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Memoir of Sister Cecilia O’Conway:
Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s

By

BETTY ANN McNEIL, O.C.

In this bicentennial year of the founding of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s by Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821), it is appropriate to examine the “precious stones in the foundation” and retell their story. Cecilia Maria O’Conway (1788-1865) is to the Sisters of Charity of North America what Marguerite Naseau (1594-1633) is to the Daughters of Charity of Europe — the first candidate to present herself and the sister who showed others the way.

This article presents one of the oldest extant chronologies of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s and was written by Sister Cecilia O’Conway at Emmitsburg, Maryland. In order to elucidate the entries of this primitive record, extant writings of Sister Cecilia’s companions are utilized to hear their voices and learn from their accounts. The most pristine description of the earliest Sisters of Charity comes directly from the founding generation.

In addition to the correspondence of the foundress, Elizabeth Ann Seton, and the memoir of Sister Cecilia, I draw on the voices of Sister Rose White (1784-1841), and Sister Margaret George (1787-1868), who both left written records. Sister Margaret and Sister Rose entered the Sisters of Charity at Emmitsburg during the time span of Sister Cecilia’s chronology (1805-1815), and were her companions until 1814. Both left valuable records which are

1 “The first Mother, foundress, 34 years of age. June 22, 1809. A native of New York. Arrived this day at Mount Saint Mary’s. Remained in the log house on the hill until July 30th in the morning. Took possession of the farm house, filled the office till her death — 11 years and seven months. Deceased January 4, 1821. [Written in the margin]: died in her 46th year.” #1, The Treasurer’s Notebook of Sister Margaret George (1808-1843), Archives of the Daughters of Charity, St. Joseph’s Provincial House [Archive hereinafter cited as ASJPH] RB#69. Hereafter cited as Treasurer’s Notebook.
3 “Sister Rose (Rose Landry White). 25 years [of age]. Joined Mother [Seton] in Baltimore. Daughter of Mrs. Magdalen Lendrè [sic] [aka Landry]. Widow of Captain Joseph White of Baltimore. Succeeded Mother Seton. Filled the office 6 years - from 1821 to 1827. Elected again in 1833 and held the office to 1839. Is now Sister Servant in Frederick (1840). Born in Baltimore. Died July 25th in 1841 in Frederick. [Written in the margin]: [At the time of her death, her body] was brought home [for burial in the community cemetery at Saint Joseph’s].” #7, Treasurer’s Notebook.
4 “Sister Margaret (Margaret Cecilia Ferrall George), Daughter of Mr. John Ferrall, a native of Ireland. Only 6 years old when she left it; widow of Lucas George, Esq., professor of Belles Lettres at Saint Mary’s College, Baltimore. Educated in Baltimore as she is also the writer, she leaves to others to say — when and where she lived and died: (1840).” #24, Treasurer’s Notebook.
mined to provide context and additional content about events included in the O'Conway memoir, as well as significant others she omitted.

Memoir of Cecilia O'Conway. The first and last pages.

Courtesy, Daughters of Charity Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland

Cecilia Maria O'Conway

Cecilia Maria O'Conway was the oldest of ten children born to Matthias James O'Conway (1766-1842), a native of Galway, Ireland, and Rebecca Archer, whose Protestant parents were originally from Dublin. With their first child, Cecilia Maria, they moved to New Orleans and later to Havana, Cuba. By 1799 they had moved to Philadelphia where Matthias worked as a Spanish and French interpreter. The family moved to Philadelphia sometime after her birth in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Matthias was a philologist, lexicographer and interpreter of languages who had international connections, especially with Cuba and Mexico.

When discerning her call in life, Cecilia Maria was attracted to contemplative religious life and thought she would need to go to Spain to become a nun. God had other plans, made clear when Reverend Pierre Babade, S.S. (1763-1846), a Sulpician priest, visited Philadelphia on a missionary trip. Babade, who had assisted Reverend Louis William Dubourg, S.S. (1766-1835) in establishing Saint Mary's College in Baltimore and taught Spanish there, probably knew Cecilia Maria's father either through Cuban connections or because he was a linguist and Spanish interpreter. Through Babade's
instrumentality and Dubourg’s support, Cecilia Maria joined Elizabeth Bayley Seton at Paca Street, Baltimore, Maryland, in December of 1808. Cecilia Maria was the first candidate for the Sisters of Charity, and as such she joined an apostolic society as the first Sister of Charity in North America.

Sister Cecilia O’Conway was also known as Sister Veronique, after Cecilia Barbara Seton arrived in June 1809, but she reverted to the name Cecilia after the latter’s death in 1810. Elizabeth Seton was very fond of Sister Cecilia and described her as having an “Angelic disposition.” She was probably one of those involved in “the first Mission of Charity,” documented in a written report, “To the Revd. Superior Mother and Council of St. Joseph” which provided “an account of the first Mission of Charity” indicating that they “arrived safe after some difficulty on the road.”

At the first Council meeting of the newly established Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s, Sister Cecilia was named to the Council and fulfilled the office of secretary for the community, probably until Sister Angela Brady was elected to replace her. Not only was she appointed school mistress but, in the beginning, she was also sacristan and one of six sisters who shared responsibility for handling the community laundry done in Tom’s Creek at that time.

Sister Cecilia was in the first novitiate group and the first group to make vows 13 July 1813. She was present for the reading of the proposed Regulations for the Sisters of Charity in the United States of America to the assembled community for approval. John Carroll (1735-1815), archbishop of Baltimore (1789-1815), approved the Regulations, which were based on the Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity in France, in January of 1812.

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Special thanks to Marguerite Zerby, S.C., and to Lateefah Philibert, M.A., for their assistance in preparing this document.
Memoir

This document covers the time period of 1805-1815, but contains gaps for 1811, 1813, and 1814. The memoir may have been written retrospectively, probably prior to 1817. It consists of two unlined, folded half-sheets of paper approximately 7 inches x 4 ¾ inches in size, folded in half again, creating eight sides on which dark brown ink was used to write on both sides. The writer sometimes used underlining for emphasis and also added double lines as separators between some entries.

In preparing the manuscript for this article, I preserved the chronological sequence of presentation, original spelling and sentence construction, but have inserted missing letters in brackets for readability. I have adjusted the alignment of some dates with the appropriate sentence into paragraph format for readability. The endnotes contain the biographical descriptions of individual sisters taken from the Treasurer’s Notebook of Sister Margaret Cecilia George which is the earliest personnel record of the community (1808-1843).12 The Journal of Mother Rose White and Sister Margaret George’s Memoirs and Chronology help to fill in some gaps.

It is plausible that Sister Cecilia, as the first Sister of Charity, was advised to compile an historical record of the foundation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s. The facts and dates recorded have been checked against extant contemporary records for accuracy and found to be reliable, except where noted.

