

St. Frances Academy Owensboro, KY (1849-1950)

By Jerry Long
c.2025



St. Frances Academy, 505 Allen St. (school built in 1889) & 515 Allen St. (annex - auditorium built in 1920), Owensboro, KY; buildings were razed in 1967



**The Roman Catholic Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky,
Diocese of Owensboro, Turner Publishing Company, Paducah, KY, 1995:**

Chronology of Events (1785-1937):

- 1849 – St. Frances Academy, Owensboro, started in former hotel by five Sisters of Charity of Nazareth; named to honor Mother General Frances Gardiner. (p.21)
- 1890 – New St. Frances Academy, Owensboro, June 17. (p.28)
- 1950 – St. Frances Academy [school] opened in 1849 and closed in 1950. (p.97)



**The Guardian, A Catholic Weekly Journal
Louisville, KY, Saturday, 8 May 1858, p.2:**

ST. FRANCES ACADEMY, OWENSBORO — Sister Constantia Robinson, Sister Servant.— This is a boarding and day-school, and is attended by an average of seventy-five pupils. Number of Sisters, 11.



Owensboro Monitor, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday 22 April 1874, p.4:

EDUCATIONAL.
St. Frances' Academy,
Owensboro, Daviess County, Ky.

Conducted by the Sisters of Charity from Nazareth.

THE BRANCHES TAUGHT ARE AS FOLLOWS:

Reading, Writing. English Grammar, Geography, Arithmetic, History, Rhetoric, the Elements of Botany, Moral, Mental and Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Algebra, French and German: Wax Work, Plain Sewing, Marking, and Needle Work in all its varieties: Drawing and Painting: Vocal Music: also Music on the Piano and Guitar.

TERMS OF BOARDING:

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1. Board and Washing, during the season of twenty weeks | \$66.00 |
| 2. Use of Bed and Bedding | 4.00 |

TERMS OF TUITION :

1. Spelling and reading	\$8.00
2. English Grammar, Geography, Writing and Arithmetic	12.00
3. History, Botany, Algebra, Chemistry, &c.	16.00
4. Drawing and Painting.	10.00
5. Painting in Italian, Celestial, Grecian, Mezzotinto and Polish, each.	10.00
6. Wax Work and Materials	10.00
7. Hair Work	5.00
8. Lessons on the Piano or Guitar, and use of Instrument, each	18.00
9. Lessons in the French Language.	10.00
10. Lessons in Vocal Music	6.00

Payments made for each session in advance. No deduction for absence except in cases of protracted illness.

There will be a vacation from the last of June to the first Monday in September, each year.

The first session will commence on the FIRST MONDAY OF SEPTEMBER, and terminate on the 31st of January.

The second session will commence on the FIRST OF FEBRUARY, and terminate on the last of June.

Winter Uniform for Sundays – one dress of Maroon colored Merino, a plain Mantilla or Cloak of black cloth, green colored Hood, lined with Crimson.

Summer Uniform for Sundays – one dress of buff-colored Lawn, a belt of Mazarine blue, also a hat trimmed with Mazarine blue.

In order to prevent improper correspondence, the letters written or received by the pupils will be subject to inspection: however, their correspondence with parents or guardians will be entirely unrestricted.

All communications respecting the Academy, addressed to SISTER THEODORA, will receive prompt attention.



Messenger and Examiner, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 13 August 1879, p.3:

The Sisters of St. Frances' Academy will open school for boys at the school house on Daviess street, near Fifth, known as Hart's school house. Two more Sisters from Nazareth will be added to the number of teachers at the Academy. The school will be under the supervision of Father Crane.



**History of Daviess County,, Kentucky
(Chicago, IL: Inter-State Publishing Co., 1883) pp368-369:**

St. Francis [sic] Academy and St. Stephens' Parochial School. — The day-school for Catholic children was first taught in the old Daviess County Seminary building; but now it is kept in a large house built for the purpose, on Third street. The front portion is a two-story frame, and

the rear a two-story brick. There are now eight teachers employed – Sisters of Charity of Nazareth; Eulalia, Sister Superior.



Messenger and Examiner, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 31 May 1888, p.3:

A New St. Frances Academy.

The St. Frances Academy sisters bought of the Barrett estate, through Mr. John W. Matthews, the lot on the southeast corner of Allen and Fifth streets, fronting 200 feet on Allen, for \$3,400. It is their purpose to erect a very handsome convent school on the property. They have long desired to remove from their present location at Third and Allen streets in order to enlarge their school. Capt. F. L. Hall is negotiating for 45 feet of the east end of the old property on Third street.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 4 October 1888, p.4:

The excavation for the new St. Francis academy at the corner of Allen and Fifth streets has been commenced.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 16 April 1889, p.1:

Building Permits.

St. Francis Academy, school building, corner Fifth and Allen, at a cost of \$15,000.



**A Glimpse of the Progress of Owensboro
(Owensboro, KY: Inquirer Publishing Co., 1892) pp.26-28:**

SAINT FRANCES ACADEMY

The Saint Frances Academy, of Owensboro, Daviess county, Ky.. is situated on the Southeast corner of Fifth and Allen streets. Designed by D. X. Murphy, Esq., of Louisville, Ky.. it was erected In 1889, according to the plans and specifications of that distinguished architect.

The edifice is lofty, spacious. and imposing to the view, while the interior is furnished with that tasteful elegance so characteristic of the good, pious, accomplished and zealous daughters of St. Vincent de Paul, the Sisters of Charity.

Centrally located, in the beautiful city of Owensboro, it is an ornament to the city, and holds a high rank among the public buildings which reflect so much credit on the intelligence and liberality of the people of the great State of Kentucky.

This institution—the offspring of the Catholic church, and consecrated to the highest and noblest of human aims, learning and piety—is conducted by the Sisters of Charity, whose mother-house is at Nazareth, near Bardstown, Ky.

The reputation of these accomplished and indefatigable teachers, the cherished daughters of the most honorable and respectable families in the land, is not confined even to the broad extent of our National domain. For who has not heard of the heroism and devotion which they have displayed in those "times which tried men's souls," and which have won for them, for the very name of "Sister of Charity," an everlasting remembrance in the hearts of those who honor pure, disinterested, self-sacrificing devotion. How many a poor soldier nursed back by them with more than sisterly care or maternal solicitude from the very verge of a hero's grave, remembers them with gratitude? How many of our bright and accomplished Southern ladies, whose youthful minds and hearts they trained to be the charm of the domestic circle and the ornaments of the refined and elevated society in which they move, recall with affection the tenderness and care of which they were the constant recipients during their school days with the Sisters of Charity?



Their sterling worth as teachers is well known and appreciated from Maine to Florida, and from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and their flourishing schools and academies are to be seen in almost every State of the Union.

The course of instruction embraces the various branches required by the advanced state of our civilization to train the mind and advance the heart to the love and practice of what is good, pure and useful.

Particular attention is paid to physical exercises, so necessary to the brightness of intellect and the elevation of moral sentiment.

Reading, writing, orthography, history, mathematics, in its various departments of arithmetic, algebra, geometry and mensuration, together with the art of composition and the elements of literature are followed by the study of rhetoric, philosophy, natural and moral botany, physiology and chemistry, the use of globes and astronomy. French and Latin, music—both vocal and instrumental—embroidery in all its varieties, drawing, painting, and polite literature.

The studies are conducted in three departments, the Minim. Junior and Senior, to which pupils are admitted without distinction as to religion, either as boarders or day scholars. Small boys are received as clay scholars only. There are two sessions, beginning on the first Monday in September and February. The terms are moderate, and the discipline mild but firm, and in all cases

adapted to the age, character and disposition of the pupil. Special attention is given to young ladies whose education has been neglected or interrupted, or who may wish to qualify themselves for teachers.

The success which has always attended the efforts of the Sisters of Charity as educators, inspires them with the hope that the Academy of Saint Frances will be generously patronized by all parents and guardians who desire to procure for their daughters and wards the benefits of a thorough, polished and practical education, which will fit them for the duties and responsibilities as well as for the honors of every station in life.

