THE ROLE OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS
IN KANSAS HISTORY, 1841-1981

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In our free society, we are abolishing the past, not by rewriting it, but simply by losing all interest in it. This is as fatal for a society as it is for a man to lose his memory.

These words of Barbara Ward are even more relevant for the 1980's than they were when she wrote them nearly 30 years ago. Today, the woeful results of the neglect of history are evident on every educational level.

What, it may be asked, has the decline in the study of history to do with a guide to the archival sources of women's religious communities in the United States, the project which has engaged my attention these past three years and which nears completion at the present time? The direct relationship can be summarized succinctly in the simple statement, according to the well-known author and historian, John Tracy Ellis, in his foreword to that Guide, "No documents, no history." Regardless of advances made in recent years by new approaches and new methods of research, historians still depend on documentary evidence in one form or another for their knowledge of what happened, what was said, and what was thought by those who have gone before us. Therefore, it is necessary to preserve and professionally organize and arrange these documents and make them available for the research scholar to write the biographies of individuals or the histories of groups of individuals associated in a common enterprise, whether that enterprise be of a religious, political, commercial, or social nature.

It is now nearly a century since Pope Leo XIII on August 8, 1883, issued his memorable letter on historical studies. He there urged research workers to "keep vividly in mind" the oft-quoted words of Cicero that "the first law of history is to dread uttering falsehood, and the next not to fear stating the truth . . . ." The pontiff then declared:

Thus having compiled works of greater compass from the documents esteemed most accurate, it will only be needful to extract from those the leading points, briefly and lucidly put, an easy task, indeed, but of no mean utility, and worthy, therefore, of engaging the labours of lofty intellects.

Fresh emphasis has lately been given to Pope Leo's letter in the fascinating book by Owen Chadwick, Catholicism and History: The Opening of the Vatican Archives, when the learned Cambridge historian remarked: "The contents of the letter made it one of the most important utterances of a pope in modern times." It did, indeed, and the tradition inaugurated by Leo XIII in 1883 was the prime motivation for undertaking the present work.

Among all religions, civic and ethnic organizations in America, Catholic religious orders of women are among the few who have preserved continuous records and manuscripts which document the lives and activities of their members. The impact, dating back to the early 18th century, has been felt not only by the American Catholic population, but also by millions of Americans of other or of no religious affiliation, who have been and still are affected by their educational and social endeavors.

Over the years, dedicated communities of women religious have served the people of America in every aspect of their lives, regardless of race, color, or creed. The recent canonization of Mother Elizabeth Ann Seton and the award of the Nobel Prize to Mother Teresa of Calcutta, India, whose sisters work also with the downtrodden in New York, Detroit, and Saint Louis, give testimony to world awareness and recognition of dedicated service.

The contribution of these unsung heroines cannot be written in a vacuum. They influenced, and, in turn, were influenced, not only by the religious conditions of their time but also by the social, political, and economic conditions of the milieu in which they mini-

Mother Bridget Hayden
(1814-1890)

Old log church at Osage Mission

Rev. John Schoenmakers
(1807-1883)
tered. A felt need of society and a generous response to that need led to the establishment of the various congregations regardless of time or place. The earliest women religious to arrive in what would later become the United States were the French Ursulines, who came to New Orleans in 1727, the forerunners of dozens of religious communities of women from the Old World who responded to the needs of millions of their fellow citizens, transplanted to these shores during the 19th century. The numerous houses of Benedictine nuns, for example, represent a religious and cultural vein dating from their founding in the six century and introduced to the young republic of the West with the arrival of the first members in 1852. The Sisters of Saint Joseph, the community of which I am a member, came to Saint Louis from Lyons, France, in 1836 bringing a heritage from its establishment in 1650 to meet the needs of the neglected members of society, through persecutions during the French Revolution. From Saint Louis, this congregation today has 20 motherhouses and provincial houses with a membership of about 15,000 sisters in the United States.

