Spring 1994

Soldiers of Christ, Angels of Mercy: The Daughters of Charity in Los Angeles, 1856–1888

Michael E. Engh S.J.

Follow this and additional works at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/vhj

Recommended Citation

Soldiers of Christ,
Angels of Mercy:
The Daughters of Charity
in
Los Angeles, 1856-1888

by
Michael E. Engh, S.J.*

We started early on the morning of the eighteenth of October [1855]. There were five of us—three Spanish sisters and two of the three American sisters ... for the California Mission, ... the whole community was at Mass. The Sisters sang “Soldiers of Christ, Arise.” After Mass, our lamented Father Burlando gave us his blessing and, to each sister, an umbrella.¹

In these brief words, an aged Sister Angelita Mumbrado recalled the day, sixty years previously, on which she and her companions had set out for Los Angeles. These women were leaving from the motherhouse of their community, located in Emmitsburg, Maryland. They were destined for New York, from which they would sail on to Panama, San Francisco, and finally, southern California. All five pioneers were members of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, an organization whose American roots dated from 1809.² Like so

¹This article appeared originally as a chapter in Michael E. Engh, S.J., Frontier Faiths: Church, Temple, and Synagogue in Los Angeles, 1846-1888 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992). Reprinted with permission of the University of New Mexico Press, which holds the copyright on the book and any portion of it. The author wishes to acknowledge the generous research help received from several wonderful people: Sister Mary William Vinet, D.C., then-archivist of the Western Province of the Daughters of Charity, Los Altos Hills; and Sister Linda Ann Cahill, D.C., and Alexandria “Sandi” Arnold of Maryvale in Rosemead, California.


many other Roman Catholic women religious in the United States, their experiences on the frontier contributed to the ongoing Americanization of their denomination. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the challenges these women confronted and the manner in which they coped with successive difficulties in the boisterous cow town.3

Several recent historians have noted the neglect of so many nuns who made important contributions to the settlement of the American West. Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller called attention to the omission of these and other "gentle tamers," such as missionary teachers and wives of ministers. Polly Wells Kaufman cited the need for information regarding religious women of the ante-bellum era. She specifically noted that Catholic sisters had been prominently involved in founding schools and hospitals. More recently, Margaret Susan Thompson has maintained that inattention to these women's efforts severely weakens any comprehensive understanding of the Roman Catholic experience in the United States.4

For Thompson, pioneering Sisters played a crucial role in the difficult adjustments that Old World Catholics faced in nineteenth-century America. Many Protestant citizens sincerely believed that Catholicism was a religion incompatible with a democratic society. For example, Reverend Lyman Beecher's 1835 tract, "A Plea for the West," expressed the fear of many evangelical Americans about Catholicism's rapid spread across the continent. Catholics in the early republic repeatedly defended themselves against Beecher's charges of being members of a foreign and despotic religion. Controversy focused on the nature of their allegiance to the pope, resident in Europe, the authority of priests and bishops, and the education of Catholic children. Amidst these conflicts, the nuns confronted the stubborn dilemma that for decades bedeviled all members of their communion: how to be both Catholic and American.

Many of the clergy and bishops born and educated in Europe were thoroughly imbued with Old-World concepts of divinely or-

---

3The terms "nun," "sister," and "woman religious" have technically different meanings, particularly for the years prior to the 1983 revision of canon law. I have followed common practice, however, which permits a certain interchangeable use of these terms.
dained Church-state relations. When these clerics reached American shores, they frequently could not speak English and would not accept religious pluralism as a legal principle or a legitimate practice. However, the frontier challenged not only bishops and priests, but the church’s lay members as well, and it was they who, whether married or committed to religious sisterhoods, most readily adapted their religious practices to pioneer conditions. This was as true for Hispanics on the *frontera* of New Spain as it was for Anglo-American settlers in Kentucky, in the 1820s.

The experience of the Sisters of Charity in Los Angeles provides an excellent illustration of this process. These women repeatedly demonstrated their willingness and ability to adapt to the changing exigencies of life in this far-western community. This blue-robed band proved to be the most flexible and adaptive Roman Catholic personnel in the pueblo. Invited to found a school and orphanage, the nuns later undertook hospital nursing, disaster relief, job placement for women, parish catechism instruction, fundraising for Catholic causes, and care of smallpox victims. Because of the nuns’ far greater numbers, range of ministries, and contacts with the broader community, they contended more directly than most priests with local pastoral problems.5

These sisters constituted only one segment of the local female population concerned with the advance of religion in the community. Other churchwomen in Los Angeles included parish or synagogue members, the wives of clergymen, female Chinese believers, and the teachers of the American Missionary Association and the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions. To varying degrees and in differing capacities, all these women actively spread their respective faiths. However, two circumstances set the Daughters of Charity in a category by themselves: the number of nuns who served in this settlement and the extensive written material that survives to describe their work. Be-

---

tween 1856 and 1882, 126 Sisters served locally and corresponded regularly with their superiors, in Maryland and France.

It is the abundance of documentation that permits this survey of the ministries of these women. Source materials on other groups of women, unfortunately, are far less complete. The minutes of the meetings of the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society, for example, do not exist for this early period. Only a handful of letters survive from three teachers of the American Missionary Association, between 1871 and 1875. Scattered references mention Ida Boone’s labors. For these reasons, a systematic comparison among the women of different denominations is not possible.

Three aspects of the Daughters of Charity’s early experience warrant attention: their adaptability and willingness to respond to local needs; their creativity in funding their efforts; and their central position in pueblo society. The first evidence of the sisters’ pioneering spirit appeared shortly after their arrival in southern California, in January 1856. Bishop Thaddeus Amat and a committee of prominent citizens quickly obtained a house for them and a nine-acre lot, northeast of the plaza. With equal dispatch, the sisters commenced their labors. Within five years, they had extended their property to fourteen acres, on which they located a prosperous academy, an orphanage, a hospital, a vineyard with 6,000 vines, and an orchard of 300 fruit trees. However impressive these achievements appeared to their Angeleno neighbors, the sisters nonetheless felt isolated from other houses of their sisterhood and suffered a chronic shortage of ready cash.

---


7 None of the records of any Ladies’ Aid Society or Sewing Circle remain from the early congregations known to have sponsored such organizations during this period. This includes the Northern Methodists, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Roman Catholics. The papers for another association, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union of Southern California are no longer open for research. Other societies, such as the women’s clubs and the Free Kindergarten Association, were not specifically religious groups, though they did attract members from the churches and synagogue. The documents of the Flower Festival Society date from 1885-88, though this too was not a specifically religious group.

