

Remembering Things Past: The First Schools In Duluth

By † Sister Margaret Clarke

Sister Margaret Clarke wrote this two-part article just before her death in April, 2014. The summer issue of Pathways outlines the first schools, and this article continues with three other early schools.

Part 2: Three more early schools in Duluth

St. Clement's School, 1887-1967

In 1887 Abbot Alexis Edelbrock of St. John's Abbey, impressed by the economic prosperity of Duluth, decided to create a new Benedictine monastery there. He purchased a block of land on 20th Avenue West, and sent a group of his monks to build a church, parish house, school and monastic seminary. In the fall of '87 three frame buildings were completed, including the school. A year later the brick seminary building was completed. By this time, the Abbot had decided to abandon the idea of a Duluth foundation in favor of a possible site in Shakopee. (It never materialized.) Abbot Alexis convinced Mother Scholastica to rent the brick building as a hospital—St. Mary's. Her Sisters continued to staff the school, and the hospital provided housing for a number of Sisters teaching in the West End. In 1937 a separate building was bought and remodeled as a convent. In 1939 the "new school" was constructed, a two story "modern" style edifice. The original school was eventually razed, but the new school still stands and now houses the Seafarer's Center. If one looks closely above the main door, a large medal of St. Benedict can be seen. The school merged with St. Jean's School in 1967, and officially closed as a separate entity at that time.



St. Clement's School students and faculty, 1938

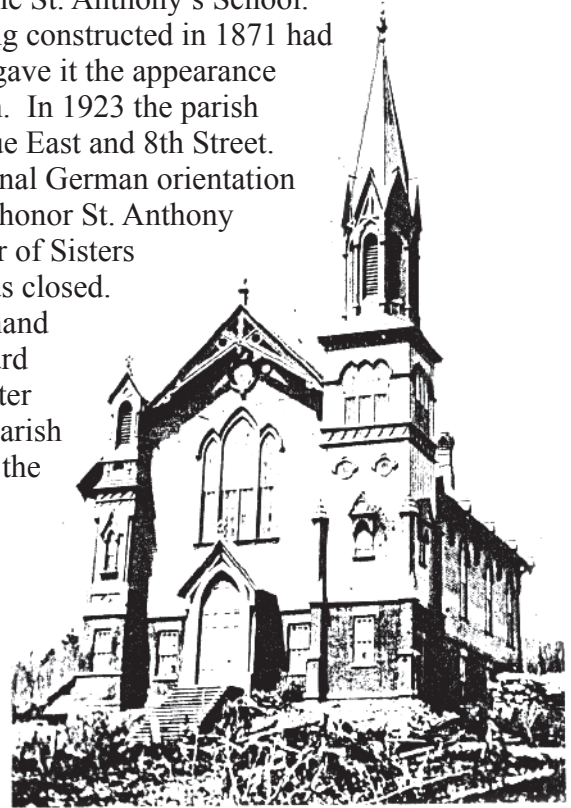


Classroom, St. Clement's School

St. Anthony's School, 1891-1970

Sister Aquina Prettner, a teacher at St. Anthony's, told this story to Mother Agnes. "My third grade pupils were learning the Salve Regina in English: '...to thee we send up our sighs. ...' At the end of the first week, one of the little girls asked me 'Sister, when are you going to measure our heads?' Puzzled, I asked 'Why should I do that?' 'Aren't you sending up our sizes so the Blessed Virgin will know how big to make our crowns?'"