March 14th 1805. Our dearest Mother [Seton] was received in the [Catholic] Church March 25th 1805 she made her 1st Communion in N[ew] York.13

Corpus Christi June 16th 1808.14 Mother arrived in Baltimore with her three little daughters Anna [Maria], [Catherine] Josepbine and Rebecca.15

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12 Sister Margaret entered the Sisters of Charity in 1812 and was a companion of Sister Cecilia O’Conway at Emmitsburg. Sister Margaret was the sister servant of the mission at Cincinnati in 1852 when the sisters separated from Emmitsburg and formed the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati as an independent diocesan congregation.
13 In addition to making her Profession of Faith, Elizabeth Bayley Seton also received the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Confirmation for the first time at St. Peter’s Church on Barclay Street in lower Manhattan.
14 The Seton party arrived at St. Mary’s Chapel of the Presentation during its dedication. The Sulpicians had opened St. Mary’s Seminary on what is now Paca Street, Baltimore, Maryland, in 1791. It was chartered as a civil university in 1805.
15 Anna Maria (Annina) Seton (1795-1812), Catherine Charlton (Josephine) Seton (1800-1891), and Rebecca Mary Seton (1802-1816). Cf. issue of Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton and William
December 7th 1808 first beginning [candidate] of the new Institution; I arrived on this day from Philadelphia.

Maria Murphy [Burke] arrived in Holy week 1809 from Philadelphia.

Susan Clossey came on Wednesday 24th May 1809 from New York.

Mary Ann Butler arrived the 1st June 1809 from Philadelphia.

April 27th 1809 Josephine made her first Communion in Baltimore.

June 22d 1809 dearest Mother, Cecilia Seton, Maria

Magee Seton, CW, 2:xxviii.

16 The Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's. All records document that the community was founded in The Stone House at Emmitsburg, 31 July 1809, feast of St. Ignatius of Loyola, patron of the Maryland missions of the Jesuits.

17 "Sister Cecilia/Veronica (Cecilia Maria O'Conway, 1788-1865). Daughter of Mr. O'Conway, profession of translator of languages (Philadelphia). Mother Seton's first companion — joined her in Baltimore. After remaining 14 years, left the community for the convent of [the Ursulines] in Canada in 1822 [1823], May 12th. The first professed sister that left. She was a native of Ireland and had from early life wished to become a nun — (and now is one)." #2, Treasurer's Notebook. Cecilia dates the genesis of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's to her arrival as the first candidate. In a letter to a lifelong friend, Elizabeth refers to Cecilia as her "assistant." #5.20, Elizabeth Ann Seton to Julia Scott, 2 March 1809, CW, 2:59. Cf. Records of the American Catholic Historical Society, 5 (1894), 420-520, contains a brief biography of Cecilia O'Conway by Sara Trainer Smith entitled "Philadelphia's First Nun."

18 "Sister Maria (Maria Murphy Burke, c.1787-1812). About 22. Joined Mother [Seton] in Baltimore in Holy Week [of] 1809. Daughter of Capt. Murphy. Her Mother (Margaret Cary Murphy Burke) was afterwards married to Mr. Burke [and she is sometimes referred to as Maria Burke]. Sister Maria was a native of Ireland — an uncommon piety, and after edifying all during 6 years sweetly and calmly breathed her last October 12 [15], 1812." #4, Treasurer's Notebook. Sister Maria was a niece to Matthew Carey, a prominent printer in Philadelphia at the time.


Murphy [Burke] and Madalene [Harriet] Seton\textsuperscript{22} set off for Emmitsbourg.

July 28th 1809 Sr. Rose White and Kitty Mullan\textsuperscript{23} were [previously] added to our little Community and we all set off from Baltimore in a waggon for the Valley of Emmitsburg.

_Perfection_, every heart transported with delight at the little beginning of St. Joseph's family, the journey was pleasant some relating the different devout passages of St. Theresa's [of Avila] travels at last we arrived at the old stone house where we met our beloved Mother, Cecilia Seton, Madalene and Maria all with gay and happy hearts and yet more happy to find the beloved Cecilia restored to her health which but 3 weeks before was hurrying her to the grave. She was one of the first who ran down the lane to meet the waggon of travellers.

30th July all met in the old [farm] house\textsuperscript{24} where two more members were added, Sister Sally Thompson\textsuperscript{25} and her younger [sibling] Sr. Ellen [Thompson]\textsuperscript{26} we were at this time 9 in number.

August 10th 1809 we began our first retreat under the care of our 1st Superior Revd. Wm. Duburg.\textsuperscript{27}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Death had marked her for his Victim. She died April 28, 1810.” #3, Treasurer’s Notebook.
  \item Henrietta (Harriet) Madeleine Seton (1789-1809), was the daughter of William and Anna Maria Curson Seton, and a half-sister of William Magee Seton. She accompanied her younger sister Cecilia to Baltimore in June 1809 for a visit with their sister-in-law Elizabeth Seton. Once engaged to Elizabeth’s half-brother, Andrew Barclay Bayley (1783-1811), Harriett broke the engagement after her conversion to Roman Catholicism at Emmitsburg. She decided to convert on 22 July but made her profession of faith and First Communion 24 September, and died 23 December 1809.
  \item “Sister Kitty (Catharine Mullan, 1783-1815). 26 years of age. Joined Mother [Seton] in Baltimore. Filled many important offices. The 1st Housekeeper, nominated treasurer, Mistress of Novices. After a lapse of six years of edification and usefulness, died December 25, 1815. Received Holy Communion in the morning and [received] Viaticum [in the] afternoon. A native of Baltimore.” #8, Treasurer’s Notebook. Sister Kitty’s surname appears in community records as both Mullan and Mullen. Mullen is correct.
  \item The Stone House was constructed c.1750.
  \item “Sister Sally (Sarah Thompson, 1778-1850). Born and raised in the neighborhood [of Emmitsburg]. Of pious, respectable parents. Joined Mother [Seton] as soon as she [Mother Seton] came to the Mountain. 31 years of age. Still living (1840) – the [sentence not completed].” #9, Treasurer’s Notebook.
  \item Cf. A-6.4a, “The Provisional Regulations for the St. Joseph Sisters,” CW, 2:737. This document
\end{itemize}
Octobr 20th 1809 Bishop Carroll administered Confirmation in the Valley for the first time.

Decber 23d 1809 Madelane [Harriet] Seton died, she was interred on Christmas eve, most solemn day to all.28

Feby 20th 1810. We moved in the new house though not finished. This same day the B[lessed] Sacrament was carried in procession to the new little Altar of St. Joseph’s so poor and humble not even plaistered.

Feby 22d. We first opened [Saint Joseph’s Free] day school.

March 19th 1810 the first high mass was celebrated in St. Joseph[’s House].

April 9th 1811 [sic, 1810]. Mother returned to Baltimore with Cecilia Seton whose health was again very bad and required a change of air, (as was thought).

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28 Henrietta (Harriet) Madeleine Seton (1787-1809), was the daughter of William Seton and Anna-Maria Seton.
April 30th. [1810] Mother, Anna [Maria Seton] and Sr. Susan [Clossey] returned with the precious corpse which after being exposed to the view of the Community, in the choir was deposited in the sacred little wood near her Sister.

May 14th 1810 we receive the first 5 boarders from Frederick [for Saint Joseph’s Academy].

July 29th 1810 Revd Mr [John] David arrived with three new Sisters vis. Fanny Jordan,29 Angela Brady, and Julia [Shirk]30 ...he staid at the Stone house; with him the second retreat was made, which began 8th of October and finished the 15th.

1811. [No entries.]

Feby 2d 1812 we made our third Retreat with the Revd J[ohn] Dubois our present Superior.

October 7th 1812 Bishop Carroll gave Confirmation in St. Joseph’s house.

October 15th 1812 Sr. Maria [Murphy Burke] died.31

1813. [No entries]

1814. [No entries]

July 20th 1815 first election [since approval of rule in 1812] of Mother took place at same time the officers were appointed.32 Sr. Rose [White], assistant, Sr. Kitty [Mullen] Treasurer, Sr. Ann Gruber Procuratrix.


