

THE LIFE AND LABORS OF
MOTHER MARY THECLA THREN, O.S.F.
OF THE
CONGREGATION
OF THE SISTERS OF THE THIRD ORDER
OF
ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI
SISTERS OF PENANCE AND CHARITY
ST. FRANCIS, WISCONSIN
1868 - 1930

By


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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School, Marquette University, in
Partial Fulfillment of the Require-
ments for the Degree of
Master of Arts.

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

April, 1942

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To all the Sisters of my community
who knew or were directed by dear
Mother Mary Thecla and to all her
living relatives and friends who
cherish her memory.

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Preface

This work was at first intended to be a complete history of the Community of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi at St. Francis, Wisconsin. On investigation of the archive material, it was found that the uncatalogued condition of documents would require so much preliminary study that it seemed better to limit the subject to the Generalship of one Superior General of the St. Francis Community. Therefore, advised by Mother Mary Bartholomew, O.S.F., present Superior General of the Community, the writer undertook to sketch the life and labors of Mother Mary Thecla Thren, O.S.F., Superior General of the Congregation from 1898 to 1925. She is dead only twelve years, yet her extraordinary personality and extensive labors can never be forgotten by the members of her community, by her living relatives, and by her friends both among the clergy and the laity in the United States and in Europe.

The manner of developing the subject is historical and required the retelling of some State and National history, because Mother Thecla was born in Wisconsin in pioneer days, became the Superior General of the first Congregation of religious women founded in that State, and guided that community at a critical period of Wisconsin's Catholic development. The study has required extensive, original research, which was sometimes fruitless, for up to the present date no biography of Mother Thecla has been written. Hence no guide posts were found to direct the student.

The writer has drawn considerably from information derived from a great number of interviews with living relatives, members of the hierarchy, members of her religious Congregation, and friends and benefactors who knew Mother Thecla. Material available in the existing diaries, annals, and archives of the St. Francis of Assisi Community has been helpful.

Acknowledgments:

To Mother Mary Bartholomew, O.S.F., Superior General, for her inspiration and continued encouragement; to members of the Congregation of The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi for valuable information; to members of the hierarchy, relatives, friends and benefactors of the community for reliable facts; to Professors of History at Marquette University, Milwaukee, especially The Reverend Raphael Hamilton, S.J., Dean of the Graduate School and Head of the Department of History, for the correction of the Manuscript and assistance in the arrangement of footnotes, and Dr. Herbert Rice and Dr. Leo Wearing for reading it, my grateful thanks are due.

S.M.E.

Profession Day of St. Francis
April 16, 1942

Chapter I

To the End of the Line--Into the Old Northwest

Thomas Thren stepped briskly to the sidewalk. His countenance beamed with joy and his footsteps echoed these unspoken words: I am no longer an alien; I am a citizen of these United States; I am an American. In his hands Mr. Thren grasped tightly the papers Mr. William Purson Deft, a clerk of a New York city, had given him. For Mr. Thren had just recorded under oath his intention of becoming a citizen of the United States and had perpetually renounced

"all allegiance and fidelity to any Foreign Prince, Potentate, State or Sovereignty whatever, and particularly to the King of Baden." ¹

1. St. Francis of Assisi Convent Archives, Folio: Early Life of Mother Thecla 1868--1898, a recopy of the original citizenship papers taken out by Thomas Thren, father of Mother Thecla. The papers are kept at the home of Herman Thren, Watertown, Wisconsin, brother of Mother Thecla.

N. B. Hereafter when reference is made in this thesis to the St. Francis Convent Archives the abbreviated form of S.F.A.C.A. will be used.

This was the 23rd of October, 1855. Sometime before this date, in the early fifties of the nineteenth century, Thomas Thren had abandoned his weaving looms in Kammersdorf, Baden, Germany, where he was born, sought the new world across the Atlantic waters, worked at various jobs in several cities of New York State, and, at Albany, married Margaret Bogner, formerly of Thereseienfeld, Bavaria, Germany.

The continual stream of immigrants that came into the Empire State from Europe caused Mr. Thren to seek an opportunity to move farther west where the vistas were wider and the spaces more open. From Commissioners who had been sent to New York, he had heard that

the state of Wisconsin was a land flowing with milk and honey, the immigrants' land of promise. This State Mr. Thren decided would be the country of his adoption; there he would take his young wife and their first-born daughter, Rose. Being a man of firm determination and fixed resolve, Mr. Thren decided to set out at once. It never entered his mind that his congenial, kind wife, who loved the frilled and lacy dresses and the fancy caps of the age, would miss the life of a New York metropolis in a strange, undeveloped frontier region. Overruling her reluctance, Thomas Thren persuaded his wife to pack only absolute necessities and to set out with other German immigrants to people the new state in the old Northwest.

The route taken may have been the one recorded by another Milwaukeean, Dr. Jeremiah Selby:

"When New Englanders and a few from Western New York joined the western stream, all lines of travel were sought which converged at the city of Buffalo, the point of departure of a line of steamers whose western terminus was Milwaukee or Chicago. Many of the Western New Yorkers arrived at Buffalo with their own private conveyance, family and all . . . Some came to Buffalo by stage, but more came by the Erie Canal." 2

2. Reuben Gold Thwaites et al., Wisconsin in Three Centuries 1634--1905, 3:40

Western settlers also traveled westward by rail. Slim evidence showed that Thomas Thren and his family left Buffalo by rail. On the route many hardships were encountered. The railway trip was undoubtedly made on a track very new, laid only ^{on} a flat iron rail. In those days railroads were still in the experimental stage. Therefore,

experiences on the journey were not dissimilar to those related by Dr. Selby, a traveler of an earlier date:

"An engine would run off the track, or the flat rail would curl up by a pressure of a wheel, and the first knowledge of the disaster would be its snake-like form dashing through the floor and perhaps pinning a passenger to his seat or perhaps the roof of the car. Then delays would ensue, and when the train arrived at the end of the line, its connection would have left on time, making it necessary for the whole train load of passengers to lie over until the next day."³

3. Ibid., 3:41

With interminable difficulties and delays such as these, the Thren family made their way to their destination, the state of Wisconsin.

Upon their arrival, in 1855 or thereabouts, the Threns found themselves in the state lying at the head of the Great Lakes, and the Mississippi basin, the state drained by rivers that contained the principal trade route between the east and west of the continent, the state rightly called the "keystone of the arch connecting Canada with the Illinois and the Louisiana." Moreover, this territory which Mr. Thren had chosen for his future home had a long record of contact with American destinies. Wisconsin had been the recruiting ground of the French nation when in search of savage allies. Under Charles de Langlade, Wisconsin Indians had been conspicuous at Braddock's defeat. Many of the same tribes had participated in Pontiac's War. The British, successors of the French in the Old Northwest, had employed Indians from this same region in the War for Independence and in the War of 1812.⁴

4. Ibid., 1:10-11

By the end of the contest for American independence, Wisconsin, by her fur trade, had also helped to build American fortunes. John J. Astor drew much wealth from this part of the country by "the trade."

But Wisconsin had been known to white men since the days of the French traders. The explorer Jean Nicolet had viewed for the first time the blue expanse of Lake Michigan, "the great inland sea along whose shores are now four of the most important of American commonwealths." Pere Menard, Jesuit priest and pioneer missionary of Lake Superior, had faced dangers, sacrificed his life, and died for the redemption of the savages in this region. Claude Allouez, perfect type of Jesuit missionary, had built Wisconsin's first missions. His accounts had revealed to the world the secrets of the barbarous people whom he had encountered. Pere Marquette, S.J., priest and explorer, had contributed much through his courage and enterprise to the annals of the Wisconsin territory. In 1673 with Jolliet, he had traveled through its length and breadth on the trip that resulted in placing the Mississippi River and the name of the future state on the map. Later, this same land had formed part of the territory mentioned in the Ordinance of 1787, a document which has been pronounced the foundation of almost everything peculiar to the American system of government. Such was the historic background of Wisconsin which was admitted to statehood in 1848. ⁵

5. Ibid., 1:65--203

Wisconsin had been admitted as a state because during this and the previous decade of the thirties, immigration to American lands had progressed with tremendous strides. During the decade of the forties, a large number of Germans had found their way and settled in the Wisconsin Territory. Soon every European nation was represented in the population of Wisconsin. This increase of population made it possible to enter Wisconsin as a separate state in the Union. Soon these new settlers had ravaged the timber lands, widened cultivation, ribboned the fields with railroads, harvested grain, built up a thriving business of stock raising and dairy farming, developed lake and inland fisheries, opened quarries and iron mines, and supplanted lumbering with manufacturing of industries in the new state.

It was while Wisconsin was working out its destiny as a young state that Thomas Thren had brought his wife and daughter there. After a stop in Milwaukee, already at that time a fair-sized city, Mr. Thren pushed farther westward into the frontier, into the wilderness. Having heard of a town, Watertown by name, a town made famous by Chief Black Hawk, in the only Indian War of any magnitude waged in Wisconsin, a war in which such famous men as Lincoln, Taylor, Harney, and Davis participated, Mr. Thren decided to settle there permanently.

The Thren family traveled on the newly constructed Milwaukee and Watertown Railroad (1855) rather than the inadequate and rather dangerous plank road. At Watertown, they arrived at the very end of the line--the heart of the Old Northwest. Like other immigrants, the Thren family lived in the village until they could rent a farm in the midst of the wild land. The spot chosen by Mr. Thren was truly God's

country, fresh and untouched. The following excerpt gives one a picture of a farm of an early Wisconsin settler:

"Unobstructed by fences, his cattle ranged in rich feed far and wide. He had bells of bronze iron on his cows, the tone of which was well known to the boys and girls of the family. They took hours to hunt the cows, wandering in a garden of flowers, in the woods or marshes all filled with life and beauty. In the half wet land, lady slippers white and yellow grew dense in the grass. The fringed gentian, painted cup or "squaw" flower two feet high, the large yellow lady slipper, the "shooting star" or dodecatheon with its glorious crown of fifteen to twenty-four pendent blossoms, roses, violets, lilies, and asters, the blazing star three or four feet high, with its long stem of gorgeous purple, bells blue and yellow in large bushy growth, phlox in three or four kinds, puccoon, mineral weed, vetches of half a dozen species; and these and hundred others grew rank everywhere.

In the thickets were plums of a dozen kinds, the exact flavor and season of each well known to the cow-hunters. Crab apples of at least two kinds grew in abundance and the larger oily kind served for the settler's mince pies and table sauce. Cattle learned to shake the plum and apple trees to get the fruit. Strawberries of marvelous flavor reddened the ground. The denser woodland had its compensations in berries, shelter, and game. Endless flocks of ducks and geese pervaded the waters and marshes. Pigeons darkened the sky in their flight. Prairie chickens and quail were in every cornfield.⁶

6. Ibid., 2:236-239

This was the country as the newly arrived German settlers had found it. In spite of the beautiful natural surroundings with its riot of color, wild life, and plenty of game, the task that faced each new settler was no easy one. Like other settlers, then, the Thren family

built a home and participated in the life of their community. After a home had been erected, roads, bridges, and fences had to be added. Land had to be cleared of timber and stones. Grain had to be planted and later harvested. Cattle and fowl had to be cared for and fed. When more prosperous days appeared, crude buildings had to be replaced by more substantial habitations. All this was part of the sturdy labor in the lives of one family of settlers.

This, too, was the work of the father, mother, son, and three daughters of the Thren household. To add to the hardships of making their livelihood was the unsuccessfulness of Thomas Thren as a farmer. Prosperity was slow in coming to the Thren family and there was the added difficulty of Mr. Thren's severity and excitableness. He would brook no opposition from his own family, from his farm-hands. Therefore a few years passed before success came their way. Just when the Thren family was better established, there came the call to follow the country's colors.

For the United States, of which Thomas Thren was now a citizen, was face to face with a great controversy. Antagonism of opinion, antagonism of action, antagonism and confusion was arising over the duties and privileges of the Federal Government and the several States in particular. One war had been fought to create, strengthen, and cement the Union, one war had been fought to gain for that Union recognition among other nations of the world, and now still another war had to be fought to decide whether discord and confusion should prevail over peace and tranquillity; whether the Constitution should be scrapped at the will of an individual State; whether selfish gain of a few should replace the general welfare of all.

Besides the activities of Federal authorities, besides the troops called to the firing lines, other master minds aided in the work and shared the responsibility of maintaining the American Commonwealth during the struggle of the '60's. Wisconsin, the new home of Mr. Thren, produced men of sagacity to meet the exigencies arising during this great conflict. Governor Randall, sixth Wisconsin governor, made the preparations for the war in his State. To a joint convention of the two Houses of the Wisconsin legislature, Governor Randall, in his annual message, read his personal views on the institution of slavery. He said:

"It is a question which rises far above all party considerations. The free people of Wisconsin will never consent to any such construction of the Federal Constitution.

We owe to ourselves, and to the other free states, and to the spirit of our institutions, to record our solemn protest against it. Wisconsin was born of Virginia when ideas of free government filled the minds of her great statesmen, and when Liberty was the theme of her Orators. The child has not forgotten the early taught lessons of the parent. There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the State of Wisconsin otherwise than in the punishment of crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted." 7

7. Reuben Gold Thwaites, Civil War Messages and Proclamations of Wisconsin War Governors, 9

After quoting from the State Statutes what officers must do in sustaining the law, Governor Randall, in the same speech, appealed for a united nation in the following words:

"Wisconsin is true to the Constitution.
The people are loyal to the Constitution

and the Union. She will give to the Federal Government all their rights, and will insist upon her own. The people will never consent to disunion of the States. They will aid in bringing back every State that forgets its loyalty. They will not consent to speculate upon a contingency in which disunion would be justifiable, but doing justice and demanding justice, they will continue to support the Constitution and the laws." 8

8. Ibid., 13

By January 10, 1861, according to the Adjutant General's report, fifty-two uniformed volunteer companies had responded to the call to arms, were equipped and organized throughout the State. So that within ten days after he had issued his Proclamation, Governor Randall had more than the allotted quota of men for his regiments. Since men of the State continued to volunteer, the Governor enrolled these as minute men, who were to be ready at any moment to answer the call. Like true patriotic sons of these United States, within one month, five thousand Wisconsin men had offered their service for war and soon distinguished themselves in active service. 9

9. Ibid., 54

Thomas Thren, although he had volunteered for service in his State, was not numbered among the regiments nor minute men. Examining officials had rejected his offer because of his flat feet. But Thomas Thren found other ways of showing his loyalty and patriotism to the epoch-making Chief Executive, Abraham Lincoln, and the Union he was trying to sustain. Without doubt, while he labored on his farm, Mr.

Thren generously shared his farm produce and cattle and even made loans of money to his newly adopted State. His sympathetic wife, too, encouraged those mothers who had sacrificed their sons that this nation might endure and with other women furnished lint and bandages for the soldiers wounded on the battlefields. Mrs. Thren surely had heard of or read the appeal of the Governor to the women of Wisconsin. His words are historic and worthy of repetition:

"It is your country and your Government as well as theirs that is now in danger, and you can give strength and courage and warm sympathies and cheering words to those who go to do battle for all that is dear to us here. Bitter as the parting may be of many, I am assured that you will bid them go bravely forward for God and liberty, to 'Return with their shields, or on them.'" 10

10. Ibid., 51

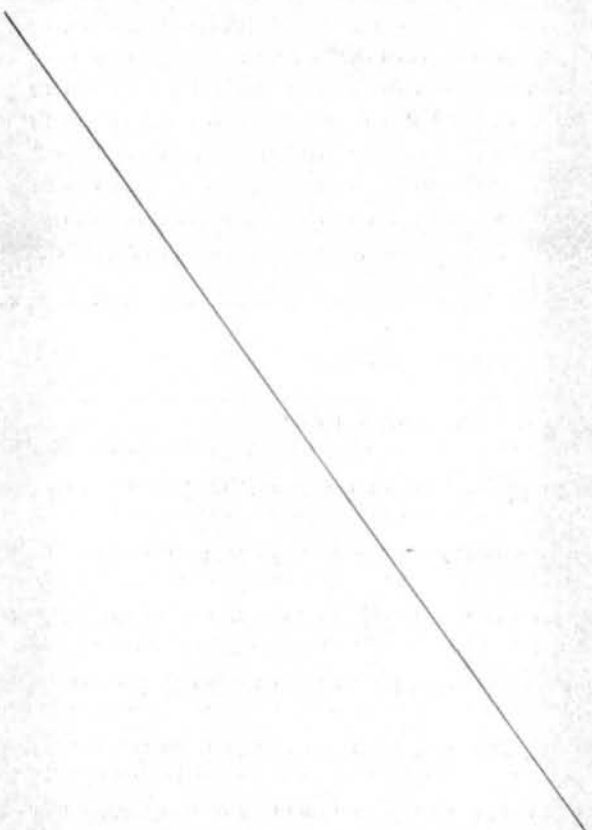
Four years passed by. The men in "blue" had triumphed over the men in "gray." The Union was preserved and reconstruction was in order. To heal the wounds caused by the Civil War, to recall some measure of prosperity on a peace-time basis, and to adjust the State finances was the task of the last War Governor Lucius Fairchild. While this Governor was paying bounties, back pay, and pensions; while the orphans of soldiers were being cared for and protected by the generous contributions of an appreciative people; while the assurance prevailed that slavery was dead forever, that the Union was one and indivisible, that the people of this United States, no matter, what color or race, would be free, in the town situated on the Rock River, the town of Watertown, another event, important to one family

there, took place.

This event occurred in the household of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Thren. A fifth and last child, a daughter was born. The three older daughters, Rose, Mary, and Margaret were happy that their home was blessed with another baby sister, but the only son, Herman, was disappointed, for he had looked forward to a brother companion to himself. Though the birth of this daughter was not generally known to the outside world, this child was destined to be a great religious woman, was destined to be a great builder of monumental works to Catholicism, was destined to mother several hundred religious daughters, and was destined to earn the praise of men and women residing throughout the Old Northwest.

Chapter II

Victoria was Her Name



In the year 1868, in the lovely month when men of every age and clime do honor to Mary Immaculate, this fifth child, daughter of the Thomas Thren family was born on the 29th of May. Not until the 26th of June, 1868, was she brought to the baptistry of St. Henry's Church at Watertown, Wisconsin, to be baptized by Reverend W. Bernard, the resident pastor. ¹

1. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Watertown History, Goldenes Jubilaeum Erinnerungs--Feier St. Heinrich's Gemeindel853-1903. This jubilee booklet compiled for the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of St. Henry's Church in Watertown, Wisconsin shows that the church had been founded fifteen years before in 1853.

When the baptismal party, consisting of Victoria Böhle, sponsor, the father and mother with other relatives of the child, returned to the farm house, the other children of the family were eager to know what name their baby sister had received. The name had intentionally been kept secret and was revealed when the child's sponsor announced, "Victoria is her name." The faces of the brother and sister fell, for the name Victoria was unknown to them. Loudly they expressed their protests. Why should such a pretty baby, thought they, have such a homely name. But both the child's mother and god-mother had had their secret reasons for naming the child Victoria--the mother, because she always admired Victoria, Queen of England; the god-mother, because it was her own name. Thus, although unknown to the general public, the Americas also had their nineteenth-century Victoria, who, if she did not give her name to the age, at least won a lasting place in the hearts of her future Franciscan daughters. Though she was known to her immediate family as Victoria, the

baptismal files record the child's complete name as Maria Victoria Catherine Thren.²

2. Baptismal Records, St. Henry's Rectory, Watertown, Wisconsin.
The author had access to these records and copied the complete name from them in the summer of 1941.
-

The place of Victoria Thren's birth, Watertown, Wisconsin, is located in the Rock River valley and had once been in the possession of the Winnebago and Pottawotamine Indians. A Frenchman is credited with the establishment of the first trading-post in that vicinity. In 1836, the Indians, who were strongly attached to the region, had unwillingly surrendered it to Timothy Johnson, a native of Middletown, Connecticut. Mr. Johnson staked out a thousand acre claim of land there. With three other companions, he constructed a cabin and lived where the Rock River was hemmed in by

"grand groves of oaks and elms and maples and basswood; the banks of the river on either side fringed with red cedars, resembling hedge fences. Within the forests abounded herds of deer." 3

3. History of Watertown, Manuscript. Passage quoted from History of Jefferson county, Wisconsin, 1879, 8. Kept in the Watertown Public Library. The author received it from Gerhard Thren, son of Herman Thren, Mother Thecla's brother, while writing the thesis.

Also in S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Watertown History, Watertown Centennial 1836-1936, pages unnumbered. This pamphlet was secured by Gerhard Thren for the author.

In the fall of 1836, the Johnson family came from Ohio and joined Mr. Johnson and the other white settlers. Within the next few years, other immigrants were attracted to the "Rapids" as the settlement was then called. By 1853, because the population numbered 4,000 persons,

Watertown was incorporated as a city. By 1855, due to the Milwaukee boom and the plank road connecting the two cities, Watertown, for a time, ranked second in population among the cities of Wisconsin. ⁴

4. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Watertown History, Watertown Centennial, pages unnumbered.

Herbert W. Rice, Early History of Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railway, 50.

From the time of the coming of the Thomas Thren family before the Civil War and for three decades after (1842-1873), Watertown developed various businesses, industries, and mills. The most important ones were elevators for grain, saw and lumber mills, tanneries, confectioneries, and cigar, melodeon, and pipe organ manufacturing. The town was also well known for its artesian wells, made famous by the quality of water which flowed from them and for its various agricultural products. ⁵

5. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Watertown History, Watertown Centennial, pages unnumbered.

Also History of Watertown, Manuscript. Passage quoted from History of Jefferson county, Wisconsin, 1879, 8.

At the time of Victoria's birth, in 1868, the Threns were included among the agricultural group of the vicinity of Watertown. In general, they lived the simple life of farm folk. All the members of the household, father, mother, children, hired-hands busied themselves girdling trees, clearing the land for more grain produce, planting staple crops, and caring for the fowl and cattle. In this rustic atmosphere grew up "Unsere Victoria" as the mother loved to call her.

These childhood years of Victoria were not unlike that of other normal children. Religiously, her home life was ideal. Meal prayers were said in common. The beautiful custom of reciting evening prayers together as a group before retiring was the daily practice. No matter how inclement the weather, both Victoria's father and mother attended all the church services at their parish, St. Henry's, at Watertown, a four and a half miles distance from their farm home and they often walked the entire way. And it was not an uncommon sight to see Victoria's mother kneeling in contemplation, meditation, or prayer before her Crucifix in the privacy of her bedroom. Naturally, with such parental example, Victoria grew to be not only a good-natured but pious girl.⁶

6. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Early Childhood of Mother Thecla, (1868-1884), Card 8, response of Mother Thecla's living brother and sister-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Herman Thren of Watertown, Wisconsin, in an interview regarding Mother Thecla's parents and her early childhood. 1941; and

Card 9, response of Mrs. W. E. Strumburg of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a childhood friend of Mother Thecla and still living in 1941. This information was given in an interview in response to a request for information about the childhood days of Mother Thecla.

Even before school age, Victoria was taught by her mother to spend her time in simple home tasks and constructive games. Beside her little household duties, Victoria delighted in helping her mother care for and watch the little chicks and goslings. The young geese, in particular were her favorites. On one occasion, she took special care of three of the young things, fondling and hugging them tenderly until called to the house by her mother. The next morning, to her great surprise, Victoria found three dead goslings. All that could

be done was to improvise three coffins. Then the lone mourner tearfully buried her favorites. ⁷

7. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Manuscript written in 1941 by Sister Bernard, a member of the St. Francis Community in response to a Questionnaire compiled by the author for the Convent News, mimeographed monthly publication edited at St. Francis Convent, St. Francis, Wisconsin. This incident was related to Sister Bernard by Mother Thecla herself.

After this misfortune, Victoria was admonished by her parents to handle the barnyard geese more carefully. For, from the time of the earliest settlers, the farmers of Watertown had specialized in the raising and the fattening of geese. This process of fattening or "noodling" as it was called consisted of a forced feeding of the birds --once every four hours, day and night. Wheat, corn, and barley were used to prepare the noodles. Through this feeding process the geese often scaled twenty-five pounds; a record of thirty-eight pounds had once been established. This "Stuffed Goose Industry" as it came to be known gave Watertown a reputation for fowl and provided a good profit for the farmers. The extent of the industry can be estimated from the fact that sometimes in a single season 50,000 pounds of Watertown geese were shipped to New York markets. ⁸

8. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Watertown History, Watertown Centennial, pages unnumbered.

School days began for Victoria Thren when she was six years old. Because the distance was too great to the city, Victoria attended the traditional "Red Schoolhouse" of the country. In this two-room school, the lay teacher kept rigid discipline and tolerated only

studious pupils. Thus Victoria established a record for industry and good manners. At that time the public schools of the city could have offered even better advantages for attainment in scholarship. For, Watertown, from the time of its settlement in the early nineteenth century, had had high regard for education and by 1856 had valued its school property at about a half a million dollars. During the same year, in 1856, Margarethe Meyer Schurz, a pupil of Frederick Froebel, had opened the first kindergarten in the United States in Watertown. In the Union School System, early organized in the city of Watertown, a report card of 1866 had the following subjects listed as required of a fourteen year old child in Class A: Reading, Spelling, Grammar, Composition, Mental Arithmetic, Written Arithmetic, Geometry, Algebra, Writing, Drawing, Geography, U. S. History, Physiology, Latin, German, and Bookkeeping. As early as 1863, Watertown also had its high school and its Northwestern College. In the former, commercial subjects were offered for the first time in Wisconsin history. ⁹

9. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Watertown History, Ibid., pages unnumbered.

Because of the distance, Victoria had not been able to attend the city schools for her early education. Therefore, she remained at the two-room country school for several years. When she left it, she transferred not to one of the public schools of the city but to the parochial school at St. Henry's.

The First Provincial Council of Baltimore, held in 1829, had decreed as follows:

"We judge it absolutely necessary that schools should be established in which

the young may be taught the principles of faith and morality while being instructed in letters." 10

10. Peter Guilday, A History of the Councils of Baltimore (1791-1884), 94.

Again, in 1866, the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore, repeated the necessity of giving youth religious instruction. The clergy and laity were admonished to establish vocational and industrial schools for the proper training of youth, so that there would be fewer idle and vicious boys and girls among our Catholic youth.¹¹

11. Ibid., 211

Before the second decree was promulgated, Watertown, Wisconsin, had its first parish school. It was erected at St. Bernard's parish in 1857. St. Henry's parish, where Victoria Thren and her parents attended services, though organized in 1853, had no school until a new church was begun and completed by Reverend Francis Spath, its pastor from 1881 to 1882. Then the old frame church served as a parish school until a better structure could be built later. This new school was completed under the direction of Reverend Henry Kampschroer. He was pastor of St. Henry's from 1882 to 1902. To it, Victoria Thren, now in her early teens, went. 12

12. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Watertown History, Fuenfzig Jaehrigen Jubilaeums Feier der St. Heinrich's Gemeinde zu Watertown, Wisconsin, 47; and Catholic Herald Citizen clipping, December 13, 1941, 5

Since Victoria had always wished for a religious teacher, she was glad to make the change in spite of the difficulties it entailed.

That she wished to be taught by a Sister may have been but a natural attraction, for her oldest sister, Rose Thren, had already joined the Franciscan community at St. Francis, Wisconsin. By nature also a religious child, Victoria had looked forward to the day of her first Holy Communion. At St. Henry's School, she was able to receive all the necessary instruction to prepare her for that happy day. 13

13. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Early Childhood of Mother Thecla, Card 8, response of the Thren relatives living in Watertown, Wisconsin, to questions put to them in an interview concerning Mother Thecla's school days. This interview took place in 1941.

In spite of the four and a half mile walk from her home to the city, Victoria rarely missed a day of school. Each school day this interesting departure ceremony took place at her home on the farm. Dressed in a school frock, which was protected by a little apron, her round face and short, brown curls enclosed in a crocheted hood, her oil-cloth school bag under her arm, Victoria kissed her mother farewell at six-thirty in the morning. Leaving the house, she would walk sedately across the path down to the bend in the road. After her mother had waved her last farewell, Victoria would hurry her pace and from then on could be seen running almost the entire distance to school. The reason for her increase in speed was her desire to be on time for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. This daily self-sacrifice merited its own reward. At the end of the month, when the cards for attendance at Holy Mass were counted, Victoria Thren often carried off the well-earned prize. 14

14. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 9, The Thren Relatives, 1941

In the old-fashioned three-room parochial school of St. Henry's, under the direction of Sister Rustica, a Notre Dame Sister, Victoria Thren completed her grade-school education. Though her teacher was a strict disciplinarian and did not, according to the testimony of one of her pupils "spare the rod and spoil the child", Victoria was seldom rebuked, never mischievous, never punished, never idle. But Sister Rustica had made whispering or mischief-making impossible by strictly segregating the boys to the right, the girls to the left of the room. Thus, during school hours the boys never spoke to the girls for fear of a rebuke from their teacher. Such was the training in the schools of the eighties of the last century. 15

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15. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 12, response of Reverend Joseph Koester, Madison, Wisconsin, living classmate of Mother Thecla. An interview with him took place in the summer of 1941.
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In spite of the strictness of Sister Rustica, this teacher understood child-psychology and developed all the faculties of her pupils. By practice of dramatic selections, she developed that talent in her pupils. Oral and choral reading, certainly a lost art in the modern day, was specially stressed. Patriotic and folk songs afforded an enjoyable pastime. But the one occasion which the children of St. Henry's school particularly enjoyed was the party on the feast of the Little Christmas King, Christ Jesus. Yearly, it was the custom of the pastor to have erected in the church a lovely Christmas tree which was trimmed with all the things that delight the heart of a child: dolls, rubber balls, horns, wooden horses, and books. At the party each child was allowed to pick his own present. It is related, that when Victoria Thren was asked what she desired, she invariably

begged for and received an interesting story book. The memory of this happy event was never forgotten by those pupils who had the joy to participate in it. 16

16. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 10, response of Mrs. W. E. Strumburg, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, childhood acquaintance of Mother Thecla. Mrs. Strumburg was interviewed in the fall of 1941.