8 Their names, once again, were Sisters Scholastica Logsdon, Ann Gillen, and Corsina McKay, all American born; and Francesca Fernández, Angelita Mumbrado, and Clara Cisneros, all from Spain. See “‘Remarks on Sister Mary Scholastica Logsdon,’” Lives of Our Deceased Sisters, 1903 (Emmitsburg, Maryland: Saint Joseph’s Central House, 1903), p. 109.

9 Letter, Bishop Thaddeus Amat to Reverend Francis Burlando, C.M., 7 May 1855, Paris, Archives of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, hereinafter cited as AALA; El Clamor Público, 12 January 1856; and Mumbrado, “Remembrance,” pp. 7-8.

10 Illustrative of the sisters’ repeated cash-flow difficulties, the Los Angeles Star, of 11 May 1861, included their property on the “Delinquent Tax List,” subject to auction to satisfy back taxes.
The nearest Daughters of Charity were 350 miles to the north, in San Francisco, while an entire continent separated them from their motherhouse, in Maryland. Their Los Angeles Institución Caritativa remained the sisterhood’s far southwestern outpost for many years. Letters in 1858 traveled at the then-remarkable rate of twenty-one days by stage from Saint Louis. The hostilities of the Civil War interrupted communications, which prompted the Emmitsburg authorities to dispatch a priest as “Sub-Director” to assist in the management of the California houses.\(^{11}\) The success of the sisters in this remote post was due in large measure to the leadership of the pioneer superior, Sister Mary Scholastica Logsdon.

Prior to her arrival in Los Angeles, Sister Scholastica had filled several different posts during her sixteen years in the sisterhood. She had worked in an orphanage in New York City, between 1842 and 1846, and then joined two sisters in founding an asylum in Natchez, Mississippi, 1846-1849. Logsdon returned to her native Maryland, in 1849, and remained there until dispatched to California. Serving in the Emmitsburg motherhouse, she manifested her administrative skills in those years as the province procuratrix, or manager, of the temporal goods of the Sisters in the United States.\(^{12}\) Logsdon’s varied experience and winning personality enabled her to undertake the challenging Los Angeles assignment in 1856 and to serve successfully as superior, or “Sister Servant,” until 1884.

According to her journal, difficulties confronted Logsdon from the very start of the trip to California from Maryland. The six Sisters of Charity traveled in the company of Bishop Amat, eleven priests, one seminarian, and twelve Sisters of Providence. Amat booked passage for his party in New York City, on the *Empire City*. Designed to handle 700 passengers but carrying 1,000, the crowded vessel had a frequently stormy passage from New York City to Aspinwall. The nuns were frequently seasick, despite the administration of “old brandy” by a kindly fellow passenger. Logsdon noted, after three

\(^{11}\) In common with many Roman Catholic women’s communities, the Daughters of Charity were technically subject to male superiors. The superior-general of the Congregation of the Mission in Paris appointed a priest to serve as the “director” for each province of the sisters worldwide. In the United States, the director, Reverend Francis Burlando, C.M., was resident at the sisters’ motherhouse, in Emmitsburg, Maryland. See de Barbery, *Elizabeth Seton*, pp. 495-500.

\(^{12}\) “Remarks on Sister Mary Scholastica Logsdon,” p. 109.
Plaza of Los Angeles, 1869, showing the church of Our Lady of the Angeles on the left. The two-story brick Los Angeles Orphan Asylum of the Daughters of Charity, located on Alameda Street, can be seen on the far right. In the distance at the center of the photograph the Jewish and Catholic cemeteries are visible, (both with white picket fences). Near these burying grounds was located the first "pest house" where the Daughters nursed small pox victims in 1862.

Courtesy of Mr. Tom Owen, Los Angeles

weeks at sea, “We are getting very tired of the ocean—we encourage ourselves that San Francisco will cure all.”

They entered the Golden Gate on 14 November 1855 and dispersed to their various destinations throughout the state. The nuns rested several weeks and then proceeded on to Los Angeles by steamer. Finding no one to meet them, the women arrived unannounced in the pueblo, on 6 January 1856. The committee in charge of local arrangements soon called upon the women and showed them a variety of sites for their prospective residence and orphanage. Logsdon chose a house and lot offered by Benjamin D. Wilson, much to the consternation of the gentlemen assisting her. As Wilson’s agent noted, “Some of them [the committee members] are anxious to favor some of their friends and buy some of their old adobe houses. The Sisters are equally anxious to retain the place [Wilson’s] as they are much pleased with the premises”.

---

13Copy of Logsdon’s journal, found in ledger, “San Francisco,” p. 39; Archive of the Western Province of the Daughters of Charity, hereinafter cited as AWPDC.
14Letter, Henry Rice Myles to Benjamin D. Wilson, 12 February 1856, Los Angeles; Wilson Papers, Huntington Library, hereinafter cited as HL.
With the selection finally concluded to Logsdon's satisfaction, the sisters commenced their school and orphanage in the unfurnished residence, in February 1856. Soon known to Spanish-speaking Angelinos as "Hermana Escolástica," Logsdon utilized the limited resources at hand to provide beds and other necessities. She instructed her companions to sew large bags, which they then stuffed with wood shavings she obtained from a carpenter's shop. These mattresses on the floor proved "awfully hard," but there was little time to complain. Soon boarding students were living with the sisters, and the room where the girls slept served as "oratory, classroom, sewing room, and parlor." As one nun later recalled, "Only God knows what we went through."15

A school for girls and an orphanage comprised the Institución Caritativa, an "asylum" modeled on similar worldwide institutions of the sisters. The editor of the local Spanish newspaper monitored their progress and reported, in July 1858, an enrollment of 170 girls, of whom 45 were orphans.16 The annual "exhibition at the Sisters' school" soon merited extensive coverage in the town's journals.17 The success of the school prompted church authorities later to request that these women religious instruct young boys. Because of pressing local need, the Maryland superiors of the sisters permitted an exception to the regulation that had restricted the nuns to the education of girls and boys under six years of age.18

Other community needs surfaced over the years and demanded initiative and imagination on the part of Logsdon and her companions. For example, the Daughters of Charity were famed for their hospital work in other portions of the United States and around the world. Citizens approached Logsdon within months of her arrival, in 1856 and requested that she open a hospital in Los Angeles. While she corresponded with Reverend Francis Burlando, the nuns' Director in Maryland, the local parish priest brought a sick man to her door for

16El Clamor Público, 3 July 1858.
17The Los Angeles News, of 5 July 1867, contained an account of the academy's exercises, which concluded, "Los Angeles is justly proud of her Seminary." The editor of the Los Angeles Star devoted virtually the entire front page of the 22 June 1872 issue to that year's exhibition. He went so far as to reprint the texts of four student speeches, as well as the name of every student awarded a prize.
nursing. The sisters' response to this invalid encouraged several residents to renew their appeal for the establishment of a hospital.