These communities worked among the immigrants in the East and followed the frontier from coast to coast establishing schools and hospitals and engaging in other works of charity. As groups these women made a corporate impact on their times, and as individuals they emerged as educators, administrators, and as women who met specific needs. They nursed—over 500 of them—in the “floating hospitals” of the Civil War and in the Spanish-American War, in leprosaria, and in epidemics of cholera and yellow fever. Today, they are found in innercity areas, in far-flung mission territories, and in Thailand, assisting Cambodian refugees. There is so much history, civil and church, intertwined with histories of these congregations that it is difficult to separate the one from the other.

As we celebrated the bicentennial year, Americans became acutely attuned to the importance of “Heritage.” A seeking to know our glorious past demonstrated the value of organizing and preserving documents which make that past understandable to the present. Women religious have become caught up in that urge for this reason, a search for roots, but primarily, because of the admonitions of Vatican II that they seek out the spirit and charm of their founder in their renewal programs.

Realizing the richness of this documentary material in their congregational archives, which up to this time had been relatively unknown, and therefore, unrecognized by the research scholar, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) initiated an ar-

Opposite page—Two groups of women religious were well established on the Kansas frontier before Kansas was organized as a territory. The first group, four sisters of the Sacred Heart, arrived at Sugar Creek in July, 1841, to work with Jesuit missionaries with the Potawatomi Indians. Another group, Sisters of Loretto from Nerinx, Ky., came at the request of Rev. John Schoenmakers to teach in a girls’ school at Osage Mission which had been established by the Jesuits in 1847 near present St. Paul. Mother Bridget Hayden was one of the four Sisters of Loretto who first taught practical household arts at the Osage Manual Labor School, and later the four R’s at the elementary and secondary levels. Photographs of the old log church and Father Schoenmakers reproduced from W. W. Graves, Life and Letters of Father Ponziuglio, Schoenmakers and Other Early Jesuits at Osage Mission (St. Paul, the author, 1916).
The Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth arrived in Kansas in 1858 and are still contributing significantly to education and health care in the state. Their initial foundation in Leavenworth was a hospital, St. John's, the first civilian hospital in Kansas and the only one to survive the Civil War. Photograph reproduced from Lamps on the Prairie (Writer's Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Kansas, Emporia Gazette Press, 1942).

Archives project at its national assembly in Milwaukee, Wis., in 1975. I became national director of the project in September, 1976.

The measurable goals projected for the project were:

- To arouse awareness among American women religious of their heritage and of their contributions to the church and to American society.
- To secure basic archival training for those entrusted with the organization, preservation, and availability of these documents.
- To encourage professional growth of our religious archivists.
- To develop a survey instrument and conduct a mail survey of 500-600 motherhouse archives in the United States with WATS line and field visit follow-up.
- To organize, categorize, and edit results of the survey.
- To publish and disseminate the results of the survey.
- To grant access to these resource materials to the research scholar and thereby to bring an additional 500-600 sites into the mainstream for researchers of women's organizations.
- To correlate data in this survey with the Directory of Archives and Manuscripts Repositories, published by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), thus assuring articulation into the NHPRC data bank, and into future editions of the Directory.\[18\]

With a grant of $32,400 from NHPRC, six workshops in Boston, New York, Dayton (2), San Antonio, and San Rafael offered basic archival training to 375 sister archivists and a grant of $98,956 from the National Endowment for the Humanities made possible the survey of the documents. The survey has not been confined to the archives of the 126,000 Catholic sisterhoods but has included manuscript repositories of Episcopal and Orthodox sisters as well as Lutheran, Mennonite, and Methodist deaconesses, lending an ecumenical note appropriate for our time.

A cross section of 40 repositories, dating from the early 18th century to the 20th-century Maryknoll Sisters of New York and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament of Philadelphia, were visited by seven field personnel during the summer of 1979. The richness of the collections attests to the value of over 500 entries in the Guide.

There are documents in these archives which trace American foundations to the Middle Ages, to suppressions in 16th-century England, to upheavals in church and state during the French Revolution, the Kulturkampf in

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18. Goals set for the LCWR archives project, approved by the board of directors, as submitted in the proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities, May 19, 1975.
Germany, and more recent persecutions in Mexico, Cuba, and Hungary. There are records of well-known European Catholic organizations that aided the American missions: the Propagation of the Faith (France), the Leopoldinenstiftung (Austria), and the Ludwigsmissionsverein (Bavaria) which sent financial aid to some of these congregations.

