

## Chapter 42

### *Far and near Yesterdays*

The King William's Town Telephone Exchange and Post Office had a busy time on the afternoon of 6<sup>th</sup> July 1946. The occasion was the election of a new Prioress General for the "King" Dominican Convents in succession to the late Mother M Augustine Geisel. Her place was very difficult to fill and on 5<sup>th</sup> July representatives and delegates gathered at the Mother House from all parts of the Union for the General Chapter. It was too soon after World War II for the convents in Europe to send delegates to this Chapter, so they nominated Sisters in South Africa to represent them at the election.

Mother M Demetria Hemmer<sup>1</sup> of Springs Convent, Transvaal, was duly elected to the position – one of the most onerous in the educational world of the country. She would now be head not only of one school but of virtually dozens, as well as of various missions, hospitals, nursing homes, clinics and orphanages dotted throughout the land. She would be answerable for the well-being of a staff of about eight hundred nuns, and indirectly responsible for the welfare of the thousands of pupils attending the various schools of the Congregation. She would have to be organiser, financier, diplomat, teacher, adviser for the entire organisation, a task that would daunt the most brilliant of men. But she accepted the vote of the ~Chapter solely in obedience to God's Will. Those who saw her assume office that day said her blue eyes were sad and, as she sat in her place at the head of the assembly, she often seemed withdrawn like a woman burdened beyond her strength.

The tidings of the election were flashed to every part of the Mother General's domain by post and by telegraph. The news had to be relayed to Holland, Great Britain and Germany too, as there were branch houses in all these countries. She now received many messages of congratulation and good wishes for her new office; and the work of the Congregation had to go on.

### *Our Lady's Sanctuary*

From the early days of pioneering up to the present the people of Southern Africa have learnt to be grateful for the kindly help and skilful nursing of the white-clad Dominican nurses as hospitals, nursing homes and clinics were established over the far-flung spaces of our sub-continent.

When Mother Jacoba Zirn was Prioress of the Mother House (1917 – 1923) "Marienthal" had been purchased from a Mr Everitt for the dual purpose of providing stables for the convent cows and to have a suitable home for Mr Sellman who was to lay out the gardens of the Loreto Hostel. When Mr Sellman eventually left, the house was let. In 1948 "Burnville" Maternity Home closed down and the local medical men, headed by Dr Doran, the Convent's friend and physician, petitioned Mother General Demetria Hemmer to begin a Maternity Home in King William's Town. Much against her wishes – for the financial burden borne by the congregation was very heavy – she finally acceded to their request.

As soon as Mrs Peters, the tenant, was able to get her own house and the premises were vacated, the work of reconditioning the building was given over to Messrs Linde & Co. Mother General also set about selecting the nursing sisters for "Marydale Nursing Home", and the work of furnishing and providing the

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<sup>1</sup> *She hailed from the heart of Catholic Bavaria from the archdiocese of Bamberg. Arriving in King William's Town in 1912, Sister Demetria made her religious profession the following year. Except for two short periods at the Mother House and Klerksdorp Convent, the whole of her religious life had thus far been spent in Johannesburg and on the Reef, where she was well known and esteemed. For more than 20 years she had taught in the school at Belgravia. As Directress of the Children of Mary Sodality of Belgravia Parish Sister Demetria had won respect within and without the convent, especially from the hundred converts whose steps she had guided into the Church. She had governed the Community at Springs as its Superior for the last six years. After the expiration of her Generalship, Mother Demetria spent most of her life in Britain and Europe. She finished her earthly course at Riehen, Switzerland on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1977.*

necessary equipment was begun in earnest. The Sisters chosen to begin this work were Sister August Daisenberger, former Superior of Glen Grey Mission Hospital; Sister Magda Weber from Mater Dei, East London and Sister de Montfort Coyle – all trained nurses and members of the south African Nursing Association.

In May 1950 many visitors called to look over the Home and all were enthusiastic in their admiration at what they saw. Patients were booked who intended to patronise Marydale in the future months. On 31<sup>st</sup> May Rev Dr M Prendergast D.D., said Mass at Marydale in one of the rooms and Rev Brother Boniface of the De La Salle School served the Mass. Monsignor Prendergast reminded the Sisters of the great privilege Marydale had just received in the blessing of Mary's Son. He further encouraged the nuns to work for God's glory and not for the empty praise of men.

The little hospital was thereafter declared open. The premises had also been inspected by the Public Health and Provincial Authorities who expressed their satisfaction at the comforts and equipment provided by this 12-bed institution. Some of the attractive furniture had been made by Sister Revocata Recher in the convent workshop. Sister Digna Guenther, head of the Convent Art Classes, had also painted a special picture of the Madonna and Child with the Pirie Mountains in the background, which would grace the hallway.