31 Cf. 11.9 “departed St. Teresa’s day...,” CW, 3b:8.

32 The Council Minutes do not include the results.
Commentary
March 1805 — June 1808

This memoir includes events in the life of Elizabeth Seton prior to Sister Cecilia’s acquaintance with her. Elizabeth must have shared these details with her. The memoir concludes with the first election, after the approval of the Regulations of the Sisters of Charity in the United States of America in 1812.\(^{33}\) Sister Cecilia was in Emmitsburg continuously from 1809 until 1817 and would have had personal knowledge of the events of this period.

Mrs. Seton wrote her youngest sister-in-law, Cecilia Seton, who was still in New York, “It is expected I shall be the Mother of many daughters.”\(^{34}\) Two months later she was writing her life-long friend Julia Scott about her satisfaction with the status quo. However, Elizabeth noted, “many very advantageous offers of assistants have presented themselves,” and she seemed reluctant to this change, “but in the present state of my family we are so happy and live so much as a Mother surrounded by her children that I cannot resolve to admit a stranger, yet it must be eventually.”\(^{35}\)

By early March Mrs. Seton was expressing her delight about the evolving plan of establishing the Sisters of Charity, and referred to Cecilia O’Conway as “a very amiable young lady who has been my assistant” and who would accompany her to Emmitsburg.\(^{36}\)

As you have so long shared all my pains my dearest how much pleasure it will give you to know that providence has disposed for me a plan after my own heart — a Benevolent gentleman [Samuel Sutherland Cooper] of this place has formed a scheme of establishing a manufactory for the use of the poor, and includes in his intention the Education of children rich and poor. He is about purchasing a place at Emmetsburg some distance from Baltimore, not very considerable, and has offered me the department of taking care of the children who may be presented or rather of being the Mother of the family. This pleases me for many reasons — in the first place I shall live in the mountains, in the next, I shall see no more of the World than if I was out of it and have every object centered in my own family, both of provision employment etc...\(^{37}\)


\(^{34}\) 5.10, Elizabeth Ann Seton to Cecilia Seton, 6 October 1808, CW, 2:34.

\(^{35}\) 5.13, Elizabeth Ann Seton to Julia Scott, 6 December 1808, CW, 2:41.

\(^{36}\) 5.20, Elizabeth Ann Seton to Julia Scott, 2 March 1809, CW, 2:59.

\(^{37}\) *Ibid.* Samuel Sutherland Cooper was a former sea captain and Catholic convert of Reverend
Cecilia records the development of the Sisters of Charity from her personal experience and attributes the “first beginning of the new Institution” to her arrival as the first candidate or postulant. Elizabeth Ann Seton refers to her as an ‘assistant.’ Apparently Reverend Babade, stationed at St. Mary’s College in Baltimore, met Cecilia O’Conway and Maria Murphy Burke there. As a result of this acquaintance, and the instrumentality of Reverend Dubourg, president of St. Mary’s College, Cecilia learned about Mrs. Seton and the Sulpicians’ project of collaborating with her to establish the Sisters of Charity.

Providentially, the day before Cecilia O’Conway arrived in Baltimore, Reverend John Dubois, S.S. (1764-1842), was admitted to the Society of St. Sulpice, and “thus made eligible, through the designs of Providence, to fill the office of Director of the Community, taking birth under the fostering care of the Sulpicians in Baltimore.”

Michael Hurley, O.S.A., at Philadelphia, and was ordained a priest in Maryland in 1818. As a seminarian he became a significant benefactor of Elizabeth Seton and the Sisters of Charity. His donation of $6,961 allowed for the purchase of 269 acres, including two tracts of 212 acres and 57 acres in Saint Mary’s Valley (near Emmitsburg). Cooper financed the purchase of the farm owned by Robert Fleming and his wife Janet Patterson Fleming. The deed was recorded on 26 April 1809, in the name of Samuel Cooper and William Dubourg of Baltimore County and John Dubois of Frederick County, Maryland. After the sisterhood was incorporated as the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s, Inc., in 1817, the title was transferred to the Sisters of Charity. At the time of his death in Bordeaux, France, his wealth had diminished to a total of only $80.00. He is buried at the Cathedral in Bordeaux not far from the tomb of his friend Cardinal Jean Lefebvre de Cheverus (1768-1836), first bishop of Boston (1808), and later Archbishop of Bordeaux (1826-1836).

38 Chronological Table (1766-1891), 6 December 1808, ASJPH 7-13. Dubois became the third bishop of New York in 1825.
Although most of the earliest candidates are included, the names of some other entrants from the same period (1809-1812) are missing when compared with the list of admissions found in the Treasurer’s Notebook, compiled later by Sister Margaret George using her own chronology for the same period. From the date of foundation, 31 July 1809, through 1812, a total of 26 names appear in the compilation by Sister Margaret George. Sister Cecilia included only the nine women who joined Mrs. Seton as candidates at Baltimore, and the two Thompson sisters who entered at Emmitsburg at the end of July 1809.

1809

It is of interest that Sister Cecilia mentioned neither Mrs. Seton’s making of private vows before Archbishop Carroll in the crypt chapel of St. Mary’s on the 25th of March, receiving the title “Mother Seton,” or the adoption of religious attire by the earliest sisters in June of 1809.39

Cecilia and Harriet Seton, sisters-in-law to Mother Seton, arrived in Baltimore for a visit at the beginning of June 1809. Cecilia was in fragile health and Dr. Pierre Chatard was consulted. He advised that she should leave the city for the country air as soon as was possible. Since the nascent community was to move to Emmitsburg in the near future, it seemed best for Mother Seton to arrange for an immediate departure with her sisters-in-law.40

During a stop in Westminster, Maryland, on Friday Mother Seton outlined the progress of their travels in a letter to Father Dubourg. The date was 21 June 1809.41 Although this memoir, and the Journal of Mother Rose White, both give the date of 22 June as the date of departure from Baltimore, the date traditionally given for the journey to Emmitsburg is 21-22 June, based on Mother Seton’s letter. In this case the travelers arrived at Mount St. Mary’s on 22 June. There Father Dubois provided hospitality in the cabin called “Mr. Duhamel’s house,” named as it was used by Reverend Charles Duhamel who ministered in the area.42 From the Mountain Elizabeth Seton described their location: “we are half in the sky the height of our situation is almost incredible.”43 Sister Cecilia’s construction of the sentence beginning “July 28th 1809” erroneously gives the impression that 28 July is the date of arrival for Rose White and Kitty Mullan at Paca Street. Both Rose and Kitty had arrived previously and were already living with the community before the first

39 #6.70, Elizabeth Ann Seton to Catherine Dupleix, [date outside 4 February 1811], CW, 2:172. 
42 Reverend Charles Duhamel (1853-1818), was a priest of the Society of the Holy Ghost and a former pastor at Hagerstown, Maryland. Duhamel replaced Reverend John Dubois as pastor of Saint Joseph Parish in Emmitsburg (1809-1818). He is buried in the original cemetery at Mount Saint Mary’s University.
group of travelers left on 22 June. Although an entry for her Philadelphia friend, Catharine (Kitty) Mullan, is omitted, she traveled with the second group. An accurate rearrangement of this section would read as follows: ‘Sr. Rose White and Kitty Mullan were [already] added to our little Community. On July 28th 1809 We all set off from Baltimore in a waggon for the Valley of Emmetsburg.’