During one of the vacations of her early teens, Victoria was told by her mother that she could go with her to pay a visit to her oldest sister Rose, now Sister Antonine of St. Francis Convent, St. Francis, Wisconsin. Expectant but uncertain of what she should see when she arrived, Victoria made the journey with her mother to St. Francis Convent. Though convent life had made its impression upon her pious soul, during this visit she showed no signs of a vocation to the religious life. When asked, while there, whether she would like to stay with her sister at the convent, Victoria quickly replied to the questioning sister, "Nein. Ich habe kleine Katzen zu versorgen. Ich muss Heim gehen." "No. I have little cats to care for. I must go home." 17

17. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 12, response of Sister Germaine, one of the members of the St. Francis Community, in an interview concerning the life of Mother Thecla, 1941.

So in these teen years, Victoria had gone back to her school work, her home tasks, and her play. The school work she had always loved and in the class room had distinguished herself by retaining a seat in the first row, a place of rank in the class. To her home tasks she had likewise been faithful. And when she was not tending to these assigned duties, Victoria had spent her time out doors. With her brother Herman, she had searched the woods for hickory nuts,

driven home the cows, or chased the geese from the flower garden. Victoria also loved horses and had an innate understanding of these animals. Her brother Herman related how one time when Victoria was in the field raking hay her horse stumbled into a bees' nest. Soon both horse and driver were swarmed with bees. With firm determination, Victoria held the reins while the horse ran wildly around the hay field, bees in hot pursuit. Wonderful to relate, the narrator said that when the horse had outrun the bees, Victoria was seated unhurt and unstung on the driver's seat. Still another incident showed Victoria's power over animals. One day, Victoria with her father was bringing a load of hay to the barn. While they were still in the field, a storm arose and lightning flashed. Taking the reins, Victoria, amid the volleys of thunder, streaks of lightning, and pouring rain, drove the horses and their load to the safety of the barn. ¹⁸

18. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 8, response of Mr. Herman Thren, brother of Mother Thecla, in an interview concerning the childhood years of his sister, Victoria. 1941; and

Manuscript of Mrs. Margaret Reinehr, sister of Mother Thecla, which contains the second incident.

Besides spending her time in play on the farm, two other pastimes delighted Victoria. Like most other girls, she loved to play house and sew dresses for her dolls. Her maternal instinct early displayed itself as is shown by a story related by Lizzie, one of her childhood playmates. While she visited Lizzie's home, the two girls decided to play house and serve a meal. The tiny cups and saucers were brought out; the table was set. Unfortunately, Lizzie had nothing to serve at table. But Victoria came to the rescue. From her apron pockets

Victoria brought forth nuts and apples and the party proved a success. But at such parties, Victoria played the role of hostess and directed the eating of the refreshments, a characteristic trait brought out more pronouncedly in later years. Reading books and papers always attracted Victoria, but since neither of the parents approved of daily papers, these had to be read surreptitiously, if at all. Whenever a secular paper was found in the Thren home, the parent who found it first took it to the stove and burned it, setting an example which might well be followed by parents of our modern day. ¹⁹

19. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Interviews, Card 35, response of Lizzie Buchac, Watertown, Wisconsin, a playmate of Mother Thecla when interviewed concerning childhood games played by the girls in their young years. 1941.

After the adolescent years, school days were over in the late eighties. After that, household duties and farm work occupied most of Victoria's time. She often went to her parish church in the city of Watertown and made prolonged visits to the Blessed Sacrament. This aroused the curiosity of her parents and they wondered what Victoria was contemplating. That was the question to which no one as yet had an answer.

Chapter III

Daughter . . . Forget thy Father's House

Victoria Thren was in her sixteenth year and at the cross-roads of life. Before deciding on what vocation she would follow, she turned for advice to her pastor and confessor, Reverend Henry Kampschroer. He had formerly been a Professor of Philosophy, an administrator of the La Crosse diocese in Wisconsin, and at the time of his pastorate a candidate for the episcopacy. ¹

1. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Early Childhood of Mother Thecla, Card 13 response of Reverend Joseph Koester, Madison, Wisconsin, in an interview made in 1941. The questions asked pertained to the influence of the parish priest on Mother Thecla's life.
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During the interview, Father Kampschroer severely tested Victoria. While speaking to her, it is reported that he said, "Victoria, you say you want to enter a convent. Do you know what that means? Do you want to leave your father, mother, brother, sisters, and your home which is so Catholic and religious? Do you not know that good girls are needed in the world as well as in the cloister?" ²

2. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Interviews, Card 37, response of Sister Emerita, member of the St. Francis Community, to the question whether Mother Thecla had related to her any incident or event of her youth. Sister Emerita was interviewed in 1941.
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With courage and without fear, Victoria told the Reverend Father that sooner or later she would be choosing some vocation and that the religious life had most attracted her. But the pastor continued the test and presented the difficulties of such a state of life. Finally, he asked, "Victoria, can you be treated like a broomstick, put in the corner or used at will? If so, you have a vocation to the religious life." ³

Without hesitation, Victoria replied that she had prayed long and earnestly and was ready to answer the Master's call:

"Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear: forget thy people and thy father's house. And the King shall greatly desire thy beauty; for He is the Lord thy God, and Him they shall adore." 4

3. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 33, response of Sister Miranda member of the St. Francis Community in an interview made in 1941. When questioned whether Mother Thecla had ever related any event of her youth to her, Sister related this story.

4. Psalm 44, 11-12.

Victoria had decided to join the humble, struggling Franciscan Community at St. Francis, Wisconsin, The Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis the Seraphic. This was the convent her oldest sister, Rose (in religion, Sister Antonine), had chosen, and therefore, the convent of Victoria's choice. After applying for admission from the Superior General there, her request was granted and the entrance day set for May 31, 1884. Before her entrance into the convent, Victoria was confirmed in her parish church, St. Henry's, on May 22, 1884, by Archbishop Michael Heiss, D.D. Her sponsor in confirmation was Mrs. Elizabeth Salick, mother of the Deceased Monsignor August Salick, formerly pastor of St. Anne's Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Fortified with this sacrament and strengthened by sanctifying grace, Victoria was better prepared to consecrate herself to the great God of virgins, and could explain with St. Theresa of Avila:

". . . I have found my King-consort. Now, I am offered the mystic nuptials with the King of Heaven, the King of eternity, the King of Kings. 'Now to the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be

honor and glory, for ever and ever. Amen."'
 (I Tim. 1, 17) 5

5. Reverend Fulgence Meyer, O.F.M., Why and How to Become a Nun, 20-21

When the 31st of May, the day of her departure arrived, Victoria Thren bade farewell to her father and mother, immediate kindred, friends, and home town and was on her way to St. Francis, Wisconsin. When she reached the convent, Mother Mary Helen Wagner, Superior General (1880-1886), invested Victoria with the black bonnet and collared dress of a candidate. After the investiture ceremony, Victoria was taken to the convent chapel. Kneeling in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, she recited the prescribed prayers for perseverance in her chosen vocation. Victoria could now exclaim with St. Paul:

"Having nothing and possessing all things,
 (2 Cor., 6, 10) I have learned, in what-
 ever state I am, to be content therewith.
 I can do all things in Him who streng-
 theneth me." 6

6. Philipp., 4, 11-13

On that May day in 1884, community life began for Victoria Thren. With the other candidates, she was under the direction and care of the Mistress of Novices, Sister Mary Gertrude*. At their entrance, the candidates not only attended the prayers and community exercises but were also tested for proficiency in religion and reading. If any deficiencies were found in the latter branches of knowledge, instruction of the candidate was required by the community rule and provided by the Mistress. 7

* Deceased

7. Rules for the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis the Seraphic, 36

The newly admitted candidate, her two companions, and the two novices of the community followed a regular order of the day. Quarter before five was the hour for the morning rising. Fifteen minutes was allowed for dressing. After that followed morning prayer and a half hour of meditation. This spiritual exercise was followed by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, then breakfast and work until nine o'clock. At that hour, the Sisters' Canonical prayer, the Office of the Blessed Virgin, was chanted in choir. Work continued until the noon repast, The afternoon program included a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, general work until three, the recitation of Vespers, Compline, and Particular Examen. After these prayers, work was done until six. The evening hours were equally strenuous. After Matins and Lauds were chanted, there was the evening meal. No recreation followed, for work continued until eight o'clock. The day ended with the recitation of the Rosary, Meditation, and Evening Prayers. Nine o'clock was the hour for retiring. Besides prayer and work, during the day silence was imposed at specified times. Thus the young postulant spent her day. ⁸

8. Ibid., 7-8

Although work and prayer, as can be seen from the above, was given precedence, the candidates also advanced in school work. Class hours were short and often interrupted. This caused some unpleasantness to

Victoria, for she dearly loved to study and read books. Regretfully, she would lay aside her books to obey the summons of her Mistress to go elsewhere. At such times, as she herself later related, homesickness crept upon her and sadness deluged her soul. In order to conquer the temptation, she went to her Eucharistic Lord and prayed for the grace of perseverance in the religious life. Her prayer did not go unanswered and the words of the great St. Bernard were again verified:

"In the religious state man lives more purely, falls more rarely, rises more quickly, conducts himself more cautiously, is bedewed with grace more frequently, is cleansed more promptly, dies more trustfully, is rewarded more abundantly." 9

9. Reverend Fulgence Meyer, op. cit., frontispiece

After a year of postulancy, Victoria was invested with the habit and veil and entered the novitiate, August 16, 1885. In the novitiate, Sister Gertrude*, Mistress of Novices, admonished her novices to pattern their lives on the principles laid down in the book True Spouse of Christ written by St. Alphonsus Liguori. She also required her charges to read and meditate on the Religious life of the Fathers of the Desert. To emulate such holy persons was difficult for the young novices. Victoria who had received in religion the name of the virgin and martyr, St. Thecla, and was now called Sister Mary Thecla prayed to her patron for aid. The name Thecla is Greek and signifies "valiant" or "one who is tried." The young novice like her patron was valiant and passed through many earthly trials and hardships in her novitiate years. But she endured all trials and became in later years, the valiant woman and God's instrument for doing great work in

in this our twentieth century. 10

* Deceased

10. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Early Childhood of Mother Thecla, Card 14, response of Sister Bernardine, an aged member of the St. Francis Community, only living religious classmate of Mother Thecla, when asked about the year of Postulancy spent with Mother Thecla, 1941.
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In her second year novitiate, Sister Thecla devoted herself more intensely to study and was also instructed in the fine arts. She soon distinguished herself in the art of music. She could play well both on the piano and organ, sing well, and showed some talent in harmony composition. Sir John Singenberger,* a distinguished composer of church music, taught Sister Thecla harmony and piano. Reverend Father Becker,* Professor of Church Music at St. Francis Seminary, St. Francis, Wisconsin, was her instructor in pipe organ and Gregorian chant. 11

* Deceased

11. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 17, response of Mother Celestine former Superior General of the St. Francis Community. Mother Celestine was intimately associated with Mother Thecla for thirty years. She recalled this information in an interview made with her concerning the extent of Mother Thecla's musical education which she received after she entered the St. Francis community. 1941.
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After two years of novitiate were over, Sister Thecla was summoned, as the rule prescribed, before her religious superiors, and questioned whether she still resolved to persevere in the religious life, whether she would bind herself by the Evangelical Counsels of obedience, chastity, and poverty. When Sister Thecla had confirmed her wish to

remain in the community, she was permitted to make a Retreat of three days. 12

12. Rules, op. cit., 37

During this Retreat, the novice read the Rules and meditated on the solemn step she was about to take. First, Sister Thecla read the passage concerning the first vow, obedience.

"In order, therefore, that this community may vanquish its spiritual foes, and speak to its Heavenly Spouse in the life to come of many happy victories, its foundation should be laid in perfect obedience." 13

13. Ibid., 17-18

On the vow of chastity, those about to make this vow, were admonished to endeavor to please their Heavenly Spouse

"by a saintly modesty in their manner, in their actions, and by an immaculate purity of body and soul. 'Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.'" 14

14. Ibid., 19

Regarding the vow of Poverty the novice learned that

"As imitators of the poverty of Jesus Christ, and as true daughters of St. Francis, the Sisters renounce all private property and personal acquisition of worldly goods." 15

15. Ibid., 20

After reading the Rules of the congregation, Sister Thecla was made fully aware of the gravity of the step she was about to take

in order to sanctify her own soul and thus become a saint and also promote the welfare of the community she had joined. On the solemn day of her oblation to the Lord, August 15, 1887, Sister Thecla could exclaim with the Psalmist:

"The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup. . . I will bless the Lord who hath given me understanding. . . I set the Lord always in my sight; for He is at my right hand that I be not moved. Therefore my heart hath been glad, and my tongue hath rejoiced; moreover my flesh shall rest in hope. . . Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt fill me with joy with Thy countenance: at Thy right hand are delights even to the end." 16

16. Psalm 15, 5 et sqq.

After Sister Thecla had pronounced her simple vows, she could devote her time and energies to the works of charity in which the community was engaged. The principal works of the community were the instruction of Catholic youth, care and instruction of the orphans, service and ministration of the sick and infirm, and the household duties at the Salesianum. Sister Thecla's obedience assigned her to teach at the Sacred Heart School at St. Francis, Wisconsin. 17

17. Rules, op. cit., 5-6; and

S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Early Childhood of Mother Thecla, Card 17, information given by Mother Celestine in an interview in 1941.

In 1887, Sacred Heart School was quite a contrast to the million dollar school buildings of the modern day. This mission school boasted of one class room. Since Sister Dominica* shared the teaching

duties there by teaching the lower grades, Sister Thecla surrendered the lone classroom to her sister companion and taught in an improvised school room in the sacristy of the Church. Neither did the Sisters have resident accommodations in the beginning of their teaching career. Thus it happened that it was their daily task to trudge to their school, no matter what the inclemency of the weather. They carried a basket dinner with them. When this task became an impossible hardship, living quarters of some sort were provided for them at the school. They slept lightly in their new home and were often disturbed in their slumbers. ¹⁸

* Deceased

18. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 17, response of Mother Celestine on the early teaching career of Mother Thecla. 1941.

On one occasion, Sister Thecla and her companion Sister Dominica had this experience. The story goes that tramps entered the school building and slept that night in the class room. Some time during the night Sister Thecla heard unusual noises. Her usual resourcefulness served her in good stead. This is what she did. Begging Sister Dominica to stand guard at the window, she went to the stairway and shouted, "John! Jake! Come quickly. Please bring a club from the wood box." After a short time had elapsed, Sister Thecla to deceive her unwanted callers, walked heavily back and forth across the corridor upstairs. She then returned to their living quarters. Her scheme had worked, for not long after, the tramps hurried away for fear of being caught by the men Sister Thecla had summoned. ¹⁹

19. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Manuscript written by an elderly member of the St. Francis Community, Sister Coletta, in response to the Questionnaire which appeared in the Convent News as mentioned above, 2-3, 1941.

As a teacher of the grammar grades, Sister Thecla took pains with her school work, believed in frequent drill, and was the first to introduce Gregorian chant in her school. She kept discipline in her classroom, but understood the heart of a child. In fact, her maternal instinct went out even to the mischievous. Stephen Mueller, Cudahy, Wisconsin, one of Mother Thecla's pupils at Sacred Heart School, recalled the following incident.

During penmanship class, Stephen was being annoyed by the boy seated in front of him. Stephen endured the torment as long as he could, but when his patience had worn thin, he dipped his pen into the bottom of the bottle of ink and flipped its contents into the face of his annoyer. In wiping off his face the lad soon had his whole face covered with ink. When Sister Thecla discovered the mischief, she ordered Stephen to wash the boy's face at the pump. Stephen obeyed the orders promptly, almost too promptly. When he reached the pump, Stephen took the unfortunate fellow by the neck, stuck his head under the spout, and pumped water over him until not a trace of the ink was left on the offender's face. The boy wet and dripping returned to the classroom. With one of her penetrating looks, Sister Thecla took care of the lad and ordered Stephen to remain after school hours. Stephen knew what that meant. He would receive Three Tatsen, that is, lashes over the hand with a rawhide together with

the added penalty of writing "I was naughty" a hundred times. During the afternoon of that notable day, Stephen worked most diligently and recited lessons perfectly. After school, he wrote his penance and marched up to Sister Thecla's desk. Instead of the expected punishment, Sister Thecla gave Stephen an earnest admonition which he never forgot. Because of his teacher's kindness Stephen ever after loved and respected her. 20

20. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Manuscript sent to the author by Stephen Mueller, Cudahy, Wisconsin. Mr. Mueller was a pupil of Mother Thecla's in the late 80's. 1941.

In 1891, after four years spent as teacher at Sacred Heart School in St. Francis, Wisconsin, Sister Thecla was summoned to the Motherhouse. Mother Mary Antonine, her own sister, was the Superior General and assigned to Sister Thecla the task of Mistress of Postulants. At this time, the community numbered some hundred members and the postulants were few in number. So, in addition to this post of trust, Sister Thecla taught school, fulfilled the post of secretary to the Mother General, and was convent organist. Since the sisters were also active in the business of stamp collecting, Sister Thecla did the correspondence pertaining to that work. 21

21. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Early Childhood of Mother Thecla, Card 19, response of Mother Celestine in an interview regarding the posts of trust held by Sister Thecla before her Generalship.

Besides other posts of trust, Sister Thecla remained Mistress of Postulants for seven years. The postulants loved her dearly, and Sister Thecla often acted as mediatrix between them and her own sister,

Mother Antonine. She had special devotion to the Angel Guardians of her charges and interceded with these heavenly spirits for their protection. Before retiring herself, each evening Sister Thecla would sprinkle the bed of each postulant with Holy Water and thus also ascertained if they were asleep. 22

22. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 20, response of Mother Celestine in an interview regarding Mother Thecla when she was Mistress of Postulants.

Soon the postulants were to lose their loved Mistress, because God had destined her for greater things. While still in her teens, Sister Thecla's spiritual director had advised her to recite daily Three Our Fathers and Aves that she would never become a superior of the St. Francis Community to which she had then aspired. Obediently, she had obeyed and recited the required prayers. But man proposes and God disposes as the event of April 17, 1898 revealed.

Chapter IV

Her Community Makes Its Decision

- 1 The Newly-elected Superior General
- 2 Milwaukee, the City near the
St. Francis Community
- 3 A Half-century of Community History

The Newly-elected Superior General

Sunday morning, April 17, 1898, ^{dawned.} The convent home of the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis the Seraphic, at St. Francis, Wisconsin was astir. The air was filled with a hushed expectancy. Of the hundred and ten sisters in the community, eighty-two were then present as delegates for the election of a new Superior General. ¹ After a short wait, the bell summoned them to the convent chapel for the election. Seated at the organ, awaiting the arrival of the prelates that were to preside, was Sister Mary Thecla. Presently, His Excellency, The Most Reverend Frederick Xavier Katzer, Archbishop of Milwaukee, Monsignor Joseph Rainer, Rector of St. Francis Seminary, St. Francis, and Reverend George Weiss, Chaplain of the St. Francis Community took their places in the sanctuary of the chapel. ² Sister Thecla intoned and the choir sang the hymn to the Holy Spirit so that the delegates should be inspired to give their votes "for that Sister, who, before God they consider the best qualified." ³ An exhortation by the Archbishop followed. Without delay, the election procedure began. Each sister delegate brought her own ballot to the communion rail and handed it to the prelates. On the ballot she had written the names of the sisters whom she wished to be chosen for the office of Superior General and Sister Assistant. ⁴ After these ballots had been counted, Archbishop Katzer announced to the assembled delegates that no sister had received an absolute majority. He

also informed the group that the votes were equally tied between Sister Mary Martha and Sister Mary Thecla. The voting was repeated. The second count showed that Sister Mary Thecla had received all but two votes for the office of Superior General. After each delegate present had declared in favor of the nominee designated by the ballots as the Rule of the community prescribed, the Spiritual Director, Father Weiss announced the election decisive. ⁵

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1. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Election Delegates. Listed here are all the names of the sisters who had been professed four years and who could, according to rule, act as delegates in the election. The names are copied from the Record Book of Profession which is kept in the convent vault; and
 2. Mother Thecla Administration, Card 1, response of Sister Isabel, Administratrix General of the St. Francis Community. Sister had entered the community in 1892 and vividly recalled the election procedure.
 3. Rule Book of 1874, op. cit., 31
 4. Ibid., 31
 5. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Administration, Card 1, Sister Victoria, an aged sister of the community who was present at the election of 1898.
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Since Sister Thecla had been elected Superior General, she had to leave the organ bench and descend from the organ loft. Approaching the communion rail, in humble submission she knelt before the Most Reverend Archbishop and accepted from him the seal and keys of the convent. By this ceremony she became Superior General and was called Mother Mary Thecla. After the singing of the Te Deum, Archbishop Katzer invoked the Church's blessing upon the new Superior General. After the blessing Mother Thecla received the homage of all the delegates present at the election. Then the delegates formed a

procession and led Mother Thecla to the convent community room where she received the congratulations and good wishes of the sisters of the Motherhouse. 6

6. Rule Book of 1874, op. cit., 32

S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ceremonial booklet of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. The manner of electing the Superior General is given in this booklet.

After accepting in holy obedience the high and responsible office of Superior General, Mother Thecla Thren took over the direction and jurisdiction of the entire community. She was not yet in her thirtieth year. She felt the burden of the responsibility placed upon her and wept bitterly. Hearing of her tears, Archbishop Katzer sent for her and consoled her, saying, "Why, Mother Thecla, if a priest can be made a bishop at thirty, you are certainly not too young to be made Superior General." 7

7. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Administration, Card 1, related to some of the sisters by Mother Assistant Catherine Murphy at the time of the election and a matter of tradition in the community since 1898.

After assuming the office to which she was elected, Mother Thecla was destined to direct and govern the community at St. Francis for twenty-seven years. Three times she was re-elected for three years for this superiorship and three times for six years each. She is the only Superior General who ruled the St. Francis Community for so long a period of years. Sister Thecla might have held that office for life had not Canon Law limited the years of the administrations of Superior Generals to a briefer period. In 1925, obedient to the law of the

Church, she relinquished her post. That year, Sister Thecla was elected to the office of first assistant to the Superior General and held that position until her death. During the period of her religious life, she had held some of the highest offices in the community at St. Francis, namely: Mistress of Postulants, Secretary to the Superior General, Superior General, and Sister Assistant to the Superior General. That she was deserving of these high dignities, her sterling quality as a religious, her lovable character, and her numerous and notable activities of zeal which will be discussed in subsequent chapters will well prove. During the period of Mother Thecla's Generalate, her vicarress and first assistants were: Sister Mary Catherine Murphy,* Sister Eleanore Moser,* and Sister Celestine Stark. 8

* Deceased

8. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Directory of the Conventual Institute of the Congregation of the Third Order of St. Francis of Assisi for the year of our Lord 1926. A description of this Directory is given in the Bibliography.

Milwaukee, The City near the St. Francis Community

Milwaukee, the city near which the founders of the community of St. Francis were to settle, in 1849, was at that time a pioneer's village. When the first white man visited the site is uncertain. Pere Jacques Marquette may have stopped there in 1674 as the Jesuit Relations seem to point out. At any rate he was followed by a

Recollet priest, Father Zenobe Membre. In 1679, he had accompanied Robert Cavalier de la Salle on an exploratory trip from Lake Erie to the Illinois country. Historians record that after that French and English fur traders, Jesuit priests, and French voyageurs also tramped over the location of the present city. However, although a trading post was established there as early as 1795, the first permanent settlement is usually dated at 1835 or 1836. In one of those years, Solomon Juneau erected a log cabin on the east side of the Milwaukee River and became the future city's pioneer settler. When he established himself on the site, Juneau found a Pottawattamie village. White settlers followed Juneau and soon the settlement had formed three sectors. The east side was called Juneautown after Solomon Juneau; the west side Kilbourntown after Byron Kilbourn; and the region of the Menomonee River, Walker's point after George Walker. ⁹

9. Charles E. McLenegan, "Milwaukee," Encyclopedia Americana, 19:142

This settlement had originally been known as Melloki. But by an evolutionary process the numerous variants of the name became known as Milwaukee. The name had originated with the Pottawattamies and signified "good land." Another historian had interpreted the name as "council place," because the spot had been regarded as neutral territory by the different tribes of Indians in Wisconsin. By the time the forty-niners of the community of St. Francis arrived, the name Milwaukee was in use. ¹⁰

10. Ibid., 19:142

In a letter dated August 30, 1835, a Mr. Wells of Green Bay, Wisconsin, aired his views about the place where Juneau had settled.

He wrote:

"I have purchased considerable real estate at Milwaukee, mostly village property. The land about Milwaukee is the best in the territory, and as Milwaukee is the only harbor for some distance either way on the lake it must of necessity become a place of importance. . . I think money can be made here in the lumbering business if one had capital, as all kinds of lumber sell readily and for high figures. The winter is the same here as in New England or nearly the same. The settlers will all get their claims for \$1.25 per acre, as it is considered very mean to bid against them; some of them have already sold their claims at high figures, in one case for \$8,000.00. I have also entered a few lots of land at ten shillings per acre." 11

11. Lieutenant Col. Jerome A. Watrous, ed., Memoirs of Milwaukee County, 1:78

Not all persons shared the views of Mr. Wells. For instance, a physician from the East, Dr. O. P. Wolcott, after visiting the settlement about this time, gave this picture of the site:

"Such a miserable looking place for a settlement I had never seen before. It was one unbroken series of sand-banks, frog-ponds, clay hills, and river marshes, with the unpretentious habitations of probably five thousand people scattered around in a desultory way. In three days I had gained the acquaintance of nearly every man in town, and I made it a point to abuse everybody I met for locating in such an ill-favored and unpromising stretch of waste. Such a spot, I informed them, was intended for water-fowls and wild beasts, but not for dwellings of men." 12

12. John G. Gregory, History of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1:205

Milwaukee must have improved in its appearance very rapidly, for Dr. J. B. Selby, who came and settled there in 1842, presents quite the contrary picture to that of Dr. Wolcott. Recalling the city as he remembered it in its early days, he wrote in 1895:

"I think I have presented a faithful summary of the appearance of Milwaukee in 1842. To say that it was simply beautiful would be an understatement of the truth--it was enchanting. Those bluffs, so round and bold, were covered with timber, casting shade on soft velvety turf beneath. From their tops could be seen the distant lake with its green waters and between them the river like a silver thread. It was a clear stream in which the Indian could spear his fish to a depth of ten or fifteen feet and upon whose surface the morning sun sparkled as upon a mirror. No wonder it was called by the Indians the "beautiful land." It is beautiful today, but its beauty in its state of nature was the work of God." 13

13. Ibid., 1:207

Despite the different views and contrasting pictures of the men who visited or settled in the locality, throngs of easterners and foreigners came there and bought the best lands at \$1.25 per acre. These new settlers also peopled the entire region of the territory of Wisconsin.

"Among these immigrants was the first installment of Germans and Norwegians--the advance guard of thousands that were to flock to Wisconsin soil in search of homes. The effect of the arrival of these foreign born

home-seekers was very refreshing to the hardy pioneers of Milwaukee County, as they brought with them gold and silver with which to purchase homes, and money now became plentiful." 14

14. Lieut. Col. Jerome A. Watrous, op. cit., 1:81

Almost daily these immigrants arrived in their national dresses at the rate of a thousand a week. As a result, within the decade of the forties, Milwaukee County became self-sustaining. The best land in the region was taken over for farms, and the city, Milwaukee, as it grew, was destined to become one of the chief commercial and manufacturing centers of the Middle West. A census taken in June 1846 of the city and county showed that the population had increased to 15,592. Thus, within eighteen months, the total population registered 22,791. This showed how rapidly this portion of the state developed in that decade.¹⁵

15. Ibid., 1:91,96

John Gregory, op. cit., 2:1301, 1306

With the advent of these new settlers, Milwaukee could be incorporated as a city and became industrially inclined. The real impetus to this industrial character came from the immigrants themselves. For they had acquired their vocational training in the old world from whence they had come.

"They were, in the main, skilled artisans who could produce a great variety of useful things, and while for a time they served local needs only, they soon expanded their activities and found a market for their products beyond the borders of the city. . . They were not only skillful but also

believed in an honest product.
 Furthermore, they believed in honorable
 methods in the marketing of their wares." 16

16. William George Bruce, A Short History of Milwaukee, 95

In Milwaukee of this time, the industries that demanded competent workmen were housebuilding, shipbuilding, railroadbuilding. These newly-arrived settlers possessed the executive ability and financial genius for their management. Thus various industries developed and upon the foundations laid by the immigrants was built twenty-century Milwaukee, today one of the biggest industrial centers of the Union.

One of these pioneer industries deserves special mention. It was brick-making. Made of excellent clay found in the boundaries of the settlement, it was found that the heat of the kiln turned the color of the bricks to a pale yellow instead of the usual red. Because of this peculiarity of its bricks, Milwaukee eventually acquired the name of the Cream City. Architects, far and wide, demanded the yellow Milwaukee bricks for artistic effect in the trimming of buildings. And while the townsfolk had been disappointed in the color of their bricks, visitors and travelers praised them. Thereafter, the color became a matter of distinction and was regarded as a matter of local pride. 17

17. John Gregory, op. cit., 1:510, 512

At the end of the forties, at the same time that the founders of the community of St. Francis came to this city, Milwaukee became a

thriving city. Mr. John Dadd, who also came here around 1850, has left this interesting picture:

"I found the city of ten or twelve thousand inhabitants, a heterogeneous mass of buildings mostly of frame but many of brick construction, with wooden sidewalks of varying elevation, many of them having awning posts at the outer edge, from which awnings stretched to the buildings. Teams filled the streets, bringing all kinds of produce, many of them having traveled from great distances to reach the city. Wheat-buyers thronged the places frequented by teams, inspecting and purchasing the cereal for the numerous firms engaged in the shipment. Prairie schooners were frequently to be seen, laden with lead from Galena and Mineral Point. No railroads had yet been built, and goods intended for the interior were loaded on to wagons at all hours, to suit the convenience of the teamsters. General stores were the rule, dealing in mixed merchandise, and speculation developed slowly. Many firms maintained wagons which traveled through the state peddling their wares. . . .