As we examine the documents emerging from the LCWR archives project, one fact is universally true, namely, that women religious of America have stood ready at all times to meet new and varied needs of the church and society. Early apostolates of teaching and health care are still fundamental but they have expanded at all levels and specializations to meet requirements of those levels; into health care beyond managing and staffing hospitals to meeting the needs of the terminally ill in hospices and to those of the chemically dependent and geriatric patient in specialized programs.

When the United States was still considered a missionary country at the end of the 19th century, Katherine Drexel of the Philadelphia banking family, established a community whose ministry was to the American Indian and the Negro. This vision became world-wide by Mother Mary Joseph Rogers and by hundreds of other American communities that now conduct missions in all areas of the Third World. It was my privilege to see over 110 linear feet of hand-written diaries, including those of 47 Maryknoll Sisters interred by the Japanese during World War II, when I visited the archives of that congregation in 1979—a veritable treasure for the scholar who will research Chinese history from 1912 to 1965.19

So much for the congregations actively engaged in multitudinous works in the United States today. It is true that the sisters’ congregations have witnessed a marked decline in numbers since the mid-1960’s, yet as of the beginning of 1980 they still remained a controlling factor in 720 hospitals with 34,252,953 patients annually, 497 homes for the aged with 63,245 residents, and in maintaining 40,000 sisters in teaching positions from elementary schools to universities in a private educational system that had a total enrollment of over 3,675,000 students.20

And what about the beautiful contribution of the contemplative nuns to our society? Their prayer life remains the undergirding of the work of all of us since the Discalced Carmelites Nuns from Holland came to Port Tobacco, Md., in 1790, the year after our constitution was adopted and the same year John Carroll, S.J., was consecrated first Bishop of Baltimore.

19. Maryknoll was one of the 40 archival centers visited during the LCWR archives project.
The correspondence between sisters in this Carmel and Bishop Carroll and other civic and ecclesiastical leaders has been preserved (now in Baltimore)—not in acid-proof Hollinger boxes but wrapped carefully in brown paper awaiting classification by a trained archivist.

A touching interview of a columnist of the Charlotte (N.C.) Observer, December 23, 1979, defines the role of the contemplative nun in today’s society:

The inconspicuous brick building on Pleasantburg Drive is the home of twenty-four Poor Clare Nuns. It is a cloister, a retreat for prayer and consolation, a place where human time vanishes and eternal order repeats the pattern and ritual of the ages. It is a place of quiet for the Order of St. Clare practices what its abbess, Sister Mary Lucy, calls “the privilege of silence.” If Sister Mary Lucy is an example of the woman who has chosen this special life, it is a vital, concerned way of living. In her 40’s, blind, a woman who prays silently for hours during the day, she is animated and direct, articulate and loving in her concern for others. She explains: “We are here for others because we love the world. Because everything in the work matters to us—political campaigns, the Cambodian boat people, a worker’s job. There is nothing that is not important because it matters to Christ.”

A year and a half ago, at Columbia University, the present day interest in prayer was evident when scholars of every persuasion—Catholic, Protestant, Hebrew, Hindu, Buddhist—probed prayer in all its aspects. Three contemplative nuns participated on a panel, “Women Contemplatives Past and Present.” Sharing their private diaries and personal experiences with others through this LCWR Guide fulfills another need of 20th-century scholars.

What impact, you may ask, has been made on the history of Kansas by women religious? Before Kansas was organized as a territory and before John Baptiste Miege, S.J., was named vicar apostolic by Pope Pius IX of the newly formed ecclesiastical district, stretching from the western boundary of Missouri to the Rocky mountains and the Canadian border line, and including a tract of approximately 390,000 square miles, two groups of women religious were well established on the Kansas frontier. The Religious of the Sacred Heart, founded in Paris in 1800, and brought to Saint Charles, Mo., in 1818, sent four sisters in 1841 to work with the Jesuit fathers among the Pottawatomie Indians, recently migrated to the territory along the western boundary of Missouri. The Jesuit missionaries, Charles Van Quickborne, Felix Verreydt, and Christian Hoecken, had worked among the Kickapoo, the Osage, and among the Pottawatomies since the 1830’s.