On 19<sup>th</sup> June 1950 Mrs Erick was admitted as the first patient of the Home. During the first year 116 confinements were conducted here and the new venture was now well launched. On Trinity Sunday of 1952, triplets (2 girls and a boy) were born at Marydale. The trio did well and later the boy was to join the art class and proudly introduce himself to Sister Digna as one of the triplets.

Christmas of 1954 brought great joy to the Sisters; they were granted permission to build a little chapel of their own. Hitherto the little community had to attend Mass and Office at the Convent which meant that one Sister had to stay at home with the patients. Once their chapel was built this was no longer necessary. On 24<sup>th</sup> March of that year the Blessed Sacrament was reserved there after the dedication Mass by Msgr. Prendergast.

After 15 years, on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1965, Marydale Nursing Home had to close down. It was a difficult decision for Mother General in Johannesburg to make; but lack of trained staff, a problem in all the religious hospitals in the land, finally made it impossible for the little nursing home to carry on. The registers showed that 1903 babies had been born here and among them were several sets of twins there had also been 1903 general cases admitted.

One of the former patients, when she had paid her farewell visit to the nuns said: "... I think the Sister realised the sadness in my heart as I sat for the last time in the charming little room where, as a very young mother, I had often received such good advice on baby care... The Home was small and it was friendly. You were a person and your baby had a name – not just an anonymous bundle doled out to one from a passing trolley... The nuns were unfailingly calm and cheerful; rocks to cling to if things got bad; ready for a laugh when things went well. They created an almost tangible atmosphere of happiness and trust. The people of "King" will certainly not forget the Sisters who have given of themselves to heal the sick and to bring new life into the world during these past fifteen years..."

The premises were then transformed into the Marydale Art School and, in February 1966, Sister Digna wrote to the Prioress General in Johannesburg: "... We are very grateful that we could move the Convent Art Department from the old, cramped quarters to this sanctuary of Our Lady... Every inch of the house, on the ground floor, is well used and a few Sisters still occupy the former nurses' bedrooms on the upper storey..." Very soon the number of pupils rose from 45 to 65 and Sisters Digna and Winifred Koenig have their hands very full for many different branches of art are being taught here. Among Sister Digna's fine exhibits to be seen at Marydale are also lino cuts, work in pastels and a few beautiful etchings – all her own work. She closed her letter to Mother General, asking for prayers "that Our Lady may bless this Art School which is Hers..."

## *Red Light over Loreto*

The fire was first noticed by one of the Sisters at two o'clock in the morning of 17<sup>th</sup> July 1954. The other nuns were quickly roused and one thought of ringing the tower bell which wakened everyone on the premises and many people in town. Fanned by a high wind which often changed direction, the fire, which started in an upstairs sewing-room, spread down two portions of the building which flanked the quadrangle.

It was raining softly and it was bitterly cold when the King William's Town volunteer fire brigade, under the chief officer Mr N Bauer, arrived on the scent. After a struggle lasting two hours, the men won, and the fire was stopped at two points from spreading to other parts of the school. The senior girls behaved splendidly; no one panicked. They were awakened by the strange red light and at first seemed nonplussed; but in no time they were helping the sisters evacuate the juniors and marshalling them down to St Dominic's Hall.

Local helpers came from all over the town. Dale College boys mingled with grown men and did their share manfully. In spite of all efforts the fire spread under the roof and also Sister Raymond Whyte's Memorial Library was badly damaged.

As a result of the conflagration, which was one of the most disastrous fires in the history of the town, the operetta "The Magic Ruby", which was to have been staged in the Town Hall on 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> July, had to be cancelled.

The Rotarians under the leadership of their able President, Mr Malkin, also came to the rescue. All the children from the hall were sent by car two, four and five at a time, to different homes of the Rotarians in town where they were given something hot to drink and put to bed to get over the shock.

Mother Prioress Germaine Holmes said: "... We cannot fail to pay tribute to the citizens of King William's Town. They were wonderful when our need was so great and the help they rendered will never be forgotten in the history of the Convent... The list of helpers is too long to single out names of those who so generously gave their services..."

All through the weekend the vast work of restoring some sort of order from out of the chaos of the fire's aftermath went on. The Sisters were helped in this by many of the pupils and various friends of the school.

After only one day's enforced holiday, temporary classroom accommodation for the school's 400 pupils was arranged and school work could be resumed once more. The fire was a real disaster – financially as well as materially. While the damage amounted to many thousands of pounds, the institution was found to be considerably under-insured; but people were very helpful. Sympathisers sent substantial cheques and the Insurance Company also paid up well, so that the school was restored to look as it had before the fire.

By 1967 the pupils of "King" Convent were proud to be able to say that their school possessed one of the very few language laboratories in the country at the time. It was due to the generosity of Mr Harry Dilley, a farmer at Tzaneen in the Northern Transvaal, who had been a former pupil of the convent under the tuition of Sister M Raymond Whyte. At first the laboratory was used chiefly for teaching the second official language, Afrikaans. Later it became known as the "Learning" laboratory as various other subjects are also taught there.

