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Three Catholics and a Congregationalist

Four Women and the Founding of a Medical Industry in South Dakota

Today, South Dakota is home to Avera Health, a multi-hospital, multi-million-dollar medical system whose origins date back over one hundred years. The largest facility in the system run by the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary is Avera McKennan Hospital and University Health Center, established in Sioux Falls with money left by Helen McKennan, a wealthy widow. The story of how a group of Roman Catholic nuns stepped in to help carry out McKennan's vision is one that shines light on turn-of-the-century America where, despite many social, professional, and political limitations, women were active in creating much-needed social services. While none of these women could have foreseen the scale and scope of the Avera Health system they helped to create, all showed the determination to complete the mission to which they had been called. The key figures involved—one a Congregationalist who held progressive ideas and three members of the Presentation Order—were full-time businesswomen who used bold and innovative leadership to circumvent society's limitations.¹

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1. Kathleen McGreevy, "Avera Health: A New Name for the Presentation Health System," *All of Us* 20 (Apr./May 1998): 5; *Sioux Falls Argus Leader*, 12 Mar. 1998. In South Dakota, both the Presentation Order of Aberdeen and the Benedictine Sisters in Yankton administered hospitals during the twentieth century. In 1998, the two formed an alliance and created Avera Health. Today, the organization has facilities in South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, and North Dakota. Avera Health runs 33 hospitals, 208

Sioux Falls-based Avera Health owes its beginnings in part to a religious movement in Ireland. In 1880, Mother Bridget Carroll, leader of the Presentation Convent in Dublin, wrote to that city's Roman Catholic archbishop, Edward McCabe, "Our missionary seems in great spirits and hopes to be able to start for America with several companions early in March!"² The missionary, Mother Mary John Hughes, believed that she had been called to work in North America. The Presentation convent she would go on to establish in Dakota Territory would not only teach, as the Irish order traditionally had done, but would also one day serve the Northern Great Plains by providing medical care—the only Presentation convent to do so.

These Irish women who came to the United States were part of a mass migration of Europeans in which the small island played a significant role. Although hidden by the cloak of their habits, these women religious were integral to ensuring that the Catholic Church had a role in the business of care and developing the nation's social service system.³ The Presentation Sisters of South Dakota and North Dakota showed both impressive organizational abilities as well as flexibility, giving up the cloister in order to manage their medical, educational, and other charitable work.⁴

primary and specialty care clinics, and 40 senior living facilities. Avera Health, "About Avera," www.avera.org/about/.

2. Papers of Cardinal Edward McCabe, 1880, Ref. No. 346 1–4, Shelf 331 II, Dublin Diocesan Archives, Dublin, Ireland. McCabe was Dublin's archbishop from 1879 to 1885.

3. For discussion of women religious, see Anne M. Butler, *Across God's Frontiers: Catholic Sisters in the American West, 1850–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Kathleen Sprows Cummings, *New Women of the Old Faith: Gender and American Catholicism in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Emily Clark, *Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727–1834* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); and Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York's Welfare System, 1830–1920* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006). For more about their work in the United States, see Margaret M. McGuinness, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), pp. 87–110; Barbra Mann Wall, *Unlikely Entrepreneurs: Catholic Sisters and the Hospital Marketplace* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005); and Barbara Walsh, "Lifting the Veil on Entrepreneurial Irishwomen: Running Convents in Nineteenth-Century England and Wales," *History Ireland* 11 (Winter 2003): 23–28.

4. Susan C. Peterson, "A Widening Horizon: Catholic Sisterhoods on the Northern

As the women of the Presentation Order settled in North America, they clung to their Irish heritage, and the order's founder became an iconic figure and role model for each convent. Honoria ("Nano") Nagle, was born in 1718 in Cork, Ireland, one of seven children of Catholic parents. Nagle attended an Ursuline School in France to complete her education and returned to Cork to work as a teacher among the poor children of the city. By the time of her death in 1784, Nagle had established a number of schools and created the foundation of what, in 1791, became the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. By the late nineteenth century, there were Presentation convents throughout Ireland and beyond as these women joined the exodus from the island that followed the potato famine of the late 1840s. At present, Presentation convents can be found in Australia, India, and North America.⁵

The Catholic Church sought to be part of North America's nineteenth-century westward expansion, and one focus of its efforts was missionary work with American Indians. Among the missionaries on the Northern Great Plains was the Reverend Martin Marty, a Benedictine monk and Swiss immigrant. Born in 1834 in Schwyz, Switzerland, and ordained a priest in 1856, Marty arrived at Saint Meinrad's Priory, now Saint Meinrad Archabbey, in 1860. His superior sent him to the Benedictine monastery in southwest Indiana expecting Marty to strengthen the order's position there. With his "indomitable drive," the young monk quickly shored up the monastery by opening a seminary and a school and founding the town of Saint Meinrad.⁶ In 1871, when the priory was elevated to the status of abbey, Marty became its first abbot. Five years later, in 1876, Marty left this position to begin work with the natives of Dakota Territory. Within three years, Pope Leo XIII

Plains, 1874–1910," *Great Plains Quarterly* 5 (Spring 1985): 130–31. Though the terms are often used interchangeably, a nun is a woman who has taken solemn vows, while a sister is one who has taken only simple vows.

5. See Mary Pius O'Farrell, *Nano Nagle: Woman of the Gospel* (Cork, Ireland: Cork Publishing, 1996), and M. Rosaria O'Callaghan, *Flame of Love: A Biography of Nano Nagle, Foundress of the Presentation Order, 1718–1784* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Bruce Press, 1960).

6. Joel Ripinger, "Martin Marty: Monk, Abbot, Missionary and Bishop-I," *American Benedictine Review* 33 (Sept. 1982): 227–28.

appointed him the territory's Roman Catholic bishop. Returning from his installation in Rome, Marty stopped at the Presentation convent in Dublin to confirm that several Presentation sisters would relocate to Dakota Territory. The new bishop planned to establish a school for American Indians that he envisioned becoming the foundation for his missionary endeavors.⁷

A mission in America was not a novel idea for the Presentation Order, which had already formed a convent in San Francisco in 1854. In March 1880, Mother John Hughes, Sister Agnes Hughes, Sister Teresa Challoner, two choir postulants, and a servant sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to the United States. There they hoped to found an American Indian mission and teach native children.⁸ The women landed in New York and then made the uncomfortable trip across half the continent to Wheeler, a town on the Missouri River in south-central Dakota Territory. In a small, two-story building, with the help of two nuns from New York, the women founded the new convent and established Saint Ann Chapel and School.⁹ Marty had asked a local priest,

7. Ibid., p. 231; John C. Scott, "To Do Some Good among the Indians': Nineteenth-Century Benedictine Indian Missions," *Journal of the West* 23 (Jan. 1984): 28–33; Robert F. Karolevitz, *With Faith, Hope and Tenacity: The First One Hundred Years of the Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls, 1889–1989* (Mission Hill, S.Dak.: Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls, 1989), pp. 11–12, 15–20; Joel Rippinger, "Martin Marty: Monk, Abbot, Missionary and Bishop-II," *American Benedictine Review* 33 (Dec. 1982): 391–92. For more on these missionary efforts, see Sister Mary Claudia Duratschek, *Crusading along Sioux Trails: A History of the Catholic Indian Missions of South Dakota* (Yankton, S.Dak.: Benedictine Convent of the Sacred Heart, 1947), and Sister Mary Margaret Mooney, *Doing What Needs to Be Done: Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Fargo, 1882–1997* (Fargo, N.Dak.: Access Midwest, 1997).

