



THE VIEW FROM THE BLUFF

NOVEMBER 2019

SISTERS OF CHARITY OF OUR LADY OF MERCY

CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA



Mother M.

Francis Robb

1931-1937 & 1940-1946

Cecilia Agnes Marie Robb, the future Sister M. Francis, was born in Hoboken, NJ, on December 31, 1877. Her Irish-born parents, William and Ann Crumley Robb, moved the family to Philadelphia, PA, during her childhood. Cecilia received her primary and secondary education in the City's public schools prior to her entrance into the OLM Community on December 8, 1899. The records do not indicate how she learned about our Community. However, oral tradition maintains that there was a priest in Philadelphia who directed young women to us. The Community Register lists at least ten members who came from Philadelphia in the early 20th century.

The Community experienced several significant changes during Sr. Francis' novitiate. Mother Teresa Barry died on May 18, 1900, four months prior to Sr. M. Francis' Reception in September 1900. The following year the Mother House moved from Queen Street to 51 Meeting Street. In February 1902 the Community began to assign sisters to teach in St. Peter's School for Catholic colored children on Society Street in Charleston. Following her profession on October 20, 1902 Sister M. Francis taught the children of St. Peter's and Immaculate Conception Schools until 1916. Thereafter she taught in the Cathedral School in Charleston from 1916 to 1919, and, at Bishop England High School from 1919 to 1931. She was elected Mother Assistant in 1929 and Mother Superior from 1931 to 1937, and, from 1940 to 1946.



1928 BEHS Faculty: Srs. Mary Bernard Campbell, Ignatia Gavaghan, **Francis Robb**, Mechtilde Rogers, Catherine Smith.

Note the difference in the headdress in these two pictures

During Mother Francis' first term as Superior the Community literally changed its appearance. In October 1932 she was notified that the material used for the sisters' headdress was no longer available. Following a year-long search for alternatives the majority of the Community voted to adopt a new headdress consisting of a bonnet covered by a veil. The change was made on August 29, 1933, the last day of retreat. That same month, at the request of Bishop Walsh, the Council agreed to send six certified teachers to staff St. Mary's School in Greenville, SC, from which the Ursulines had withdrawn. The OLMs were also teaching in the parochial schools and Bishop England High School in Charleston, in Saint Angela Academy, Aiken, and Mine Creek (Ward), SC. In 1936 the Community established a Junior College affiliated with the Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, and accredited by the State of South Carolina. The OLMs in Sumter, SC, conducted a Mission Center which provided religious education to Catholics in Dillon, Hartsville, Bennettsville, Camden, Florence and Sumter. In May of 1937 Mother Francis received word that Mr. Neill O'Donnell of Sumter had died and left his residence to the OLM Community. However, the disposition of the property was left to Mother M. Bernard Campbell, OLM Superior from 1937 to 1940. During these years Sr. M. Francis was placed in charge of the City Orphanage in Charleston.



OLMs in Greenville, 1933, L-R, Srs. Martha Groghan, Genevieve Cross, Catherine Smith, Immaculata Codere, Mother Francis Robb, Gerald O'Brien, Ursula Riley, Celestine Kennedy.



MINE CREEK, WARD, SC

On August 17, 1940 Mother M. Francis was again elected Mother Superior. Re-elected in 1943, she governed the Community until August 1946. In an entry in her diary toward the end of her term in office she states: "During the last six years many improvements were made in the Mother House. The new wing of St. Francis Infirmary was completed. The new kitchen at the Orphan House was completed and a new wire fence installed in the back yard. During these years seven Sisters passed to their eternal reward, and, six young ladies entered the novitiate. However, three of these returned to their homes. On account of the shortage of teaching members, the Mine Creek Mission was closed. St. Patrick's Parochial School was transferred to the Sisters of Saints Cyril and Methodius from Danville, PA. The Hospital at York, SC, had to be abandoned also for lack of sufficient nursing Sisters. (Divine Saviour Hospital, which the OLMs established during Mother Bernard Campbell's administration, was transferred to the Sisters of Charity of Saint Augustine from Cleveland, Ohio). During the summer of 1946 negotiations were made with the most Rev. Archbishop of Boston to open a mission in his Archdiocese for the purpose of cultivating vocations for our Community. So far this project has not materialized." Although Mother Francis does not mention it in her diary in February 1946 the OLM Council approved the sale of Hopkin's Villa in Summerville and the land formerly occupied by Saint Joseph's Academy. In April 1946 the Community purchased twenty-three acres of land on James Island.

Following her six years as Mother Superior, Sister M. Francis was assigned to St. Angela Academy, for two years. In 1948 she was appointed Assistant Superior for the Sisters living at St. Francis Xavier Hospital Convent in Charleston. She spent the last years of her life in retirement in the Motherhouse on James Island, the site of the land the Community purchased in 1946. Mother Francis suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and died in St. Francis Xavier Hospital on April 7, 1962. She is buried in Holy Cross Cemetery.



M. Francis Robb as a postulant, with her sister in Philadelphia, with Bishop Walsh, as a senior sister



Plaque recovered from Loretto Cottage after Hurricane Hugo in 1989 indicating the bedroom wing in honor of Mother Francis.



HAPPENINGS



Sisters and our Partners In Charity gathered on October 12 for a program on the Charity Charism given by Sister Mary McCormick, SC-NY.

Our next Partners In Charity Gathering will be on November 16. Save the date Flyer coming out soon.