The absence of any health care facilities in the southern portion of the state so moved Sister Scholastica that she won permission to accept a county contract to nurse the indigent sick. The initial facilities rented by the county in 1858 were of the most primitive sort, in a four-room adobe house, "North of the church." The only furnishings the authorities provided were cots and bedding for eight patients and two nuns. Indian women took the linens to the riverbank to be washed, and an Indian boy and girl prepared the meals under the supervision of Sister Ann Gillen. She later recalled that providing milk for the patients was a challenge, because "the cows were not accustomed to be milked and the operation was a dangerous one."  

The blue-clad Daughters of Charity with their charges in white dresses and veils were a common sight in Los Angeles parades and processions after 1856. In this 1857 painting, the Sisters lead the children from the Our Lady of the Angels church on the plaza back to the Orphan Asylum on Alameda Street at Macy. It is interesting to note that this view of the church reveals its original facade and its flat roof, probably covered in brea (tar from the La Brea Pits).

Courtesy of the California Historical Society/Ticor Title Insurance, Los Angeles, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California Library

---

19Mumbrado, "Remembrance," p. 8; and Letters, Sister Scholastica Logsdon to Reverend Francis Burlando, 25 July 1856, 8 May 1857, and 9 October 1857, Institución Caritativa [Los Angeles], "Correspondence of the Director, volume II," Box III: Manuscripts, hereafter referred to as "Correspondence, II," AWPDC.
20Quoted in "Remarks on Sister Mary Scholastica Logsdon," p. 113.
The Irish-American Gillen remained in charge of the hospital from 1858 until failing health forced her to resign in 1881. A variety of letters and memoirs record her wit as well as her compassion. Logsdon described one religious celebration, when “dear Sister Ann threatened to dance around the wards of her Hospital.” Gillen cared deeply for the welfare of invalids in her care, as community annals record. “It was hard for good Sister Ann to see her patients die; and when the circumstance of sickness and death were particularly touching, as in the case of two or three French boys who died regretting their mother, her tears would flow abundantly.”

After only four months at the initial site the county provided, Gillen and Logsdon transferred the nursing operation, in November 1858, into a residence on a lot adjoining their orphanage. Logsdon did not wait for approval from Burlando this time, but “presumed” his permission to expend $3,000 for the five-acre site. The increasing numbers of patients over the years prompted the nuns to erect additional buildings on the property. After one decade of operation, the crowded conditions were no longer tolerable. As one priest wrote in 1868 to the nuns’ director in Maryland, “They [the sisters] cannot possibly go on much longer as they are. They are obliged to put the patients in the Barn! The Wash-house! and even the Bath-house!” Late in 1869, the sisters obtained eight acres on the northeastern edge of town and erected a two-story brick facility for their Los Angeles Infirmary.

This commitment to health care prompted these women to volunteer to nurse during the smallpox epidemics that repeatedly ravaged the community. The nuns agreed to the requests of city and county officials to tend smallpox victims in 1861-1862, 1869, and 1876-1877. Logsdon and Gillen visited the initial “pest house” in 1861 and discovered a distressing situation. It was “in a pitiable condition—the patients Lying pell-mell on the floor, suffering in every way. . . . Some becoming delirious from fever, would rush out over the patients thickly strewn on the floor—all was confusion and distress!”

---

21Letter, Logsdon to Burlando, 30 January 1859, Los Angeles; “Correspondence, II,” AWPDC.
22“Remarks on Sister Mary Scholastica Logsdon,” p 114.
23Letter, Logsdon to Burlando, 8 October 1858, Institución Caritativa [Los Angeles], “Correspondence, II,” AWPDC.
24Letter, Reverend James McGill to Burlando, 20 December 1868, Saint Vincent’s College, Los Angeles; “Correspondence, I,” AWPDC.
The two women decided immediately to commit the resources of their sisterhood to the care of the afflicted. Their first act was to move the sick from the remote pest house, in the hills outside of town, to a site closer to medical facilities. The women secured a residence on the next street from their hospital and there tended between fifty and sixty victims during the three months of that first epidemic. In the removal, during the night, of the blanket-wrapped bodies of the dead, it was Gillen who held the horse and steadied the burial cart. The names of others who worked during that first siege of smallpox went unrecorded. However, Sisters Phileta McCarthy and Margaret Weber nursed in the isolated cottage in 1869, followed by Sisters Xavier Schauer and Mary Ellen Downey, in 1876-1877. During the course of the first epidemic, a natural disaster prompted the sisters to undertake another mission of mercy on behalf of the suffering.

The winter rains of 1862 lashed southern California with such force that rivers overflowed, fields were swept away, and streets turned into muddy bogs. Sixty miles east of Los Angeles, the raging waters of the Santa Ana River destroyed the small towns of Agua Mansa and San Salvador. Bishop Amat noted, in a letter, that Logsdon and the nuns managed the relief effort on behalf of the flood victims. "The Sisters will go tomorrow throughout the town collecting something, and after tomorrow two of them will go to that place with the provisions they will be able to raise up." The women gathered two wagon loads of goods, and then two of their number proceeded by stage to render what assistance they could offer.

This disaster relief was not the only endeavor outside of Los Angeles that the sisters undertook to meet pressing pastoral needs. Bishop Amat, for one, repeatedly approached these women to extend their labors throughout his vast diocese. He initially desired sisters to teach at an Indian school one hundred miles south of Los Angeles.

---

26"Remarks on Sister Mary Scholastica Logsdon," pp. 113-14. See also a Letter, Logsdon to Burlando, 21 May 1869, Los Angeles, "Correspondence, II;" Folder, "Lives of Our Deceased Sisters, 1879-1954," p. 75; and unidentified newspaper clipping, 1 December 1912, obituary for Sister Xavier Schauer, found in "Los Angeles Orphanage" box; AWPDC.


