister of Mercy Dies at Cedar Rapids

September 17 brought to a close the life of a well beloved member of the Order of Mercy in Cedar Rapids. In April 1893, Sister Mary Andrew Fallon pronounced the vows which bound her to the Spouse she so faithfully served for more than fifty years. The first Sister of Mercy professed in the Cedar Rapids mother house of the Order, she was identified with its interests until her saintly soul was released.

For more than twenty years Sister Mary Andrew bore acute suffering with unfailing patience, even with real joy. Her memory will long be an incentive to higher and better living. Incapacitated for active duty, her fingers were never idle, and the beautiful altar linens and vestments she wrought contribute much to the beauty of the chapels she so dearly loved.

The Solemn Requiem was celebrated in the college chapel at Mount Mercy, 9 o'clock Monday morning. The celebrant was Rev. P. Behan, Cedar Rapids; deacon, Rev. Francis Churchill, Cedar Rapids; subdeacon, Rev. Dorrance Noonan, Marion; master of ceremonies, Rev. Francis Houlihan, S.T.D., Cedar Rapids. In attendance were Rev. A. Vojacek, Rev. D. J. Lenihan, Rev. J. Peters, Cedar Rapids; Rev. T. McElliott, Marion; Rev. Eugene Lorenz, S.T.D., Sioux City; Rev. J. M. Courtney, Victor, Iowa.

At the conclusion of the Mass, Father Courtney, a former pupil of the deceased religious, preached the sermon.

