



The Pennsylvanian "Bethlehem" of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus - TOWANDA

"My Own Dear Country"

By Mother Mary Campion, S.H.C.J.

Part I. Early Foundations in America

The thought of an American foundation was ever dear to the heart of Mother Connelly who had written to her family: "...our Rules were at first drawn up for the United States, as I had no intention, nor have I now for deserting my own dear country". *Sept. 12, 1846*. In correspondence with Dr. Grant about the proposed foundation she writes: "...we were invited by two of our American Bishops four or five years ago, when my brother offered us 300 acres of land but we were not then strong enough to undertake more than we had in hand." *April 4, 1861*. The possibility of this foundation and its achievement came fittingly through the

generosity of the grand-daughter of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, eminent Catholic and distinguished signatory of the Declaration of Independence.

Louisa
Catherine,
Duchess
of Leeds





The Pioneers.

Above:

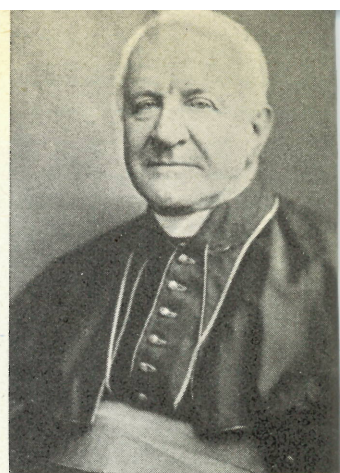
**Rev. Mother,
Mary Xavier
Noble, devoted
and delicate.**

***Below: Mother
Agatha Deacy, the
humorist of the
party, ready for
anything; Mother
Lucy Ignatia
Newsham, lovable
and ingenuous;
Sister Aloysia
Walker, Mother
Connelly's first
and much-loved
religious daughter***

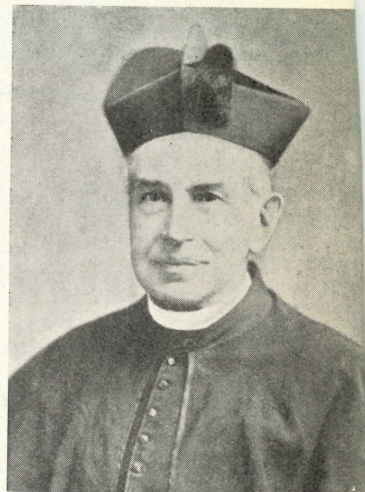
The grand-daughter, Louisa Catherine, Duchess of Leeds, visiting St. Leonards in Sussex, met Miss Kate Duval, Mother Connelly's niece who had come from the States to see her aunt. The topic of a foundation of the Society in America came up, and the suggestion was enthusiastically received by the Duchess who offered to the Society as a gift, some property in Towanda, Bradford County, Pennsylvania.

Now all seemed in readiness for the venture — a gift of house and land, the reluctant permission of Dr. Grant, Mother Connelly's niece as escort for the Sisters to the strange, new land of Northern Pennsylvania. But it was not to be — yet. Civil War broke out in the United States and prudence dictated a delay until a more settled time.

Finally however, on August 2, 1862, Mother Connelly went on board the *Scotia* with five Holy Child nuns and one postulant. At Queens-town on the following day they met Bishop Wood of Philadelphia who was returning to his Diocese. The *Scotia* made a speedy journey and reached New York on August 12, 1862. Upon arrival the travellers — Mother M. Xavier Noble, Superior, Mother Lucy Ignatia Newsham, Assistant, three professed Sisters and a postulant — proceeded immediately by train to Philadelphia where Bishop Wood introduced them to



**James Frederic Wood,
Bishop of Philadel-
phia in 1860, Arch-
bishop in 1875.**



**Fr. C.I.C. Carter,
friend and benefactor**



American hospitality. On August 18, the Reverend C. I. H. Carter, Vicar General of the diocese of Philadelphia, set out with Mother Mary Xavier and Mother Lucy Ignatia to inspect the property given to the Society.

