



FIRST MARIST COMMUNITY
IN IRELAND
02-07-1873



First Marist community in Ireland (1873)

Ireland, in the late nineteenth century was an impoverished country. Disease and emigration had followed centuries of oppression and religious persecution, and famine had devastated the Irish countryside. The two great needs of the time were care of the many sick and destitute people and education for the children. It was in response to these needs that the five pioneer Marists arrived in Carrick in the June of 1873. They stayed for some days with the enclosed Franciscan Sisters at Drumshanbo and on the feast of Mary's visitation, July 2nd, the first community in Ireland - Mother St. John (Mugnier) Sister St. Henry (Shaw) Sister St. Alban (Russell) Sister St. Epiphane, and Sister St. Foy - took up residence in the rented house which was to be their home for eighteen years.



Main Street Carrick the shop on the right is where the Sisters first started

***Mother St. John** had worked among the destitute poor in London's wretched east end. In 1880 she found poverty and misery in Carrick and was long remembered for her charity to the poor of the district. Catholics and Protestants shared in her benevolence. To one man who had lost his last cow she gave the price of a replacement, another she helped to pay his rent. On another occasion a poor woman asked for alms, and Mother St. John not having any money slipped off her petticoat and gave it to her. These alms were given not out of abundance, but out of the extreme poverty of the community.*

***Sister St. Henry** was the first English woman to enter the Marist congregation. She was sent to France for their religious formation. Sister Henry accompanied Mother St. John to Ireland. As a teacher she had acquired a wide*

experience in London, and consequently found little difficulty in taking over the girl's school in Carrick. Her great love for our Blessed Lady was instilled into others, and many religious vocations budded in her school.



Sister St. Alban was head mistress in the infant department in Carrick. She impressed the parents by her perfect discipline, and her easy natural manner towards the children.

To begin with, Education was a priority and immediately a school was opened in the house. This was the only Catholic school in the town and Mother John Mugnier, (the superior, later third superior-general), Sister Henry Shaw and Sister Alban Russell lived and taught there and ministered to the poor of the area. The school was State-aided from the start so education was free to all.



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In a short time, numbers grew, and a bigger school was needed. The building of a

proper school had been the dream of the first superior in Carrick: Mother John Mugnier. She used all her powers of persuasion to convince the bishop and the other authorities that this was urgent. Finally, she succeeded.

Finally, in 1887, teachers and pupils moved into their new school on the outskirts of the town.

Later, the convent and secondary school were built on the same site. This was a thirteen-acre tract of rocky land on the hill which, thanks to the bargaining powers and persuasiveness of Mother John had been acquired from the parish, and here the community have lived and ministered to the present time.



During the years of expansion, another ministry was undertaken by the sisters. This was the care of the sick and destitute in the local Workhouse and the surrounding area. As a result of years of famine in the mid eighties thousands of families had lost everything, and sickness caused mainly by malnutrition devastated the rural areas. In 1887 the sisters were asked by the Parish Priest to help in the local workhouse which was run by lay-staff. Workhouses were the last resort of impoverished people and conditions were grim. Funds were low, morale also, and disease and death were part of daily life. The Master was responsible for the running of the place which also included a Fever Hospital. For thirty-five years, 1887-1922, the sisters worked under the direction of a lay-matron. They ministered to the sick and dying, to those on the outer margins of society, and under appalling conditions at times. The scourge of these years was typhoid fever. Many people died of it, among them two sisters – **Sister Brigid Harte** and **Sister Ursula O’Hagan**. The memory of the sisters’ kindness and care has lived on.

By 1922, a national government had taken over from the British and a programme of social reform was put in place. Workhouses and Fever Hospitals were closed and a scheme for their modernisation was initiated. In 1935 repairs were completed, and the building was reopened under a new name – the County Home and Fever Hospital.



In 1939 the sisters were again invited to help, this time in a different role. The community were asked to manage both County Home and Fever Hospital and to provide some staff. From 1939 to 1989 St Patrick's Hospital, as it was renamed in 1960, became a national example of excellence in caring for the weakest and most vulnerable, and so it continues.

In 1989 the Marist Sisters handed over the running of St Patrick's Hospital to the North Western Health Board and is now known as St Patrick's Community Hospital.

And so, life goes on ...