



*Daughters of Charity*  
OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL  
PROVINCE OF ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON

From the Archives of  
PROVINCE OF ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON  
Los Altos Hills, California

---

## Mexican Sisters Arrive in San Francisco

February 19, 1875

The year '75 had just dawned on us, when rumors reached San Francisco that the Sisters of Charity were to be expelled from Mexico, and that [it] was very probable some of [them] would seek a temporary refuge in California.

Sister Frances [McEnnis'] house is large, and we judged it filled to its utmost capacity, but later events will prove that its protecting influence offered a cordial greeting to the dear exiles of Mexico. Every available corner was sought; old bedsteads that had been quite ignored for years past, were by the aid of paint, putty and glue, made to look as good as new.

Sister Frances was not taken wholly by surprise, as, early in February of this year, a telegram, from Mother Euphemia, then in New Orleans, La., came, desiring to know if Sister Frances could offer hospitality to forty-five Sisters of Charity. Sister's reply was characteristic of her generous nature: "The dear Sisters will be received with open arms."

What before was talked of as "May be Yes," and May be No", was now looked forward to with certainty. Ample demands were made for the soft woolen blankets, for which our [Far]-Western home is remarkable, to make amends for the change of climate, as the country our dear Sisters were leaving was so much warmer than ours, this was the first consideration of our ever thoughtful Sister Frances, who would surely have a chill herself if everybody else was comfortably clothed from "Morn till dewy eve," and especially when the brooding shadows of night steal over her numerous family.

They were somewhat prepared then, when on the 19<sup>th</sup> of Feb. the Pacific Mail Steamer arrived, bringing among other passengers, forty-five Sisters of Charity, accompanied by their spiritual director, the good Mr. Ferren, C. M., a young lady interpreter, Miss A., and Senora Manuela Esculide Rosing. The latter, a highly esteemed widow lady, who had been an intimate friend of the Sisters, her means permitting, she willingly shared their destiny in a strange land.

When the Steamer was signaled at 10 A.M., already a multitude of people were in attendance on the wharf. Sister Bruno, several of her Sisters, and about a hundred of their day-pupils, were also among the expectant assembly. Though the large Steam Ship could not cast anchor in the accustomed place, the impatient multitude were not discouraged, they awaited the return of a small steamer which had been dispatched to expedite the landing of the exiles. Sister Bruno and one of her companions, availed themselves of this opportunity of approaching the large vessel. On coming along-side, salutes were mutually given, but the emotion of that first interview, words can never adequately depict. The language was unintelligible, but the heart readily comprehends even when the tongue is silent. After some interchange of civilities, more in dumb

show than in verbal expressions, the little steamer returned covered with Cornettes, resembling, as the Captain himself remarked, a garden enameled with flowers. As that barge sped over the waters of our beautiful bay, its precious convoy was worthy the admiration of Angels and men.

Nearly a quarter of a century had elapsed, since St. Vincent's Daughters first came, to soothe the weary and afflicted that are to be encountered even, where the earth is lavish of her gifts. It was fitting then, that on the same peaceful strand of the Pacific, a cordial greeting should await those so nearly allied to the five Pioneers in the cause of Charity. When the visitors were fairly in sight, all hats were raised, handkerchiefs waved; and borne on the atmosphere and unrippled waters, went up a shout of enthusiasm that plainly spoke the heartfelt welcome that was proffered.

Mr. D. J. Oliver, whose name is connected with everything benevolent that has flourished in California, had been on the wharf for hours previous to the landing of our dear Sisters, kindly saw to the baggage being forwarded to its destination, and only took his departure, when everything had been attended to.

The Sisters took their places in the carriages prepared for them; the number of vehicles being more than sufficient, some of them unoccupied followed the triumphal cortege that directed its course to St. Vincent's School. There our good Sister Frances, Sister Angelica & Co. met the dear exiles. It was already dinner time, and as there had been an abundance of donations contributed, without more ado, the weary travelers appeased for a while the cravings of nature. At 5 P.M. the carriages being again in readiness, five of the New-Comers remained at St. Vincent's School, the others took leave of the town for the Asylums in South San Francisco.