8. Susan Carol Peterson and Courtney Ann Vaughn-Roberson, *Women with Vision: The Presentation Sisters of South Dakota, 1880–1985* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 8; Annals of the Presentation Convent, George's Hill, 1880, Dublin, Ireland; Sister Pauline Quinn, "Biographies of Major Superiors, Section III: Mother John Hughes, 1886–1892," p. 1, Presentation Convent Archives (PCA), Aberdeen, S.Dak. Sister Agnes Hughes was the biological sister of Mother Mary John Hughes.

9. Peterson and Vaughn-Roberson, *Women with Vision*, pp. 59–60. As stated in an 1881 annual report, "Two young ladies, graduates of St. Michael's academy, 31st 9th Ave. New York, have arrived here last September to join the Presentation Nuns of St. Ann's" (Bureau General Correspondence, 1862–1884, Bureau of Catholic Indian Mission Records, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wis. [hereafter BCIM Records]). The town of Wheeler no longer exists.



Bishop Martin Marty played a key role in shaping the mission work that led the Presentation Sisters to Dakota Territory.

Father J. F. Malo, who met the women in New York, to find a location for the school. Malo had done so, but instead of the stone convent the nuns anticipated, they found a building of “unshaped chalk rock laid in common mortar, huddling on the banks of the Missouri.”¹⁰ There were also fewer American Indians to teach than the women expected. Many had moved to agencies on the Great Sioux Reservation farther west or had fled to Canada with Sitting Bull after the Sioux War of 1876–1877. Nevertheless, the women began their work.¹¹

As immigrants, the new arrivals found themselves in an environment that differed greatly from their native Ireland. They undoubtedly felt some trepidation. As one young nun wrote to her mother, “Hills and valleys do not exist here, and one is often awakened at night by the howling of the prairie dog and the coyote. I miss the friendliness of our own people and the quiet beauty of my native land, but Mother, I know that there are souls that need me.”¹² Dakota Territory was the land Norwegian American novelist Ole E. Rølvaag described in *Giants in the Earth* as beyond the outposts of civilization. The nuns might readily have agreed, particularly when the winter of 1880–1881 arrived. Their first winter on the Great Plains was known as “the snow winter,” or sometimes “the hard winter,” as recurring storms that began in October brought accumulations of more than eleven feet of snow to some communities. After a February blizzard hit the region, rail service from Sioux Falls halted until mid-June. Food and fuel grew scarce as transportation routes were cut off, and starvation was a possibility.¹³

10. Duratschek, *Crusading along Sioux Trails*, p. 278. The 1881 annual report noted, “The mission house built of stone (chalk-rock) 32 x 58. ft. two stories high, costs \$ 3,500” (BCIM Records).

11. Peterson and Vaughn-Roberson, *Women with Vision*, p. 60; Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 4th ed., rev. John E. Miller (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2004), pp. 88–89; Sister Mary John Hughes, 21 Nov. 1880, BCIM Records. Mother Hughes also may have taught Sitting Bull. Camillus M. Galvin, *From Acorn to Oak: A Study of Presentation Foundations, 1775–1968* (Fargo, N.Dak.: Presentation Sisters, 1969), p. 58.

12. O’Callaghan, *Flame of Love*, p. 170. Sister M. Magdalen Menahan, who came to Saint Ann’s Mission in September 1880, recalled, “Our neighbors were few and scattered. From the convent, as far as the eye could reach[,] only three log cabins could be seen” (Mooney, *Doing What Needs to Be Done*, p. 20).

13. Rølvaag, *Giants in the Earth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1927), p. 38; David Laskin,

The nuns spent the winter huddling in their poorly built home that offered little in the way of heat or comfort, surviving with the help of American Indian neighbors.¹⁴ Hughes wrote in early 1881, “We had a great number of fowl but nearly all have frozen to death—we shall be more experienced next year.”¹⁵ After the hardships of winter, snowmelt from thawing drifts overwhelmed the prairie as the James River became “a giant lake stretching across the breadth of what is now South Dakota.”¹⁶ The floods made the sisters’ home uninhabitable. As Sister

The Children’s Blizzard (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), pp. 56–60; Schell, *History of South Dakota*, pp. 180–81; *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 14 Oct. 1911. Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote about the hardships of that season in De Smet, Dakota Territory, in *The Long Winter* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940).

14. Sister Francis Menahan (formerly Sister Magdalen Menahan), recalled later in a memoir written at the request of Mother Joseph Butler, “The Nuns received no salary, but were supplied with food. Salt pork was the only meat, except when the Indians sent some venison in the fall” (Menahan, typescript, n.d., in Butler, Mother Joseph, *Annals 1880–1915*, Folder 1, Box (1) 10.3, PCA).

15. Mooney, *Doing What Needs to Be Done*, p. 22.

16. Laskin, *Children’s Blizzard*, p. 45.



Two nuns visit the long-abandoned site of Saint Ann Mission and School near Wheeler in 1934.

Francis Menahan recalled, "The walls were crumbling in places and it was considered unsafe. In June a portion of one wall fell out and the whole edifice was in danger of collapsing."¹⁷ Clearly, the women had to move.

Seeking a place for them, Marty proposed that the sisters travel to Deadwood in the Black Hills, where the local priest, Father Peter Rosen, had requested the bishop's help in building a school and finding some sisters to operate it. After their arrival, the practice of enclosure (or limiting nuns' interaction with the public while still allowing them to do charitable work) and the nature of the notorious mining town itself (Wild Bill Hickok had been shot dead there just five years earlier) became complicating factors. Rosen stated that the nuns would need to travel each Sunday to the parish church for mass. Hughes immediately informed the priest that by leaving the convent, they would be breaking their rule of enclosure, an idea she found unacceptable.¹⁸

Departing Deadwood, the nuns returned to Wheeler to inhabit what was left of the buildings at the mission. Bishop Marty arrived to find the women living in grim conditions. Giving up on the endeavor as financially unsustainable, he immediately escorted them to a Sisters of Mercy convent in Yankton. Eventually, Father James Stephen, a priest from Fargo in northern Dakota Territory, sent a request to Marty for a community of sisters to establish a school. The sisters' challenging odyssey ended as Hughes led the women north. In July of 1882, the Presentation Order established Saint Joseph's Convent and Academy in Fargo. While the women had come to educate American Indians, their focus changed to establishing schools for immigrant children.¹⁹

17. Sister Francis Menahan, typescript.

18. Peterson and Vaughn-Roberson, *Women with Vision*, pp. 62–63. The Presentation Order became enclosed in the early nineteenth century when financial pressures created a need for more novices. The order believed that enclosure would attract more women, but Nagle never intended the order to be enclosed. Mary Peckham Magray, *The Transforming Power of the Nuns: Women, Religion and Cultural Change in Ireland, 1750–1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 117; Rosemary Raughter, "Pious Occupations: Female Occupations and the Catholic Revival in Eighteenth-Century Ireland," in *Religious Women and Their History: Breaking the Silence*, ed. Rosemary Raughter (Dublin, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 2005), p. 45.

