

150 Years of Sisters of Mercy in Albury

Greg Ryan

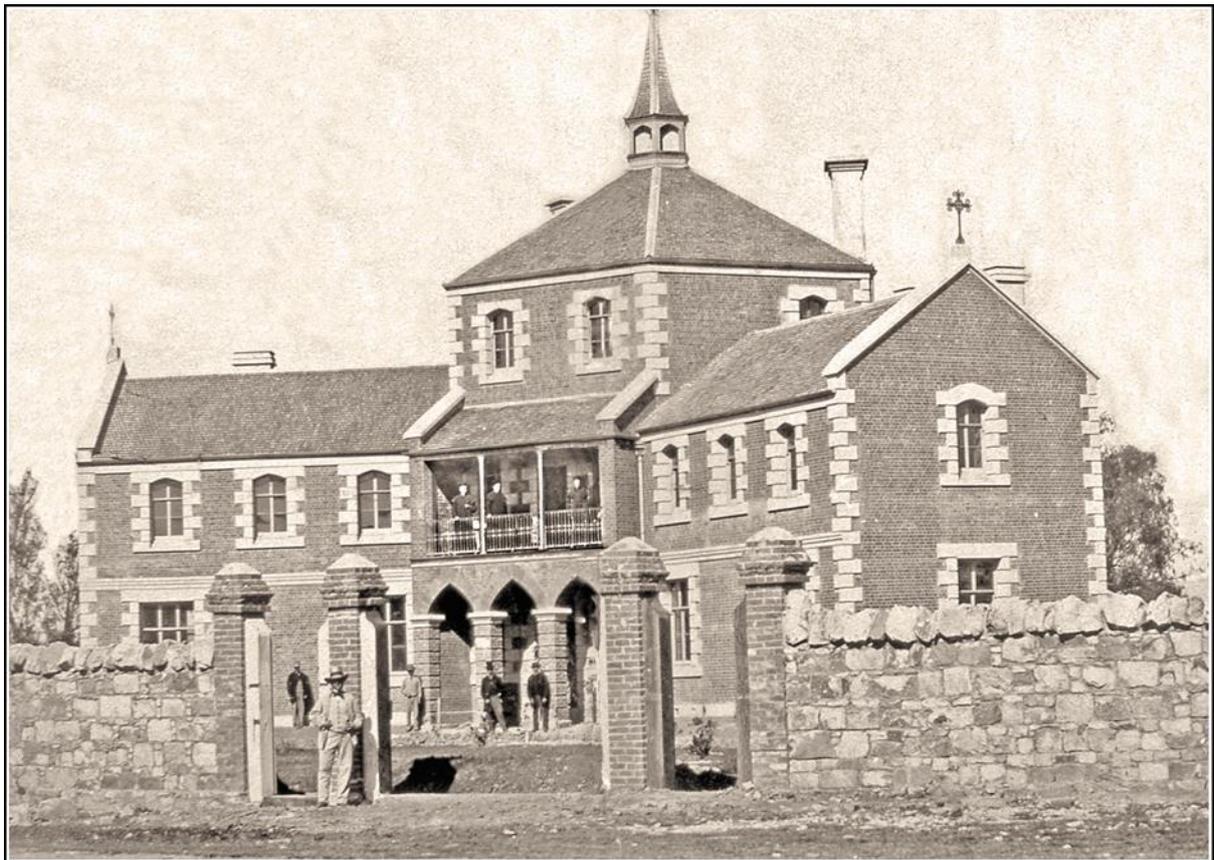
The Sisters of Mercy were established in 1831 in Dublin by Catherine McAuley, vowing “perpetual poverty, chastity and obedience” and the congregation “established for the visitation of the sick, poor and charitable instruction of poor females.”

On October 28, 1859, six Irish Sisters of Mercy arrived in Goulburn, NSW. There they established what was said to be “the first foundation of religious women in inland NSW.”

Rev Dr Michael McAlroy was appointed to Albury’s Catholic parish in 1868. He immediately made plans for an Albury convent. On Friday July 17, 1868, Dr McAlroy, four Sisters of Mercy led by Mother Ignatius Murphy, and two women soon to join the Sisters, left Goulburn by road for the six-day journey to Albury.

Along the way they were welcomed by families whose daughters they had educated at Goulburn. The first night was spent in Yass, with some of the group staying at the home of Mr & Mrs Hilly. Their daughter Jane followed the Sisters to Albury, and later entered the convent as Sr Bridget.

The second night they stayed at Jugiong where they were presented with a purse of sovereigns and they were also welcomed generously at Gundagai and Germanton (Holbrook).



The convent building before the chapel was added in 1879.
The building was blessed and opened February 6, 1870.

Anticipating their arrival, an “Albury Reception Committee” ventured ten miles north to meet the travellers at Plunkett’s Wheatsheaf Hotel, where they were welcomed over lunch.

The party was then escorted into Albury, arriving at about 4 pm on July 22, 1868. They visited the church where a choir performed a “Te Deum” before a welcome address. Afterwards they were entertained at dinner by the reception committee at the Globe Hotel.

Four days later, Bishops Lanigan and Quinn laid the foundation stone for the new convent. The Sisters soon had children enrolled in infants, primary and secondary classes. The first boarders to enrol at the school in October 1868 were Bridget Craven, and sisters Mary and Anne Fallon.

Over the next 150 years, the Albury Sisters were involved in education, health and welfare services. In 2002, a *Border Mail* editorial stated: “Yesterday’s announcement that the Sisters of Mercy are to withdraw from administering Xavier High School is a time to reflect on their magnificent contribution to the area, to Catholics and the broader community. Without doubt, they are the most influential single group of women that have shaped the Border district. They deserve the region’s thank you.”

For more information on the history of Catholic Education in Albury, refer to Greg Ryan’s book, *A History of Catholic Education in Albury*, available from the Xavier High School office or Albury LibraryMuseum – refer to <https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/232258004>