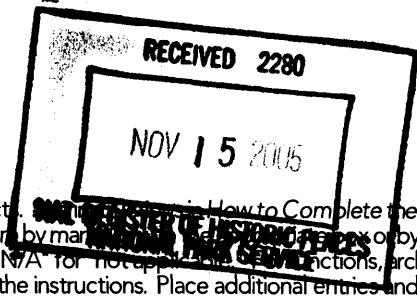


1474

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for not applicable. For actions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Our Lady of the Angels Academy
other names/site number n/a

2. Location

street & number 18801 Riverwood Drive not for publication n/a
city or town Little Falls vicinity n/a
state Minnesota code MN county Morrison code 013 97 zip code 56345

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this x nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property x meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide x locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Britta L. Bloomberg 11/10/05
Britta L. Bloomberg, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Minnesota Historical Society date

State or Federal agency or bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official date

State or Federal agency or bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
 entered in the National Register See continuation sheet
 determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet
 determined not eligible for the National Register
 removed from the National Register
 other (explain):

Edson W. Beall 12/28/05
Signature of Keeper date of action

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION

Period of Significance

1911 - 1955

Significant Dates

1911 (completion of main building)

1931 (completion of north and south wings)

1951 (completion of rear wing)

Significant Person

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect / Builder

A.H. Harrison, Little Falls MN, contractor, 1911 building

Buechner & Orth, St. Paul MN, architect, 1931 wings

Fred V. Traynor, St. Cloud MN, architect, 1951 wing

Nelson Const. Co., Willmar MN, contractor, 1951 wing

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- other state agency
- Federal agency
- local government
- university
- other _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.97 acresBelle Prairie, Minn., 1956
Photorevised 1979**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

15	396475	5098560
zone	easting	northing

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Clayton B. Fraserorganization FRASERdesign date 30 May 2005street & number 420 South County Road 23E telephone 970.669.7969city or town Loveland state Colorado zip code 80537

Additional Documentation

submit the following items with the completed form

Continuation Sheets**Maps**A USGS map (7½ or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location
A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

name/title MDI Limited Partnership No. 88street & number 1600 University Avenue, Suite 212 telephone 612.646.7848city or town St. Paul state Minnesota zip code 55104

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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OUR LADY OF THE ANGELS ACADEMY Morrison County, Minnesota

The Our Lady of the Angels Academy is situated within the rural setting of the central Minnesota township of Belle Prairie. Belle Prairie has historically been an unincorporated village, located four miles north of Little Falls; within the past year it has been annexed by the City of Little Falls. Belle Prairie village is today comprised of several houses, a convenience store and the Holy Family Church and Rectory and the Our Lady of the Angels Academy. Most of these properties abut Riverwood Drive, which parallels north-south State Highway 371. The Academy building stands immediately north of the church. The original church at this location was constructed in 1852 as the first Catholic church in the St. Cloud Diocese. A log structure, it was replaced with the existing church building in 1880. The Holy Family Church is a single-story, stuccoed stone building, traditionally configured with the altar and sanctuary at the rear and a three-story steeple centered over the front entrance. North of the Academy, beyond an asphalt parking lot, is a school building that houses classrooms for a religious group called Together Encountering Christ. Completed in 1963 as the Mother Mary Ignatius High School, this structure is a modern-style, single-story brick building, located outside of the nominated area.

Between the church and the Academy—and located at the southern edge of the nominated property—is a replica of the log cabin occupied by Mother Mary Ignatius Hayes, the Franciscan nun who founded the original St. Anthony's Academy. The cabin was built in 1872 by Mary Ignatius when she first came to Minnesota. The replica was built in 1950 by the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception Order. Although it reportedly uses some of the logs from the original cabin and replicates the cabin's single-pen shape, this building is essentially a 1950 structure. It was originally located north of the Academy but was moved to its present location in 1962, to make room for the high school building. Because the cabin is a reconstructed structure, subsequently moved, it is considered a non-contributing element within the nominated property.

The Our Lady of the Angels Academy is located on the west side of Riverwood Drive, immediately north of the point that the drive adjoins Highway 137 [see Figure 1]. It is set back from the road, facing east within a small grove of trees. Beyond the nominated property to the west is forested land that slopes down to the Mississippi River. Immediately east of the Academy's front entrance is a circular drive, paved with asphalt and lined with concrete curbs. Behind the Academy building is a small prayer garden, added within the past five years. The original Academy building and its two subsequent additions now enclose a small courtyard, between the original building and the gymnasium. Surrounded on all sides by the brick buildings, this contains a relatively new monument to the original Academy, destroyed by fire in 1889. A grassed lawn extends from the Academy building on its north and south sides. This lawn is studded with large coniferous trees. Trees are also aligned along the circular drive and beside the building's side wings.

The Academy is actually an agglomeration of structures built in stages over a 47-year period. The original Academy building was constructed in 1911 by Little Falls contractor A.H. Harrison. It is configured as a three-story (with basement), symmetrical brick block, almost square with a footprint of

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OUR LADY OF THE ANGELS ACADEMY Morrison County, Minnesota

82x90 feet [see Figure 2]. To the north and south sides of this building were appended three-story wings, each a 28x54-foot brick block. Designed by Buechner & Orth of St. Paul, these wings were built in 1930-1931. In 1936 the school was rehabilitated; this may be the date of the small brick portico placed over the front entrance. At the rear of the original 1911 building, on the site of the 1872 academy, is a 89x53-foot, single-story gymnasium, built in 1950-1951 by the Nelson Construction Company of Willmar, from a design by St. Cloud

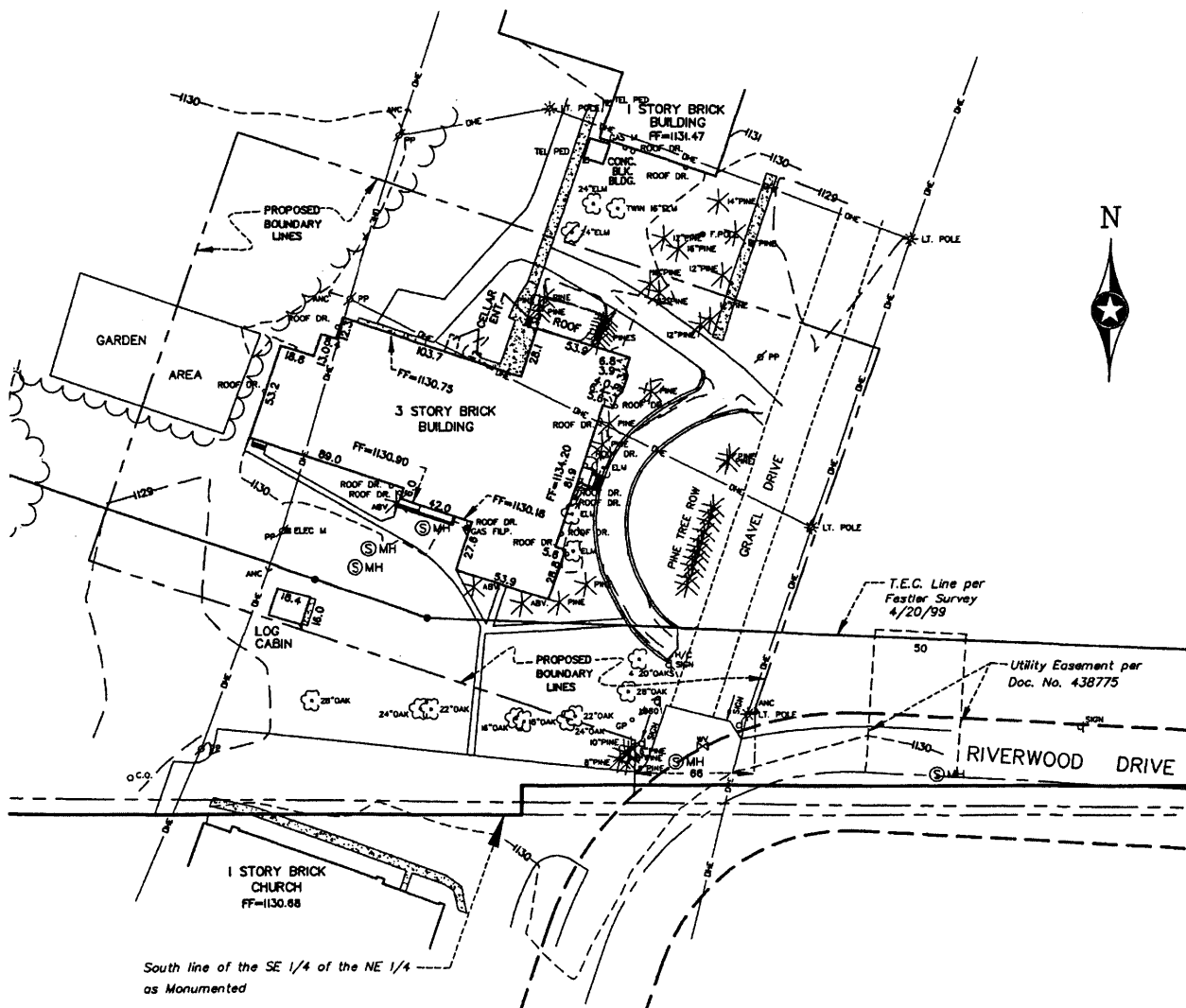


Figure 1. Site plan of Our Lady of the Angels Academy, September 2004.

