

# Religious Women

---

## Care of the Sick , Hospitals and Nursing Education in 19th Century America

Davida Michaels

11/5/2017

### Table of Contents

Religious Women – Role in Nursing and Nursing education.....	1
Catholic Nursing Education.....	1
Sisters of Mercy .....	1
Sisters of Mercy Land on Chicago Shores.....	2
St. Elizabeth Ann Seton .....	4
Protestant Deaconess Movement .....	5

## Religious Women – Role in Nursing and Nursing education

Before Florence Nightingale brought reforms to nursing , there were religious women — Catholic Nursing Sisters (Nuns) and Protestant Deaconesses — whose vows included the care of the sick . They were often called to nurse victims of typhoid, cholera and other epidemics. and through their religious communities were responsible for starting hospitals throughout the young country.

### Catholic Nursing Education

Historically, ‘modern’ nursing and nursing education has been credited to have begun with Florence Nightingale. In *Say Little, Do Much*, Sioban Nelson casts light on the work of women's religious communities. According to Nelson, “the popular view that nursing invented itself in the second half of the nineteenth century is historically inaccurate and dismissive of the major advances in the care of the sick as a serious and skilled activity, an activity that originated in seventeenth-century France with Vincent de Paul's Daughters of Charity”.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the earliest hospitals in America were started by religious congregations both Catholic and Protestant. According to Curry, “historically Catholic nursing education was found in hospitals incorporating courses of study and apprenticeships for those wishing to become a nurse.”<sup>2</sup>

### Sisters of Mercy

. The Sisters of Mercy, a religious congregation founded in Ireland in 1831 by Catherine McAuley, brought its stated mission of caring and compassion to the growing industrial city of Pittsburgh in 1843. Mother Frances Warde led six other sisters to the United States, where they founded the first congregation of the Sisters of Mercy in Pittsburgh.<sup>3</sup> The pioneering “Seven Sisters” of Mercy opened the first permanent hospital in Pittsburgh, and the world’s first Mercy Hospital, on January 1, 1847. Founded by Bishop Michael O'Connor, it began life in a temporary frame building on Penn Avenue known as Concert Hall. The hospital they established

---

<sup>1</sup> Sioban Nelson, *Say Little, Do Much*, Nursing, Nuns, and Hospitals in the Nineteenth Century

<sup>2</sup> Curry, Bernadette, 2010, *Nursing Education and the Catholic Tradition*. In HEALTH PROGRESS, www.chausa.org, May-June 2010. P. 25.

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UPMC\\_Mercy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UPMC_Mercy)

was open to all regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, or religion. Mercy established the region's first teaching hospital with resident physicians in training in 1848.<sup>4</sup>



. In the mid-1800s, Pittsburgh suffered from several outbreaks of diseases like cholera, and hospitals like Mercy did wonders to improve the primitive public health provisions in the city. Mercy's opening led to the formation of several denominational hospitals throughout the region

### Sisters of Mercy Land on Chicago Shores

*“Mud.* That was Mother Agatha O’Brien’s first impression of Chicago: a wooden village sinking in mud. *Need.* That was the reality that had drawn her to Chicago. Need, for a Sister of Mercy meant and still means, *opportunity.* Agatha and her companions had come to scatter seeds of Mercy in Chicago soil.<sup>5</sup>

They began by opening the first Catholic schools, starting the first orphanage, and founding the city’s oldest hospital.”

In 1846, the needs of Irish immigrants and the insistent invitation of Rev. William Quarter, the city’s first Catholic bishop, drew the Sisters of Mercy to Chicago.<sup>6</sup> At the request of Bishop Quarter from the new frontier diocese of Chicago, Mother Mary Frances Xavier Warde chose