It is a study in contrast to read the real-estate agent's report of the Duchess' property in Towanda and that of the nuns who wrote an heroically restrained version of the ruin they found. The property was a wilderness, the "mansion with its garden of rose bushes" was an unsafe ramshackle building. The Catholics in Towanda were too few and scattered to support a school for any length of time. On opening day, when the parochial school registered only a total of eighty boys and girls, and not a child materialized for the Convent school, the nuns made the round of the neighbouring towns seeking pupils.

Between September's falling leaves and April's releasing rains, there occurred such an intensely cold winter and such heavy snowstorms that the wine froze in the chalice at Mass, and at night the only extra blanket the Sisters knew was a blanket of snow. Lady Poverty was a familiar companion. The nuns were well-acquainted with privation and once had to sell their shoes for food.

At Father Carter's strong protest to Mother Connelly about such conditions, which were unknown to her, Towanda was closed but its great purpose was achieved. This Bethlehem of the Society in the United States was founded on poverty, hunger, cold and desolate circumstances but it

The first Convent H.C.J. in Philadelphia, at Spring Garden Street.

THE PYLON

reflected — in loving memory of that other Bethlehem — a joy of spirit, a gallantry of heart, and a loving devotion to the will of God that are the hallmark of the Society. Long ago Coheleth wrote:

"There is an appointed time for everything: a time to plant and a time to uproot the plant". (iii : 1) In Towanda the roots of the Society went deep into America and this apparent failure only accentuated the spiritual law of loss and gain: the perpetual cycle of beginning again, of putting down roots for renewal. The roots of Towanda lie at the heart of the apostolate in America, and three religious vocations from this foundation of two years attest to the marvels of grace refracted from the radiant courage and obedience of the nuns of Towanda.

The Convent at Spring Garden Street in Philadelphia, towards



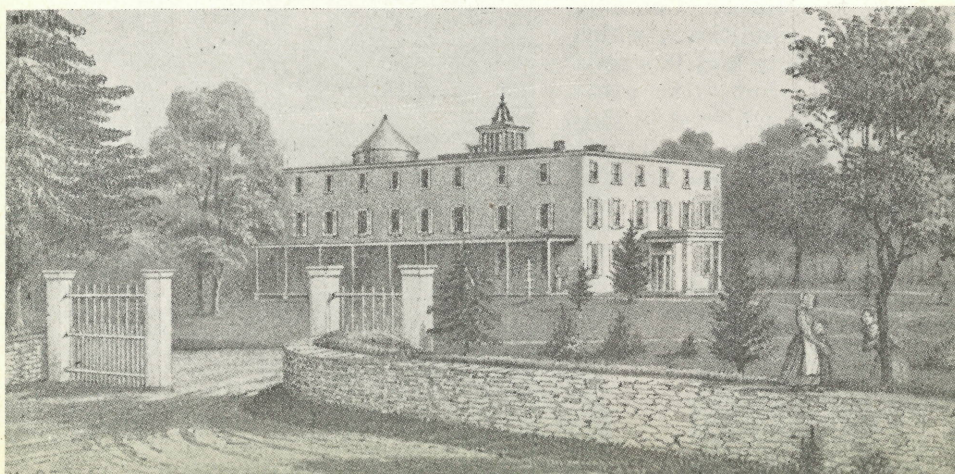


Mother Mary Andrew and some helpers prepare for the new term at the Assumption School, Spring Garden Street, Philadelphia, as it is today.

which the Sisters from Towanda now made their long journey, was the second foundation of the Society in the United States. Father Carter, observing the excellent educational methods at Towanda, had written Mother Connelly asking for Sisters to teach in his school in the Assumption parish. In 1863, Mother Mary Walburga White and Mother Antonia Gray, arrived with a second contingent of pioneers from Eng-

land, so that it was possible to organize three schools in one building: the Assumption parochial school, an academy, and a large night school for working girls. A prospectus dated August 19, 1863, states that "the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus have opened a school for young ladies, offering all the usual branches of a sound English education at fees ranging from \$ 15 per quarter." Both the night school

Sharon Hill, the second Holy Child Convent in the Philadelphia area, as it must have appeared when Mother Connelly saw it in 1867.



and the academy have long since disappeared with the industrialization of this area of Philadelphia, which has also affected the registration of the parochial school but not the sense of privilege of those Sisters who teach there.