According to the last census our population is more largely composed of representatives of the German race than that of any other city in the Union. This gives it a stability, a staying power that few other places possess. It is her blood at the root of the Anglo-Saxon race which gives it its wondrous power. A few years ago I heard a lecture by Matthew Arnold entitled 'Saving Remnant of Nations.' He spoke of the various nations and their characteristics, the likelihood of their permanency or decay. In speaking of the American nation, he said our salvation and existence are guaranteed by the infusion of Teutonic blood in our veins. Arguing from this promise our permanent prosperity is assured. 18

Politically, at this time, the majority of the Milwaukee inhabitants supported the Democratic, Whig, or Abolitionist Parties. The Germans, in particular, supported the Democratic party. This was but natural, for the word Democrat had had a different meaning for the German people than for others. In their European homeland, more especially in Prussia, Democrats were those "who stood in opposition to tyranny, monarchy, and aristocracy--upholding everything that was free and good and noble." Naturally the German immigrants who later settled in Wisconsin had left their fatherland because they had been dissatisfied with home rule or because necessity obliged them to leave. Those that were obliged to leave were revolutionists. When they arrived in the state of Wisconsin, they found out that the word Democrat had the same meaning in America as it had had in Germany. Therefore, the Germans joined the Democratic party. They would have considered it an outrage, an impossibility to join any other. As time passed, however, many of these Germans lived to change their political point of view. Later, some of them joined the opposing party, the Republican. From the year 1834 onwards down the years, this opposition group had formed a coalition under the party name of Whig. They fought their political battles under this title until 1854. That year the Free-Soilers and Know Nothings joined the Whigs and they became known after that date as Republicans. 19

19. Ibid., 2:1288

Lieut. Col. Jerome A. Watrous, op. cit., 1:123

While Milwaukee was being built up industrially and politically, religious worship and spiritual influence kept apace to the times. Though the settlers and immigrants differed widely in race, creed, and social antecedents, a high standard of morals and manners were maintained not by the rule of compulsion and official surveillance but by the innate virtue which the people themselves possessed. At the city's semi-centennial, a clergyman in his eulogy to Milwaukee referred to this trait of the pioneers when he asserted:

"It was this that induced Juneau, the founder of the city, to set apart a portion of land for God's service in the most prominent part of the new settlement. It was this that induced Protestants, Jews and Catholics alike to give a generous portion of their scanty earnings to build and maintain their respective churches, in which they might enjoy the privilege of religion and worship God according to their consciences without interference with the convictions of others. It was this that gave Milwaukee her enviable reputation among the cities of the West for being conservative and law-abiding and for maintaining the high standard of morality which she enjoys today." 20

20. John G. Gregory, op. cit., 2: 837-838

From the time of the founding of the city churches were being built. Many Protestant denominations built their churches in the locality. Among them were Congregationalists, Methodists, and Baptists. In the August of 1835 or 1837, the first Catholic service, the Holy Mass, was celebrated by the Reverend Fleurimond J. Bonduel. He had been ordained in Detroit, in 1834. After twenty Catholics had settled and made homes in the city, a missionary station was formed

and occasionally visited by Reverend Theodore J. Vander Broek. Because of the fewness of the Catholic population, Milwaukee was a part of the Detroit diocese from the years 1833 to 1843. But already in May 1839, the city had its first resident priest, Reverend Patrick O'Kelley (O'Kelly, Kelly). At first he read Holy Mass in the courthouse. In 1839, with the aid of the Catholics of Milwaukee, he began a small frame church (28 x 42) known as St. Peter's. It was erected on lots 10 and 11, block 73 and was donated by Solomon Juneau. An interesting historical item chronicled about it, is that its patron saint was St. Luke, and as late as 1842, it was referred to as St. Luke's. During the year of its completion, 1842, due to the illness of Father Kelly and the needs of the Catholic Germans, who were by this time coming to the city in increasing numbers, Reverend Martin Kundig was appointed pastor. ²¹

21. The Reverend Peter Leo Johnson, D.D., "First Catholic Church in Milwaukee: St. Peter's, 1839--," The Salesianum, 1938, 23:123-131

When a question arose as to a bishop for the territory, Milwaukee, being both a religious and commercial center, was chosen for the episcopal city. It became the Cathedral City of the diocese of Milwaukee, May 16, 1843. The Right Reverend John Martin Henni was appointed its first bishop and after his consecration assumed the duties of his office on May 3, 1844. St. Peter's main building (it had since its foundation been enlarged for school purposes) served as Bishop Henni's cathedral. With the incoming tide of immigrants in the forties, St. Peter's proved too small to accommodate all parishioners. Therefore, St. Mary's Church was built in 1846-1847. St. John's

Cathedral was begun in 1848. Until its completion in 1853, St. Mary's was the most imposing edifice in the city. As the years passed, Milwaukee, in July 1875, had the distinction of being raised to an archdiocese, when Bishop Henni was invested with the pallium, symbol of the archepiscopate. By the end of the century, when Mother Thecla took over the jurisdiction of the community at St. Francis, situated a few miles from the city, Milwaukee was a city of 300 churches, the Catholics claiming 27 of them. 22

22. T. J. Sullivan, The Catholic Church in Wisconsin, 296-299

J. J. Gregory, op. cit., 2:123-131

Catholic Directory, 1898, 1899, 1900

After the half century mark, around the time the community of St. Francis was being established, Milwaukee also became a manufacturing city. Up to 1850, the farmers had exchanged their produce for manufactured goods from the East. But when individuals with money to invest had arrived here, the little back-yard shop expanded into a factory; the individual mechanic became the employer. So that by 1872, one-half of Milwaukee's working population was engaged in industrial pursuits and \$20,000,000.00 of the output of her factories was on the market. Because transportation and finance was favorable to the city, business developed; manufacturing boomed. In the late eighties, business was reorganized and there entered the city

"the era of mass production coming with the genius of invention, of scientific organization, and of progressive salesmanship, ... Thus great industries,

which send their products to the four ends
of the world were reared." 23

23. William George Bruce, op. cit., 97

At the beginning of this the twentieth century, then, Milwaukee was one
of the outstanding industrial centers of America, standing ninth in the
value of manufactured products in the nation. 24

24. John J. Gregory, op. cit., 1: 524-530

3

A Half-century of Community History

There came to the diocese of Milwaukee, five years after it had
received its resident bishop, in 1849, two priests and a small band
of Franciscan Tertiaries from Ettenbeuern, Bavaria, Germany. This
group of forty-niners, unlike the better known California forty-niners,
came to the Milwaukee diocese with the purpose of founding a religious
community of the Third Order of St. Francis of Assisi in North America.
They had selected the state of Wisconsin because the Right Reverend
John Martin Henni, first German bishop of the States, while traveling
through Europe, and Bavaria in particular, in 1848, had distributed
pamphlets and periodicals praising this new land of promise. The
articles invited priests and laity to migrate to America and especially
Wisconsin, in order to promote the cause of Catholicism there. Filled
with the indomitable spirit of apostles, inspired with the desire of
perfecting their own souls, and animated with an unselfish zeal for

the salvation of the souls of mankind, many persons responded to the prelate's appeal.

Bearing a recommendation from the King Louis Mission Society, München, two priests, six Tertiary women, and several tertiary men set out from Ettenbeuern, a village in Bavaria in the diocese of Augsburg, March 6, 1849. On Pentecost Monday, May 10, 1849, they arrived in Milwaukee. In this new world, the founders of the St. Francis community made their first sacrifice, for they had neither friend to welcome them nor roof to shelter them. It so happened that Bishop Henni, whom they came to assist in his diocesan work, had gone on his 'ad Limina' visit to the Holy Father in Rome. Before returning to his episcopal city, he was further delayed by the meeting of the bishops in the III Provincial Council of Baltimore. Therefore, the priests and Tertiaries called on Reverend Martin Kundig, Vicar General of the Milwaukee diocese, at Franklin, Wisconsin. Father Kundig gave them hospitality until Bishop Henni returned.

When Bishop Henni was informed that these priests and Tertiaries desired to found a community in Milwaukee, he accepted their services. He further advised them to purchase a tract of land about four miles south of the city of Milwaukee located near the south shore of Lake Michigan. At that spot, amid the woods, was a small clearing called Nojoshing, which in the Indian language signified a point of land extending into the water. Following the advise of Bishop Henni, this band of missionaries purchased for \$1,000.00 thirty-seven acres of land from Henry and Eva Gross. On the land was a log cabin. Here, the six women Tertiaries, founders of the community of St. Francis,

lived throughout the summer in the greatest poverty and hardships. Thus, began the community which Mother Thecla was to govern forty-nine years later. 25

25. Since material on the early founders is not completely catalogued, the above information was combined from the following sources:

1. Mother Mary Thecla, O.S.F., Nojoshing now St. Francis, Brief History of Our Community 1849-1925, 4-7
2. Sister Mary Raymond, O.S.F., The Study of the History of Our Community, Five speeches with questions for a study club, 1-4
3. Reverend Philip Joseph Rose, B.A., History of the Origin and Founding of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis of Assisi, Sisters of Penance and Charity at Nojoshing, Wisconsin now St. Francis, 1849. Unpublished thesis. 1-8
4. Very Reverend Joseph Rainer, A Noble Priest Joseph Salzmann, D.D. Founder of the Salesianum. Translated from the German by Reverend Joseph Berg, Professor of the Salesianum, 86
5. Souvenir of the Twelfth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Catholic Societies 1913, 78

Before the winter 1849, a more secure and habitable dwelling had to be built for the six women foundresses. With the aid of their brother Tertiaries, a modest convent was built. Thus, the first congregation of religious was built in Wisconsin. Religious life really began when a religious garb was designed and the six women Tertiaries were invested as postulants. Miss Duerr, one of the six Tertiaries, who had spent a year in a novitiate at Augsburg in Bavaria was by common consent appointed Mother Superior of the little band of missionaries. A simple rule wherein the entire day was

devoted to prayer and work was drawn up by Reverend Anthony Keppeler, one of the missionary priests who had come with the group to Milwaukee. At the time he had acted as Rector of the convent of St. Francis. 26

26. S.F.A.C.A., Mother Mary Thecla, op. cit., 7; and
Sister Mary Raymond, op. cit., 23

From the year 1850 until almost the end of the century, the newly-organized community of St. Francis was to undergo severe trials and sufferings. During that half-century, three crises threatened its very existence. The first sorrow and loss sustained by the young community was the death of the two priests, Father Keppeler and Father Steiger. The sisters had relied on these priests for material aid and spiritual aid, but they had been snatched from them by the cholera that was then raging in the land. Father Keppeler had not only been their spiritual director but had also opened a school in the neighborhood of New Coeln, Wisconsin. In this school the sisters instructed the children and thus made their living. With the death of their priests, friends and advisers, revenues became scarce and life looked very black to the sisters.

In their difficulty, the sisters went to Bishop Henni for advice. The bishop advised them to remain at their convent and trust in Divine Providence. These six religious women obeyed his orders. Wanting a chaplain, the sisters, from 1851 to 1852, walked all the way to St. Mary's Church, Milwaukee to attend Holy Mass on Sundays. When the bishop realized the hardships that the sisters were undergoing, he appointed Reverend Michael Heiss spiritual director of the community

at St. Francis. And when St. Aemilian's Orphan Asylum was transferred to a building near the convent at the then known Nojoshing, in 1854, financial aid came to the sisters when two of them began teaching the orphan boys. With the erection of the Salesianum, the Seminary of St. Francis de Sales at St. Francis, in 1854-1855, and after its completion in 1856, the sisters accepted the charge of the household duties there. The sisters thereby fulfilled a part of their Conventual Contract which they had made in 1848 before they had set out from Bavaria "to instruct German-speaking boys, who had the necessary talent, gratis, or with a meager contribution." Teaching the orphans and doing the household duties at the seminary somewhat relieved the poverty of the struggling community and tided them over the first crisis that had threatened their new foundation in Wisconsin. 27

27. S.F.A.C.A., Mother Thecla, op. cit., 8-10; and

Sister Mary Raymond, op. cit., 24, 26, 28-29

Greater than the first was the second crisis that afflicted the young community at St. Francis. Though the community had increased in personnel, the blow fell when word went around the convent that the six foundresses, the Tertiaries who had come from Europe to establish a community in America, had decided to withdraw. These six women, although they were sincerely pious and had endured much suffering for a decade of years, resolved that the work was beyond their endurance. They wished to spend their declining years in a religious order of contemplatives. For this reason, with the permission of their confessor, Monsignor Batz, they applied for admission to one of the contemplative orders in Europe. The European order

sent the sisters a reply in the negative. Nevertheless, these women seeing the work in Wisconsin beyond the strength of their advancing years, decided to leave the convent as they first had planned. On June 1, 1860, six veiled women, dressed in black, stepped out of the entrance of the primitive convent onto the narrow and winding path that led from the clearing in the woods into the city of Milwaukee. They sought refuge at St. Mary's Rectory. Monsignor Bats retained two of them as his housekeepers and later purchased a house for the other four women. Under the direction of the Monsignor, these six women led pious, mortified lives, were living examples of zeal and sacrifice until their deaths. Their last resting place was Calvary cemetery, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Such was the inscrutable will of God in behalf of the community founded at Nojoshing in 1849. Eight sisters and three postulants remained at the convent. The spiritual director, Father Heiss, appointed the oldest sister as Superior for an indefinite time and the community was saved from dissolution. Father Heiss constantly admonished these sisters who remained with these words, "Fear not, my little flock. God will take care of you." That the community still exists today and has not been buried in oblivion is proof that the words of the good priest were verified. 28

28. S.F.A.C.A., *Mother Thecla*, op. cit., 11-14; and

Sister Mary Raymond, op. cit., 39-41

From the year 1860 until the year 1873, when the third and greatest crisis occurred, the remnant band of sisters struggled along

supported at first with food, fuel, and a small wage for their work at St. Francis Seminary. The community was reorganized the same year 1860 that the foundresses left it. The sisters appeared in a new garb that year. The sister personnel was soon doubled and by 1863, the community numbered twenty-seven members. With increased membership, the poor community began again to prosper and was engaged in some of the charitable works of the diocese of Milwaukee.

In 1865, a new Superior General, Sister Antonia Herb by name, was elected. Anxious to once more take up work in the field of education, Mother Antonia approached Bishop Henni and asked permission to train talented sisters for the position of teachers in the parochial schools. The bishop granted her request. Thereupon Mother Antonia engaged instructors to prepare the sisters for their work as teachers. A year after her election to the office of Superior General, because of the hard work imposed upon the sisters in fulfilling their duties in the orphanage and seminary, Mother Antonia, with the aid of her adviser, Father Heiss, bought a farm and house in Jefferson, Wisconsin, and negotiated to move the Motherhouse to that location. While several sisters remained loyal to the work at St. Francis, the cradle of the community, most of the trained teachers departed for Jefferson, Wisconsin with Mother Antonia. Mother Antonia then attained her goal by receiving for her sisters charge of two schools in the vicinity of Jefferson, Wisconsin. But in their new home, the sisters had to undergo privations and hardships. One misfortune was that of being deprived of the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in their convent home. Later at St. Coletta's Convent at Jefferson affairs took a

turn for the better. After a few years, an additional wing was added to the original building. Today, St. Coletta's of yesterday, is the well-known institution for backward youth, the first Catholic school of its kind in the Union. 29

29. S.F.A.C.A., Mother Thecla, op. cit., 15-17

The removal of the Motherhouse to Jefferson, Wisconsin was but the prelude to the third and most disastrous blow which was to try the stout hearts of Wisconsin's pioneer sisters. The community had survived the first exodus, the departure of its foundresses. That it survived the second exodus, which occurred in 1873, showed how visibly Divine Providence guided the destinies of the sisterhood founded at St. Francis in 1849. The new disaster began in 1868.

Mother Antonia's constant adviser and counselor, Father Heiss, was made Ordinary of the La Crosse diocese in Wisconsin in the year 1868. He had up to that time been spiritual director of St. Coletta's, Jefferson. When he became bishop, Mother Antonia asked to have him retained as director at St. Coletta's. Bishop Henni refused this request because it was contrary to the laws of the church. Mother Antonia then turned to Bishop Heiss of La Crosse for counsel. The bishop suggested that Mother Antonia remove her convent to his diocese at La Crosse. Acting on his advice, Mother Antonia, though keeping the matter secret, made preparations for the transfer of her community. With the assistance of Bishop Heiss, Mother Antonia received permission from the Minister General of the Minor Conventuals at Rome to affiliate her future convent at La Crosse with the Franciscan Order. Accordingly,

on July 10, 1871, a sister and four postulants left for La Crosse, Wisconsin. Two days later Mother Antonia herself left the community of St. Francis and announced that La Crosse was now the Motherhouse and St. Coletta's its mission. No further action was taken until, in 1873, Mother Antonia sent Sister Brigitta Neppers to St. Francis with six resolutions she had formulated. Acting on the resolutions on the morning of March 15, 1873, seventy-five professed sisters, fifteen novices, and ten postulants, a total of ninety members, left for La Crosse. There remained in the abandoned community of St. Francis twenty-seven professed sisters, three novices, and one postulant, a total of thirty-one sisters. Two-thirds of the community had departed, what was to become of the remaining one-third.

When the entire matter was referred to Bishop Henni of Milwaukee, to whom the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the community rightly belonged, the bishop generously decreed that the sisters of St. Francis were free, without prejudice to their vows, to remain at the original Motherhouse at St. Francis or to leave and join Mother Antonia at La Crosse, Wisconsin. This decision was delivered by the Rector of St. Francis Seminary, Doctor Salzmann. At the same time, while allowing the sisters to make their own choice, the Rector, with great earnestness, pleaded with them on how noble it was to assist in the training and educating of seminarians for the priesthood. The majority of the sisters agreed to remain and continue the lowly work of the seminary domestic duties. Assisted by the Rector, these sisters began once more to build up the community where the first founders had cradled their community. With the permission of Bishop

Henni, another Mother General was elected with her Sister Assistant and for a third time the community had to build itself up on slim resources. 30

30. S.F.A.C.A., Sister Raymond, op. cit., 58-60

In spite of difficulties, God watched over the community at St. Francis. Before the end of the year, information was received from the Holy See at Rome that the Community was recognized as separate from the sisters that had followed Mother Antonia to La Crosse and Bishop Henni was authorized to receive novices as professed sisters in St. Francis. A spiritual director in the person of the learned and pious Reverend C. Wappelhorst, Professor of St. Francis Seminary, was appointed for the sisterhood at St. Francis. Once more, but only for a year, St. Coletta's at Jefferson, which had been purchased from the La Crosse sisters, became the Motherhouse. The sisters were again sent back to St. Francis and have had their Motherhouse there ever since. The community grew and, by 1880, the St. Francis community numbered fifty-two members. When Bishop Henni was succeeded by Bishop Heiss in the archdiocese of Milwaukee, the latter had some plans to amalgamate the St. Francis community with a younger order in the diocese. However, the plan was suppressed through the vigorous protest of Reverend August Zeininger, Rector of St. Francis Seminary. His words on that occasion are a matter of tradition. He said:

"It would be the greatest injustice ever heaped upon this community, after they worked so faithfully in the Seminary, to humiliate them by annexing them to a younger community as the last of them all.

If this is done, I will never again be able to say Mass in peace, the injustice will haunt me to my dying day." 31

31. Sister Raymond, op. cit., 63

Under the direction of their protector, Father Zeininger, the sisters at St. Francis once more undertook some of the charitable works of the archdiocese of Milwaukee. As time passed, strange as it may seem, the educating of youth, the prime motive of the second exodus, became the principal work of the community. In 1885, the sisters took over the domestic duties of Pio Nono College, now St. Francis Minor Seminary at St. Francis, and without remuneration instructed and cared for the children of St. John's Deaf Mute Asylum, also at St. Francis.

From 1886, and for twelve years thereafter, when Mother Thecla became Superior General, the St. Francis community was governed and directed by Mother Thecla's oldest sister, Mother Antonine Thren. Mother Antonine's spirit of prayer, her great courage and willingness to make sacrifices enabled the community to become an individual unit and she secured for it a firm and lasting foundation. It was Mother Antonine who built an addition to the little old convent and the Gothic chapel. It was Mother Antonine who prevailed upon the Faculty of St. Francis Seminary to remunerate the sisters for services given with money instead of produce. It was Mother Antonine who accepted many new members both from abroad and from the States and thus built up the personnel of the community. Lastly, it was Mother Antonine who sent young teachers beyond St. Francis into other parts of Wisconsin, into Illinois, Iowa, Ohio, Missouri, and Nebraska to

educate youth in Catholic schools in these states. 32

32. S.F.A.C.A., Mother Thecla, op. cit., 24; and

Sister Raymond, op. cit., 67; and

Directory of the Conventual Institute of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis of Assisi, Sisters of Penance and Charity, 1926, 43

As time went on then, instead of being obliterated from the face of the earth, the community founded in 1849, at St. Francis, Wisconsin, grew and lived. It was the task of the Superior General, Mother Thecla Thren, who was elected to that office in 1898, to build the superstructure of the community upon the foundations of her own sister, as her predecessor, had left her. To Mother Thecla fell the task of building up the community materially, of furthering the education of teachers for their tasks in the parochial schools of the States, of imbuing her Franciscan daughters with the true spirit of Penance and Charity, and of impressing upon them a truly religious spirit. That Mother Thecla ably and conscientiously fulfilled this trust, the subsequent chapters will prove.

Chapter V

A Wise Architect's Work Abides

- 1 St. Mary's Academy**
- 2 St. Coletta School**
- 3 St. Joseph's Academy**
- 4 In and About St. Francis**

St. Mary's Academy

In 1898, Mother Thecla Thren was the choice of the delegates for Superior General of the community at St. Francis. To carry out the immediate needs, especially the material needs of the community at that time, a woman of ability, of sagacity was needed. Mother Thecla was a woman that answered to that need. She was capable, cautious, efficient, tactful. Other religious women of her community had planted and replanted the seed, Mother Antonine, her own sister had made the foundations firmer, and now Mother Thecla, as a wise architect, was to build thereon. Throughout her administration, using her practical foresight, Mother Thecla was busy purchasing and improving buildings here, adding some wings there. She was, in truth, a monumental builder.

As has been shown, there stood in Jefferson, Wisconsin, the buildings known as St. Coletta's. They served as a home for the Sisters from St. Francis until they followed Mother Antonia to La Crosse in 1877. In 1879, the community remaining at St. Francis purchased the buildings and eighty acres of land from the sisters at La Crosse. The price paid was \$3,000.00. From that time, until Mother Thecla became Superior General in 1898, St. Coletta's was worked as a farm by the sisters. By this time, the buildings though ample were old. This made renovation necessary. Therefore, the first task undertaken by the new Superior, was to remodel the Jefferson property at a cost of \$10,000.00. After the buildings were repaired, the question arose as to what useful purpose the lands and buildings could be put.

Mother Thecla thought it wise to request a resident priest for St. Coletta's as the first step. When the Archbishop of Milwaukee granted her request, she proposed to her council that the Jefferson buildings be used for a boarding school for girls. The principal object of this new school would be to admit girls who lived too great a distance from parochial schools. St. Coletta's would not only prepare these girls for their first Holy Communion but also give them a religious training for life. Perceiving the nobleness of Mother Thecla's project, the pastors of many neighboring parishes near the school gave their heart approval.

By the fall of 1899, nineteen girls were registered in the grade and high school departments of St. Coletta's at Jefferson, Wisconsin. Although the first object of the school had been to supplement the lack of Catholic schools in the vicinity, young ladies from other cities also applied for admission. The high school department was opened to accommodate these girls. In the second year of its existence, because the older girls outnumbered the younger, Literature, Rhetoric, Ancient History, Algebra, Civil Government, and Shorthand and Typing had been added to the curriculum. ¹

1. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Administration, Cards 2, 4, response of Reverend George Meyer, Mother Assistant Irene, Sister Raymond in separate interviews to the question as to the origin and development of the boarding school at Jefferson, Wisconsin.

As the years passed, more pupils sought admission to St. Coletta's boarding school. Five years after its founding, the school was found to be too small for its increasing numbers of pupils. Once more, a new problem faced Mother Thecla. Should she annex a new wing to the

already cramped quarters of St. Coletta's or should she seek a new location for the boarding school. The Superior General was helped in her decision by the fact that many of the applicants came from the city of Milwaukee. After due deliberation, Mother Thecla decided to erect a new school, an academy at the outskirts of the city of Milwaukee. She felt this would be advantageous both to the community at St. Francis and to the faculty and pupils of the new academy. Both would benefit by having a building near the Motherhouse at St. Francis and near the city of Milwaukee rather than fifty miles from the metropolis.

This new plan of Mother Thecla's when made known, received severe opposition from outside sources. The Professors of St. Francis Seminary would hear nothing of it, and it was not until a provincial council of bishops, seconded by The Most Reverend Sebastian Messmer, Archbishop of Milwaukee, approved the project that the resident school for girls came into being. St. Mary's Academy (originally called St. Mary's Institute) was to be built near the shores of Lake Michigan on the southern limits of the city of Milwaukee. Mr. Peter Brust was the architect. At the time of its building in 1904, the school was valued at \$65,000.00. When completed, it was dedicated on the feast of the Presentation of Our Lady in the Temple, November 21, 1904, by The Most Reverend Sebastian Messmer, D.D., Archbishop of Milwaukee. In the presence of many clergy and laity, Reverend George Meyer, chaplain of St. Coletta's School of Jefferson, Wisconsin, preached the sermon. In 1904, then, the first material work of Mother Thecla, a well-planned and up-to-date resident and day school for girls, St. Mary's Academy, saw its completion. 2

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2. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Administration, Cards, 4, 10, 12 response of Reverend George Meyer, Mother Assistant Irene, and Sister Isabel, persons concerned in the transfer and building of St. Mary's Academy at Milwaukee, also Sister Raymond who collected some of the data and Sister Imelda a former pupil of St. Coletta's and sister of Father Meyer. This particular folio contains the material achievements such as buildings and other improvements made by Mother Thecla throughout her administration.
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The objectives of St. Mary's were explicit, definite. In the prospectus of the first bulletin issued by the school one reads:

"It purposes to give girls a practical and religious education. In particular it aims to assist such parents who find it difficult or impossible, owing to the distance from a parochial school or for other reasons, to have their children instructed in the most necessary branch of education, namely religion. For said reason and on account of the dangers that threaten faith and morals of our Catholic youth in so many public schools, a higher course has been established for those who have graduated from the parochial school." 3

3. St. Mary's Academy Archives, Prospectus of St. Mary's Institute near Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1904, The Object, pages unnumbered.
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A thoroughly religious and practical education was not the only aim of the new academy. As the bulletin further states, another of the aims of the institution was to train youth at as little expense as possible to their parents. Daughter of parents in less favorable financial circumstances could also receive a training in a religious atmosphere. The bulletin continues

"education without religion is of no permanent value neither to the child nor to society in general; on the other hand education based on religion ennoble the mind. It is the greatest gift that can

be imparted by parents and teachers to children which reaps a reward for time and eternity." 4

4. S.M.A.A., Ibid., pages unnumbered

With the teaching of religion as its primary aim, the academy also offered regular courses of study. An elementary course was established for all girls who had not made their first Holy Communion or whose studies had been interrupted or neglected for other reasons. This course was equivalent to our modern Primary and Intermediate Grades. A Preparatory Course, as it was called, that is, the Grammar Grades, sixth, seventh, and eighth, was intended for those girls completing the first course. Those girls desiring a higher education, and Advanced Course equivalent to the present high school course was offered. This course included such subjects as Christian Doctrine, Church History, Higher Arithmetic, Algebra, Bookkeeping, Rhetoric, Literature, Civil Government, Physical Geography, Ancient History, Botany, Natural Philosophy, Latin, Geometry, English, and German. The Commercial Course fitted girls for a business career. 5

5. S.M.A.A., Ibid., pages unnumbered.

In the fall of 1904, when the academy admitted its first pupils, eighty in number, the sisters of the St. Francis community that comprised the faculty and household staff were: Superior, Sister Eleanore* ; Academic department: Sisters Irene, Fabian, Otto* ; Music, Sisters Aegidia and Paula; Art--painting and embroidery-- Sisters Melania, Blandina, and Callista; Grades, Sister Philippa*;

Household duties, Sisters Florentine, Maria,* and Augusta.* 6

* Deceased

6. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Administration, Card 12, response of Sister Florentine, the cook at St. Mary's in 1904, to the question as to the number and names of the sisters who were stationed at the academy the year it opened.
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During the long period of her administration, Mother Thecla was destined to undertake and see a further two-fold expansion of her first material venture. In 1920, the large north wing was begun. It was added to the original building of St. Mary's Academy and was named Loretta Hall, when completed in January of 1921. On the twenty-first of that month, in the presence of forty priest^s, the wing was blessed and dedicated by The Most Reverend Sebastian Messmer, D.D. Monsignor Bernard Traudt, Vicar General of the Milwaukee Archdiocese, read the Solemn High Mass, and Reverend David O'Hearn, D.C.L., pastor of St. John's Cathedral, Milwaukee, delivered the sermon. 7

7. S.M.A.A., The Fioretti, Yearbook of 1929, 149
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Again, in 1929, plans were under way for an up-to-date modern school building to be added to St. Mary's Academy. Mother Thecla, then Mother Assistant, helped to plan this addition, but did not live to see the completion of the building known as Rosary Hall in 1931.

