

## **It's all about relationships:**

### **Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet Start Their Ministries**

Minnesota was still a territory in 1851 when Bishop Joseph Cretin decided some of the Native Americans and immigrants of his new Roman Catholic Diocese would benefit from education and other services. Familiar with the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in France, which was founded in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to do “all of which woman is capable, and which will most benefit the dear neighbor” [Primitive Constitution], he decided a direct appeal would be best. Bishop Cretin traveled down the Mississippi River by steamboat to the village of Carondelet, a small town five miles south of St. Louis, Missouri where the sisters had settled in 1836.

His request was successful. With ice forming along the Mississippi's shore, four Sisters of St. Joseph from Carondelet, Missouri, stepped off a steamboat at the St. Paul landing on November 3, 1851. “The group, ... accustomed to makeshift living conditions ever since their arrival in St. Louis,” was not surprised by their new quarters. The habitation awaiting them in St. Paul had been the Bishop's house, “a shanty adjoining the log chapel of St. Paul, the first cathedral. St. Joseph's Academy was opened [in the chapel] the second week of November, 1851, only a few days after the arrival of the four sisters.” By the end of their first year, Mother St. John wrote: “There were eighty-seven pupils, seventeen of them boarders, of Canadian and Indian descent. Among them ... there were orphans and destitute children whose care fell to the sisters as a matter of course.” [Dolorita, Dougherty, Hurley, Daly, Coyne, B. Herder Book Co, (1966) *The Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet*]

As early as 1852 there was discussion about a hospital for the growing St. Paul, but in June of 1854, well before a hospital could be built, a cholera epidemic caused the sisters to meet a new need by converting the school into St. Joseph's Hospital which still operates in downtown St. Paul not far from the original site. The Sisters of St. Joseph were well on their way to doing all they could to serve the “dear neighbor.”

By the 1890s, hardworking and visionary siblings, Archbishop John Ireland and Mother Seraphine Ireland, CSJ, began laying the groundwork for a women's college. A financial panic in 1893 postponed the project, [Ryan, R. & Wolkerstorfer, J.C. (1992), *More Than a Dream*] but in 1903 and 1904, 110 acres of land were finally acquired at the corner of Randolph and Cleveland Avenues. The College of St. Catherine opened in January of 1905 as a liberal arts college for women. It was considered “extremely remote and cloistered. The tract upon which Derham Hall [the college's first building] was perched was separated from streetcars by miles of unrelieved mud. Scattered farmhouses were all but invisible in the distance. Deep oak woods and dense thickets of hazel bushes would have prevented any exposure to passing traffic, had there been

any.” [Sister Angela Hurley (1951), *On Good Ground*]. The institution was first incorporated on May 13, 1913.

Sixteen years later (1929), the sisters incorporated under the name St. Joseph’s Provincial House. Later, in 1938, the sisters reorganized under the name they now bear—The Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, St. Paul Province (CSJs). Related refinancing efforts resulted in a split of the property which created two distinct campuses. Today, the CSJ campus consists of approximately 10 acres on the northeast corner of the property. The college campus, which became St. Catherine University in 2008, claims approximately 100 acres of the original site.

Though respectful of each other’s mission and vision, the two organizations are separate and distinct. However, the CSJ Province continues to sponsor the University. The Province, as founder and sponsor, and the University, as a major ministry of the Province, have been dear neighbor to each other for over 100 years.

Since their Minnesota founding more than 160 years ago, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet have started hundreds of ministries in the areas of advocacy, creative arts, education, healthcare, social service, and spirituality. Today, they strive to meet the needs of the times as they continue serving the needs of the dear neighbor. [www.csjstpaul.org](http://www.csjstpaul.org)

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