19. Peterson and Vaughn-Roberson, *Women with Vision*, pp. 61–63; Mooney, *Doing What Needs to Be Done*, pp. 23, 30–31.

In 1886, Marty again asked the Presentation Sisters for help, and in October of that year, Mother Hughes, Sister Aloysius Chriswell, and an Irish novice, Sister Joseph Butler, traveled south to open a second Presentation convent and school in Aberdeen. The first winters there were severe, marked by weather events such as the storm of 12 January 1888 that brought seventy-mile-per-hour winds and one of the most severe cold waves ever observed in the United States. The disaster became known as the “children’s blizzard” because the storm struck without warning, and many students died on their way home from school. In Aberdeen, temperatures dropped to forty-eight degrees below zero, and Hughes and her colleagues feared for the lives of their students. Father Robert Haire began escorting the children home but nearly lost his way in the wind-driven snow. Returning safely, Haire ordered the rest of the students to stay at the school, where they spent a frigid night. Estimates of deaths in the blizzard range from two hundred fifty to five hundred, with at least 148 dying in Dakota Territory. Like others in the Aberdeen area, the nuns struggled along through that severe winter.²⁰

It was not Mother Nature but Mother Church that challenged them next. In 1892, Hughes was in her sixth year as Mother Superior for the Aberdeen convent; it was to be her last. Though accounts differ, there is some evidence that Bishop Marty wanted a change of leadership. The Presentation Sisters’ constitution called for elections for the office of Mother Superior every six years, and one such election was to take place in 1892. Hughes could have run for another term; instead, she left for Fargo before the date of the election arrived, and one day after a visit from the bishop. Marty then unilaterally appointed Sister Aloysius Chriswell as the new Mother Superior. Angered, Hughes took with her the deed to the Aberdeen property.²¹

20. Peterson and Vaughn-Roberson, *Women with Vision*, p. 65; Laskin, *Children’s Blizzard*, pp. 6, 175; *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 12 Jan. 1918; Karolevitz, *With Faith, Hope and Tenacity*, p. 96; Butler, Mother Joseph, Annals 1880–1915, Folder 2, Box (1) 10.3, PCA; Sister M. Eleanor Joyce, “Dakota Foundresses: Sisters M. John Hughes and Joseph Butler” (paper presented to Midwest Women’s Studies Association, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, Apr. 1993), p. 13.

21. Susan Peterson, “From Paradise to Prairie: The Presentation Sisters in Dakota, 1880–1896,” *South Dakota History* 10 (Summer 1980): 221; Mooney, *Doing What Needs*



The strong-willed Mother John Hughes served six years as Mother Superior of the Aberdeen convent before leaving in 1892.

Hughes's actions are noteworthy, given that Catholic women usually submitted to the will of the church's male hierarchy. There is no doubt that Hughes was a woman of courage and fortitude; she was described as zealous and disciplined. She likely clashed with the headstrong Marty, who must have found her strong-willed and difficult to control.²²

Smarting over the loss of what she saw as *her* convent, Hughes soon sought compensation. Marty and Hughes engaged in an intense correspondence in which he accused Hughes of lying. He further maintained that any property over which she had previously had oversight belonged to the Presentation community; if she were to claim any ecclesiastical property as her own, she would be breaking her vow of poverty and would by her own act be excommunicated.²³ Both Hughes and Marty appealed to Fargo's Bishop John Shanley. "I am to be forced by every pressure to leave the diocese without a cent," Hughes wrote. "I have refused to give up the County Corporation Account Book until an understanding and settlement is made. This step, I know, will bring me a host of persecution."²⁴ Eventually, the Presentation community in Aberdeen regained the deed upon payment of twenty-six hundred dollars to the Fargo community. Despite Hughes's principled stand, in the end—and not unlike other such cases—it was the sisters who suffered. Due to Marty's interference and Hughes's pride, there remained a split between the two convents.²⁵

to Be Done, pp. 38–39. Another account relates that Hughes left for Fargo immediately after the election of Mother Aloysius Chriswell in December 1892. Peterson and Vaughn-Roberson, *Women with Vision*, p. 69.

22. Quinn, "Mother John Hughes," pp. 3–5; Peterson and Vaughn-Roberson, *Women with Vision*, pp. 65–66; Ripinger, "Martin Marty—I," p. 225.

23. Bishop Martin Marty to Mother John Hughes, 5 Jan. 1893, Sacred Heart Convent, Fargo, N.Dak.

24. Mother John Hughes to Bishop Shanley, 6 Jan. 1893, *ibid*.

25. Peterson, "From Paradise to Prairie," p. 221. Marty's meddling was not an uncommon experience for women religious. As Barbara Mann Wall shows, convents increasingly sought to have clearly written constitutions, and many orders sought to report directly to Rome because this arrangement "checked bishops' interference with their work" (Wall, *Unlikely Entrepreneurs*, p. 17). See also Sioban Nelson, *"Say Little, Do Much": Nurses, Nuns, and Hospitals in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp. 36–38. Marty served as bishop of Dakota Territory and then

Mother John Hughes never returned to Aberdeen, living out her final years in Fargo, where she died on 17 June 1897.²⁶ Among her many accomplishments were successful trips to Ireland to recruit women for mission work in the Dakotas. On one such trip in 1885, Hughes met a young novice named Mary Ellen Butler, who had been born in Cork in 1859. Hughes spoke to Butler of coming to the Dakotas as a missionary and offered her “no salary, no recompense, no holidays, no pension but much hard work, a poor dwelling, few consolations, many disappointments, frequent sickness [and] a violent or lonely death.”²⁷ Not put off by such an offer, Butler traveled to the Dakotas where she took the name Mary Joseph. In 1888, she became the first Dakota Presentation sister to take her final vows.²⁸ Following the sudden death of Mother Superior Aloysius Chriswell in November of 1894, the thirty-five-year-old Sister Joseph Butler assumed the office of Mother Superior of the Aberdeen convent and played a key role in expanding the work of the Presentation Order in Aberdeen and beyond.²⁹

In 1900, the sisters filled a new need when a diphtheria epidemic struck Aberdeen. Although the women had no experience in health care, Butler asked them to nurse the sick. She set up a temporary hospital in part of the convent and within a year established Saint Luke’s Hospital.

