

MOTHER M. AUGUSTA (ANDERSON)

Doing What Needs Doing

Sister M. Georgia (Costin)

Sister Georgia (Costin), historian for the Sisters of the Holy Cross, has a master's degree in English from Marquette University and a master's in Criminal Justice from Michigan State University. The University of Notre Dame Press has recently published her book Priceless Spirit, a history of the Congregation from 1841 to 1893. In 1995 she traveled to Brazil to write a history of the order there. During the genesis of this book, one of the local historians we approached was Bernice Maher Mooney, author of The Salt of the Earth: The History of the Catholic Church in Utah, 1776–1987. She identified Mother Augusta of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, who lived in Utah for only three years, but she established several schools and a hospital, some of which are still serving the state. Feeling that her story could best be told from the motherhouse of her Congregation, Mooney referred us to Sister Georgia, who graciously agreed to join us. She says that as she researched the life of Mother Augusta, she came to realize how much her experience in Utah reflected the rest of her life, devoted to “doing what needs doing.”

When the Reverend Lawrence Scanlon arrived in Utah in August 1873, he found himself pastor of the most extensive parish in the United States, with probably the smallest Catholic population. The area for which he was spiritually responsible covered 85,000 square miles — the entire state of Utah and the eastern third of Nevada. There were about 87,000 people in the area. If they had been spaced out evenly there would have

been one (and a very small fraction of a person) in each square mile. But Father Scanlon's parishioners numbered only 800 of these people; if the Catholics of Utah had been spread out evenly they would have been 108 miles apart. The 1911 edition of the *Catholic Encyclopedia* in its article on Utah says, "In Salt Lake and Ogden there were, by actual count, 90 Catholics; the remainder were dispersed along railroad divisions, in mining camps, and on the ranches." Later on, the same article praises Father Scanlon's accomplishments:

The Catholic population of Utah is sparse; nevertheless the bishop [the same Father Scanlon] has achieved marvels. He brought the Sisters of the Holy Cross from Indiana to Salt Lake City, to Ogden, to Park City, to Eureka. In Park City and Eureka the Sisters teach select and parochial schools; in Ogden they conduct the Sacred Heart Academy; in Salt Lake City the Sisters conduct St. Mary's Academy and also Holy Cross Hospital. The Kearns St. Ann's Orphanage, built by Senator and Mrs. Kearns, has, since its completion in 1900, been under the care of eleven Sisters of the same order.

All of this began when Father Scanlon decided that the ninety persons in the Salt Lake-Ogden area were enough to make a beginning. He decided that this would be the headquarters of the parish and that there had to be a school there. Religious sisters were needed to teach in the school. The Sisters of the Holy Cross, originally a French group, now with an independent motherhouse at Saint Mary's, Notre Dame, near South Bend, Indiana, were establishing a fine reputation as teachers. Father Scanlon and his immediate superior, Archbishop Joseph S. Alemany of San Francisco, agreed that if these sisters could come and organize it, the school would be a good one. They wrote to the sisters.

The letter was received in early April and presented to the sisters' council, the governing body of the congregation, on April 10, 1875. There was discussion for and against the request, but unfortunately no verbatim account of it can be found. Finally the council voted in the affirmative: the school would be accepted. At first, two sisters would go—Sister Ferdinand (Bruggerman) and Sister Guardian Angels (Porter).

So this might have been an account of the heroic **western adventures** of Sister Ferdinand or Sister Guardian Angels, except **that in the end** neither went. Sister Ferdinand asked to be excused from **the assignment**. The council then looked within its own membership and **asked its secretary, Mother M. Augusta (Anderson)**, if she would go. **She agreed. Then she** somehow got the point across that while Sister **Guardian Angels** would no doubt be very useful on the assignment, Sister **Raymond (Sullivan)** might be just a little better. On May 13, Sister **Raymond was named** to replace Sister Guardian Angels. It was also noted at **the meeting on that day** that the Salt Lake area "seems to promise a **great field. Both school and hospital seem to be desired.**"¹