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architect Fred V. Traynor. On the north side of this is a small three-stall garage, built in 1958 by Little Falls contractor Marcel LaFond from drawings produced by St. Paul architects Bettenburg, Townsend & Stolte. With the original school building and additions combined, the Academy comprises a T-shaped structure, with overall dimensions of 140x185 feet [see Figures 3-5].

Academy and Church, Little Falls, Minn.



■ Figure 2. Academy and Church, Little Falls, Minn., ca. 1920.

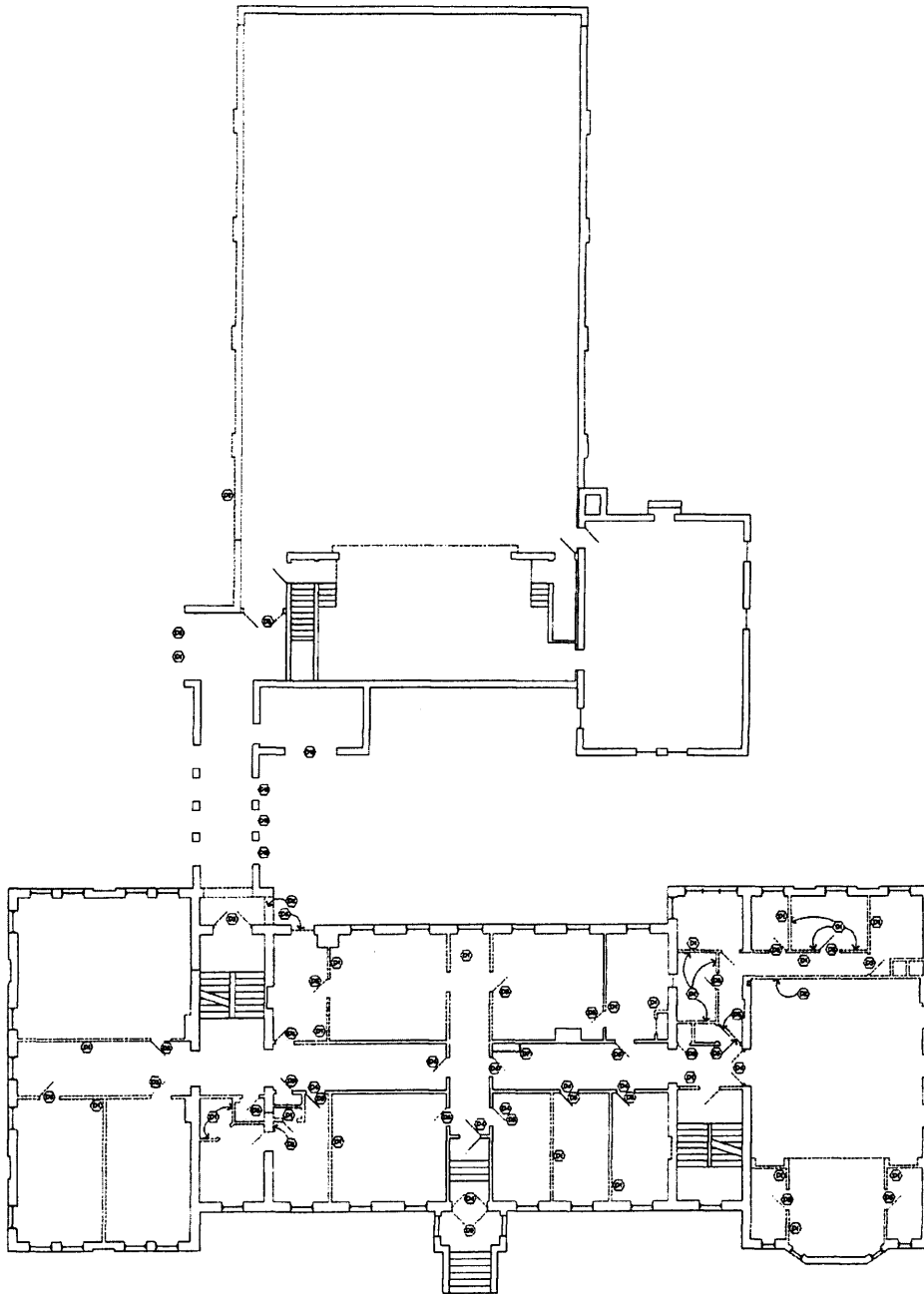
The defining elements of the original building and its wings are intact today. The roof on the original section is a moderately pitched hip, featuring exposed rafter ends without soffits. This is sheathed with asphalt shingles and lined with metal gutters. An octagonal cupola is centered on the center ridge. With a wooden balustrade over asphalt-shingled kneewalls, it features an asphalt-shingled tent roof capped by a cross. The roofs over the 1931 and 1951 wings are flat, covered with composition roofing and lined with brick parapets. The parapets on the 1931 wings are capped with ceramic tile copings; those on the 1951 wing have sheet metal copings. The 1911 and 1931 sections of the building employ reinforced concrete foundations, masonry bearing walls and wood interior framing (1911) or structural clay tile walls and concrete floor slabs (1931). The 1951 gymnasium uses structural clay tile walls and a roof with steel bar joists and concrete panels.

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OUR LADY OF THE ANGELS ACADEMY Morrison County, Minnesota



■ Figure 3. First floor plan, by Johnson Laflen Galloway Architects, September 2004.

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OUR LADY OF THE ANGELS ACADEMY Morrison County, Minnesota

Exterior walls on all sections are sheathed with buff-colored bricks laid in common bond. The foundation walls are raised slightly above ground line; these are plainly formed, without water tables. On the original section, the bricks are corbeled between the window sills of the second and third floors, forming a continuous sill/band course. Additionally, eight small panels of diagonally laid bricks are corbeled from the wall to form diamonds between the second- and third-floor windows. A statue niche with a corbeled brick semicircular arch is centered above the main entrance, and a cast stone cornerstone, which depicts a cross and two stigmata-scarred hands above "A.D. 1911", is set into the brickwork. The 1931 wings have similar corbeled brick band courses at the second- and third-floor window sills. The bricks on the gymnasium are steeped out slightly between the window bays to form simple pilasters. A large cross made of contrasting brick is set into the gym's north wall. This wing has its own commemorative stone, set in the brick wall beside the south entrance, which reads "Our Lady of the Angels Academy."

The fenestration on the two remaining unaltered walls of the original section is evenly spaced and uniformly enframed with segmental brick arches and cast stone lug sills. Windows on the lower two levels feature three-over-two, double-hung wood sash with wood frames and brushed aluminum storms, arranged singly or in pairs; those on the upper level are tucked under the eaves and have smaller three-over-three double-hung wood sash. The windows on all three levels of the 1931 wings feature three-over-two, double-hung wood sash, loose steel lintels and concrete lug sills. The gymnasium's north and south walls are lined with panels of glass blocks with loose steel lintels and concrete slip sills, placed high on the walls. The gymnasium's west rear wall contains no window or door openings.

The main entrance is centered on the east façade of the building's original section. It features a double-leaf doorway, with paneled wood, single-light wooden doors and brushed aluminum storms. The doorway is sheltered by an entry porch. This small brick masonry structure is fronted by a concrete stairway flanked on both sides by brick bulkheads. The open entrance features a loose steel lintelled head topped with a semi-circular blind arch infilled with brick laid in a diagonal basketweave pattern. Double-leaf entrances with simple slab doors in hollow metal frames provide access to the gymnasium on its north and south sides.

Given the emphasis placed on humility by the nuns, the relatively plain-faced appearance of the original building and its wings is unsurprising. With its hipped roof, central cupola, segmental-arched window and door openings and nearly square footprint, the Our Lady of the Angels Academy resembles thousands of similar school buildings constructed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in America. Though it makes no strong stylistic statement, the building's handsome proportions and simple detailing are consistent and attractive. Like the original building, the 1931 and 1951 wings are simply detailed and stylistically indeterminate. Unobtrusively attached to the 1911 structure, their use of similar materials, fenestration and scale tie them visually with the original building.