The Religious of the Sacred Heart arrived at Sugar Creek in July, 1841, to initiate their work among the Kansas Pottawatomies. They were the first women religious to work in Kansas and to this courageous group of pioneer women just tribute should be paid. Among the group who traveled to Independence by steamboat and thence by wagon over the military road for another 75 miles were Mothers Philippine Duchesne, Lucille Mathevon, Mary Anne O’Connor, and a lay sister, Louise Amyot. It was at the insistence of Father Pierre DeSmet that they undertook this venture, one unique in the history of the Society. He had collected the sum of $500 for the proposed mission. The party was met by two Indians who told them that the night before the tribesmen had come from all directions to welcome the women of the Great Spirit only to meet with disappointment. The remainder of the trip was like a grand procession with Indians stationed at intervals along the line of march. The Indian women approached the sisters on their arrival and kissed them individually. They were followed by the men who shook hands with them—all these tokens of welcome were repeated over 700 times. The enrollment reached 50 within a short time and many visitors and agents of the government commented favorably on the teaching of the sisters.

Rev. N. Sayres Harris, inspector in 1844 of the Episcopal mission schools in Indian country, visited Sugar Creek and observed:

At one of the Roman Catholic schools I learned the fondness of the Indians for embroidery is cultivated with success; by this one interest, so to speak, they may be led to perfection. In some instances we have felt pained by the well-meant but unwise crushing and quelching of Indian tendencies. Better to train and direct and make use of them for good.

23. “It was for the sake of the Indians that Mother Duchesne felt inspired to establish the order in America,” St. Madeleine Sophie Barat, foundress of the Religious of the Sacred Heart. The sanctity of Mother Duchesne (1769-1852) was recognized by the Indians who called her “the woman who always prays.” The Catholic Church also recognized this sanctity when it beatified her in 1940.
Nor were the useful arts of homemaking neglected; in fact, the girls would, in turn, teach their Indian mothers these arts and this course in adult education continued during the years the sisters worked at Sugar Creek. What astonished visitors and elicited commendation was the fluency with which the Indian girls sang in four languages—native, English, Latin, and French. Neither of the schools taught by the Jesuits or the sisters at Sugar Creek became boarding schools because of lack of room. It was not until schools were established on the north bank of the Kaw at St. Mary's in 1848 that boarders were accepted. St. Mary's, located on the military road between Fort Leavenworth and Fort Riley offered hospitality to other religious enroute to Arizona and New Mexico.

The school served Indian girls for a period of 20 years but government subsidies proved insufficient, personnel was limited, and the influx of white settlers into the area revolutionized life at St. Mary's in 1869. The decision of the Jesuits to establish a college for Catholic youth of the West led to a division of property, establishment of the sisters school on a level with others operated by the society with Indian girls now received only as day students in a free school. Ten years later in 1879, circumstances led to the withdrawal of the Religious of the Sacred Heart from the Kansas missions at the time the society opened mission fields in New Zealand.

Now we turn to the Osage Mission in southeastern Kansas to complete the early foundations. At the request of Pres. James K. Polk and Bishop Peter Richard Kenrick of St. Louis, the Jesuits established the Osage Mission. This became the nucleus of missionary expansion throughout the southeastern and south-central part of the state as St. Mary's held a parallel position in the northern part. On April 7, 1847, Father John Schoenmakers, Father John Bax, and three lay brothers traveled to the Neosho valley and set up headquarters not far from present St. Paul to work among the Osage and neighboring tribes. The school was called Osage Manual Labor School. Father Schoenmakers entreated the Religious of the Sacred Heart to open a school for the girls of the tribe similar to that at Sugar Creek but lack of personnel by that congregation led to another congregation, the Sisters of Loretto from Nerinx, Ky., accepting the challenge of this frontier mission. From St. Genevieve, Mo., four Sisters of Loretto, including Mother Concordia Henning, Sisters Bridget Hayden, Mary Petronilla Van Prater, and Vincentia McCool, braved the privations of the frontier and manifested the same efficiency and devotion to the cause of education. The school for the daughters of the red men had to be cleaning, sewing, laundry, making beds, and plain everyday occupations for women in the home, a curriculum striking in contrast to that in their schools for whites in more settled areas. The four R's followed, then gradual organization into primary, intermediate, and elementary divisions. These were the steps that gradually built up to the secondary level, but it was a long and weary climb to the palmy days of St. Ann's Academy, later at that place.