At that time, there were few hospitals in the state, and the women soon gained a reputation for their medical care. A Mitchell physician, Dr. Byron Bobb, eventually asked Butler to build a hospital in Mitchell. After “due deliberation,” Butler agreed. Construction began on Saint

South Dakota for fifteen years. He became bishop of Saint Cloud, Minnesota, in February 1895 and died there the following year. Robert F. Karolevitz, *Bishop Martin Marty: “The Black Robe Lean Chief”* (Yankton, S.Dak.: Benedictine Sisters of the Sacred Heart Convent, 1980), pp. 79, 122, 131.

26. Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, “Mother John Hughes,” www.presentationisters.org/sisters/mother-john-hughes/.

27. Quinn, “Mother John Hughes,” p. 3.

28. Peterson and Vaughn-Roberson, *Women with Vision*, pp. 88–89; Sister Francis Menahan, typescript; Joyce, “Dakota Foundresses,” p. 15; Butler, Mother Joseph, *Annals 1880–1915*, Folder 2, Box (1) 10.3, PCA.

29. Mother Joseph Butler, *Annals 1880–1915*; Peterson and Vaughn-Roberson, *Women with Vision*, pp. 88–89.

The Presentation Order expanded its work in South Dakota under the leadership of Sister Joseph Butler, who became Mother Superior of the Aberdeen convent in 1894.



Joseph's Hospital in July of 1905, and the four-story wooden building officially opened for patients on 15 November 1906. At the dedication, Harrison C. Preston, chair of the citizens' advisory committee for the hospital, commended the business acumen of Butler, whose Aberdeen hospital had already proven a "great success."³⁰

30. Kathleen McGreevy, *A Century of Care . . . A Journey of Faith: Avera Queen of Peace Hospital, 1906–2006* (Mitchell, S.Dak.: Avera Queen of Peace Health Services, 2006), p. 13.



Nursing students at Saint Luke's Hospital assembled for this photograph in 1910, the same year the Presentation Sisters began operating a third hospital in Miles City, Montana.

In 1910, Father James O'Carroll and Dr. A. I. Bouffleur, both from Miles City, Montana, traveled to Aberdeen to ask Butler to manage Miles City's small but growing medical facility. In August of that year, the commissioners of Custer County, Montana, transferred management of the county hospital to the Presentation Sisters, who renamed the facility Holy Rosary Hospital. The Presentation Sisters then bought the hospital in 1919 for twenty-five thousand dollars.³¹

While arranging to take over the Miles City facility, Butler received a request from Roman Catholic Bishop Thomas O'Gorman of Sioux Falls to open a fourth hospital. In December of 1911, McKennan Hospital, named after its benefactress, Helen Gale McKennan, opened its

31. Peterson and Vaughn-Roberson, *Women with Vision*, pp. 172-73.

doors. The new hospital quickly became a key part of the Presentation Sisters' health care work, and it put the Catholic order in the curious position of carrying out a Protestant woman's last wishes.³²

Helen McKennan could be described as the grande dame of twentieth-century Sioux Falls, representative of those wealthy women of the late Victorian era who sought to be active through community engagement.³³ Socially a progressive, she left most of her worldly possessions to the improvement of Sioux Falls.

Helen Gale was born in Albion, New York, on 6 September 1841 to Elizabeth Decker and David Gale. Located along the Erie Canal in upstate New York approximately thirty-five miles west of Rochester, Albion was a principal stop on the New York Central Railroad. Like Sioux Falls, the city was a bustling town through which a good deal of business flowed by the latter half of the nineteenth century. Helen was from a large family, and the 1855 census lists her widowed mother as residing in a home with Helen and her siblings, Phoebe, Margaret, Frances, and Gabriel. Helen's brother Artemus, sixteen years older, had moved to Saint Paul, Minnesota, in 1854 to work in a grain and mercantile business. One of the original incorporators of the Dakota Land Company that founded Sioux Falls in 1857, Artemus moved to Sioux Falls in 1870 and was followed by Frances.³⁴

Helen was later described as a "woman of broad education and wide sympathies" who traveled throughout the United States, Europe, and

32. Ibid., pp. 173–74. For histories of McKennan Hospital, see Margaret Preston, *A Journey of Faith, A Destination of Excellence: Avera McKennan Hospital's First Century of Caring* (Sioux Falls, S.Dak.: Avera McKennan Hospital, 2010), and Dolores Harrington, *A Woman's Will . . . A Sister's Way: The McKennan Hospital Story* ([Sioux Falls, S.Dak.: McKennan Hospital], 1961).

33. For more about Victorian women and social engagement, see Margaret Preston, *Charitable Words: Women, Philanthropy, and the Language of Charity in Nineteenth-Century Dublin* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004).

34. Jeanne Schulte Richardson, *Here Lies Sioux Falls* (Freeman, S.Dak.: Pine Hill Press, 1992), p. 79; Gary D. Olson and Erik L. Olson, *Sioux Falls, South Dakota: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk, Va.: Donning Co., 1985), p. 21; Fern L. Chamberlain, "Galesburg Gales Reunion October 4, 1986–revised August 21, 1993," First Congregational Church Archives, Sioux Falls, S.Dak. Helen had two other brothers: Sidney (1835–1861) and Wilbur (1843–1844). The author thanks Janice Nims and First Congregational Church for supplying information on McKennan, her brother Artemus, and A. E. Sherman.

Asia during her lifetime.³⁵ She spent a short time in Sioux Falls in 1874 but returned to Albion to marry physician William McKennan. Born in Herkimer, New York, in 1817, McKennan had completed his medical degree at the College of Physicians and Surgeons (now Columbia University) in 1847 and moved to Albion to practice medicine in 1852. Widowed in 1872, he married Helen Gale two years later, but the union was brief, as McKennan died on 21 August 1879 at the age of sixty-two.³⁶ In the early 1890s, Helen moved to Sioux Falls to be with her sister Frances and brother Artemus, becoming a partner in his real estate company. She purchased a half-interest in eighty acres surrounding her home, located in a neighborhood that housed other prosperous

35. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 1 Oct. 1906.

36. Isaac Signor, *Landmarks of Orleans County* (Syracuse, N.Y.: D. Mason & Co., 1894), pp. 140, 191, 263; *Orleans Republican*, 27 Aug. 1879; Arad Thomas, *Sketches of the Village of Albion* (Albion, N.Y.: Willsea & Brach, 1853), p. 20. William McKennan first married Harriet Guild, a local schoolteacher, and together they had three children: Effie, Alexander, and William.



Helen Gale McKennan's vision for a hospital for the needy in Sioux Falls took shape after her death in 1906.