Sister Guedonia is the Superioress of the Academy, and all communications addressed to her respecting course of studies, terms, etc., will receive prompt and courteous attention. Prospectus containing all necessary details will be furnished on application.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 13 March 1914, p.4:

The old wooden veranda erected at the time St. Frances academy was built, many years ago, and fronting on Allen street, has been torn down, and a new veranda will be put in its place. Concrete steps will also replace the iron ones which have been used for many years. A veranda will also be built to the entrance leading from Fifth street. Other improvements about the building that are in contemplation will be announced later.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 17 July 1917, p.2:

ST. FRANCES ACADEMY
WILL SOON BE MADE FREE DAY SCHOOL
For Children of Two Catholic Congregations In City of Owensboro

St. Frances academy will soon be made a free day school for the children of the two Catholic congregations in the city, St. Paul's and St. Stephen's. This was announced at services Sunday morning by the pastors of the two churches. Ten Sisters of Charity will be added to the teaching staff when the arrangements shall have been made, which will accommodate several hundred children.

St. Frances academy is one of the oldest educational institutions of the city and has been accepting boarding students and used as a parochial school for St. Paul's congregation exclusively. St. Stephen's until a short time ago had its own parochial school and St. Joseph's has its St. Hubertus academy, which also is used as a parochial school.

Members of the two congregations will support the new institution so as to make it a free one. Only nominal charges have been heretofore, sufficient to maintain the teaching staff.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 28 November 1920, p.1B:

**THREE HANDSOME
SCHOOLS BUILT IN
COUNTY THIS YEAR**

**St. Frances Academy Annex;
St. Martin Parochial School
and West Louisville High
School.**

With the year 1920 drawing to a close, during which on account of high costs very little building has been done in Owensboro and Daviess county, it is interesting to note some facts in connection with the three handsome school buildings which have been erected in the county this year. These are the annex to St. Frances Academy, the new high school at West Louisville and the new parochial school at St. Martin's church, Rome.

The St. Frances academy annex was the largest and most expensive of these three buildings. It is a handsome brick building finished with stone. It is three stories high. Underneath the building, which is about 44 by 80 feet is a basement which provides rest and recreation rooms and houses the heating plant. The first two floors will be used for an auditorium, which has a seating capacity of 900 persons, and at one end of which is a large stage. The third floor of the building is divided into four class rooms, which house the high school department of the school. The seating capacity for pupils on one this floor is 160. If all three floors were to be used for class rooms they would seat 480 pupils.

The building, part of which is occupied, and all of which will, be finished before the end of the year, will cost between \$40,000 and \$45,000. The original estimate of the cost of such a building was around \$30,000. The building could have been built before the war at from \$20,000 to \$25,000, contractors and architects say. The building was designed by C. W. Kimberlain and built by Leo Monarch....



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 23 January 1921, p.5:

**MISS MARY E. GRIFFITH DESCRIBES
ST. FRANCES ACADEMY OF 1860;
NAMES FEW OF EARLY PUPILS THERE**

Reminiscences of St. Frances Academy 60 years ago furnished the Inquirer by Miss Mary Griffith, of Louisville, are very appropriate at this time when this school is preparing to open the \$45,000 addition just completed and which will be thrown open to the public next Friday.

Miss Griffith, who was a daughter of Ridgely Griffith, of Daviess county, is related to Mrs. Bettie Ewing, Mrs. Henry S. Berry, S. R. Ewing and the families of J. T. Griffith, Dr. D. M. Griffith

and Clint Griffith of this city. While she has been living in Louisville for many years, she recently spent a winter in Owensboro.

She attended St. Frances Academy the winter of 1860-61 when she was ten years old. At that time the academy was located at Third and Allen streets where the Y. M. C. A. now stands and her recollections of the school, scholars and some of the teachers are vividly related as follows:

My first experience in school was at St. Frances academy in 1860, and 1861, when I was ten years old. My father was a farmer near Owensboro, and because of bad roads so many months in the year, and other reasons, my mother instructed me at home.

Old School Site

The site of St. Frances academy was Third and Allen streets the present location of the Y. M. C. A. The academy faced Third street where was the parlor to receive visitors and patrons. Through the long side entrance on Allen street pupils rushed in to school. There was a large enrollment, both Catholics and Protestants.

The building was a two-story, room, rambling, ramshackle frame, used both as day and boarding school.

On my first day I was ushered into the big, school room, at the first recess. I stood abashed and timid, twisting the corner of my apron in a hard knot, when a pretty girl nodded to me and smiled, giving her name, Jenny Pegram. Then came a sweet, little girl holding out her hand, saying: "My name is Ruth Hagan." At once she won my fond affection, and to this date, Ruth Hagan, Mrs. Miles Mattingly, and I are fast friends. I made friends later on, but Jenny Pegram and Ruth Hagan were the first to give smile and a word of welcome on that initial day at school.

Mother Isabelle

I do not know the number of St. Frances faculty at that time, but four teachers stand in my memory as shining stars, guiding the Alpha of my school life. The Mother Superior Sister Isabelle, shrewd, politic, affable where the interest of the school was in question, but commanding, sarcastic severe in correction. Then Sister Generose, teacher of mathematics and grammar. In her arithmetic class of 15, I obtained my foundation and love of figures and numbers. Sister Generose ruled with the rod. We felt it was either murder or mathematics, and all being young we bent our minds mightily to mathematics. With Sister Generose we learned to add rapidly long rows of different figures and subtract as quickly. I am here to testify Sister Generose never struck any one, but the look in her eye and the rod in her hand made our answers prompt and timorous. I do not believe Sister Generose ever reported any other than a class that passed. From her I learned the multiplication table up to the sixes. To this good day I can repeat them forward, or backward, without hesitation. In grammar she was as effective as in mathematics.

Adored Teacher

Sister Dinesia taught spelling, reading and history. Her I adored. At church in those days children sang, "I Want to Be an Angel and With the Angels stand." After knowing Sister Dinesia I had the temerity to say, "I didn't have to go to Heaven to stand with an angel, I could go up to St. Frances and by Sister Dinesia, she was my angel." She taught me to read with great force. "The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck." My first real heart ache came when Sister Dinesia left St. Frances three months after I entered school.

Then Sister Mary Frances, sweet mannered, kind and smiling. I recall her cheerful work substituting in classes, especially her instruction in geography.

I entered St. Frances as a pupil in September and left school the following March, because of a heavy cold that threatened pneumonia. My last two months I was a boarder in the school.

As I look backward over half a century, I begin to understand the firm foundation my St. Frances of 1860 was builded and instead of growing old, grew young in the new St. Frances of 1921.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 29 January 1921, p.3:



More than 500 people attended the formal opening of the new St. Frances academy annex last night. A program preceded a reception given by the alumnae. The rostrum was beautifully decorated with palms and ferns.

Splendid addresses were given by Rev. E. S. FitzGerald, pastor of St. Paul's church; Rev. Richard Maloney, pastor of St: Stephen's church, and La Vega Clements. Vocal solos were given by Miss Cora Jesse and Miss May Watkins, and the academy orchestra gave numbers.

The reception committee included Mesdames Bernard Hazel, T. M. Barrow, J. W. Richardson, Mr. Frank Zinsz, Mr. and Mrs. Leo Monarch.



**The Record – Official Newspaper of the Catholic Diocese
of Louisville, Louisville, KY, 25 December 1921:**

St. Frances' Academy, Owensboro, Ky.

All true Kentucky Catholics know and most proudly cherish the history and traditions of early Catholicity in Central Kentucky. The stories of the courageous missionary priests and sisters, who labored so zealously in _?__ing and spreading the teachings of Holy Mother Church, and who founded the great institutions of learning which are still the pride, not only of the Catholics of the state, but of all its citizens, has been often told. But it bears repeating nor can it be repeated too often that the fruits of their labors are to be seen not alone in the communities in which they strove, but in every town and hamlet of the west to which the early Kentucky Catholics and their children have passed on.

Conspicuous, perhaps foremost among those noble hands of women who contributed so much to Kentucky Catholicism were the Sisters of Charity, who well over a century ago founded that institution which has since been one of the glories of the state – “Nazareth.”