28Letter, Logsdon to Burlando, 21 November 1856, Los Angeles, "Correspondence, II," AWPDC.
Reverend Blas Raho, C.M., (1806 - 1862). A Neapolitan by birth, this Vincentian priest served in the American South prior to volunteering for the diocese of Monterey-Los Angeles. The popular Raho brought the Daughters of Charity their first patient to nurse in 1857.

Courtesy of the Archival Center of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles

When superiors in Maryland declined this offer, the bishop continued to appeal for the establishment of "asylums" in six other small towns across the state. Sister Scholastica weighed the merits of each case,
reviewed the personnel available and the commitments already made, and eventually assigned sisters to four locales. 29

Church authorities in both San Diego, California, and Virginia City, Nevada, also requested that the Daughters of Charity establish schools or hospitals in their respective towns. Beginning with ninety students, the women commenced instruction in Virginia City in October 1864 and expanded to two schools and an orphanage by 1867. 30 The sisters also opened Saint Mary's hospital in that community in 1875, the first health facility in the state of Nevada. To the south, the pastor in San Diego had written, as early as 1870, to petition for such an institution in his hamlet. The sisters could not accept his appeal, because the extreme poverty of the place would not have permitted them to sustain themselves. 31

From their first days in southern California, the Sisters had manifested a second distinctive trait: the ability to administer several different institutions in a community where ready cash was frequently unavailable. The Los Angeles committee of citizens, for example, had secured only half of the money needed to purchase the property for the Institución Caritativa in 1856. A drought that year had depressed the local economy, which was based on the cattle trade. Bishop Amat assisted the nuns in this instance, though it was his usual practice only to pay for the costs of the women's transportation from the motherhouse in Maryland to his diocese. 32 The only other revenue received through Amat was from an annual collection taken, after 1869, in the parishes of the poor diocese for the benefit of all its orphanages. 33

Other than these two transfers of funds from the bishop, the sisters were entirely responsible for the financial affairs of their institutions. They exhibited a notable creativity in responding to the ongo-

---

29 Letter, Thaddeus Amat to Francis Burlando, 21 December 1857, Los Angeles, Correspondence, I; Letters, Logsdon to Burlando, 19 June 1859, 7 December 1861, 28 August 1862, 4 August 1863, 26 March 1867, 15 May 1867, all from Los Angeles, “Correspondence, II,” AWPDC.
30 Letter, Reverend John Asmuth to Francis Burlando, 3 May 1864, San Francisco, and 5 June 1864, San Francisco, “Correspondence, I,” AWPDC. See also White, Life of Mrs. Eliza A. Seton, p. 504.
31 Letter, Reverend James McGill to Francis Burlando, 23 January 1870, Los Angeles, “Correspondence, I,” AWPDC.
32 Letter, Logsdon to Burlando, 23 June 1867, Los Angeles, “Correspondence, II,” AWPDC.
33 Letter, Logsdon to Burlando, 22 April 1867, Los Angeles, “Correspondence, II,” AWPDC. Regarding the annual diocesan collection to benefit orphanages, see Decree 34, Constitutiones Latae et Promulgatae ab Illmo. ac Revmo. D. Thaddaeo Amat Congregationis Missionis Episcopo Montereyensi et Angelorum in Synodo Dioecesanis Prima et Segunda (San Francisco: Mullin, Mahon and Company, 1869), p. 98.
ing demands to sustain the costs of their expanding endeavors. The nuns and the “ladies of Los Angeles” commenced an annual “Orphans’ Fair” in 1858. Though such a benefit was without local precedent, townspeople of all faiths generously patronized this event. Later newspaper publicity suggests the popularity which the fair came to enjoy. Numerous newspaper accounts appeared between 1856 and 1885, reporting on a host of other benefits and collections on behalf of the orphanage. These ranged from a Saint Patrick’s Day dinner (with profits of $98.75) to a weekend performance of “Lee’s National Circus.”

The sisters also altered their traditional goals in education, in order to augment school revenues. Their director, Father Burlando, reminded them that their sisterhood had been founded to teach the children of the poor. Other communities of nuns existed to instruct the daughters of the wealthy. Nonetheless, the priest granted the nuns’ request for permission to charge tuition and to accept boarding students. Logsdon later requested that the sisters also might offer the “finishing school” subjects of music, drawing, and French, but only to generate additional income for the support of the orphans.

The school and orphanage also benefited from other sources of income secured by these religious women. The vineyard and orchard yielded not only fruit for the table, but also cash crops, used “to buy flour and other necessary things.” In 1859, the state legislature also began to allocate small grants for the care of orphans. That first year, the sisters received an appropriation of $1,000, according to an 1861 pamphlet entitled, “Report of the Trustees of the R.C. Orphan Asylum of Los Angeles.” Logsdon noted in this statement that the 1861 appropriation had not yet reached her, a distressing situation, since her debts totaled $13,000. Sister Scholastica did not hesitate to press her...

---

34EI Clamor Público, 20 March 1858; Southern Vineyard, 21 December 1858; and Los Angeles Star, 9 January 1869. See also the programs for the Orphans’ Fairs, found in the Antonio Coronel Collection of the Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Los Angeles, California.

35Letter, Bishop Thaddeus Amat to Reverend Francis Burlando, 19 January 1857, Los Angeles, AALA; and copy of letter, Burlando to Amat, 27 February 1857, Emmitsburg, Maryland, “Correspondence, I,” AWPDCC. See also letters, Logsdon to Burlando, 21 November 1856 and 18 September 1861, Los Angeles, “Correspondence, II,” AWPDCC.


37Sister M. Scholastica Logsdon, D.C., “Report of the Trustees of the R.C. Orphan Asylum of Los Angeles,” (n.p.: Benjamin P. Avery, State Printer, 5 December 1861), pp. 1-4. For the appropriations voted by the state Legislature, see Leyes de California (Sacramento: John O’Meara, State Printer, 1859), $1,000, pp. 239-40, (1861) $1,000, p. 49, (1862) $1,000, p. 201 (1863-1864) $1,000, p. 12; and the Appendix to Journals of the Senate and Assembly (Sacramento: State Printer, 1870), $1,000, p. 72.
The second site of the Los Angeles Infirmary of the Sisters of Charity, located on their Alameda Street property, 1859-1869. Sister Scholastica Logsdon purchased this building when the rented Aguilar Adobe proved too distant for the Sisters. Surrounding the house were fruit trees and a vineyard, from which the Sisters sold fruit for the support of patients and orphans.