Sister Augusta had been moving west all her life. **She was born in 1830 in Alexandria, Virginia, and baptized Ann Amanda, the youngest of the four Anderson children. Her mother died when Amanda was four,** and the father put the children in a prairie schooner and set out in a wagon train for Kansas. Somewhere between Alexandria and the town of Lancaster, Ohio, Amanda's eight-year-old brother **John was kidnapped** by roving gypsies. After a six-day search and a ransom contributed to by every family in the wagon train, John was restored to **his thoroughly shocked and frightened family.**

An aunt of the Anderson children, the sister of **their dead mother,** had married a Mr. Lilly and now lived on a farm near Lancaster. **The Andersons stayed some days with the Lillys while the wagon train made an extended stop. Mrs. Lilly suggested that it was too dangerous for Amanda to continue the journey, and her father reluctantly agreed. Amanda therefore remained behind with the Lillys and grew up in Lancaster, though she was always in touch with her father, brother, and two sisters. The Lilly farm was the Catholic center for that part of rural Ohio. Mass was offered there once a month by an itinerant priest, Father Casper H. Borges, later third bishop of Detroit. So Amanda was brought up in a firm and lively faith.**

The city of Lancaster was not just another midwestern farm town. Among its distinguished inhabitants were several who affected the life of Amanda Anderson and the order she would some day join. Chief among these were the Ewing, Blaine, and Gillespie families. **Thomas Ewing, lawyer and judge, had served as secretary of the treasury in the brief ad-**

ministration of President William Henry Harrison and for part of the administration of President John Tyler. Later, under President Zachary Taylor, he became the first secretary of the newly organized Department of the Interior. The Ewing family accepted William Tecumseh Sherman as their foster son at the age of nine when his own father died.² In 1850 Sherman married Ellen Ewing, daughter of Thomas.

Two sets of Ewing cousins, the Gillespies and the Blaines, also became part of Amanda's destiny. James Gillespie Blaine was a presidential candidate in 1884. Neil Gillespie was one of the first to graduate from the University of Notre Dame, and his older sister Eliza became Sister Mary Angela in 1853 and is generally regarded as the American foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Cross.

Eliza Gillespie had studied music in Lancaster under Mrs. Harriet Redmon, whose daughter, also named Harriet, had married a Mr. Lilly. There is no record of a relationship between the farm Lillys and the town Lillys, but it seems strongly likely. When Harriet Redmon Lilly's husband died, she decided to follow her friend Eliza Gillespie into the convent. On her trip from Lancaster to South Bend, Harriet was accompanied by Amanda Anderson and Mary Caren, both of whom also hoped to become Sisters of the Holy Cross. Amanda Anderson (Mother Augusta) and Harriet Lilly (Mother Elizabeth) each had a profound effect on the later history of the community. Mary Caren did not remain.

After the required year in the novitiate, Sister Augusta began her apostolic life by teaching grade school in Chicago. She then returned to Saint Mary's to serve in the "manual labor" school for girls who would have to earn their own living. She was given charge of a girls' academy in Morris, Illinois, but was suddenly removed from that work in December 1861 to join the sisters who were already nursing in the hospitals of the Civil War. She described her arrival at her first hospital assignment:

Although we were tired and sick for want of sleep, there was no rest for us. We pinned up our habits, got brooms and buckets of water, and washed the blood-stained walls and scrubbed the floors. Dr. Burke sent some men to carry away the legs, arms, and other pieces of human bodies that were lying around. We had no beds that night, but we slept as soundly as if we had

feathers under us. The hospital was full of sick and wounded, but after some days we succeeded in getting it comparatively clean.³

Sister Augusta remained at military hospitals throughout the war and beyond. She was in charge of the Overton Hospital in Memphis from June 1862 until August 1865. She then went to Cairo, Illinois, and took charge of a "pest house" which contained wives and children who had contracted small pox while trying to reach soldiers on either side of the recently erased line of hostilities. She got back to Saint Mary's briefly but returned to take charge of a newly opened hospital in Cairo in 1867. From this stay she brought back with her two orphaned children who simply had nowhere else to go. The boy, Florian DeVoto, was educated at Notre Dame, which in those days took elementary and prep as well as college students; his sister, Rose, went to Saint Mary's. Rose later taught at St. Mary's Academy in Salt Lake City. Florian remained to teach at Notre Dame for some time, but moved to Ogden, Utah, where his son, the brilliant historian Bernard DeVoto, was born in 1897.