Added by rsmk

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Family Members

Parents

John Fallon
1805–1892

Margaret *McCune* Fallon
1822–1883

Siblings

James A. Fallen
1843–1914

Bridget Agnes *Fallon* Gardiner
1845–1923

Anna Maria *Fallon* Donelan
1845–1935

Margaret *Fallon* Donelan
1852–1935

Flowers

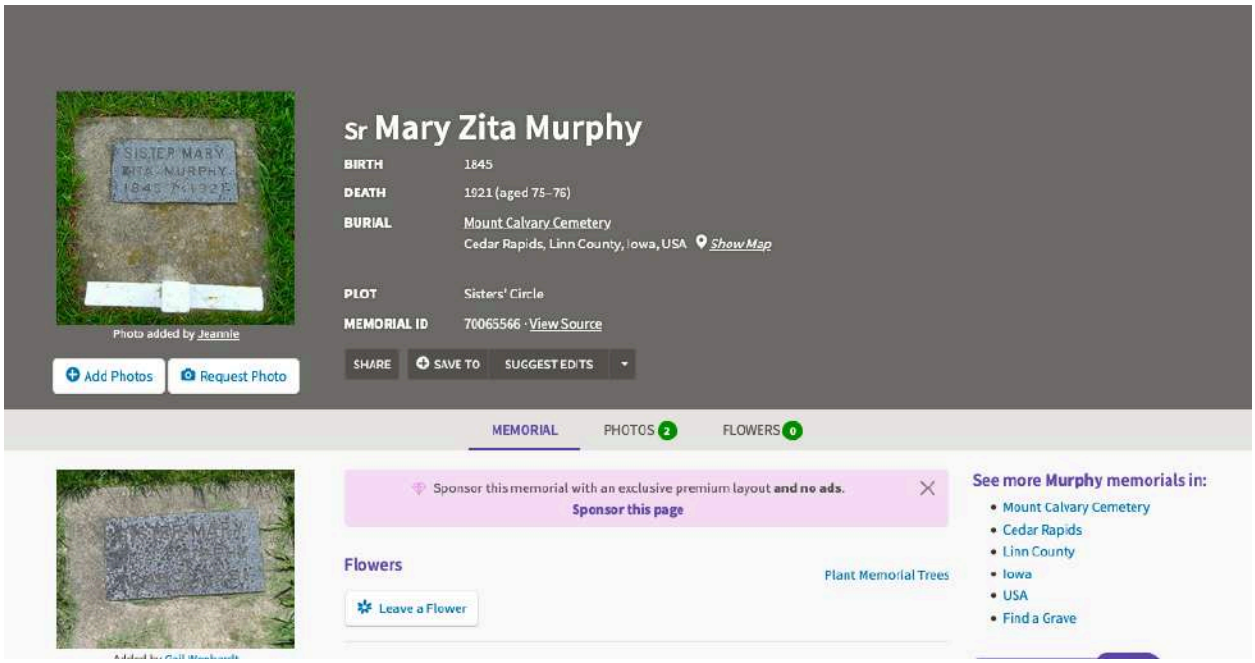
Plant Memorial Trees

Leave a Flower

We Remember by ancestry

COLLECT & SHARE MEMORIES OF MARY

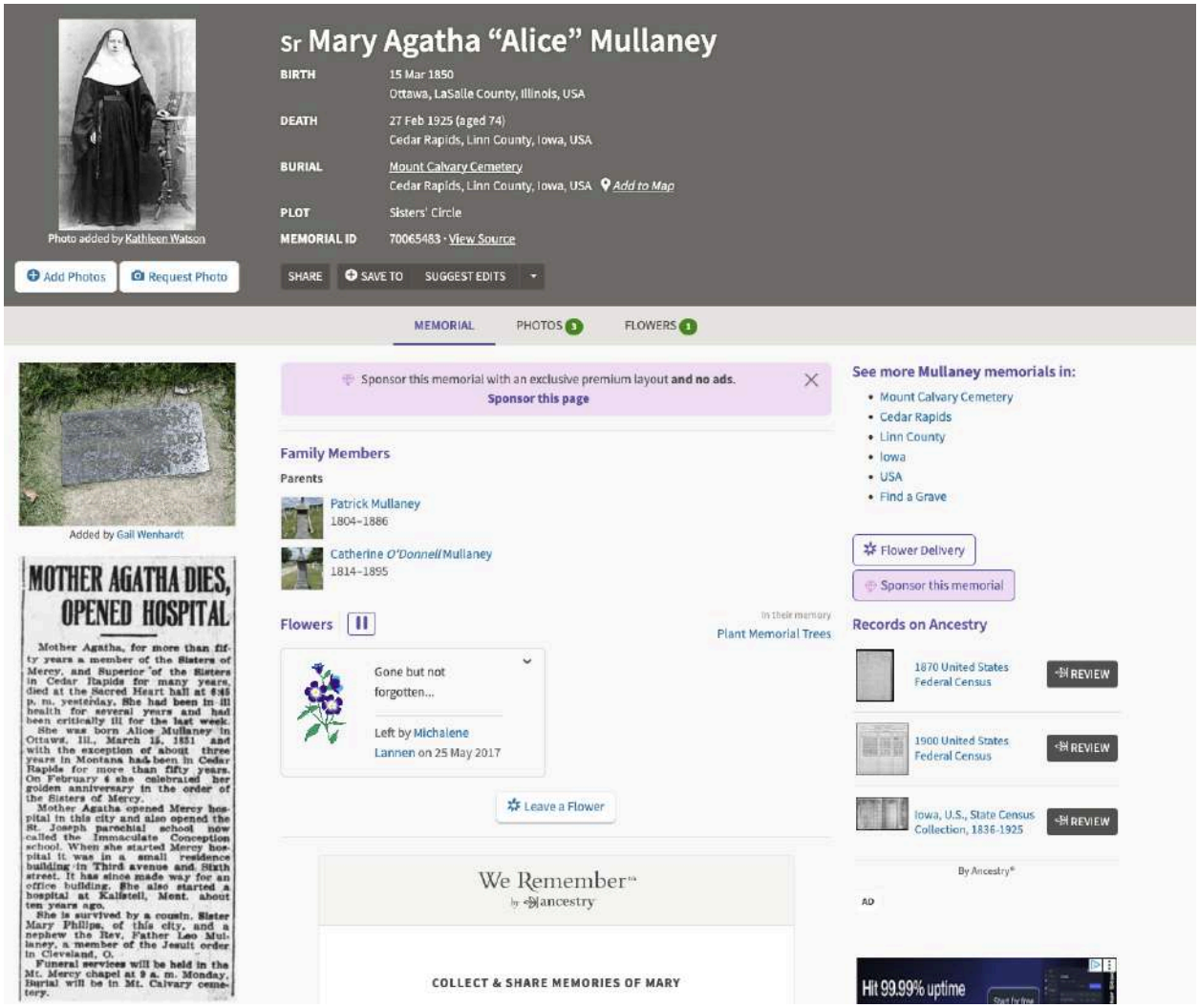
What's one thing you'll always remember



The above information, provided by researcher Dr. Ruth R. Kath, is from the Find-A-Grave website.

SISTER MARY AGATHA — The first mother superior in Cedar Rapids, Sister Mary Agatha of the Sisters of Mercy, helped start some 16 schools and three hospitals. Remembered in eastern Iowa for her 40 years of selfless work, she was especially helpful to poor children.

A clearer photo above of Sister Mary Agatha Mullaney.