Courtesy of the Archives of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Seton Provincialate, Los Altos Hills, California

claims on behalf of the orphans, a fact abundantly clear in her later correspondence with one prominent local citizen, Benjamin D. Wilson, though not a Roman Catholic, had generously supported the works of the nuns over the years. Upon Wilson's election to the state senate in 1869, Logsdon wrote a letter of congratulation that revealed how well she understood the processes of government. "We expect through your influence to have this year an increased appropriation. We have written to the good Governor, who is always a kind friend to us. We are not much acquainted with the members in the Assembly, but one word from you to them will be sufficient to secure us friends." 

38When the sisters arrived in Los Angeles in 1856, they located their Institución Caritativa in Wilson's former residence. The citizen's committee purchased the property for the asylum, and Wilson himself reduced the price by $1,000 and then contributed a further $250 to the collection. Letter, Logsdon to Burlando, 4 June 1856, Los Angeles, "Correspondence, II," AWPDC.

39Letter, Sister Scholastica Logsdon to Benjamin D. Wilson, 22 December 1869, Los Angeles; Wilson Collection, HL. Within four months, the Los Angeles Republican carried an editorial opposing a bill then pending in the state senate to appropriate $5,000 to the Los Angeles orphanage and $5,000 to the sisters' hospital. See the issue of 5 March 1870. The Appendix to the Journal for the Senate and Assembly for 1872 records, on p. 67, that the legislators finally voted an appropriation for the hospital of $500.
On the local level, Logsdon also understood how to manage government officials and to secure appropriations for the hospital in her care. Certain "gentlemen" she had consulted in 1857 informed her that the county supervisors budgeted $2,600 annually for the care of the impoverished sick. The sisters would probably be able to obtain this funding, if they agreed to operate the proposed county hospital.\(^4\) The nuns assumed operation of the new facility in 1858, receiving from the board of supervisors one dollar per day per indigent patient. Though this amount was reduced in 1871 to seventy-five cents per day, the sisters continued to care for those otherwise unable to afford medical treatment.\(^4\)

The increasing demands from citizens in later years for greater economizing coincided with steps that the Daughters of Charity had taken to protect their properties and benevolent works. They formed two civil corporations in June 1869 and became the first Los Angeles women ever to organize themselves in this manner. They constituted the orphanage and the hospital as distinct legal entities: The Los Angeles Orphan Asylum and The Los Angeles Infirmary.\(^4\)2 Listing the names of the respective incorporators, the "Corporation Books" also document annual meetings, election of officers, budgets, and real-estate transactions. The nuns were following the guidelines issued from their Maryland motherhouse, which were later printed as "Remarks on Corporations."\(^4\)3

\(^{4\text{a}}\)Letter, Logsdon to Burlando, 8 May 1857, Los Angeles, "Correspondence, II," AWPDC.

\(^{4\text{b}}\)Beginning on 9 November 1859, with the allotment of $706.00, the "Minutes" of the county board of supervisors list the dates that "Mary S. Logsdon" received payment for the services which the Sisters of Charity rendered. See vol. 11, p. 299, in "Minutes," housed in the Executive Office of the Board of Supervisors, Los Angeles, California. For the reduction in per-patient reimbursement, see Los Angeles Star, 7 March 1871.

\(^{4\text{c}}\)"Articles of Incorporation," The Los Angeles Orphan Asylum, 21 June 1869, Office of the Secretary of State, Sacramento, California; and "Corporation Book, 1869-1909," p. 1; Department of Marketing Communications, Saint Vincent's Medical Center, Los Angeles, California; hereafter cited as SVMC.

\(^{4\text{d}}\)Letter, Reverend James McGill to Francis Burlando, 15 June 1869, Los Angeles, "Correspondence, I," AWPDC; and "Corporation Book," pp. 1-15, SVMC.
Evidence suggests that a further reason existed to compel the sisters to seek incorporation of their institutions.44 Disagreements apparently arose between the nuns and the local bishop regarding who should hold title to the properties of the asylum and hospital. As head of the local diocese, the Spanish-born Thaddeus Amat evidently considered himself to be the rightful owner of this realty. Though all the documents are not available, it appears that the American-born Logsdon thwarted the bishop’s designs, by recording the title to the nuns’ real estate in her own name. Circumventing the bishop once more, she later transferred ownership of the hospital and orphanage land and assets to the new corporations.45

In the first election of officers on 3 January 1870, Sister Scholastica and her longtime assistant, Ann Gillen, received the hospital corporation’s presidency and vice-presidency, respectively. The initial financial report listed $6,000 in income, an amount comfortably exceeding the year’s expenses of $5,500.46 One of the earliest endeavors of the corporation was the construction of a new hospital. The county grand jurors, charged with reviewing expenditures of county funds, evidently did not consider the sisters’ site suitable for such a clinic. As early as May 1869, the members of this body had issued a report describing this district as unhealthy.47

The sisters began the search for a better site that year and eventually decided upon property on Naud Street, in the northeastern section of town, near the river. A visiting reporter later described the completed two-story brick structure they erected as “scrupulously neat and clean” and reflecting “great credit on the management of the Sisters.”48 Such newspaper publicity became increasingly important,

44All pertinent documents in this dispute are not presently available for study. The episcopal correspondence files in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles contain materials that suggest the outline of the lengthy disagreements. See Letters, Thaddeus Amat to Francis Burlando, 30 May 1856, Santa Cruz [California]; Amat to Burlando, 18 August 1857, Santa Barbara [California]; Amat to Burlando, 21 December 1857, Los Angeles; Amat to Martin J. Spalding [Archbishop of Baltimore], 22 April 1865, Los Angeles; Alexander Cardinal Barnabò [Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide at the Holy See] to Amat, 17 December 1862, Rome; Barnabò to Amat, 25 January 1864, Rome; Amat to M. Étienne [Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, Paris], 13 July 1864, Los Angeles; Amat to Barnabò, 13 October 1865, Los Angeles, AALA. For published summaries of additional Roman correspondence, see Finbar Kenneally, O.F.M., ed., United States Documents in the Propaganda Fide Archives: A Calendar (First series, Washington, D.C.: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1966-1977), vol. II, #2021; vol III, #186, #365; vol. V, #1033, #1165.
45“Corporation Book,” p. 14; SVMC.
46“Corporation Book,” p. 14; SVMC.
47Los Angeles Republican, 13 May 1869.
48Los Angeles Star, 20 August 1870.
because French residents of Los Angeles had commenced construction of the town's second hospital in October 1869. Though smaller and restricted to serving members of the French Benevolent Society, the Maisonne de Santé was located in a more desirable locale than the sisters' older infirmary. The "French Hospital," as it came to be known, initiated the gradual proliferation of health care facilities in the settlement.49