Sioux Falls residents, and also invested in land outside of town. Today, McKennan's name remains part of the Sioux Falls landscape.³⁷

The *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader* covered McKennan's funeral on 2 October 1906 under the headline, "A Good Woman Gone." The mayor had sent a contingent of six aldermen, one from each ward, to represent the city. The Reverend Frank Fox, pastor of First Congregational Church where McKennan and her brother were members, presided. Fox stated that McKennan's upbringing in the eastern United States enabled her to see that Sioux Falls lacked "better institutions." Consequently, she contributed to the building of a new Congregational church and left property to the city.³⁸ A separate story described the wealthy woman's will, noting that she not only left twenty acres for a city park but also set aside money for an institution that would offer medical care to the neediest citizens of Sioux Falls. In all, the civic-minded McKennan distributed more than fifty thousand dollars in property to improve the city.³⁹

McKennan had designated three trustees to coordinate efforts to build a hospital: Edwin L. Perkins, Colonel Thomas H. Brown, and John Mallanney.⁴⁰ After trying unsuccessfully to convince the city of

37. David Richardson and Sioux Falls Planning and Building Services Department, "McKennan Park Historic District," (n.p., n.d.); Sioux Falls Planning and Building Services Department, "Historic Avenues, Sioux Falls, South Dakota" (City of Sioux Falls, S.Dak., 1983), p. 42; Olson and Olson, *Sioux Falls, South Dakota*, p. 79; *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 1 Oct. 1906; City of Sioux Falls, "McKennan Park: The Jewel of the Park System," www.siouxfalls.org/contactus/city/history/park-history/mckennan; Larry Weires, "A Trilogy of Sioux Falls Park History," *Pioneer Pathfinder* 35 (Jan. 2009): 3.

38. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 2 Oct. 1906. McKennan donated 160 acres of land to the church, which the congregation then sold, using the money to buy the site upon which the building still sits. Mrs. George E. Cox, *First Congregational Church, a Congregation of the United Church of Christ: Centennial, 1872-1972* ([Sioux Falls, S.Dak.: First Congregational Church,] 1971). Helen's brother inherited some of her estate. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 2, 20 Oct. 1906.

39. The headline reads "Hospital for Sioux Falls," with the subhead, "Will of Helen G. McKennan, filed today, leaves \$25,000 for this purpose" (*Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 2 Oct. 1906). Merely a proposal at that point, the new facility would become Sioux Falls's second hospital. In 1894, a group of businessmen and clergy had established Sioux Valley Hospital. For more about its founding, see Nancy Recker, *An Institution of Organized Kindness* (Sioux Falls, S.Dak.: Sioux Valley Hospital, 1996).

40. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 2 Oct. 1906. Interestingly, the trustees' minute book

Sioux Falls to found a hospital, the trustees approached O’Gorman in 1910. The bishop contacted the Presentation Order, and plans for the institution began to take shape.⁴¹

By early 1911, there was great anticipation in Sioux Falls. A headline in the *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader* announced, “Sioux Falls’ Magnificent New Hospital Under Construction.” Reflecting the trend throughout the nation to improve the safety of municipal services, the newspaper noted that the building would be “absolutely fire proof and as sanitary as modern ingenuity will make it.” The second and third floors would offer more than thirty private rooms, over half of which would have private baths. The fourth floor would host a small operating room and “a large surgeons and consulting room,” as well as sixteen more private rooms. The fifth story would contain private rooms and a community room. Finally, in keeping with the common practice of providing housing for nursing students, Sioux Falls’s new facility would offer its nurses on-site accommodations.⁴²

The newspaper updated readers in June, predicting that construction would be finished by October. It noted, however, that the costs were inching higher, surpassing the predicted sixty thousand dollars and edging toward ninety thousand, partly due to an added underground tunnel that connected with the boiler and laundry rooms. Ul-

reflects that a motion was approved accepting an invitation from the Presentation Sisters of the hospital in Mitchell to attend the dedication services there, but the trustees did not approach the order at this time. Minutes, 13 Oct. 1906, Minute Book of Trustees of the McKennan Hospital Fund, 1906–1914, Avera McKennan Hospital Archives, Sioux Falls, S.Dak.

41. Minutes, 12 Apr. 1910, Minute Book of Trustees of the McKennan Hospital Fund; Harrington, *A Woman’s Will*, p. 9. While not a Catholic, McKennan was probably acquainted with O’Gorman, who became bishop in 1896. The bishop’s house was only a block from McKennan’s. Karolevitz, *With Faith, Hope and Tenacity*, pp. 73–77, 87.

42. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 28 Jan. 1911. Hospitals were not being benevolent by providing housing but, rather, were taking advantage of nurses and students who worked long hours at low pay. In South Dakota, student nurses commonly boarded in a wing of the hospital, spent a probationary period that included such chores as scrubbing surgery rooms, and worked twelve-hour days that included an interlude of two hours for classes. Most schools paid a small allowance to students who had completed the probationary period. R. Esther Erickson, *Nursing History in South Dakota* (Sioux Falls, S.Dak.: South Dakota Nurses’ Association, 1973), p. 14.

timately, the structure cost \$110,000 to build. The new hospital was not as large as many, but it was a thoroughly up-to-date, modern, and well-equipped facility.⁴³

The dedication took place 17 December 1911. In his opening remarks, Bishop O’Gorman reflected on McKennan’s bequest, noting that it was not only visionary, but also inspirational: “Yonder is McKennan Park intended to prevent disease; here is McKennan Hospital intended to cure or relieve disease. Are not these institutions a fit tribute to a noble Christian woman? May they prove to be an inspiration of philanthropic benevolence to many another citizen of Sioux Falls.”⁴⁴

The naming of the new facility had been left to him, O’Gorman said, and he had “no hesitation naming it the McKennan Hospital in honor of and gratitude to the noble-hearted woman” who had done so much for Sioux Falls. The bishop added that the success of any hospital was “due mainly to the nurse by the bedside, [and] to the managers of the institution,” in this case the women of the Presentation Order. “The whole world confesses that none can surpass our Catholic Sisters in this respect,” O’Gorman stated. “They have been heroines on the battlefields of our great civil war, [and] they are heroines every day and night in thousands of hospitals in the incessant fight against the ills human flesh is heir to.” McKennan Hospital would be a place where patients and ministers of all faiths would be welcomed. There, the bishop suggested, doctors of the body and doctors of the soul would find “the perfect democracy” of Christianity.⁴⁵

Edwin A. Sherman, Helen McKennan’s executor and good friend, spoke next, saying the benefactor had hoped a private organization would step forward if the city could not run the hospital she had proposed. She had discussed two religious denominations, Catholic and Presbyterian, that had carried out such work successfully and had spo-

43. Preston, *Journey of Faith*, pp. 9–10; Harrington, *A Woman’s Will*, p. 9; “Explanation Called For: President of McKennan Hospital Association Tells of Financial Condition,” *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, [1913], and “Publish the Will: Trustees of McKennan Hospital Make Public the Donor’s Will,” *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, n.d., clippings in Minute Book of Trustees of the McKennan Hospital Fund; *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 21 June, 10 Nov., 14 Dec. 1911.

44. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 18 Dec. 1911.

45. Ibid.



McKennen Hospital is pictured here around the time of its completion in 1911.