Sister Mary Agatha "Alice"Mullany, Mother Superior of the Sisters of Mercy in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, commissioned the five Sisters of Mercy, whose Find-A-Grave entries are included above, to the Immaculate Conception Academy in Decorah in 1885. The article about Mother Agatha is from the *Cedar Rapids Gazette,* July 16, 1950, on the 75th anniversary of the Religious Sisters of Mercy (RSM). Information provided by researcher Dr. Ruth R. Kath.

Then one day there came to the chapel to say Mass, the Assistant, short and slight of build. He continued to come several days in succession which led the sacristan to believe that the pastor had given the small assistant charge of saying Mass for the Sisters indefinitely. So she remodelled the alb to fit the smaller man.

The very next morning after she had shortened the religious garment and otherwise reduced it in size, the pastor appeared at the convent to say the Community Mass. He went into the sacristy to vest. Everyone in the chapel knew that things were not going too smoothly within but they waited to see what would happen.

Presently he emerged looking very uncomfortable and, no doubt, feeling more so. He stood for a moment at the foot of the altar, then beckoned the sacristan toward him. Sister Mary Benedict knelt straight and tall on her prie-dieu. He beckoned again, this time more forcibly. Still no response! Again the arm was crooked in a decidedly imperative gesture. This time she moved toward the altar step; she stood before him still very straight and tall. Then, "Who cut down this alb?"

"I did, Father."

"You – had – no right – to – In – Nomine – Patris – et – Filii – et – Spiritus – Sancti."

"Amen," answered the sacristan as she returned to her place in the chapel, to continue her role of acolyte.

The following occurrence happened on a Sunday morning. The members of the St. Benedict congregation were fulfilling their Sunday obligations. The Sisters were hearing Mass from the gallery, the place usually assigned them. After the Gospel everyone sat back for the announcements. What was the surprise of that gathering when they heard a plea being made for the congregation to contribute to the support of the Sisters.

Those good nuns needed money all right but they could very well be spared the humiliating experience that was now in store for them. Finishing his plea, the well-intentioned pastor called up to the gallery, "The Mother Superior up there will now take up a collection."

Sister Mary Andrew, the Superior, looked bewildered! What was she to do! She dared not disobey, and yet, how could she face that congregation with the collection box alone! She looked helplessly from one Sister to another. Finally Sister Mary Nicholas Scallon arose, stepped forward, and together the two Sisters went forth to pass the plate.

Another event that somewhat disturbed the even tenor of life in Decorah was the fire of 1907. Quietly the children were poring over

their books one bright autumn day when suddenly the siren sounded and the usual hook-and-ladder array shot up Pleasant Hill. Strange to say the only reaction on the part of the children was a general questioning glance directed toward each other over their books.

Presently Sister Mary de Sales, the principal of the school, appeared at each door in succession and said in a quiet voice, "The difficulty seems to be here. You better dismiss the children for recess." Quietly the pupils filed out to enjoy an out-of-season recreation, only to find as they reached the playground that the firemen were fighting a blaze in the adjacent convent.

Eventually the fire was extinguished but not until the building was damaged beyond use. Not long after this the ruined convent—the old time inn, with all its mysterious nooks and corners—was moved away, and in its place was erected the beautiful convent which has since been converted into an up-to-date grade school.

The "Decorah fire" and the subsequent erecting of the new building took place during the pastorate of Father John Hawe whose assistant at the time was Father T. R. Collins.

Decorah has had many pastors in its long history, but here we shall only mention those who have been directly associated with St. Benedict's School since its opening. Father Garrahan, who was responsible for bringing the Sisters of Mercy to Decorah in 1885, remained pastor of St. Benedict Parish until 1897, when he was succeeded by Father John Hawe whose term of pastorship lasted until 1916.

In July of that year, Father Hawe was succeeded by Father Martin Hogan, who remained pastor until his death in 1933. While he was in charge of the parish, the new church was erected on the corner of Main and Court Streets. Father M. E. Nolan succeeded Father Hogan in January, 1934 and ministered to the Catholic people of Decorah until his sudden death in July, 1946.

Father Daniel O'Sullivan, the present pastor of Decorah, is most active in the interests of the school. He has purchased a home for the Sisters nearer to the Church and has remodelled the spacious convent, built in 1908, and made it into an up-to-date grade school; the old frame building which served so unpretentiously as a hall of learning for sixty-five years is no longer adequate for present needs.

In 1919, St. Benedict's High School, always small, was discontinued, but the grade school continues its spendid work in the cause of Catholic elementary education. Many men and women of fine calibre have gone forth from St. Benedict's School since its opening in 1885, and not a few have chosen to follow a little more closely their Leader