Rose White wrote about their travels in her journal:

Bishop DuBourg had left Mrs. Rose White in the place of Mrs. Seton to take charge of the family left in Baltimore who were to follow. The persons left were the two children of Mother Seton, Josephine and Rebecca, Miss Cecilia O’Conway from Philadelphia, Miss Mary Ann Butler of Philadelphia, Miss Susan Clossey of New York, [Kitty Mullan of Baltimore], two boarders, Miss Isabella [Editha] O’Conway and Miss Julia La Briton, and a young woman who attended the duties of the house, named Miss Ann Nabs.44

July 28th is when the second group left Paca Street for Emmitsburg. A humorous incident was recorded which corroborates this conclusion.

We went on all day, without stopping to take dinner, made use of the provisions we had in the wagon. At night we stopped at a tavern where we had but poor accommodations. We asked for supper, but told them as it was Friday [28 June], not to prepare any meat. When we went to supper, there was plenty chicken on the table. Sister Kitty [Mullen] remarked we had told them not to prepare any meat. “Oh,” said the woman who waited on the table, “chicken is not meat.” We smiled and made our supper on bread and butter, tea and eggs William and Richard Seton were with us, slept in the wagon with Mr. Harris to take care of our baggage.45 We rose early and were soon seated in our wagon for another day’s journey [Saturday, 29 July]... and arrived at about 4 o’clock at the Farm House of St. Joseph’s, where we were met by our dear Mother, and her three children, Anna, Josephine and Rebecca.46

44 RW Journal, 2:718.
45 In July 1809 William Seton was thirteen, and Richard eleven.
46 RW Journal, 2:719. Two weeks after Mother Seton left Baltimore her young daughters, Josephine and Rebecca, went to the Mountain in a private carriage.
Soon both Father Dubois and Father Dubourg came to the Valley to greet the travelers. On Saturday the priests went to the village of Emmitsburg and "purchased a few cups and saucers, pewter spoons, knives and forks, etc., half a dozen of chairs." The women had brought their mattresses with them and slept on the floor since there were neither cots nor bedsteads. The next day, 30 June, they rose early to attend Sunday mass in the primitive chapel where parishioners of St. Joseph’s parish worshipped. On Monday the women began community life and the order of the day according to a specified rule. The Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s were founded in the Stone House on the 31st of July, the feast of St. Ignatius of Loyola, Patron of the Maryland Missions. In her exclamation, “every heart transported with delight at the little beginning of St. Joseph’s family,” Sister Cecilia reflected the joy of the sisters and Elizabeth Seton herself.

Mother Seton had named their property St. Joseph’s Valley, which was a sub-valley of St. Mary’s Valley. The log house built in 1810 for the Sisters of Charity was named St. Joseph’s House. Usually the site was referred to as “St. Joseph’s.” Sister Cecilia’s reference to “St. Joseph’s family” illustrates this tradition.

The reference to “Perfection” (see page 25) may be an idealistic exclamation or a reference to a retreat which began 10 August; Father Dubourg, who preached the retreat, presented the sisters with a copy of the classic text Christian Perfection. Dubourg also gave them a bell to regulate the spiritual exercises of the community.

Sister Cecilia refers to nine sisters. She is probably including Mother Seton, Cecilia Seton, and the two Thompson sisters. The Journal of Mother Rose White mentions Sally’s arrival at the end of July, but states that Ellen did not join the community until late September, adding that her health was very delicate.

Reverend Dubourg, who had first invited Mrs. Seton to Baltimore, and who desired having a religious community to educate Catholic children, was named the first ecclesiastical superior of the Sisters of Charity. He said the first mass in St. Joseph’s Valley at the Stone House on 10 August, and he provided all the instructions and meditations of the retreat. Afterwards, on the 18th of August, the sisters gathered in Dubourg’s presence and voted for three sisters to form a Council with the Mother and her Assistant. The results were:

50 Alphonse Rodriguez, Pratique De La Perfection Chrestienne (Paris: 1679), ASJPH RB166. An English translation from the French, by Antony Hoskins, S.J., was printed at St. Omer in 1612. The best known English translation, often reprinted, is that which first appeared in London, 1697, from the French of Abbé Regnier des Marais.
Mother Mary Elizabeth Ann Seton and Sister Rose Mary White, Assistant Council Members:
Sister Catharine [Kitty] Mullen
Sister Veronica (Cecilia) O’Conway
Sister Cecilia Theresa Seton

Two days later the Council met and resolved “to watch conscientiously over the economy of the house with the same diligence as if it was the separate charge of each particularly... to unite in breaking the two [too] natural propensity of us all to forming private parties, and to watch over the general good.”52 At this time Sister Cecilia O’Conway was appointed “Secretary and School Sister.”53

The Sisters in turn to cook, all lending a hand to ironing, and our washing place was at the creek where we took our clothes early in the morning, and remained the day; not a plank to stand on or a covering but the tree under which we would place our tubs, and if rain came on, we would have to bring up our clothes all wet and heavy — no accommodations, no water to wash with at the house.54

In her journal Rose White recorded the story of Harriet Seton’s conversion. During the six weeks Harriet stayed at the Mountain she decided to convert to Roman Catholicism. Soon she was received into the Church and received her First Communion, 24 September. About a month later Archbishop Carroll arrived from Baltimore. Both Harriet and Annina received the sacrament of confirmation in the little chapel of the Stone House, with Harriet taking the confirmation name of Madeleine.

After their first retreat was over, Dubourg suggested that the sisters walk the farm and select a place for a burial ground. Some designated one spot, some another; but the attention of Harriet Seton focused on a large oak tree before her, and “having an apple in her hand she playfully threw it against the tree, saying in a laud tone of voice, ‘this is my spot.’”

Her words were prophetic and in four months she was suddenly taken ill with a violent fever. During her illness Elizabeth Seton described her

52 Ibid.
54 Ibid. All washing was done at Tom’s Creek, located in a ravine just below the Stone House.
stance before the will of God, “I am like a leaf before the wind.”55 Within two weeks Harriet died, and she was laid to rest beneath the large oak tree.56

The first winter was a struggle for the women. From what she knew of their poverty and courage, Sister Margaret George recorded that, “Our Lord showed from the commencement how dear to his heart was this rising Community by real proofs of his love sending them a portion of his cross, all the winter of 1809.”57

1810

Rose White elaborated on the sisters’ move into their new log home, which Mother Seton named St. Joseph’s House. “Sister Veronica (Cecilia O’Conway) walking before with the bell and the cross,” Father Dubois carrying the Blessed Sacrament, Mother Seton and the sisters, then “Sister Sally had in her arms Sister Cecelia [Seton] wrapped up in a blanket, as she was yet very sick.”58 The first high mass was celebrated in St. Joseph’s Valley on 19 March, feast of the community patron, St. Joseph. The compiler of the Annals wryly notes that the sister charged with ringing the rising bell on this day was filled with excessive fervor. “The Community was rung up at three o’clock by mistake.”59

56 7-8 Provincial Annals (1810): 201, ASJPH.
58 RW Journal, 2:726.
59 ASJPH 7-13 (19 March 1810).
The opening of Saint Joseph’s Free School for day pupils marked the beginning of a regular course of instruction for many pupils from the village and surrounding country. Three months later St. Joseph’s Academy opened its doors to tuition paying pupils. This primitive start laid the foundation for Catholic education in the United States. Mother Seton wrote the Regulations for the School at St. Joseph’s:

Tuesday and Friday — 2nd and 3rd class parsing while 2nd class parse [and] 3rd class read French or repeat Cecil [O’Conway’s] Writing and work...