There is no historical basis for the story that as a result of her nursing activities in the Civil War, Sister Augusta became a favorite of General Grant. It is likely, though, given her Lancaster connections, that she may have met General Sherman, especially since his family moved to South Bend and his daughter attended Saint Mary's during the war.

In 1870 Sister Augusta left Cairo to take up a position as general secretary and stewardess (buyer and provider) for the congregation. It was from this work that she went to Salt Lake City with Sister Raymond in 1875.

The Golden Spike had been laid in Promontory just six years before, so the sisters were able to take the train all the way to Utah. They were met by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Marshall, who took the sisters to their own house. There the sisters stayed until their convent was ready, which was not long. The house which the men of the area built for them was "a little adobe cottage, as unpretentious as the home of Nazareth."⁴ From the beginning the sisters were enthusiastic about their first western location. "I think this is one day to be a great center,"⁵ Sister Augusta wrote

back to the Reverend Edward F. Sorin, C.S.C., her highest superior and founder of the University of Notre Dame.

The sisters had been instructed that if possible they were to buy the property on which the school would be located. This would enable them to set up a "select school," for which they would take full responsibility: admitting the pupils, setting the course of study, selecting the textbooks, collecting the tuition, and paying the bills. This plan did not meet with the approval of Archbishop Alemany, who preferred a parish school, administered by the pastor and supervised by the archbishop. In either case, because of the great distances to some Catholic homes, the school would have to take boarders as well as day students. For this reason they were starting out with girls only, hoping to take small boys as soon as possible. Children would be accepted at whatever academic level they had attained, so there would be a wide range of ages and intellectual development.

Sister Augusta wrote back to her motherhouse that, when the rest of the faculty arrived, they would need "one first-class teacher." Her preference would be one of the following sisters: Pauline (Moriarity), Rose (Crowley), Blanche (Bigelow), and Rita (Brennan). She also specified Sister Anna (Crowley), a sister of Sister Rose, to teach drawing. She seemed intent on getting people she knew. Scrambling her syntax a little, she wrote, "I very much dread to have a Sister sent to this queer, far-off place that I do not know."⁶

Her next concern was to fund the school. Salt Lake City was surrounded by mines—Bingham Canyon, twenty miles to the southwest, was one of the richest copper deposits in the world and also contained lead, zinc, gold, and silver. While many of the miners did not have their families with them, some of them did; and even those who did not were willing to support a Catholic school. Father Denis Kiely, Father Scanlon's first and at that time only assistant, guided and accompanied Mother Augusta and whatever sister went with her among the outlying mining areas, explaining to the men what the sisters hoped to do. Usually they returned wearily at the end of a day, but sometimes they were gone as long as a week. It was on these expeditions that the sisters realized why a hospital had been mentioned in the original letter along with a school.

Mining was a dangerous business, and there was no central place to take the seriously injured and care for them. When Mother Augusta spoke of starting a school, some of the miners told her that a hospital was what was really needed. She promised them that there would be a hospital, too.