It was out of Nazareth in the summer of 1849 that a brave little band of five of these Sisters of Charity departed to carry into what then might have still been called the wilderness of Western Kentucky – the seeds of that faith and culture to the spreading of which they had devoted their lives. They traveled by flatboat, for the railroad had not yet penetrated into that broad and as yet undeveloped section of the state in which they were to labor.

The names of the members of the little band are still preserved. They were under the direction of Sister Euphrasia Mudd, who had with her Sister Regina Drum, Sister Lucy Lampton, Genevieve O'Maley, and Bridget Gormley.

They were going to the Catholics of the small town of Owensboro, in Daviess county, and the scattered few of the faith in the surrounding country, who had felt the need of a Catholic school and had asked Nazareth for Sisters.

An old frame building which had been used as a hotel was purchased and fitted up as their residence and school. The school was called St. Frances Academy, being named after Mother Frances Gardiner then Mother Superior of Nazareth.



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 29 May 1924, pp.10H & 12H:

**SAINT FRANCES ACADEMY, ONE
OF PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS, TO HOLD
75TH COMMENCEMENT JUNE 10**

Was Founded By Mother Frances Gardiner
NEW BUILDING
Completed in January, 1921, Cost \$40,000

Saint Frances academy at Fifth and Allen streets, the oldest school in Daviess county, is completing the third quarter of a century of its existence and will hold its seventy-five annual commencement on June 10, in its handsome auditorium.

St. Frances academy, which is taught by the Sisters of Nazareth, was founded in 1849 by Mother Frances Gardiner, mother superior of Nazareth academy, the famous educational institution near Bardstown, and named for its founder. The school in its early years had many trials which challenged the courage of the little group of sisters, who were its teachers, but it soon gained prestige and patronage from Catholics and Protestants. Sister Euphrasia Mudd was the first sister superior, but no records exist to show who were her assistants.

The academy was originally located in a two story frame building on Third and Allen streets, where the Y. M. C. A. stands, and here the work of education was conducted for 40 years, or until 1889 when the great increase in the number of pupils necessitated larger quarters and the substantial, large brick building at Fifth and Allen streets was erected.

Building Enlarged

For some years the new academy building accommodated the large number who came as boarding and day pupils from Owensboro and all parts of western Kentucky; but the students became so numerous and class rooms so crowded that the music hall had to be taken for lessons so it was decided to build a much needed auditorium and additional class rooms. The work was begun in March, 1920, and the addition, which cost \$40,000 was completed and formally opened January 28, 1921. This annex which faces Allen street south of the main building is a substantial three story structure of brick and stone. It contains a spacious auditorium four class rooms, cloak rooms and wide halls. The auditorium which occupies the first stories seats 650, is attractively, finished in old ivory and oak, and has a large stage with three sets of scenery, affording appropriate

settings for musical recitals, drills, fetes and entertainment given by the students. The windows of the first story were the gift of George D. Gaw, of Chicago, a former student of the academy. They are of stained glass, and are artistic representations of scenes from the Bible.

The addition was planned and erected during the administration of the Mother Superior, Sister Mary Raymond, during which time the enrollment of pupils was largely increased and the different departments enlarged and kept abreast of the most modern methods of education.

Sister Mary Raymond was succeeded as Mother Superior by Sister Ann Sebastian, who came in September 1923, from Memphis where she was in charge of one of the largest Catholic schools. She has under her direction 19 sisters, who are carrying on the educational work in the grades and high school where the enrollment is over 600. The music department has always been a special feature of the academy where well trained instructors have trained and inspired many talented pupils, who have made names as musicians at home and elsewhere. Besides the piano, violin and voice, the students instructed in playing the different orchestral instruments and the academy orchestra renders difficult selections of classic and standard music delightfully.

A list of students from the early years in St. Frances' to now would include many names inseparably connected with the history and progress of Daviess county. Many of these women have lately passed away.

Some Early Students

Among the women who attended the academy in its early years are Mrs. Sophia Gunther, Mrs. Elizabeth Petit, formerly Miss Betty Aubrey, and Miss Lide Carrico. Some who were enrolled at St. Frances 50 or 60 years ago are Mrs. Miles Mattingly, Mrs. Cary Applegate, Mrs. George Williams, Miss Ophelia Hagan, Mrs. J. V. Gasser, Mrs. Henrietta Weill, Mrs. J. W. Mathews, and Mrs. Mary Weber.

St. Frances Alumnae association was formed in 1910. Its first president was Mrs. J. W. Richardson, who with her sister, Mrs. P. F. Manning, of Frankfort, were the first graduates of regular high school course of the academy in 1890, as previous to that time most pupils on completing the eighth grade went away to school.

The present officers of St. Frances Alumane are: President, Mrs. Thomas Payne; vice president, Miss Agnes Payne; treasurer, Miss Helen Bryan; secretary, Vies Virginia Monarch.



Sixty Years of Owensboro, 1883-1943, William Foster Hayes
(Owensboro, KY: Messenger Job Printing Co., 1944) pp.207-210:

ST. FRANCES ACADEMY

It is safe to say that few who note the handsome, commodious and modern buildings of St. Frances Academy at the southeast intersection of Fifth and Allen Streets realize that they house the oldest educational institution in Owensboro, or indeed in Daviess County. Yet that is certainly true. It antedates the public school system of Owensboro by twenty-two years, and if there was any other private school here when this one opened, it has long since disappeared.

The school has been from the beginning under the direction of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky. In the summer of 1849, five of those Sisters arrived in Owensboro, having come by flatboat from Louisville. They were Sister Euphrasia Mudd, religious superior of the

Sisters and first principal of the school, and Sisters Regina Drum, Lucy Lampton, Genevieve O'Malley, and Bridget Gormley.

They opened their school in an old frame building previously used as a hotel, located where the Y. M. C. A. building now stands. At that time Mother Frances Gardiner presided over the Nazareth Community, and the academy was named in her honor, and placed under the patronage of St. Frances of Rome.

Worthwhile institutions as well as individuals not infrequently owe much of their strength to the trials they have endured and withstood, and this truism finds illustration here. Such troubles are likely to be pecuniary, and that too was the case here. In the early years, when Owensboro itself was just emerging from the wilderness, the families from which the Sisters would naturally expect their support were few and struggling, and the going was hard. It is thought indeed that the going might have stopped altogether but for the patronage of those of other faiths who no doubt were glad to take advantage of the careful and excellent instruction afforded by this school. For the Sisters were under the injunction from their Mother Superior, which they never forgot, to give of their best.

Even in its second and third decade the school was beset by financial difficulties. The support did not keep pace with the increasing enrollment, and for a time the faithful teachers felt that they were not receiving the support and practical interest that they felt was due them.

These untoward conditions, however, seem gradually to have been overcome by the patience and courageous persistence of those in charge of the school, and after forty years at the first location, the Mother Superior was able to contract for the erection of the present academy building. This was occupied the following year, 1890, and the first graduation exercises of the high school department were held in the new building in the spring of that year, Misses Chessie and Mattie Thomas receiving diplomas.

Thirty years later more room was needed, and on January 28, 1921, the new \$40,000.00 annex facing on Allen Street was formally opened. This was made possible by the contributions of many persons, some of whom were not in the communion of this church. Of the latter may be mentioned the legacy of \$700.00 received under the will of Mrs. Ellen Riley, widow of Camden Riley, (both prominent residents of the County and later of Owensboro. Though not "of the faith," Mrs. Riley appreciated the work of the school, having attended a similar one in her youth and in her last years observed this one at close range from her home on Fourth Street and enjoyed the music from its studio.

The superiors who have presided over the Academy from the beginning have been: Sisters Euphrasia Mudd, and Isabel Drury, Mother Helena Tormey, Sisters Theodore Crowe, Eulalia Gaynor, Mary David Wagner, Blanche Traynor, Guidonia Flaherty, Madeline Sharkey, Mary Vincent Hardy, Isadore Nevin, Berenice Greenwell, Columba Fox, Emilianna Murray, Isabel Henry, Mary Raymond McDonough, Ann Sebastian Sullivan (now Mother General), Rose Mary Newman, Mary Aimee O'Brien, and Anna Louise Mattingly.