After the building of the academy had been enlarged and modern accommodations added, St. Mary's Academy had a rapid growth. The student enrollment gradually increased until it reached the five hundred mark. With this student increase, other improvements followed. New laboratory equipment was purchased. The curriculum was enriched

with additional courses in arts and science. The library was stacked with every type of serviceable books for educational needs. A faculty professionally trained to teach the academic, commercial, and home economic courses earned recognition for the academy. Before many years had passed after its founding in 1904, St. Mary's Academy was accredited to the University of Wisconsin, affiliated with Marquette University, and became a member of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.

In the thirty-eight years of its existence, students of St. Mary's Academy have participated in the activities of many clubs and societies both national and city, and have earned high honors therein. Students, almost a hundred in number, have left the academy to join twelve different religious communities in various parts of the country and have dedicated their lives to the teaching profession in Catholic schools. And, to the credit of Mother Thecla, hundreds of students have been educated and imbued with the ideals underlying the school's motto "Virtue and Knowledge United" and have been proud to be graduated from

"a school with a Catholic atmosphere; a school that combines the highest scholastic standards with the cherished traditions of our Holy Mother the Church; a school where spirituality and scholarship fuse to enkindle the innate quality in every woman--the desire to give herself in service to others." ⁸

8. S.M.A.A., Prospectus of St. Mary's Academy, 1940, pages unnumbered.

St. Coletta School

In 1904, the buildings known as St. Coletta's at Jefferson, Wisconsin, were once more vacant. To what new use they could be put was the troublesome question which confronted Mother Thecla in the sixth year of her generalship. While it was still a boarding school for girls, the chaplain of that institution, Reverend George Meyer, visioned a plan that was to blaze the trail in an unheard of venture in the Catholic Western States. Although versions vary as to how the idea was actually conceived, the tradition prevailing at the present St. Coletta School at Jefferson, and the statement of several living persons who remember the original plan present the following accepted story.

While Father Meyer was traveling in the state of Tennessee, he chanced to meet a wealthy family from the South. It so happened that one of the children of this family was mentally retarded. The parents of the afflicted child greatly lamented that no Catholic institution existed where they could place their child. They were particularly anxious to have their daughter trained in the fundamentals of the Catholic religion. They told Father Meyer their predicament and hoped he could interest some one in this charitable work.

When Father Meyer returned North, he suggested to Mother Thecla that she establish a school for mentally handicapped children in the now vacated St. Coletta's. Because the field was new and as yet unexplored in Catholic circles, Mother Thecla hesitated. She feared

to impose such a heavy task upon her sisters. But, when an appeal was made to the community, several sisters nobly responded as volunteers. Seeing the courage and willingness of her Franciscan daughters, Mother Thecla boldly set out to establish an institution for what she styled the "poorest of the poor." Thus, St. Coletta's was once more destined to be put to a new use, the first of its kind in the Old Northwest. An institution with a Catholic sisterhood at its head was to be established for mentally retarded children. Thus was launched Mother Thecla's second great material undertaking.

To give every assistance to the project, Father Meyer made trips to state institutions to see how the work was done and also gathered data concerning the methods of caring for the feeble-minded and mentally undeveloped children. With the approval of the Most Reverend Sebastian Messmer, Ordinary of the Milwaukee Archdiocese, and within the summer of the same year, a prospectus for St. Coletta Institute for Backward Youth, as it was then to be called, was published and circulated throughout the States.

In the fall of 1904, the institute opened. Five children were admitted. Though the beginning was an humble one, no one rejoiced more than did Father Meyer. Of the training and care of these children he said later, "It's a noble work to train the mentally fit and to educate them, but it is a greater work to awaken a dormant and darkened mind to the knowledge and love of God." 9

9. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Administration, Cards 14, 71, response of Reverend George Meyer, Sister Anastasia, et al., regarding the establishment of a school for mentally retarded.

With so few schools in this field of work, St. Coletta's in the first years of its existence admitted both the better and lower class of mentally retarded children. Even the epileptic child was admitted. When Mother Thecla saw the very great hardships and sacrifices made by the sisters in the care of these children, she felt she had demanded too much of them. After some experimenting and due deliberation, Mother Thecla and the sister in charge of St. Coletta's decided that charity demanded that only the trainable child should be accepted. Thereafter, St. Coletta's became a home for children unable to do the school work in the graded schools, for children socially unfit.

Because religion is a great factor in discipline and control and because children respond quickly to a religious atmosphere, religious training superceded all other training. From its founding and to the present day, the main objective of St. Coletta's has been to instruct these children sufficiently that they might attend religious services and receive the Sacraments. 10

10. Sister Mary Anastasia Mueller, O.S.F., The Socialization of the Mentally Retarded, 28-29. This work is a thesis presented to Marquette University by a sister for her Ph. B.

Although religious training is given precedence at St. Coletta School, other training is not neglected. When a child is admitted to the institute, specially trained teachers administer scientific tests to determine the capabilities and needs of the child. When the extent of his ability is determined, everything possible is done to develop that individual in order to make him a useful member of society after he leaves the institute. For this reason, included ~~included~~ in the courses of study and activities, are school subjects, manual train-

ing, industrial works and arts, and health education. The children are also trained in a sense of duty, respect for authority, thrift, honesty, and courtesy. 11

11. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: St. Coletta's, Prospectus, St. Coletta School, Jefferson, Wisconsin, pages unnumbered.

In school subjects at St. Coletta's, ranking first is reading. This subject aims to give these children informational knowledge in every day life happenings. Secondly, arithmetic is taught. In this branch, special emphasis is placed on the practical application of all mechanical processes. For practical purposes, a special classroom is equipped with stores of purchasable merchandise. Spelling, writing, language, home geography, history, and nature study are also taught. Also, by story-telling, projects of various types, and dramatizations, these children are taught how to conduct themselves in important life situations. 12

12. Ibid., pages unnumbered.

In the industrial work and arts, rug-weaving, clay modeling, wood-work, brush-making, and needlework are taught both to the boys and girls of the institute. Special training for girls includes cooking, sewing, home decorating and management, and laundering. The boys also assist in the work in the garden and on the adjoining farm.

Special mention must be made of the teaching of music at St. Coletta's. Some of the children show special talent in this art.

Therefore, instruction is given on the various musical instruments. The children with special musical ability are organized into a school band. The best talent is thus shown in weekly concerts under the direction of a band master. On special occasions, St. Coletta's band, composed of both boys and girls, has broadcast over the air. 13

13. Ibid., pages unnumbered.

Throughout her whole life, Mother Thecla cherished a warm spot in her heart for the noble and charitable work done by her sisters at St. Coletta's. As the undertaking advanced successfully, she felt the efforts of the sisters had been visibly blessed by God. This consoled Mother Thecla, for she felt this daring venture had not been undertaken in vain. She took special care that the sisters training these children should get extra help in their work. After the teachers had received the fundamental philosophies at Catholic Universities and Colleges, Mother Thecla sent them to secular institutions which specialized in this type of instruction. And to relieve all the sisters in their arduous task of caring for the backward and underprivileged, Mother Thecla would sometimes prolong their vacation after their annual retreat. She would also permit them to have special lawn parties or surprise parties indoors each month, and would permit them to see a movie occasionally. 14

14. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Interviews, Cards 17, 36, 46, response of Sister Anastasia, Superior of St. Coletta's regarding Mother Thecla's attitude toward the work the sisters were doing.

Were she alive today, Mother Thecla would be proud of St. Coletta School for Exceptional Children as it is known in our present day. For St. Coletta's is not only a school. It is also a home for what she once called "poorest of God's poor." Were she to visit the institution at Jefferson at the present time, she would find, in the first place, an atmosphere and environment that is delightful. The interior of the buildings is made pleasing by artistic furnishings and harmonized color designs. Moreover, because the children are assigned little home tasks, their aesthetic tastes are developed when they help to keep the rooms neat and tidy. Home life is retained at table where regular and varied meals are served. Each department has birthday parties for all the children that had a birthday on that particular month. Special decorations and menus add joy to the occasion. A Merit system has been introduced to help correct the character faults of the children and to handle problem cases. Organized programs both indoors and out of doors has aided the physical development of the children. Likewise, corrective and preventive medical treatment and dental care are a part of the regular health program. 15

15. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: St. Coletta's, Prospectus, pages unnumbered; and Sister Anastasia Mueller, op. cit., 32-33

It is evident from what has been said above that what was once a pioneer Catholic School for the mentally retarded, the first of its kind in the Old Northwest, St. Coletta School for Exceptional Children, has grown and expanded into a distinguished home and training school. It has become the consolation of desolate parents and the

admiration of the outside world at large. It is now nurturing its first offshoot, a branch house, St. Coletta's-of-the-West. This new school is located in the State of Colorado, near the city of Longmont. In the fall of 1941, nine pupils were enrolled there. Though the beginnings of this branch house is also humble, the prospects for the future are as promising as those of its parent house at Jefferson, Wisconsin.

In this work begun by Mother Thecla, many members of the community at St. Francis have devoted themselves throughout their religious life to the care of the mentally handicapped. Several sisters, in particular the superiors of St. Coletta's, have dedicated many years of service to the institution. Since the opening of St. Coletta's in the fall of 1904, the following sisters have been superiors there: Sisters Theophila, Matilda, Emerentia, Spes,* Anastasia, and Madeline. The last two sisters have been connected with the school for many years and have sacrificed their lives to work for the children at St. Coletta's. Such heroic work will not go unrewarded, for it has as its only motive, that promise of Christ, "Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for Me." 16

* Deceased

16. New Testament Revised, Matt. 25, 40

St. Joseph's Academy

In her first six years as Superior General, Mother Thecla had established two important schools, St. Mary's Academy at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and St. Coletta School for Exceptional Children at Jefferson, Wisconsin. Necessity compelled her to purchase and remodel a third building, a former Presbyterian College, at Longmont, Colorado. Mother Thecla had contracted bronchitis and her health was impaired. Therefore, Archbishop Messmer of Milwaukee, suggested and strongly advised Mother Thecla to go to Colorado to recuperate. In September 1906, obedient to the Bishop, Mother Thecla accompanied by her nurse, Sister Bilhildis, left for the West. Their temporary dwelling was St. Rose Orphanage, Denver.

During the fall and again in the winter of the same year, two other sisters, Mother Celestine and Sister Paula, were also sent West. After the latter arrived, they together with Mother Thecla lived at St. Anthony's Hospital, Denver. However, after this, Mother Thecla realized that hospital care was expensive and that some permanent residence had to be secured for the sisters.

At the beginning of the next year, 1907, the Superior General accompanied by Mother Celestine, paid an official visit to Bishop Mats of the Denver diocese and petitioned him for permission to open a school in the Colorado diocese. This appeal was not well received. Instead, the bishop suggested to Mother Thecla that she open a hospital in the State. When Mother Thecla referred the matter to Archbishop Messmer of Milwaukee, he replied that since

instruction of youth in schools was the principal work of her community, she should not undertake any other new work. When Mother Thecla returned to the episcopal residence with her answer, Bishop Metz warned her that sisters could not live on sunshine and water and dismissed her.

In the meantime, while the bishop's wrath was cooling, Mother Thecla, with her usual resourcefulness, did some personal reconnoitering. She had been advised that the pastor of Fort Collins, Colorado was desirous of having a parochial school. Promptly, Mother Thecla went there for an interview with Reverend Lajeunesse, the pastor. Very quietly, the pastor listened to her request and after due deliberation delivered his ultimatum. "You can stay," said he, "if you build the school yourself."

Frustrated in her second plan, Mother Thecla, driven from one door sought out another place. When another of her Colorado friends heard of the failure of her plans, she suggested to Mother Thecla to inquire at Longmont, Colorado. Accordingly, she and her companions hunted this town. Arriving in Longmont, amid a terrific snow storm, they trudged along from street to street in search of the Catholic church. Finally, spying the church steeple, they were guided by it to the parish rectory.

Tired and weary they approached the house. The pastor, Father Nicholas was his name, saw them coming. Thinking the sisters were soliciting funds for some charity, he resolutely determined to refuse them admittance. When Mother Thecla and Mother Celestine knocked at the door, Father Nicholas came forward to give them a cold reception.

After the supposed mendicants had sincerely explained their errand to the pastor, all of his hostility vanished. Instead of driving them back into the storm, Father Nicholas gave the Mothers a tardy welcome and offered them hospitality for the night. During the evening conversation, the pastor showed them every kindness and even suggested a remedy to their difficulties. On that day, in the winter of 1907, another Waterloo was won. This time Mother Thecla was the general and Longmont, Colorado the battlefield. 17

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17. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Administration, Cards 17, 18, response of Sister Paula, a member of the St. Francis community who, after the purchase was made, opened the academy at Longmont and was its first superior; and

Writeup of Longmont, Colorado by Sister Raymond as its early beginnings were related to her by several sisters who were stationed there in the first years of its existence.

Mother Thecla's trouble had been solved by the fact that Longmont, Colorado, although a town of 6,000 inhabitants, had boasted of a Catholic church but no Catholic school. The people of the town seemed to be unacquainted with the sight of persons wearing a religious garb, for when the Mothers appeared there, they were stared at with great and unconcealed astonishment. But their coming at this time was providential.

When they reached Longmont, there was for sale a house, Longmont College, and four city lots. Father Nicholas had suggested that Mother Thecla purchase this property. The pastor was wise enough to make the suggestion for he knew that the locality would have its first Catholic school. Acting on this advice, Mother Thecla had a consultation with Mr. Ottens, a real estate agent. Negotiations for the pur-

chase of the college were begun. Because some religious sisters were to make the purchase the entire matter had to be kept secret lest the price be raised. Due to prejudice, care had to be taken not to view the building too publicly for fear of detection. At long last the deal was closed, the property purchased, and a home secured for the community of St. Francis at Colorado.

With Father Nicholas, the pastor, and Mr. and Mrs. Ottens, prominent people of the Catholic parish of Longmont as friends, Mother Thecla made plans for the remodeling of the somewhat delapidated college building which thereafter was to be known as St. Joseph's Academy. With the aid of the pastor and the Ottens family, who remained kind benefactors and advisers of Mother Thecla while they lived, Mother Thecla received the deed to the land from Secretary Mahony of the Longmont Commercial Association in March 1907. Extensive repairs were then made and the renovated building became a boarding school for young ladies and a home for the sisters of the community in need of western sunshine. 18

18. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Administration, Cards 17, 18, response of Sister Paula, first superior of Longmont, when asked for information concerning the purchase and repairing of the Longmont property.

On the feast of St. Anthony, June 13, 1907, the first sisters from the East, Sisters Paula and Regina, arrived to take charge of the Longmont mission. As has been mentioned, the sight of sisters was unusual. The people regarded them as an oddity. Great was the surprise of the store-keepers when the sisters made necessary household purchases. Greater was their surprise when they paid for them.

Up to that time, the business men had encountered only such persons who were soliciting a donation for some charitable institution or cause. When the pioneer sisters of Longmont academy asked for nothing gratis, they made their first favorable impression upon the town. On another occasion, when the Mothers went to town on a tour of shopping for the school and sisters' home, they met the undertaker of the place, Mr. Milo Rice. After greeting them, Mr. Rice said, "I hear you are going to settle here." "Yes," replied Mother Thecla, "we have come here not to interfere but to supplement." 19

19. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Interviews, Card 57, response of Sister Emerita, the first kindergarten teacher at St. Joseph's Academy, Longmont, Colorado.

After the household was somewhat settled, in the summer of 1907, the sisters prepared the prospectus of St. Joseph's Academy of Longmont and distributed them to the Catholic families. During the first year, the sisters planned on teaching kindergarten, tutoring in English, Latin, and German, and opening a Music Department. And when Mother Thecla departed for the East she begged the sisters to be good saleswomen for her new undertaking, to encourage parents to send their daughters to St. Joseph's, and to make the school self-supporting.

Under the guidance of Sister Paula, the sisters did their best to circulate information and obtain pupils. In spite of their efforts prospectus looked dark and foreboding. A few weeks before the school opened only two music pupils applied. Even their staunch friend, Mrs. Ottens, had no success. The sisters soon realized that their first task was to break down the prejudice and opposition of the people.

Catholics were as yet few, and Catholic sisters seemed unwelcome. By accepting harsh treatment from some of the people without retaliation, the sisters gradually won over the people and by the second year of the academy's existence, seventy pupils were enrolled. In time, since the kindergarten did not prove so lucrative, it gave place to a regular grade school. Within a decade, a high school department was added and the Music department of the academy won high praise in the community by the presentation of music recitals and entertainments. 20

20. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 57, response in an interview of Sister Emerita, the same sister mentioned above.

From the time of its foundation by Mother Thecla in 1907, St. Joseph's Academy has been a boon to Longmont, Colorado. When prospective settlers learned that a Catholic school had been established, it was the first one in the place, families came to settle where their children could receive an education in a religious atmosphere of a sisters' school. This increased the academy enrollment. When the pupils began to crowd out the sisters sent West to recuperate their health, Mother Thecla requested the new pastor of St. John's Church to build a separate parochial school near the parish church. Almost a decade passed before her plan and request was granted. One difficulty remained. The academy still remained the residence of the sisters teaching at the parish school. In the lifetime of Mother Thecla no separate convent was built for teaching staff of St. John's School. Not until the year 1940 was a convent home provided for them.

Mention has been made in Part Two of the use to which St. Joseph's

Academy has been put recently. To complete the Mother Thecla Longmont venture, it must be said that the former academy still retains and has a flourishing Music department. The building was still the home of sisters from the East in need of the Colorado climate until a new house was purchased and prepared in Tucson, Arizona, in 1941. At this time, with the hearty approval of the Bishop of Denver, Colorado under whose jurisdiction the town of Longmont is, St. Joseph's Academy became the first offspring of the Jefferson, Wisconsin institute, a second St. Coletta School-of-the-West, a school for mentally retarded and socially handicapped children. With promise of a successful future and with a view of further expansion, twenty-two acres of land have been purchased near Estes Park not far from the city of Longmont, Colorado. On this land a new and more-up-to-date St. Coletta School as the old St. Joseph's Academy has been named will be built. This new institution will now devote its efforts to the difficult work of training and caring for exceptional children of the Rocky Mountain region. 21

21. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Longmont, Writeup of Longmont, Colorado, as written by Sister Raymond when she interviewed several sisters who had taught at the Longmont School; and

Information gathered by the writer from Mother Bartholomew, O.S.F., present Superior General of the St. Francis Community on the new St. Coletta School-of-the-West, 1942.

In and About St. Francis

During her first two terms of office, Mother Thecla, while supervising the three major buildings just discussed, at the same time added wings and made other improvements to the Motherhouse, at St. Francis, Wisconsin. Indeed, scarcely a year passed during her entire administration, as the records show, when some building project and improvement was not under way. Her ability to finance these enterprises is also surprising. Mother Thecla managed to balance her budget by impressing upon her religious daughters that, since money was needed, the first requisite of a Franciscan was to be saving. Because some of the salaries of the sisters were very low, and because schools were taken and institutional work done without any remuneration, Mother Thecla trained her sisters to be thrifty, to cut down expense by living frugally. However, it must be remembered, that prices of food commodities and living maintenance at the turn of the century in no way compare with war time prices in the age in which one is living today. Besides being economic in the use of resources, Mother Thecla did not build without assistance from Heaven, for great was her trust in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and in St. Joseph.

At the Motherhouse, she made the following necessary improvements. To lighten the burden of the sisters who had to pump water into a large tank in the convent attic for domestic needs, Mother Thecla had a waterworks and a sewer system laid in 1900. To eliminate the

household duty of carrying candles about and filling lamps with kerosene all through the house, she had installed a general power and electric plant in 1904. To protect the sisters from the inclemency of the weather, she had a tunnel built to connect the convent with the laundry and power house in 1905. To replace artificial flowers and to brighten the chapel altars with natural plants and out flowers, she had a large green house built in 1909. To better preserve the food, she had installed an ice plant consisting of four coolers and an ice machine in 1911. To replace the electric power house that had exploded and caused property damages, she had it rebuilt and bought steam boilers for it in 1919. And, for the greater convenience of all, she had a sewerage system extended and a gas line piped in the convent in 1924. 22

22. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Administration, Cards 5, 11, 15, 25, 31, 47, response of Sister Isabel, Administratrix General of the St. Francis Community. She handles all financial affairs, building matters, and improvements to be made about the convent.

The buildings added to the convent grounds by Mother Thecla during her Generalship were also begun in 1900. That year a small dwelling house for the mechanics working on the grounds adjoining the convent was built. It was replaced by a larger dwelling in 1909. This has been and is known as St. Joseph's Home. The workmen live at this home and guests rooms there furnish visitors to the convent with sleeping quarters. The foundations were laid for a large modern barn in the same year, 1909. It replaced the old barn which was converted into a carpenter's workshop for the cabinet-maker. A bungalow was built for the cabinet maker and St. Elizabeth's

building, an infirmary to be used as an isolation department for contagious diseases was erected in 1921. 23

23. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Cards 6, 23, 24, 36, 54, data collected and placed in a book by Sister Raymond, an elder member of the community who was the first to begin collecting documents for the community history. These facts have been recopied and rearranged by the author.

After the election of the Superior General in 1898, the community increased rapidly in membership and the convent quarters became too small. During her third term, Mother Thecla decided to enlarge the convent building. Her first addition was the north west wing of three stories. It was built in 1907 and served as refectory, community room, and dormitory or sleeping quarters for the sisters. On the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, October 4, 1914, just seven years later, ground was broken for another wing, the main south wing of the convent. On the feast of St. George, April 23, 1915, the cornerstone of this south wing was laid. The completed south wing, the largest addition built by Mother Thecla to the Motherhouse at St. Francis, Wisconsin, was blessed a year later on April 27, 1916. During the impressive religious ceremonies held to celebrate the completion of the wing, The Right Reverend Monsignor Joseph Rainer, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, preached the sermon. His words expressed on the occasion give the reasons for the rejoicings:

"The joyful solemnity which has assembled us in this chapel today is perfectly in keeping with the character of the joyous Easter season into which we entered a few weeks ago. For the present solemnity, too, is of a joyous nature, it marks the successful completion of a great work, commenced sometime ago with some misgivings indeed,

but also with a strong confidence in the assistance from above; and thanks to this assistance we see the great work brought to a successful issue. It is therefore with sentiments of gratitude to God that the sisters of this community and its many friends from far and near behold the realization of their pious wishes, of their efforts and prayers, and their sacrifices. Yes, God has wonderfully blessed their work. . . The history of this community is another striking proof that the humbler and more insignificant the beginning of a work, the greater the difficulties and obstacles it meets at its start, the greater will be its success in the future, the richer the blessings it is destined to bring to the world and to religion." 24

24. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Cards 16, 20, 38, 40, 42. This material has also been recopied and arranged by the writer from Sister Raymond's collected data and is concerned with the additions to the convent at St. Francis built by Mother Thecla; and

Folio: Sermons, The Right Reverend Joseph Rainer, Sermon. This sermon is preserved in the archives and was delivered at the ceremony of the blessing of the south wing of the St. Francis of Assisi Convent, St. Francis, Wisconsin, April 27, 1916, 1.

No doubt, Mother Thecla's heart was overflowing with gratitude to God at this completion of another of her material endeavors. As she listened to the Monsignor preach, she heard him relate the hardships of the pioneer sisters who had preceded her. She heard him praise the interior life and spirit of her community. This spirit, said the preacher was sacred to the traditions of the community's past. It was a spirit patterned on that of the Seraphic patron, Holy Father Francis, a spirit of poverty and contempt for the world's goods, a spirit of obedience to the Holy Rules of the Franciscan order. She also heard her own work extolled when the Monsignor continued:

"Thanks to the good example and wise guidance of its superiors this community has never allowed the worldly spirit to enter these hallowed walls. It has always preserved the spirit of its founder, of the Seraphic Saint whose image you daily behold on this altar, St. Francis of Assisi." 25

25. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Sermons, Ibid., 4

Finally, Mother Thecla heard Monsignor Rainer praise the new and beautiful home she had built for her missionary sisters. It was the conviction of the preacher that the sisters deserved such a home, for, he concluded:

"You all have done your share of hard labor and many a sacrifice to make this building possible, and have a perfect right to enjoy the fruit of your labors. You all have reason today to offer your heartfelt thanks to the giver of all good things for having blessed the work of your hand and to ask Him further blessing that this house may stand for many years to come, that it may be a dwelling of peace and home of virtue and Christian charity where all vie with another in striving after perfection by humbly performing the duties of their state. This is my wish and prayer, this the wish and prayer of your many friends who have come today to share your joy and to thank the Father in Heaven in union with you. Amen." 26

26. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Sermons, Ibid., 5

The convent chapel, too, saw many new and fitting adornments. With her consummate tact and winning ways, Mother Thecla secured the following gifts for the convent's imposing Gothic chapel. There was presented in 1909 by Mrs. Fred Daalman, mother of the deceased Sister Ernesta, the Statuary of the Agony Group which stands on the left

transept of the chapel. This was presented to the convent as a memorial of Mrs. Daalman's daughter, Magdalen. In 1910, the Relief Stations, designed by the Carl Walter Company of Trier, Germany, were gifts of several individuals among them Monsignor Rainer and Father Metzdorf. In 1921, the chapel itself was completely redecorated by the artist, Gaertner. Other chapel improvements placed there under the direction of Mother Thecla were the buildings of confessionals, the installing of a ventilation system, the refinishing the aisles and sanctuary floor in tile, and the hanging of new electric light fixtures. ²⁷

27. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Administration, Cards 27, 29 49, 52 data reorganized and collected from material gathered by Sister Raymond.

The buildings completed and internal improvements made, Mother Thecla, herself a one-time artist, undertook the beautification of the grounds around the convent buildings. Her first project in outdoor work was begun in 1909 when she had the grounds landscaped. With this improvement of the convent landscape, other layouts were added throughout her administration. In 1912, a graceful pebble-dash grape arbor was constructed and the western terrace planted with Norway maple trees. In 1916, after the completion of the southern wing mentioned above, an interested benefactor donated a life size statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the circular driveway near the main entrance. This benefactor was Dr. Thomas Fitzgibbons, former resident physician of the community. The stone pedestal upon which the statue was placed was presented by Messrs. Edward Steigerwald and Sons, contractors and builders of Milwaukee. The latter

also donated an Agony Grotto which stands on the east terrace and was constructed of medium sized stones gathered on the shores of Lake Michigan. The grotto was adorned with an Agony Group of Statuary. The same year, 1916, relatives of that year's Profession Class contributed to the building of outdoor stations of the Cross. The stations were the work of the Munich Statuary Company of Milwaukee. A summer house, replica of the first convent of the forty-niners, was built in 1917 and called the Assisium. Additional trees, shrubbery, and rose plants were added to complete the outdoor park in 1920. With the building of tennis and croquet courts in 1924, Mother Thecla, at the close of her administration, beheld at the convent where she had been Superior General so long not only a fine layout of additional wings and buildings but artistic landscaping and beautiful grounds as well. 28

28. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Cards 27, 29, 49, 52. This material is from the source quoted above, the Sister Raymond data.

Mother Thecla has shown in her material projects that she was an astute financier and a woman of insight. Moreover, like a far-sighted real estate agent, she often bought property and land when it was offered for sale. As early as 1900, she obtained the land lease for the sisters' burial grounds near the Chapel of the Woods at St. Francis, Wisconsin. To secure seclusion for the convent and prevent the encroachment of the city houses too near the grounds, she was compelled to purchase the fifteen acre Koenig farm at St. Francis. Other property and land purchased made by Mother Thecla included Mrs. Mary Broidy's estate at Eagle Lake, Wisconsin, the Henry Ruhl residence in Milwaukee, and the sixty acre Nicholson farm at Cudahy,

Wisconsin. These properties either were sold again or remained in the hands of the community and still do service today. 29

29. S.F.A.C.A., Folio, Ibid., Cards 28, 32, 45, 48, reorganized and rearranged by the writer from the material collected by Sister Raymond from financial accounts of the community.

In fulfilling the material needs of her community at St. Francis, Mother Thecla did her ample share. When she laid down her office as Superior General in 1925, it could be said of this wise architect that she had built upon the foundations as she found them in 1898. Now, to this very day, her work abides.

Chapter VI

Educators Shall Shine Like Stars

- 1 Early Education in Wisconsin
- 2 Growth of the Public School System
3. Parallel Growth of the Catholic School System
- 4 Contribution of Mother Thecla to Catholic Education

Early Education in Wisconsin

The Ordinance of 1787, one of the three great documents of American History, contains this famous sentence: "Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." ¹ Upon this statement the foundations of the educational principles of Wisconsin have been laid.

1. Clay J. Daggett, ed., Education in Wisconsin, 14

These same principles were repeated by Mr. Rufus King in his superintendent's report concerning Milwaukee schools. In 1845, he stated:

"The importance of a good education to free people cannot be overestimated. The future safety of life and property may depend upon the means now adopted for laying the foundation of an education that will render those who are soon to occupy prominent places in Wisconsin, a moral, intelligent, and virtuous people." ²

2. Lieutenant Colonel Jerome Watrous, Memoirs of Milwaukee County, 1:387

Mr. King's sentiments are undoubtedly those of all Christian educators of youth. Since one of the foremost objectives of the Community at St. Francis is the guiding and training of youth, Mother Thecla, too, realized this need. In adopting plans for the training of her teachers, she proceeded carefully, cautiously. Before making any decision, she probably studied what advances in education had been made from earliest times in her own State, made in the public school system in the city of Milwaukee, near which her community was

located. The history of the growth of Catholic education in Wisconsin was of very special interest to her. Here are her findings.

