

*The exhibit of the Sisters of Notre Dame was highly commended and at the close of the Fair, which lasted six months, a diploma and medal were awarded to fifteen of our houses in Massachusetts, Lowell's parish and day schools being among the favored ones. See also the report of the Fair, the Boston Star, Dec. XIII., Columbus, Queen Isabella, and*

# Annals from the Archives

## The Sisters of Notre Dame and the 1918 Influenza Pandemic

\*Inspiration for this article comes from Sister Esther MacCarthy's 1990 article, "Blue Apron Days, 1890-1920."



Tents Erected To Care for Influenza Patients, Emery Hill in Lawrence, MA October 1918

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—Nearly 2 months ago, the mayor of Boston declared a public health emergency. Between October 2012 and the beginning of January 2013 the city reported over 700 cases of influenza, ten times the number experienced the previous year. How fortunate we are it bore no resemblance to the Influenza pandemic of 1918 when 3500 people from Boston alone died. The disease had started the previous spring, but the worst outbreak began in Boston in early September 1918. From there it spread across the state. On September 25<sup>th</sup>, the Governor of Massachusetts closed all schools, movie houses, concert halls, any place where crowds might pass on the disease. Despite that, by October 1<sup>st</sup> an average of 200 people died every day just in Boston. And because so many nurses and doctors were still serving in the war, the situation was desperate. Teachers were asked to volunteer as nurses. Among those who served during that horrific time were the Sisters of Notre Dame.

The Annals kept by Sisters from Boston to Worcester recorded again and again that no Masses were celebrated in early October "owing to all the funerals." In Salem, "Six Sisters went to the Emergency Hospital to help care for those suffering from the Epidemic." In Boston, at the center of the epidemic "the Sisters went out to care for the Influenza patients in their homes. A canteen furnished by the City of Boston was opened at the Assumption School under the direction of the Sisters with the help of Miss Mary Barr and the Ladies of the Parish. Food and clothing were daily distributed to the Poor."

In Lawrence, the Annals reported that 25 of their Sisters tended the sick in tents that were erected on Emery Hill. Because fresh air was thought to slow the spread of the disease, emergency hospitals constructed by the military, such as the one pictured above, were set up across the state. "From the 8<sup>th</sup> of October throughout the month, 9 to 12 Sisters of Notre Dame were in active service daily. . . they worked for the many patients, under the direction of physicians and graduate nurses in the Army. . ." So impressed were the people of Lawrence by their sacrifice that the Lawrence Daily Eagle reported "An outstanding feature of the work at Emery Hill has been the work of the Sisters. . . they do their work--and it is the hardest kind, actual nursing--without seeking any thanks of the public. . ." And, Charles Durant, the commander of the Base Hospital reported that "I may say that the success of the nursing and care of the patients at Camp Emery was largely dependent on them."