The faculty of the Academy now numbers twenty-one. The school is affiliated with the University of Kentucky, and the Southern Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges. Growing out of the Academy are an alumni association dating from 1911 and a Parent-Teachers Association, which in turn grew out of a Mother's Guild established in 1923. Other clubs, musical, dramatic and religious, are maintained among the student body.

By January, 1939, the enrollment had increased to approximately 530 in the grades and 150 in the high school classes, and the academy was again crowded for room. In this situation Bishop Cotton, whose interest in education is very great, bethought him of establishing another

school, and the Knights of Columbus generously gave up their fine home at Seventh and Frederica for that purpose. Thereupon, and in that building, was established the Blessed Mother School.

This school also is under the direction of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth. It was dedicated by Bishop Cotton September 10, 1939. This school, as well as St. Frances Academy, serves both parishes, St. Stephen's and St. Paul's. The new school takes care of the children of the first four grades, while St. Frances takes those of the fifth grade and on up through the high school. Thus for the present the educational interests of these churches seem to be adequately provided for.



**Questing, St. Frances Academy, Owensboro, KY,
newspaper published by students; June 1949, p.2:**

HISTORY OF ST. FRANCES ACADEMY

By Elizabeth Fuqua, '49

A century of Catholic education in Owensboro, Kentucky! That is the record of St. Frances Academy, "the oldest educational institution in Owensboro, or indeed in Daviess County."

The opening chapter of the history is the petition of the Catholics of the city through the Rev. Walter S. Coomes, pastor of St. Lawrence Church, Philpot, the first church in Daviess County, for a Catholic school. Under date of May 19, 1849, the annalist at the Mother House has made the following brief entry: "House rented in Owensboro". This then was the excited word that passed among the Sisters of Charity regarding a new mission soon to be opened.

First School

Some of the early settlers in Owensboro had migrated here from Bardstown where they had known Father Coomes and the Sisters of Charity, hence the news of the Sisters' arrival was an occasion for rejoicing. The Catholic Telegraph and Advocate also notified its readers in the early Fall that a lot adjoining the church (St. Stephen's) has been purchased for the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Ky., and that a female academy would be opened by them in a hired house early in next November.

The property rented by the Sisters was the old frame building at Third and Allen Streets where the Y.M.C.A. now stands. It had formerly been a hotel. This was the site of the school for forty years.

Pioneer Band

The pioneers who traveled by flatboat from Louisville to open St. Frances Academy were Sister Euhrasia Mudd, superior; Sister Regina Drum, Sister Lucy Lampton, Sister Genevieve O'Malley, and Sister Bridget Gormley.

The school was named for Mother Frances Gardiner, second mother of the congregation of the Sisters of Charity. St. Frances of Rome was selected as patroness.

Owensboro had many Catholics at the time so it is not surprising to find in the early enrollment which averaged fifty students, a number 'of non-Catholics and Jews. Almost from the beginning, boarders were accommodated at the convent.

Curriculum Expansion

The early curriculum included religion, reading, writing, arithmetic, English grammar, geography, plain sewing, marking and needlework. And when examination time rolled around, the students had sufficient reason to be nervous for public examinations were the order of the day with

the parents as an audience. These ordeals were held semi-annually and besides the subjects above mentioned included vocal music, English literature, original composition in prose and verse, natural philosophy, physiology, astronomy, mental and written arithmetic, algebra, and geometry.

The Senior class for years underwent their ordeal in the Study Hall with the Rev. Thomas F. Gambon, later pastor at St. Stephen's, as examiner.

By 1880, the enrollment has reached about one hundred thirty students of whom fifty were boarders.

Cutting the Cake

But life at St. Frances wasn't all examinations. On one occasion when Bishop McCloskey and Father Chambige visited the Sisters and students, an immense cake was made and probably baked in a dishpan. It was carried to the study hall, where Fr. Chambige cut the cake and each student enjoyed a slice.

Christ Comes Weekly

During the earliest years, the sisters had no chapel and attended Mass in the parish church. About 1888, Mass was being said for them in their convent chapel once a week. This was after the erection of the present building at Fifth and Allen Streets in 1889.

In 1890, the first formal exercises were held in the Academy and diplomas presented to the first graduates, Chessie Thomas and Mattie Thomas.

New Century

By the turn of the century, the enrollment had reached nearly two hundred. The classics then as now had a prominent place in the cultural program of the school as has the study of music.

The new century witnessed the organization of the St. Frances Alumni in 1911. In 1921, the school became a member of the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae and was host to the organization at its state meeting in 1923.

The same year, the Parents' Teachers Association, an outgrowth of the Mothers' Guild, was formed to build a stronger bond of cooperation between parents and teachers.

Crusade Organized

Most outstanding among the organizations that have claimed the attention of the students is the Little Flower Unit of the Catholic Students Mission Crusade organized as a charter member twenty five years ago on the Feast of St. Joseph, March 19, 1923. During the quarter of a century it has seen six of its members raised to the priesthood, seventeen preparing for the same vocation and more than forty professed as religious.

Meeting the standards of all high ranking schools, St. Frances was affiliated with the State Department of Education, Frankfort in 1923 and with the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. The Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools also opened its door to the St. Frances as a Class "A" school.

New School Opened

Shortly after the erection of the diocese of Owensboro in December 1937, Bishop Cotton began plans for taking care of all the Catholic children of Owensboro and vicinity, many of whom were attending public schools. In Sept. 1939, the Blessed Mother School, recently, renamed, Cathedral School, was opened to house the first five grades. To day all pupils of the first seven grades are taught in the Cathedral School by a corps of thirteen sisters.

The Blessed Sacrament school for the education of colored children is also under the direction of the Sisters thus making their total of grade students in the three schools more than eleven hundred.

Schools Merge

Finally in the spring of 1948 as a means of equalizing educational opportunity for all Catholic children in the city and vicinity, Bishop Cotton united the St. Joseph High School and the St. Frances Academy as a central high school. The centennial year records a registration of five hundred students plus an additional sixty eight in grade 8. The Senior Class numbers one hundred six.

Superiors since 1849

Selected by the General Council at Nazareth, the following Sisters have held the office of superior of St. Frances Academy since 1849. They are: Sister Euphrasia Mudd, Sister Constantia Robinson, Sister Isabella Drury, Mother Helena Tormey, Sister Theodore Crowe, Sister Eullia Gaynor, Sister M. David Wagner, Sister Blanche Traynor, Sister Guidonia Flaherty, Sister Madeline Sharkey, Sister M. Vincent Hardy, Sister Isadore Nevin, Sister Berenice Greenwell, Sister Columba Fox, Sister Emiliana Murray, Sister Isabel Henry, Sister M. Raymond McDonough, Mother Ann Sebastian Sullivan, Sister Rose Mary Newman, Sister M. Aimee O'Brien, Sister Anna Louise Mattingly, Sister Francis Borgia Quigley.

Sister Francis Borgia's term closes with the centennial year with the hundred years that spell spiritual and material progress for the glory of God.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 5 June 1949, pp.1B & 10B:

St. Frances Academy Established Here As '49ers Went West Centennial Being Observed By Oldest School In City

Important in the history of the nation is the year 1849. The mention of it brings to the minds of even the school children the story of the '49ers – the thousands of people who left home and friends to stake their claims to a fortune in the gold hills of California.

Coincident with the trekking of the red blooded Americans to the west was the arrival in Owensboro of another group of '49ers a pioneer band of Sisters of Charity from Nazareth, Ky. – who came to stake their claim to the minds and hearts of a growing generation of young Americans who until that time had had no opportunity for Catholic education. They established St. Frances academy which today is the oldest educational institution in Owensboro and Daviess county, antedating the public school system of the city by 22 years, and which is now observing its centennial.