In the autumn of 1867, Mother Connelly came to visit her two American Convents. What memories must have flooded her mind on the two hour journey from Philadelphia to Sharon Hill, six miles away! She had left her native Philadelphia the radiant 22-year-old bride of a Protestant minister, Pierce Connelly; now 58, she could look back over a span of 36 years, during which God had stripped her of every natural love and joy, even those He had given her. None knew better than she that the Kingdom of God, like the Promised Land of old, lies at the far side of a terrible desert. Whatever the memories, they found no utterance; nor did she revisit friends and places of long ago. She who so loved her family spent only two days with her sister, Mother Mary Peacock, R.S.C.J. some of the rest were too far away for any visit. Behind the

**Mother Mary
Walburga White,
S.H.C.J., first
Provincial
in America.**



carapace of silence and religious reserve she exemplified the high ideal of detachment found in her Rule to "live only to Christ Our Lord, holding Him in place of... all things."

The enthusiastic welcome for her at Sharon, with all bells pealing and all gathered in front of the future provincialate to greet her, must have touched her deeply. What a joy to see again those who had come from England — the old friends of other lands and other days — and to meet the new members whose hands would hold the American future of her dear Society. She was interested to see this con-



**Sharon
School
today,
during the
traditional
Holy Child
Procession
which takes
place on the
25th of every
month for
Vocations.
It was in this
Chapel that
generations
of Holy
Child
Sisters were
professed,
until the
Novitiate
was
transferred
to Rosemont.**

Sarony



Sharon School in springtime



At Fr. Carter's grave.

vent, the latest gift of Father Carter to the Society. Formerly a Quaker Academy, the nuns had remodeled it, and Father Carter defrayed the expense for the erection of a small Gothic chapel. The years ahead would see a new school building joined to the old, and a new enlarged chapel modeled on that of St. Leonards-on-Sea, Sussex. During the many decades when the novitiate was at Sharon, the novices paused after outdoor recreation for a prayer and a hymn at the tiny Cemetery holding the graves of

Father Carter and Mother M. Walburga, the first American Provincial.

The Sharon High School today is large and flourishing; younger children are taught in a separate school in the neighboring suburb of Drexel Hill, to which the Sisters went each day, but which now (1961) has its own convent. The Community also staffs the nearby Holy Spirit parochial school. Sharon has also the privilege of caring for the sick members of the Society whose suffering like incense rises in loving apostolic prayer.

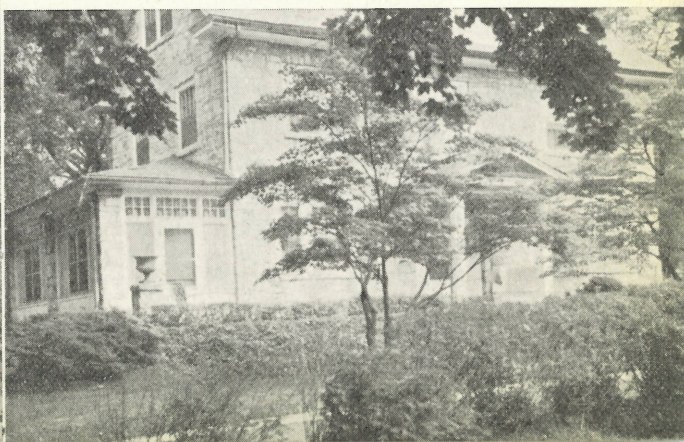
Faust Photo

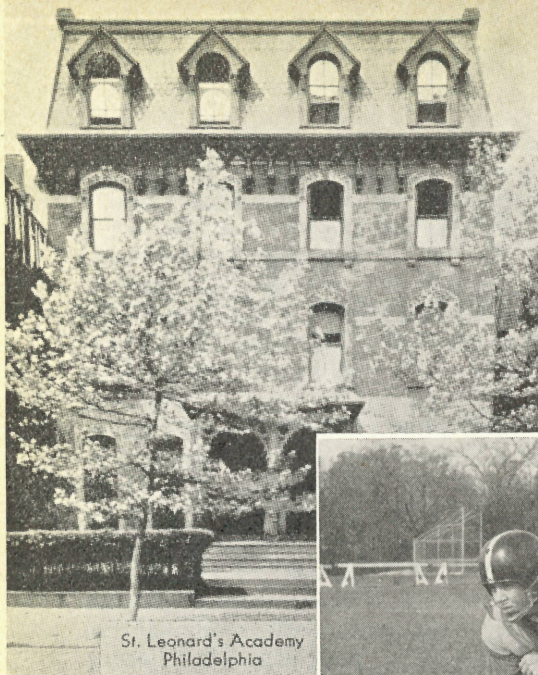


Left: These preparations with Mother Mary Alma for the "Mothers' Club" Card Party, Drexel Hill, might stand as a symbol of all the help, in big things and small, which is given by the Parents of Sisters and children — so generously, so constantly.