(Mr Dilley had in the past already contributed substantially towards the school's Reference Library as well as to the "Sister Raymond" All-weather Tennis Courts.)

The "SILVER STAR", our school magazine, was begun in 1906 when the first Editor, Sister M Raymond Whyte O.P. wrote: "... We think it is quite time that we should introduce ourselves to the South African public as our Convent is now nearly thirty years old." As more and more pupils joined the news section of the magazine it was decided to enrol them in an association called KING CONVENT GIRLS' UNION (K.C.G.U.) in 1911 – the same year in which Msgr John Fagan opened Saint Dominic's Hall at the Mother House. Sr M Paula Wahlspeock was the first Secretary General of the Union and Mrs Veronica Wynn

(nee Doyle) the President. At the inaugural meeting eight local secretaries were appointed. The basic idea was to link up past and present pupils.

Even in those days the formation of an annual scholarship was considered essential. May Williams was the first holder of the Mother Mauritia (Tiefenboeck) Bursary. Then the war years intervened and the last K.C.G.U. took place in 1918. For practical purposes it then ceased to function. The SILVER STAR, however, from which the Union was born, continued to shine. In 1927 the Memorial Church was built at the Mater Infirmorum to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of the Mother House and the members of the original Union donated the Sanctuary, the silver Sanctuary Lamp and several stained-glass windows.

In 1925 Sister M Joseph Sweetnam was recalled to King William's Town at the request of the Mother Prioress Ignatius Naegele to resuscitate the past pupil's Union. On 13<sup>th</sup> February, some 45 pupils were present at the meeting and Sister Joseph was in the chair. Mrs Maggie Rosin (Nee Grant) was elected President and Miss Margaret Jack Local Secretary. Mother Ignatius was the essence of encouragement and help to the K.C.B.U. King Convent and Branches Union, as it was then named.

As far back as 1911 the Union has been wanting a distinctive badge embodying the Schools' motto "Veritas" and K.C.B.U. on the familiar Dominican Star. The Star, as ancient as the Order itself, signifies Truth and Hope; the ray shows that the influence of the K.C.B.U. must penetrate home, office and hospital. The chain links the members with their respective Alma Maters. This badge, designed by Sister M Digna Guenther, is considered a very fine badge indeed.

As the Union grew and funds increased, the allocation for the different bursaries multiplied accordingly: the Father Willie Doyle Book Bursary was extended in 1940 to all our Convents. Then, in 1947, the Mother Augustine Geisel Bursary was established in East London. Lady Lukin, Mother Pius Galvin, Mother Johanna Pflaum and Sister Claudia Kusterer Bursaries were donated to various branches. According to the revised constitution each branch was responsible for its own bursaries for Primary and Secondary Education.

The local newspaper of King William's Town, "The Mercury", speaking of the school magazine on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1958, said: "'The Silver Star' – the magazine of the Dominican Convents in South Africa, of whom the one at King William's Town is the 'mother', has just been printed for the current year, which is the magazine's golden jubilee year... This journal, which in its own right has become an institution after 50 years of publication, is well worthy of the auspicious milestone that has been reached..."

The following message was also received from His Holiness, Pope Pius XII on December 16<sup>th</sup> 1956, to whom a copy of the magazine had been sent:

Segretaria di Stato

Di Sua Santità

"The Secretary of State of His Holiness is directed to acknowledge receipt, on behalf of the Holy Father, of the copy of the 'Silver Star' and has pleasure in communicating that the Sovereign Pontiff, as a token of His benevolent regard, accordingly imparts to the Dominican Sisters of Saint Catharine of Siena of King William's Town, to the teachers and pupils of their schools, the nurses and their hospitals as well as to parents and benefactors, in pledge of copious divine grace and heavenly favour, His Paternal Apostolic Blessing."

Sisters Joseph Sweetnam and Ludwiga Heanen kept the K.C.B.U. on its pivot and piloted it and the "The Silver Star" through many exigencies of our changing times. Sister M Carmel Kampfert took over from Sister Ludwiga in 1959 and gave the journal its attractive new cover. To these Sisters the past and present pupils of our schools owe a deep debt of gratitude.

When the K.C.B.U. reached its own golden anniversary in 1961, a copy of the Silver Star, recounting the union's history, was sent to His Holiness Pope John XXIII and in return those responsible for its publication received "a special Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of divine favours..."