Catholics Petition

The opening chapter in the history of St. Frances academy recounts the story of devout Catholics who had migrated to Owensboro from Bardstown, the cradle of Catholicity in the West. They had known the Rev. Walter S. Coomes there where the Sisters of Charity had made one of their first foundations. The Rev. Father Coomes had been appointed pastor in 1842, of St. Lawrence church, Philpot, the first church in Daviess county. On the petition of the Catholic people for a Catholic school, the Rev. Father Coomes turned to Nazareth, whose council reported favorably through Mother Frances Gardner, head of the Sisterhood. The annalist at the Motherhouse made the following brief but significant entry under date of May 19, 1849: "House rented in Owensboro."

Colony Arrives

The Catholic Telegraph and Advocate reported early in the fall that "a lot adjoining St. Stephen's church has been purchased for the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Ky., and a female academy will be opened by them in a hired house early in November."

The site of the school for forty years was an old frame building at Third and Allen streets where in later years and until recently the YMCA was located. The colony of five sisters with Sister Euphrasia Mudd, superior, traveled by flat boat from Louisville to Owensboro. Other Sisters were Sister Regina Drum, Sister Lampton, Sister Genevieve O'Malley and Sister Bridget Gormley.

Owensboro had few Catholics at the time so it is not surprising to find among the average enrollment of fifty children, a number of non-Catholics and Jews. Historians have written that because of the poverty of many of the Catholic people, it doubtful whether the school would have been self-sustaining without the cooperation of those of other faiths. The Catholic families numbered about 35, some residing several miles from the town.



For sixty years of its 100 years St. Frances academy has occupied this building at Fifth and Allen streets in Owensboro. The auditorium building at right is 29 years old. Right: St. France chapel which is a part of the school building is used primarily by members of the faculty who attend mass there, but students also visit it on school days.



Priests who are members of the faculty of St. Frances are, from left, the Rev. George Hancock, home room instructor for freshman boys, the Rev. Charles Saffer, counselor, and the Rev. Henry O'Bryan, sophomore boys' instructor.

St. Frances, Patron

Out of deference to Mother Frances, the academy was placed under the patronage of St. Frances of Rome. The motto given the Sisters by Mother Frances was a ever cherished and lived: "My daughters, review, study. Never think you have reached a point beyond which you need not aim. Onward, ever."

With religion in first place, the curricular plan was that of most schools of 100 years ago. It included the three R's, English grammar, geography, plain sewing, marking and needlework. Students in the advanced classes were taught natural philosophy, physiology, astronomy, mental and written arithmetic, algebra and geometry. Instrumental and vocal music was in the hands of a specially trained teacher. The girls were taught in the old hotel at Third and Allen streets, and classes for smaller boys were held in the St. Frances annex, a cottage, just opposite. Professor Spalding taught the older Catholic boys of the city. In the 1880's a boys school known as Hart school was opened by the Rev. Dominic Crane, pastor of St. Stephen's, and was taught by two Sisters of Charity.

Closing in 1872

As the school neared its silver jubilee year all departments were functioning with efficiency. The Owensboro Monitor chronicled the closing of the school year, July 26, 1872, as an event of considerable importance at which "spectators comprising the beauty, gallantry, and intelligence of Owensboro were present in numbers." Presumably this commencement was held in the Temple theatre. The music was furnished by the Rockport, Ind., brass band, assisted by the Silver Cornet band of Owensboro with Professor Buck as director. An operetta, "The Enchanted Bower," was presented by children of the following families: Allen, Bellew, Gerry, Buckler, Burgess, Clements, Clarke, Hardesty, Houston, Johnson, Lindley, Lewis, McDaniel, Millett, Naghel, Pope, Porter, Rose, and York.

Public Examinations

Semi-annual examinations were held in all subjects in the presence of the parents. The Rev. Thomas Gambon, appointed pastor of St. Stephen's parish in 1884, delighted in grilling the Senior class in philosophy, and astronomy, testing them not only on the textual matter but on the practical application of scientific principles. A newsman of the day reported that "a thorough and sifting examination gave evidence that the pupils were being taught according to that system of concise method that develops reason and enables the pupil to apply fundamental principles independent of the parrot-like system of memorizing rules so much depended on nowadays and at the expense of which the faculty of reasoning is allowed to remain dormant and inactive for want of proper development in the school room."

New Building Opened

Four decades had passed since the Sisters of Charity had begun their work in Owensboro. The year 1889 witnessed the erection of a substantial brick building at Fifth and Allen streets, with D. X. Murphy, of Louisville, architect. Sister Guidonia Flaherty, a teacher and a woman of marked executive ability was superior at this time. The Sisters had as housekeeper, Mrs. Civill, mother of the Rev. Henry J. Civill, the first of St. Stephen's parish to be elevated to the priesthood.

With the opening of the new school, a four year high school course was inaugurated and the first formal graduation was held in June 1890, the graduates being Miss Chessie and Mattie Thomas, later Mrs. J. W. Richardson and Mrs. P. F. Manning.

The Golden Jubilee year, 1894, saw the registration reach an all-high peak of 180 with a faculty of 12 sisters directing the education of the 150 day pupils and 25 boarders.

Rounding out the cultural education of the students, special advantages were given in art, oil painting, water color and crayon. In one of the finest art exhibitions held at the academy, Mamie Decker won high praise for a portrait of her father. Other artists whose work was commended were Lizzie Richardson, Ermine Payne, Monarch, E. G. Slack, Adele Payne, J. Moorman, Pearl Monarch, Roxa Patterson and Master Leo Monarch.

New Century

In 1911, the bond of unity among St. Frances academy teachers and students was strengthened by the organization of an alumni with Mrs. J. W. Richardson as first president. In 1921, the school was affiliated with the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae and was host to the organization at its state meeting in 1923. The same year, the Parent-Teacher association, an outgrowth of the Mothers' guild, was formed to build a stronger bond of cooperation between parents and teachers.

Crusade Organized

A student organization, destined to celebrate its silver jubilee coincident with the centennial of the academy, was the Little Flower unit of the Catholic Student's Mission crusade which held its first meeting March 19, 1924. Mary Cecilia Payne, who later became an Ursuline Sister, Sister Mary Cecilia, was the first president.

A high mass was sung by the crusaders March 19, 1949, commemorated the jubilee of the unit which is affiliated with 1,000,000 students in Catholic schools in this country.

Keeping pace with trends in education, St. Frances academy was affiliated with the state department of education in 1923 and with the Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C. The rank of a Class "A" school granted in 1933 by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools has been maintained through the years.

Diocese Erected

Following the erection of the diocese of Owensboro in December, 1937, the Most Rev. Francis R. Cotton, D. D. bishop, made plans for enrolling all Catholic children of Owensboro and vicinity in Catholic schools. This necessitated the opening of another school, the Blessed Mother school, located in the chancery building, and renamed the St. Stephen's Cathedral school in 1948. In September, 1939, it was opened to for the first five grades. Today, seven grades are taught in the Cathedral school by a faculty of thirteen sisters.

Sisters of Charity also teach in the Blessed Sacrament school for colored children, thus bringing the total of their charges in the three schools to more than 1,100.

Schools Merge

Bishop Cotton, desirous of equalizing educational opportunities for all the Catholic high school students of Owensboro and vicinity, in the spring of 1949, merged the St. Joseph high school and the St. Frances academy as a Central high school. In September 500 students registered.

Classical, scientific and general courses are offered with the additional advantage of instrumental and vocal music, with special stress on the chant.

The high school faculty has the Rev. Charles A. Saffer, as counselor, the Rev. Henry O'Bryan and the Rev. George Hancock, home room instructors of sophomore and freshmen boys, for the past two years; a Sister principal, a full time librarian, three music teachers, a dietician, twelve class teachers and one eighth grade teacher. The priests teach daily or weekly classes in Christian doctrine.

Co-curricular Activities

Besides the Mission crusade, the students have been at various times members of music, literary and dramatics clubs functioning as a part of the curriculum.

In 1928, athletics became a regular part of the program for the boys. The first basketball ball team was directed by the Rev. L. J. Nieters, and had as a member the present athletic director, the Rev. Robert W. Connor.