Our good wishes go to the new Holy Child Convent at Drexel Hill, opened September, 1961.

Below, a snapshot of one of the houses.





St. Leonard's Academy
Philadelphia

Students daily come long distances for the privilege of spending their school years at St. Leonard's, Chestnut Street, Philadelphia.

During the short five-week visit, Mother Connelly opened a new Convent on the outskirts of Philadelphia and called it St. Leonard's. Marked by this unique privilege, St. Leonard's has cherished its historical foundation and it is no doubt this original blessing that sends to the Society a steady stream of vocations. For a short time after its establishment, St. Leonard's served as the provincial house and an Old House Journal records the

admission of postulants. The city of Philadelphia has long since surrounded St. Leonard's and provided an apostolate for its many works: an academy for girls, a boys' school, the school of its parish, St. James, and the Cornelia Connelly Association, a society which through

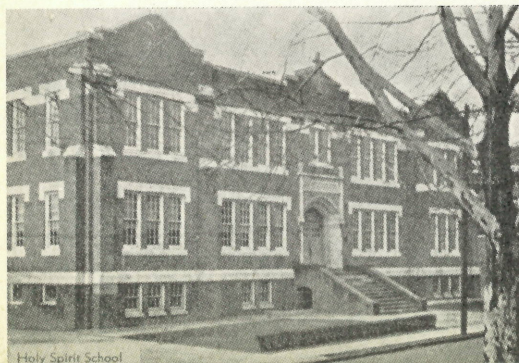
St. Leonard's boys take football seriously.



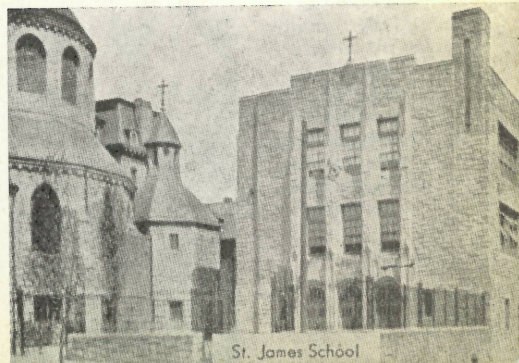
its generous and indefatigable members provides for every priestly need of missions throughout the world.

The penetrating vitality of the roots put down in Towanda showed rich promise for the future of the Society in Philadelphia in the person of Mother St. Michael Dunn who as a little girl of nine had attended the Towanda School. In 1889, Mother St. Michael was appointed the Superior of the newly-

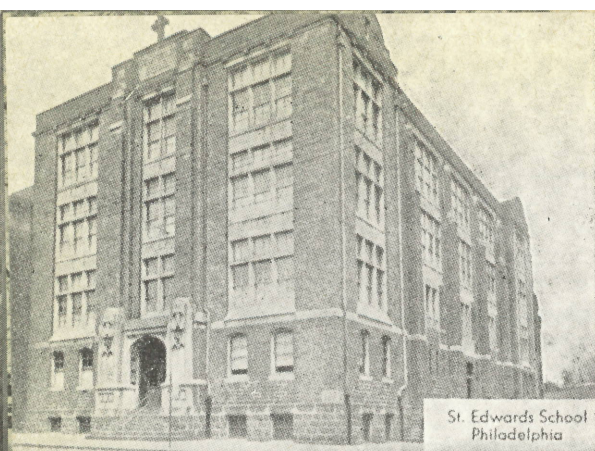
Two of the many parochial schools, where — like Fr. Carter in the early days — the Pastors are lavish in their care and generosity.