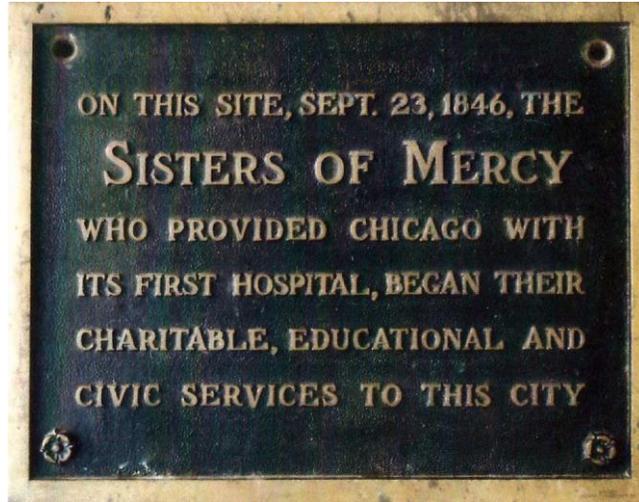
---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.brooklineconnection.com/history/Facts/Mercy.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sistersofmercy.org/west-midwest/history/chicago/>

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

five Sisters from the growing community in Pittsburgh and set out for Chicago — at the time a muddy village on the shores of Lake Michigan ravaged by recurrent outbreaks of typhoid, smallpox, and cholera.



The following is from the website *History of Hospitals in Cook County* at <http://www.genealogytrails.com/ill/cook/hospitals.html>



“Newly opened and seeking students, Rush College wanted a hospital to fill a need for clinical education. Rush provided the doctors, the county supplied the medicine, and the city paid for the building rental. However, it soon became evident that the accommodations were inadequate for the large number and variety of patients, and the hospital went out of business. Rush physicians soon incorporated another general hospital, called

the **Illinois General Hospital of the Lakes**, which opened in 1850 with 12 beds in the old Lake House Hotel at Rush and North Water Streets. The charge was three dollars per week per patient.



The doctors asked the Sisters of Mercy, a Roman Catholic order, to provide nursing care, and in the spring of 1851 transferred

control to the Sisters. With a new charter, the hospital was renamed **Mercy Hospital**. Cook County supervisors paid Mercy to care for county patients. The oldest continuously running hospital in Chicago, it moved in 1853 to a new building at Wabash and Van Buren and in 1863 was relocated to its present campus at 26th and Calumet”.<sup>7</sup>

## St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

In the 19th century, inspired by the work of these original Daughters, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton founded a community of Sisters in the United States that later joined with the Daughters of Charity in France. This became the first community of Daughters in the United States.<sup>8</sup> 1809 American Elizabeth Ann Seton, founded the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's, adapting the rule of the French Daughters of Charity for her Emmitsburg, Maryland community<sup>9</sup>

On 3 June 1848,<sup>1</sup> eight Sisters of Charity, Sisters Ursula Mattingly, Ann de Sales Farren, Hieronimo O'Brien, Anacaria Hoey, Clare McDurby, Mary Aloysia Lilly, Mary Eliza Dougherty, and Agatha O'Keefe, arrived in Buffalo. Bishop Timon had purchased an unused brick schoolhouse and adjoining cottage at Pearl Place, which he gave to the



Sisters to use. They outfitted it with 100 beds and living quarters for themselves. On 1 October 1848, Sisters of Charity Hospital officially opened as Buffalo's first large healthcare facility, under the leadership of Sister Ursula Matting, D.C.”



<sup>7</sup>Cook County Hospitals <http://www.genealogytrails.com/ill/cook/hospitals.html>

<sup>8</sup> <http://daughters-of-charity.com/history/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.seton.net/about-seton/setons-history-and-heritage/daughters-of-charity-of-st-vincent-de-paul/> and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daughters\\_of\\_Charity\\_of\\_Saint\\_Vincent\\_de\\_Paul](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daughters_of_Charity_of_Saint_Vincent_de_Paul)

## Protestant Deaconess Movement

Deaconess means messenger, servant, or helper. Rasche describes deaconesses as “dedicated women who dared to be different in order to give full-time Christian service to the ministry of mercy.”<sup>10</sup>

Theodore Fliedner, a Lutheran Pastor of Kaiserswerth, Germany, was responsible for the revival of deaconess work. While traveling across Europe in the 1830s and was appalled by the suffering of the sick, the poor, the aged, and the outcasts of society that he saw in many places. He returned to Kaiserswerth and with the help of his wife, Frederike, opened the first Deaconess Home and Hospital in Europe in 1836.<sup>11</sup> The most revolutionary contribution of the Fliedners in their Kaiserswerth model for deaconess work was in the area of training. They required that the training be threefold: spiritual, intellectual, and technical. This concept changed the entire image of nurses, who were not held in high regard in the early nineteenth century.