The program has expanded with the years. In the fall of 1948, with the merging of St. Joseph high school and St. Frances academy, the team of the then one school lined up to play teams of larger school. Coach Harold Mischel trained the team.

Football has been added to the sports program and a team began practice last fall. Leslie Van Meter is the coach. A schedule of games for next fall has been drawn up.

Guiding Spirits

Superiors who have guided the destiny of St. Frances academy during one hundred years follow: Sisters Euphrasia Mudd, Constantia Robinson, Isabella Drury, Mother Helena Tromeay, Sisters Theodore Crowe, Eulalia Gaynor, M. David Wagner, Blanche Traynor, Guidonia Flaherty, Madeline Sharkey, M. Vincent Hardy, Isadore Nevin, Berenice Greenwell, Columba Fox, Emiliana Murray, Isabel Henry, M. Raymond McDonough, Mother Anna Sebastian Sullivan, Sisters Rose Mary Newman, Mary Aimee O'Brien, Anna Louise Mattingly, Francis Borgia Quigley.

Sister Francis Borgia's term as superior closes with the centennial year. During the six years of her office, she has directed the education of hundreds of children according to the Christian principles outlined by Pope Pius X in his encyclical, "Christian Education of Youth."

The centennial observance, which opens today, will begin with attendance at 8:30 a. m. mass at St. Stephen's cathedral by members of the school's graduating class of 106 members.

High mass will be offered at 8:30 a. m. Monday at St. Stephen's for deceased priests, sisters, benefactors, parents and children associated with the school during its 100 years of existence. A banquet will be served to the alumni of the school at the Rudd coffee shop Monday evening, and special tribute will be paid to members of the class of 50 years ago at the time.

Tribute will be paid to priests, sisters and friends of St. Frances academy, in a high mass to be sung Tuesday in the cathedral.

Centennial Mass

The centennial mass will be celebrated by Bishop Cotton Tuesday morning, and bells of the cathedral will announce that Lucian P. Hayden, former student at St. Frances will be elevated to the priesthood. He is the eighth former student so elevated. The Rev. Thomas Libs, of Hickman, a member of the St. Frances class of 1930, will deliver the sermon. Following the mass a banquet will be served at the cathedral to priests of the diocese.

Sisters of St. Frances will hold open house at the academy from 3 until 5 p. m. Tuesday and will have as an honored guest the Rev. Mother Bertrand, S. C. N., head of the Sisters of Charity at Nazareth, and the Rev. Mother Ann Sebastian, S. C. N., former director of the congregation and now treasurer-general.

Commencement exercises for the graduates will be held at the Sportscenter at 8 p. m. Wednesday. The program follows:

Processional, "Priest's March," Aida; Chorus, "Praise Ye the Lord, Mozart, arr. by Montani, words from the Psalms; distribution of diplomas and other awards; chorus, "Salve Regina," dress, Dana; address, the Rev. Robert W. Connor class of '30; recessional.

The St. Frances orchestra will provide the music. George Bell, an alumnus and assistant in the department of choral work, will direct the choruses.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 1 October 1967, p.1B:

**Saint Francis Academy Remembered
As Workmen Destroy Old Building**
**Former Student
Retraces Years**

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This writer spent several of his formative years attending the old Saint Francis Academy. In the following article he shares his memories and the memories of others at a time when the 79-year-old edifice is being dismantled in the interest of progressive destruction.)

By Dave McBride, Messenger and Inquirer Night Wire Editor

There are several instances in a person's life which bring lumps to the throat and mist to the eyes.

One of these unforgettable times is that day when our mother or father took our hands and introduced us to the world of education.

Another of these times is when one of those little guys grows to manhood, and makes a sentimental return to his first house of learning.

But on this visit 29 years later he finds that the winds of change have blown hard .. hard enough to transform that once pulsating institution into an empty building where every sound sadly echos the past.

He retraces the years of his childhood, from that day when he loosed the grip on his mother's hand to the day when he said goodbye as a student.

The high classroom walls which once wore clean coats of paint now are dirty and peeling and an occasional slab of plaster crashes to the floor – the floor which has felt the brunt of countless thousands of feet. It too shows signs of long neglect.

And as the visitor walks through the naked rooms and halls, he finds his feet keeping time with the disheartening blows of a hammer slowly reducing his school to a pile of rubble.

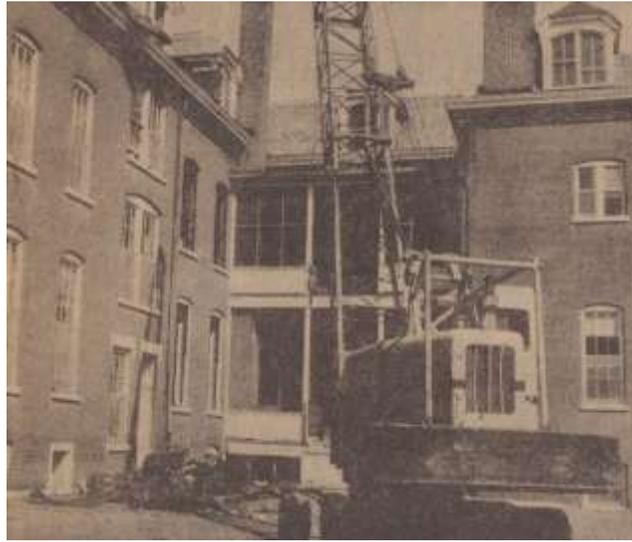
That his feet should first carry him to his first classroom is not ironic. Standing there, he hears sounds emanating from what was a nearby music room and he thinks how these recalled sounds from aspiring musicians are as bad as when he first heard them.

Although it no longer is there, he remembers an artist coming to that room almost three decades ago and painting a bust of George Washington on the blackboard. But he cannot remember his first teacher's name.

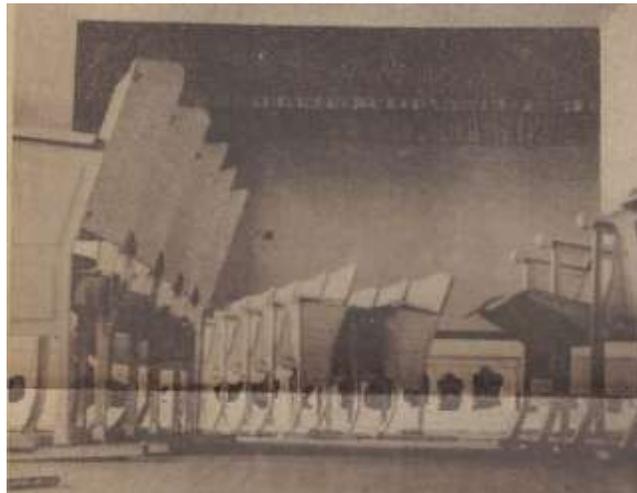
Looking out the windows he scans the inner courtyard and envisions scores of screaming, wildly running youngsters utilizing every precious second of that too-short lunch period. And through all this motion he sees a bashful boy who has been soundly stabbed by cupid making an awkward try for his first date.

Beyond the courtyard the sad-faced visitor sees the basketball court and clears his throat, remembering the clouds of dust which boiled up from the dirt playing surface. And he shivers as

he recalls winter days with ice and snow, how slick tracks were made and how the first brave youth to slide down that frigid runway was mashed against a wire fence by those following.



Poised for destruction – This crane in the yard behind the former St. Francis Academy is serving as the main tool of destruction in leveling the building which was built in 1889. This was the first Catholic high school in Owensboro.



Silenced – Only a few seats are scattered over the floor of the auditorium at Saint Francis as workmen go about the job of tearing away a visible page of Owensboro's history.

Moving his eyes along the concrete wall separating the two playing areas he can't help but remember the old bicycle racks often used by the senior boys as a "jail" for freshmen.

Leaving his first classroom the visitor returns to the main hall and instinctively looks at his watch. Twenty - nine years ago at 11 a.m. his class would be lining up single file for the short trip to the basement lunchrooms. He took his place in the imaginary line and slowly walked down those basement steps. And with each step he realized that suddenly he was not to happy with progress.

