

# Buying The Field

By Sister Margaret Clarke

*September 2009 marks the hundredth anniversary of the completion of the first section of what is now Tower Hall, and the Sisters' move to their Kenwood site. In celebration of this centennial, we present a multi-part history of the construction of the Motherhouse and Academy.*

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in joy goes and sells all and buys that field." *Matthew 13:45 NRSV*

In 1892 when the group of thirty-two Benedictine Sisters arrived in Duluth to establish a new motherhouse, they chose to rent two sections of the recently completed Munger Terrace townhouses on Mesaba Avenue, which would house the Sisters and their academy. Two years later they were ready to move to their own newly constructed building on Third Avenue East and Third Street which they named Sacred Heart Institute. As the number of Community members grew and the enrollment at the Academy increased, it became obvious that a more spacious building would be needed. In 1899 it came to Mother Scholastica's attention that land in the suburbs had been advertised for sale, and on March 4, 1899, the Chapter voted "to purchase a farm of eighty acres lying about two miles distance from the city and which may in future prove a great good to the Community, as its location is very favorable." The Chapter agreed unanimously to purchase this land for a sum of \$8,000 if the title could be cleared

The land in question had been claimed in 1861 under the Homestead Law by Frederick Ryder. He eventually deeded the property to his daughter's husband, A.M. Weller, who farmed the land and in 1872 took a three-year mortgage on the property with Nehemiah Hulett in order to have funds for building and improvement of the farm. Mr. Weller, a graduate of Yale University, also opened a boarding school which he called the Yale School. A letter from a former pupil to Sister Pauline Dunphy describes her experience there: "It was called the Weller Farm when we spent a winter there, and went to school in a room which had been cut off in the great hay barn. . . . It was a happy one. The teachers—there were three of them at different times—were all good and kind, and there were almost no rules. I am sure during the school year no one was ever punished." Mr. Hulett foreclosed on the mortgage in 1877 but lived with the Wellers on the farm for a few years. After his death in 1899 there was some legal squabbling over the ownership of the property, but that was eventually resolved, and the Sisters took possession in 1900.



*Cutting wheat in late summer; view of Kenwood area to the northeast.*



*Mrs. Beyenka tends the chickens. The light-colored building was the house constructed for the farmhands in 1902. In 1940, it was moved uphill to become the College post office.*

# Buying The Field

*Continued from page 3*

This land comprised one-half of the eventual quarter-section of property to be acquired by the Sisters: the northern half of the present campus. At the time the Sisters took it over, the farm had been uncultivated for several years and was covered with wild grasses and weeds. Most of the timber in the area had been lumbered off years before but second-growth trees had sprung up along the edges of the property, and willows grew along the banks of Chester Creek, which ran through it. From the hill on the west side of the property, one could catch a view of Lake Superior.

Although the Community could not afford to begin building at once, Mother Scholastica decided that the farm could be utilized to supply milk and fresh vegetables to the missions in downtown Duluth. Dairy cows, draft horses, farm implements and a carriage horse were purchased, and relatives of the Sisters were employed as gardener and farm foreman. Sister Amata Mackett, later to be remembered as the “lumberjack nun” who sold hospital insurance tickets in the lumber camps, was appointed farm supervisor. In 1902 a dairy barn and several other smaller buildings, including a house for the farm laborers, were constructed.



*Sisters picking berries on the west hill of the property known as 'Pine Grove'*



*Mr. Beyenka, the farm manager and the father of Sister Eustacia, surveys the cabbages.*



*The Community, including five postulants, enjoying an outing at the creek.*



*The young ladies from Sacred Heart Institute on a picnic at the farm*

No one knows exactly when the Sisters began referring to the property as the “Daisy Farm,” but daisies were indeed plentiful on the property, and it became a popular spot for picnics and outings for both the students and the Sisters. It was on one of these occasions that Sister Adelaide Blais remembered what would probably become one of the most famous utterances of Mother Scholastica. “One summer day,” Sister Adelaide recalls, “when a group of Sisters was sitting in the pine grove, Mother Scholastica, who was present, voiced a prophecy which is verified today: ‘My dream is that someday there will rise upon these grounds a fine building, like the great Benedictine abbeys of Europe. It will be built of stone; within its walls, higher education will flourish; the Divine Office will be chanted, and the beautiful ceremonies of the liturgy will be carried out.’”

In the meantime, enrollment at the Academy was increasing, the number of Community members continued to grow, and by 1905 it became obvious that it was time to start to build.



*Younger students from the Institute at the farm; the original Weller barn is in the background.*

To be continued in the Advent *Pathways*. Quotations are from Chapter minutes and from Mother Agnes Somers’ unpublished history of the Community. Photos from Monastery Archives.