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OUR LADY OF THE ANGELS ACADEMY Morrison County, Minnesota

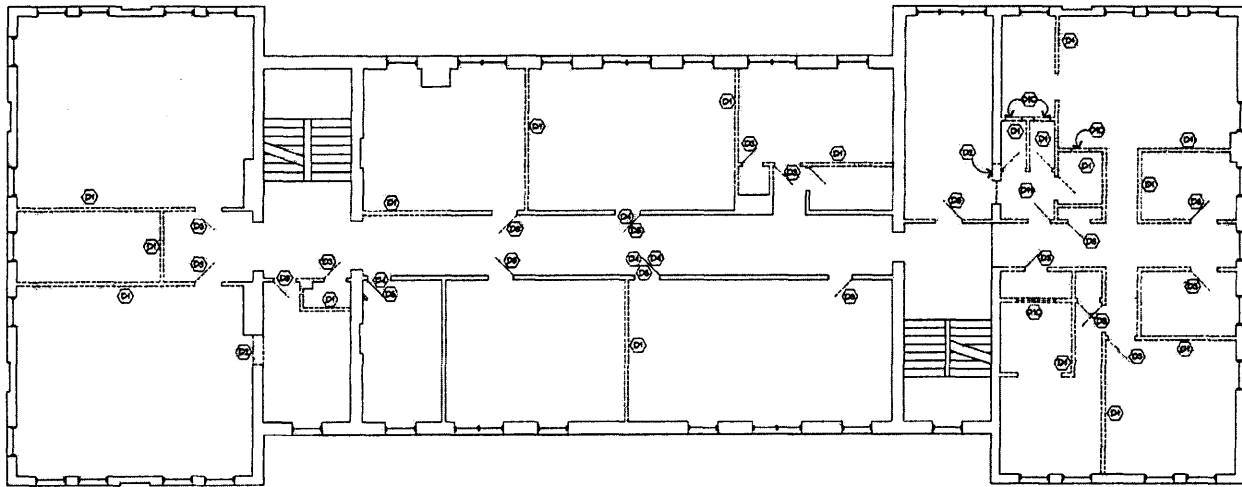


Figure 4. Second floor plan, by Johnson Laffen Galloway Architects, September 2004.

Though there have been minor changes to the interior layout and finishes of the Our Lady of the Angels Academy, the spatial arrangement of the building has remained essentially unchanged since completion of the 1951 addition. The main entrance on the original building's east side leads into a small foyer, beyond which is a stairway and a short hall. This intersects with the main hallway, which extends north-south as the central spine of the building. Offices, parlors, guest rooms, dormitory rooms and other support spaces adjoin the hallway on both sides of the 1911 structure. In the 1931 south wing is a stairway, a library, the sisters' community room and the bishop's dining room. In the north wing, is a symmetrical stairway and the chapel. To the west of the hallway off of the south wing is another corridor, which leads past the courtyard to the 1951 gymnasium. This latter building is organized as a large open gymnasium/auditorium space with a raised stage along the east wall.

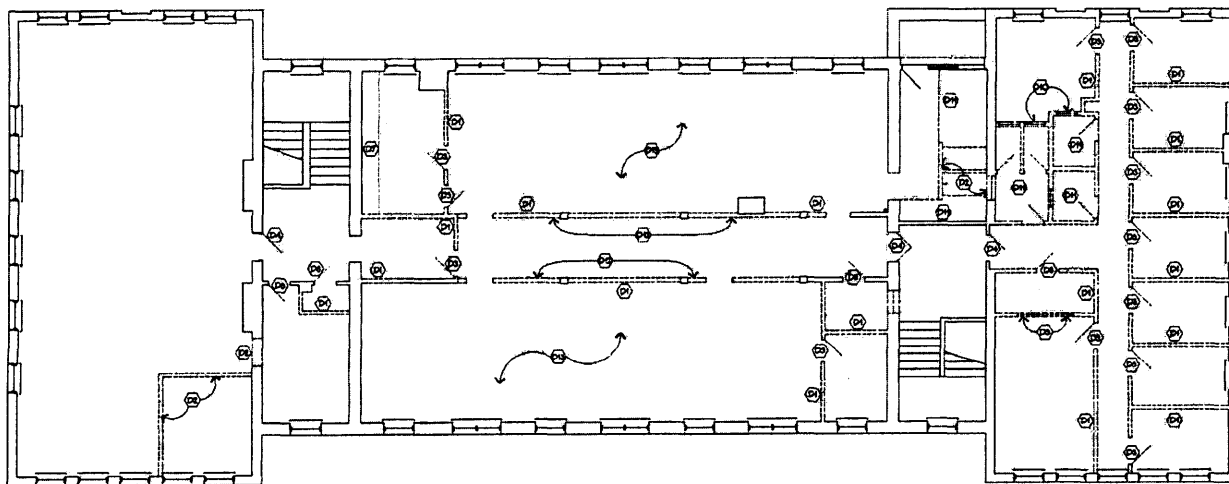
The second floor is organized similarly, with dormitory, classroom and restroom spaces aligned on both sides of a central double-loaded hallway. The third floor of the 1911 building is devoted entirely to the girls' dormitory, a large open space that featured beds aligned on both sides of a center row of lavatories. The south wing contained the boys' dormitory, an open space once subdivided by pine beadboard partitions; the north wing contains ten small convent chambers adjoining an east-west hallway. The basement contains coat and trunk rooms, the laundry and the boiler room in the 1911 building, the nuns' kitchen and dining room in the north wing, and the children's cafeteria in the south wing.

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Interior finishes consist primarily of painted plaster walls and ceilings with terrazzo or tile floors. Accessed through a single-leaf, paneled wood door with sidelights and transom, the entrance vestibule and hallway feature plaster walls, acoustic tile ceilings and vinyl-asbestos tile floors. Stained wood baseboards and shoes line the walls, and the windows and doors all feature stained wood casings, heads, jambs and aprons. The main hallway is similarly finished, as are the first floor parlor and office spaces. The chapel is organized with the sanctuary in a small slanted bay at the east end of the north wing. This is flanked on both sides by arched niches that once housed statues. A single-stall confessional is located in the northwest corner. The plaster walls feature plaster coves at their tops; on these walls the ghosts of painted angels can still be discerned. The passageway between the main building and the gymnasium features quarry tile floors, structural clay tile walls and a painted plaster ceiling. The gymnasium itself has vinyl-asbestos tiles applied over a concrete slab floor, with glazed tile walls and a concrete slab ceiling over the steel bar joists. The raised stage has a maple strip floor with integral cutouts for the theatrical lights.



■ Figure 5. Third floor plan, by Johnson Laffen Galloway Architects, September 2004.

The second-floor rooms are similarly finished, with vinyl-asbestos tile on the floors of the original building and terrazzo on the wings. Those classrooms located in the 1931 wings have maple strip floors and painted plaster walls and ceilings; the classrooms in the 1911 building have vinyl-asbestos tile on the floors and Celotex tiles on the ceilings. The girls' dormitory on the third floor of the original building features maple strip flooring, painted plaster walls and Celotex tiles on the sloped and flat ceilings. The trim up here is painted, not stained. The boys' dormitory in the south wing is separated from the girls' room by a nun's chamber,

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from which one of the sisters kept guard by means of a small window. Between the two dorms is a vestibule, which functioned as a sort of no-man's zone for the children. The boys' dorm has maple floors and painted plaster walls and ceilings, with painted trim. The stairs in the 1931 wings feature terrazzo pan treads and risers and low plaster walls with steel pipe handrails.

The Our Lady of the Angels Academy remains largely intact from its original construction, but there have been a number of alterations to the building, which have had varying degrees of impact. The most significant change occurred in 1930-1931, with the construction of the wings onto the north and south sides of the original building. These wings essentially doubled the building's footprint and necessitated some changes to the 1911 building to accommodate the new construction. The overall spatial organization of the original building remained unchanged, as did the office, classroom and dormitory spaces, but the interior stairway that extended through the floors in the central hallway was removed. In 1936 unspecified changes were made to the interior of the Academy building. The addition of the gymnasium in 1951 and the garage in 1958 had little impact on the 1911 building and the 1931 wings. Built onto the building's rear, the gym is visible only from the sides and rear of the Academy. An entry porch has been added over the main doorway on the east facade of the 1911 building. This was done sometime before 1942, probably during the 1936 rehabilitation.

Other changes have been comparatively minor. Aluminum storms have been added onto the exterior windows and doors. Celotex tiles have been added to the ceilings of many of the spaces, vinyl-asbestos tiles to the floors. The roof has been reshingled, with asphalt shingles replacing wood. The basement-level windows have been covered with plywood. And the statue of the Virgin Mary, donated to the Academy by one of the parishioners, was removed from the niche in the front of the original building in 1999 and placed in front of the adjacent church. More pernicious than these alterations is the deterioration that has occurred after years of deferred maintenance. The gymnasium, used until recently by a Christian youth organization, remains in good condition. The 1911 and 1931 buildings have stood abandoned since the Academy closed in 1969, however, and the damage from weathering has been extensive.

These alterations have impacted the building's appearance, but this impact does not impinge too seriously on the school's overall architectural character. Moreover, with the exception of the 1958 garage, the wings have all been added within the property's historic period. They match the building in overall scale, materials and configuration and represent the historic growth of the Academy over time. The Our Lady of the Angels Academy today maintains a high degree of integrity of design, workmanship, location, setting, materials, feeling and association. The building is an important visual anchor for the village in which it stands.