Gone were the wooden tables and benches and replacing the aroma of food was a prevailing dampness. Standing there in the semi - darkness, he almost could hear the clatter of dishes and the rustling of the paper sacks of those who brought their lunch from home.

A large chunk of the roof cascades to the ground and the visitor is jolted back to reality. And the incessant hammering continues.

Suddenly he is in his sixth grade classroom and the sixth grade is in the same room as was his first grade and his memories are compounded. And the sounds from the music room are no better.

And then, as if afraid the building might collapse and rob him of his nostalgic daydream, the visitor rushes to the seventh grade and the eighth and the ninth, He pauses at the ninth to recall the running feud between Joe and Bobby and the everyday fisticuffs between Charlie and Don,

And girls suddenly were growing up and life was taking on an entirely new meaning. It all happened here and he keeps remembering as his thoughts take him to the auditorium and more sadness.

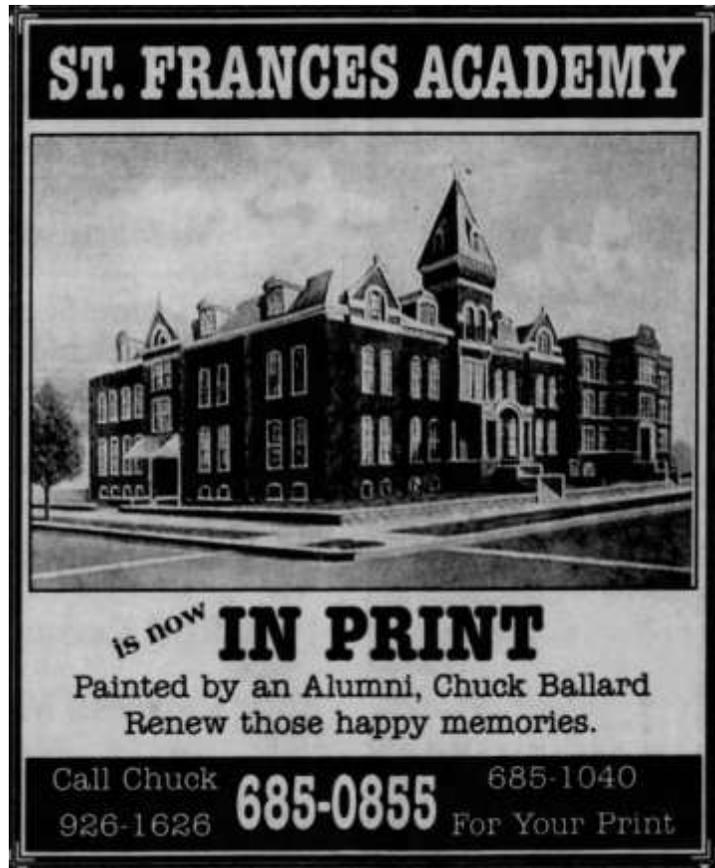
Gone are the stained glass windows, the remaining holes allowing the past to escape. Only a few of the seats remain and the stage is barren. It was here that the entire student body gathered for assemblies, plays, sports rallies and an occasional movie. And in one of the movies there was a kissing scene and there was giggling.

Leaving the auditorium, the visitor walked into the yard. He passed the spot where the shrine to the Blessed Mother once stood and paused for a second where the iron drinking fountain used to be. Walking toward the porch he glanced down the steps leading to the furnace room and remembered Mr. Simon.

Another large slab of the roof fell to the ground behind him and startled him into the realization that within a few short weeks this southeast corner of Fifth and Allen Streets would revert to its original form of 1889 – an empty lot.



Chuck Ballard, a commercial artist, of Owensboro, painted a picture of St. Frances Academy in 1998.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 1 May 1998, p.4B
& 17 November 1999, p.1B



**The Western Kentucky Catholic, August 2021, Volume 48, Issue 6
Newspaper of the Diocese of Owensboro, KY, pp.11-12:**

St. Frances or St. Francis?

Setting the record straight on Owensboro Catholic High School’s original name

By Elizabeth Wong Barnstead, *The Western Kentucky Catholic*

When reading his April 2021 issue of *The Western Kentucky Catholic*, Robert “Bob” Slack noticed – but was not surprised to see – that the original name of Owensboro Catholic High School, his alma mater, was misspelled.

The error appeared on page 13, in the story “‘Keep up a good spiritual life...’ 102-year-old priest advises clergy, other Church ministers.”

The story had focused on several favorite memories from Msgr. George Hancock, who resides at the Carmel Home in Owensboro and had just celebrated his 102nd birthday.

The story referred to Msgr. Hancock as having taught at “St. Francis Academy” in Owensboro, which later became Owensboro Catholic High School.

The only problem was that in reality, the school's previous name was actually spelled in the feminine form of "Frances" – with an "e," not an "i."

Hoping to set the record straight, Slack reached out to The Western Kentucky Catholic.

In a friendly April 4, 2021 email, Slack introduced himself and said he had enjoyed reading the story about his retired freshman class teacher, Msgr. Hancock, who had taught Slack from 1948-1949.

However, he explained, the name of the high school was actually "FrancEs, named for the Mother Superior of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Mother Frances Gardiner, in 1849."

He went on to share that the school, which was founded by and originally operated by this community of women religious, was for girls only, and then later added grade-school boys.

He shared that the "Frances" versus "Francis" situation has been a persistent problem in local reports that reference the high school, with obituaries frequently misspelling it as well.

"So don't feel like the Lone Ranger," he wrote.

Journey through history

After receiving his email, the WKC asked Slack if he would be willing to share more of his knowledge about this small, albeit significant, error.

Slack has dedicated years of research into his beloved high school's history, working with both the Diocese of Owensboro's Archives as well as the library at Owensboro Catholic High School, which is home to many resources about the school's legacy.

He was more than happy to share some of his research with the WKC.

For instance: St. Frances Academy, founded in 1849, was originally located at Third and Allen St., Owensboro. In 1889, the all-girls' academy moved to a location at Fifth and Allen St.

The school became coed in 1914, according to the book "Daviness County, Kentucky 1815-2015 Celebrating Our Heritage.")

In 1951, St. Frances Academy changed names to become Owensboro Catholic High School. It also changed locations, moving from Fifth and Allen to its current location on Parrish Ave.

"I was always proud to be in the first graduating class of Owensboro Catholic High School," Slack told the WKC during an interview on June 14, 2021.

Slack was a senior when the name change and the move across town took place. He and many classmates spent that summer helping move equipment for the new school, and today he recalls "the excitement of coming into something new."

Slack graduated from OCHS in June 1952. One of his classmates included Florence Henderson, who went on to play Carol Brady, the mother in the 1970s sitcom "The Brady Bunch."

(Slack even performed in a school play, "Jerry of Jericho Road," with Henderson. Slack played "Uncle Pete, an old time westerner" and Henderson played the titular character, "Jerry." Slack still has the program, whose orange construction paper cover has remained in excellent condition.)

Legacy of faith

According to a 2007 document compiled by Sr. Sheila Ann Madden, SCN, on the topic of OCHS's history, St. Frances Academy was named not only for Mother Frances Gardiner but also for the school's original patroness: St. Frances of Rome.

Slack is not sure why the persistent problem of misspelling "Frances" keeps happening.

"I think there's an assumption that it's named for the male St. Francis of Assisi," since that saint is more commonly known, said Slack.

According to LoyolaPress.com’s “Saints Stories for All Ages,” St. Frances of Rome lived from 1384-1440. Despite feeling called to become a nun, she married a nobleman and raised four children on the wealthy family estate. She and her sister-in-law cared for the poor and the sick during civil wars and the plague.

“In 1424, with Lorenzo’s full support, she organized a group of women as the Oblates of Mary,” stated the online article. “They lived at home under the Rule of St. Benedict without vows and shared Frances’s mission to the sick.”

After her husband died in 1436, Frances joined the Oblates and became their superior. She received visions and ecstasies during the remainder of her life.

But interestingly enough, St. Frances of Rome is not today’s patroness of OCHS.

From early on in the high school’s history, OCHS has looked to Our Lady of the Assumption as its patroness, said Edward Wilson, the Diocese of Owensboro’s archivist.