She usually met with good results. The men were chronically short of cash, but promised donations on the next payday. And they kept their word. "Miners," she wrote back to Father Sorin, "are *not* like fashionables, who sometimes think the name enough without the money."⁷

The school building was going up with amazing rapidity. Fort Douglas, an army post nearby, had an architect in the person of Captain G. C. Davis of the Fourteenth U.S. Infantry. Mother Augusta described what she wanted, and Captain Davis drew up the plans. Excavations began on June 21, 1875. The first shovel of ground was turned by Mr. D. C. McGlynn, who had made the first money donation toward the school. He also donated the tin for the roof. W. S. Potter served as foreman, carpenter, and overseer of plans and specifications. S. W. Carlisle was the stonemason, and Louis Moser and John Snell laid the first stones of the foundation June 27.⁸ Window frames, sashes, stairs, and casings were the work of Joseph Salisbury, William Berklon, and Henry Raddon. Roofing material other than the tin was provided by M. B. Callahan. J. M. Allen took care of heating and plumbing and W. Lemmon did all the painting.

By July 12 they had enrolled fifteen boarders and fifty day students. Not all were Catholics. Mormons and Protestants were showing an interest in the new school. Father Scanlon officiated at the laying of the cornerstone in August, assisted by Father Kiely, and named the school Saint Mary of the Assumption.

Sisters Pauline, Anna, Josepha (McHale), Holy Innocents (McLaren), and Petronella (Piggott) arrived in mid-August. Sister Holy Innocents was to teach music and Sister Petronella was a cook, which ensured regular and substantial meals.

It seems incredible that the structure could have had a roof on it by the first week of September, but opening day was set for Monday, September 6. On Sunday, September 5,

a Mormon Bishop proclaimed from the pulpit that no Mormons would be permitted to send their children to the Sisters' school

* under penalty of being cut off from the church. Consequently, few returned for school, though many parents had registered their daughters. The Catholic population of the city consisted of nine or ten families, but so generous was the non-Catholic patronage that by the end of the first week of school the enrollment was one hundred day pupils and six boarders. At the end of the first year there were twenty-five boarders.⁹

The first student enrolled was Nannie Marshall, daughter of the family who had given the sisters hospitality on their arrival.

It will be seen that even if Mother Augusta functioned as full-time administrator and fundraiser, and Sister Holy Innocents taught music all day, the pupil-teacher ratio was a little better than forty to one, which was average or better than average for Catholic schools in those days. Nevertheless, the sisters must have been counting on a continuous increase, for before September was over, the motherhouse sent three more sisters: Sisters Eugenie (D'Orbesson), Gertrude (Kunze), and Martha (Ready).

Two months after the young ladies began their classes, an addition was ready on the little adobe house and Sister Gertrude opened a school for small boys. Mother Augusta's office was nearby, in case Sister Gertrude needed any backup, but Mother Augusta probably did not teach. She had too many other responsibilities.

She was able to rent a two-story brick house on Fifth East Street in which to make a start on a hospital. In October 1875 Sister Holy Cross (Welsh) and Sister Bartholomew (Darnell) came from Saint Mary's to begin setting up the hospital and receiving patients. Dr. Allan Fowler, Dr. D. Benedict, and his brother Dr. J. M. Benedict agreed to treat the patients without a fee. The hospital was soon overcrowded. Sometimes the only available beds were the two being used by the sisters; then the sisters gave up their beds and slept on the floor.

Miners subscribed to the hospital at the rate of one dollar a month, "paid regularly while in health."¹⁰ It was an early form of health insurance.¹¹ The care for those who subscribed was entirely free, not only the doctors' services, but room, nursing care, food, and medicines. Those who chose not to subscribe were charged ten dollars a week plus physicians' fees. The sisters had flyers printed and distributed in the area with

this information clearly stated. The three doctors were described in the flyer as “a corps of the best Physicians of the City.”

Sister Martha left the group at the school to become cook at the hospital—not only for the two sister nurses, but for all the patients. She only stayed one year. In 1876 Sister Alcantara (Evans) and Sister Martina (McMahon) joined the original pair. Both are listed as nurses. For that year the four sisters apparently shared the cooking duties.

For the year 1877–78 Sister Petronella came from the school to take up the cooking chores. Sister Holy Cross, the superior, and Sister Bartholomew, her assistant, shared the nursing duties with Sister Martina. Other kinds of help were provided: Sister Gonzales (Meagher) took over all the laundry work, which must have been considerable, and Sister Zita (Murphy) did most of the housekeeping.