As early as 1670, adventurous French explorers, missionaries, and traders had opened up the lake region and the Mississippi Valley, Immediately after white man had come, missionary stations were established by French Jesuits at La Pointe, De Pere, and the Fox River Valley. The instruction given at these centers was largely religious. It consisted of catechising the proselytes, of teaching them to sing canticles, and impressing upon them the ceremonies of the Catholic Church. ³

3. J. W. Stearns, ed., Columban History of Education, 10-11

"Post schools" were also conducted at the principal forts of the territory. They were directed by officer commanders, soldiers, and prominent citizens. Often they were placed in charge of the chaplains stationed there. ⁴

4. Lyman C. Draper, ed., Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 5:336

Prior to the year 1836, two decades before Mother Thecla's father, Thomas Thren, came to the West, there had been established in the region eight or nine private elementary schools. With a spirit of initiative, some individuals, who were alert, active, and public spirited, arranged to gather the children of the district into a private dwelling or rude log school house for instruction. If unable to do the teaching themselves, they would select some person with a

common school education and experience in pedagogy as teacher of the group. Money would be collected by subscription and the teacher was paid a salary of \$3.00 a term per pupil. The school remained open three months of the year. ⁵

5. Ibid., 5:336; and

Clay J. Dagget, op. cit., 24

All the schools set up in these early days were poorly equipped and most primitive in their make-up. The following excerpt gives one a good description of these so-called schools:

"The schoolhouse was generally a log cabin or cheaply constructed frame shanty, probably 18 by 24 feet, with a door at one end, a huge fireplace in one end and two small windows on each side. Often these windows were not more than 24 by 30 inches in size, and on cloudy days the scholars who occupied seats in the corners or in the center of the room found it a difficult matter to study their lessons. Long, backless benches were provided for smaller children, while along the walls under the windows was arranged a broad board for a writing desk. Sometimes small tables with suitable seats were provided for the pupils old enough to write, though tables were regarded as a luxury, and the school that could afford them was considered fortunate. The schoolmaster was furnished with a chair, a small deal table, a few books, a bottle of ink and a quill pen, as part of his duties was to "set the copies" in the writing books of the pupils. One of his accomplishments was to know how to make a good quill pen, as steel pens had not yet come into general use. Reading, writing, and arithmetic--sometimes denominated the three R's--constituted the principal features of the curriculum, though occasionally an old map would be hung upon the wall and used for general exercise in geography. Text-books were of divers

kinds, written by various authors, so that efficient class work was out of the question, and blackboards were rarely used in the pioneer schools." 6

6. Lieutenant. Colonel Jerome Watrous, op. cit., 1:381

If she had carried her research further, Mother Thecla would have found that among the schools of a private nature were the first schools of eastern settlers. Wherever families of Jews resided in the same neighborhood a synagogue was built, and wherever even lesser numbers of Easterners settled together, a traditional "red school house" was found there. 7 And when the state of Wisconsin was still a part of the Territory of Michigan, the legislature of that territory passed a school law in 1827, which decreed that as soon as twenty families had settled in a town, three commissioners of a common school should be selected. Thus was organized the first school district. While the town became the unit of civil administration for the state, the district became the unit for administration and control of schools. But free education for the children of all the settlers had not yet been widely accepted. This being true especially of the Wisconsin region, many children did not attend school at all. 8

7. Lyman C. Draper, ed., op. cit., 5:335; and

8. Clay J. Daggett, op. cit., 25

The first public school was organized by law in the bounds of the State in the year 1836. It was the only public school under the laws of the State while under the Michigan territory. Private schools were also set up as early as 1845 in Kenosha and Sheboygan. However,

the notable event of the year 1845, was the establishment of the first free school in the state of Wisconsin. It was located at Kenosha (then called Southport). This free school movement was led by Colonel M. Frank. When this experiment proved successful, the Kenosha schools, in the course of time, acquired an enviable reputation for completeness of organization and accuracy of instruction. The success of this Kenosha enterprise of establishing a free school system did much, no doubt, to insert liberal provisions into the State constitution for public schools in Wisconsin.⁹

9. J. W. Stearns, op. cit., 13, 17; and

L. C. Draper, op. cit., 5:340

Growth of the Public School System

When the founders of the community at St. Francis first settled in Milwaukee, in 1849, a school census taken a year before showed that the school population had increased and numbered 763 pupils. Since David Worthington, later a Methodist Minister, had established and taught the first school set up in the city, in 1836, eight other private schools were in operation. Their enrollment numbered 865 pupils with an average attendance of 670. In the decade of the fifties, due to the financial panic in 1857, Milwaukee schools also suffered a financial depression and the school attendance dropped considerably. Warrants of schools had so depreciated that the

executive committee of the school board recommended that the public schools close their doors. Somehow, the schools tided the depression and remained open throughout the period of the Civil War. But during this period the pupils were few in attendance.

It was not until 1865 that the legislature interested itself in the public school educational system. That year it ruled that the superintendent of Milwaukee schools to be a graduate of some college or normal school of the United States. Lacking a degree, the candidate had to hold some certificate showing his qualifications for the office.

Another step forward was the abolition of the old departmental system. In 1868, the primary, intermediate, the grammar departments were dropped and the graded system introduced. That year also the law required that certain text books be used for a period of five years.

Three years later, in 1871, a normal school class was organized in the public schools. It was a three year course and was taught in the schools until the fall of 1885. When the normal school building was completed that year, the city training school course was dropped. Included in the normal school course was the kindergarten system. By 1888, twenty-two kindergartens were organized in the city of Milwaukee.

The law had also provided for schools for the deaf. About 1885 and thereafter, they were incorporated as a part of the public school system. A limited State aid kept them in existence. In the beginning of the eighties, the first evening schools were opened. For these

sessions, the school board supplied books, slate, and stationery for a small fee. By 1891, pupils attending the evening classes were required to furnish their own books. This arrangement has been continued to the present day.

As a department of special instruction, a cooking school was added to the Milwaukee public school system in 1889. The course consisted of twenty lessons and included the essential branches of cooking.

Auxiliaries to the public school system were called into existence in 1891 when a few mothers interested in the moral and physical welfare of their children organized the Woman's School Alliance. Its object was to cooperate and confer with school authorities in an effort to secure better sanitary conditions about the school buildings. As the Alliance expanded it also provided for the needs of poor children thus enabling them to attend school.

In Superintendent' Peckham's report for the year ending August 1892, the school population of Milwaukee was totaled at 80,116. Of this total, 29,552 were enrolled in the public schools; 17,565 in private schools, and 32,999 not enrolled in any school.

Toward the end of the century, in 1897, Mr. Siefert's report gives these figures by way of summary of schools in Milwaukee. There were three high schools, twenty-four district schools, twenty-one primary schools, and one school for the deaf. 854 teachers were employed.

These facts have been dwelt on at some length because the Milwaukee public school system was the model for the entire State and the

show the stages at which public school education had arrived by 1900.¹⁰

10. Lieut. Col. J. Watrous, op. cit., 1:388-409

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Parallel Growth of the Catholic School System

Catholic education paralleled this development with some less material show^{with} the arrival of Father Mazzuchelli at Green Bay in 1830. With the aid of the government and out of the annuities of the Menomonees, he set up a school for the Indians. Apparently, this was the first Catholic school established in Wisconsin. After working among the Indians at Green Bay for four years, this zealous missionary went elsewhere and wherever he went he built a church and established a school. The schools at Mackinac, Sault Ste. Marie, Green Bay, Prairie du Chien, Grand Butte, Portage, Galena, Dubuque, Davenport, Iowa City, and smaller settlements in Michigan, Iowa, and other points in Wisconsin were established directly or indirectly through his indefatigable zeal. ¹¹

11. L. C. Draper, ed., op. cit., 5:328

Like other pioneer endeavors, the schools established by Father Mazzuchelli were of the most primitive nature. The following excerpt not only shows the similarity between the first Catholic schools with those of the pioneer public schools as described above but also

points out the importance of Catholic schools in the development of the Old Northwest.

"a rude log or frame building, a few rough benches or seats, a teacher, either man or woman, whose principal qualifications consisted of the ability to read, write, and "cypher," and who sometimes had to be given instruction in necessary points by the priest himself; this was usually all that was meant by the word "school" in the West in the pioneer days, as it had been likewise in the East a century or so before. Yet, little as the term implied, when interpreted by our present standards, the institution itself, primitive as it was, meant much for the progress of civilization and religion in the West; for when the great stream of emigration a decade or so later swept over this portion of the west, and immense diocese with organized school systems, sprang into existence as if by magic, the work of Father Mazzuchelli and his co-laborers played a great part in the result. His churches and schools scattered over the broad prairies, everywhere pointed to a fixed ideal; and the little bands of Catholics he left behind were so many living nuclei around which could center the elements that went to form these new and rapid growths of the Church. 12

12. Reverend J. A. Burns, The Catholic School System in the United States, 339-340

In the next decade, the footprints of that pioneer apostle, Reverend Martin Kundig, are stamped on the grounds of nearly every city or village of note in central and southeastern Wisconsin. Besides supervising the building of a score of churches, he set up many schools among them the first school in the basement of St. Peter's, Milwaukee, Father Kundig, arrived in Milwaukee in 1842 just two years before Bishop John Martin Henni, first bishop of the newly-created

diocese of Milwaukee. Like his forerunner and friend, Reverend Martin Kundig, Bishop Henni recognized the need of building up the church and advancing education in his diocese. After six years of strenuous labor, Bishop Henni in a sermon spoke of the rapid development of the Milwaukee diocese:

"When, six years ago, we took possession of the newly established bishopric of Milwaukee, we found nothing to note here, unless what the most urgent and immediate payments enabled us to retain. All things had to be begun; all things had to be created. . . . Churches and chapels have sprung up in unexampled numbers; schools, institutions of piety, and convents now exist not only on the Milwaukee, but on the Wisconsin and Mississippi Rivers." 13

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13. John Gilmary Shea, History of the Catholic Church in the United States, 256-257
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Besides building churches and schools, Bishop Henni was anxious to secure religious teachers for his schools. It was through his instrumentality that the community of the Sisters of St. Francis was founded in the vicinity of Milwaukee, in the May of 1849. Two other communities, the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa, who were established at St. Clara's Academy, Benton, Wisconsin in the August of 1849 and later moved to Sinsinawa, and the Notre Dames, who under Sister Caroline Friess, had come to this country and were secured as teachers for St. Mary's parish school, Milwaukee, in 1850, were set up in the limits of the diocese of Bishop Henni. 14

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14. Henry H. Scholten, The History of Catholic Elementary Education in Wisconsin 1848-1900, 15-17
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Catholic education was given additional impetus after the provincial councils of Baltimore. Bishop Henni, after attending two of these councils, convened the First Diocesan Synod in Milwaukee to carry out its decrees on schools and other matters. But it was Archbishop Heiss, who succeeded Archbishop Henni in 1881, who made notable advances in educational institutions. Archbishop Heiss represented the archdiocese of Milwaukee at the famous Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in the November of 1884. This council concerned itself especially with education and made important legislation concerning Catholic schools in the United States. One fourth of the decrees adopted by this assembly pertained to Catholic education.

The subject of Title VI, of this council, is entitled Education of Catholic Youth. Regarding parochial schools it decreed

"whenever possible parochial schools were to be erected, and a strong plea was made to religious communities and teaching orders to devote themselves to the work." 15

15. Peter Guilday, A History of the Councils of Baltimore (1791-1884), 237

Moreover, a general law was passed binding both clergy and laity to establish parish schools. The words of the decree (n. 196) read:

"Therefore, we not only exhort Catholic parents with paternal affection, but we command them with all the authority in our power, to procure a truly Christian education for their dear offspring, given them by God, reborn to Christ in baptism and destined for heaven; and further, to defend and secure all of them from the dangers of secular education during the whole term of their infancy and childhood; and finally, to send them to

Catholic, and especially parochial schools, unless, indeed, the bishop of the diocese judge that in a particular case other provision may be permitted. 16

16. Ibid., 238

In this section of the council's decrees one can see that nothing was overlooked or forgotten that would tend to create a more perfect system of Catholic education. Teachers, studies, schools and administration, and methods were all discussed by the bishops in this plenary session. And though high schools were in their infancy in 1884 the prelates hoped in time to advance Catholic children "by regular ascent from the elementary to the superior Catholic schools." 17

17. Ibid., 239

In Milwaukee, Archbishop Heiss, though he attended the plenary and provincial councils of Baltimore, did not live to carry out the decrees promulgated by the bishops of the United States. His successor, The Right Reverend Frederick Xavier Katzer assumed duties in 1891, and promptly proceeded to carry out the wishes of the prelates. In 1892, he convened a synod in Milwaukee which was intended to supplement the Provincial Council of Baltimore as that had supplemented the Plenary Council 1884. At this second gathering of the clergy of the diocese of Milwaukee, regulations were passed for more uniform practices in both churches and schools. Since the archdiocese, at the time of Archbishop Katzer's coming included 185 churches, 5 colleges and academies for boys, 148 parochial schools, 29,210 pupils,

such regulations were needed. 18

18. P. J. Mahon, Trials and Triumphs of the Catholic Church in America, 2:888

The wonderful development that followed the decrees of the Councils of Baltimore in organization, in instruction, in methodical training of teachers, though it had not proceeded as far in Catholic schools as in the public schools by 1900, was so rapid thereafter that Catholic education soon stood on an equal footing with the public school system.

4

Contribution of Mother Thecla to Catholic Education

Mother Thecla taking charge of the community at St. Francis at the turn of the century saw that many Catholic schools already existed. She sensed from the outset that better buildings, better organization, better teacher training was needed to make the schools of which the community had charge the equal of the public school development. Mother Thecla also saw that with the stepping up in improvement of buildings, methods, campus surroundings, recreational facilities, and sanitation, in order to bridge the gap from the old to the new era, she too had to keep step with modern trends.

Through practical judgment and the school of experience, since for her a higher intellectual training was unavailable, Mother Thecla knew that she must not only build schools but see that her sisters advance with the times in teacher training, educational methods, and

improvement of physical surroundings. That she was active building schools where they were wanting has been shown in the previous chapter. What Mother Thecla did toward the training of her teachers and the schools accepted in her administration will now be discussed.

Mother Thecla's first concern was to comply with the decrees of the councils of Baltimore and the regulations regarding schools laid down by the bishops and clergy in the Synod held in Milwaukee in 1892. In the second year of her generalship, she established St. Catherine's Normal School at the Motherhouse at St. Francis. In 1900, just fifteen years after Milwaukee had its first normal school, her community adopted a normal school course of study. It was a two year course, the studies divided into twelve week groups. In the first year of the Normal school, the first twelve weeks were devoted to Arithmetic, Geography, Composition, History of Education, Music, and Physical Culture. The second twelve weeks included Grammar, Drawing, American Literature, Methods of Penmanship, and Expression. The last twelve weeks of the first year had such subjects as Language Methods, Physiology, Hygiene, Psychology, Methods in Spelling, Library Reference Work, and Electives. In the first twelve weeks of the second year course, there was Pedagogy, Civics and Wisconsin History, and Blackboard Drawing; the second twelve weeks, Methods in Story Telling, Dramatization, Reproduction Stories, United States History, School Management, Practice Teaching, Observation; the last twelve weeks, Practice Teaching, General Science, and a number of Electives. The following list gives an idea of what electives were offered: Agriculture, Biology, Analytical Geometry, Geology, Trigon-

ometry, Rural Economics, Debating, English Literature, Ethics, Modern Languages, Greek, and Music. If one could venture a comment on the list of subjects, one would have to admit that the training of future teachers at the beginning of the twentieth century was much like the ones given today. Even if the prospective teachers did not master them, they existed, at least, in print in the school bulletin. 19

19. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Normal School and Teachers' Institute, St. Catherine Normal School Bulletin, Courses of Studies.

During the same year, 1900, Mother Thecla conceived the idea of establishing a Teachers' Institute. Modeled on the public school Board of Education, it had for its officers: Mother Thecla, president; Directress of Studies, Sister Alfonsa;* Committee Members: Sisters Irene, Herman,* and Melania. For each school study, a supervisor and two examiners were appointed. The following sisters filled the post of supervisors: Reading, Sister Patricia,* Grammar, Sister Irene; Geography, Sister Alfonse;* United States History, Sister Baptist; Arithmetic, Sister Celestine; German, Sister Herman.* 20

* Deceased

20. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Syllabus of Teachers' Institute, 2-8

Besides attending the Normal school, the teachers of the community attended daily Teachers' Conferences, which were held each vacation under the direction of Mother Thecla. The minutes of several of the conferences have been preserved and afford interest to a modern teacher. The minutes of the recording secretary of 1900 reveal that each meeting was opened with prayer. Roll Call followed. After reading the

activities of the previous day's conference, school topics were discussed. The topic of each day's discussion was selected from a question box prepared for that purpose. The subject was submitted to a committee of critics for a final decision. The meeting closed with a prayer and the singing of some religious hymn or patriotic song. Interesting to note was the work assigned the treasurer. Since she had no dues to collect, the treasurer had charge of and distributed badges to each teacher in the conference. The badge was made of red ribbon to which was attached a pin of St. Catherine. The officers of the first summer conference were: Sister Alfonsa,* President; Sister Raymond, Secretary; Sister Aegidia, Treasurer; Sisters Irene, Celestine, and Eleanore,* Critics. 21

* Deceased

21. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Minutes of Summer School Conferences 1900.

Educators of today might be interested in the problems of teachers at the beginning of the century. The following questions, preserved in the archives, give one an idea of what the teachers discussed in their conferences at that date.

- "1. How can a person stop the habit of children looking around in church?
2. What are the principal causes of disorder in school?
3. Are children permitted to chew gum during school hours?
4. If children come and say: my pencil, pen, or ruler are gone, what should we do?

5. Should children be made to draw all the maps they study in geography?
6. Is it allowed to practice a play for an entertainment during school time?
7. Should teachers join in games with the children? That is dominos or the like?" 22

22. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Book of Questions. This copy book contains eighty questions that were asked by the teachers at summer school conferences. The seven questions quoted are copied as they appeared in the book.

About a decade later, Mother Thecla took another step forward in the improvement of sisters for the teaching profession. From Marquette University at Milwaukee, from St. Francis Seminary, at St. Francis, and from State Teachers College of Milwaukee, instructors in Mathematics, Science, and Rhetoric, Lecturers in History and Literature, and Professors of the Classics were employed. Lectures were given by them at the Motherhouse at St. Francis both during the scholastic year and during the summer sessions. 23

23. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Traits, Card 12, response of Reverend George Meyer and Sister Mary James. The former had suggested the plan to Mother Thecla; the latter attended the lectures or knew the professors employed.

When this method of training her sisters became outmoded and no longer proved satisfactory, Mother Thecla decided to permit her sisters to attend Catholic colleges. She did this with some reluctance, for she feared the religious spirit and first fervor would suffer. Marquette University, Milwaukee, St. Theresa's College, Winona, De Paul University, Chicago, and Columbia College, Dubuque were some of

the colleges the sisters of St. Francis Community attended and from which they earned B.A. and B.S. degrees.²⁴

24. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 12, response of Sister Mary James who attended some of these colleges and response of other sisters who earned their degrees at these schools.

Under the direction of Sister Mary Esther, Directress of Schools, the high school department was affiliated to the Catholic University at Washington, D.C., and the University of Wisconsin at Madison. To earn their high school diplomas examinations prepared by the University of Washington were written, preparatory to entering college to earn degrees.

With a stepping-up of the training of the teachers of the community, more books were needed for the convent library. To supply the educational needs, many books were bought and others were received by donation. One of the most generous benefactors of library books was the convent chaplain and spiritual director, Reverend George Regenfuss. Each Christmas and Easter season, Father Regenfuss presented his gift of a goodly supply of the best in educational books. At the present writing his contribution of books to the library numbers 1,485 books. When Mother Thecla celebrated her Silver Jubilee as Superior General of the St. Francis Community, the surprise gift of the occasion was a check of \$1,480.75, money intended for library books. The donors to this fund included three Monsignori, twenty priests, ten institutions in and about St. Francis and the State, fourteen missions in other States, thirty parents, friends and benefactors of the community, and several individual members. Since

that time, the stacks of the library have been well filled with books. Today, the convent library at St. Francis, known as St. Clare College Library, contains 12,000 volumes. It has a fine collection of encyclopediae, social science works, Greek and Latin classics, and an excellent set of books on the history of Wisconsin. 25

25. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Donors to the Jubilee Library Fund, This folio contains the list of seventy-seven donors who contributed to the fund.

One of Mother Thecla's chief concerns in the educational field had been to prepare her teachers for their profession. However, at times sufficient and adequate preparation was not given. Very frequently Mother Thecla was besieged by parish priests who begged her for her sisters as their teachers. The priests often told Mother Thecla they would be satisfied to take postulants as their teachers. She was most unwilling to grant such requests and would reply, "No, Father, the religious education comes first." But some priests would persist. On one such occasion, Mother Thecla had sent to a mission school a young postulant. To the postulant, Mother Thecla gave this parting advice, "My dear, this Reverend Father needs you. You are only fifteen. When you get out on mission, act as though you were forty." Such teachers were sent out in obedience and therefore had to rely for guidance on the Holy Spirit. While such procedure would be censured in our day, Mother Thecla acted according to the needs of Catholic education in her day. And often these sisters made the best teachers. 26

26. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Interviews, Card 58, response of Sister Mildred, the sister who was sent to this mission.

Mother Thecla gladly gave her sisters for the Catholic cause of education of Christian youth. She even accepted mission schools where the teachers received little or no salary. When a Catholic parish was in poor financial circumstances, Mother Thecla would give her sisters as teachers without remuneration or for the low rate of \$175.00 or \$200.00 a year. This was a meagre salary when one remembers that communities have expenses and that the Motherhouse must be maintained on the salaries of the teaching sisters and those sisters doing household duties in institutions of charity. So at the sacrifice to the community purse but for the greater glory of Mother Church and the promotion of Catholic education of youth, Mother Thecla fulfilled her duty as she saw fit. ²⁷

27. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 59, response of Reverend Joseph Koester, Madison, Wisconsin, in response to a question about Mother Thecla's spirit of sacrifice.

In spite of her willingness to promote Catholic education, Mother Thecla sometimes received letters from mission schools that saddened her heart. Sometimes the community where she sent her sisters was strongly prejudiced against religious teachers. At other times, it happened that the locality was largely non-Catholic and even Catholic children refused to attend the Catholic school. Still others did not care for religious instruction and would not pray. When informed of such conditions, Mother Thecla would beg her sisters to trust in Divine Providence and invoke the Guardian Angels of their charges.

She would urge them to have special devotion to St. Joseph, and to try to conquer all difficulties through prayer. ²⁸

28. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Traits, Card 13, response of Sister Nila, who opened a school in one prejudiced town and of Mother Bartholomew, who had the same experience.

But such happenings do not tell the whole story. In other towns, the pastor of the parish together with his parishioners would come out to meet the sisters who had just arrived. They would give them the warmest welcome, provide comfortable living quarters, and build up a beautiful spirit of cooperation. Thus from its beginning of the mission all worked together hand in hand.²⁹

29. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 13, response of Mother Bartholomew to the question of what the reception given the Sisters was on various new missions.

In determining the number of mission schools accepted by Mother Thecla the record is revealing. From figures compiled from the Motherhouse Chancery Office and the 1925 Directory of the community of St. Francis, the books show that Mother Thecla sent teachers to: 33 schools in Wisconsin, 10 in Illinois, 6 in South Dakota, 4 in Colorado, 2 in Missouri, 1 in Minnesota, and 1 in Iowa. During her administration from 1898 to 1925, then, Mother Thecla opened a total of 57 schools in various states. Today 40 of these schools are still under the direction of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. From these statistics one can see that Mother Thecla took a school or two almost every year of her generalship. In 1915, the number for a single year reached a new high when six schools were opened in

12 months. The record is indeed creditable for one Superior General. 30

30. S.F.A.C.A., Directory of 1925 and 1926. These directories contain the names of the sisters stationed at each mission, the number of schools and houses, the number of pupils in attendance, and the like. They are on file in community Chancery Office files.

Mother Thecla not only founded schools, she also enjoyed visiting them. Except during advent and lent, she made frequent trips to them as Visitatrix. When she arrived at a school, Mother Thecla would visit the classroom where she enjoyed listening to a program of entertainment in her honor. After the program, she would thank the pupils and admonish them to make good use of their time, to pray for a vocation to the priesthood or sisterhood, and to do all their work for the greater glory of God and Holy Mother Church. She would also include a greeting and good wishes to their parents as she loved to call them. Then as a token of remembrance, Mother Thecla would distribute a holy picture and a stick of candy. This riddle accompanied her parting gift to each child, "Why is a stick of candy like a horse?" 31

31. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Traits, Card 14, response of Mother Bartholomew in regard to Mother Thecla's visits to the missions.

The story of Catholic schools would not be complete without recalling the hearty welcome Mother Thecla gave to departing and returning missionaries. On the day set for the departure of the sisters for their respective mission schools, Mother Thecla would summon them to her office and present each sister with a holy

picture and a bag of peppermints. Then she bid them an affectionate farewell. When the sister missionaries returned to the Motherhouse during the summer vacations, her welcome was equally hearty and motherly. After a heartfelt "Griess Gott" Mother Thecla would herself take the sisters to the dining hall and order a good lunch or dinner to be served. While the sisters were partaking of the meal that had been brought in, Mother Thecla would inquire into the happenings and events and successes of their missionary enterprises during the year just passed. After the sisters had finished their meal, Mother Thecla would send them with quick dispatch to their beds to rest after their journey. Then, during the entire summer months, Mother Thecla would have interviews with the missionary sisters. She was untiring in her considerateness of each individual sister. Is it any wonder then, that sisters, priests, parents, and children loved and respected her? Is it any wonder, then, that they begged even on their knees that Mother Thecla send her sisters to their mission schools? Who can doubt, then, that Mother Thecla did more than her share for the promotion of the education of Catholic youth?

Chapter VII

She Showed Herself a Mother

- 1 The Maternal Heart
- 2 The Human Heart

The Maternal Heart

Not all of Mother Thecla's time was spent attending to the material and educational needs of her community. These needs she had tended to because the welfare of her community demanded it. But, besides material concerns, Mother Thecla tried to inculcate the Franciscan ideals of cheerfulness and joy in her spiritual daughters in religion. She desired each sister to be imbued with a true religious spirit. Therefore, Mother Thecla interested herself in the welfare of each individual of her community. In every situation, in every circumstance that arose, she showed herself a mother.

Instead of thinking of herself, she devoted her time and energy to her sisters. Because she been elected to the high office of Superior General, Mother Thecla felt that the care of the souls entrusted to her was her responsibility, her duty.¹

1. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Interviews, Card 56, response of Monsignor Bernard Traudt, Vicar General of the archdiocese of Milwaukee at the present time, 1942. The monsignor was interviewed by the writer because he was a personal friend of Mother Thecla from the beginning of this century and was consulted by her in events pertaining to the community; and

Card 13, response of Sister Spes, now deceased, who was interviewed in 1941, when asked about Mother Thecla's predominant character trait.

Any and every sister who was in need of advice or consolation received a cheery greeting from Mother Thecla. The door of her private office was always open and any sister was welcome to enter.

If the hours of the day were too short, she would shorten the hours of repose at night in order to be at the disposal of the sisters. In the discharge of these duties, Mother Thecla often stayed up late at night or had to absent herself from community exercises. Her motherly heart refused to dismiss a sister until she was calm and comforted. She often consoled a sister with the words, "Die soupe wird nicht so heiss gegessen wie sie gekocht wird." "The soup is never eaten as hot as it has been cooked." 2

2. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Cards 10 and 28, response of Sister Cornelia and Sister Paula. Both sisters have been in the St. Francis community a number of years and had dealings with Mother Thecla all through her generalship. 1941

Even postulants and novices knocked at Mother Thecla's door. Most often they were afflicted with homesickness. Mother Thecla would encourage them and dismiss their trouble as a temptation. At the same time, she would encourage the tempted one with the recital of her own first days in the religious life. Prayer had been Mother Thecla's consolation, so she would say, "Don't listen to temptation. God will give you the grace. Pray!" When peace would return to the tried soul, Mother Thecla would bless her with holy water and tell her to go to rest. She herself would continue ^{with} her work and correspondence, and if it were night, would go to the already darkened chapel to complete her breviary and prescribed prayers.³

3. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Cards 19 and 28, recalled by Sister Maximilla and Sister Emerita as a custom of Mother Thecla while she was in office. These sisters were interviewed in 1941.

While Mother Thecla was busy and concerned about the welfare of the souls of her Franciscan daughters, she also found time to interest herself in their work, whether it was in the classroom or in the various departments of the household. She always impressed on the teachers the great responsibility that was theirs in training the young both for a useful life here and happy life hereafter. To the sisters at work in various housekeeping duties she also paid special attention. Mother Thecla would visit the various rooms or departments of the Motherhouse, enter with a smile of greeting, and inquire, "How are you, sisters? How is your work progressing?" After impressing upon them the responsibilities of their special charge, she would ask, "Are you in need of help in your department? Is all going well?" After straightening out their difficulties and with a word of encouragement, she would give the salutation, "Praised be Jesus Christ!" and leave the sisters brighter in spirits. ⁴

4. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., response of Sister Cyrilla, a member of the community who has had charge of the sisters' wardrobe and supplies for many years. She was interviewed in 1941.

Mother Thecla not only gave words of encouragement to the sisters who were busy at their various tasks, she herself did not shirk work. After the completion of St. Mary's Academy building, Mother Thecla put on a printed apron and helped the sisters arrange beds, sweep the rooms, dust the furniture, and set the rooms in order. At the Motherhouse, she did household duties and sometimes helped the sacristan design the candle arrangement for the convent altars. When the arbor, a shelter connecting the Motherhouse with the adjoining academy was built and was in need of a coat of paint, Mother Thecla also assisted

in the painting of it. When as Visitatrix, she visited the mission houses, it is told, that she helped the cook prepare the meal, taught her how to make bread and arrange the food. 5

5. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Cards 33, 54, 55. These incidents were gathered by the writer in several interviews and are vouched for by Mother Mary Bartholomew, Sister Cyrilla, Sister Callista, and Sister Mary James, members of the St. Francis Community. 1941.

