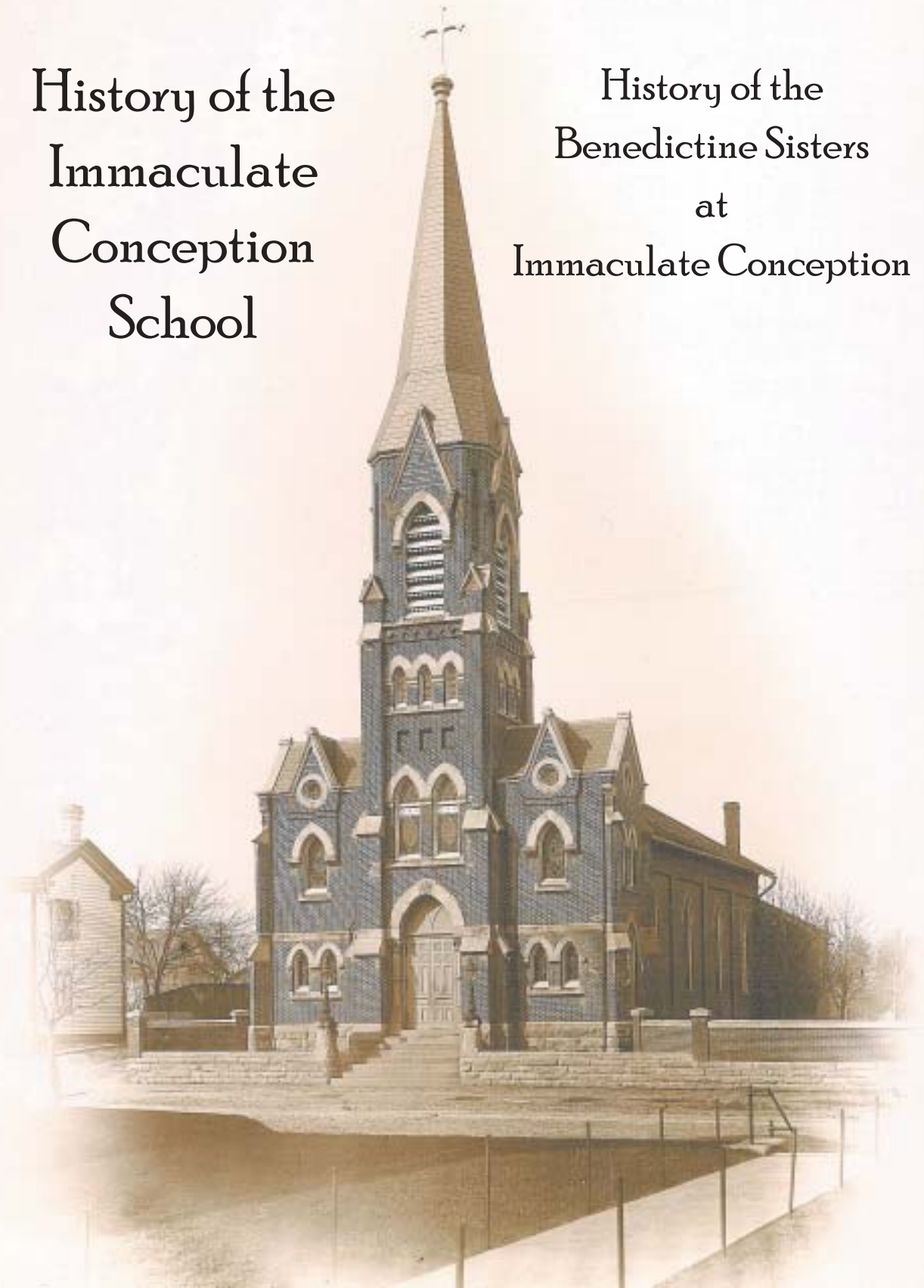


History of the
Immaculate
Conception
School

History of the
Benedictine Sisters
at
Immaculate Conception



Catholic Church and Parochial School, Clarion, Pa.



History of Our Parish School and the Benedictine Sisters

Our parish was established in 1852, and before long a school was in the works. In 1860 during the pastorate of Reverend John Koch, who came here from Lucinda, the first parochial school was opened in the sacristy of the church. The room, about 18 x 30 feet, had about twenty students and Miss Kate Fillinger was hired as the first principal. Local teachers were procured to take charge of the school, among whom are recorded, Miss Allenbach and Mrs. Moche, and later Miss Hoffman. In the early years, the staff was comprised primarily of one teacher for all the elementary grades. The parochial school here had an occasional male teacher, but in the early days of education in America, teaching was looked upon mainly as the vocation of women.

By 1865 the number of students was too large for the size of the sacristy and Father Koch erected a one room school on Main Street that was completed in the summer of 1867. It was a hardship for him to do this. The school had an attached home for the teacher and his family. It was built on ground donated in 1861 by John C Reid and was in use for sixty-six years. The first teacher was Mr. Haumusser, who believed that to spare the rod spoiled the child. His students attested to the fact that he was an excellent teacher. Others

wielding authority in turn were Mr. Strauss, Mr. Schrenkner and Mr. Vogel.

In 1876 Reverend Father Deckenbrock, born near Muenster, Westfalia, Germany, took charge of the parish. Twenty years earlier, in 1856, when the first church was dedicated, four Benedictine Sisters left the St. Joseph Motherhouse at St. Marys, Pa. for Erie, where they were to arrange railway transportation to work in Minnesota. When they arrived in Erie, the Bishop insisted they remain in the city to take charge of the Catholic school there. That was the beginning of the Sisters of St. Benedict in this area. From there they gravitated to Oil City, Pa. where they arrived at St. Joseph's Parish in 1875 to assume the parochial school there.