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OUR LADY OF THE ANGELS ACADEMY Morrison County, Minnesota

Built in 1911 and later enlarged in 1931, 1951 and 1958, the Our Lady of the Angels Academy in Belle Prairie derives its significance from its role as a locally important educational facility. The original Catholic school and convent here had been established in 1873 by Mother Mary Ignatius Hayes, a Franciscan nun who had come to Minnesota to establish the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. Named St. Anthony's Academy, the facility functioned as a boarding school for area girls. It offered the only French-language education in the area to daughters of the French-Canadian settlers. By all accounts, the Academy was successful, both as a school and a convent. Under Mother Mary Ignatius' charge, the sisterhood grew and school enrollment increased. When she left to open other institutions, however, the Academy struggled. Its troubles climaxed dramatically in April 1889, when the building was destroyed by arsonists. After a 22-year hiatus the school/convent was rebuilt by Mother Mary Ignatius' Missionary Sisters as the Our Lady of the Angels Academy. The institution quickly re-established its place in the center of Belle Prairie social and educational milieu. Growing incrementally over time, the Academy functioned for almost eighty years as the largest school in the community before its closure in 1969.

The Academy is eligible for listing on the National Register under Criterion A for its exemplification on a local level of a nationally important educational institution. The role that Catholic nuns have played in education in America can hardly be overestimated. "Vowing to live a life of celibacy, agreeing to obey male superiors and living on a few dollars a month might seem hopelessly anachronistic to many modern women," writes historian John Fialka, "to some downright un-American. But the three vows created strong, disciplined, selfless organizations that adapted very well to the rigors of America."¹ Nuns—and particularly Franciscan nuns—have been responsible for building the country's largest private school and nonprofit hospital system. They are credited with the founding of some 800 hospitals and 10,000 parochial schools, colleges and universities across the country—an accomplishment unequaled by any other non-governmental group in American history. At the peak of its attendance in the 1950s, the Catholic parochial school system accommodated fully 11 percent of the country's students. As an educational entity, it is exceeded only by the nation's public school system in the breadth of its influence.

In its two iterations, the Catholic school operated by the Missionary Sisters in Belle Prairie exemplifies this national trend. The Academy provided quality education, both secular and religious, to the area children, rivaling the local public school in attendance and contributing significantly to the social and educational development of this community. The Academy's school, convent and chapel provided a focal point for Belle Prairie social life. Even the burning of the original academy and its later reconstruction plays a pivotal role in local lore. For decades a locally prominent structure, the Our Lady of the Angels Academy represents an important aspect of Belle Prairie history.

¹John J. Fialka, *Sisters: Catholic Nuns and the Making of America* (New York: St. Martin's Press: 2003), 2-3.

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OUR LADY OF THE ANGELS ACADEMY Morrison County, Minnesota

Mother Mary Ignatius first came to Belle Prairie, Minnesota, to open a school in 1872. At the time she had a string of other attempts at missionary work, most of which had ended in failure for one reason or another. Born Elizabeth Hayes in 1823, she was the daughter of the headmaster of a boys' school. She grew up on the channel island of Guernsey, a child of fragile health who, according to one biographer, shared the family propensities toward "musical talent, an aptitude for teaching, service to the church in a committed role, and an inclination towards celibacy."² After her parents died, she moved in the mid-1840s to Blackheath, a suburb of London, where she taught school. In 1850 Hayes entered an Anglican Sisterhood, the Community of St. Mary the Virgin, headed by Reverend William John Butler, the Vicar of Wantage. There she taught at a home for fallen women. "Miss Hayes began a workschool for the girls of the parish who have past school days," Butler wrote in 1852. "They are to receive 1^s weekly and their work sold. This will be a great thing for them, enabling the Mothers to spare them from that demoralizing habit of carrying babies about at 6^d a week and misery with all those loose fellows in the town."³

Over the next five years Hayes taught at the girls' school, inbetween absences caused by ill health. In July 1855 she was appointed as Superior for a new School Sisterhood, charged with training young children, servants and governesses. But the relationship between Hayes and Butler soon became strained. "It seems that Miss Hayes is a person far too selfwilled & unpractical to leave in command," Butler lamented in his diary at the end of the year. Hayes was chafing under Butler's direction and, more seriously, was beginning to doubt her calling with the Anglican Church. "After willingly leaving all things in my hands, she now writes, very dictatorially, arranging them in her own way," Butler wrote in February 1856. "This of course cannot be permitted and I see nothing but a separation in prospect. May God guide us all in this matter & suffer no human feeling to stand in the way of His holy Service."⁴

²Brian de Breffny, *Unless the Seed Die: The Life of Elizabeth Hayes (Mother M. Ignatius O.S.F.)* (by the author, 1980), 26. According to Mother Mary Ignatius' other major biographer, Franciscan Sister Mary Ahles:

That she was determined to do something useful with her life was already forcefully demonstrated during her "teens," when she was stricken "with an acute spinal weakness" which kept her confined to her couch for a few years, except for such special events as participation in the Communion Service of her Church, whither she was wheeled for the occasions. During this period of painful inactiveness Elizabeth did not idle away her time in useless pining and fretting or self-pity but devoted herself to instructing a class of poor girls in sewing and making ornaments for the altar. Thus Elizabeth, during those three years of her confined adolescence, learned well that lesson of ennobling sacrifice (which she had to practice for the remainder of her life), not only by stoical forbearance, but more particularly by making it bear spiritual dividends.

Mary Assumpta Ahles, *In the Shadow of His Wings: A History of the Franciscan Sisters* (St. Paul: North Central Publishing Company, 1977), 9.

³Ahles, *In the Shadow of His Wings*, 15.

⁴*Ibid.*, 20.

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OUR LADY OF THE ANGELS ACADEMY Morrison County, Minnesota

The rift between the Superior and the Vicar grew progressively wider over the following months. By the end of the year she had severed her connection not only with Butler, but with the girls' school, the Sisterhood and even the Anglican Church itself. Sometime after Hayes made her "abjuration of heresy" from the Church of England, she received baptism at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, a Catholic chapel in London. In November 1858 Elizabeth Hayes received the Holy Habit of St. Francis at the Bayswater Convent, becoming a Franciscan nun. She completed her year's novitiate at the age of 36 and on November 26, 1859, offered her Profession of Vows in Glasgow, Scotland, as Sister Mary Ignatius of Jesus.

After teaching briefly at a boarding school in Kingston, Jamaica, and serving a subsequent stint in Rome, Mary Ignatius undertook the establishment of a missionary institute in Sèvres, France. There her new Franciscan Sisterhood operated a boarding school for English converts until the Franco-Prussian War forced it to close. Mary Ignatius then traveled to St. Thomas to take over another Catholic school there. She contracted yellow fever, however, and soon was compelled to abandon that post as well. Throughout all her early attempts at missionary work—in London, Jamaica, Sèvres, St. Thomas—Mary Ignatius had been dogged by disappointment. "Instead of regarding or deploring Mother Mary Ignatius' early missionary endeavors as failures, one should rather view them as foundation stones on which she would one day erect a solid spiritual edifice," Ahles stated optimistically. "Her humility in facing defeat; her trust in Providence when all else failed; her patience in meeting opposition from those who should have been her support; her courage to begin over again when all seemed lost—these were the qualities which as a would-be Foundress she developed and strengthened, so that when the real Foundress emerged, they could be brought to bear upon the Institute that would one day stand as a monument to God's glory and an edification to God's children."⁵

In 1872, as she was approaching the age of 50, Mary Ignatius moved to Minnesota to start the Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception—the first Franciscan convent in Minnesota. It is unclear how she came to choose Belle Prairie Township as her next mission. Located in central Minnesota, the small community was situated in rural Morrison County. It had been settled by French trappers and traders in the early 19th century and was by mid-century still largely occupied by Native Americans and French Canadian Catholics. In 1853, three years before the establishment of Morrison County, Father Francis Pierz established a Catholic church at Belle Prairie, from which he carried on missionary work. Housed in a log building, St. Andrew's Church (later renamed the Holy Family Church) was distinguished as the earliest Catholic church in the region. By 1856 it listed 300 French-Canadian souls as its parishioners. Other priests eventually came to the area, including Father Joseph Buh. But the parish was still huge and largely unsettled—and without a Catholic school—in 1872.

⁵*Ibid.*, 50.

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When Mother Mary Ignatius [see Figure 6] arrived by stagecoach at Belle Prairie in the autumn of 1872, her intent was to establish a convent and mission school. In September Father Buh [see Figure 7] donated a parcel of land next to the church for her facility. Mary Ignatius mortgaged the property to raise funds for construction and immediately built a small cabin for herself and her assistant, Sister Mary Clare Peet.⁶ A month later she began advertising the St. Anthony's Academy in local newspapers. An announcement in the *St. Cloud Press* in November read:



■ Figure 6. Mother Mary Ignatius/Heys.

ST. ANTHONY'S ACADEMY, Belle Prairie, Morrison County, Minnesota, will be opened on the 1st of January 1873 under the direction of the Franciscan Sisters, for the reception of young ladies who desire to unite the advantages of a home and foreign education. TERMS for board and tuition — including washing — per session of five months, \$55. Music, painting, and foreign languages extra. For further particulars apply to the REV. MOTHER SUPERIOR.⁷

Construction on the school continued through the winter; in February the *St. Cloud Times* reported:

This school is under the management of the Franciscan Sisters who have just had four buildings erected, two boarding houses 20 x 50 each; a schoolhouse 20 x 25, with a 12 foot ceiling, and a dwelling house two stories high. Mr. F.H. Dam, of this city furnished all the material, and Mr. P. Smith had the job of putting up these buildings. The school is in fine running order, and already has quite a large attendance.⁸

The Academy was actually a single-story, H-shaped building, with the schoolhouse flanked on both sides by the boarding house wings. A simply detailed frame structure, it featured side-gabled, wood-shingled roofs and beveled wood siding, with six-over-six, double-hung windows arrayed symmetrically along the front

⁶A single-pen, front-gabled log building, this cabin was reconstructed by the Order at its original location in 1960. It was later moved and stands today between the Our Lady of the Angels Academy and the Holy Family Church.