Episodes and examples of Mother Thecla's motherly solicitude could be multiplied without number. Only a few incidents can be related to confirm this her predominate character trait.

Just as a natural mother cares for the needs of her children and prepares their clothes and wardrobe for different occasions, so did Mother Thecla. The first incident related proves this. Word came to her that several daughters of the Dimpfl family wished to enter the community at St. Francis, Wisconsin. They had applied for admission from Europe. The youngest daughter, who was only ten years old, did not want to remain home alone. She, too, begged to go along to America. After the Dimpfl girls arrived at the convent, the youngest, since she had not reached the canonical age for admission, was placed by Mother Thecla in a boarding school for girls. At the school she was prepared for her First Holy Communion. Before that day came, she received a box from Mother Thecla. The package contained a complete First Communion wardrobe: a new white dress, wreath and veil, patent buttoned shoes, a prayer book, and a Rosary. A letter enclosed by Mother Thecla read in part:

"Deinen wunsch in Betreff der Kleider werde ich erfüllen. Selber kann ich zwar nicht hinkommen, aber ich werde eine deiner Schwestern hinschicken."

"Your wish regarding the wardrobe I have fulfilled. But I myself cannot come. I will send one of your sisters instead." 6

6. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 49, incident related by the youngest Dimpfl daughter, Sister Mildred, who received the box from Mother Thecla. Her sister, Sister Maxelinda was sent in Mother Thecla's place. Sister Mildred was interviewed in 1941.
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The next incident equally proves that Mother Thecla was a woman with a thoughtful maternal heart. It was the solemn feast of the perpetual profession day of Sister Anthony. Sister had invited for the services her only living relative, her brother Charles. The ceremonies for the profession were about to begin but Charles had not yet arrived. Completely resigned to the will of the Lord, Sister Anthony offered this disappointment to God, thus making her oblation more perfect. But Mother Thecla knew that Sister had expected her brother and had been informed that he had not arrived. Later on, Mother Thecla spied him in the convent chapel. During the ceremonial, after Mother Thecla had pinned the medallion of the Sacred Heart on Sister Anthony's habit, she whispered, "Your brother Charles is here." Surely, no earthly mother could have been more kind. 7

7. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 39, response of Sister Anthony, director of music of the the community, in answer to the request of some incident in her own life in which Mother Thecla figured. This interview took place in 1941.
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A final incident will portray this trait of motherliness in Mother Thecla. Three daughters had entered the convent of St. Francis, Wisconsin--from the Michels family of Oshkosh, Wisconsin. When Mrs. Michels, their mother had passed away, the eldest daughter, Sister

Leonine, asked to keep her mother's wedding ring as a remembrance of her. When the three daughters returned to the convent, Sister Leonine brought the ring and gave it to Mother Thecla. She promised to keep it for the sisters. To surprise them and to let the youngest daughter have a perpetual reminder of her own dear mother, Mother Thecla had the wedding ring remade into a religious ring. When the sisters of the perpetual profession class were assembled in the community room of the Motherhouse, Mother Thecla, after congratulating the youngest Michel daughter said, "Take off your profession ring." Obedient to her superior but thoroughly disturbed by the command, Sister took off her ring and handed it to Mother Thecla. In return, Mother Thecla handed her a package with a note attached. It read, "To my dear Sister Lioba: Accept this "ring" as a remembrance from your beloved mother and from Mother Mary Thecla." No doubt, Sister Lioba and her two sisters have never forgotten the day on which they were made happier because of the resourcefulness of Mother Thecla. 8

8. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 49, incident related to the writer by the eldest Michel daughter, Sister Leonine, in response to a question whether she knew any happening in her own life in which Mother Thecla figured. Interview made in 1941.

Mother Thecla's maternal love was not confined to members of her own community. Her love knew no bounds. After her spiritual daughters, ranking first in her consideration were the parents and relatives of the sisters. Next, she showed special devotion to the young and innocent children, especially those children who were about to receive their Lord for the first time in Holy Communion. Nor were friends and benefactors of the community forgotten. Mother Thecla extended hospitality to everyone.

To the parents and relatives of the sisters of the community, Mother Thecla was a second mother. On visiting days, she would try to meet every parent and friend and would spend the afternoon conversing with them in the parlor. Before the guests departed, she would invariably give them some token as a remembrance. She liked to select a religious article such as a statue, rosary, medal, Crucifix, Agnus Dei, or a picture of our Lord, our Lady, or some Saint. These small gifts were cherished even by the worldly-minded and retained as keep-sakes of Mother Thecla. ⁹

9. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Cards 7, 45, 82, response of Sister Paula and Sister Virginia in reference to Mother Thecla's kindness to the sisters' relatives and of Miss Rose and Miss Mary Thren, nieces of Mother Thecla who still cherish gifts she gave them.

Mother Thecla was also concerned about the parents who had not visited their daughters in the convent over a period of time. If she knew of such a case, she would say to the sister on meeting her, "How is your father? How is your mother? I haven't seen them for a long time." If the absence of either parent was due to serious illness, Mother Thecla would try to prepare the sister for a daughter's greatest sacrifice, that of giving up a father and mother. She would console the sisters with comforting words and remind them that death is a punishment inflicted not on her parents alone but on the entire human race. Finally, she would beg the sisters to offer their affliction in atonement for the sins committed throughout the world. ¹⁰

10. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Cards 40, 52, response of Sister Carola and Sister Catherine to the question whether they could recall any incident in their own lives associated with Mother Thecla. They were interviewed in 1941.

Mother Thecla also loved young children. As has been shown in a previous incident related above, she took special interest in preparing children for their First Holy Communion. A card written by her to Louise May, who was attending St. Joseph's Academy, Longmont, Colorado, comments on Louise's coming happy day:

"My dear little Friend,

Many thanks for the nice letter and valentine you sent. Am so pleased to hear the news that you will be so happy as to receive our dear Lord for the first time on Easter Sunday. Shall remember you in particular in prayer and ask Jesus to bless you and give you the grace to receive Him worthily, and that you may get your hearing back. God bless you." 11

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11. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Personal Letters of Mother Thecla, Card 4. Louise May, now Sister Mary of the St. Francis Community, received this card from Mother Thecla in 1910. It is now in the archives.
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The sphere of Mother Thecla's influence stretched beyond the convent. She showed great hospitality to friends and benefactors of the community. Especially did she extend a warm welcome to members of the hierarchy. Cardinals, Archbishops, bishops, priests both regular and diocesan called at the convent and to all of them Mother Thecla showed the highest regard as became the dignity of the priesthood. Whenever a priest came to the convent, Mother Thecla would extend a hearty welcome to him and invite to the convent guest rooms her visitor and converse with him until refreshments were served. She always impressed upon her sisters the dignity of the priesthood, and urged her sisters to be kind, courteous, and respectful to all priests.¹²

12. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Traits, Card 8, response of Monsignor B. Traudt, personal friend of Mother Thecla's, of Sister Nila, Directress of Schools of the community, and of Sister Cyrilla, who has charge of the chaplain's quarters, when asked about Mother Thecla's attitude toward priests.

Incidents of Mother Thecla's relations with priests are traditional. Two have been selected which show her attitude toward them and give both sides of the picture. Difficulties and misunderstandings arise in all conditions and positions of life. So when some members of the hierarchy showed the sisters unkindness, Mother Thecla reciprocated with kindness. It was her principle to cloak the faults of priests and when the latter were at fault, she would beg the sisters to pray that the matter might be quickly remedied.

On one occasion a certain pastor disliked the way the sisters were conducting the school. He made them aware of this by reprimanding them during the announcements at the Sunday Mass. When the correction was repeated for several Sundays, the sisters at the mission informed Mother Thecla. She was not convinced. After deliberating over the affair Mother Thecla decided to go to the mission school herself. The next Sunday, she accompanied the sisters to the church services, for she thought if her sisters suffered humiliations, she, too, could endure them. After the pastor had ascended the pulpit, when he made his announcements, he also directed the usual remarks against the sisters, in spite of the presence of the Mother General. Though humiliated, Mother Thecla kept calm and did not show anger. When they returned to the house, Mother Thecla asked her sisters, who were innocent, to endure the humiliation and thus imitate their Divine Master whom they

had vowed to serve. By giving this advice, Mother Thecla revealed her nobility of soul and strength to endure rebuffs when they were not deserved.¹³

13. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Interviews, Card 89. This incident actually occurred and was related to the writer by a member of the community (I do not care to reveal her name).

The second story is related by Reverend Francis Emmerich of Hart, Michigan. It is typical example of Mother Thecla's big heart and shows her compassion to those in distress or difficulty. This is the story.

Father Emmerich was still a student of Major Orders at St. Francis Seminary, St. Francis, Wisconsin. The time of his first solemn Mass approached. Reverend Emmerich had all arrangements made to read his first High Mass at Brooklyn, New York. Circumstances intervened which canceled all his plans. At first the deacon was disconsolate and did not know what to do. Finally, betaking himself to the convent, he asked for Mother Thecla. She always befriended the seminary students; she would not fail him now. After hearing of his predicament, Mother Thecla replied, "I am glad you honor us with so great a privilege. You will be the first priest who has asked to read your solemn Holy Mass at the Motherhouse of St. Francis. Therefore, I promise to make all preparations, to care for everything." Mother Thecla kept her word. On June 20, 1899, the convent chapel was the scene of the great solemnities. All the professors of St. Francis Seminary and the sisters residing at the Motherhouse of St. Francis were present for Father Emmerich's first High Mass. At the Mass, he wore the alb and surplice Mother Thecla had given him as a gift. To make the day as happy as

possible and to make him forget his disappointment, Mother Thecla spared no pains, but, as the Father himself related, she refused to take a single penny to pay the expenses incurred. Moreover, when the chapel services were completed, Father Emmerich and his erstwhile professors were served a "royal dinner." At the close of the day, before Father Emmerich departed, Mother Thecla gave him this consoling reassurance, "Now, Father, whenever you feel the work is too hard for you, or when you can't work any more, St. Francis Convent will always have a room for you, whether I am alive or dead." 14

14. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Cards 21-22. In an interview with Reverend Francis Joseph Emmerich, Weare (Hart P.O.), Michigan in the summer of 1941, Father Emmerich related this episode to the writer. He is still living today.

2

The Human Heart

There were other notable qualities and traits in Mother Thecla's character. Among other things, she was humble in spirit. Mother Thecla never liked ostentation or display. For example, when her name-day was observed as a special feast day at the Motherhouse, after the celebration, Mother Thecla would remark, "I'll accept this demonstration as a token of ^{my}superiorship, but not for me individually." There were times when she would lock herself in her private office and try to absent herself from the program. Sister Michael, now deceased, would go to the office room and request Mother to appear at the program. Sister Michael used clever strategy. She would threaten to lay down

her office of local superior or forewarn that she was going back to the Dakotas if Mother did not come out. Naturally, Mother Thecla respected the sister's wishes and would be present to hear the expressions of devotion given to her by her spiritual daughters. 15

15. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 5, response of Sister Cyrilla in an interview made in 1941. She was asked what she thought of Mother Thecla as a religious superior.

Even as a religious superior Mother Thecla realized that she at times was in error and made mistakes. But Mother Thecla had enough humility to admit her failings and shortcomings. At the time of her annual retreat, she would, as she put it, square up everything in order to clear the slate. She would present herself to the chaplain of the community, kneel down and beg forgiveness for the faults and mistakes she had made during the past year. Then she would beg for his blessing and his prayers that she might make a good retreat. 16

16. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 44, response of Reverend George Regenfuss, Chaplain of St. Francis Community for the last twenty-nine years. In an interview with the writer in 1941, he related this incident.

In every position, in every walk of life, one virtue is indispensable. It is equally necessary in a religious community, in the cloister. This requisite is a sense of humor. Happily, Mother Thecla possessed a fair sense of humor. It served her in good stead while fulfilling the position of Superior General. Her smile was suppressed at times while she gave reprimands and penances. The doings of the postulants furnish some good examples.

One time some postulants were given the task of sweeping the floor of the convent basement. One of the postulants, being in a playful mood, seized a broken-off broom, which had a mere stump for a handle. Instead of sweeping the floor, she began playing hobby horse with her broom stump. While making the rounds through the convent, Mother Thecla chanced to come to the basement and found the postulants marching around following their leader. When the postulants saw the Superior General they were almost petrified. But Mother Thecla, instead of administering some severe penance, ordered the culprits to repeat the stunt for her benefit. They did so, very much to their chagrin and the amusement of Mother Thecla. 17

17. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 76, response of Sister Emerita who remembers the incident from her postulant days. 1941.

At another time, a postulant was telling her associates that she would not be caught on April Fool's Day in a joke. The information reached Mother Thecla. Mother Thecla abided her time. On the next April Fool's Day, the bragging postulant was told to come to the office of the Superior General. She was told to bring a hamper along. The unsuspecting postulant obeyed the command. With one hand she knocked at Mother Thecla's door, with the other she held the wash basket. Mother Thecla was expecting her. Unconcernedly, she dropped a small slip of paper into the basket and said to the surprised postulant, "That's all, Emma." Later, when the postulant examined the paper, she read, "April Fool." 18

18. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 76, related by Sister Anthony to the writer in an interview made in 1941. This happened to Sister Anthony when she was a postulant.

While out West for her health, Mother Thecla traveled in the mountains and enjoyed commenting on the sights of the Rockies. In a letter to her friend, Reverend Bernard Traudt, she gave her verdict on the peak known as the "Devil's Slide:"

"We saw the "Devil's Slide" and were told if any of the tourists desire to take a slide down, they would go right to hell. I believe it." 19

19. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Personal Letters of Mother Thecla, Card 1, Letter written by Mother Thecla on September 1, 1906, to Reverend Bernard Traudt, at the present time Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

Mother Thecla not only enjoyed the sights in the Rocky Mountains, she herself showed good sportsmanship in her travels. At Meadow Park, Colorado, Mother Thecla and Sister Damascene had a unique mountain experience. The two of them decided to climb a peak 3,000 feet high. Like courageous and old-time mountaineers, they started the ascent. After much difficulty with their long skirts, after several stops and much shortage of breath, they actually reached the top of the peak. Once there they decided to rest and enjoy the scenery. But soon they became aware of the fact that they had to make a 3,000 foot descent. Mother Thecla decided there was only one method by which they could reach the foothills. They ^{must} slide down. This they finally agreed to do. On their way again, whenever a rough section appeared before them, Mother Thecla would mutter to herself, "Jesus, Mary, Joseph, help us slide." After many impediments and with clothes awry and shoes shaved of their leather, the two climbers arrived at the foothills without mishap. 20

Then Mother Thecla would promise the sister that candles would be burnt on the altars so that the operation would be successful. 22

22. Mother Thecla concern for the sick is a matter of tradition in the community and can be confirmed by Sister Bilhildis, who was nurse at the Motherhouse since 1899 to the present.

In 1918, when the "flu" epidemic raged throughout the United States, Mother Thecla, at a great sacrifice, permitted the sisters of her community to nurse the sick and dying. The sisters of the St. Francis community did service as nurses in Colorado, in Dakota, and in Wisconsin.

When a temporary emergency hospital was set up in the Masonic Hall at Sterling, Colorado, the city officials seconded by the pastor of the Catholic church there decided that the Sisters of St. Francis should direct it. The city's public health Commissioner, Dr. Naugel, installed Sister Paula, who was the superior of St. Anthony's parochial school, as head and chief manager of the "flu" hospital. Acting in this capacity, Sister Paula had to purchase all bedding, supplies, and medicine to care for and accommodate the 150 cases of pneumonia or "flu". Sister Nicole, in her letter of November 5, 1918, related the part the sisters played in the role of nurses. To Mother Thecla she wrote:

"We sisters see to it that the patients get the proper care and food as prescribed by the doctor. We give whatever assistance is needed at every bedside. We have a/shift and a night shift and Sister Victoria comes up at any hour we need her most to prepare the broths and other nourishing food. The four sisters at Home are kept busy making pneumonia padded jackets, etc." 23

23. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: "Flu" Epidemic, information from a clipping of the Sterling newspaper "The Advocate". The date is not given but from an election advertisement on the opposite side, it can be estimated as the first week of November 1918; and

Letter of Sister Nicola written to Mother Thecla on November 5, 1918. The quoted passage is from the letter.

This temporary hospital of Sterling, Colorado created friendly alliances throughout the city, especially between all denominations and the Catholic sisters. Sister Nicola's letter gives further evidence of this friendliness:

"The Free Masons donated their temple, the Catholic nuns their services, the Episcopalian minister served as nurse, the Methodist minister also served as nurse, likewise the public school teachers. In these trying times we all somehow stand on the same platform--that of Christian charity. But the greatest share of the burden rests on good Sister Superior's shoulders; hers is the entire management and that explains all. Sterling is surely realizing doubly the blessing of having Catholic sisters. And need I tell you that Father Sasse is holding his head high." 24

24. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Same letter of Sister Nicola quoted above.

The same noble work was done by the sisters in Dakota and in Wisconsin. While doing duty as nurses some of the sisters contracted the "flu" but by the power from above eventually regained their health. God in his mercy spared them, because Mother Thecla had so generously given the cup of water in His name.

In other matters, Mother Thecla was equally broadminded. When the radio was first perfected, she had a good word for its use. Of the

radio she said it was frequently instructive and offered clean enjoyable recreations. She also believed in the judicious reading of good books. She wrote to the present Superior General of the community, Mother Bartholomew, who at the time was absent on a Visitation of schools:

"I distributed nine of our books, which time has not as yet permitted me to read. . . . asking the sisters to read each chapter--^{part} in a tablet of course--a short outline, and any important and helpful facts which could be used for chapter or instructions." 25

25. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Personal Letters of Mother Thecla, Card 9, The matter concerning the radio was written by Mother Thecla to her brother in Watertown, Wisconsin. It was written January 11, 1929 and addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Herman Thren; and

The passage last quoted is taken from a letter written to Sister Bartholomew, who was in Longmont, Colorado. It was written the day before Mother Thecla died, March 18, 1930.

Combined with other character traits was the firmness shown by Mother Thecla. Her firmness often bordered on severity. In her zeal for the welfare of the community, Mother Thecla would not tolerate the introduction of new customs. She believed that the traditions handed down by the founders and her predecessors should be left intact. And when violations or innovations were introduced or occurred, she was not slow to impose penances on the offenders. Any one thus corrected was careful not to repeat the offense. However, Mother Thecla did not carry a grudge, and when she met that person later she would whisper to her, "Forget it." 26

26. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Interviews, Cards 11, 68, 74, response of Sister Fabian and Sister Radegundis for information about Mother Thecla's firmness.

Mention must also be made of Mother Thecla's neat appearance and her Franciscan simplicity. She would not tolerate untidiness and, in general, liked plain things. Common sense, resourcefulness, and sociability were among other of her character traits. In conversation, she could speak to beggar or king. A certain priest summed up her character in these words: "Eine hoch gebildete Dame würde ich sie gerade nicht nennen, aber eine kluge Frau ist sie." "I would certainly not call her a highly cultured woman, but she is indeed a clever woman." 27

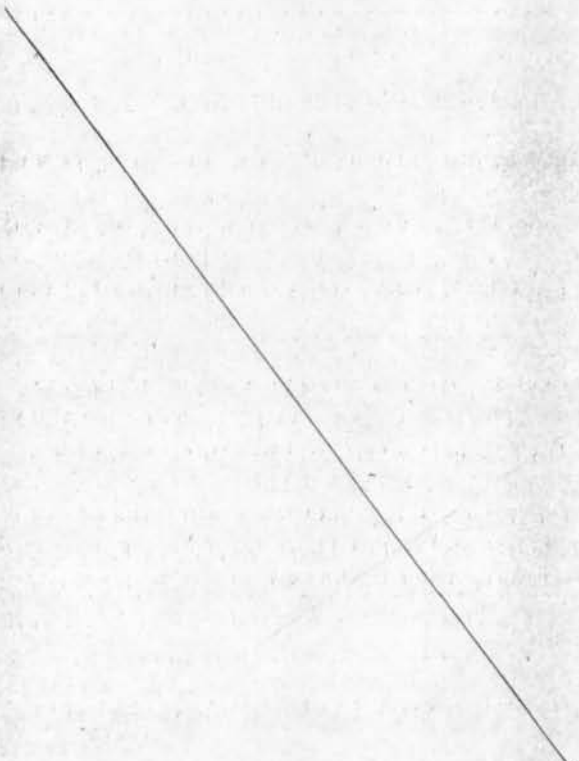
27. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 25, this remark was recalled by Sister Maximilla when interviewed about Mother Thecla's character traits. 1941.

A discussion of Mother Thecla's character would not be complete without the mention of one other trait. Like another St. Francis, she was loved by animals. The convent watch-dog, Tige, was her special pet. As Father Metzdorf, an instructor of religion at the convent once remarked, "Everybody likes Mother Thecla. Even the dog." Certainly, certain animals sensed her kindness and approached her unafraid. Mother Thecla, on her part, treated them humanely and saw to it that they were properly fed and housed. It is related that if she heard that a cat or dog was unwanted in one household, she tried to have it cared for elsewhere. Could it not be said of Mother Thecla, that as a true Franciscan, she walked in the footsteps of St. Francis. 28

28. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Cards 15, 19, 20, Sister Blandina, Sister Adeline recall this trait of Mother Thecla. 1941.

Chapter VIII

God's Coadjutor



The achievements and character traits of Mother Thecla speak volumes. She was a great builder, a great educator, a benevolent mother. But she was more than this. She was a woman of prayer, a religious woman. These qualities were necessary of a woman in her position, the head of a religious community. For

"The superior is the channel of grace to his community. Through the superior God imparts to them the graces of direction, of protection, and the spirit of their state." 1

1. Reverend Ferreol Girardey, Qualities of a Good Superior, 2

Since at the time of her election, the membership of the community was not numerous, Mother Thecla was truly the fountain-head of her congregation. To fulfill her duty as Superior General, she had to be a woman of prayer, had to imbue her religious daughters with a spirit of fervor and devotion. Therefore, she tried by her teachings and admonitions to be their guide, for "Words teach, but example draws." She ever endeavored to sacrifice her time and abilities for the good of the community. This was the spirit of Mother Thecla, the spirit she bequeathed her community. 2

2. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Interviews, Cards, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32. Whenever the author inquired in interviews concerning Mother Thecla as a religious superior, all confirmed to the opinions given above. Monsignor B. Traudt, Reverend F. Emmerich, Mother Bartholomew, Mother Celestine, Sister de Sales and many others all agreed that these statements are true. 1941.

First of all, Mother Thecla was a woman of prayer. In prayer she was pious, sincere, trustful. Her whole life was characterized

by deep devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. She also asked the intercession of the Blessed Mother of God, and St. Joseph was her special patron and financier. Her prayerful sentiments are well expressed in one of her letters to the entire community. She invites her sisters

"to come in spirit to the Motherhouse on Christmas day and make a special visit with me to the manger of our little King, where I shall beg of Him to bless you all with His tiny hands, to bring unto you Bethlehem's peace and joy. When kneeling there, let us humbly ask pardon for our many negligences and sins, renew our vows, promise fidelity in observing our holy rules, and plead for grace to lead a more perfect life." 3

3. S.F.A.C.A., Polio: Circular Letters of Mother Thecla, 11, 1922

Her New Year's wish of the same year express the same sentiments. In this letter she assured her sisters that true happiness can be found only in union with Jesus and Mary. Her heartfelt wish for the coming year is that her sisters will daily do something for God. She continues:

"for His will is our vocation and we never deceive ourselves in following it; of confidence--trusting in the goodness of God; whether he grants or refuses, He always acts as a Father; of consolation--the wisdom of God disposes all things; His mercy remains to help and console; of peace--the peace of God which surpasseth all understanding keeps our hearts and minds stainless in Christ Jesus; of charity--filling our hearts with the tenderest love for Jesus, without fear pressing Him closely to our hearts."

These my dear Sisters, are my best wishes for a happy and holy New Year to you all,

that the Sacred Heart of Jesus bestow upon you His choicest blessings with the special grace that you continue the noble work of your sublime calling for many, many years to come, as humble Franciscans and true daughters of our beloved Seraphic Father." 4

4. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., 11-12, 1922

Mother Thecla's prayers were also sincere and trustful. Every day she would make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and plead for her own needs, the needs of her spiritual daughters, of her community. She never left the chapel until she had made a special visit to the shrine of her "pet" saint, St. Joseph. Mother Thecla indeed had great confidence in "good" St. Joseph as she always called him. St. Joseph, in turn, heard her prayers as the following incident proves.

Mother Thecla was anxious to purchase some property near St. Francis for the community. When she made inquiries about the purchase, the owners refused even to consider the matter. But Mother Thecla did not give up hopes. Before she left the grounds she wished to buy, she cast a medal of St. Joseph on the property. Two weeks later she was informed the property was for sale. Soon, through the aid of her heavenly patron, the purchase was made and the deed for the property in the possession of the St. Francis community.⁵

5. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Interviews, Card 15, response of Reverend Nicholas Brust, who was a pupil of Mother Thecla's in the late '80's. Father Brust has always been a staunch friend of both Mother Thecla and the community. 1941.

In prayer, Mother Thecla was unselfish. She prayed not only for herself but also for all those who petitioned aid. How all-embracing

her petitions were especially after receiving Holy Communion is shown in one of her letters addressed to her sisters:

"When the Eucharistic Savior comes to us Christmas in Holy Communion, let us ask His blessed Mother and dear St. Joseph to be in spirit at our side and while we kneel in worship after receiving, let us converse in words of love with the new born King, let us ask the Virgin Mother, who gave Him birth and was the special work of His own creation, to speak to Him for us, of our dear community, especially our beloved Mother, the dear sick, the many intentions and needs. We know that through Mary we shall find grace and receive what is best for us." 6

G. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Circular Letters of Mother Thecla, Sl, 1928.
This letter was written while Mother Thecla filled the post of Mother Assistant two years before her death.

Mother Thecla also accepted with deep gratitude prayers that were said for her by others. In her letters to her community, she would express thanks for all the prayers and spiritual bouquets offered for her by the sisters for her saintsday and on special occasions. She also appreciated and gave thanks to priests who made a Memento for her at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. A personal letter written on March 30, 1907 by Mother Thecla to her life-long friend and adviser, the present Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Monsignor Bernard Traudt contains this message of appreciation:

"We are deeply indebted to God and all those who so kindly remembered us in their devout prayers, Holy Masses, etc., for which as a small token of gratitude, we remember you all frequently when receiving Jesus and visiting Him in the Blessed Sacrament." 7

7. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Personal Letters of Mother Thecla, Card 2, 3.

As has been seen Mother Thecla was a woman of prayer. As Superior General of her community, she was an excellent administrator. With natural charm, she combined prudence, kindness, ingeniousness, and justice. The office of Superior was, as it were, a part of Mother Thecla's make-up. She was born to rule. She saw things had to be done, and so she did them. In many respects she was an ambitious woman. But her ambition was not directed so much toward her own glory as that of her community. In her day, since the community had fewer members than today, Mother Thecla undertook the direction of her sisters herself. At first, she seemed at times very severe, but with the passage of time, she mellowed in the art of governing. As a superior, Mother Thecla was zealous that the spirit of St. Francis, the spirit of the Franciscan Rule be implanted in her subjects. This was the spirit of Franciscan joy, simplicity, cheerfulness, the spirit of the Holy Founder, St. Francis himself. 8

8. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Interviews, Cards, 23, 26, 27, 29, 32, response of the following persons when interviewed regarding Mother Thecla as a religious superior in 1941, Sister Damascene, Sister Miranda, Sister Fabian, Sister Laetitia, Mother Bartholomew, Mother Celestine, Monsignor Bernard Traudt, Rev. Francis Emmerich; and

Folio: Mother Thecla Traits, Cards 2, 16, response of Sister Cyrilla, Sister de Sales, Reverend Francis Emmerich.

* As a superior, Mother Thecla was careful to guard the Holy Rules of the congregation. Of special concern to her was the observance of and fulfilling the obligations of the Holy Vows. Her letter written

to the community in 1920 contains this warning:

"How faithful and obedient, when separated from the world and detached from all, but attached to Jesus only, ought we not to be who have taken the holy vows; these sacred bonds which bind us religious to Christ crucified on the Cross. Next to these it is our Holy Rule expressing the will of God of which Superiors are authorized guardians. Fidelity to our Holy Rules is the proof of our friendship with Jesus our Spouse, and furthermore we are thereby enabled, at least to a limited degree, to show our unbounded gratitude we owe to God for having chosen us out of many who were far more worthy than we." 9

9. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Circular Letters of Mother Thecla, 2, 1920

In a letter written at a later date, Mother Thecla again reminds the sisters of her community that they have vowed to strive after perfection and do more than ordinary Christians. Regarding the observance of the Evangelical counsels, she admonishes:

"Let us rouse ourselves daily; be model religious in obedience without choice, without self-will. Our comfort will be in the caress of His infinite arms; our strength in the embrace of His Sacred Heart; and our confidence in the assurance of His unfailing care.

While we behold the Infant Savior lying in the crib, we are reminded of Holy Poverty, which we freely chose with all its humiliations. . . on the day of our profession. How do we imitate the example of Jesus in our duty to love poverty and how do we practice it? We should remember that every earthly attachment is an act of disloyalty toward our vow.