Monday and Thursday — Sister Fanny’s 2nd class of reading assist Cecilia [O’Conway] with work. 60

Sister Fanny Jordan was responsible for directing studies and handling matters when Mother Seton was not available. Duties included handling expenses for school supplies, a partial list of which was given “Aug[us]t 10th 1810”:

Feb[ruar]y. May. June 1810 furnished to Veronica [Cecilia O’Conway]
2 Doz catechisms
2 doz. Large 6 slates.
4 Comleys Gr[ammars]
2 Doz spell[in]g. Books
½ Doz pen knives
2 quires(1) paper
1 Doz. Slates. Ink powder 61

In addition to Sister Cecilia O’Conway, several other sisters were listed as school mistresses including: Sister Fanny Jordan, Sister Margaret George, Sister Susan Clossey, and Sister Elizabeth Boyle, 62 who entered in 1810.

It is not known if a physician recommended that Cecilia Seton would benefit from a different climate, but Sister Susan Clossey and Annina accom-

60 12.8, “Regulations of the School of St. Joseph,” CW, 3b:125.
panied Mother Seton and Cecilia to Baltimore in the vain hope of prolonging her life. The family of George Weis opened their home to the travelers and provided hospitality which soon became hospice care. Rose White recorded the conclusion of this journey of hope:

Recd news that our Sister Cecelia was no more; she died on the 28th of April. After high Mass had been celebrated and the corpse present which was placed in a carriage and Mother and Susan accompanied the body to the Valley. Rev. Mr. Cloriviere attended on horseback and arrived at the Valley about an hour before the carriage. We assembled, and went out to meet them as they approached the house. The coffin was brought in the hall and the body exposed — was taken in the choir and the same evening placed in the little woods, next to her beloved sister, [Harriet] Madeleine Seton. They were the two first interred in our burial ground — in the places they had selected but a few months before, when in perfect health, at least Madeleine was. Our good Mother felt much, yet was greatly consoled at the angelic life and happy and so edifying death of Cecelia."}

Sister Cecilia O'Conway had been very ill. Elizabeth Seton wrote Mr. O'Conway about his daughter’s condition at the same time that the community was anticipating the arrival of their new superior, Reverend John Baptiste David, S.S. (1761-1841). “We expect the Superior’s here every day Whatever is my destination (which is yet undecided) Yours, are mine and we will not grieve.” Shortly after Reverend David’s arrival many of the Sisters of Charity became unsettled, not knowing what to expect next.65

Soon there was talk David might send Elizabeth Seton to another mission, perhaps in Baltimore, and replace her with his former directee Rose White. This conjecture is excluded from the O’Conway memoir. Elizabeth Seton worried, “Everything is now in confusion. When and how it will end only God knows.” Within weeks, she confided her alarm to a friend in Baltimore:

Everything is again suspended and I am casting about to prepare for beginning the world again with my poor Annina, Josephine and Rebecca, as we have reason to expect

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63 RW Journal, 2:727.
64 6.48, Elizabeth Ann Seton to Matthias O’Conway, CW, 2:145.
65 Reverend David became the second bishop of Bardstown, Kentucky.
66 6.56, Elizabeth Ann Seton to George Weis, [July 1810], CW, 2:149.
from many things passed lately that our situation is more unsettled than ever.67

The next day Bishop Benedict Joseph Flaget, S.S. (1763-1851) returned from France with a manuscript copy of the Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity. He had hoped to bring along French Daughters of Charity but Napoleon denied them passports, as Sister Rose recounts:

Rev. Mr. Flaget had returned from France and brought us the Rules, constitutions and conferences of the Sisters of Charity [sic, Daughters of Charity] founded by St. Vincent de Paul. Rev. Mr. Flaget had the promise of Sisters to accompany him to America and the money was provided to pay their passage and it was then he secured for us the Rules, constitutions, etc., etc., but the government under Bonaparte interfered, and the Sisters were not at liberty to leave France.68

Accompanying Flaget was a young French cleric, Reverend Simon Gabriel Bruté, S.S. (1779-1839), priest, physician, and scholar, familiar with the rule of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac in France. Over time it was he who inculcated the Vincentian charism in Elizabeth Seton and the [American] Sisters of Charity.

In late July, Sister Rose went to Baltimore on business as a guardian for her son, Charles, age seven, who was to be placed at Mount Saint Mary’s. She returned with Reverend David and three new candidates for the community — Fanny Jordan, Angela Brady and Julia [Shirk].69 David had recently been appointed to succeed Reverend Dubourg in the role of superior. Staying in the Stone House, he led the second retreat of the Sisters of Charity which concluded on the 15th of October, the feast of St. Teresa of Avila.

1811

Sister Cecilia included no entries for the year 1811. David left Maryland to accompany and support his friend Benedict Flaget, new bishop of Vincennes, on the 11th of May.

Early in the summer Elizabeth referred to Sister Cecilia as “the Angel of the Community,”70 and wrote to her father describing her adjustment and peaceful nature. Since Sister Cecilia’s bed was located next to hers, Elizabeth

67 6.52, Elizabeth Ann Seton to George Weis, 9 August 1810, CW, 2:156.
68 70 RW Journal, 2730.
69 Ibid., 2.728.
70 6.46, Elizabeth Ann Seton to Matthias O’Conway, 5 June 1811, CW, 2:140.
Seton knew that she "would go to sleep long before" herself "and be in peace like a Babe." Close bonds developed between the foundress and her first Sister of Charity. For Elizabeth, Sister Cecilia was "a true and solid comfort" and "Counsel in the place of my departed angel Cecil [Seton]."

The upset described by Elizabeth Seton in late July and August may have subsided with the arrival of the Common Rules, which, by late summer of 1811, Dubois translated and gave to her for review and comment. She responded directly to Archbishop Carroll.

You my most Venerated Father know also every thing that has past from my first Union with this house until the present moment, temptations, trials and etc — and now I cast all at the feet of the Adored, placing every consideration and all my concerns in your hands as his Representative to decide my fate = the rules proposed are near[ly] those] we had in the original manuscript of the Sisters in France — I never had a thought discordant with them as far as my poor power may go in fulfilling them. The constitutions proposed have been discussed by our Rev. Director [Dubois] and I find he makes some observations on my Situation relative to them but surely an Individual is not to be considered where a public good is in question — and you know I would gladly make every sacrifice you think consistent with my first and inseparable obligations as a Mother.

1811 July 29
The Revd. Mr. DuBourg paid a visit to St. Joseph’s bringing with him 2 French Candidates and a Made. Guerin, one of these Candidates Sister and who afterwards joined the Society.