“The seniors of the class of 1955 dedicated their yearbook to her and highlighted that she was the patroness of the school,” said Wilson in a July 8, 2021 email.

Keith Osborne, chief administrative officer of Owensboro Catholic Schools, confirmed that Our Lady of the Assumption remains OCHS’s patroness to this day.

Throughout the years of being a lifelong Catholic, Slack says his education with the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth “taught me to embrace my own Catholic faith.”

“I still remember the songs we were taught; we memorized the old Baltimore Catechism,” said Slack, whose father came from a large Catholic family himself.

“I’ve never lost my faith,” he added. “I attribute it to (the sisters) and my family.”



A History of Owensboro and Daviess County, Kentucky, Hugh O. Potter, Daviess County Historical Society, Owensboro, KY (Montgomery, AL: Herff Jones-Paragon Publishing, 1974), pp.50 (picture) & 104:



St. Francis [sic] Academy, Owensboro

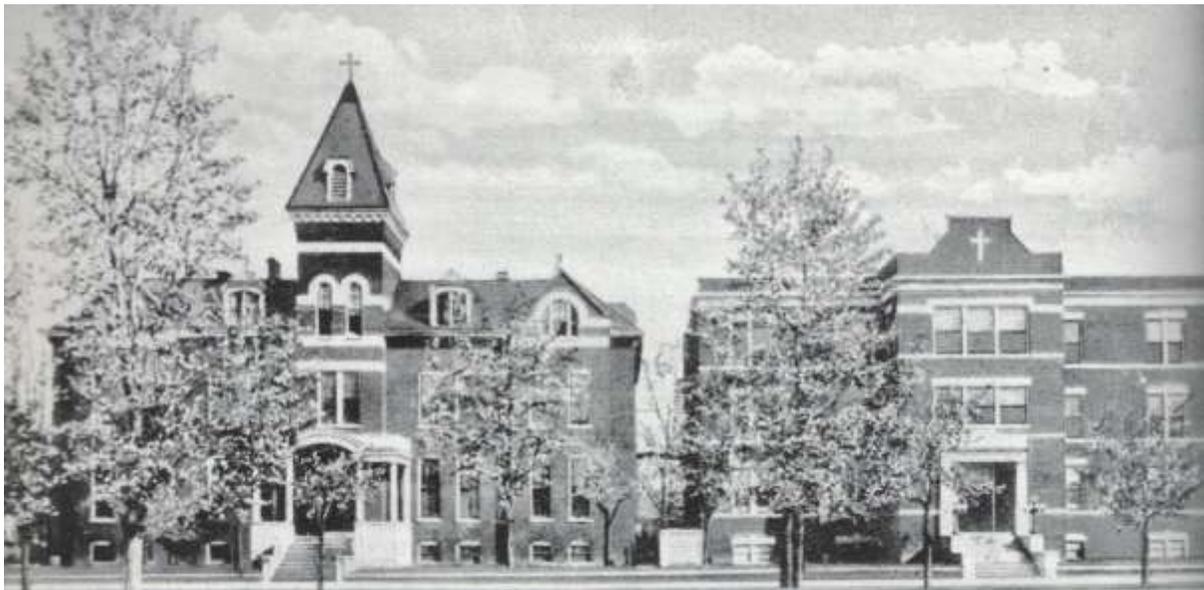
Parochial schools have been an important part of the educational program in Owensboro for a longer period than have the public schools. They started in the summer of 1849, when six members of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth arrived here and opened the first St. Frances Academy in an old frame hotel building then on the northeast corner of Third and Allen streets.

For a number of years after Sister Superior Euphrasia Mudd, Sisters Regina Drum, Bridget Gormley, Lucy Lampton and Genevieve O'Malley came to Owensboro to open St. Frances Academy, this pioneer institution was generally known as the "Sisters' school." After 40 years in its original location, a new and larger brick structure was built at Fifth and Allen streets. It was occupied by the academy from 1889 until 1963 when the building was demolished and its students transferred to the new St. Stephen's school, near St. Stephen's Cathedral on Cedar street.

In 1892, the New Inquirer's special edition, "A Glimpse of Progress of Owensboro," announced that St. Frances then offered courses in reading, writing, orthography, history, mathematics, rhetoric, philosophy, botany, physiology, chemistry, astronomy, French, latin, music, embroidery, drawing, painting and "polite literature." At that time the student body was mostly composed of girls. The newspaper announcement specified "small boys" would be accepted "as day scholars only."



Postcard History Series: Owensboro, Terry Blake & David Edds, Jr. (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2007) p.52:



St. Frances Academy was located on the southeast corner of Fifth and Allen Street. The school was first established in 1849 in an old hotel on the northeast corner of Third and Allen Streets by the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky. In 1889, a new main administration building, seen on the picture's left, was opened, and the auditorium on the right was added in 1921. Actress Florence Henderson graduated from the school in 1951 and went on to fame, starring in the 1970s television program *The Brady Bunch*. St. Frances Academy closed in 1963. Third Baptist Church, seen slightly on the far left of the postcard, purchased the property for a parking lot.

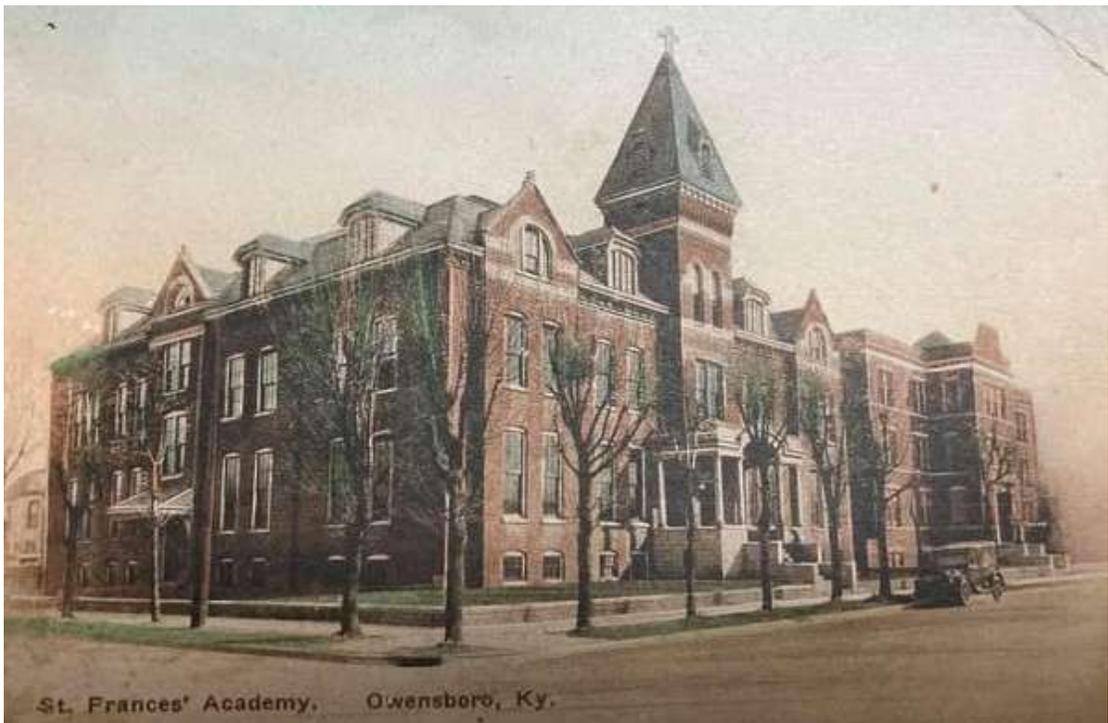


**A Pictorial History of Owensboro – Daviess County,
Vol. 1, Messenger-Inquirer (Owensboro, KY:
Owensboro Publishing Company, 1994, p.119:**



St. Frances Academy, 1930. Began at a different location in 1849, 3rd and Allen. Located at 5th and Allen from 1889 until 1963. Sisters of Charity from Nazareth were teachers.







The Old Catholic High School