Since the training was systematic and thorough, “doctors could write orders and know that consistent, careful, loving care would be given in their absence by deaconess nurses.”<sup>12</sup> Florence Nightingale studied with the Fliedners on two occasions and stayed in Kaiserswerth for three months in 1851,<sup>13</sup> Florence Nightingale commented that the Deaconess Sisters punctually obeyed the directions of the medical man, and that “they are too well trained not to do so, with far more correctness than is found in other hospitals.”<sup>14</sup>

The Kaiserswerth model required that the nursing students and Sister nurses lived together in the Motherhouse. Group living in a motherhouse, a primary concept for the Fliedners as they organized deaconess work, proved to be a significant element of their success. Single young women could, with parental approval, leave the family circle and find security living and

---

<sup>10</sup> Ruth Rasche, *The Deaconess Movement in 19th-century America: pioneer professional women*,

<sup>10</sup>[http://www.ucc.org/about-us\\_hidden-histories\\_the-deaconess-movement-in](http://www.ucc.org/about-us_hidden-histories_the-deaconess-movement-in)

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>14</sup> Ruth Rasche, *The Deaconess Movement in 19th-century America: pioneer professional women*,

<sup>14</sup>[http://www.ucc.org/about-us\\_hidden-histories\\_the-deaconess-movement-in](http://www.ucc.org/about-us_hidden-histories_the-deaconess-movement-in)

working in the company of like-minded women who were dedicated to a career in the ministry of mercy.<sup>15</sup>

## The deaconess movement comes to America

*Mrs Elizabeth Wupperts*

with three deaconesses who accompanied her and Pastor Fliedner to Pittsburgh in 1849



According to Rasche, “the Deaconess work in the United Church of Christ began within the Evangelical Synod, one of the four roots of the UCC heritage. On March 18, 1889 the Evangelical Deaconess Society of St. Louis, Missouri, was organized, and soon thereafter the first Evangelical Deaconess Home and Hospital was opened in St. Louis Mo.”<sup>16</sup>



On August 18, 1889, Katherine Haack, a minister's widow who was already a trained nurse, became the first deaconess of the Evangelical Synod when she was consecrated at a worship service held at St. Peter's Church. She immediately recruited her stepdaughter, Lydia Daries, also a trained nurse, to become the second deaconess..<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/hidden-histories>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Rasche, Op. Cit.

Ibid



1893

A new Sisters' home opens  
at 4117 West Belle Place in St. Louis.

Postcard view – Chicago, Il – Norwegian  
Lutheran Deaconess Home and Hospital  
Surgical Ward - 1909<sup>18</sup>




---

<sup>18</sup> “In order to alleviate some of this suffering, deaconess work was established in a variety of institutions in many cities across the land by members of the Evangelical Synod” The website [http://www.ucc.org/about-us\\_hidden-histories](http://www.ucc.org/about-us_hidden-histories) lists many of the early hospitals :

1889—Evangelical Deaconess Home and Hospital, St. Louis, Missouri; 1889—Tabitha Institute, Lincoln, Nebraska; 1892—Protestant Deaconess Home and Hospital, Evansville, Indiana; 1902—Evangelical Deaconess Home and Hospital, Lincoln, Illinois; 1905—Evangelical Emmaus Homes, Marthasville and St. Charles, Missouri; 1908—Evangelical St. Lucas Deaconess Home and Hospital, Faribault, Minnesota; 1910—Evangelical Deaconess Home and Hospital, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; 1910—Evangelical Hospital, Chicago, Illinois; 1911—Evangelical Deaconess Home, Louisville, Kentucky; 1912—Evangelical Deaconess Association, Baltimore, Maryland; 1913—Evangelical Deaconess Hospital, Marshalltown, Iowa; 1915—Evangelical Deaconess Home and Hospital, East St. Louis, Illinois; 1917—Evangelical Deaconess Hospital, Detroit, Michigan; 1919—Evangelical Deaconess Hospital, Cleveland, Ohio [http://www.ucc.org/about-us\\_hidden-histories](http://www.ucc.org/about-us_hidden-histories)