71 Ibid., 2:141.
72 Ibid.
74 "Elisabeth Madeleine Guérin (Sister Madeleine, 1784-1816). The sister of Sister Adelle [Salva]. Came with her [and] remained a while [as] a boarder. A Widow with one son, soon she had him provided for. She joined the Community. Of an uncommon piety, spirit of mortification and zeal. Health rather delicate. Died of consumption in [sic] during her illness and death, all was most calm and sweet. I might say joy, — ” #22, Treasurer’s Notebook.
These Candidates were Louise Roger\textsuperscript{75} and Adele Salva,\textsuperscript{76} Madame Guerin the Sister of the later, received at first as a Boarder and her little son [Eugene Guerin] placed at the mountain. She shortly after became a Sister and every hour from this to her precious death was marked by an act of virtue. She was admitted among the Sisters in the month of Feby 1812 and died the death of the Saint in 1816 on 20th December.

16 of March
Elizabeth Boyle and Ann Gruber\textsuperscript{77} arrived at St. Joseph’s. Sr. Agnes Duffy\textsuperscript{78} and Clare [Stinson]\textsuperscript{79} the latter did not remain.\textsuperscript{80}

1812
Sister Rose summarized the steps taken toward adopting a rule of life suited for the Catholic Church in North America, while modeling the community on the French Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul with which the Sulpicians were familiar.

The Constitutions and Rules were submitted to the Archbishop [Carroll] and Rev. Mr. Tessier of St. Sulpice. They were modified to suit this country and translated into English by our Rev. Supr. Mr. DuBois, then read to the Sisters.

\textsuperscript{75} “Louise Roger (Sister Louise, 1771-1847), Came from Martinique with the above, always at home. Generally employed in the work room ‘till her sight failed. She is still living and is our dear old blind ‘Soeur Louise’ (1840).” #21, Treasurer’s Notebook.

\textsuperscript{76} “Adele Salva (Sister Adele, 1785-1839), A native of Martinique, came from thence with her sisters and a lady with Rev. Mr. DuBourg. Generally at home, active, useful and pious. A great lover of ‘good order’ [scribe’s emphasis]. A spirit of poverty. Kind and obliging. Died May 3rd, 1839. Once only to mission to Baltimore infirmary where I believe she lost her health.” #20, Treasurer’s Notebook.

\textsuperscript{77} “Ann Gruber (Sister Ann, 1779-1840) By birth a Swiss, raised in Baltimore. Filled the office of Housekeeper and other important offices both on mission and at home. Is now in Saint Louis [1840]. [Written in the margin]: Died in Pittsburgh on her way home from Saint Louis.” #16, Treasurer’s Notebook.

\textsuperscript{78} “Sister Agnes (Catharine Duffy, 1792-1814), Health always rather delicate. Meekness and mildness show copiously in her character. This gentle lamb soon went to more congenial soil. Died [space] in Baltimore [Emmitsburg], I think. A native American.” #18, Treasurer’s Notebook. Sister Margaret uses the phrase “native American” to mean “born in North America” as opposed to being an immigrant or indigenous person.

\textsuperscript{79} “Sister Clare (Margaret Stinson, 1784-?), Remained 3 years and then returned to the world. A native American. 2nd that.” #19, Treasurer’s Notebook.

\textsuperscript{80} Memoirs and Chronology, 8.
assembled before they were signed by the Abp. and Rev. Mr. Tessier. To know from us if they were approved by Abp. and Rev. Mr. Tessier who had directed them to be translated and made to suit this country. We were all at liberty to adopt these rules or not, free to retire, if we wished to from the Community. All were invited to remain notwithstanding bad health and other infirmities. Each was invited to raise her hand, if she was willing to adopt the Rules. All were united but one voice — the good Supr. left us for Baltimore, returned in a few days, the Constitutions signed, Rules approved by the Abp Carroll and Rev. Tessier. We proceeded to an election of officers and began our novitiate according to the Rules of the Sisters of Charity, and made our vows at the end of one year.81

Reverend John Dubois succeeded David as superior, and Reverend John Mary Tessier, S.S. (1758-1840), Sulpician superior in the United States, and Bishop John Carroll approved the Regulations for the Sisters of Charity in America, a modified version of the Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity, in January of 1812.

The community held its first election after the approval of their Regulations in January of 1812. Elizabeth Seton was chosen Mother; Sister Rose White, Assistant; Sister Catherine Mullan, Treasurer; and Ann Gruber, Procuratrix.

Sister Rose recorded information about the next arrivals at St. Joseph’s:

February 1, 1812, Mrs. [Bridget] Farrell and her daughter Mrs. [Margaret] George, and Miss Teresa Conroy82 arrived at St. Joseph’s. Mrs. George and Miss Teresa [Conroy] as candidates; Mrs. Farrell as a boarder. Mrs. George took the name of Sister Margaret and Miss Conroy kept her name and was called Sister Teresa.83

On the 2nd of February Dubois opened the third retreat, which would have been conducted in St. Joseph’s House, now known as The White House. Sister Cecilia omitted mention of the distressing illness of Mother Seton’s oldest child, Annina, whom she nursed day and night. Despite her youthful age

81 RW Journal, 2:731.
82 "Teresa Conroy (Sister Mary Teresa, 1780-1823) Of Carroll Manor. Engaged in active duties both at home and abroad for 10 years. Died of consumption November 6, 1822,” #25, Treasurer’s Notebook.
83 RW Journal, 2:730.
of sixteen, Annina died on 12 March having “made her vows on her deathbed and expired like an angel in the arms of one of the Sisters who was supporting her.”

She was buried to the right of her Aunt Madeleine, Harriet Seton.

Sister Rose recorded that before Annina “applied to become a Sister she practiced the rules she saw observed by the Sisters, and her early rising at four o’clock never failed both winter and summer, though we then had no fire to say our prayers or meditation, and the weather was intense cold.”

Annina’s malady baffled medical experts at that time, but it was tuberculosis which caused her intense suffering from a violent cough, chills, and high fevers, resulting in her premature death.

The first novice to be admitted after the establishment of the novitiate was Mary Gartland, a former boarder at St. Joseph’s Academy. She was admitted on the feast of St. Joseph, the 19th of March.

Reverend Bruté moved to the Valley at the end of September to aid Dubois at Mount St. Mary’s College. Bruté became confessor at St. Joseph’s and spiritual director to Elizabeth Seton. Bruté, along with Dubois, formed the Sisters of Charity with the Vincentian charism. Sister Margaret made note of the first instructions given by Bruté, entitled “I have loved these with an Eternal Love and have drawn thee in pity.”

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84 Ibid., 2:731.
85 Ibid.
86 “Mary Gartland (Sister Jane Frances Gartland, 1786-1823), A native of Ireland. daughter of Mr. T. Gartland of Philadelphia and sister of Rev. Francis Gartland. Was for one year a boarder in school [at Saint Joseph’s]. After 8 years active usefulness in the school, died of consumption August 21, 1820. [Written in the margin]: Made her vows August 21, 1814, the first to make her vows from the novitiate.” #26, Treasurer’s Notebook.
Yes my Saviour has loved me since Eternity and though he might have created millions who would have served him so much better he has notwithstanding drawn me in pity from nothing — though there are many still in the world who sigh after the knowledge and love of their creator yet my God has called me in a special manner to His house of St. Joseph into his own bosom, fed me with his own flesh and now particularly calls me in this blessed retreat to talk with himself, to recreate my heart, to bid for a while an adieu to all my temporal concerns and enjoy God and God alone.87

1813

At the conclusion of their novitiate the Sisters of Charity made vows for the first time, 19 July 1813, using the following adapted version of the vow formula of the Daughters of Charity in Paris:

I, the undersigned in the presence of God and all the company of heaven, renew the promises of my Baptism and make my Vows of Poverty, chastity, and Obedience to God and our [Sulpician] Rev. Superior General until the 25th of March next, and engage myself to the corporal and spiritual service of the poor sick, our true Masters, the instruction of those committed to our charge, and to all the duties pointed out by our Rule in the Society of the Sisters of Charity in the United States of America, which I beg to fulfill through the merits of our crucified Savior and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin.88

Sister Cecilia made no entries for the year 1813, but Sister Margaret left a brief record of the historic event for the Sisters of Charity:

1813 July 19th Feast of St. Vincent. This day the first profession of Sisters of Charity the following made their vows on this day together 18 months after their rules having been given to them.

