

winter of 1826-1827 saw her frequently in the city on her search for a house, for aid, for even a word of encouragement. At length she could report to Mother Barat :

Ever since you expressed your desire, following on Father Niel's visit, I have been spreading my nets, sounding the ground, trying to get somebody interested in the matter. On all sides I have met with nothing but opposition, coldness, indifference. At last I applied directly to Mr. Mullanphy, asking him if, among his numerous pieces of property, there was one he could sell at a moderate price for a work of charity and zeal. He soon offered me a house, built of brick and almost new, at about fifteen minutes distance from the church, and surrounded by twenty-four arpents of land. . . . I went to inspect the property. The situation is less smiling than that of Ste. Marie d'en Haut at Grenoble, but resembles it slightly, being elevated, solitary, in a healthful locality overlooking the Mississippi and the city.¹⁰

The name of John Mullanphy is familiar to all who know the history of St. Louis. He and his wife, Elizabeth Brown, were among the group of Irish settlers who contributed an interesting element to the cultural and social development of the town in the period following the Louisiana Purchase. John Mullanphy began his career as a gallant soldier fighting under the Fleur-de-lis, and ended it as an honored citizen in the western metropolis founded under that same banner nearly three-quarters of a century before. Knowledge of the French language gave Mr. Mullanphy a mercantile advantage in the public life of the town, and a social advantage in its cultural contacts, but educational facilities in St. Louis were too meager to satisfy him. For the sake of his children he moved, first to New Orleans, then to Baltimore.

The Religious of the Sacred Heart had made their pioneer foundation in Missouri when Mr. Mullanphy returned permanently to St. Louis. Through land and cotton he had become the foremost merchant in the Mississippi Valley. In 1826 his eldest daughter, Ellen, who had persevered in her aspirations towards religious life, obtained his consent to her entrance into

¹⁰ Cahier, *op. cit.*, 1 : 463.

a French novitiate of the Society. While her father was facilitating the establishment of a convent of the order in St. Louis, Ellen Mullanphy died in Paris in March, 1827.¹¹ The news of her death reached him shortly after he had made his charitable grant, but in no way altered the gift. As Bishop Rosati heartily approved of the proposed foundation, Mother Duchesne accepted the offer, closing her eyes, it would seem, to the fact that certain conditions in the contract might prove difficult of fulfillment in years to come.

The Mullanphy grant to the Religious of the Sacred Heart is an interesting realty transfer, unique of its kind, perhaps. The tract of farmland, containing a little more than twenty acres, lay beyond Chouteau's Creek, truly "on the confines of the wilderness." Mullanphy did not convey the property outright to the Society, but leased it to the nuns for nine hundred and ninety-nine years, in consideration of the payment of one dollar.¹² In the lease he specified that the religious "shall occupy said premises as a convent, and shall therein board, lodge, clothe and provide for and educate all such indigent female children who are orphans, or whose parents are both indigent and helpless, not exceeding the number of twenty at any one time, as shall be designated by said Mullanphy during his life," and after his death, by female descendants or the Catholic bishop of the diocese. The pioneer landowner further stipulated that he, his female heirs or the bishop should pay the nuns "the sum of \$10 at the time of the admission of any indigent child as aforesaid, to be expended on bedding, and also the further sum of \$5 per annum in advance for each and every child so presented, as long as such child shall remain at said convent." In order to prevent the orphans or indigent children from being educated above their station in life, the founder of the asylum required that they go barefoot in the summer, "at least the smaller ones," that they be given neither tea nor coffee to drink,

¹¹ Lawrence Kenny, S.J., "The Mullanphys of St. Louis", *Historical Records and Studies*, 14: 70-111; *Reminiscences of Mrs. Jane Mullanphy Chambers*, and other manuscript material obtained through the courtesy of Mrs. Katherine Boland Clemens, St. Louis.

¹² Copy of Lease, Archives RSCJ, St. Louis.

and that they eat corn-bread, and not that made from wheaten flour.¹³ The validity of the grant was made to rest on the orphanage being run in perpetuity.

Mother Barat's brief comment on the contract and her desire to aid the foundation appear in a letter dated from Paris, June 6, 1837:

I have received, my dear Daughter, the letter informing me that you have accepted the establishment in St. Louis, as proposed by Mr. Mullanphy for the orphans. Twenty — that is a heavy burden, but I have every confidence that God will help you bear it. When your letter came, our last missionary band had left Paris for Havre. There were only four, but the news of the foundation in St. Louis roused us to greater effort. We summoned Mother H  l  ne Du Tour from Chamb  ry to join the others. She will be for your new house. At Chamb  ry she was mistress general of the boarding school and mistress of novices, and she replaced Mother Lavauden as superior for six months. I hope she will be a real help to you. Of course, you are free to place her wherever you see the need, and the same is true of Mother Van Damme, the Flemish nun. She knows English and French very well, has talent, and is a remarkably good teacher of religion. . . .

I hope our travellers will bring you at least two thousand francs, and they can, if they economize on the way. This sum includes a thousand francs from Madame de Rollin, another thousand from Abb   Perreau, for which you must be sure to express your gratitude. There is also the sum of five hundred francs for the Jesuit Fathers from their brethren of Saint Acheul. . . .

I would love to send a letter to all of my American daughters, but I fear I shall not have time. How I envy you your little corner at St. Ferdinand! Why can I not hide myself there for a few years? If I did not supply for this by means of St. Catherine of Siena's cell of solitude, I should indeed be badly off.¹⁴

The property leased from Mr. Mullanphy lay in an isolated neighborhood. The house had the reputation of being haunted, and so had stood vacant for some time. Weird noises were said to echo through the empty rooms at night. Mother Duchesne took up her abode in the place on May 2, 1827. She brought

¹³ In a friendly suit conducted by Judge Garesch  , the religious were permitted by the laws of Missouri to be less rigid in these matters.