The potential for competition from this Gallic operation troubled the sisters, as did the repeated statements of the grand jurors in later years. The impaneled citizens began to complain that the wards of the facility were being filled by those who were recent, "penniless" arrivals in the county.50 The growing populace of Los Angeles included those who were not considered true "residents," but newly settled "chronic cases." Responding to the jurors' pleas for greater economy, the board of supervisors took steps to save taxpayers' dollars. The supervisors first terminated the county contract with the sisters in November of 1878. Board members then opened a publicly administered county hospital, with an attached almshouse where patients would work to help support themselves.51

The increasing population and altered expectations regarding local health care led to important changes in the sisters' endeavors. The nuns reevaluated their existing hospital location because of the adverse comments on the healthfulness of the site and the proximity of the recently constructed depot and yards of the Southern Pacific Railroad.52 The hospital's board of trustees finally decided in March 1883 to sell the property and to purchase a six-acre site in the "Beaudry Park" development on the north side of the city.53 Following the real estate practices of the times, the women subdivided the vacated site on Naud Street. The sale of lots in their "Infirmary" and "New Depot" tracts produced more than $30,000 in revenue between 1883 and

49Los Angeles Star, 30 October 1869 and 30 July 1870. The French Hospital is presently known as the Pacific Alliance Medical Center.
50For example, see Los Angeles Star, 15 January 1870 and 21 February 1871.
51Los Angeles Star, 7 March 1871; and Los Angeles Herald, 30 October 1878.
52As early as 14 December 1874, the hospital's board of trustees had voted to move the infirmary because of the new railroad depot. The president, Sister Ann Gillen, purchased property by January 1875. It is not clear from the records why the hospital was not relocated at that time. "Corporation Book," pp. 63-64, 66, SVMC.
The Los Angeles Infirmary of the Daughters of Charity, erected in 1870 at Ann and Naud Streets. Local admirers named Ann Street in honor of Sister Ann Gillen, who was long in charge of the hospital. The facility later moved when the Southern Pacific Railroad erected tracks and yards adjacent to the site. Note the presence of two of the Sisters on the balcony.

Courtesy of the California Historical Society / Ticor Title Insurance, Los Angeles, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California Library

1886. They also advertised for construction bids on the new infirmary, selected the contractors, and proceeded to break ground, in September 1884.

The correspondence of the corporation’s president reveals the anxious moments that such financial affairs involved. Sister Emily Conway headed the hospital from 1881 to 1885, while also serving as the corporate treasurer. In a letter to the director in Emmitsburg, she explained the difficulties she faced. “There is quite a stir among the Physicians of the City to erect a Protestant Hospital . . . not far from our new place.” Undaunted, she continued with the news that the cornerstone ceremony for the sisters’ Infirmary was slated for 8 Sep-

---

54Entries in the “Corporation Book” between March 1883 and January 1886 record a total of $30,250 in lot sales, pp. 152-88, SVMC.

55The presidents of the hospital corporation and their terms of office were: Sisters Scholastica Logsdon, 1870-1874; Ann Gillen, 1874-1881; Emily Conway, 1881-1885; and Severana Brandel, 1885-1886. See “Corporation Book,” pp. 14, 54, 123-24, 184, SVMC.
tember 1884. She also discussed the details of construction and the difficulties of finance: "By contract the whole building will cost, I mean Mason and Carpentry work, Sixty-three thousand and some dollars, Plumbing, etc., extra or different contracts, but the whole will not cost as much as was first supposed. There is property at the rate we have been selling to cover all, and it would be a relief if we could secure the cash."56

Property sales evidently did not proceed as rapidly as Conway anticipated to meet payment deadlines for construction contracts. Corporation minutes recount that the sisters’ officers over two years’ time contracted a series of short-term loans totaling $35,000, to cover their obligations.57 The range of these financial dealings demonstrates the administrative skills of these nuns. They effectively secured the necessary loans, provided the appropriate collateral, and met repayment schedules in such a way as to maintain a sound credit rating. The nuns continued to negotiate their loans with the Farmers and Merchants Bank, the oldest and most reputable firm in the community.58

Similar documentation exists for the other corporation the sisters formed in 1869, the Los Angeles Orphan Asylum.59 As noted previously, a boarding school for girls and an orphanage comprised this institution, northeast of the plaza. Enrollment by 1878 totaled 202 students and 31 orphans, with the expenses of $12,765 running within $1.25 of receipts for that year.60 In 1884, the nuns purchased new property in East Los Angeles to relocate the aged facility to more spacious grounds. The women then expended so little money on the old structure that “on one occasion as a visitor was being entertained ... in the parlor, there was a interruption in the conversation—a foot and ankle were seen protruding through the ceiling—a Sister was

54 Sister E[mil Conway] to “Very dear Father” [Alexis Mandine, C.M.], 17 August 1884, Los Angeles Infirmary, “Early History Mss.” folder, “St. Vincent’s Hospital” box, AWPDC.
55 “Corporation Book,” pp. 178, 181, 184, 185; SVMC.
56 A summary of the early history of banking in Los Angeles is found in Robert Glass Cleland and Frank B. Putnam, Isaias W. Hellman and the Farmers and Merchants Bank (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1980), pp. 9-57.
57 The women who founded this society on 21 June 1869 were Sisters Scholastica Logsdon, Ann Gillen, Francis Xavier Schauer, Mary Eugenia Maginnis, Mary Corsina McKay, Theresa McDonald, Mary Ellen Downey, Mary Angela Noyland, and Rosanna Smith ("Articles of Incorporation," Office of the Secretary of State, Sacramento, California). With their facility now located in suburban Rosemead and known as Maryvale, the sisters still continue their work in child care.
58 White, Life of Mrs. Eliza A. Seton, p. 504; and “Minutes,” Los Angeles Orphan Asylum Board of Trustees, vol. I, p. 75, Maryvale, Rosemead, California.
coming through, but fortunately her descent was arrested. 