From the Master General, Most Rev Father Michael Browne O.P., the Union obtained the following message through the Prioress General:

**“Roma, 8 – 48. 25<sup>th</sup> May 1961**

Concento Santa Sabina (Aventino)

“... Upon the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the King Convent and Branches Union, I take the opportunity of expressing my deep appreciation of the devoted labours of our Sisters of the King William’s Town Congregation. Their contribution to the work of the Church in Southern Africa over the years, whether in their schools, in their hospitals or in their missions, has been most fruitful and has fully merited the universal approbation accorded to it. The Fiftieth Annual Reunion of their pupils and patients, past and present, is itself a tribute both of the devotion of the Sisters and the success of their unflagging efforts.

“May God bless them and their work, together with all those gathered together for the Golden Jubilee. With the blessing of our holy Father St Dominic to you and the Sisters...”

The Silver Star, as mentioned before, was the nucleus of the K.C.B.U., and it continued until 1970 when the light of our friendly Star went out. Its publication ceased because the individual schools decided each to publish its own annual or quarterly journal. Necessary and advantageous as this might be, many senior past pupils, especially those who live far from the institutions at which they were educated, will doubtless sadly miss the SILVER STAR.

A special feature of the Marian Year 1954 was the Congress of Women Religious held at Kroonstad in the Orange Free State. As the Congregation of the King William’s Town Dominicans was the largest, though not the oldest in South Africa, it was allowed to send nineteen representatives.

On the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup> December the 230 delegates assembled in the chapel of the Convent, Notre Dame, Kroonstad. To the strains of the “Ecce Sacerdos Magnus” the Apostolic Delegate Archbishop CJ Damiano entered, heralded by a procession of clergy and acolytes. Then followed Benediction after which the delegates repaired to the school hall for the reception.

This began with an address of welcome by Sister Provincial M Ursula S.N.D. in the Chair. Speeches were then made by the Apostolic Delegate and Bishop G van Velsen O.P. Archbishop Whelan of Bloemfontein was also present.

Next day started with Solemn Pontifical High Mass of the Holy Spirit sung by the Apostolic Delegate. After that the lectures commenced and the Congress continued for three days. On Sunday evening the assembly was brought to a close by a short social. It had been decided that this was to be the first of a chain of congresses to be held periodically; but that future gatherings would be smaller and more specific. In order that something permanent might emerge from the Congress, a standing committee was formed under the guidance of Bishop van Velsen O.P.

The first tangible result was that in 1957, from April 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>, a Congress of all the Major Superiors of Religious Women in South Africa was held at Parktown Convent, Johannesburg. This was again inaugurated with a Pontifical High Mass celebrated by Archbishop Damiano who also gave the opening address. He explained that the Association of Religious Women was now constituted according to Canon Law and that Bishop G van Velsen was appointed the first Religious Assistant to the Association.

The Programme on this occasion did not specify lectures but purposed rather to have practical discussion on Catholic teaching, nursing or other social activities in South Africa. Its chief aim was to give Superiors of various Sisterhoods the Opportunity of getting together in amicable co-operation. One paper by the Secretary of the Apostolic Delegate on Women Religious and the Mission Schools made all present realise that modern problems must be seen far beyond the limits of the individual congregations.

Before the meeting was adjourned the Religious Assistant proposed to send cables of thanks for good wishes and blessing to His Holiness Pope Pius XII and to Cardinal Valeri, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Religious in Rome.

On the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup> January 1956, the Secretary of the Apostolic Delegate arrived at the Mother House, King William's Town. He brought a Papal Decree establishing the various Provinces of the King William's Town Congregation. The Provinces had been requested by the General Chapter of 1953. Through his Secretary the Archbishop also informed Mother General Aquilina Spiegel<sup>2</sup> and her Councillors that the House of the Generalate must be moved from King William's Town before the decree could be enforced. He added that the Generalate must be separate from any of our existing Convents. He wanted it in the Transvaal, not too far from Pretoria, and that his should be implemented as soon as possible.

A Three-storeyed house was found to be for sale at 80 Valley Road, Parktown, just off Oxford Road. "Welgelegen" was then purchased for the home of the Generalate of the King William's Town Dominican Sisters. As the transaction was completed on 11<sup>th</sup> February, it was decided to call the place "Lourdes".

To effect the transfer to Johannesburg was no easy task. For nearly eighty years since 1877 the Convent of the Sacred Heart at King William's Town had been the home of the Generalate.

The momentous historical change was effected quietly and without ostentation. A furniture removal company had agreed to transport belongings from King William's Town to Johannesburg. At the last moment, however, the Sisters were notified that the goods would arrive a fortnight later than had been previously arranged. This meant a prospect of arriving at an empty house.

A still more dreary outlook faced the Councillors. A call on urgent business summoned Mother General Aquilina to Europe. She sailed from East London in the "Arundel Castle". She would not return until the end of October and by that time the transfer would be a thing of the past.