During the Civil War, the location of Osage Mission was in a dangerous position as it stood exactly on the line dividing the two warring parties. Besides, they were entirely isolated since the nearest town was 40 miles distant.

Following the Osage treaty of September 19, 1865, made at Canville Trading Post, by which the Osage Indians ceded their land holdings in Neosho and Labette to the United States, they began to move west and the Osage Mission ceased to be an Indian reservation. On January 1, 1867, the land was opened to white settlers. The religious care of the Osages was entrusted to the Quakers so a new apostolate was opened to the Sisters of Loretto at the time they were forced to abandon their work with the Indian girls. Under the leadership of Mother Bridget

25. "During the year 1868, we were visited by the Bishop of Santa Fe (J. B. Lamy), who, on his return trip to his diocese, was accompanied by three Jesuit Fathers, three secular priests, three seminarians, two Sisters of Charity and three Sisters of Loretto. We were happy to give hospitality to these edifying Sisters. The route to Santa Fe is very dangerous because of the Indians who attack and pillage caravans all along the trail. The Bishop and his party had experienced this. They were suddenly attacked by a marauding band of savages, but were able to defend themselves, killing four chiefs and scattering the other Indians. The Sisters were so terrified that we understand one of them died of fright and one of the seminarians fell a victim of cholera on the way. Only after much danger and hardship did the party reach its destination." Letter Annals 1867-1868. Religious of the Sacred Heart Archives, St. Louis, Mo. An account of this incident is given in detail by Sr. Blandina Segale, SC, At the End of the Santa Fe Trail (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1943), pp. 89-92.


Hayden, the Industrial School was remodeled and renamed St. Ann's Academy for young ladies. It flourished from 1870 to 1895 when it was destroyed by fire and the sisters decided to withdraw from Kansas. Today, the religious orders of women working in Kansas look back to the example and solid base laid by these first two groups working among the Indians and early settlers of the state.

The next congregation to arrive in Kansas in 1858 and still contributing significantly to education and health care in the state was the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth. They trace their beginnings to the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Ky., one of the first American-founded congregations in the United States. Sixteen members of an autonomous group from Nashville, Tenn., led by Mother Xavier Ross, answered the request of Bishop Jean Baptiste Migea to work in his vicariate. Their initial foundation in Leavenworth was a hospital, St. John's, built in 1863 during the Civil War. It was the first civilian hospital in Kansas and the only one to survive the war. St. Vincent's Home opened by the sisters in 1866 is believed to be the first orphanage in the state. During the cholera epidemic of 1867, three sisters went to Fort Harker to offer assistance to victims there and brought back four orphans, children of a service family. The Sisters of Charity opened an academy and taught in parochial schools, built hospitals and a college in this state and other states of the West.

With the influx of settlers into the state after the Civil War, each decade brought corresponding numbers of congregations from Europe or from other parts of the United States to move westward in the state to meet new needs. In 1863 seven Benedictine sisters arrived from St. Cloud (St. Joseph), Minn., under the leadership of Mother Evangelista Kremmeter to establish that congregation in Atchison, and to staff a day and boarding school. Today, jointly they conduct Benedictine College with the Benedictine fathers.

Catholic colonies, as those established by other denominations in Kansas, preserved much of the cultural heritage they brought to America while acquiring the culture of the new environment. A splendid example of this characteristic is found in the interesting (Men-


Six sisters of St. Joseph enroute to Arizona to assist in mission work there, were persuaded by Bishop Louis M. Fink of Leavenworth because of Indian uprisings in Arizona to stay and work in Kansas. They opened a school in Newton in 1883, but moved the Motherhouse to its present location in Concordia the following year. The entrance to the present Nazareth Motherhouse is shown at right. Two congregations of the Sisters of St. Joseph now operate schools, colleges, and hospitals in Kansas today. Below, a photograph of Mother Antonette Cuff, founder of Marymount College, Salina, is superimposed on a photograph of Antonette Hall on the Marymount campus. The college which was opened in 1922 was the first college for women in Kansas.