Private patient rooms and other amenities made the new McKennen Hospital a thoroughly modern facility.

ken highly of both.⁴⁶ McKennan may have been aware of the growing success of the Catholic Church in the business of health care. By the early twentieth century there were 581 Catholic acute and specialty hospitals in the United States, mainly under the leadership of nuns.⁴⁷ As the dedication ceremony closed, trustee Thomas Brown offered a concluding benediction: "Let us all, with bowed head and in silence most reverently dedicate this hospital to humanity, the city of Sioux Falls, and the memory of that good woman, Helen G. McKennan."⁴⁸

McKennan's legacy extends beyond the institution known today as Avera McKennan Hospital. She was a progressive during an age when such activists sought to enhance urban living by advocating improvements like public lighting, sewer systems, and organized police and fire protection. She was also part of a coterie of Sioux Falls citizens who worked to modernize and improve the city. Trustee Brown held similar goals. Along with his wife, Mary Morse Brown, he had been involved in the early development of Sioux Falls, spearheading paving and lighting work throughout the city.⁴⁹

McKennan was undoubtedly aware of increasing efforts by urban planners to improve the health of city dwellers by ensuring clean drinking water and better waste removal, including in Sioux Falls. Her death in 1906 came only a year before the creation of the city's first municipally owned water system. She may have known that by 1900, urban centers such as Chicago, Kansas City, and Buffalo had begun "multi-purpose park systems."⁵⁰ Her park, which she hoped would provide "a place where tired mothers could come with their babies and rest," added Sioux Falls to this list of more progressive cities.⁵¹ A few years after McKennan's death, E. A. Sherman followed her example and donated

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.; Wall, *Unlikely Entrepreneurs*, pp. 3, 22, 33–34.

48. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 18 Dec. 1911.

49. George W. Kingsbury, *History of Dakota Territory*, and George Martin Smith, *South Dakota: Its History and Its People*, 5 vols. (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1915), 5:1054–56.

50. Stanley K. Schultz and Clay McShane, "To Engineer the Metropolis: Sewers, Sanitation, and City Planning in Late-Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of American History* 65 (Sept. 1978): 407. See also Olson and Olson, *Sioux Falls, South Dakota*, p. 25.

51. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 2 Oct. 1906.

fifty-three acres to the city, now known as Sherman Park.⁵² Decades later the *Sioux Falls Argus-Leader* reminded residents that McKennan was the “Mother of the City’s Parks,” noting that the gift of a park was her idea, not Sherman’s.⁵³ As for McKennan’s hospital, the need was immediate, and the Presentation Sisters quickly set to work.

McKennan Hospital was the fourth hospital Mother Joseph Butler opened during her tenure as mother superior, which ended in 1915. Under Butler’s direction, the convent expanded from four to eighty-four nuns, the result of Butler’s recruiting trips throughout the United States, Canada, and Ireland.⁵⁴ While it may seem surprising that the mother superiors of Aberdeen’s Presentation Order would continue to return to Ireland for recruits, the island offered a steady supply of Catholic missionaries. Nineteenth-century Ireland underwent what historian Emmet Larkin termed “the Devotional Revolution,” during which the Catholic Church greatly strengthened its position and role. That renewal movement after the famine of 1845–1850 placed new emphasis on personal piety and helped transform Catholic institutions in both structure and practice.⁵⁵ The number of convents in Ireland increased from eighteen houses representing six orders in 1800 to 368 convents representing thirty-five orders in 1900. The number of nuns in Ireland, meanwhile, rose from 122 in 1800 to 8,031 at the century’s end—approximately one woman religious per every four hundred persons.⁵⁶

52. Olson and Olson, *Sioux Falls, South Dakota*, p. 79; David Richardson and Sioux Falls Planning and Building Services Department, “McKennan Park Historic District”; *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 4 Sept. 1911.

53. *Sioux Falls Argus-Leader*, 15 June 1956.

54. Annals of the Presentation Convent George’s Hill (1885); Sisters Benedict Murphy, Pauline Quinn, Martha Raleigh, and DeSales Treacy, “History Presentation Sisters Aberdeen, South Dakota 1877–1975” (typescript, 1975), pp. 10, 13, 15, PCA; Peterson and Vaughn-Roberson, *Women with Vision*, p. 89.

55. Larkin, “The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850–75,” *American Historical Review* 77 (June 1972): 625–52.

56. Magray, *Transforming Power of the Nuns*, pp. 4–5, 9; Deirdre Raftery, “‘Je suis d’aucune Nation’: The Recruitment and Identity of Irish Women Religious in the International Mission Field, c. 1840–1940,” *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* 49 (July 2013): 10.



In this undated photograph, Catholic sisters pose for a portrait at the entrance to McKennan Hospital.

Ireland, of course, was sending many of its citizens abroad, and by the end of the nineteenth century, as many women as men were leaving. Between 1851 and 1920, more than three million Irish arrived in America. Among these persons were women religious, many of whom were well-educated. As historian Suellen Hoy observes, the Presentation Sisters of Aberdeen were not the only religious order that returned to the island to recruit. With a ready supply of willing female missionaries, in addition to the needed support and necessary hands to do the hard work, Irish recruits offered their American compatriots a shared common culture and a reminder of home.⁵⁷

As more women joined the Presentation Sisters, Butler ensured that they continued their academic training so that the convent could provide capable women for its educational and medical institutions. In addition to the hospitals, each with a nursing school, Butler established nine parish schools before her death at the age of seventy-five in 1935. In 1988, the *Sioux Falls Argus-Leader* reflected on her work in an article headlined “Nun’s Good Deeds Made State Smarter, Healthier,” commending her vision for improving education and health care in South Dakota.⁵⁸

In considering the accomplishments of Butler and the women with whom she worked, it is important to remember that she and her colleagues lived during a time when women had few professional options. While they were not CEOs of large, nonprofit organizations, they were nevertheless helping to invent one of the region’s largest health care systems, and each of the men who approached Butler about opening a hospital clearly believed that she, and the women religious with whom she worked, could operate such an enterprise successfully. The irony of those pre-Nineteenth Amendment days is that despite the vote of confidence she received from those who watched her open a fourth hospital in 1911, Butler, like other American women, could not vote for the next president of the United States in 1912.⁵⁹

57. Hoy, “The Journey Out: The Recruitment and Emigration of Irish Religious Women in the United States, 1812–1914,” *Journal of Women’s History* 6/7 (Winter/Spring 1995): 64–98.

58. *Sioux Falls Argus Leader*, 1 May 1988; Harrington, *A Woman’s Will*, pp. 72–73.