The car containing the Councillors arrived at their destination on Thursday the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1955 at 15.45 o'clock. The lonely empty house towered above them and they were met only by the African workmen. One came forward and introduced himself as Charlie, the gardener; the other, Alpheus, was the chauffeur. Charlie presented the key of the front door. After walking through all the rooms on the three floors, the Councillors then went to seek accommodation for the night at St Vincent's Convent, Melrose.

Next morning after breakfast the party of cook, housekeeper and Councillors left for "Lourdes". On the way visits were paid to the baker, the butcher, the grocer and the dairyman to open regular accounts for essential commodities. By evening the members of the Generalate were almost complete: Mothers Hilda Moloney, St John Pienle, Joseph Sweetnam, Alcantara Pauli with Sisters Edelindis Schelle, as housekeeper and Sister Laurentia Weidinger as cook. Mother Anthony Stury, the Bursar, came at the end of the week from Belgravia Convent, where she was teaching.

Their first occupation was to arrange a chapel. The dining room of the former occupants was chosen for the present. The boys of St Vincent's School, under the direction of Sister Dosithea Grasspointner, had

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<sup>2</sup> *Born in 1890 at Althausen Wuertemberg, Aloysia Spiegel was the youngest of fourteen children. Having completed her schooling she helped for a time in her father's office. He was an architect and builder. At the age of twenty she followed God's call and entered our Congregation at Schlehdorf. In South Africa she made her religious profession into the hands of Mother Clare Huber in 1915. In the same year she passed the Art Examination of the Department of Education of the Cape of Good Hope, which qualified her as an Art Teacher. Mother Aquilina held the position of Superior in a few Convents before she was chosen as Prioress General in 1953 by the Chapter held at the Mother House. In 1959 she became First General Councillor. As Vicar General she also assisted Mother General Fromunda Zimmermann with the planning of various convents. At the House of the Generalate she planned the chapel, adorned it with symbols and designed the Stations of the Cross. Mother Aquilina also modelled the statues of the Madonna and St Joseph for the chapel, although her eyesight was then failing fast. She died on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1970 at St Annes' Convent, East London, where she was living in retirement.*

*(It was after the Congress of Religious, held at Kroonstad in 1954, that our Sisters were given leave to visit their families in Europe. Formerly when a Sister had her family goodbye to come to South Africa she did not expect to see them again in this life.)*

made a fine altar. On Sunday the 3<sup>rd</sup> April Bishop H Boyle Blessed the house and said the first Mass at “*Lourdes*”. However, the Blessed Sacrament could not be reserved as there was as yet only a portable tabernacle. On Friday 15<sup>th</sup> April, after Mass, His Lordship could reserve the Eucharist as a beautiful liturgical tabernacle had been fixed to the altar the evening before.

On 6<sup>th</sup> April the furniture and luggage arrived from the Mother House. Though this was welcome it entailed endless going up and down stairs until everything was in order.

On Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> April, three Councillors represented the King William’s Town Dominicans at Father P Peyton’s Family Rosary Crusade at Pretoria. It had been quite impossible to attend the meeting at Johannesburg. At Pretoria there was an audience of nine thousand people and the Reverend Mothers from “*Lourdes*” were given seats on the pavilion immediately behind Archbishop Garner and his suite including the Knights of Da Gama. A pleasing feature of the gathering was that five families, English, Afrikaans, Chinese, Coloured and Bantu, each said aloud in their vernacular a decade of the Rosary; the events of the decade were at the same time staged theatrically behind the reciters. Loudspeakers carried their words over the vast square.

When Mother General Aquilina Returned from Europe on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1955 she, at once, started to implement the papal decree forming the Provincial Administration for her Congregation. Mother Carina Betzl, Provincial of the Southern or Sacred Heart Province, had her residence at the Mother House and Mother Vedasta Erber, Provincial of the Northern or St Joseph’s Province, resided at Springs. These and their Provincial Councillors were appointed on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1955 and the Provinces were inaugurated at the beginning of 1956.

Alas, the house in Valley Road had not long been the home of the Generalate when Johannesburg city Council planned to build a freeway in that area in an attempt to lessen the congestion of traffic. The Sisters’ plot, like many other properties, was expropriated and the Mother General, once again, hunted long and fruitlessly for a suitable house to which she could move. Finally the former home of Mr Tivett-Carnack was bought at 19 Rock Ridge, which the Sisters occupied in January 1963. This house was far less roomy than their former home so, in time, a wing was added to accommodate the few student Sisters who attend the University or one of the Colleges in the City.

### *Hill Crescent School*

Even before the arrival of the Dominican Sisters in 1877, the Priests of King William’s Town had started a Catholic School for boys and girls in Durban Street. When the nuns came the girls were drafted to the Convent School of the Sacred Heart, but St Patrick’s was retained for boys. As the Sisters increased in numbers Monsignor Fagan asked them to staff the boys’ school while it remained attached to the parish and the Parish Priest continued as Manager of the school. Sisters Raymond Whyte, Alacoque Brien, Amalia Joder and Honoria Kenna are some of the many nuns who taught boys here. Classes ranged from the Grades to Matriculation. A number of lads also boarded in a house managed by the Sisters in Durban Street.