28. W. W. Graves, Life and Times of Mother Bridget Hayden (St. Paul: Journal Press, 1938); records of United States Indian Department, Washington, D.C. A charocal portrait of Mother Bridget Hayden can be found in the Kansas State Historical Society Museum, Topeka.


nonite, Lutheran, and Catholic) Russian-German settlements. Driven from Germany by military conscription, invited into the fertile Volga region by Catherine the Great, envied by the native Russians who induced Catherine's successors to rescind some privileges granted them, they found their way to Kansas in 1876. When the Catholic group settled in Ellis county, the Capuchin fathers from Pennsylvania were invited to minister to them and in 1879, the Sisters of St. Agnes of Fond du Lac, Wis., arrived in Herzog (present-day Victoria) to open a parochial school, the first west of Topeka. These sisters are still engaged in school and hospital work in western Kansas. 

The decades of the 1880's and 1890's witnessed accelerated settlement of the state with accompanying invitations to congregations of women religious to meet educational, health care, and other eleemosynary needs of the settlers. Nine different groups of sisters came during this period to open schools, hospitals, and orphanages, primarily in the southeastern and central parts of the state.

Six Sisters of St. Joseph, under the leadership of Mother Stanislaus Leary en route to Florence, Ariz., to assist in the missions of Bishop John B. Salpointe, vicar apostolic of Arizona, were persuaded by Bishop Louis M. Fink of Leavenworth that due to uprising of the Indians in Arizona, they should work in Kansas. They opened a school in Newton in 1883 but moved the motherhouse to its present location in Concordia the following year. With a division of the state of Kansas into three dioceses in 1887, the following year a second congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph was formed from Concordia with headquarters in Wichita. Both groups operate schools, colleges, and hospitals in the state today.

The Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a congregation founded by Mother Mary Frances Clarke and serving on the Iowa frontier since 1843, arrived in Wichita in 1887 and opened an academy for girls and are still engaged in secondary education there.

In 1888 a need to provide care for orphan black children prompted the Oblate Sisters of Providence of Baltimore, Md., to open the Guardian Angel Orphanage in Leavenworth.


34. Marymount College, Salina, conducted by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, opened in 1922 and was the first college for women in the state. St. Mary of the Plains College, Dodge City, is conducted by the Wichita Sisters of St. Joseph.


37. Among the few manuscript papers extant are some of the early candidates to enter this order. These were discovered as an important find in the LCWR archives project, 1978.
They contributed greatly for a period of 80 years but withdrew in 1938 when there was need for their services elsewhere. During that period many of the Negro sisters received degrees at The St. Mary College which was near by Leavenworth.38

Three congregations arrived in Kansas between 1883 and 1889 primarily to open hospitals which were lacking on the frontier with the exception of St. John’s Hospital, Leavenworth, and the few dispensaries along the roads to the West.

In 1883 the Sisters of St. Francis from Colorado Springs, Colo., opened what later became St. Mary’s Hospital in Emporia.39 These sisters remained in charge until 1963 when another group of Franciscan sisters from Dubuque, Iowa, replaced them and continue to operate the hospital in Emporia today.40

In 1884 the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis from Cincinnati founded St. Margaret’s Hospital in Kansas City, Kan., and amalgamated in 1971 with Providence Hospital, conducted by the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, as the Providence-St. Margaret Health Center.41

The Sisters of Mercy, founded in Dublin, Ireland, in 1831 by Mother Catherine McAuley, and brought to the United States in 1843 to Pittsburgh, Pa., spread across the country establishing schools and hospitals. They came to Fort Scott in 1886 from Grand Rapids, Mich., to open what became Mercy Hospital in that place and continue to conduct hospitals in the state.42