Elizabeth Seton, Rose White, Catharine Mullen, Ann Gruber, Elizabeth Boyle, Angela Brady, Cecilia O'Conway,

87 Memoirs and Chronology, 1.
88 Souvenir Book, ASJPH.
Susan Clossey, Mary Ann Butler, Adele Salva, Louisa Roger, Margaret C. George, Sally Thompson, Helen [Ellen] Thompson, Martina Quinn, Frances Jordan, Teresa Conroy and Julia Shirk - 18 [sisters]
Augst 14th. Sr. Margaret elected Treasurer and the former treasurer [Sister Catharine (Kitty) Mullan] appointed Mistress of Novices for the first time. 90

The next month Mary Jane Brady entered the Sisters of Charity and received the name Sister Victoria. 91 Late that summer Sister Ann Gruber was re-elected Procuratrix for the space of two years.

1814
Sister Cecilia made no entries for the year 1814, but Sister Margaret noted the historic establishment of the first mission beyond Emmitsburg.

Jany. 17 1814.
Sr. Benedicta Corish died. Arriving 9 months she was a Boarder Candidate, novice and a professed Sister, the Council having given her a special permission to take her vows previous to her death, she having anxiously desired it, not quite 17 years old when she died.

1814 6 Oct.
Left St. Joseph’s to Phila. Sept. 29th The Orphan Asylum of Phila. near Trinity church given in charge to the Sisters of St. Joseph[’s]. Sister Rose sent as Sister Servant accompanied by Srs. Susan [Clossey and Teresa (Conroy)], Revd. Mr. Roloff appointed their Confessor. 92

1815
Louisa Daddisman, a former pupil of St. Joseph’s Academy entered the novitiate and received the name Sister Martha. As the last companion of Elizabeth Seton and the first sisters

89 “Mary Quinn (Sister Martina Quinn, 1795-1816) Of Irish parents, born in New York. Was a lively, amiable and innocent being, very useful in the School. Died 1816. Universally regretted.” #11, Treasurer’s Notebook.
90 Memoirs and Chronology, 13.
92 Memoirs and Chronology, 14.
she became a link between the generations of pupils and sisters in the Valley. Sister Martha was present at the first mention of introducing the Seton cause for canonization, and she gave personal testimony.

Neither Sister Cecilia nor Sister Margaret recorded Elizabeth Seton's concern for Dubois, who was experiencing great difficulties with domestic help at the Mountain. In July of 1815, at her recommendation, the Council sent three sisters to be responsible for domestic duties and the infirmary. The following were named for this new mission: Sisters Ann Gruber, Bridget Ferrall,93 and Anastasia Nabbs,94 a novice. Sister Angela Brady was named the sister servant.

According to the Constitutions, a second election for the appointment of Mother was held, which resulted in the re-election of Elizabeth Seton on the 20th of July. By the end of the year her "spiritual father" had gone to his eternal reward. Sister Margaret included among her list of Mementos: "3rd Decr. 1815 John Carroll, 1st Archbishop of Baltimore, [died] who approved the Constitutions."95

Epilogue

Besides Sister Cecilia's role as a teacher and school mistress at St. Joseph's Academy and Free School, she also served as treasurer of the community (1816-1817) after the unexpected death of Sister Kitty Mullan.96 Additionally, Sister Cecilia was among those named in the State of Maryland's articles of incorporation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's in January 1817.

The O'Conway parents sent their younger children to school at Emmitsburg. The sons attended Mount St. Mary's, then a Sulpician college located near Emmitsburg,97 and Isabella Editha O'Conway attended the school operated by Mrs. Seton in Baltimore and was one of two pupils who transferred to St. Joseph's Free School and Academy in St. Joseph's Valley.

93 “Bridget Ferrall (Sister Bridget (1765-1847), Born in Ireland. Mother of Sister Margaret [George]. Was a boarder for a few months at first – “An Israelite in whom there is no guile” – Still living (1840) – My mother.” #28, Treasurer's Notebook.
95 Memoirs and Chronology, 31.
96 The 21 July 1817, entry in the Council Minutes states that “The Treasurer’s duties offering some difficulties some resolutions were formed. Mother [Seton] consented to keep the books and assist the present Treasurer, Sr. Cecilia.” ASJPH, 3-3-5.
97 Mother Seton was godmother to Petrus Ireneus Misericors Dei O’Conway (1809-1844), a son of Matthias and Rebecca O’Conway.
It is also worth noting that Matthias O'Conway gave beautiful religious artwork to the two institutions, possibly as in-kind tuition payment.98

Sister Cecilia was sent to open the third mission of the Sisters of Charity, the first mission in New York, along with Sister Rose White, sister servant, and Sister Felicité Brady. She remained at the New York Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum for two years, until returning temporarily to St. Joseph's in 1819 due to poor health. She was present for the final illness and death of beloved Mother Seton, to whom she was so devoted. After the election of Sister Rose White to succeed Mother Seton, Sister Cecilia was named sister servant of the New York Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum in New York.

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98 In 1811 Matthias O’Conway gave the Sisters of Charity a large oil painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe by an unidentified artist. Sometime before 1825 O’Conway also gave Mount St. Mary’s a painting as payment-in-kind for $244 in outstanding fees for his son, Columbkill, a student at the Mount from 1809 to 1812. An over-size oil, it is a superb 18th century copy of famed 17th century Flemish artist Franz Francken the Younger’s depiction of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Mary Magdalene and St. John standing in sorrow at the feet of the crucified Christ. Cf. 6.28, Elizabeth Ann Seton to Matthias O’Conway, 19 March 1810, and 6.46, Ibid., 5 June 1811, CW, 2:113 and 140.
From financial accounts it appears that Sister Cecilia was also presiding over the Pay School and admitting boarders. The Council disapproved of her handling some matters independently, without authorization from Emmitsburg. Later that same year other problems arose for Sister Cecilia and she returned unexpectedly to Emmitsburg on community business, apparently without consulting superiors about her plans. The Council arranged for her immediate return to New York, accompanied by Sister Ellen [Timon].

The Council also recalled two other sisters to Emmitsburg from the New York mission — Sister Mary Paul Fougherty for health reasons, and Sister Mary Teresa Conroy because of her “fits of temper.”