The purchase of Glendower House seems to have been a chance stroke. Bishop MacSherry had been on a visit to Monsignor Fagan and, when packing his luggage, he realised that he needed a hold-all. Msgr Fagan set out to buy one at an auction sale that was being held in Hill Street. Here he found the house being auctioned for two thousand four hundred pounds. For some reason the priest could not explain, he raised his hand, palm facing the auctioneer, who then called out: “Monsignor Fagan bids two thousand five hundred pounds! Any further bid?” No other was forthcoming; probably out respect for the priest. Down went the hammer and Glendower belonged to Monsignor Fagan. We are not told what the Bishop said when the Priest broke the news to him...

Strange to say, two other persons had set their hearts on the purchase of Glendower House. They were also prepared to go much higher but, by chance, they were both late for the auction. Thus Monsignor Fagan had bought a potential hold-all for Catholic boys.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1904 the Teaching Brothers of St John de la Salle arrived from Ireland in King William's Town to open a school for boys at Glendower House, the former residence of Mr H Baker. The pioneers of this venture were Brother Paul (the Superior) and Brothers Thomas, Christopher, Alexius and Alexander. Two days later their house and school were blessed by Bishop MacSherry. This opening was to have a great influence on our schools.

The assistant priest, Father James McNally, transferred the boys from the Sisters in Durban Street to Glendower House. The Brothers arranged that the small boys in the Grades should be taken by the Convent School. In the Brothers' high school there were now only seven pupils. When more Brothers arrived from abroad it was decided to close the high school section as pupils were so few. Meanwhile the Sisters from the hostel in Durban Street had returned to their convent.

In 1929 Brother Boniface arrived as the new Superior. The school continued as a primary one. But in 1956, with only 36 boys on the roll, the Brothers decided they could do more good by being drafted to one of their institutions.

Bishop Green then asked our Sisters to staff the school again but, owing to the shortage of personnel, we had already refused several other similar offers.

In 1957 the Irish Missionaries of the Sacred Heart from Ireland had promised to take over the school as soon as they could get trained teachers to do the work. Under the energetic leadership of Father J White M.S.C. the school was given a new look and also a new name: The Sacred Heart College. On his recall to Ireland to undertake more onerous duties, Father DJ O'Neill became principal. Seeing that this small boys' school would continue to be a state-aided primary school, the name was changed to "Hillcrescent School".

Once more, principally on account of the shortage of priests, the Sacred Heart Fathers left the Port Elizabeth Diocese. The parish priest, Father P Duffy, who was also the Manager of the school, asked the Dominicans again to take over the institution. This was now done and Sister Luisetta Dengel became the Principal. Old Glendower House finally had to make way for a fine new school building. In time Hillcrescent School was amalgamated with the Convent and now forms the primary section of King Convent School.

### *St Anne's Hostel and School, East London*

When the staff of the "Mater Dei" Nursing Home left Number 12 St Matthew's Road in East London, the vacated house was converted into St Anne's Hostel for working girls at the request of Bishop H Boyle D.D. It gave accommodation to 22 young ladies working in the city. From 1948 to 1955 it rarely had a vacancy. In fact, it usually had a long waiting list. However, when the de la Salle Brothers, opposite the new "Mater Dei" Hospital, decided that they did not have sufficient space to expand their property came into the market and was bought by Mother General Demetria Hemmer. The place needed to be reconditioned and, as there was no staff to occupy it, it deteriorated rapidly. Tramps soon got to know of the unoccupied house and enjoyed free night lodging by breaking windows.

The once-beautiful home of Mr and Mrs Burnham-King, with its tower known as the Nightingale's Cage, now cut a sorry figure. Mr Vogelzang was engaged to repair the place and it was determined to transfer St Anne's Hostel from St Matthew's Road to Number 36 St Mark's Road.

Sister Edward Liebhart was in charge at the time of the transfer but she was then succeeded by Sister Bertrand Singhammer. For the hostel this was an unfortunate move as the new situation was further out of town and less convenient for the ladies to board there. As a result of this boarders were few and the hostel was finally closed down in 1954.

The old school building of the former de la Salle College became known as St Raymond's. After suitable repairs were made it was used to house the Government Section from the overcrowded Sacred Heart convent in Albany Street in 1955. Later the name was changed to St Anne' Convent School.