This was the situation in Salt Lake City when Mother Augusta left the city. The three years she had spent in founding the hospital and the school were a longer time than she had expected to spend. Like all of her work, the tasks were done well. Both institutions had long lives ahead of them.

Because pioneers do not have much time for writing things down, there is not much in the written record about these three years. An account from a much later student gives us an idea of St. Mary's eventual development. Ann Bassett apparently enrolled in St. Mary's Academy on October 22, 1898. She later wrote:

Father decided to send me to a Catholic convent in Salt Lake City, Utah. . . . I was met at the station by the Sisters [and later] tabulated and turned out among 400 girls of every age and size, from tots to twenties. . . . Our clothing was beautifully pressed and placed ready to wear. . . . And what thrilling sensations I experienced listening for those innumerable bells to ring! . . . At the slightest symptoms of illness or fatigue we were gently whisked away to another part of this endless building, to the infirmary.¹²

We learn from the records of later years that there was a great Pontifical High Mass in St. Mary's Cathedral in Salt Lake City when Sister

Holy Cross died in 1898, with Bishop Scanlon as celebrant and Father Kiely as homilist. In the oratorical style of the day, Father Kiely reviewed the sister's life in Salt Lake City.

In a building on Fifth East for a temporary hospital, her labors began.

There she labored most devotedly, and under the most trying circumstances for seven years. With only one Sister to assist, they had at times as many as fifty patients to be watched, cared for, and nursed. Often to meet pressing demands, she gave up her own apartments, and slept on the floor; still oftener would she be a week without rest, or sleep, save only perhaps a few hours in the day, when she would entrust her patients to other hands. Her broad charity, tempered with the greatest patience, and entirely devoid of selfishness, won for her the affection, love, good will and generous support of all who knew her.¹³

While her school and hospital were growing in Utah, Mother Augusta returned to Saint Mary's, where she was assigned to serve four one-year terms as superior in four different establishments, adding to her experience in both school administration and nursing administration. She was then elected to a six-year term as mother superior of all the Sisters of the Holy Cross. Then, with a change in the sisters' constitutions, she served another six-year term with the title of superior general, leaving major office in 1895. During her twelve years in charge of the congregation she added to its missions five parish schools (three of them in Utah),¹⁴ five academies (three of them in the West), and four more hospitals.

She lived twelve more years and died at 8 P.M. on Christmas Eve of 1907. There were no Pontifical High Masses or lavish homilies for her. Many of the bishops, priests, and religious leaders she had worked with were themselves dead by then. The motherhouse records contain copies of articles about her death from the South Bend *Tribune* and the South Bend *Times*, the Cairo (Illinois) *Bulletin*, the *Catholic Columbian Record* of Columbus, Ohio, and the Saint Mary's *Chimes*. There was also one from the *Intermountain Catholic* of Salt Lake City, an editorial written by her

old friend Father Kiely, remembering her work and praising her virtues. Twelve priests of the Congregation of the Holy Cross order were on the altar for her funeral mass, including the Reverend Gilbert Francais, fourth superior general.

The school which Mother Augusta had opened in 1875 became Saint Mary's Academy and later the College of Saint Mary-of-the-Wasatch. The college closed in 1959 and the high school in 1969. In 1994 circumstances necessitated the sale of the Holy Cross Hospital to Health Trust of Nashville.

The Sisters of the Holy Cross are still serving the people of Utah, but in less institutionalized ways. Many are working in smaller towns and rural areas, following, as Mother Augusta did, the precept of their founder, the Reverend Basil A. Moreau, "Do what needs doing."

Mother M. Augusta Anderson

been one tenth a very small fraction of a percent in 1848. The
Father Soudon's parishioners numbered only 500 of these people. If the
Catholics of Utah had been spread over every city would have been told
that they were the only Catholics in the state.



Mother Augusta (Anderson) during her tenure as mother superior of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross. Photo courtesy of the motherhouse of the order.