Jesus teaches us another lesson--it is purity--reminding us of our holy vow of Chastity. If we desire to be pure,

we must love mortifications of the body, of the heart. 'They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh with its vices and concupiscences.' Therefore, let us unite in prayer that the shield of His saving grace protect us; the power of His sheltering love uphold us; and the deep calm of His presence sustain us." 10

10. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., 11, 1922

Likewise, to prevent the worldly spirit from creeping into the convent, Mother Thecla begged the sisters to pray each morning with the author of the Imitation, "Today, Lord, shall I begin, for what I have done until now is nothing." After quoting this passage, Mother Thecla herself advised:

"Thus shall we maintain ourselves in our first fervor and wield a powerful weapon against the dangers of our times, which are worldliness, materialism, and a spirit of liberty and insubordination. And since we are living in an age of progress--an age of hurry and anxiety for material gain--we ought not allow ourselves to become imbued with the spirit of the times, but remember that though living in the world, we, as religious, may not be of the world. In order to offset the evil influence that present conditions may have upon us, let us frequently reflect upon the peace and joy we experienced when we first entered religion." 11

11. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., 9, 1922.

That the sisters intrusted to her care might be real religious women, Mother Thecla counseled them to assume all responsibilities and duties conscientiously, cheerfully, trustworthily. No matter what work the sisters did, whether in the classroom, kitchen, laundry,

or garden, Mother Thecla wished them to do it all for the glory of God and the advancement of the community. She desired that the sisters examine their accounts at the annual retreat, and compare the income or merit with the expenses or losses. Mother Thecla then suggested that each sister make out a balance sheet and compare that year's progress with those of by-gone years. She hoped the comparison might not suffer and that our dear Lord might not be disappointed. ¹²

12. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., 2, 1920

While it is true that Mother Thecla as a zealous superior watched over the observance of the Holy Vows and sought to mold the characters of her sisters after the spirit of St. Francis, she had another interest at heart. This interest was the welfare of her Franciscan community. Her every prayer, her every labor was for the good and betterment of her community. One might well say, that next to motherliness, love of her community predominated in Mother Thecla. By a study of the early history of her order, Mother Thecla realized that its foundations had been uprooted and rebuilt several times. While her own sister, Mother Mary Antonine Thren had secured a firm footing for it, Mother Thecla's task was to build it up. To accomplish this end, she prayed God to bless her dear community, she petitioned men for its welfare. Thus, if she was ambitious, herein lay her ambition, for one of prime motives of her generalship was to see that her community was recognized, to see that it was making progress equal to that of other congregations. ¹³

13. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Interviews, Cards 5, 18, 60, 63, 66, testified to by Dr. Schottler, Sister de Sales, Sister Damascene, Sister Cornelia, Sister Laetitia, Sister Blandina, Sister Anthony, Sister Mildred, Reverend George Regenfuss, Reverend Francis Emmerich; also

Folio: Mother Thecla Traits, Card 16, Mother Celestine, Sister Catherine, Reverend George Meyer.

In her solicitude for her community, Mother Thecla was anxious to admit good and worthy postulants. Many an hour and much of her efforts were devoted to fostering vocations both to the priesthood and to the religious life. In her general and personal letters, she frequently requested prayers for good members for the community. She also begged her sisters to extol the religious life fittingly, since religious were in such demand both in this country and in the foreign mission field. 14

14. S.F.A.C.A. Folio: Circular Letters of Mother Thecla, 4, 16; 1921; 1923.

To prospective postulants, Mother Thecla wrote encouraging letters and praised convent life. The following is a letter written to a young lady who entered a community other than her own. Her letter read in part:

"The news that you have followed the call of the Master and are preparing to serve Him in the religious life was very pleasant news, I assure you. I also noticed from your letter that you have already found sweet consolation and peace in the service of the Lord. Yes, my dear Sister, as long as we are faithful to duties, to our heavenly Spouse, the religious life is a haven of peace and rest. True, trials and temptations

we shall always have as long as we live, but true service renders them harmless and gives us enough moral strength to see the vanity of all earthly things. From my long experience I can give you no better advice than encourage you to walk close to the side of your heavenly Spouse, serving Him according to the Holy Rules and customs of your dear community." 15

15. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Personal Letters of Mother Thecla, Card 10. This letter was written by Mother Thecla to Sister Annella, a sister of another community and natural sister to Sister Tharsilla of the St. Francis Community.
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To young ladies about to enter her own convent, Mother Thecla wrote in a cordial, practical manner as is exemplified in a letter written on April 3, 1919, to Madeline Wagner of Chicago.

"I bid you a hearty welcome to our Community and, as to the time of coming, I would set for you the first week of June, the month of the Sacred Heart.

. . . In the meantime we shall continue to remember you in our prayers that no further obstacles will place themselves in your way, but that you may reach the goal of your heart's desire." 16

16. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Card 5. This letter was written to Sister Inez, a member of the community, before her entrance into the convent.
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When girls showed signs of a religious vocation and were not permitted to enter a convent because of the objection of their parents, Mother Thecla by her tact often won their consent. One time, when Frances Mueller spoke to her parents about entering St. Francis Convent, ~~her parents~~, the latter decided to look at the place first. When they came to the Motherhouse, Mother Thecla spoke so convincingly on their daughter's vocation, that they allowed Mother to set a

date for their daughter's entrance. Though Frances had wanted to enter the convent but had been opposed by her family, Mrs. Mueller remarked to her daughter on the way home from the visit, "If you go to such a Mother, I will let you go to the convent." The young girl was accepted as a postulant at St. Francis on the very day that Mother Thecla had set beforehand for her entrance. 17

17. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Interviews, Card 69. This information was imparted by Sister Cyrilla, a member of the St. Francis Community who was Frances Mueller in the story.

During her administration as Superior General, Mother Thecla also petitioned in behalf of her congregation for the approbation of the Constitutions and Rules. From the Holy See and the Congregation of Religious in the College of Cardinals came the Decree of Praise on December 6, 1911. Again, when the Canons of the Church law were revised, the Rules of the congregation were once more revised and sent to the Holy See for approval. They were returned from Rome for a six year trial on the Easter of 1924. When the Rules arrived Mother Thecla was very happy and wrote to the members of the whole community on May 6, 1924:

"I trust you all enjoyed Easter and that it brought you many joys and blessings. God bless and reward you for your kind greetings. We had a most joyful day--for on Holy Saturday evening a parcel sent special delivery brought our approved Holy Rules. All rejoiced! We made a novena of thanksgiving, and now are praying two additional Our Fathers and Aves in honor of our Seraphic Father St. Francis; one in thanksgiving, the other that all our dear Sisters receive strength and grace to live up to them conscientiously as good Franciscans

should. Please, join us in prayer, so that as soon as they are translated we can have them printed and ready to give each member a copy in vacation." 18

18. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Administration, Cards 33, 64, information received from the chancery files; and

Folio: Circular Letters of Mother Thecla, 20-21, 1924

On March 17, 1922, Mother Thecla petitioned Archbishop Sebastian Messmer, Ordinary of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, for a Cardinal Protector for the St. Francis Community. Her request was granted when, on July 25, 1923, word came from the Holy See at Rome that John Cardinal Bonzano was appointed by apostolic decree, Cardinal Protector of the congregation. 19

19. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Administration, Cards 56, 59 matter on record in the chancery files.

Throughout and to the end of her Generalship, Mother Thecla encouraged her sisters to adhere to the true Franciscan spirit and to the Holy Vows and Rules they had promised to obey. Guided by the Holy Spirit and her heavenly patrons, Mother Thecla truly fulfilled her obligation as a religious superior. The last year of her administration, her Christmas wish of 1924 read:

"Again, dear Sisters, let us reanimate ourselves in the sanctity of our vocation, and with Mary and Joseph keep so closely united to Jesus that we may merit to praise Him here below, and hereafter to sing with the blessed ones above, an eternal 'Hosanna in the Highest.'" 20

20. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Circular Letters of Mother Thecla, 23, 1924

Uniquely enough, Mother Thecla, as Superior General, celebrated two Silver Jubilees, the one of her profession of religious vows, the other, a Jubilee as Superior General of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. These were occasions of great rejoicings by the community. One of the gifts of her first jubilee was a sham brick containing a check of \$1,000.00 which was to be used for the building of the new south wing of the convent. Almost a hundred donors contributed to this check. A memorial picture was likewise unveiled at the program given in her honor on that day. The framed testimonial still hangs in the community room of the Motherhouse at St. Francis. The Superior assisted by the chaplain of the Longmont missions drew it up. This was August 2, 1912. It reads:

"This testimonial was voted for presentation on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of her profession to the Venerable Mother M. Thecla as an expression of the Community's appreciation of her labors and accomplishments as a Religious and a Mother and as a Memorial of the deep love and respect entertained for her by all her Sisters and a constant fervent prayer. Ad multos annos. . . " 21

21. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Jubilee Donors, Names recorded; and

Folio: Mother Thecla Interviews, Card 80, Recopy made by the author of the Original Testimonial that hangs in the community room of the Motherhouse at St. Francis.

The community celebrated with great solemnity Mother Thecla's jubilee as Superior General of the congregation. At the program, members of convent Music Department played Bach's "Jubilee Overture" and Herbert's "The Serenade;" the convent choir sang "Glad Festal

Day," "Ave Maria," and "Jubilee Bells." A dramatization, "The Roses of St. Thecla," ^{was given.} In this latter number, the roses symbolized Mother Thecla's love of God, love of the Church, love of souls, love of the poor and afflicted, and her mother's love. 22

22. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Jubilees, Selections quoted from the Jubilee Program preserved in the files; and

The Roses of St. Thecla, dramatization in verse kept in files.

If the auditorium program was joyful, the ceremonies held in the convent chapel were far more impressive. The sentiments of all present were expressed in the sermon preached by the Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Monsignor Bernard Traudt. The Monsignor did not want Mother Thecla to listen to hollow phrases of praise.

So he said:

"Should I attempt to extol Mother Thecla today and sing her praises on account of the many undertakings brought to a happy and successful issue during the long years of her incumbency as Mother Superior of your community, should I ascribe to her indefatigable and self-sacrificing labor the marvelous growth of your community and its present prosperous condition, should I in a word endeavor to magnify the success that has crowned all that Mother Thecla has done for the welfare of this community, I am sure the good Mother in the humility of her heart would resent all this praise and would have me exclaim with the Psalmist: 'Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam.' 'Not to us, O Lord, not to us; but to Thy name give glory.' (Ps. 113)" 23

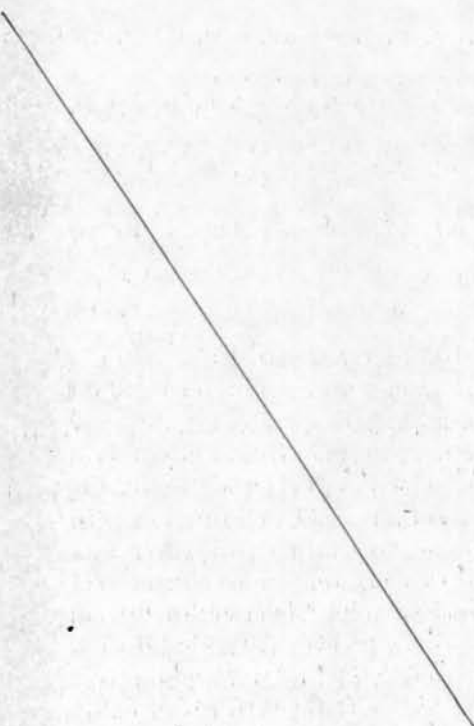
23. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Sermons: Monsignor Bernard Traudt, Mother Thecla Jubilee Sermon, given to the author by the Monsignor. It is at present preserved in the archives.

Monsignor Traudt concluded his sermon with a wish which well expressed that of all the spiritual daughters of Mother Thecla, who had so faithfully fulfilled her obligations as a religious woman, as Superior General. The sermon concluded with these words:

"And you, my dear Mother Thecla, may you continue your fruitful work, and when the Lord calls you to your eternal jubilee in heaven, you will hear from His lips, as He takes you to His Heart the words: 'Veni, sponsa Christi, accipe coronam quam tibi Dominus praeeparavit in aeternum.' 'Come, O Spouse of Christ, receive the crown which the Lord hath prepared for you forever. Amen.'" 24

Chapter IX

You Know Not the Hour



In spite of the greatness of any one human being, in spite of the offices and dignities that one may have held, all earthly things have an end. Mother Thecla had held some of the highest positions in her community and had had the unique privilege of ruling her congregation of religious women for twenty-seven years, the longest on record in the annals of the community of St. Francis. There is no doubt that she might have held the office of Superior General for life had the decrees of the revised canon laws ruled otherwise. In these laws legislating for the duration of the office of superiors, Canon 505, in particular, states its preference for temporary rather than permanent superiors. For the higher superiors of a community or congregation it decrees that they be elected for a "Certain limited term." 1

1. The Reverend Charles Augustine, O.S.B., D.D., A Commentary on the New Code of Canon Law, 3, 119, Canon 505

In accordance with the rules laid down by the Congregation of the Roman Court, Mother Thecla resigned her office as Superior General of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, at St. Francis, Wisconsin, on Monday, April 27, 1925. That day, the General Chapter convened at the Motherhouse and elected Mother Mary Celestine as Superior General. In turn, Mother Thecla was elected as first Assistant and Vicarress to the new Superior General. 2

2. S.F.A.C.A., General Chapter Book, Minutes of the Proceedings of the General Chapter. This book of minutes is preserved in the vault of the Motherhouse.

From 1898 to 1925, during her generalship, Mother Thecla had seen the growth of her community to four times its number. The statistics on file in the chancery office of the community showed that when Mother Thecla assumed the office of Superior General, the community numbered 110. When she laid down the keys and the seal of the St. Francis community, in 1925, the figures showed the following membership:

"Perpetually professed sisters	341
Temporarily professed sisters	<u>142</u>
Total of Professed Sisters	483
Novices	39
Postulants	<u>34</u>
Total Membership	556" 3

3. S.F.A.C.A., General Chapter Book, Statistics. Record in the same book mentioned above.

Though Mother Thecla had stepped down from the highest office of the congregation, that of Superior General, her interests in the welfare of the community, in the welfare of its members did not diminish. After so long a generalship, it was natural that Mother Thecla should continue to assist in the direction and the guidance of the members of the community. Her usual concern was shown in a letter written before the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi, September 29, 1926. She wrote:

"All I have to say is this, to assure you, dearest sisters, of remembering you individually before the tabernacle. There I promise to plead with Jesus for you, asking Him to bless and reward your devotedness and generosity toward me. Kindly remember me too

for the future in your prayer, but especially our dear Mother and the welfare of the Community." 4

4. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Circular Letters of Mother Thecla, 29, 1926

Five years passed. Then the summons of the eternal reaper came. It was the day on which the Church celebrates the feast of St. Joseph, patron of the universal Church, the blessed patron of a happy death, Mother Thecla's "pet saint." It was Wednesday, the 19th of March, the year 1930.

Throughout that last day of her earthly life, Mother Thecla was unusually joyful. She greeted every sister she met with a kind word and a hearty smile. She went from room to room, from department to department, and gave a bit of admonition here, a bit of advice there. It was as though it were her farewell. She also visited the convent chapel several times that day and each time paid a special tribute to St. Joseph. That afternoon, she remarked to one of the sisters that she was asking good St. Joseph for three wishes. Just what all three wishes were no one ever knew.

Finally, towards dusk, at the Vesper Hour, the bell summoned the sisters of the Motherhouse to spiritual reading, a spiritual exercise held in the community room. Mother Thecla, too, had answered the summons of the bell and was present. After the reading was over, Mother Thecla tarried in the community room. Because the Mother General, Mother Celestine, was gravely ill at the time, as her Vicarress, Mother Thecla remained to solve the difficulties and troubles of the sisters with whom she spoke. She talked rather

a long time with Sister Vita, for Sister Radegundis, who was waiting her turn, had left the room and returned a third time. At that moment, Mother Thecla turned and noticed that Sister Radegundis was also waiting to speak to her. She immediately called to Sister Radegundis, "Sister, did you want something?" Sister Radegundis approached the dear Mother and Sister Vita with whom Mother Thecla had been speaking. At the time, then, their positions were such that Mother Thecla had the place of honor in the center, Sister Vita being on her right and Sister Radegundis on her left. When Sister Radegundis presented her question about an album intended for snapshots of the community's mission in China, Mother Thecla lifting her hand to her forehead as if in pain replied, "What album?" and at the same moment dropped to the floor, unconscious. The two sisters present soon realized that Mother Thecla was dying. While Sister Vita tried to speak to Mother Thecla, Sister Radegundis ran hither and thither throughout the convent halls calling, "Mother Thecla is dying." She sent Sister Isabel, the first one she chanced to meet, to summon the convent chaplain, while she herself announced the news to the Superior General, Mother Celestine. Then she hurriedly summoned the nurses and all the members of the Council and any other sister she met to the community room. But Mother Thecla was dying. After receiving the last Absolution of the Church and Extreme Unction, after a life of sacrifice and good deeds for her community, after a flowering of the seeds so conscientiously sown, seeds that were white already to harvest, God summoned Mother Thecla to reward her at once to the eternal mansions of the Blessed. For there was no denying the

fact, Mother Thecla was dead. From person to person the words were passed on and soon re-echoed throughout the convent halls and rooms, Mother Thecla is dead! Mother Thecla is dead! 5

5. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Concerning Death of Mother Thecla, Personal Account of Sister Radegundis. This account was recorded by the author in an interview with Sister Radegundis in 1942. She was an eyewitness being present in the community room at the time of Mother Thecla's death.

Mother Thecla, clothed in the holy habit of a Franciscan, like the Community Seraphic Patron, lay on the floor of the convent community room in death. She had fallen at the feet of the image of her Crucified Lord, and near a pedestal on which the statue of Holy Father Francis stood. There she met Sister Death. It was St. Joseph, the saint to whom Mother Thecla was so devoted, who came on his own feast day, to accompany Mother Thecla to the eternal nuptials with her Heavenly Spouse, Jesus Christ. It was the hour of twilight, at 4:45 p.m. that Mother Thecla was united with her heavenly Bridegroom. 6

6. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Mother Thecla Interviews, Cards 82, 83, 12. Mother Assistant Irene and Sister Cyrilla have verified these accounts in interviews made with them in 1941; and

Letter announcing Mother Thecla's death to the mission houses of the Congregation.

N. B. Many members of the community are still living who recall the incident of Mother Thecla's death. They have given the author all the information she did not witness personally. The author, who was attending classes at Marquette University at the time, returned just after Mother Thecla had died. So the incidents narrated are partly a personal account of what she herself witnessed.

Chapter X

Her Name Shall Not Die

Death had come to Mother Thecla suddenly, unexpectedly. But it had been her wish that it be thus. Throughout her life she had prayed for such a death. She had said that a sudden death was not an unhappy death when one was prepared. In 1928, she had written in her Christmas letter:

"Let us daily prepare for death; 'die daily' is a good meditation and much matter is offered in these two words. We must always use time well, for a moment well used in a good thought, a kindly word or act, a little self-denial, an act of contrition for one's sins; one act of love of God which is sown shall reap an eternal crown of joy, an eternal God whom we shall enjoy forever." 1

1. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Circular Letters of Mother Thecla, 32, 1928

Like other souls favored by God, Mother Thecla had been forewarned of her death. Sister Sabina, one of the older members of the St. Francis community, had heard the story from Mother Thecla's own lips. When Sister Christopha lay dying, she said to Mother Thecla, "When thirty comes the time is up." The dying sister did not tell Mother Thecla more than that. As to what the thirty meant, whether the year 1930, or thirty years of life Sister Christopha did not reveal. But the prediction was verified when Mother Thecla died in the year 1930. Sister Sabina kept the incident secret, as Mother Thecla had requested her, until after the latter's death. 2

* Sister Christopha died December 1, 1908

2. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Concerning Death of Mother Thecla, Prediction of Mother Thecla's Death. Sent to author by Sister Sabina. The original is written in German.

Mother Thecla, as early as 1924, showed that she was prepared for death. During the Lent of that year, after two members of the community had died rather unexpectedly, Mother Thecla in a letter addressed to the sisters commented:

"All our strenuous duties, what are they all but a preparation for that decisive moment. After that there will be for us, my dear Sisters, a happy union with our Spouse, provided we have worked, not for ourselves or our own glory, but in union with our suffering Savior and to please Him alone." ³

3. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Circular Letters of Mother Thecla, 18, 1924

The news of Mother Thecla's death soon spread from the convent halls on that March day to the nearby village of St. Francis, to the city of Milwaukee, where it made headlines in the Catholic and daily papers, and to the outside world. The news came as a distinct shock to not only the sisters in the convent but to others as well.

Reverend George Regenfuss, chaplain of the St. Francis convent, declared that nothing in his priestly career had taken him so unawares as the sad summons to administer the last consolations of Holy Mother Church to Mother Thecla. He further said that when Sister Isabel rushed to his quarters in the convent and cried out "Mother Thecla is dying," he was like a paralyzed man and Vergil's words were a reality, "My voiced adhered to my throat." ⁴

4. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Concerning the Death of Mother Thecla, Reverend George Regenfuss, In Memoriam, words taken from his Conference which was delivered on March 30, 1930 in the Convent chapel.

Living relatives and friends of Mother Thecla and benefactors of the St. Francis Community were informed of her death through the articles in the newspapers and the following announcement:

"With great sorrow we announce the death of our dearly beloved Mother Mary Thecla Thren who was called to her eternal reward on the Feast of St. Joseph at five in the evening in the sixty-second year of her age, and the forty-third year of her religious profession. Of your charity pray for the repose of her soul.

Funeral services in the Convent Chapel
Wednesday, March 26, at 10 o'clock

Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi,
St. Francis, Wisconsin." 5

5. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Announcement of Mother Thecla's Death

While Mother Thecla's body lay in state in the convent mortuary chapel, hundreds of persons, both religious and laity, paid their last homage to this woman of extraordinary achievements and beautiful character. All exclaimed that the St. Francis Community had sustained an irreparable loss. As an expression of their sympathy, numberless spiritual bouquets and Mass offerings were deposited around her bier.

Beside the many spiritual offerings and Holy Masses of the members of her own community, beside the unnumbered offerings of those donors who preferred to remain unknown, prayers offered for the repose of the soul of Mother Thecla included several thousand Holy Masses and Holy Communion, Rosaries, Litanies, Ejaculations, various prayers and good works. The offerings on the Mass Cards showed that thirty-three Requiem High Masses and four hundred and seventy Holy Masses were read

for the repose of the soul of Mother Thecla. Inscribed on the cards were the names of scores of members of the American hierarchy, orders and congregations of men and women, hundreds of school children in charge of the Sisters of St. Francis, laymen and laywomen, among which were relatives of Mother Thecla and friends and benefactors of the St. Francis community.

Two Gregorian Mass offerings were offered for the deceased Mother Thecla, one from the Archbishop's residence at Milwaukee, and one from her living relatives, The Mr. and Mrs. Herman Thren Family of Watertown, Wisconsin. A benefactor had her enrolled in the Perpetual Participation of the Seraphic Mass Association for the support of the Foreign Capuchin Mission. Other Masses were read throughout the country. To mention a few of the places: Gesu Church, the Carmelite Church at Holy Hill, the Archbishop's chapel in Milwaukee, the Capuchin Monastery, the Salvatorian Monastery, the Techmy Monastery, and the National Shrine at Washington, D.C. 6

6. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Reverend George Regenfuss, op. cit., 4, Conference; and

Statistics on file in the convent archives--Mass cards, spiritual bouquets, letters of sympathy, etc. The author recounted the cards to get the number of Masses read and checked the places at which they were read.

Before Mother Thecla was buried, while she still lay in her casket, there sat on the window sill of the mortuary chapel another mourner. It was the convent squirrel. He had been a pet of Mother Thecla's. She had fed and cared for him while she was alive and instinct told him she was dead. Without his usual breakfast of nuts, the squirrel,

too, paid his silent homage. Sister Mary John, a member of the St. Francis community, wrote the following poem to commemorate the incident:

The Convent Squirrel

"Good morning, little squirrel! how still
 You sit on Mother's window sill.
 Your nuts for breakfast won't be fed
 By Mother dear, for she is dead.
 Her death our hearts with sorrow fill.

But do not go away until
 Like FATHER Francis, someone will
 Prepare your meal in Mother's stead
 This morning, little squirrel.

I know you'll want to pay your bill;
 So join our ranks though wind is chill.
 And when the fun'ral train is led
 Along the snowy path, then tread
 Near virgin pines across the hill
 In Mourning, Little squirrel." 7

7. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Sister Mary John, O.S.F. The Convent Squirrel. This poem was written on March 25, 1930.

On Wednesday, March 26, 1930, hundreds of persons, clergymen, relatives, laymen and laywomen, friends and benefactors, and the sisters of the St. Francis Community and other congregations, gathered at the Motherhouse to attend the funeral services. The Pontifical Requiem High Mass was sung by The Most Reverend Paul Rhode, Bishop of Green Bay, Wisconsin. The Right Reverend Monsignor Bernard Traudt, administrator of the Milwaukee archdiocese was assistant priest. Reverend Nicholas Maas,^{*} Spiritual Director of the Students of St. Francis Seminary, St. Francis, Wisconsin preached the sermon. In the sanctuary, present at the Requiem Mass were seventy-one priests. 8

* Deceased

8. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., Newspaper Clippings from the

Catholic Daily Tribune, March 29, 1930

Catholic Herald, March 20, 27, 1930

Columbia, March 26, 1930

Milwaukee Journal, March 29, 1930

Wisconsin News, March 26, 1930.

Following the Requiem Mass, a procession was formed and the members of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, including novices and postulants, men and women of religious orders and congregations, members of the diocesan clergy, students of St. Mary's Academy, students of St. Francis Seminary, the orphan boys of St. Aemilian's Orphanage, living relatives and the laity marched to the Chapel of the Woods Cemetery, adjoining the grounds of St. Francis Seminary, St. Francis, Wisconsin. Six members of the St. Francis Community carried the casket: Sister Emerentia, Sister Radegundis, Sister Loyola, Sister Vita, Sister Natalia, and Sister Hildegundis. At the cemetery grounds six seminary deacons were pall bearers. In spite of the biting winds, the stinging cold, and the drifting snow, persons from all points of the country stood by while Monsignor Bernard Weber of Salem, South Dakota said the last prayers for the deceased Mother Thecla. Then, amid the tears of her religious daughters, Mother Thecla's earthly remains were lowered into the grave. 9

9. The events enumerated above were observed by the author on the day itself, March 26, 1930.

Immediately after the death and even after the burial of Mother Thecla, hundreds of letters of tribute were written to honor her and to express sympathy to the community for their loss. Promises of prayers came from all points of the United States, separated as far as from New York to Florida, Louisiana, Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, and Washington, D.C.; from Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Iowa to the far western state of California. Even far-off Europe was included. From friends in Rome came three letters, two letters came from Bavaria, Germany, and one from Innsbruck, Austria. 10

10. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Letters of Sympathy. These letters are contained in three folios--one for priests, another for religious communities of women, and a third that of the laity.

Since these letters express the sentiments of the persons who wrote them, some abstracts from various letters will be quoted. From Bonaventure Cardinal Cerretti, then Cardinal Protector of the St. Francis Community, came this message:

"Your letter of March 24th brought me a very sad news. I share most sincerely the great sorrow of all the Community for the death of the exemplary Mother Thecla whose life was always an inspiration to each Sister. I fully realize the great loss you have sustained but the beloved Mother, I am sure, will continue to look upon her dear daughters and to help them with her prayers. . . I am convinced that she has already received her eternal reward." 11

11. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Letters of Sympathy, Clergy, 1, B. Cardinal Cerretti

This wire was sent to Mother Celestine from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, by Archbishop Sebastian Messmer of Milwaukee:

"Most heartfelt sympathy and condolence to yourself and community on terrible loss of Mother Thecla. But don't get discouraged the Lord will help." 12

12. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., 2, The Most Reverend Seb. G. Messmer

The Provincial of the Techny Community of Men, the Society of the Divine Word, wrote a letter of sincere sympathy. The Provincial was convinced that all the sisters would be resigned to God's will, since the Remunerator of the good would not fail to reward "This good religious for all she had done for His work and cause on earth." 13

13. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., 3, Reverend A. Hagspiel, S.V.D.

Genuine grief filled the heart of a Salesian Father of Ven. Don Bosco, Reverend W. Verhalen. In his letter dated March 27, 1930, one reads:

"Oh! but it hurt me, yes, hurt is no word to express my feelings when I found the notice of my good friend's death, for she, Ven. Mother Thecla, only recently wrote to me. Yet I am consoled for I know her spirit and know that not only I am praying for her but that she is also praying for you and me in closer contact with God." 14

14. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., 5, Reverend W. F. Verhalen, S.C.

Reverend Aloysius K. Ziegler, Professor of History at the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., promised to read a Mass at the shrine of the Immaculate Conception for the repose of the soul of

Mother Thecla. He wrote that the convent had been blessed in having her guidance for so many years and believed that her memory as well as her intercession would be a rich inheritance to her community.

Father Anthony, a Franciscan priest, of Grand Rapids, Michigan, sent the reassurance that he would be proud to pray for her whom he had always esteemed in life and "who was always a real sister to the brotherhood of which I am a member." 15

15. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., 6, Reverend Aloysius Ziegler; and Ibid., 7, Father Anthony

In an interview with Reverend Joseph Koester, childhood schoolmate and friend, the writer was sent this estimate of the deceased religious ten years after her death:

"Mother Thecla was a true religious, always faithful in every respect to her high calling. She was kind and solicitous toward her Sisters of whom she had charge. She was friendly and gracious to all. She was especially interested in the welfare of her religious order, of which she was the Mother General for many years. . ." 16

16. S.F.A.C.A., Reverend Joseph Koester, Madison, Wisconsin, Estimate of Mother Thecla, dated July 22, 1941. This estimate was written by request of the author.