Holy Spirit School



St. James School



St. Edwards School
Philadelphia

opened St. Edward's Parochial School on York Street. As Supervisor of Schools her brilliant intellect, her gift for teaching, her patient

M. M. Nicholas at Hallahan. A class responsive to French Literature.



Carl Wolf
studio

Seven religious congregations staff West Catholic Diocesan High School of about 4000 girls. Nine of the postulants now at New Sharon are from this school.

and persevering zeal were to leave a strong imprint not only on St. Edward's but on the other newly established schools. Bishop McDevitt, observing her powers of organization in the educational field, asked her to co-operate in the planning of a diocesan school system on the secondary level. The first step in the project was the establishment of High School Center, and Mother St. Michael was instrumental in setting up the Holy Child Center at St. Edward's in 1900. Today five great Diocesan High Schools attest to the genius and zeal of these educators; and the Holy Child Sisters still teach several subjects, e. g. Religion, Art, History or Languages, in three of these High Schools of Philadelphia. Because of the exigencies of other foundations it was necessary to yield the Visitation School and St. Veronica's to others, and to close St. Agatha's and St. Michael's, but St. Edward's flourishes still, and its vigorous growth witnesses to the early pioneers of the Society. To that germinal phase of the Society in America, could well apply these words of the Lord to His loved Israel: "I remember your youthful affection, your bridal love: you followed Me into the desert, into a land *unsown*." (Jer. 2 : 2)



ONE HUNDRED YEARS LATER

Stepping from the SCOTIA, August 12, 1862, the five Sisters looked wonderingly at the panorama of New York harbor — the bustling port, the shouting stevedores, officious inquirers. This was their first glimpse of the Holy Child's new vineyard — America. They had left England ten days ago. Mother Cornelia had come to the boat and, with mixed feelings, had watched her pioneer Sisters set off to her own native land, whilst she remained in England. For it was there that the Church had wished her to begin her work for the young, always with the understanding that it should later reach America. And now, after sixteen years of spiritual and educational evolution, the hour had come.

* * * * *

In the intervening hundred years, many Sisters, dedicated and selfless, have "finished the course" along the path laid out for them by Cornelia Connelly: a path of holiness and charity; a path of prayer and joy; a path of sacrifice and fulfillment in God, through the spirit of the Holy Child Jesus.

The first little band looked to their mother — Cornelia Connelly — for their example of holiness and so do the 500 Sisters laboring in the United States today. As they study her life, as they learn her way of following Christ, they want to share her, to share her — God willing — with the Universal Church through her beatification and canonization.

For this end, the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus in America are taking the opportunity of the Centenary Year to introduce Cornelia Connelly to those who do not yet know her or who would like to be better acquainted. With this in view the CORNELIA CONNELLY GUILD has been established.

WHAT IS THE CORNELIA CONNELLY GUILD? An association of those who wish to meet Cornelia Connelly and make her better known and loved *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*.

WHAT DO MEMBERS OF THE GUILD DO? I. Offer one hour of their day in union with the Mass for the intentions of the Guild Members in a CORPORATE UNION OF PRAYER II. Attend, where possible, the lectures, discussions, dramatic performances, etc., which will be held at the Guild Centers.

WHAT SPIRITUAL BENEFITS ARE RECEIVED? Your intentions, both spiritual and temporal, are prayed for twenty-four hours a day, by the CORNELIA CONNELLY GUILD members and all their associates; daily prayer of the Novices; annual novena of Masses at the Provincial Houses, S.H.C.J.

HOW MAY I BECOME A MEMBER? Fill in the detached blank and send to:
THE CORNELIA CONNELLY GUILD (Letters from Europe addressed to:
1341 Montgomery Avenue **THE CORNELIA CONNELLY GUILD**,
Rosemont, Pa., U.S.A. 10 Via Boncompagni, Rome, Italy, will be
forwarded to Rosemont.)

I wish to become a member of the CORNELIA CONNELLY GUILD
(please print clearly and cancel what does not apply).

Name Rev/Mr./Mrs./Miss/

Address City State

Please pray for my special intentions through the intercession of
..... (Cornelia Connelly).

Subscription enclosed to cover expenses: printing, mailing, etc. — \$2.00 (10/- or 1000 Italian Lire) per year, if possible; or any offering you can afford.