¹⁴ *Barat Collection*.

with her Mother Mary Ann O'Connor, Julie Coutermanche, a commissionaire, and three or four orphans from Florissant, whom Mr. Mullanphy allowed to profit by his charity. The first night was a terrifying ordeal. The garret of the house was inhabited by a wild cat that cavorted about in the darkness and filled the air with dreadful discord, as it sprang from beam to beam. There were crawling creatures, too, that tenanted the cellar and cracks in the walls, and came out stealthily into the light to peer at the intruders, or wandered at large in the dark, as was their wont, causing creepy discomfort to the newcomers, if not actual fright. The house was completely bare of furnishings. Though Florissant had contributed what it could, there were no beds, few chairs and the most meager assortment of other household goods. Happily the season was mild, and there were months of warmth ahead. Preparations would be made before winter set in with its rigorous cold.

The record of the foundation is entered briefly in Mother Duchesne's *Journal*. Hardly had the nuns reached their new home, when Father Saulnier, the pastor in St. Louis replacing Father Niel, called to offer his services, promising to make arrangements with Father Lutz, in order that the religious might not be deprived of Mass. Returning home, he sent them at once a cow, a supply of vegetables and the assurance of more—they were at liberty to gather what they needed from his garden—and a cartload of furniture, including desks, tables, benches and other school equipment which had been standing idle since the temporary closing of St. Louis College. A chapel was arranged in what had been the kitchen. It was a partly underground basement, with ample floor space, but requiring excavation, as well as flooring and plastering. The first Mass was offered on May 6 in an upper room, and St. Joseph was chosen patron of the house. A pathetic line in the *Journal* tells that "we cannot reserve the Blessed Sacrament, having no ciborium."

As the convent in St. Louis had been founded on condition that an orphanage be opened, it was appropriate that this work should be inaugurated before any other. The first children

presented by the founder were Marie Laberge and the two McManus girls, who remained in the asylum seven, eight and eleven years respectively. Next came Margaret Cornelius and Mary Knappe. After eight years with the religious, these two young girls joined the Society of the Sacred Heart, the one as a coadjutrix sister, the other as a choir nun. Between 1827 and 1833 Mr. Mullanphy himself placed twenty-five children in the orphanage. About twenty of these, in black and white uniform, took part in the funeral cortège which followed the body of their benefactor to its last resting place. For a short time after Mr. Mullanphy's death, Bishop Rosati paid the entrance fees and annual donation for each child, in accordance with an agreement between him and the founder in 1830. In 1853 the obligation of the Mullanphy family to contribute to the support of the orphans was cancelled by a donation to the Society of a piece of unimproved property.¹⁵

The admission of children into the institution remained in the hands of Mr. Mullanphy's daughters as long as they lived. The clause limiting the number of girls received to "not exceeding the number of twenty at any one time," was never strictly adhered to. Following the cholera epidemics in the city, and during the Civil War and the decade that followed, this number was frequently exceeded, the enrollment mounting to thirty-five and even forty at times, and averaging twenty-seven a year. The good accomplished by this charitable foundation may be estimated from the fact that, at the end of a century of existence, the record showed a total of more than five hundred girls, of ages ranging from four to fifteen, who had been given the opportunity of Christian education in a religious environment, where food, clothing and maternal care were bestowed upon them, and where they were so trained as to be able to support themselves in later life or aid those on whom they became dependent. Among these girls vocations have been numerous. Some have embraced the contemplative life; a greater number have dedicated themselves to the work of education and the care of the sick, the aged or the defective in active orders, and have even

¹⁵ Archives RSCJ, St. Louis.

been privileged to help in the foreign mission field ; a few have chosen to remain at the Sacred Heart and spend their lives in the mixed life of labor and prayer.

The approach to the Mullanphy land lay across the mill creek draining Chouteau's Pond. Bridges were a rarity on the outskirts of St. Louis in those days, and it was necessary for Mother Duchesne to have one constructed over the stream, in order to facilitate communication between the convent and the city. Etiquette required that Mr. Mullanphy be consulted on the matter. He in turn interviewed Mr. Auguste Chouteau, then advised Mother Duchesne to do the same. Her letter is preserved in the archives of the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis. After the best French fashion of the day she began :

Monsieur,

When there was first question of our making an establishment here, Mr. Mullanphy assured me that you would place no obstacle in the way of our having a bridge for pedestrians over your creek. Since my arrival here, he has added that you had formally given your consent and had promised to put it into writing when the time came for it. I wish, Monsieur, to thank you for your kindly sentiments towards us. I should not have felt at liberty to begin the work without warning you in advance and soliciting anew your written permission. Kindly honor me with an answer, I beg you, and believe me, etc. . . .

The permission was granted and the work begun at once. By the end of July a generous donation from the convent at Grand Coteau enabled Mother Duchesne to meet the cost of the bridge and several other constructions and alterations in the house. Applications for enrollment in the new academy had begun before the end of May. To her great regret, Mother Duchesne was obliged to postpone the opening for want of teachers. She endeavored to persuade the parents to send their children to Florissant for a few months, but the arrangement was not acceptable. On June 25 Mother Duchesne was at Florissant for the ceremony in which Miss Eleanor Gray received the religious habit. The novice accompanied her to St. Louis that very afternoon, and within a few days the academy opened its doors to receive the first pupils of what has been known for more than