The expression of sympathy of the clergy can best be concluded with the letter sent by Reverend Francis Emmerich, Hart, Michigan.

He wrote:

"So good and saintly Mother Thecla is no longer with us. How much I shall miss her to whom I owe so much, my truest friend and greatest benefactor after mine own dear mother. . .

Rev. dear Mother, I can understand your sorrow and grief at the loss of such a saintly, such a noble, such a sweet soul and I hasten to convey to you and the sorrowing community my deepest sympathy and my poor prayers. . .

P.S. Place for me, please, a spring flower upon the noble heart of Rev. Mother Thecla with a prayer of greeting from me. She always shall share as mine own dear mother in the Masses for the family." 17

17. S.F.A.C.A., Polio: Letters of Sympathy--Clergy, 9, Reverend Francis Emmerich.

Although many other letters were received from both regular and diocesan clergy, it would be impossible to quote from almost a half-hundred letters. Not to tire the reader only a few of the letters sent by communities of religious women from Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Missouri will be cited.

Mother Mary Inez, Superior General of the Holy Family Convent, Manitowoc, Wisconsin promised the prayers of her community and wrote that to the departed Mother Thecla could be applied this text: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for their works follow them." Apoc. xiv, 13. Mother Seraphine, St. Rose Convent, La Crosse, Wisconsin, too, realized the sacrifice the Lord had asked of the St. Francis Community. She begged Mother Celestine, fortified with the grace of the Lord, that she would "speak a tearful 'Fiat' and feel that He and He only is the staff on whom to lean." She told Mother Celestine to place her trust in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and concluded, "He is the strength of our weakness, the wisdom of our feeble understanding, the strong arm of our human frailty." 18

18. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Letters of Sympathy--Religious, 1, Mother Mary Inez and 2, Mother Mary Seraphine.

Sister Mary Joseph of Saint Mary's Hospital, Rochester, Minnesota, sent this message to the community:

"We share your sorrow as we share your love and admiration of Reverend Mother Thecla whose debtors we are for many kindnesses as well as for the inspiration that her noble character and her piety always imparted to those who came in contact with her." 19

19. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., 3, Sister Mary Joseph

Sister M. Aloysia, St. Agnes Convent, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, assured the community that Mother Thecla's soul met with a "loving welcome from Him whom she had faithfully served since her childhood", and recalled with pleasure the genuine hospitality she always extended to members of her Community when they visited St. Francis. Finally, a very personal letter came from Sister Mary Angela, O.S.F., Good Counsel High School, Chicago.

"God has willed it so, therefore His will be done. This sublime expression is yours in the anguish of your sacrifice; it is also your Sisters'--but, Mother, it is mine, too; I repeat it weeping. . . . How dear to me her friendship was, and how deeply the tokens of it, that I received, touched my heart. . . .

What condolence can I offer your good sisters who have been ably fully to understand and appreciate the purity and beauty of the Spirit which has just passed from among you? . . . To Him, who hath taken to the arms of His love our most dear Mother Thecla I can alone commend you all." 20

20. S.P.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., 4, Sister M. Alcyia, C.S.A., and 5, Sister Mary Angela, O.S.F.

Letters also came from the laity, Relatives, friends, and benefactors sent sympathy notes of sorrow to the community. Among these letters from one from the President of the Milwaukee Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women, Miss Katherine Williams. The Council in Miss Williams' name united their prayers

"With the thousands of others who have experienced (Mother Thecla's) kind cooperation and generous support in her work as a Sister of St. Francis, in asking our dear Lord to grant her eternal rest, and to confer upon her the rich rewards due her long years of service." 21

21. S.P.A.C.A., Folio: Letters of Sympathy--Laity, 1, Miss Katherine Williams, President.

A similar note came from the Catholic Instruction League of Milwaukee. The note of the league lauded her faithful service and "beautiful example of Catholic womanhood and perfection in the religious life." Expressions of regret came from the Board of Directors and officers of the First Wisconsin National Bank, Milwaukee, from Mr. Stemper of the Milwaukee Church Supply Company, from the E. H. Lohman Company, St. Paul, Minnesota, and from Mr. S. P. Kunzelmann of the Kunzelmann Esser Company, Milwaukee. Mr. Kunzelmann, in his letter to Sister Isabel, Administratrix General of the Community, gave this tribute to Mother Thecla:

"You know, Sister Isabel, I just loved her. I thought she was one of the greatest Sisters I have ever met and I have met a great many of them." 22

22. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Ibid., 2, Signed Ann Aman, Cor. Sec'y to Miss Katherine Williams, President of the Catholic Instruction League of Milwaukee; and

Letters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, signed by the persons mentioned above.

The striking testimonials expressed by these many people to the memory of the departed Mother Thecla can be concluded with no better statement than that made in a conference by the Spiritual Director of St. Francis, Convent, Reverend George Regenfuss. In a special conference, entitled In Memoriam, which Father Regenfuss delivered the Sunday after the burial of Mother Thecla, he eulogized her character and labors, and achievements. The following is but one of the many passages which could be quoted:

"Her position as Mother General brought her in contact with high and low, priests and laymen, but everywhere she showed a genuine reserve, a pleasing humility, consideration for the opinions of others which permeated her conversations. She knew the opportune moment to speak. . . Her Franciscan humility and Jesuit polish enabled her to converse with cardinals, bishops, priests, and laymen alike. No person was so poor or illiterate as to escape her notice and congenial greeting." 23

23. S.F.A.C.A., Folio: Concerning the Death of Mother Thecla, Reverend George Regenfuss, Conference in Memoriam delivered Sunday, March 30, 1930.

One must pass by the tributes of the members of her own community. They will be revealed in the Book of Life, hereafter. But beside the written eulogies, there stands a landmark to Mother Thecla's memory on the convent grounds. It is a Grotto of St. Francis of Assisi. Mr. Jacob Weninger had it erected in her memory because he thought she was the most marvelous woman he had ever met.

Along with the community's remembrance of Mother Thecla is an annual Requiem High Mass to be read on her anniversary in perpetuity. Then there are the mementoes of many unrecorded prayers and the undying love of her own Franciscan daughters in religion. To them her memory shall ever be blessed. For to them her name shall never die.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

The St. Francis of Assisi Convent Archives at St. Francis of Assisi Convent, St. Francis, Wisconsin.

I. These archives will contain all the documents pertaining to the entire history of the congregation since its founding in the diocese of Milwaukee in 1849. At present, under the caption of Mother Mary Thecla Thren, O.S.F. (1868-1930) Superior General of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis of Assisi, Sisters of Penance and Charity from 1898-1925 documentary material is filed in the following folios:

1. Watertown History: This folio contains
 - A. Watertown, Wisconsin Centennial Pamphlet 1836-1936
This pamphlet contains the highlights of the history of Watertown from the time of its founding in 1836. Since Mother Thecla was born in Watertown, the pamphlet was valuable to the author in gleaning information on the place of her birth and the progress made in a hundred years in Wisconsin's one-time second largest city.
 - B. Goldenes Jubiläum 1853 Erinnerunggs Feier 1903
This booklet printed to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of St. Henry's Church at Watertown, Wisconsin gave valuable information concerning the pastors who directed the church during Mother Thecla's youth. It also was of aid in determining the foundation of the parish school which Mother Thecla attended.
 - C. Catholic Herald Citizen Clipping--December 13, 1941
A write-up about the centenary of St. Bernard's Church at Watertown, Wisconsin. The time of the founding of St. Henry's Church is also mentioned.
2. Early Youth of Mother Thecla: This folio contains 21
Cards recording information dealing with the period 1868--1884.
 - A. Information concerning the parents, brother and sisters, girlhood incidents, influence of the pastor, entrance into the Convent of St. Francis at St. Francis, Wisconsin, postulancy and novitiate and duties of teacher and Mistress of Postulants of Mother Thecla.

The material goes up to Mother Thecla's election to Superior General of the Community of St. Francis. This information was secured by the author from living relatives, classmates, pupils, and members of St. Francis Convent who were closely associated with the deceased Mother.

- B. Hand-written papers of incidents recalled by Mother Thecla's sister Margaret, Mrs. Joseph Reinehr, of the early childhood happenings of Mother Thecla.
 - C. Hand-written papers given the author by Sister Coletta a member of the community of St. Francis. They contain incidents pertaining especially to the early years of Mother Thecla's life.
 - D. Letter sent to the author by Sister Bernard in response to a questionnaire sent out in the monthly publication the Convent News of St. Francis Convent. Sister recalls a childhood experience of Mother Thecla and writes it up.
 - E. Typewritten paper sent to the author by Stephen J. Mueller of Cudahy, Wisconsin, a pupil of Mother Thecla's back in 1886. It contains an incident that occurred in the classroom of Mother Thecla at the Sacred Heart School, St. Francis, Wisconsin.
3. Mother Thecla Interviews: This folio contains 90 cards.
- A. In response to thirteen questions prepared by the author, priests, members of the community at St. Francis who knew or were directed by Mother Thecla in her lifetime, and laity gave what information they could concerning Mother Thecla's life, character, and works. About fifty persons were interviewed during 1940-1942.
4. Mother Thecla Traits: This folio contains 19 Cards.
- A. Information in these cards was given the author through further interviews. As the title suggests, this group of cards contains findings on the particular characteristics of Mother Thecla, such as her attitude toward her inferiors, her hospitality, her respect for priests, etc.
5. Mother Thecla Administration 1898--1925: This folio contains 76 Cards.
- A. These cards are arranged by years and contain details of buildings put up, improvements made, and happenings that occurred during the Generalship of Mother Thecla.

Some of the information in these cards was gathered by Sister Mary Raymond, a member of the community who spent several years in collecting material for the community annals. Her findings are preserved in a book which is kept on file. The prices paid for repairs and new buildings was secured by her from the Financial Accounts of the community.

6. Community Personnel to 1898

- A. This folio contains the names of the sisters in the community when Mother Thecla became Superior General in 1898. It is a recopy of the names taken from the Record Book of Professions. The copy was made in 1942 for the S.F.A.C.A. by Mother Celestine, Secretary to Mother General.

7. Ceremonial and Directory:

- A. The ceremonial contained in this folio is the ceremonial that is used at the reception of postulants, at the religious profession, and the election of the Mother General and her Council at the St. Francis of Assisi Convent, St. Francis, Wisconsin. It was originally composed and written in German by the Most Rev. F. X. Katzer, late Archbishop of Milwaukee. It was translated into English by the Spiritual Director of the St. Francis Community, Rev. George Regenfuss. It was used by the author in connection with the election procedure of Mother Thecla. Though it was published in 1914, the election procedure was practically the same at the time of Mother Thecla's election in 1898.
- B. The Directory is a mimeographed book that contains beside a list of the houses of the congregation and the sisters missioned there, a chronological arrangement of the houses with the date of their foundation, personnel, number of pupils, and location. To ascertain the numbers of schools and houses accepted by Mother Thecla this directory of 1926 was used.

8. Longmont, Colorado--St. Joseph's Academy

- A. Sister Raymond Write-up about the founding of the academy. Information sister received from the following sisters who were missioned to Longmont when the school was first organized: Sister Eugene, Sister Josephine, Sister Anselm, Sister Emerita, Sister Leonida.

- B. Clippings from the Longmont Call. Local Newspaper. Dates not recorded. The articles contain information about the purchase of the property for the academy and the new school to be opened by the Sisters of St. Francis.
- C. The folio also contains a photograph of the academy at the time of its opening in 1906.

9. Sermons:

- A. Sermon preached by the Rt. Rev. Msgr. Joseph Rainer, Vicar General of the Milwaukee Archdiocese, on the occasion of the blessing of the addition to the convent at St. Francis, known as the South Wing. April 27, 1916.
- B. Sermon preached by Rt. Rev. Msgr. Bernard Traudt, Vicar General of the Milwaukee Archdiocese, on the occasion of the Jubilee Festival of Mother Thecla as Superior General, July 10, 1923. Although the date was rightly April 17, 1923, the program and celebration was postponed until the summer so that the missionaries might be present.

10. Normal School and Teachers' Institute: This folio contains

- A. Outline of Studies: high school and normal course for St. Francis of Assisi Normal School at St. Francis, Wis.
- B. Teachers' Institute Bulletin. This bulletin contains the officers, committee, and examiners on the Board of Education and the lessons to be prepared for the different subjects in the grades. It might correspond to a modern course of studies.
- C. Roll call of the teachers present at the Teachers' Conferences each summer from 1900--1907.
- D. Minutes of the Teachers' Conferences held in 1901, 1902, 1913, 1914, 1916, 1917.
- E. Queries of St. Francis Teachers' Conferences. This book contains seventy-nine questions that were discussed at the conferences.

11. Donors to the Jubilee Library Fund--1923--and first Brick--1912

- A. This folio contains the names and amount contributed by each to the Mother Thecla Jubilee library fund. July 10, 1923. It included 23 members of the hierarchy, 10 institutions at St. Francis and in the State, 14 outlying missions, and 30 friends and benefactors. The fund total was \$1480.75

12. Mother Thecla Silver Jubilee as Mother General

- A. This folio contains the copy of the Jubilee Program given to honor Mother Thecla on the occasion of her Silver Jubilee as Superior General of St. Francis Convent on July 20, 1923. The date she actually took the generalship was April 17, 1898.
- B. Roses of St. Thecla, a copy of the dramatization given on the same occasion.

13. "Flu" Epidemic of 1918 Folio:

- A. Letter written by Sister Mary Nicola, member of the community, to Mother Thecla on Nov. 5, 1918. This letter contains particulars of the work done by the sisters at Sterling, Colorado during the epidemic of 1918.
- B. Letter written by Sister Sister Mary Julia, member of the community, to Mother Thecla on Nov. 8, 1918. It contains further information concerning the status and work of sisters in Sterling, Colorado during the epidemic.
- C. Clipping from Advocate, Sterling, Colorado, local newspaper. The clipping gives details of the action of the city council to check the "flu" epidemic there.
- D. Letter written by Rev. Nicholas J. Dahlmanns written to Mother Thecla from Parkston, South Dakota on Nov. 5, 1918. The letter thanks Mother for giving her sisters permission to nurse the sick during the same "flu" epidemic.

14. Personal Letters of Mother Thecla:

- A. This folio contains personal letters written by Mother Thecla herself to others. They cover the years 1906 to 1930. The last one was written to Sister Bartholomew the day before she died, March 18, 1930.

15. Circular Letters of Mother Thecla:

- A. Letters composed by Mother Thecla and sent to the houses of the community. They cover the years 1920 to 1929, 33 pages in all.

16. Concerning Death of Mother Thecla: This folio contains

- A. Write-up of Sister Sabina, in German, relating to the prediction of Mother Thecla's coming death. 1941.
- B. Death of Mother Thecla as related to the author by an eye-witness, Sister Radegundis, a member of the community.
- C. Announcement (printed) sent to outsiders concerning the death of Mother Thecla.
- D. Circular Letter dated March 19, 1930 which announced Mother Thecla's death to the houses of the community.
- E. A Summary of the Holy Masses offered for the repose of the soul of Mother Thecla.
- F. Some spiritual bouquets and prayers recited for the soul of Mother Thecla by congregations of religious women and school children.
- G. The Conference entitled In Memoriam given by Rev. George Regenfuss on March 30, 1930. The sermon extolled the dead Mother Thecla and offered consolation to the bereaved community.
- H. The poem The Convent Squirrel written by Sister Mary John, member of the community on March 25, 1930. Mother Thecla was lying dead in the mortuary chapel in her casket at the time.
- I. Clippings relative to Mother Thecla's funeral from the following newspapers:
 1. Catholic Daily Tribune, March 29, 1930.
 2. Catholic Herald, March 20, 1930; March 27, 1930
 3. Columbia--German publication--March 26, 1930
 4. Milwaukee Journal, March 20, 1930
 5. Wisconsin News, March 26, 1930

17. Letters of Sympathy--Members of the hierarchy:

- A. This folio contains the forty-four letters written to Mother Celestine, Superior General of the community and to the sisters after the death of Mother Thecla. Telegrams are also included.

18. Letters of Sympathy--Religious Women:

- A. This folio contains 18 letters sent to the community by communities of sisters after the death of Mother Thecla.

19. Letters of Sympathy--Laity:

- A. This folio contains letters of condolence from business firms, friends and benefactors of the community. There are 32 letters.

20. Photographs:

- A. This folio contains all the photos of Mother Thecla that the author collected.

II. Other Primary Sources used in writing this thesis

1. Nojoshing now St. Francis:

- A. This is a brief history of our community from 1849 to 1925. The material was collected by Mother Thecla herself but put in writing by Sister Joan and Sister Ignatia. It was completed April 29, 1925 and is in mimeographed form. Since a summary of the first forty-nine years of community history was included in the thesis, this reference is inserted here. It is preserved in the archives.

2. The Study of the History of our Community:

- A. This folio contains speeches arranged and compiled by Sister Raymond, a member of the community, in manuscript form. It was arranged for a study club and to acquaint the younger members of the community with the history of the congregation. It was frequently used in the thesis of the author.

3. History of the Convent of Saint Francis of Assisi:

- A. This is a history of the origin and founding of the congregation at St. Francis in a manuscript form. It is a thesis submitted to the faculty of St. Francis Seminary in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts by Rev. Philip Joseph Rose, B.A. A copy is preserved in the convent archives.

4. Baptismal Records of St. Henry's Church, Watertown, Wis.

- A. The author had access to the records while in Watertown. The complete baptismal name of Mother Thecla and her sponsor was thus obtained.

5. Rules for the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis the Seraphic, 1874.

- A. This is one of the first printed rules of the congregation. It is preserved in the chancery vault of the convent.

6. Record Book of Professions:

- A. This book is preserved in the chancery vaults also. It was used to determine the number of members in the community at the time of Mother Thecla's accession to the generalship.

SECONDARY SOURCES:

Books:

Augustine, Reverend Charles, O.S.B., D.D., A Commentary on the New Code of Canon Law, St. Louis, B. Herder Book Company, 1919, 8 Volumes, (3: p. 469).

The third volume of the series was used. The canons concerning superiors of congregations and the duration of their office were consulted, especially Canon 505.

Bruce, William George, A Short History of Milwaukee, Milwaukee, The Bruce Publishing Company, 1936, p. 249.

This book gave the author useful information on Solomon Juneau, on the industrial achievements and the trend toward big business in the city of Milwaukee.

Burns, Reverend J. A., C.S.C., Ph.D., The Catholic School System in the United States; its principles, origin, and establishment, New York, Benziger Brothers, 1908, p. 415.

This book presents the principles and relation of education to the Church. Missions schools of Franciscans, French, and Jesuits and their characteristics are discussed. The educational influence of the American Revolution and the French émigrés are touched on. Reviews of the early teaching communities are given, the influence of the hierarchy in their respective dioceses cited, the controversy of Bishop Hughes with the State over the diocesan school system is discussed. The book was helpful in writing the thesis in connection with the work done by missionaries, and the types of schools existing in the pioneer days.

Burns, Reverend J. A., C.S.C., Ph. D., The Growth and Development of the Catholic School System in the United States, Chicago, Benziger Brothers, 1912, p. 421.

The author begins with the growth of the church from about 1840. It treats the economic side of the Catholic school growth and discusses the problems of Catholic education. The book was only helpful for its discussion of schools for Indians.

Butler, Reverend Alban, Lives of the Saints; With reflections for every day in the year, Chicago, Benziger Brothers, 1878, p. 406.

This book was used to get a sketch of St. Thecla. At investiture Mother Thecla received the name Thecla.

Catholic Directories, New York, P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1898, 1899, 1900.

All three directories were checked to determine the correct number of Catholic Churches in the city of Milwaukee at the time of Mother Thecla's election to the Generalship in 1898.

Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Published by the society, 1854-1931, pages vary in each volume.

Almost every volume of the set was used by the author. The used covered the early history and condition of the State and early history of education in Wisconsin. The narrative of Andrew J. Vieau, Sr., son of Jacques Vieau, who first came to the city of Milwaukee in 1795, was read to get information about the first white man to set foot in the city. The sketch of Morgan L. Martin, a white man who lived in Wisconsin sixty years was also read. The narrative was valuable for information regarding the owner of the original plat of the then village of Milwaukee, Solomon Juneau. The latter is regarded as the first permanent white settler of the village of Milwaukee.

Daggett, Clay, J., Editor, Education in Wisconsin, Whitewater, Wisconsin, The Whitewater Press, 1936, p. 421.

The most complete work found by the author on the public school system of education in Wisconsin. Every phase of public school education is covered. A quotation was used from this book.

Girardey, Reverend Ferreol, C.S.S.R., Editor, Qualities of a Good Superior, St. Louis, B. Herder, 1911, p. 295.

This book was compiled chiefly from the instructions of Venerable Chamagnat, Founder of the Little Brothers of Mary. It was helpful in gaining a knowledge of the qualities necessary for those who govern religious communities.

Gregory, John G., History of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 4 Volumes, Chicago-Milwaukee, The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1931, pages: 1:564; 2: continued from Volume 1; 1349; 3:816; 4: 817.

The first two volumes of this set cover the history of the city; the last two are biographical. The volumes were used for their accounts of settlers from the East and abroad on the first status and subsequent growth of Milwaukee.

Guessi, Reverend A.M., Chats on Christian Names, Boston, The Stratford Company, 1925, p. 449.

This author gives an interesting account of the life of St. Thecla. It is written in letter form. The description includes the meaning of the word Thecla. It was in this latter use that the book was used.

Guilday, Peter, A History of the Councils of Baltimore (1791-1884), New York, The Macmillan Company, 1932, p. 291.

A history of the seven provincial councils of Baltimore 1829-1849 and the Three Plenary Councils 1852-1866-1884, together with a summary of the legislation made. This book was used in connection with the school legislation passed by the councils.

Mahon, P. J. and Hayes, Reverend J. M., S.J., Editors, Trials and Triumphs of the Catholic Church in America, Chicago, J. S. Hyland & Company, 1907, 2 Volumes, p. 1046.

Though a book of an earlier date, it is complete in its treatment of Catholicity during the Revolution, of the work of sisterhoods, in the work of the illustrious prelates of the different sees throughout the country of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. It was used in connection with the diocese of Milwaukee.

Meyer, Reverend Fulgence, O.F.M., Missionary, Why and How to Become a Nun, Cincinnati, St. Francis Book Shop, 1938, p. 136.

This book was helpful in giving suggestions concerning entrance and life in a convent. The book abounds in scriptural quotations. Some of them were used in the thesis.

Rainer, Very Reverend Joseph, Rector of the Salesianum, A Noble Priest -- Joseph Salzmann, D.D., Founder of the Salesianum, Milwaukee, Olinger & Schwartz, 1905, p. 254.

This biography was translated from the German by Reverend Joseph William Berg, professor of the Salesianum, lately deceased. It was valuable for information on the meaning of Nojoshing, the former name of St. Francis, for data on the foundation years of the sisterhood of St. Francis, and the origin of institutions of St. Francis, Wisconsin.

Shea, John G., History of the Catholic Church in the United States, From the Fifth Provincial Council of Baltimore, 1843, to the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore, 1866, New York, John G. Shea, 1892, p.727.

This author gives a detailed account of almost all the dioceses of the United States. The Second Plenary Council of Baltimore is also discussed. The book was of use to the author for information on the Midwest dioceses, especially those of Wisconsin.

Stearns, J. W., Editor, The Columban History of Education in Wisconsin, Milwaukee, The Evening Wisconsin Company, 1893, Volume 8, p. 720.

A ponderous volume covering every phase of the subject of education in the State. It begins with the early schools and treats of the different types of schools and agencies in the city and county school system. The book was consulted for school attendance.

Sullivan, T. J., The Catholic Church in Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Catholic Historical Publishing Company, 1895-1898, p. 1181.

As the name suggests this volume gives the history of the Catholic Church in Wisconsin from the earliest time to the present day. It was frequently consulted in this connection.

Thwaites, Reuben Gold, Civil War Messages and Proclamations of Wisconsin War Governors, Madison, Wisconsin History Commission, 1912, p. 319.

This book contains the inaugural addresses and messages of the six governors of Wisconsin during the Civil War period of our history. These messages express the governors' attitude toward the war and maintenance of the Union, gives details regarding funds, volunteers, and call for troops. Since Thomas Thren, father of Mother Thecla came to the State just before the Civil War, this book was used.

Thwaites, Reuben Gold, The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, Volume 59, 1673-1677, Cleveland, The Burrows Brothers, 1900, p. 315.

The original French, Latin, and Italian texts with English translations and notes of the travels and explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in Lower Canada, Illinois, Ottawas --1610-1791. These accounts were consulted to ascertain whether Pere Marquette passed through Milwaukee.

Thwaites, Reuben Gold, et al., Editors, Wisconsin in Three Centuries 1634-1905, New York, The Century History Company, 1905, 4 Volumes, p. 1:360; 2:311; 3: 328; 4: 354.

To secure important material on the history of the state of Wisconsin from the time of the arrival of the first white men to the present these volumes were carefully perused.

Watrous, Lieut. Col. Jerome A., Editor, Memoirs of Milwaukee County, Madison, Western Historical Association, 1909, 2 Volumes, p. 1: 633; 2: 1048.

This was a valuable book for local history of Milwaukee county. It covered the periods from the earliest historical times to the present, and included a genealogical and biographical record of representative families of Milwaukee County. It was used both for data on early history and its material on education.

Encyclopedia Article:

"Milwaukee." Encyclopedia Americana, New York, Americana Corporation, 1932, 30 Volumes. Volume XIX with 799pages was used.

The article was used to give an explanation of the meaning of the name Milwaukee and its historical section which gave information of the first white men, traders, settlers, and the date of the incorporation of the village.

Government Statutes, Reports:

Washington, The United States Bureau of Education, The Catholic Parochial Schools in the United States, 1904, 21.

Consulted for statistics on Catholic parochial schools.

Washington, Report of the Commission of Education for the Year 1899-1900, 2, Government Printing Office.

A heavy tome with innumerable reports on educational matters. It includes summaries of statistics of city school systems, higher educational and professional schools, special schools. Statistics on foreign countries are also given. Statistics was the purpose for which it was used.

Manuscripts:

Langenfeld, Reverend Nicholas, Catholic Indian Education in Early Wisconsin 1671-1848, St. Francis, Salzmann Library of St. Francis Seminary. Thesis No. 69, p. 40, 1926.

An excellent Master Thesis. It covers the land and people of Wisconsin, the origin, rise, and decline of its Jesuit Missions, the obstacles in building schools for Indians, and a survey of Green Bay Indian schools. It was helpful in writing the chapter on education.

Mueller, Sister Mary Anastasia, O.S.F., Ph.B., The Socialization of the Mentally Retarded, Milwaukee, Marquette University Library, Thesis, 1935, p. 101

This thesis was helpful in writing about the objectives, courses of study, vocational activities, and Home life of children at St. Coletta School for Exceptional Children, Jefferson, Wisconsin.

Rice, Herbert W., Ph.D., Early History of Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway, Iowa City, The State University of Iowa, Dissertation, 1938, p. 320.

The dissertation of Dr. Rice of the History Department of Marquette University gave information on the time of the buildings of railways in Wisconsin. It was also used to find out when a railway was built to Watertown, Wisconsin, Mother Thecla's place of birth and home of her parents.

Scholten, Henry H., The History of Catholic Elementary Education in Wisconsin 1848-1900, St. Francis, Salzman Library of St. Francis Seminary, Thesis No. 295, 1935, p. 57.

This was a Master thesis. Though not as scholarly as Thesis No. 69, it continues the subject of parochial school system to the present century. It was used while writing the chapter on education.

Periodicals, etc. :

"Convent and Sisterhood of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Francis, Wisconsin." Souvenir of the Twelfth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Catholic Societies, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1913, pages unnumbered.

This article was one of many consulted on the founding and development of the St. Francis Community. It includes the the schools and charitable institutions which the community directs.

"History of St. Mary's Academy," Fioretti, Yearbook 1929, p. 174.

This article is a brief history of the first twenty-five years of the academy. Mother Thecla founded it in 1904.

Hamilton, Reverend Raphael N., S.J., Ph. D., "Wisconsin's Catholic Historical Heritage." The Catholic Herald of Wisconsin, Commemorating 300 years of Catholic History in Wisconsin 1634-1934.

This copy was a special copy for the occasion. This article was used to check on the early missionaries who entered the State after Nicolet's entrance in 1634.

Herald Citizen, The Catholic. "Enthronment Issue" 1940, 70, No. 16.

This issue was used to confirm the fact that the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi were the first congregation of religious women founded in Wisconsin.

Johnson, The Reverend Peter Leo, D.D., "First Catholic Church in Milwaukee: St. Peter's, 1839--," The Salesianum, 1938, 33, No. 3, 123-131.

This article cleared up some disputed dates about the time of the founding of the first Church in Milwaukee, the Church where Bishop Memmi officiated.

Prospectus, The St. Coletta School for Exceptional Children, Jefferson, Wisconsin.

The different catalogues were used to gather information on the courses of study and specialized training given at the school.

Prospectus, St. Mary's Institute, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1904.

This is the St. Mary's Academy of today. The first bulletin was issued in 1904. To ascertain the objectives and courses of study offered then the prospectus was used.

Prospectus, St. Mary's Academy, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1940.

This is the last bulletin issued by the school. It includes affiliations, objectives, courses of study, requirements, expenses. A section is devoted to views of the school, its campus, and activities. It was used to compare the years 1904 with 1940.

Regenfuss, Reverend George, M.A., "Our Sisters," Diamond Jubilee of Saint Francis Seminary May 25 to 27, 1931. Jubilee Year-book, Milwaukee, Hustling Printing Company, 1931, p. 168.

This article gives a brief history of the St. Francis Community. It stresses the pioneer work done by the sisters for St. Francis Seminary. It was used to check with other material for more accurate information on the early pioneer days of the community.