⁷*St. Cloud Press*, 21 November 1872.

⁸"St. Anthony's Academy," *St. Cloud Times*, 12 February 1873.

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and side walls. The Academy was situated within a small yard surrounded by a picket fence and a large tree that grew in the central courtyard.

St. Anthony's began its first full term on January 2, 1873. Mother Mary Ignatius and Sister Mary Clare taught the classes and supervised the girls. By all accounts, the Academy was well received. It employed a system of partial boarding, with the girls staying at the school during the week and going home on weekends. This tended to limit its enrollment to students with families from the surrounding community, although the Academy took on a few orphans as well. The girls washed their clothes and bed linens at home and brought their food with them each week. Patterned after a convent, the Academy maintained rigidly structured routines and studies for the girls. The diet was spartan—typically salted meats, potatoes and bread; food preparation was undertaken by the nuns and older girls. They employed the traditional convent practice whereby each girl washed her plate at the table at the end of the meal.



■ Figure 7. Rev. Joseph Bihl.

the Academy took on a few orphans as well. The girls washed their clothes and bed linens at home and brought their food with them each week. Patterned after a convent, the Academy maintained rigidly structured routines and studies for the girls. The diet was spartan—typically salted meats, potatoes and bread; food preparation was undertaken by the nuns and older girls. They employed the traditional convent practice whereby each girl washed her plate at the table at the end of the meal.

In November 1873, as the second term was underway for the Belle Prairie Academy, Mary Ignatius opened a second boarding school, in Brainerd.⁸ It is unclear how the two sisters managed the simultaneous operation of two institutions separated by 25 miles. As if this were not enough, in December Mary Ignatius began publishing a monthly religious journal, *Annals of Our Lady of the Angels*, directed toward the worldwide Franciscan Tertiaries.⁹ Late in February 1874, after fail-

⁸"Catholic School," *Brainerd Tribune*, 6 December 1873.

The school recently established here under the auspices of the Sisters of St. Francis, is starting out with fine prospects of success. Some thirty pupils are already in attendance, and more are being added daily. It is to be a school of which Brainerd may well feel proud—all the branches will be thoroughly taught, including painting, music, the languages, ornamental work, and, best of all, pupils at this school will be obliged to conform strictly to the rules of good behavior. We wish Mother Superior the great success she so well deserves.

⁹In the inaugural issue of the *Annals*, Mary Ignatius stated her intentions for the journal:

In the humble hope of making more widely known and therefore more truly loved, the devotion of our Seraphic Patriarch, we have ventured on the publication of these ANNALS. . . Besides affording material of interest to the general reader, it will be our endeavor to make the ANNALS as much as possible a faithful medium of communicating to you the present progress and development of the Order (of St. Francis), its Missions, new foundations, and good works, as well as its past history, legends, and traditions.

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ing to secure a donation of mortgagable property from a local parishioner, Mother Mary Ignatius closed the Brainerd facility permanently.

According to a report on missions, northern Minnesota in the mid-1870s comprised four cities and 24 villages, with an aggregate population of 90,000 Anglo-Europeans and 5,000 Native Americans. Of these, some 25,000 were Catholic, served by ten priests spread over forty churches. Father Buh was in serious need of priests to assist him with his far-flung apostolate, and Mother Mary Ignatius needed more sisters to teach in her boarding school. To address these problems, Mary Ignatius returned to the Holy See in Rome during the summer of 1874. She succeeded in convincing the Franciscan Minister General to send some German friars to Minnesota to establish a monastery in the St. Paul Diocese. Additionally, she recruited two Italian nuns (sisters, actually) and a priest for her Academy, but all three abandoned her in New York. More disappointment.

Late in 1876 Mary Ignatius succeeded in recruiting several novices from Canada. Her convent finally had some occupants, whose French-Canadian background would prepare them for the climate and French populace of Belle Prairie. While in Canada, she also raised funds for a bell for the convent and a new chapel. The latter was built as a circular frame structure, "painted white inside and out, except for the blue ceiling, containing nothing except a small altar on which there was statue of the Blessed Virgin—and a prie-dieu [prayer kneeler] before the altar."¹¹ In the chapel Mary Ignatius installed a portrait of St. Anthony of Padua, obtained in Rome. In July 1877, however, vandals slashed the painting and destroyed building fixtures, "in the most amazing display of natural and acquired depravity that has occurred in this immediate vicinity for several years," according to a St. Paul newspaper. "It is reported that the deed was perpetrated by certain boys whose parents are Protestants in good standing, but the charge is denied by the boys and their parents."¹²

St. Anthony's Convent was essentially self-sufficient, with the nuns living in a semi-cloistered state. The sisters were kept generally isolated from the outside community and spent their waking hours alternately praying, working and teaching school. Their only forays outside the convent involved begging tours for the sisterhood. The nuns at St. Anthony's carded, wove and sewed their own habits, using coarse wool gathered from their own sheep and colored with brown dye from tree bark. They produced much of their own meat

The *Annals* were published with only minor interruptions from 1873 until Hayes' death in 1894. During this time she undertook almost all of the editorial work and supervised the journal's printing herself.

¹¹ Ahles, 117. Mary Ignatius required that the chapel and grounds be kept scrupulously clean, with the girls pasting silver stars to blue ceiling as an imitation of the vault of heaven.

¹² "A Dastardly Outrage," (St. Paul) *Northwestern Chronicle*, 18 August 1877.

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and produce in the convent garden and farmyard, and even made their own shoes from leftover scraps of cloth and leather. They printed the monthly *Annals of Our Lady of the Angels* using a small hand press lent to the convent by the editor of the *Brainerd Tribune*. The sisters and older students tended the livestock and managed the upkeep of the buildings and grounds. The Academy buildings were left cold in the winter, not only to conserve fuel, but as a lesson in humility for the nuns and novitiates. "The community room was easier to warm," Sister Mary of the Angels later wrote, "the stove being more central, but our dear Mother taught us to sit by the table, not by the stove, to exercise us, as novices should be, in mortification."¹³

For the schoolchildren, the Academy represented a religiously charged institution of learning. Regular observance of religious exercises was emphasized as much as education. The pupils began each day at mass, with the girls answering the mass prayers in unison in French. They recited rosary in the chapel, accompanied by a sister who knelt at the prie-dieu with girls arrayed in the grass around the open door. They said grace at each meal, began each school day in the classroom on their knees with the sisters, invoking God's blessing, and said evening prayers before retiring to the dormitory, always in unison, always in French. The nuns observed days of special liturgical significance with their charges, engaging in reverential rituals and processions. According to one chronicler:

Every Friday after Mass and on some special days, there was Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, at which all the girls joined in the singing. As there were no regular Mass servers at the Sisters' Chapel, the girls "did the honors" from a small hallway leading to the Chapel. From that safe distance they swung the censer and handed Father the shoulder veil.

Discipline was enforced rigorously by the nuns and corporal punishment meted out frequently. Sister Mary Angela was one of the more notorious disciplinarians. "When she came into the room, everyone flew to her seat," stated one former pupil. "[She] was quick with the stick, but I liked her just the same."¹⁴ In addition to their traditional studies, the girls learned to sing in French and Latin, staged dramatic plays, produced sewing and needlework, wove Franciscan cords and baked altar breads. They were charged with assisting the nuns with upkeep of the Academy grounds and buildings. And they were sent on errands to the post office, general store and private homes in the community. Sister Mary of the Angels recalled, "They were all blessed days to remember and illness was unknown amongst us. We were well, hearty and happy. How sweet memory clings to those days."¹⁵

¹³As quoted in Ahles, 111-112. "Despite the frigidity of the Chapel during the winter months, that place was their beloved haven, the trysting place with their Divine Spouse, where they drew strength for the day's burdens. Its devotional atmosphere enthralled the neophytes in Religious life; for even in her old age Sister Mary of the Angels still spoke enthusiastically of the 'heavenly choir, with its beautiful stalls for forty Sisters.'"

¹⁴As quoted in Ahles, 118.

¹⁵As quoted in de Breffney, 139.

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By 1878 between 30 and 50 girls attended the Academy. With another influx of new postulants and the sisterhood growing, St. Anthony's had achieved a state of, if not prosperity, then at least manageable poverty. But Mary Ignatius had been more interested in starting missions than maintaining them. Always looking for new projects, she soon left the Belle Prairie Academy to initiate what she called her "Negro apostolate" in the South, directed to ex-slaves in eastern Georgia. She opened an academy in Savannah and an Industrial School for Colored Girls near Augusta. The Savannah facility closed after only a brief period, but the Industrial School occupied much of her time. At this point, after appointing Mary Clare Peet as Mother Superior, Mary Ignatius largely abandoned the Belle Prairie Academy. This is when the troubles began.