Mother Rose White submitted her thoughts on the episode with Sister Cecilia to the Council:

The extraordinary but well meant assumption of power of Sr Cecilia [O’Conway] the present Sr Servt of N. York coming on [to Emmitsburg] from her post at an extra expense like wise without any direction of Suprs or permission and also the receiving some boarders for us at some risk and having been cautioned not to do so by Rd Supr [Dubois]

The Council deems it proper to blame such proceedings and to prevent a re-occurrence a rule shall be expressly made on this subject and a copy sent to each Sister Servant to prevent farther abuses should any Sr Servant again deviate from them, she shall be recalled immediately as unfit for so important a trust —

Tensions with Sister Cecilia regarding the parameters of local authority continued for another year, until she was replaced as sister servant six months later by Sister Susan Clossey, probably resulting as “some steps had been taken by one of the Sr Servants which appear unwarrantable.” As a result the Council decided:

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99 Mary Ellen Timon (Sister Ellen, c.1783-1855). Sister Ellen, from Conewago, Pennsylvania, is believed to be a relative of Bishop John Timon, C.M. Her name does not appear in Sister Margaret George’s personnel roster in the Treasurer’s Notebook. Sister Ellen served in New York all her community life, and remained there to become a founding member of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul of New York in 1846.

100 ASJPH 3-3-5 (20 October 1821). Sister Teresa died two years later at Emmitsburg, 6 November 1823.

101 ASJPH 3-3-5 (3 January 1823).
1st No Sr Servant can alter or modify any order, or appointment made by the Council of the central government —

2nd No Sr Servant has a right to send home any Sister under her charge without permission from her Superiors — consequently the sending home 2 Sisters without order so to do and detaining one was irregular and improper on the part of [effaced]

3rd That no Sr Servant has a right to permit any Sister to remain on any longer in the house she presides than is specified in the order of recall except when there is a moral impossibility such as sickness, unforeseen difficulty of roads or weather, want of opportunity or any unforeseen difficulty.103

Sister Cecilia was recalled to Emmitsburg but she refused to return until she received replies to correspondence she had sent to Father Dubois. She had “written on the subject to her R[ev]. Superior... intimating her intention to leave the Community to enter a Convent for greater perfection.”104 No response arrived. Feeling unable to remain tranquil as a Sister of Charity, in June Sister Cecilia contacted Ambrose Maréchal, archbishop of Baltimore, seeking his intercession with the Ursuline monastery in Canada for her admission there.105 Matthias O’Conway wrote Archbishop Maréchal expressing gratitude for his pastoral solicitude concerning his daughter’s spiritual welfare. Although at odds with Dubois, who seems to have resented her leave-taking, Sister Cecilia felt supported and understood by Fathers Bruté and Hickey.106

103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Ambrose Maréchal, S.S. (1764-1828), became the third archbishop of Baltimore (1817-1828) and consecrated the first cathedral in Baltimore (1821). In 1812 he became principal theology professor at Saint Mary’s in Baltimore and was a learned theologian and scholar who excelled in literature and mathematics. Along with other Sulpicians (Garnier, Flaget, David and Dubourg), he was a chaplain at the Manor of Doughoregan to the retired Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence. In 1814 the American bishops recommended him unanimously for the see of New York. In 1816 he received bulls appointing him to the see of Philadelphia to succeed Bishop Michael Egan but he persistently refused. He was appointed coadjutor with right of succession (1817) to Leonard Neale, archbishop of Baltimore, who died before the official bulls arrived in Baltimore. So he became the third archbishop of Baltimore. Ellin M. Kelly, “Catalogue of Documents Related to Saint Elizabeth Seton and the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore,” ASPH 28-4-1, 16.
106 John F. Hickey, S.S. (1789-1869), was the first priest ordained at Mount Saint Mary’s, and the first American member of the Sulpicians of Baltimore. As a young priest Elizabeth Ann Seton once reprimanded him because of a careless sermon. He became the fifth superior general (1830-1841), Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s in Emmitsburg. At Mount Saint Mary’s (1814-1818),
Youthful aspirations had attracted the idealistic Cecilia to a life of contemplation, even before she arrived in Baltimore. This desire remained with her after she joined the Sisters of Charity. When she was missioned to New York, Mother Seton expressed her concerns:

The only fear I have is that you will let the old string pull too hard for solitude and silence, but look to the Kingdom of souls — the few to work in the little Vineyard, this is not a country, my dear one, for Solitude and Silence, but of warfare and crucifixion.107

Opting to follow her heart Sister Cecilia arrived in Quebec City in July of 1823. She transferred to the cloistered Ursuline community, where she was known as Mother Marie de l’Incarnation. Cecilia continued correspondence with some of her former companions at St. Joseph’s until her death. In a letter to her parents in 1823 she described herself as “a happy captive to Rules more congenial to my inclinations.” Although she added, “Ever venerable will the Institution of St. Vincent de Paul be to my memory... Malicious tongues shall never say that I left the Society through a contempt for it.”108

In late November of 1827 Dubois visited the Ursuline convent, and the two friends of old were consoled in their reconciliation.109

Her fond sentiments toward the Sisters of Charity, and continuing interest in her first community, remained unchanged over the years. In an 1846 letter written to her family in Philadelphia, 23 years after she left for Quebec, the former Sister Cecilia, now the Ursuline Sister Marie de l’Incarnation, wrote:

Affectionate remembrances to the dear Sisters of Charity; are there any of those in Philadelphia whom I knew? Tell them that I will never forget them, neither the living nor the dead. I keep the list of the departed Sisters in my prayer book to revive my memory. Tell them that I am as happy in my solitary cloister as I can possibly desire to be on this side of the grave. I have a view

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107 Emmitsburg, he had a reputation as a disciplinarian and English scholar. After an interlude in Baltimore he returned to Emmitsburg around 1825 where he remained despite the Sulpicians withdrawal of sponsorship for Mount Saint Mary’s. He was also pastor of Saint Joseph Church in Emmitsburg (1825-1841). Two of his sisters entered the Sisters of Charity: Ellen (Sister William Anna, d. 1858) and Joanna (Sister Mary, d. 1872). Both separated from Emmitsburg in 1846 and became founding members of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of New York.


109 Ibid., 463.
of the lovely Valley of Graces [St. Joseph’s Valley] in my classroom, where I often recall the long past years of youth, and the memory of so many now no more. How I would like to have a sketch of the Cemetery in the little sacred grove with the graves numbered and named! One of our young ladies here embroidered the view of St. Joseph’s about three years go, very prettily. It was greatly admired. I would like to have the Cemetery also done, if I could procure the sketch of it. Who is the Sister that is now Superior of the house?"110

Of the other first candidates who joined Mrs. Seton at Baltimore, most died in their youth and are buried in St. Joseph’s Cemetery, where Harriet Seton was the first to be laid to rest:

- Maria Murphy died at Emmitsburg in 1812.
- Kitty Mullan died at Emmitsburg in 1815.
- Mary Ann Butler died at Emmitsburg in 1821.
- Susan Clossey served in New York but died at Emmitsburg in 1823.
- Rose White served in Philadelphia and New York; succeeded Mother Seton and died at Frederick, Maryland, in 1841.

As St. Vincent de Paul said to the first Daughters of Charity in 1634, “When Solomon wanted to build God’s temple, he placed precious stones in the foundation to show the excellence of what He was trying to do."111 From the vision of Elizabeth Seton and the first faith-filled candidates in Baltimore, the Company of Charity in North America has continued to grow and to thrive. Two hundred years later we, their successors in the Sisters and Daughters of Charity, continue the mission they began of serving the people of God. Impelled by Christ’s love and joined together in the mission of Charity, we collaborate in the Sisters of Charity Federation and respond to the cries of those who are poor and marginalized.112

110 Ibid., 503. The superioress of the Sisters of Charity was Mother Mary Etienne Hall.
111 “Explanation of the Regulations,” Correspondence, Conferences, Documents, 9:12.