During the summer of 1877 another class room was added to the one-room school house and Father Deckenbrock invited the Sisters of St. Benedict to assist in the educational program here, and on September 5, 1877, a contingent of mission pioneer sisters arrived: Sisters Boniface Hippeli, Columba Seifert, and Antonia Rodgers. They were joined a month later by Sister Josepha Miller, a music teacher. They were received with great joy.

History of Our Parish School and the Benedictine Sisters

The Sisters of St. Benedict at our parish trace their proximate roots to the St. Marys Motherhouse and the eventual beginning of their Order of Sisters in Erie, Pa. The Benedictine Sisters immigrated to St. Marys, Pa from Eichstatt, a small Bavarian village in Europe. They came to Pennsylvania to minister to the many German settlers as did priests of the same heritage because of the language barrier that existed in the American melting pot of mid-nineteenth century.

The remote beginnings of the Benedictine Sisters are rooted in the lifework of St. Benedict, born at Nursia, Italy, about 840. St. Benedict's greatest contribution to the church was the establishment of monks who became missionaries and civilizers throughout Europe and the world beyond. St. Benedict had a blood sister named Scholastica, and under the direction of her famed brother, she founded and governed a community of women near Monte Casino, and the orders of priests and nuns which took their name from their founder are rooted in the lifework of St. Benedict and his monastic way.

The Benedictine order has always been famous for its devotion to education and the arts and sciences. Besides the ordinary branches, plain sewing, knitting, and fancy work of various kinds were taught; also vocal and instrumental music and the German language when desired. Religious training and Christian doctrine received daily attention.



Immaculate Conception School and convent – 1912

The arrival of the Benedictine Sisters here at Immaculate Conception was the happy collection of a number of events, some of which could be called providential. Not the least among them was the German character of the pastor here at the time and the predominant presence of German parishioners, as well as the persuasive power of the Bishop of the Diocese of Erie. Not to be overlooked in the picture, however, was the dream and vision of Father Koch, the founder of the Catholic School here in Clarion.



1913 Group Photo in front of the Church

The first year that the Benedictine Sisters were here there were sixty students and the primary grades were held in one room, with the grammar grades in another. Each year there was a gradual increase until there were one hundred students. A hall was built by Father Deckenbrock and classrooms were enlarged. In 1908 another classroom had to be added, a portion of the hallway being used for this purpose.



History of Our Parish School and the Benedictine Sisters

Father Deckenbrock died in 1916 and the next two pastors were of short duration, but in 1922 The Reverend Alexis A. Fischer arrived on the Clarion scene and settled down for the next thirty years. There were significant changes on the parochial school scene during his pastorate. Very early on Father Fischer envisioned a more adequate building to house the students here, but economic conditions were not favorable. He did however, temporarily bridge over the inadequacies of relatively poor housing by dividing the classes, adding two new class rooms, and introducing a commercial course. His desire from the beginning was to bring the school to the very highest efficiency. In 1922, IC was offering a three year high commercial course. This was dropped in 1925, and a 2 year commercial high existed until plans were formulated in 1945 for expansion into a complete four year high school. In 1925 enrollment was at 180 students.



Immaculate Conception Convent, circa 1950s

On November 4, 1927, Father Fischer purchased a twelve room house on Liberty Street (previously the Sisters' quarters adjoined the school) and remodeled it to afford every possible convenience for the Sisters.

By 1930 there were six teachers, five of whom were school teachers and one music teacher.

By 1931 enrollment was at two hundred students. It was in this year that Father Fischer announced that a new school was needed and was to be built. It was a beautiful and modern school with fireproof stairwells and maple floors. There was a gymnasium, a kitchen, stage facilities, and a fireproof heating plant in the school basement that heated the church as well as the school. The school had nine rooms. The cost to build the school was close to \$59,000 and was built by John E. Trunk of Clarion; the sum of \$10,000 toward its cost was given in the will of the late Mrs. Michael Hubauer Murphy.



1933 I.C.S. Basketball Team. L-R: Coach Tug Jordan, Jim Guth, Hud Schimp, Chuck Schierberl, Joe Stevens and Bernard Distler

The new school was dedicated May 10, 1932 by Archbishop John Mark Gannon and stands today as the center section of the present complex. It was said in the local newspaper, *The Clarion Republican*, "The Immaculate Conception School building is one of the finest parochial school buildings in western Pennsylvania. It includes teaching facilities rarely found in such buildings in communities the size of Clarion."

Following is a detailed description of the school as it appears in the school archives:

The pleasing exterior of the new school is effected through modernized Gothic architecture with a native stone base and separate structure of smooth full-range gray brick. The trim is Indiana limestone with an attractive front entrance in Gothic detail. Exterior screens are of metal with double ventilating screens. The flat roof is overlaid with twenty-year bonded construction covered with slag. The interior has steel joist flooring, fireproof stairways, maple floors in classrooms and gymnasium, with linoleum or mastic floors in corridors. The translucent glass doors are clear paneled for room observation from halls.

The 33 x 31 foot gymnasium is wainscoted with glazed brick, with plaster walls and ceilings. One side is composed of special convertible bleachers which form a wall between gymnasium and corridor when not in use. At one end a collapsible wall can be raised to permit the use of the room as a stage or classroom. A fully equipped kitchen adjoins the gymnasium, and adjacent are locker and shower rooms. Emergency