59. Congress submitted the Nineteenth Amendment to the states in 1919. South Da-

As the Presentation Convent entered the new century, another woman appeared on the scene whose management savvy allowed her to strengthen the order's involvement in the fields of education and health care. Margaret McCarthy, born in 1888, met Butler when she was nineteen and accepted her invitation to work in America. McCarthy traveled to South Dakota and entered the novitiate in 1908. She trained as a nurse and started working in Aberdeen's Saint Luke's Hospital. She immediately showed talent in administration and, from 1913 to 1921, worked in the Saint Luke's superintendent's office. In 1921, at the age of thirty-three, McCarthy took the position of superior-administrator of Saint Joseph's Hospital in Mitchell.⁶⁰

In 1925, McCarthy encouraged the Presentation Order to seek a loan for McKennan Hospital from Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, which offered low interest rates at the time. However, company executives agreed to lend the money only if the sisters took full control of the hospital and accepted the risk as borrowers. Unlike the other three Presentation hospitals, McKennan Hospital was under the administration of a lay board. Because the Presentation Order had funded some of the additional expense to build and administer the hospital, which had added another building in 1919, the trustees consented to turn over control to the order. On 5 May, the newly formed Presentation Sisters, Inc., took full responsibility for McKennan Hospital and promptly negotiated a loan for \$235,000.⁶¹

In 1932, McCarthy became Mother Superior—in effect, CEO of a company responsible for operating a convent, four hospitals, and seventeen schools with a staff of 192 nuns and many more lay employees in the schools and hospitals.⁶² McCarthy's extant letters clearly show that she understood the financial complexity of her businesses. In 1934, she

kota became the twenty-first state to grant women the right to vote during a special legislative session in December. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, p. 268.

60. Sister Pauline Quinn, "Biographies of Major Superiors, Section VIII: Mother Raphael McCarthy, 1932–1946," PCA.

61. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 18 June 1918; Harrington, *A Woman's Will*, pp. 30–31.

62. Peterson and Roberson, *Women with Vision*, p. 102. Numbers provided by Sister Lois-Ann Sargent, archivist, Presentation Convent, Aberdeen, S.Dak. Not long after assuming her leadership role, McCarthy established a uniform bookkeeping system for the order that helped improve its financial position.

wrote to the vice president of Massachusetts Mutual Life that she was sending ten thousand dollars toward the hospital's loan, even though the drought and grasshoppers that accompanied the Great Depression had left some of the hospital's customers unable to pay their obligations. Despite these financial difficulties, McCarthy spoke of being proud to be able to meet her financial obligations and grateful that the company had agreed to reduce the interest rate on the remainder of the loan.⁶³

The Mother Superior was vigilant about observing the terms of the deal and expected the same from her lender. In 1936, she sent a note to the cashier of Mass Mutual Life, stating: "I notice you have charged me for accrued interest. This is entirely contrary to our agreement with your home office. According to their figures we were to pay \$2700 per month until July 1st, 1936, at which time all the interest due on all three Hospital properties would be fully paid up." McCarthy disagreed with the company that an unpaid balance of \$236.32 remained and suggested that the cashier take the matter up with the home office.⁶⁴ That same year, McCarthy asked to have the interest rate on her loan maintained at 4.5 percent and not raised back to the pre-1934 rate of 5.5 percent, writing, "Our situation in South Dakota the present year is the worst in our history. . . . There is absolutely no feed of any kind left . . . I can see little hope of any income during the coming year." As proof of good faith, the sisters hoped to pay in the neighborhood of \$15,000 toward the principal due for the Aberdeen hospital in August.⁶⁵ As the 1930s ended, McCarthy steadily paid down the amounts owed for each hospital.

Keeping her eyes open to other opportunities, McCarthy learned that the United States government was sponsoring a program to train professional nurses. Created in 1943 by legislation signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the United States Cadet Nurse Corps sought

63. McCarthy to W. A. Rawlings, vice president, Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, 1 July 1934, McCarthy, Raphael, Folder 5, Box (1) 10.6, PCA; McCarthy to W. A. Rawlings, 7 July 1936, *ibid*.

64. McCarthy to William C. Olson, cashier, Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, 23 Apr. 1936, McCarthy, Raphael, Folder 5, Box (1) 10.6, PCA.

65. McCarthy to W. A. Rawlings, 7 July 1936.



Mother Raphael McCarthy, who became Mother Superior in 1932, played a key role in managing the Presentation Sisters' health care work for more than three decades.

to alleviate a serious shortage of nurses throughout the country. The corps paid women a stipend to attend nursing school and, in exchange for their training, nurses committed to work for the corps at home or abroad. McCarthy saw the program as an opportunity for the Presentation Order to train more paying students. In addition, she likely hoped that after deployment, some of these women would return to work as nurses in Presentation hospitals. McCarthy immediately sent some of

her nuns to Washington, D.C., to apply on behalf of the Presentation nursing programs. Unfortunately, none of the four programs had the number of pupils the government required. The sisters solved this student shortage by combining the programs within days of the deadline, and the Cadet Nursing Corps allowed the Presentation Central School of Nursing to join.⁶⁶

McCarthy continued to show audacious business instincts. In 1940, she recognized the need for another building for Aberdeen's Saint Luke's Hospital. Despite advice to the contrary, McCarthy was confident that she could find a company to move the vacated four-story Lincoln Hospital a distance of ten blocks. McCarthy located the Crowe Brother's Company of Chicago and contracted them to move the five-thousand-ton structure. Over the next five months, the building safely made its way down Aberdeen's streets. In November 1940, it became part of Saint Luke's Hospital.⁶⁷

In 1942, McCarthy again sought to negotiate a loan for the order's various businesses. This time she worked with Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company, a Wisconsin-based financial services organization. Company president Neil J. Gleason expressed his support for her application despite some missing documentation. "If it were not for my faith in the Presentation Sisters, their excellent institutions and your leadership, I would be rather reluctant to pass upon the statements as submitted," he wrote.⁶⁸ McCarthy apologized, stating that she had not known that data from motherhouse and schools

66. Peterson and Vaughn-Roberson, *Women with Vision*, p. 208. Each hospital had a nurse training program that would then be considered a branch of the central school. In 1945, the nursing schools were centralized into the Presentation Central School of Nursing located in Aberdeen. "Four Nursing Schools to Be Combined Here," *Aberdeen American News* (n.d., 1945), PCA.

67. Quinn, "Mother Raphael McCarthy," p. 3. That same year, and eight years after Sioux Falls Bishop Bernard Mahoney asked McCarthy to take over operation of the diocesan children's home that had been destroyed by fire, the Presentation Children's Home of Sioux Falls opened. It would house up to ninety children of all denominations over the years. However, the Presentation Sisters decided by 1965 that "they had ventured out of their area of professional specialty" and closed the home. Peterson and Roberson, *Women with Vision*, pp. 104–5.