The children, who are easily excited, had been watching for hours from the adjacent hills; the event had something romantic for them, as they had merely read of exiles in story books. But as the shadows of evening gathered around; study-hour coming too, they reluctantly relinquished their watch for the more tedious one of communing with books. Even the supper-bell, one of the pleasantest bells of the house, had rung, grace just said, when the anticipated guests were announced as within a few avenues of the Asylum. Tea was left untouched, everyone hastening to give a nod of recognition to those who had been so unnaturally treated in their own country. It was a moving sight, to witness that long line of carriages, which contained many a noble soul now grown old in the service of God, whose expulsion from the land of their birth, or adoption, was caused by the erroneous interpretation of the word Liberty. As each vehicle passed, the occupants smiled graciously, and with that [courtesy] so peculiar to the Spanish, bowed courteously towards the hundreds of little ones around.

Sister Bernice had accommodations in the Infant Asylum for ten; the other [thirty] with their interpreter, Miss A. remained with Sister Frances.

Our good Archbishop [Alemany] called on them that same evening of their arrival, about an hour after their reaching the Asylum. This visit was the more appreciated, as the Episcopal residence is five miles distant; besides, his Grace always avails himself of the Cars, which he calls his carriage; he assures everyone, that his coach, or buggy is waiting for him at the corner. He was pleased to find in Mr. Ferren C.M. an old acquaintance from his own country, the land of the olive and vine. The good prelate was visibly touched at the meeting, conversed in his native language with the Sisters, who were delighted to find someone who understood them. He remained about half an hour, and then devolved on us the process of making ourselves agreeable, this was the most difficult part of the performance, for but two of our Sisters could speak Spanish well; all the others could count the words they understood. Some three or four had been taking lessons in the Science for Deaf &



Mutes, judging it quite appropriate on the occasion, began to use their limited knowledge to advantage. Of course, the signs were of the simplest nature and were readily intelligible to all. It was really amusing to listen to the efforts to recall some Spanish idioms and phrases, so long uncalled for, that it seemed oblivion had closed over them forever. To say nothing of the blunders that occurred; for instance, our good natured Sister M. asked if they were very married; instead if they were tired the words in Spanish, sounding similar. But their gentle courtesy understood the proper question, and graciously answered, "No." As a natural consequence, a regular course of English was begun, a great demand arose for Quackenbos' and all manner of other books containing Spanish and English phrases. Their eagerness to acquire our language was wonderful; they would study, both old and young, read aloud by the hour, and never appear fatigued. I cannot assert the same of their teachers. But the gratitude of the dear exiles for the slightest service rendered them, amply repaid one for the exertion.

Our revered Archbishop not finding it convenient to dispose affairs for a public manifestation, as he had intended on the day of their arrival, convoked a general assembly of all the Catholics for the Sunday following.

Regardless of creed or country, all the most respectable citizens of San Francisco, took part in the expressions of sympathy with which the city honored our dear Sisters. Carriages were sent to the Asylum, and some of the exiles went to town to be present at the meeting.

As soon as the good Sisters were sufficiently rested they prepared to enter their Annual Retreat, of which favor they had been deprived for some time, owing to their unsettled state or circumstances previous to leaving Mexico. For the convenience of the different houses, they were divided into two bands; one half making it first, and the other half immediately afterwards, not any one of the institutions being capable of accommodating them all at once. The worthy Mr. Ferren was indefatigable he presided over both retreats and devoted himself entirely to their interests. It was extremely edifying to witness the fervor which marked those precious days; to see how readily they forgot the troubles of the past in the calm composure of communion with God. . . .

Early in August, letters had been received from the principal Superiors in Paris, to the effect that nineteen of the Mexican Sisters were missioned to Peru. Passage was accordingly taken on the Pacific Mail Line, and on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August the devoted exiles embarked on the trackless ocean, to traverse again a considerable part of the route that brought them to our shores. . . .

`California, still rejoices in the possession of twenty of those favored souls, who courageously renounced everything that was near and dear to them, with all that this world could offer rather than forego the precious title of "Servant of the Poor."