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THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF THE MIRACULOUS MEDAL (PERRYVILLE, MISSOURI, U.S.A.)

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THE EARLY YEARS

The founding of Saint Mary's of the Barrens, Perryville, Missouri, precedes the founding of the State of Missouri by two years.

A group of English-speaking Catholics, descendants of Lord Baltimore's first colony of Catholics in Maryland, settled at what is now Perryville in what was then called the Louisiana Territory and named it *The Barrens*.

Vincentians came to the United States in 1816 to work on the frontier among the rural poor. In 1818, Fr. Joseph Rosati and a small group of Italian Vincentian missionaries, arriving from Bardstown, Kentucky, settled at St. Mary's of the Barrens in Perryville, Missouri, at the invitation of the Catholics in the area.

The first structure built by Fr. Rosati was a small log cabin constructed around 1825, which is still preserved under a shelter on the campus. On 6 January 1827, the foundation stone for the present church was laid, and contributions from Europe helped local efforts to complete and consecrate the structure in October 1837.

St. Mary's of the Barrens Church is modeled after what was at that time the Vincentian Motherhouse chapel in Rome, *Monte Citorio*. The current church structure was constructed from stone quarried at what is now the Miraculous Medal grotto on the Barrens property. The original architecture of the church was Tuscan Renaissance. Renovations in 1913 changed the front of the church to the Romanesque style. The Angelus Bell Tower adjacent to the church was added in 1980. The freestanding bell tower was designed in the Romanesque style to match the church façade.

The interior walls are decorated with various murals and paintings depicting significant events in the history of the Vincentians and the Catholic Church. Max Autenreib and his family restored many of the interior church paintings in the 1980's. Gary Schumer has added two paintings of recent Vincentian Family saints, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and Blessed Frederick Ozanam. It is one of the oldest Catholic Churches still in use in the United States.

THE NATIONAL SHRINE AND THE ASSOCIATION OF THE MIRACULOUS MEDAL

St. Mary's of the Barrens is the home of the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. In 1832 when the first medals were being distributed in Paris, beautiful St. Mary's of the Barrens Church was being completed in the wilderness of Missouri.

In 1918, 100 years after the establishment of St. Mary's of the Barrens, the priests and brothers of the Congregation of the Mission in the Western Province of the United States established the Association of the Miraculous Medal with headquarters at Perryville, Missouri. The Association brings the message of hope and affirmation from Mary Immaculate, the Mother of God, to North America. The symbol of this message is the Miraculous Medal.

Promoters of the Miraculous Medal Association built the Shrine of the Miraculous Medal in 1928, in anticipation of the 100th anniversary of Mary's apparitions to St. Catherine Labouré. The Shrine is a large chapel on the south side of the nave of St. Mary's of the Barrens Church. The Venerable Felix de Andreis, first superior of the Vincentians in America, is buried beneath its floor.

Through the door on the right wall of the Shrine can be seen the Votive Light room where thousands of lights burn at the request of promoters and members of the Association of the Miraculous Medal.

The National Shrine of the Miraculous Medal is the Association's center of prayer to the Virgin Mary. Mass is celebrated daily at the Shrine, and every Monday night the novena to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal is prayed there.

Promoters and members send thousands of petitions a year to the Association for remembrance at the Shrine.

The Association invites its members to greater holiness by attending to their pastoral and spiritual needs, by instructing them in the Christian life, and by involving them in the apostolate of charity especially to the poor. Through their prayers and donations, members participate in the Association's mission.

DESIGNATION AS AN HISTORIC DISTRICT

St. Mary's of the Barrens Historic District was listed on the United States National Register of Historic Places on 25 August 1995. This was due primarily to

the district's significance in the settlement, education, and religious life of the area.

Within the 34-acre historic district are 11 buildings of varying degrees of architectural significance, including the log cabin. Around 1850, the "Mound" was built to honor Our Lady of Victory. It was designed after a similar European shrine described by Fr. Rosati. Symbolic of Mary's virginity, all the plants around the mound are evergreen — myrtles, boxwood, and native Missouri red cedar. Some of the plants of the Mound date to its original construction.

During World War I seminarians constructed a stone grotto dedicated to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. St. Mary's hosts an annual May Procession from the church to the grotto on the first Sunday in May. This annual event began more than 85 years ago in honor of the Blessed Mother.

The historic district represents examples of early Missouri Church and Colonial architectural styles. The buildings were constructed of native limestone and brick. Visitors have admired the beauty of the buildings and grounds since the early 1800s.

St. Mary's Historic District is an excellent example of a 19th century and early 20th century college campus. As many as 5,000 pilgrims visit St. Mary's of the Barrens and the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal every year.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Besides maintaining the Shrine as a national center of devotion to the Miraculous Medal, plans for the future include two projects.

First is further restoration of the historic character of the campus. Because missionaries went forth from the Barrens to build the Church in the western United States and in other countries of the world, the Shrine is a treasure of the Catholic heritage of America and it must be preserved.

Second is the construction of a visitor center to invite and accommodate pilgrims and other visitors. It will both serve pilgrims and enhance devotion to Mary. It will also serve as an educational center for the heritage and ministries of the Congregation of the Mission in the United States. In this way thousands of people will be invited to greater appreciation of their Catholic heritage and participation in the mission of St. Vincent.

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