68. Gleason to McCarthy, 8 Dec. 1942, McCarthy, Raphael, Folder 3, Box (1) 10.6, PCA.

was needed in addition to information on the hospitals. Going on to argue her case, she contended that the convent's institutions were a good risk even though the bills receivable for the hospitals were larger than they might have been elsewhere. "We live in a farming country and these bills are paid depending upon crop conditions," she wrote, adding that while the hospitals made every effort to collect, "so much drought and poor crops" had challenged patients' ability to pay.⁶⁹ On 15 December 1942, Gleason wrote to confirm the positive outcome of the application, requesting that she, "as president of the respective corporations,"⁷⁰ sign the papers for the three loans at a 3.25-percent interest rate. These loans included \$190,000 for Presentation Academy of Aberdeen, \$98,000 for Saint Joseph's Hospital, Home, and Academy in Mitchell, and \$180,000 for Presentation Sisters, Inc., for McKennan Hospital in Sioux Falls. The total of \$468,000 would be the equivalent of borrowing more than \$21 million in 2016.⁷¹

69. McCarthy to Gleason, 12 Dec. 1942, *ibid.*

70. Gleason to McCarthy, 15 Dec. 1942, *ibid.*

71. Gleason to McCarthy, 8 Dec. 1942; www.measuringworth.com. The fact that



McKennan Hospital had been expanded and updated by the time this photograph was taken in 1943.

McCarthy immediately began repaying the loans. So substantial were the payments over the next two years that in 1944, Gleason wrote to inform her that Northwestern Mutual was concerned about the sisters' intent to pay down the debt on the Aberdeen hospital far sooner than scheduled, which would result in a considerable loss to the company. He suggested that instead of applying \$75,000 to reduce the Aberdeen principal, Northwestern Mutual "might be more favorably impressed if some portions of the sum could be applied on the Mitchell and Sioux Falls loans."⁷² Gleason noted that the company had provided low-interest loans to many Catholic hospitals, which, because of an improving economy, were paying back greater sums than anticipated. While the lender took responsibility for not anticipating borrowers' substantially increased incomes, Gleason said the company could not ignore the interests of policyholders.⁷³ As a result, Northwestern would begin to charge a 2-percent service charge on excess payments. The penalty does not seem to have deterred McCarthy, for a 20 June 1945 letter from Gleason confirmed that she would make payments of \$13,000 on the Aberdeen loan, \$18,000 on McKennan's, and \$1,000 on Saint Joseph's—all with a "premium of 2%."⁷⁴

In 1945, as World War II came to an end, McCarthy made her most significant decision for the economic health of the Presentation Order, purchasing one hundred acres in Aberdeen to house a new convent. By the time McCarthy's term as Mother Superior ended in 1946, the religious order numbered 221 nuns and owned over \$2.3 million in land and property. The Presentation Sisters ran four hospitals, fifteen schools, an orphanage, and one junior college and had nuns teaching in schools throughout eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. Far from retiring, McCarthy went on to spearhead the task of fund-raising for a

McCarthy sought to guarantee that all of the hospitals were properly insured gives further evidence that she was acting as chief financial officer for the Presentation hospitals. McKennan Hospital was actually overinsured on the buildings, while underinsured on the contents. *See* Thomas A. McCormack to McCarthy, 9 June 1943, McCarthy, Raphael, Folder 10, Box (1) 10.6, PCA.

72. Gleason to McCarthy, 20 Mar. 1944, McCarthy, Raphael, Folder 10, Box (1) 10.4, PCA.

73. Gleason to McCarthy, 20 Mar. 1944.

74. Gleason to McCarthy, 20 June 1945, McCarthy, Raphael, Box (1) 10.6, F3, PCA.

two-million-dollar building to house both the convent and Presentation Junior College, completed in 1954. In 1958, at the age of seventy-eight, McCarthy took charge of raising money for the financially challenged Holy Rosary Hospital in Miles City. Once she had completed this task, she spent her final years as an administrator at Mother Joseph Manor, the Presentation-run retirement home in Aberdeen. Mother Raphael McCarthy died on 3 July 1966.⁷⁵

McCarthy's work is all the more remarkable in that, until a corneal transplant in 1956, she was legally blind. As a local businessman noted, "We could never put anything over on her [even] when she couldn't see."⁷⁶ Sioux Falls Bishop William O. Brady worded a similar compliment more graciously on the fiftieth anniversary of Saint Luke's Hospital in 1951, stating, "God has not blessed her with much sight in her eyes, but has given her the vision of a prophethess in her soul."⁷⁷

More than one hundred years after their establishment, Helen McKennan's park and hospital still stand as a tribute to the shared vision of a progressive Congregationalist and the Catholic sisters who made her wish a reality. The Catholic religious orders that McKennan suggested might run the hospital she wanted for her city have expanded their facilities far beyond what McKennan could have imagined. McKennan Hospital has now become the largest hospital within the Avera Health system—a multi-state, multi-million-dollar, not-for-profit medical corporation.

While scholars recognize women such as McKennan, Hughes, Joseph, and McCarthy for their philanthropic work, they sometimes fail

75. Peterson and Roberson, *Women with Vision*, pp. 108–9; Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, "Sister Raphael McCarthy," www.presentationisters.org/sisters/sister-raphael-mccarthy/. The information about the membership of the convent, its finances, and its properties is based on a 1946 tally.

76. Transcript of discussion with Sisters Colman Coakley, Annrita Johnson, SaBina Joyce, Suzanne Cotter, and Bernadette Farrell, led by Sister Mary Thomas, Vice President of Mission, Avera McKennan Hospital, 13 May 2008, Avera McKennan Hospital Archives. A note with Mother Raphael McCarthy's documents about her surgery indicates that in January of 1956, she made a trip to Los Angeles for two operations, a corneal transplant and removal of a cataract. It was four and a half months before she could return to Dakota. McCarthy, Raphael, Folder 1, Box (1) 10.6, PCA.

77. Quinn, "Mother Raphael McCarthy," p. 7.

to acknowledge the business acumen that made their achievements possible. These women understood that for any of their endeavors to succeed, they had to meet the financial demands of operating a sound business.⁷⁸ Whether empowered by wealth or religious commitment, they found in South Dakota a place that greatly needed their resourcefulness. Demand for medical care and social services grew as medical knowledge advanced and the population grew. These women discovered that through service to others, they could achieve a professional authority generally reserved for men. In spite of natural catastrophes, interfering prelates, and financial crises, these dedicated women set a health system in motion, built upon it, expanded its mission, and successfully administered a medical conglomerate that continues to preserve their religious mission of caring.

78. South Dakota Senator Karl Mundt acknowledged Mother Raphael's golden jubilee on 11 August 1960, noting both her "keen business sense" as well as her "moral efforts" to care for others in greater need. *Congressional Record*, 86th Cong., 2d sess., 1960, 106, pt. 12:16194-95.

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On the covers: (Front) Before her death in 1906, philanthropist Helen Gale McKennan (bottom right) envisioned a hospital that would care for the needy in Sioux Falls. Her resources, combined with the business acumen of the Presentation Sisters, helped to make both McKennan Hospital and today's Avera Health system a reality. In this issue, Margaret Preston details the efforts of Mother John Hughes (top right), Mother Joseph Butler (bottom left), and Mother Raphael McCarthy (top left) in building a health care system on the Northern Great Plains. (Back) A group of Presentation Sisters gathers on the steps of McKennan Hospital in Sioux Falls.

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