First Hospital and Orphanage in St. Louis

The 1828 census of St. Louis reported around 5,000 residents. In only seven years, the population almost doubled. As with most cities, the crowded and unsanitary conditions prompted the need for social institutions to care for the sick and destitute. The Catholic Church in St. Louis was poised to fill two of those critical needs by establishing a hospital and an orphanage in those early days.

Mullanphy Hospital

Founded in 1828, Mullanphy Hospital was the first hospital established west of the Mississippi River. Its namesake was John Mullanphy, a prominent Irish Catholic businessman and philanthropist. Mullanphy approached Bishop Joseph Rosati in 1826 with plans for the hospital. Mullanphy supplied the property and the funds for a building and its furnishings. Bishop Rosati needed only to find a group to run the hospital. Upon Rosati's request, the Sisters of Charity, known today as the Daughters of Charity, sent four sisters to St. Louis.

In the deed, John Mullanphy specified that the hospital care for "all such indigent sick free persons without regard to color, country or religion." The hospital was located on Spruce Street between Third and Fourth Streets. The first hospital was a three-room log cabin, and the number of patients quickly overwhelmed the small quarters. The small contingent of sisters soon grew to twelve.

A new hospital was built in 1831 to accommodate the growing city's needs. It was erected in the nick of time just before the first cholera epidemics plagued the city. One of the first waves in 1832 killed more than 400 people in St. Louis, including two of the sisters working at the hospital. The sisters saved the lives of over 800 patients.
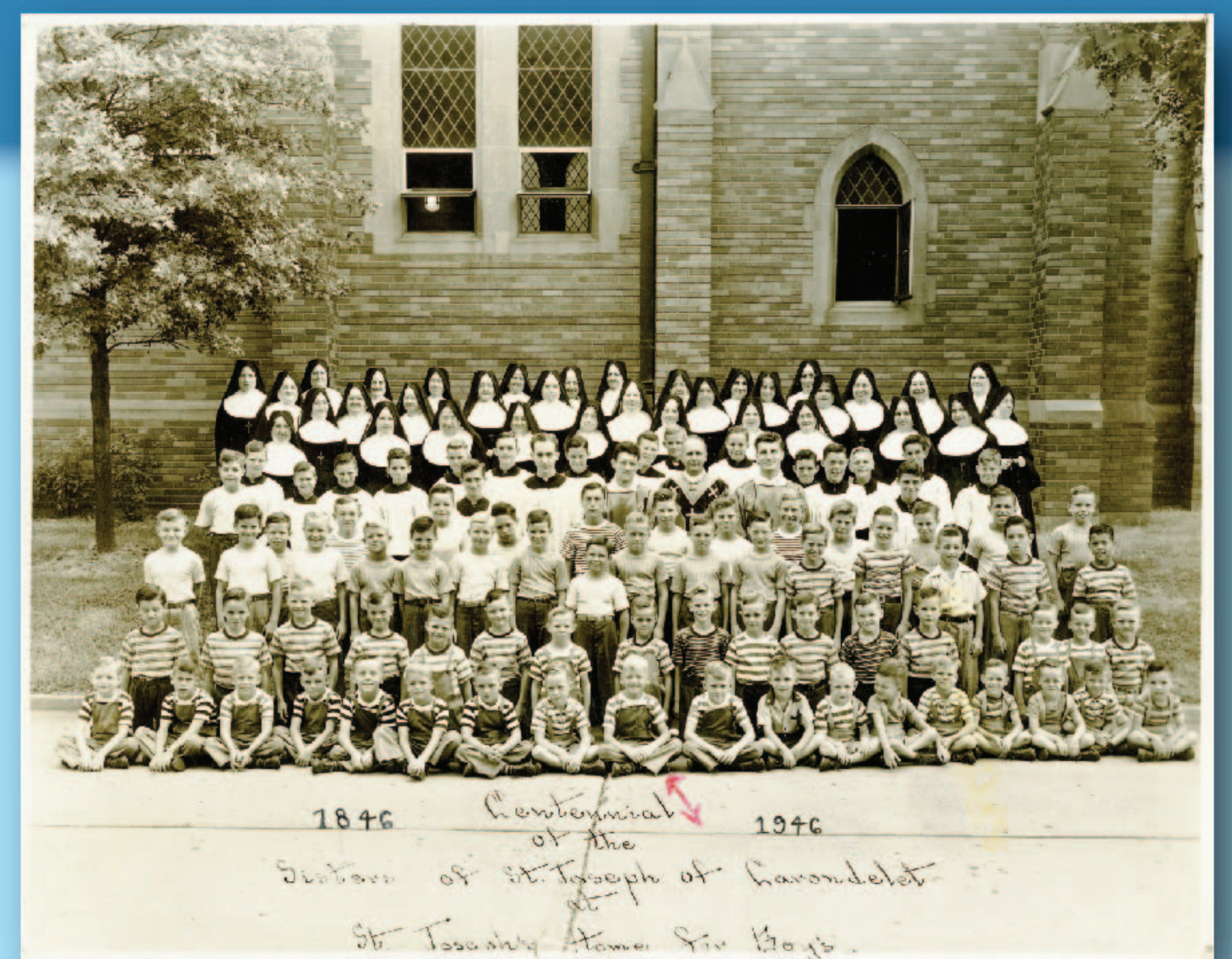
Top: **Illustration of the first hospital, a three-room cabin, established in 1828**

Bottom: **The second building of the Mullanphy Hospital, built in 1831**
Images courtesy of Daughters of Charity Archives

St. Louis Male Orphan Asylum

Poverty and disease in early 19th century St Louis left many children parentless and homeless. In 1827, John Mullanphy leased a property to the Sacred Heart Sisters for one dollar per year for 99 years. The sisters set up a convent and orphanage, and the Mullanphy family donated money annually for the care of around 20 children. This was the first orphanage in the state of Missouri. Then in 1834, Rosati established the St. Louis Male Orphan Asylum next to the Old Cathedral and placed it in the care of the Sisters of Charity. Within just one year, there were 46 orphaned boys at the home. The Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet later took over the operations of the home and renamed it the St. Joseph Home for Boys in 1846. The home cared for young men in need until its closure in 2001.

St. Joseph's Home for Boys residents and Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet during their centennial celebration, 1946
Archdiocese of St. Louis Archives