Happily this Primary School grew so that in 1976 there were over 200 pupils, and more classrooms and a hall were added to accommodate the rising numbers on the roll. Further improvements were made, such as providing the school with a library, hall, as well as science, art and audio-visual rooms. In this, our only convent school left in East London, the Sisters continue to plant Christ's teaching in youthful hearts; for the great purpose of education is not merely to develop skills and awaken the intelligence, but to direct the children's gaze beyond this world to the great end – life eternal.

### *St Rose's Convent, Keiskammahoek*

Past pupils of King William's Town Dominicans are scattered far and wide. One of these, however, lived only about forty miles from her former school.

Nestling at the foot of the forest-clad Amatola Mountains, away from the noise of traffic lies the peaceful little village of Keiskammahoek.<sup>3</sup> In this retired spot dwelt Kathleen Harran. There she taught and after school hours took the Catholics for catechetical instruction.

The village had no resident priest but it could boast of a pretty little church a stone's cast from Miss Harran's home. On Sundays she would gather the Catholics to Mass if a visiting priest was there; and if no priest was available, together they would say the Rosary and other prayers to keep Sunday as the Lord's day.

When, in 1946, a resident priest came to the "Hoek" our past pupil felt that her former responsibility devolved on him, so, when the De La Salle Brothers at East London needed a house-keeper, she offered her services to them. Miss Haran gave her house to Bishop H Boyle and went to live at the newly-opened boys' college in Vincent, East London.

His Lordship offered the property to Mother Demetria Hemmer, then Prioress General. He hoped that she would aid the Catholic Mission by opening, on no matter how small a scale, a convent whose residents would minister to the needs of his priests and people. Two Sisters<sup>4</sup> in December 1949 occupied the premises which now became known as St Rose's Convent. There they looked after the priest, acted as sacristans and had a small nursery school. Daily Mass was said and the Blessed Sacrament was reserved in the church. The two Sisters visited the sick and taught catechism to children until Sister Majella was struck down by a heart attack. Through lack of staff she could not be replaced and the little convent was closed on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1965.

### *St Mary's Convent, Rustenburg*<sup>5</sup>

At the request of Bishop JC Garner of Pretoria Mother General Demetria Hemmer agreed to open St Margaret's Convent at Rustenburg with a party of three Sisters.<sup>6</sup> They arrived on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1950 and were welcomed by Father J Johnson C. Ss.R. and Brother Andrew of the same Order. As Mother General was away overseas Mother Aquilina Spiegel and two companions accompanied the pioneers to their new home. On 23<sup>rd</sup> July the Bishop himself said Pontifical High Mass in the church which had previously been built by the Oblate Fathers.

School opened on 1<sup>st</sup> August with fifteen pupils; the numbers soon rose. At the earnest request of the rural section of the population boarding accommodation was made available in January 1952, and the first five Catholic Boarders were welcomed. In August of that year our Congregation bought a property on which

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<sup>3</sup> Formerly it was a frontier town.

<sup>4</sup> Sisters Majella Kaiser and Luitgard Albrecht

<sup>5</sup> At town founded in 1850, meaning Place of Rest. Nearby President Kruger had his farm and a monument testifies to his association with the place. During the first British occupation of the Transvaal in 1877 a fort was erected within which the garrison was besieged during the 1880-1881 War, but withstood the attack. Some of the earliest sittings of the Transvaal Volksraad took place at Rustenburg. It is now noted for its tobacco industry and citrus fruit production.

<sup>6</sup> Sisters Magdalen McLeod, Ulric Stephan and Auxiliatrix Lutz.

the Sisters lived with a vacant plot and a citrus orchard. Owing to the increase of pupils it was found necessary to build a large modern school on the newly-acquired ground.

In that year too, Sister rose Dixon succeeded Sister Magdalen as Superior and Sister Fortunata Hummel took over the school from Sister Ulrich. She found 47 children on the roll with classes ranging from the Grades to Standard Six. By August 1954 the number had increased to seventy and the new building was started by Brother Aloysius. It was ready for occupation a year later and the numbers now rose rapidly to over hundred, which included pupils of Standard Eight. The results of both the school and music examinations were very gratifying and the children were assiduously prepared for the Sacraments.

A successful school concert was staged in 1958. The school was making good progress in every sphere. When Sister Fortunata was assigned to St Louis Bertrand Mission at Potchefstroom her responsibilities passed to Sister M de Lourdes Darcy.

At the general celebration of the first Republic Day of south Africa the school children were granted a half holiday after they had sung the National Anthem and hoisted the Flag. (The Police had lent us the flag for the occasion.)

The school report from the Transvaal Education Department was fair. Soon after that His Grace Archbishop Garner came to examine the Catholic children in Catechism and gave them a splendid report. By 1961 it decided that the Dominican Sisters would withdraw from Rustenburg and their Convent would be taken over by the Sisters of Charity of St Paul. The Inspector of Schools called to bid the Sisters farewell and said he regretted their leaving. His Grace Archbishop Garner also came from Pretoria to thank the Sisters for the good work they had done and gave them his blessing.

