

V - *Holy Rosary Convent, Cradock*

In 1922 Father T Cullinan requested Mother General Lucy Kaltenstadler to found a mission school for Coloured, Indian and Chinese children at Cradock. The choice of the site presented difficulties; but Father was insistent on the urgent necessity of an early foundation for his beloved poor. He had already formed a group of poor White boys called the “Voortrekkers”. On these lads he had spent all the money he had received for the Silver Jubilee of his ordination, supplying them with clothing and personally taking them for a fortnight’s trip to the sea which they had never seen. The trip involved endless trouble, for their train journey to Post Elizabeth was, for many of the children, their first by railroad. One boy climbed out of the window while the train was in motion and sat astride on the roof. What an anxiety for the priest!

So, now he urged his request for the Coloured girls and boys. They must have a school “even if we must open in a goats’ kraal”. The priest died on 24th August 1922, just two months before the opening of the institution for which he had pleaded so earnestly. Material help, in the shape of clothing and stationery, came from the Branch Convents and was piled up at Cradock Convent for the great day of opening.

A suitable site within five minutes’ walk from the Township, at the South end of the village, was purchased. There, on 8th December 1922, Bishop H MacSherry presided at the inauguration of a small school dedicated to the Queen of the Holy Rosary. Sister Natalia Kaltenstadler was made superior with a staff of four nuns.¹ The Bishop appointed Father J MacCormack as mission chaplain. He had been travelling priest with headquarters at Cradock. He remained at the mission for seven years, always ready to help the poor. Before he left he donated his personal library as well as his few belongings to the mission.

Sister Patricia Langenbach was the second Superior and held that office to the end of 1928, when she succumbed to a painful malady and returned to the Mother House where she died on 19th September 1935. During her period of office the Orphanage for boys and girls was started. In January 1925, Sister Hilda Moloney became Principal of the school and in March 1926 the Primary School was opened. In the following year Sister Angelica Schiele arrived to teach music and to help with work at the mission. She, for thirty years, proved an ardent missionary who never spared herself. In 1929 Sister Veronata Schimpf became Principal of the combined school with a role of 450. She had ten assistant teachers and, in 1943, the school was raised by the Education Department to a “Grade B” School.

In January 1929 Sister Gonzaga Ziegler became Superior and remained till the end of 1928. She opened a Private Catholic Training School for Coloured teachers. The school did good work training both men and women to spread education among their own race. However, in December 1937, when the Government agreed to aid a similar college at Parow near Cape Town, the training section of the school at Cradock was closed. Nothing daunted, Sister Gonzaga started a Private Secondary School. She herself taught as a full-time teacher and prepared her pupils for the Cape Departmental Junior Certificate Examination so as to give them admittance to the Parow Training School. In 1937 she added Needlework, Commercial and Domestic Science Courses to her Junior Certificate class.

So much interest did she take that in June 1938 her Vocational Domestic Science School was recognised by the Union Educational Department and, in 1939, the State granted maintenance bursaries to pupils following the National Domestic Science Course. She left the Holy Rosary Mission on transfer to Village Main in January 1939 and was succeeded at Cradock by Sister Alberta Schubert. It was now necessary to build new classrooms for the Secondary School. The cramped accommodation of the Sisters had also to be enlarged. This was done and still the numbers increased so that further accommodation was provided in 1941 as well as in 1942.

Cradock is often stricken by drought when fresh vegetables, eggs and meat are at a premium. So, in 1942, a farm named Josef dal was purchased from a Mr Young. Mr C Granzier was engaged as manager and,

¹ *Sisters Frances Moosmann, Seraphine Schulte, Adolphine Heckmann and Hilarion Diermeier.*

thanks to his energetic efforts, the desert was turned into an oasis. The farm also afforded a delightful picnic spot for a day's outing during the school holidays.

The number of pupils continued to grow so, in 1944, new classrooms were again erected and, in the following year, a second Domestic Science Kitchen had to be built to cope with the numerous vocational students. In 1937 the Convent was raised to the status of a Priory and Sister Romualda Steinhart became the first Prioress. The Boarding School went on growing until it became the largest for Coloureds in the Republic.

A new Primary School was built in 1940. Mr WJ Alcaster, a former pupil of Holy Rosary School² became its head in 1961. The Mission School still expanded in spite of the great opposition the Sisters often had to face. A Matriculation Course was started and pupils were prepared for the national Senior and matriculation Examinations. This, for the successful candidates, would be the key to University and Advanced Teacher's Courses and to Training Colleges for Nurses. Holy Rosary Primary School closed down permanently in December 1969. Mr Alcaster was appointed headmaster of the new Carinus Primary State School wither he transferred with the pupils and the thirteen teachers from the Mission.

The Senior School (Standards 7 to 10) remained at Holy Rosary Mission where the students are taught by the Dominican Sisters. Another milestone in the history of the institution was reached when the Mission School became State-aided in 1973. New books, equipment and salaries were now supplied by the Education Department. The Mission Church had been considerably enlarged to accommodate the many boarders and parishioners on Sundays. In time the Coloured Community helped erect a church for themselves in Michausdal.

In March 1974 unprecedented rains in the Karroo and in other parts of South Africa sent raging floods on the rampage. The Army and Helicopters of the South African Air Force helped evacuate residents from low-lying areas along the Great Fish River which passes Cradock. The waters rose and flooded the town reaching as far as Stockenstroom Street, demolishing many homes. In the town some forty houses were wrecked completely, while very many dwellings had to be abandoned without their owners being able to salvage any furniture or other possessions. The Prime Minister, Mr BJ Vorster, visited the stricken area and expressed sympathy with the victims.

Ninety farms in the Fish River Valley were seriously affected by the deluge; among these was Josefdal. It was estimated that 27% of the lands under cultivation were damaged: It would take years to repair the farms, while in some places it was deemed irreparable. Top priority was given to the restoration of the sewerage services and other health hazards caused by the flood. Relief funds were started to help the victims. The Catholic Priest and the Sisters of Cradock also helped by distributing provisions, clothing etc. to the most needy persons.

The 20th December 1975 was a joyful interlude in the present sad transition period of our history, more memorable for the closing of old foundations than for the establishment of new ones. But, indeed, on that day a new Convent opened its doors to a group of Coloured Sisters of our Congregation, about to commence a new foundation: the Convent of Saint Rose of Lima³ at Michausdal, Cradock. The pioneers left their former home at St Francis Xavier Convent, East London, to set out for the parched Karroo.

There, for over a year building operations had been going on. The new house comprised a Convent, a Nursery School and a Crèche. The whole new complex was a worthy tribute to the missionary spirit of the 'King' Dominicans. The sisters assigned to undertake this work had all been given adequate training at Cape Town and elsewhere to fit them for the appointed tasks.

These new beginnings were made in a spirit of optimism and adventure. At a period when many of us are looking back with nostalgia to the good old days of our wide-spread Congregation, it was refreshing to see a new work being begun, fostered with the same ideals, bearing the same Dominican traditions, setting out with courage into the unknown.

² *Several good vocations to the Priesthood have come from this school.*

³ *A beautiful girl of Spanish descent in Lima, Peru, who became a Dominican Lay-Tertiary in the 17th Century.*