In Mary Ignatius' absence, the Academy quickly began to flounder. The Superior had left without making adequate provisions for the convent's support, and she showed little interest in its continuing operation. Moreover, Mary Clare was apparently ill-suited as an administrator. When Mary Ignatius visited Minnesota two years later she found "affairs going badly enough," according to Sister Mary of the Angels:

Sister Mary Clare with too harsh ruling had discouraged the Sisters and put everything in disorder, materially and morally. She had planned also a scheme of schism, to which end she had made copies of the Constitutions, and secreted a quantity of clothing, etc. and had prepared to put her plan in execution, with the help of Father Buh, in another village, as soon as our Mother had finished her visit. To make this visit as brief as possible, she managed that she (Mother Mary Ignatius) should suffer from the want of food suitable to her weak digestion.¹⁶

Whether Mary Ignatius was negligent or Mary Clare and Father Buh were duplicitous varied according to the source, but the outcome was clear: without its founder, St. Anthony's Academy was failing. Late in 1880 Mother Mary Ignatius closed the Belle Prairie Academy and traveled to the Vatican to start yet another sisterhood, the Missionary Franciscan Sisters Order in Rome. The nuns stranded from her previous sisterhoods in Belle Prairie and Augusta were left to fend for themselves, with very little explanation and no support at all from their Mother Superior. Mary Ignatius even took the *Annals*, along with the subscription money, with her to Rome.

The following year the two remaining nuns at Belle Prairie reopened the Academy. They taught classes to a diminishing number of girls and struggled continuously against poverty, often resorting to begging to make ends meet. Mary Ignatius visited the Academy briefly in 1885. This buoyed the nuns' spirits until they realized that she was taking the Order's two postulants—who constituted the Academy's only hope for continued operation—back with her to Rome. That year the convent was dealt another blow when Rev. Adelard Lemay was assigned to the Belle Prairie church. Lemay had proved spectacularly unsuited to the priesthood and had been dismissed from three other pastorates before landing in Belle Prairie. Within months of his arrival he demanded that the sisters attend mass and receive communion in the church, with

¹⁶As quoted in Ahles, 167.

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other members of the parish, rather than in their own chapel, as their Constitutions had stipulated. This marked the first skirmish in an ongoing campaign by Lemay against the nuns and prompted a schism between the convent and the church that grew over the following years.



■ Figure 8. Bishop Rupert Seidenbush.

In November 1886, after receiving complaints about Lemay's conduct, Bishop Rupert Seidenbush (see Figure 8) ordered the priest to vacate the church and rectory at Belle Prairie. Improbably, Lemay refused. The nuns at the Academy in turn refused to allow their students to attend mass given by Lemay and urged other parishioners to stay away also. As the congregation divided itself into two camps, the dispute grew more acrimonious over the next two years. The diocese took depositions from Lemay and the nuns. In August 1888 Seidenbush reprimanded the Franciscan Sisters for holding alternate services for parishioners in their own chapel. Lemay tried to close the school and had Father Anthony Poyette, who had been sent as his replacement, arrested.

News of the worsening scandal eventually spilled across the state, as St. Paul newspapers reported the affair under such lurid headlines as "PRIESTS AT SWORDS' POINTS: A Nice Little Church War at Belle Prairie." Late in 1888 Lemay was finally evicted from the rectory. Despite this, discord in the parish continued unabated. Murder attempts were made on Poyette and Buh, and the nuns at St. Anthony's were threat-

ened with physical harm. As early as January 1887 Mother Superior Mary Francis had warned of the possibility of fire at the convent. The sisters had even begun keeping watch at night for arsonists. With Lemay now gone, they discontinued the night watches.

On the night of April 23, 1889, with all of the nuns and children asleep inside, arsonists did strike. "Soon after 12 o'clock last night one of the Sisters in the Belle Prairie convent was awakened by smoke, and she discovered that the south part of the convent was ablaze," the Little Falls Transcript reported:

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The inmates of the building were immediately aroused, and it was with difficulty that all were saved. The Sisters in the convent, four in number, have been conducting a children's school for several years, and there were twenty-four of the little ones asleep in the building at the time the fire began. When the fire was discovered it was too late to make any effort to stop it, and there was barely time to awaken the children and get them out of the building; in some cases the fire had reached the sleeping rooms before the occupants were awake. None of the clothing of the children was saved, and parties from this city have been contributing today for their relief. The building and contents were valued at over \$20,000, and there was only \$2,000 insurance. The fire started in the southeast corner, near the chapel, and the occupants of the house say there had been no fire in that part of the building for months. From this it appears that it must have been the work of an incendiary, but it hardly seems possible that any human beings would do an act that would endanger the lives of those that were in the building at the time. It would be difficult to imagine a punishment severe enough for such a villain.¹⁷

St. Anthony's Academy was a complete loss. "What a disaster, what desolation," Father Payette lamented. "Pray for us." The nuns and girls spent the remainder of the night at the nearby home of one of the sisters' parents. The next morning two of the nuns walked to Little Falls to notify the authorities and solicit charitable donations for their wrecked institution. The parents collected their children; the orphans were returned to relatives. As Father Payette moved temporarily to the house of one of the parishioners, the nuns completed the school term with their pupils at the rectory. After the end of the term, however, with nowhere to live and nothing, really, to do and the threat of future reprisals, the four women—Sisters Mary Angela, Mary Elizabeth, Mary Magdalene and Mary Bonaventure—took up residence in the Academy's barn.

The nuns wanted to rebuild the Academy immediately, if not in Belle Prairie, then at least in Little Falls, where they had been generously received after the fire. "It is the plan to secure land in this city," the *Little Falls Transcript* reported after the fire, "and to build a convent here for the use of the Sisters and their school. The Sisters have already visited the Archbishop in St. Paul, and have communicated with the head of the church in Rome in regard to removing to Little Falls, and the construction of the convent will probably begin as soon as the details can be arranged."¹⁸ Actually, the nuns had not contacted the Pope, as implied in the article, but rather their Mother Superior, Mary Ignatius, for instructions. It was an ignoble end to the sisterhood at Belle Prairie: Their convent had been destroyed by members of their own church, and the nuns were forced to live in a barn with no clear mandate or means of support, while they awaited word from their Mother Superior, some 5,000 miles away in Rome. "We wrote to Rome again and again," Sister Mary Angela stated, "without receiving any answer."¹⁹

¹⁷"Convent Burned." *Little Falls Transcript*, 26 April 1889. The arsonists were never apprehended.

¹⁸*Little Falls Transcript*, 3 May 1889.

¹⁹Rose Mae Rausch, ed. *The Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls* (Little Falls: Franciscan Sisters, 1991), n.p. "My heart is troubled about the hardships our Sisters have endured the past few months. Our Belle Prairie convent and school burned down, we have not heard from Mother Mary Ignatius Hayes and I'm not sure where we will be going to continue our works of mercy. While we trust in the Lord, we don't want to continue accepting lodging from the fam-

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When word finally did arrive, it was not from Rome or even from Mary Ignatius, but rather from the Mother Superior's assistant, Sister Mary of the Angels, who was in the United States soliciting subscriptions for the *Annals* and seeking donations for the Association of St. Anthony. The news was not encouraging. Mary Ignatius had decided not to reopen St. Anthony's Academy with the donations or the insurance money. Rather, the four nuns were to "give up" any orphans they had in their care and relocate to the sisterhood in Georgia. "There will be no building nor purchasing in Minnesota at present," Mary of the Angels wrote peremptorily to Buh.

The prospect of moving to Georgia dismayed the nuns, who had heard of miserable living and working conditions at the Industrial School for Colored Girls. Nevertheless, they rode the train to Augusta using fare money that had been donated by Archbishop Ireland in St. Paul. At the Industrial School they were not well-received. Bishop Becker of Augusta would not let them take up residence because he felt he could not adequately protect them from the "danger in which [they] were outside of the city, and surrounded by an uncivilized race of negroes," according to Sister Mary Angela.

The nuns were thus in a quandary. Bishop Becker refused to take them into his Georgia diocese; Archbishop Ireland had stated that they could not remain in Minnesota without a mission. Neither man could get a response from Mary Ignatius in Rome and neither wished to have any further dealings with her at all. Desperate, with no place to go, the nuns again wrote to their Mother Superior for instructions, but she again refused to answer. In a carefully worded letter to Mary Ignatius, Ireland advised against rebuilding the Academy in Belle Prairie after the "lamentable LeMay trouble" and left open the possibility that the remaining nuns might rebuild the Academy in Minnesota under different management. Again there was no reply from Rome. Mary Ignatius, either because of illness or neglect, had apparently deserted her two sisterhoods in America in favor of her Missionary Franciscan Sisters Order in Rome.