Beginning construction of the new orphanage in early 1889, the nuns transferred the 300 orphans to the completed $150,000 structure in 1890. The financial dealings for this and other projects over the years brought the sisters into contact with a broad spectrum of the local population.

The third characteristic of the nuns' pioneering spirit was their willingness to associate widely with peoples of diverse faiths and cultures. Like other members of the Catholic laity, they participated directly in joint efforts to improve and protect the community. The work of the sisters introduced them to members of all creeds and races. Their service in the smallpox epidemics offered dramatic evidence of the commitment of these women to the neediest of the town's residents. Other activities further document the cooperation of the nuns with settlers of differing origins in the City of the Angels.

Spaniards and Irishmen long comprised the majority of the local Roman Catholic clergy. No Spanish-speaking male from Los Angeles sought training and ordination during the period 1848-1885. A different situation existed among the women. Not only did the Daughters of Charity train local females to join their sisterhood, but they also received at least four Hispanic women into their novitiate. Additional nuns from Mexico served locally, and two received election as trustees in the hospital corporation.

Only one document survives listing all the women who worked in the asylum and hospital between 1856 and 1882. Officers at the sisterhood's Paris headquarters recorded the names of 126 nuns who served in the Institución Caritativa and the Los Angeles Infirmary in those years. The vast majority were women of Irish descent, though it is impossible to determine the exact number. Eight of the sisters were exiles from Mexico, of whom María Chávez and Guadalupe Quirván occupied seats on the hospital board in 1875. Two more were natives of Spain. The other Hispanics in the local conven were native-born Californians, trained in the seminary under the charge of Sister Scholastica.

---

61 Remarks on Sister Mary Scholastica Logsdon,” p. 120
62 Ibid., pp. 121-22.
64 “Corporation Book,” pp. 71, 72; SVMC; and Los Angeles Evening Express, 24 February 1875.
65 The Spaniards, as noted previously, were Sisters Angelita Mumbrado and Clara Cisneros. A third, Francesca Fernández, had left the sisters shortly after her arrival in Los Angeles, in 1856. Recruited in Spain by Bishop Amat, she was apparently mentally unstable. See Letters, Logsdon to Burlando, 7 May 1856 and 4 June 1856, Los Angeles, “Correspondence, II,” AWPDC.
The distance from the Maryland motherhouse had led the superiors of the religious order in 1860 to decide upon opening a West Coast novitiate, or training program. Reverend Francis Burlando sent orders for Logsdon to commence the new endeavor in Los Angeles despite her protests of her inability to conduct such a project. Detailed instructions guided Logsdon in opening the institute, in early 1861. Of the six young women who commenced their training as Daughters of Charity that year, four were Hispanic. Three of the four remained in the program and joined the sisterhood: Sisters Angélica Olives, Agatha Quintana, and Josephine Orduño.

The completion of the transcontinental railroad led provincial superiors to close the Los Angeles seminary in 1870. Thereafter, all who aspired to enter the sisterhood traveled to the motherhouse in Maryland for their training. In the years of her direction, 1861-1870,

---


67 Letter, Logsdon to Burlando, 4 May 1861, Los Angeles, AWPDC; and register “Catalogue du Personnel-États Unis,” Archives of the Daughters of Charity, Rue du Bac, Paris, France.
approximately sixty women came under Logsdon's tutelage. Incomplete records make it difficult to determine exactly how many remained with the sisters. The Paris "Catalogue du Personnel" lists thirty-two nuns who had come into the religious community through the southern California novitiate. 

These women involved themselves in service to the educational and health needs of Angelenos of all ages. The breadth of the nuns' involvement with the local populace amazed their contemporaries. The sisters dealt with people from every socioeconomic level in the pueblo. While enrolling wealthy girls alongside orphans in the asylum's classes, the religious women educated the children of the local Indians as well. The sisters discovered that the daughters of the Indian people were no more difficult to train than any other children. The greatest obstacle proved to be language.

The Indian girls knew no English, and their instructor was unfamiliar with Spanish. The nun in question studied, "But the mixture of the Indian and Spanish dialect[s] embarrassed her frequently." A similar situation existed among the nuns themselves, because three of the first six sisters at the Institución Caritativa were Spaniards and spoke no English; their three American companions had no knowledge of Spanish. In the process of teaching one another, the sisters attracted the Hispanic women of the ríco class to the school. Studying English in the mornings, the señoritas sat down to a noontime lunch, which their servants provided at tables in the yard. Class and ethnicity were irrelevant factors in this frontier academy, a policy the nuns maintained in their nursing assignments as well. The sisters involved in nursing tended all those in need of medical attention at the county hospital for two decades. During the recurrent smallpox epidemics, these women also tended the stricken, regardless of race. Their solicitude for the dying Indians amazed many native Californios. The Indios comprised the lowest level of Los Angeles society and worked in the homes and on the estates of the wealthy in the most menial labor. One chronicler of the religious group recalled that ministering to these

---

66Logsdon noted, however, that in the first four years of the Los Angeles seminary, she had already trained thirty-three sisters, enrolled five more, dismissed three, and suffered the loss of one other from death. Letter, Logsdon to Burlando, 29 January 1865, Los Angeles, "Correspondence, II;" AWPDC; and "Remarks on Sister Mary Scholastica Logsdon," p. 120.
67"San Francisco" Ledger, p. 97; AWPDC.
68"Remarks on Sister Mary Scholastica Logsdon," p. 111.
afflicted people in 1861-1862 brought the nuns "the respect of Jew and Gentile." 72

The care of orphans won for the Daughters of Charity further renown, along with widespread support in the community. From the time of the nuns’ arrival in 1856, Angelenos of all classes and creeds stood ready to assist in sustaining the local shelter for children in the custody of the sisters. The involvement of people regardless of religious heritage long characterized these efforts. The sisters praised local Jews in 1869, for their "encouraging words and open purses." 73 Even the town’s pioneer rabbi left a bequest for the orphanage at the time of his death in 1907. 74

A variety of related undertakings brought this band of women into contact with the elite and the impoverished, the Spanish-speaking and people of other languages. When an orphan came of age, for example, the sisters arranged for some "respectable" employment, such as service as a governess or domestic. Sister Scholastica noted that she could easily find placements for these young women. 75 Logsdon was acquainted with members of the leading families in the community, and she utilized her social connections for the benefit of her wards. Such contacts also proved to be valuable for the success of several projects of the local clergy, as well.