In 1891 the German Catholic community felt prepared to organize a parish of its own. They appealed to new Bishop McGolrick, who readily gave permission. The Presbyterians had recently completed a new church on 3rd Avenue East and 2nd Street, leaving their original church across the street empty. The new parish purchased this building for \$20,000 and its basement became St. Anthony's School. Sister Aquina was appointed principal. The original frame building constructed in 1871 had a very fanciful arrangement of windows on its main tower which gave it the appearance of a surprised face. The Catholics did some immediate renovation. In 1923 the parish constructed a new church, school, and parish house on 10th Avenue East and 8th Street. By this time, the enrollment had grown to 250 students. The original German orientation had been forgotten; the new church was built in Italianate style to honor St. Anthony of Padua. By 1984 parish numbers had decreased, and the number of Sisters available to staff the school had diminished to zero. The parish was closed. The complex was sold to St. Mary's Medical Center for \$1.00 in hand (provided by Marty Kilroy, a long-time parish member on the Board at SMMC.) The buildings now house the Benedictine Health Center Infant Day Care, and some storage in the former church, and the parish house is available for living space for Sisters. The original site of the church and school on 2nd Street is now occupied by a residential high-rise, and the brownstone "new" Presbyterian church still stands across the street.



The original First Presbyterian Church



First Presbyterian Church renovated as St. Anthony's Church and School (school on first floor) 1891



St. Anthony de Padua new church and school, East 8th Street, (school on first floor) 1923

Continued, page 6

Remembering Things Past, Cont.



St. James School in 1914

St. James School, 1894-95; 1914-82

West Duluth got its first parish school in August, 1894. A church had been built in 1890 at 57th Avenue West, and a two-story frame building was rented to use as a school. However, like the original St. Thomas School, the building proved to be poorly constructed and drafty in the winter. Four Sisters from the now independent Benedictine community came to teach 104 pupils. The bitter winter weather brought about a near tragedy in the Sisters' residence (which was actually the school itself). On one cold night the Sisters stoked the wood stove, closed the windows tightly and retired. Sister Cyrilla reported that she, during the night, felt ill and tried to get out of bed, but fell to the floor unconscious. The Sisters sleeping in another room heard her fall and came to the

rescue, throwing open the windows. Sisters Cyrilla and Anselma had been overcome by carbon monoxide. They were, however, recovered enough to resume teaching the next day. This, among other problems caused the Sisters to give up the school after a year of operation, but Sisters continued to come to teach catechism on Sundays until a new school was built in 1913. The Sisters lived "downtown" (probably at the new St. Mary's Hospital) and took the streetcar as far as it went, then walked the rest of the way, no doubt with faces modestly covered with the voile "face veil." The school was eventually expanded to offer kindergarten through ninth grade, and a convent was built for the Sisters. Of the "early" schools, this one has remained in operation until now, although the Sisters gave up its administration in 1982. The school is celebrating its centennial this year. (See Centennial article on St. James, p. 8)

Over the century or so that the Duluth Benedictines taught in elementary, high school, and college, a total of 58 schools were administered and staffed by the Sisters. Some of these were owned by the Community itself: Sacred Heart Institute, Villa Sancta Scholastica, Stanbrook Hall, and The College of St. Scholastica. Others were located in northern Minnesota, on the Iron Range, in Crookston (these went with the Crookston community when it became independent) and in Ontario, which went with the Canadian foundation. As the century progressed, schools were accepted further from home—often as the benefice of friends and relations. The Cincinnati school was a gift from Bishop McNicholas, former Bishop of Duluth. The school in Phoenix, Arizona, was a gift from the pastor, Father Doran, who was a relative of Sister Chrysostom Doran, in hope that an independent Benedictine community would be founded there. There were also schools in Minneapolis, Chicago, Washington D.C., and most recently in Antofagasta, Chile.

As the number of Sisters diminished during the 60s and 70s, most of these schools were given up as Community ministries. At present, there are only two Community members still teaching in Chicago. Lay teachers took over, and, in many cases, the school eventually closed as parish members chose to send their children to public schools. Nevertheless, the St. Scholastica Community over the past century or more has contributed to the education of Catholic children in parish schools and has formed Christian adults who are not reluctant to attribute their formation to the Sisters who taught them.

- We invite readers to submit by mail or email any fond reminiscences of any of the elementary schools.

Much of the information in these articles comes from an unpublished history of the community by Sister Agnes Somers.