St. Francis Hospital, Wichita, the largest of the Catholic hospitals in the state was established in 1889 by the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother, a community founded in Rome, Italy, in 1833 by a Bavarian woman, later known as Mother Mary Frances Streitel. The hospital in Wichita was the first American mission of the sisters where the health care pioneers earned $50 a month working and nursing in Wichita to rent the original three-story brick house located in rural fields north of the Kansas cowtown. Centrally located on the same site in today’s metropolitan Wichita, the present medical complex of 886 beds would cost well over $120 million to replace.43

The Ursuline sisters from Louisville, Ky., arrived on the Kansas scene in 1894 to build their motherhouse and academy at Paola and contribute to the present day to education in the eastern part of the state.44

In 1902 the Dominican sisters from Brooklyn, N.Y., opened schools in Great Bend and have since then taught in parochial schools and operated hospitals in that same part of the state.45 In the same year, the Sister Adorers of the Blood of Christ arrived in Wichita from Ruma, Ill., to work in education and health care and established Wichita as provincial headquarters for the congregation in this region.46

During the last decades of the 19th century, the vision of establishing a deaconess community among the Mennonites is attributed to Rev. David Goerz of Newton. Inspired by the work of the first deaconess motherhouse founded in Kaiserswerth, Germany, in 1826, the Bethel Deaconess Home and Hospital Society was incorporated in 1903 to meet needs similar to those met by the Catholic sisters at an earlier date, namely, to meet the health needs of the people and give the world a definite Christian testimony in service and love. Bethany Deaconess Hospital and School of Nursing was built in 1908, staffed by three ordained deaconesses, Sisters Frieda Kaufman, Catherine Voss, and Ida Epp, who had received training in deaconess hospitals outside the state. This training school became well known and the contribution of the deaconesses throughout the next 66 years outstanding. Today only seven deaconesses remain, most in retired living in a home near the hospital in North Newton.47

40. Sisters of St. Francis Archives, Dubuque, Iowa.
41. Franciscan Sisters of the Poor Archives, Brooklyn, N.Y.
42. Sisters of Mercy Archives, Fort Scott.
43. "St. Francis Hospital Continues to Grow," Wichita Eagle and Beacon, July 8, 1975; St. Francis Hospital, 1899-1964 (Wichita: 1964).
45. Dominican Sisters Archives, Great Bend; Irene Hartman, O.P., Mother Antonina Fischer (Great Bend: privately printed, 1977).
47. Katie Funk Wiebe, Our Lamps Were Lit: An Informal History of the Bethel Deaconess Hospital School of Nursing (North Newton: 1978).
The first hospital in Salina, predating St. John's Hospital (1914) and Asbury Hospital (1921), was St. Barnabas Hospital opened in 1910 under the auspices of the Episcopal Church. The Sisters of Consolation, an Episcopal order of women religious under the leadership of Mother Mary Helena, ministered to the sick of that city from 1913 to 1922, when the hospital was closed and the sisters moved to St. Luke's Hospital in El Dorado where they were engaged in similar work the following year.

Today throughout Kansas there are 2,211 women religious continuing the same dedication their forebears manifested on the frontiers of our state a century or more ago. We find them in 89 elementary schools, 18 high schools,* and six colleges** with combined enrollments of approximately 30,000 students, as well as in Newman club centers and in 19 hospitals with a total annual patient census of 787,454. They conduct homes for dependent children and the aged with centers for special education, family life, and retreats to meet the needs of late 20th-century society.

The heritage that these women religious have left to our state and our nation should not be lost or forgotten but rather woven into the fabric of American religious and social history in a way that will endure and make real what Yves Congar, O.P., had in mind when he stated:

The more we know and think, the better we see how closely successive eras are bound together and to what extent each young generation is borne by its elders, who, in turn, owe everything to those who preceded them.

We are always building on foundations others have laid and are reaping the fruits of what others have sown.***

48. Christ Cathedral Archives, Salina.
50. Enrollment in elementary 18,357. —Official Catholic Directory.
51. Enrollment in secondary 6,418. —Ibid.
52. Enrollment in colleges 4,723. —Ibid. Benedictine College, Atchison; St. Mary of the Plains College, Dodge City; Donnelly College, Kansas City; The Saint Mary College, Leavenworth; Marymount College, Salina; and Kansas Newman College, Wichita.
53. Total bed capacity 3,991; patients annually 787,454. —Ibid.