The chronicle records that "the Redemptorist Fathers were very kind and helpful by putting three cars at the disposal of the Dominican Sisters to take them to their respective destinations when they left Rustenburg on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1962."

### *Zeerust*<sup>7</sup>

Further to the West of Rustenburg but also in the Archdiocese of Pretoria is the small town of Zeerust, with its Church of St Francis Xavier. Here, in 1951, Mother General Demetria Hemmer had bought a property with a view to opening a Convent to supply the educational needs of Catholic children in this area. She had done this at the request of Archbishop J Garner. However, owing to extreme shortage of staff she was obliged to inform His Grace that she was unable to send Sisters to Zeerust.

In 1954 when Mother Aquilina Spiegel was Prioress General the property passed to the Sisters of Charity of St Paul. They established there, St Mary's convent School where they teach girls and junior boys from Kindergarten to the Matriculation Standard.

### *St Michael's Nursing Home, Peddie*<sup>8</sup>

Mother General Demetria Hemmer had been asked several times to open a nursing home or a hospital at Peddie. At first a mission hospital for the Africans was thought of but the water shortage of Peddie was an obstacle to such an undertaking. Early in 1951 Mother General bought a property from Mr Petzer. There was a fairly large house on the site, though it was very dilapidated. However, plans were made to convert the dwelling into a small nursing home and Messrs Linde and McGann of King William's Town undertook the contract. A flat for the priest, a laundry and servants' quarters were also erected by the same firm. When building operations were nearing completion a couple of Sisters were sent to get the

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<sup>7</sup> Founded in 1868 and named after DJ Coetzee, its earlier version was Coetzeerust.

<sup>8</sup> A small town in the Eastern Cape, originally founded as a British frontier post as Fort Peddie in 1835, named for Lt Col John Peddie. The place saw much fighting during the frontier wars and was once actually captured by the Xhosas, but they were again driven out. It is now a farming centre.

house in order. Mother General herself often donned an apron and helped with the cleaning. Furniture and other equipment were bought and gradually the house assumed the appearance of a Nursing Home.

The first Mass was said here by Father C Woods on the Feast of Our Lady's Sorrows. For a couple of weeks Mass was celebrated here only on Sundays until the Priest-in-Charge could take up his residence at Peddie. On 8<sup>th</sup> May 1952 Bishop H Boyle D.D. blessed the house, dedicating it to St Michael and a beautiful statue of the Archangel was installed. From that day the Blessed Sacrament was reserved in the chapel to the great joy and comfort of the Sisters. The ladies of the local Red Cross Committee donated a hundred pounds for which the Labour Ward equipment was bought.

Dr Stevenson of the Public Health Department of East London called to inspect the premises and gave leave for the admission of non-infectious general and maternity cases. The little hospital was also registered as a Nursing Home.

The official opening of the first hospital in Peddie was performed by the mayor, Mr Ross Q Davies, on 12<sup>th</sup> May, in the presence of about a hundred people. Through Mr JE Puttick the M.O.T.H.S. gave a donation and several other friends also made contributions towards the home. The garden, which was a wilderness, now received attention and even a charming little "Lourdes" grotto was erected there.

Keeping the little nursing home going was not easy as the number of patients fluctuated constantly; and when all the beds were filled the work-load was more than the few Sisters could cope with for any length of time. On the other hand the shortage of nuns gave little hope of a permanent increase of staff. The residents of Peddie were generous and helpful by frequently organising bazaars and other fund-raising functions to support St Michael's. Among the special benefactors were Dr and Mrs Lalor and Dr Sheppard.

The erection of a mission hospital at Peddie was again mooted and, since the Sisters of King William's Town felt unequal to the task, Bishop Boyle approached some other Congregations but these also declined the undertaking. It was, therefore, decided to close the nursing home. In 1960 sister Quirina Eberhard and her staff finally vacated St Michael's and the property was sold.

### *Convent of St Joseph, Groblersdal*

On 19<sup>th</sup> March 1976, the Feast of St Joseph, a tiny Convent was opened at the town Groblersdal, north-east of Pretoria, not very far from Marble Hall. A private house had been purchased and fitted up as a Convent with a small Chapel. Two Sisters were assigned to this foundation to teach catechism to the few Catholic children and to assist the priest, the Very Rev Dean G Brunner.

Sr Espina Seidl would teach music to a few private pupils from the town as well as direct two Chiro Groups in the vicinity. Sister Suso Meier goes to the Junior Seminary at Lucknow in the district, to teach English and Mathematics to the pupils. Inspectors of Education, who visit the college, are full of praise for Sister's teaching there.

The nuns' contact with the people there has been most fruitful. There had never been a convent at Groblersdal and it is hoped that the Sister will be able to do much good by word and example.