With this realization, three of the nuns returned to Belle Prairie and their barn behind the burnt-out convent. The remaining nuns later abandoned their Georgia post to come to Minnesota, and early in 1890 the small group had moved into a house in Little Falls. In March two of the sisters, Mary Magdalene and Mary Joseph, traveled to Rome to see the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide and request autonomy from their Mother Superior. When Mary Ignatius offered no objection to the separation, the cardinal allowed the Minnesota sisterhood to leave their Mother Superior in March 1891, to join with Bishop Zardetti as a diocesan institution. Mother Mary Francis Beauchamp, the Mother Superior from the Augusta convent, was named the first Mother Superior of the Little Falls group.²⁰

ilies here. It is not our mission to be a burden to people but to serve the Lord by serving those who need us."

²⁰" Although we are penniless, receiving our autonomy and becoming a congregation is a tremendous step for us. The good, Reverend Bishop has given us some warm letters of recommendation so we have the credentials to solicit money for a motherhouse. St. Francis would be so pleased with our progress!" Rausch, n.p.

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To bolster their ranks, the seven nuns from Minnesota and Georgia began recruiting among Mary Ignatius' zelatrices, a group of sisters responsible for soliciting alms and subscriptions to the *Annals of Our Lady of the Angels*. They soon attracted nine zelatrices from New York, Boston and Philadelphia and started the order's motherhouse—the town's first—in Little Falls.²¹ The Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, as they named themselves, grew rapidly in the late 19th century. Like the Missionary Sisters of Mary Ignatius, they were members of the Third Regular Order of St. Francis of Assisi, a group often referred to as the Tertiaries. In 1892 the sisters established St. Gabriel Hospital and St. Otto Nursing Home in Little Falls. The following year they established the St. Cloud Home for Disturbed Children in St. Cloud and the St. Anthony Hospital in Rock Island, Illinois. At the turn of the century they founded the St. Francis Hospital in Breckenridge and the St. James Hospital at Perham.²²

Meanwhile, Mother Mary Ignatius continued her oversight of the Missionary Franciscan Sisters in Rome. The loss of zelatrices to the Little Falls order had effectively crippled her fundraising efforts in the United States. Without the zelatrices soliciting funds in America, gross receipts for Mary Ignatius' mission plummeted from over \$17,000 in 1890 (\$15,500 of which came from *Annals* subscriptions) to less than \$6,000 in 1891. In response, she complained to Rome. In September 1890 the seven nuns in Little Falls were expelled from the Franciscan Order and forbidden from calling themselves Franciscan Missionaries or wearing Franciscan habits. Bishop Zardetti in turn protested to Rome in behalf of the sisters and secured their reinstatement as a religious community.

In January 1891 Mary Ignatius' order numbered 25 nuns and five novices, all situated in Italy. The Mother Superior enrolled more zelatrices, only to have them recruited by the Little Falls nuns as soon as they arrived in the United States. Late in 1892 she learned that her Augusta school had deteriorated badly since its aban-

²¹The sixteen original sisters of the Little Falls Franciscan order were: Mary Francis Beauchamp, Mary Magdalene Michaud, Mary Bonaventure Harrison, Mary Bernadine Bergen, Mary Joseph White, Mary Angela Michaud, Mary Hyacinth Leydon, Mary Rose Ethier, Mary Elizabeth Ethier, Mary Anthony Lyons, Mary Gabriel Keenan, Mary Baptistista Blais, Mary Cherubina Vincent, Mary Michael McClarney, Mary Pacifica Marion and Mary Ferdinand Boyer.

²²Later renamed the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, this Order has grown substantially since that time, establishing schools, hospitals, nursing homes and other facilities throughout Minnesota and Wisconsin. By 1976, the group was responsible for founding over fifty such institutions in the United States and four missions in South America. Still based in Little Falls, the Franciscan Sisters remain a sizable and influential entity within the Catholic Church. "Today we number over 200 vowed members," the Order states on its website. "We live and serve throughout the United States as well as in Mexico, Ecuador and Kenya. Our mission is extended in a manifold way by an association of friends (Franciscan Associates) of the congregation who aspire to participate in the spirit and energy of the sisterhood while remaining in their own committed lifestyles. Franciscan Associates are women, men and even families from many walks of life who share with us a desire to live the Gospel with joy and zeal and to be witness in society to the peace and reconciliation that Francis and Clare envisioned." *Our Life: Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota*. 15 May 2005 <<http://www.fslf.org/>>.

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■ Figure 9. Mother Mary of the Angels Chaffee.

ba Doucette (see Figure 10) became the Superior General of the order. Under her direction, the sisterhood expanded its presence in the United States, reopening the Augusta, Georgia, school, opening a convent and orphanage in New Jersey and starting parish schools in Boston, Newcastle, New York, Pittsburgh, Brooklyn and Chicago. In 1921 the order opened a home for aged sisters of the Institute in New Jersey. This also became the home of the *Annals of Our Lady of the Angels*, which the nuns published until 1973.

By 1930 the Missionary Sisters had opened schools and orphanages in several states, as well as Egypt, Canada and Australia. During the 1930s they established a novitiate in Ireland and schools at Alexandria and Helipolis, Egypt, Newton, Massachusetts, and Rosemont, Canada. During World War II the sisters continued expanding the order's facilities in the United States, Italy, Australia, Egypt and Canada; after the war they opened a teachers' training school for the Institute in Newton and branched into Papua New Guinea (1948) and eventually into Bolivia (1970), Peru (1985) and Chad (1991).²³

²³As quoted in de Brelviay, 236.

²⁴The Missionary Sisters opened other schools in Cairo (1907) and Damanhour (1913).

²⁵Today the Missionary Sisters number about 360 nuns. "The spiritual development of our sisters as well as their response to the complex needs of an expanding Church has always been the *primum concern* of the Institute," the Order states on its website. "Coiled by God's love to follow St. Francis and Mother Mary Ignatius, we are pilgrims on

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Mother Mary Columba Doucette had grown up in Belle Prairie and had attended St. Anthony's Academy. It was to her parents' house that the nuns and children had fled after the convent fire in 1888. It was not surprising, then, when in 1908 Father Barras, the priest of the Belle Prairie Catholic church, requested that the Missionary Sisters reopen a boarding school here, she accepted his invitation. In 1909 the order purchased the 85-acre Academy property back from its mortgage-holder for \$700, with the intent to rebuild a schoolhouse. To avoid reopening old animosities, the new facility would be named the Our Lady of the Angels Academy. The lack of funds—and of nuns to run the facility—caused a two-year delay in its construction. In June 1911, however, the sisters hired Little Falls contractor A.D. Harrison to build the new facility for \$12,300. The new academy building was situated immediately east of the site of the original academy. Work proceeded apace that summer and fall, and by November the *Little Falls Transcript* could report

that the school was completed:

The school opens under the most favorable circumstances, many children being already enrolled and several more waiting to be received. The location of the institution is ideal, situated as it is on the banks of the Mississippi and along one of the finest driveways in the county. A corps of eight or ten Sisters is in charge at present and more instructors will be added as needed.⁴⁶



Figure 10. Mother Mary Columba Doucette.

Costing some \$20,000 to build and equip, the new structure would house a boarding and day school for area girls. Elementary grades one through eight would be taught by the nuns, with an initial enrollment of 42 students. "The school possesses a charming, home-like atmosphere, which is of vital importance to the growing child," the sisters advertised. "Thoroughness and attention to the individual provide the keynote of the work done at the academy. Proper preparation for all class work is insured, because the study periods are under the supervision of the members of the faculty." The sisters continued:

the way to the Most High. Turning continually to God in Christ, we turn also towards all peoples, especially in the persons of the poor and rejected with whom Christ identified himself. In loving concern for one another, we travel together as those who have here no permanent home or attachment and are always in readiness for whatever awaits us on our journey." *Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception: United States Governance Circle*. 15 May 2005 <<http://www.mifusa.org/>>

⁴⁶"Now Ready to Receive Pupils." *Little Falls Daily Transcript*, 6 November 1911.

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It is the aim of the academy to impart a thorough Christian education. Simplicity and solidity are combined in this method of instruction. Care is taken to develop and strengthen the character by the triple culture of the mind, heart, and body and thus build strong characters with solid religious training so that the rules of good behavior may be observed from a sense of honor, and from religious and moral motives.²⁷

As with the earlier Academy, religious observance was stressed at Our Lady of the Angels, though this time in English rather than French. Each school day began with mass in the chapel, and prayers were said at various times during the day. Additionally:

Special attention is given to good manners and etiquette. The members of the faculty not only regard themselves as teachers but also as personal friends of each pupil, since the welfare of each individual is the immediate concern of her teacher; it is not so great an importance that these youngsters who came under our influence remember the arithmetic, the geography, the history that we strive to teach them, but rather that they remember that the aim of the academy is to prepare them to take their places in the world as good citizens, worth-while members of society, and above all, to attain the ultimate end of all Christian education, their personal sanctification and eternal salvation.²⁸

In 1919 Mother Mary Anselm was named the Superior for the Academy. Under her charge, enrollment increased incrementally during the 1920s. Eventually, the sisters agreed to allow boys into the school, necessitating an expansion. In the summer of 1930 they commissioned architects Buechner & Orth of St. Paul to design symmetrical wings that would flank the original building on both sides. Configured as three-story brick blocks, they would more than double the size of the school building. The new wings would house convent communal rooms on the first floor, with an expanded chapel in the northern corner and classrooms and dormitory space on the upper levels. In August 1930 ground was broken for the wings; in March 1931 they were dedicated by Rev. John Van der Hulst, prior of Crosier College in Onamia.