"Las Señoras del Altar," the women’s society of Our Lady of the Angels Church, solicited funds in 1869 to renovate the shrine of Saint Vibiana, the diocesan patroness. The majority of donors listed for this project were women from the wealthiest Roman Catholic families. The names of Hispanics and Irish predominate on the ledger pages. Two entries specify the gifts of the Daughters of Charity and reveal their

72 "San Francisco" ledger, pp. 97-99; AWPDC.
75 Letter, Logsdon to Burlando, 18 September 1859, Los Angeles, “Correspondence, II,” AWPDC. See also Los Angeles Star, 7 May 1870; and Wallace E. Smith, This Land Was Ours: The Del Valle Rancho Camulos (Ventura, California: Ventura County Historical Society, 1977), p. 115.
active involvement in this society of parish women.\textsuperscript{76} In addition to this parochial project, the sisters were engaged in a diocesan fundraising endeavor four years later.

The construction of a diocesan cathedral required five years of concentrated effort by the bishops, priests, and parishioners. All segments of the Roman Catholic population cooperated to meet the staggering challenge of raising $75,000 in building costs. The Daughters of Charity sponsored one of the major events in the early part of the campaign to raise revenues. Through their ability to bring together people of differing classes and creeds, the nuns could attract a corps of volunteers to collaborate on this highly successful project. The Sisters’ Fair in 1873, on behalf of the cathedral, was one of the two most profitable benefits held during the erection of the edifice, 1871-1876.\textsuperscript{77}

This range of activities, from nursing Indians to fundraising for cathedral construction, kept the sisters in contact with a wide array of people in the town. These involvements enabled the nuns to render what were probably their greatest services to their Church and their adopted community, by bridging two major divisions within local society. The first split involved the Hispanics, who were suffering displacement within their Church in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The second chasm was found between the growing Anglo-American population and the European-born bishops and priests of the Roman Catholic communion.

Bishop Amat worked vigorously to conform local Catholicism to the norms mandated by the national hierarchy in the United States. Amat preferred rubrically precise worship, devoid of the various religious customs that had evolved over two centuries on the isolated frontera. The restriction of these pious traditions alienated many local Hispanic Catholics and left them feeling like strangers in their own Church. The Daughters of Charity, however, had participated in this Hispanic piety from the time of their arrival in 1856.\textsuperscript{78} The nuns had also served the Spanish speaking in the school and orphanage, at the

\textsuperscript{76}See El Clamor Público of 5 June 1858 for a typical description of the nuns’ participation in the street procession on the feast day of Corpus Christi. The sisters marshaled some one hundred orphans, dressed in white, in the march around the plaza that day.
hospital and during the repeated epidemics.

In the course of educating Hispanic girls at the academy over three decades, the sisters also welcomed several of them into the sisterhood itself. The number of Californio women to enter the religious group was small; only three are known to have joined prior to 1885. Nonetheless, there existed a mutual acceptance between the sisters and these women that was certainly absent between the local clergy and Hispanic young men. The nuns worked to serve the various needs of this increasingly marginalized population and in the process maintained one of the few effective pastoral bridges between local Hispanics and the church of their ancestors.

The sisters were also important intermediaries between European-born church officials and the growing local settlement. Bishop Amat showed little understanding or adaptation to the frontier community’s broad-mindedness in religious matters. He recruited his clergy from his native Spain and later from Ireland. The legislation of the diocesan synods during his tenure of office mandated ever-more precise and restrictive requirements for Catholic behavior. For the twenty-three years of his episcopacy (1855-1878), Amat retained a thoroughly European perspective in the matters of Church and society.

The nuns offered a marked contrast to their denomination’s local leader and many of his clergymen. The sisters worked beside people of all faiths, in community-service projects ranging from education to emergency health care. These women participated in the cooperative female activities in the town, as well. They were acquainted with a broader spectrum of pueblo society than most priests because of their diverse works. While garnering the respect of fellow Angelenos for their care of society’s unfortunates, the nuns also provided their Church with a flexible corps of dedicated workers.

These women also attracted attention as the first female business executives in the community. When their property was threatened, the sisters sought recourse, through the American legal system, to incorporate themselves and thereby insure the safe possession of their goods. Their hospital and orphanage developed into important local institutions, requiring increasingly sophisticated skills to staff, supervise, and finance. The sisters offered local Catholic women a vocational alternative to homemaking and keeping school. As the historian Hasia R. Diner has noted, “Nuns provided role models of women engaged in a variety of educational, charitable, and social welfare
activities, often doing work deemed inappropriate for women.”

The range of roles modeled by the sisters for Los Angeles women exceeded those sanctioned in the Catholic Church that Bishop Amat had known in Spain. Here on the frontier was an American-based group of religious women buying and selling property in the name of legal corporations they had constituted themselves. Here, too, were nuns who negotiated with bankers, lobbied politicians, and worked alongside Protestants and Jews to benefit the health and welfare of townspeople. Such wide involvement did not take place in the Old World, where nuns led a more cloistered and restricted existence.

In offering new roles for local Catholic women, the Daughters of Charity also provided local members of their faith with an alternative model for the Church itself. In their service to the civic community, they also contributed to their religious communion. The nuns struggled, as did all Catholics, to be both American and Catholic. However, the sisters looked less frequently to Rome for their inspiration and guidance than did their clerical counterparts. This more flexible spirit, so typical of Catholic female religious in the United States, allowed these women to undertake necessary new works, to search creatively for means to fund these ventures, and to serve as unofficial bridge builders between estranged groups in both Church and community.

Historians have characterized this spirit of adaptation as a key trait of the truly “American” churches on the frontier in the nineteenth century. The Daughters of Charity demonstrated that members of the Roman Catholic communion could also grapple creatively with the exigencies of pioneer life in their pueblo convent. To the extent that the sisters altered their practices, they merit recognition for their “American” accomplishments. The experiences of these women in Los Angeles offer important amplifications to historical accounts that focus so exclusively upon the accomplishments of men, particularly bishops and priests. As members of the more numerous laity, the nuns demonstrate quite clearly the willingness of this segment of their Church to engage in flexible responses to frontier demands.

---