During the Great Depression enrollment began to flag at the Academy, prompting the order to recall Mother Mary Anselm, who had left for another mission in 1925, as its director. Again under her direction, the facility began to flourish. In 1936 the order rehabilitated the building's interior. "Two new boys' dormitories, one for the senior boys and another for junior boys, were constructed, also a new cheerful and inviting dining room," the *St. Cloud Register* reported. "The building throughout is well ventilated, lighted, and heated, affording its occupants every advantage. Extensive grounds surround the school, offering ample facilities for outdoor recreation."²⁹ With seventeen sisters in residence in the Academy's convent, the school was well received in the community and continued to grow during the Depression and World War. At war's end some 105 students were enrolled here.

²⁷"Lady of the Angels Academy Ideal Boarding School," *Little Falls Transcript*, n.d.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹"Belle Prairie Convent and School Founded by English Nun in 1873." *St. Cloud Register*, 10 September 1939.

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By 1950 the sisters were ready to expand the school again, this time adding a free-standing gymnasium behind the original structure. Early that year they hired Fred V. Traynor, an architect in St. Cloud, to design the new building and in March contracted with the Nelson Construction Company of Willmar to build it for \$57,000. The gym was completed the following year. In 1958-1959 a small garage structure was added onto the gym's north side. Designed by architects Bettenburg, Townsend & Stolte of St. Paul, it was built by Little Falls contractor Marcel LaFond for \$6500.

The last expansion to the Academy was made in 1962, when the sisters constructed a high school building immediately north of the original grade school. Named Mother Ignatius High School, it was built by Marcel LaFond and dedicated in May 1963 by Bishop Peter Bartholome. Before completion of this structure, the Academy offered only grade school classes. With the new building, the order began teaching 9th grade to boys and a full four-year high school curriculum to girls. The gender difference reflected the order's intention to prepare Academy girls for the sisterhood.

As a boarding school offering Catholic-based education to grade schoolers—and later high schoolers—the Our Lady of the Angels Academy had no equivalents in the area. The facilities offered by the local school district were, of course, secular day schools, with no religious curricula and no provision for overnight accommodations. St. Mary's School and the Our Lady of Lourdes School in Little Falls were Catholic parish schools that offered religious education, but were both primary-level day schools. And the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls maintained their own Catholic boarding school from 1926 until 1977, but it accommodated only high school girls. With the Our Lady of the Angels Academy located next door to the Holy Family Church, there was no need for a traditional parish school, so the Catholic children in the Belle Prairie parish attended the Academy as day students.

During the 1950s and 1960s, enrollment at the Our Lady of the Angels Academy remained relatively constant, with some 80 boarding school students and about 40 day school students under the tutelage of around 20 nuns. The students represented an eclectic mix, with local parish children sitting in classes with boarded children from a variety of socio-economic circumstances. Attracted by the school's reputation for first-rate religious education, wealthy parents from St. Cloud, Minneapolis, Chicago and as far away as New York and California sent their children to this tiny Minnesota village for grade school and high school instruction. Additionally, the diocese sent orphaned and destitute children to the Academy, and troubled inner-city children attended classes here as well. As a result, the student body displayed a noteworthy ethnic diversity, comprised of Anglo-Americans, African Americans and Native Americans.

The Academy's religious curriculum had changed over time. No longer were the children required to attend mass each day, but they did say morning, noon and evening prayers. They observed religious feast days, and they were required to attend daily Catechism classes, often taught by a priest from the Holy Family Church. On Sundays the boarding students attended mass in the Holy Family Church as a group with the nuns. The day students attended mass with their families.

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The new high school did not accomplish what the Order had wanted—a training facility for prospective nuns. Reflective of national trends in the late 1960s, enrollment fell precipitously. The graduating class in 1968 was only six students. The next year promised even less.³⁰ In light of this the Missionary Sisters closed the Academy in May 1969 and once again moved from Belle Prairie, this time for good. In September St. Cloud real estate developer Dan Brutger purchased the property and leased the buildings to the school district in Little Falls. The district used the high school to house a kindergarten and head start program until 1970.

When a religious commune, Christ's Household of Faith, attempted to buy the property from Brutger in 1971, the Catholic parish bought it instead. In 1978 the parish rented both the high school and the original Academy building to Central Minnesota Together Encountering Christ [TEC], a non-profit corporation associated with the St. Cloud Diocese. A program for Christian youth that had begun in 1965 as Teens Encountering Christ, TEC purchased the property in 2000 for \$1. The original Academy building has recently been acquired by MetroPlains Development of St. Paul. MetroPlains plans to adaptively reuse the structure to provide affordable housing. Sensitively rehabilitated, the Our Lady of the Angels Academy will again offer an opportunity for preservation and interpretation of this important aspect of Belle Prairie history.

Over 400 individual orders of Catholic nuns have functioned in the United States since the first sisters began coming into the country in 1790. Formed under a wide range of circumstances, these disparate groups have served the Holy Mother Church in a variety of ways. The two orders intertwined in Belle Prairie history represent the two extremes in relations between sisterhoods and their local parishes, with the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls tied closely to the St. Cloud Diocese and the Missionary Franciscan Sisters acting from an autonomous motherhouse in Rome. Despite the enmity that formed between the two groups in the late 19th century, they share similar institutional histories and have both been responsible for the establishment of numerous schools and hospitals in the United States. The Academy at Belle Prairie represents the common ground between the two groups. From its beginning in 1911—and before that, to its predecessor in 1872—the Academy has functioned as the only parochial boarding school in the Little Falls area for elementary-level children. Acting in concert with the Holy Family Church, the Missionary nuns have provided quality education to the Catholic children of Belle Prairie parish as well as to disadvantaged children throughout the diocese and to advantaged children around the country. As the most distinguished school in the township, the Academy has developed a loyal following among its alumni and former instructors. It is locally significant as the best example in the township of the Catholic educational system, which as an educational entity is exceeded only by the nation's public school system in the breadth of its influence in America.

³⁰The year 1969 was an extraordinary one for the Catholic church. In 1968 almost 180,000 sisters served the church, representing an all-time high. The next year, due to circumstances that are only partially understood, the flow of women into the sisterhood virtually stopped.

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Verbal Boundary Description

Southeast Quarter of Northeast Quarter on Section 14, Township 41, Range 32, Morrison County, Minnesota, as described:

Commencing at the east quarter corner of said Section 14, thence north 0 degrees, 10 minutes, 55 seconds west, assuming bearing, 68.81 feet along the east line of said Southeast Quarter of Northeast Quarter to the point of beginning of said line; thence north 87 degrees, 17 minutes, 35 seconds west 1006.12 feet; thence north 70 degrees, 36 minutes, 05 seconds west 339.36 feet, more or less, to the west line of said Southeast Quarter of the Northeast Quarter of said line there terminating, hereafter referred to as "TEC Boundary Line"; thence easterly parallel to the TEC Boundary Line three hundred feet, more or less; thence northeasterly at a right angle two hundred feet; thence Northwest three hundred feet; thence Southwesterly to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification

The Belle Prairie parish purchased 95 acres of property, including this building, in 1974. Of this 93 acres were sold to Morrison County for a park, leaving the current 1.97-acre property, as described above. The boundaries of the nominated area coincide with the legal boundaries for the school building. As indicated by Figure 1, they form a rectangular area encompassing the Academy building, its immediate grounds and the replica of Mary Ignatius' original cabin (a non-contributing element). The boundaries exclude the TEC building, the Holy Family Church and the Holy Family Rectory, none of which are included in this nomination.

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Index to Photographs

Name of photographer: Clayton B. Fraser
Date of photographs: December 2004
Location of original neg: FRASERdesign, Loveland, Colorado
Description of views:

- Photo number 1: General view of Academy building and grounds, with Riverwood Drive in foreground (1950 replica of cabin at far left). View to north.
- Photo number 2: East front of building. View to northwest.
- Photo number 3: South side of building, with 1931 south wing at right and 1951 gymnasium at left. View to north.
- Photo number 4: South side and west rear of building, with 1951 gymnasium at left, 1911 original section at center and 1931 south wing at right. View to east.
- Photo number 5: North side of building, with 1931 north wing at left, 1951 gymnasium at right and 1958 garage at center. View to south.
- Photo number 6: Detail of east façade of 1911 original section, with 1936 entryway portico at center. View to west.
- Photo number 7: Interior view of first-floor chapel, showing sanctuary flanked by statue niches (ghosts of angel paintings visible beside the niches). View to southeast.
- Photo number 8: Interior view of first-floor gymnasium. View to west.
- Photo number 9: Interior view of typical second-floor classroom in 1911 original section. View to northwest.
- Photo number 10: Interior view of typical second-floor dormitory room in 1911 original section. View to east.
- Photo number 11: Interior view of third-floor girls' dormitory in 1911 original section. View to north.