

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. —*St. Columbus, Queen Isabella, and Leo XIII.*

Annals from the Archives

Sr. Frances of S.H. 1929 Japan Scrapbook



Sr. Frances of the Sacred Heart Cahill
(1856-1935)

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—Sr. Frances of the Sacred Heart served as the Provincial Superior of the Sisters of Notre Dame's Eastern Province of the United States from 1920 to 1928. During those years, the province opened many new missions, including one in Okayama, Japan.

The six sisters founding the new mission in 1924 were Sister Marie Claire, the Superior, and Sisters Aimee Julie, Francis Helena, Mary Lucilla, Agnes St. John and Marie Raymond. In truth, they couldn't have gone at a worse time. Just a year before, Japan experienced a massive earthquake that triggered a 40 foot tsunami, resulting in the deaths of more than 140,000 people. In addition to the devastation and the sisters having no knowledge of the Japanese language, they also faced growing anti-American sentiments in Japan. This was the result of the United States' government instituting the U.S. Immigration Act of 1924, preventing Asians from becoming U.S. citizens.

Those first years in Okayama were more than a struggle, though the letters the sisters sent home seldom let on just how difficult things were for them. Undaunted, they began the work of teaching, relying on the local Japanese teachers for help in translation and in learning the customs. After five years, they were ready to begin the work on a new school building, which was part of the reason for Sister Frances' decision to sail for Japan. With her was Sr. Ellen of the Blessed Sacrament as a companion, and also to replace Sr. Agnes St. John Donnelly (1899-1995) who had become ill and was unable to remain in Japan.

During the journey, Sr. Frances of the S.H. kept a scrapbook, describing through words, postcards and photographs her experiences. Before her departure, she had the chance to visit Belmont, CA. On January 20, 1929, she wrote a short note to Sr. Raphael of the Sacred Heart Pike, the Superior at Trinity College that, "We had a wonderful day at Belmont with Sister Julia of Passion, Sister Euphrasia and Sister Mary Annunciata. Sister Julia has accomplished wonders at Belmont – a fine commodious high school, everything up-to-date, even swimming pool, splendid equipment, etc. She has also erected a small building for college use and a commercial building." From Belmont, the two sisters boarded the S.S. *President Lincoln*, one of the Presidential Ships owned by the Dollar Steamship Company. The ship made a stop in Hawaii and Sr. Frances noted, "It is well named 'The Paradise of the Pacific.' What a pity we haven't a house there." In 1946, that wish would become a reality with the founding of the Star of the Sea School in Honolulu.

Sr. Frances began her scrapbook entries on January 21, 1929 with her arrival in Yokohama. She wrote that, "Arrived. . .several hours late, remained in harbor until morning. Too late to dock. Docked January 22 at 8:30 a.m. Met at the boat by Brother Janning of St. Joseph's School for Foreign Boys, Yokohama." After a tour of the boys' school and meeting three former SND students, Brother Janning took Sisters Frances and Ellen to the Convent of the Sisters of Saint Maur. They were able to see the school, which was run by the Sisters of the Holy Infant Jesus. After a visit to two Catholic Churches in the city, they

returned to the S.S. *President Lincoln*, which began sailing for Kobe. The ship docked 24 hours after their predicted arrival. To delay them even more, the Japanese officials detained the sisters at the police station because their visas weren't in order. After enduring an interrogation and a customs inspection, they were rescued by a Mrs. Hoshino, a friend of the sisters in Okayama. Through her interventions, the trunks were loaded onto the train and Sisters Frances and Ellen were free to board a tram for Okayama. They arrived at the convent late in the evening and were met in silence by the sisters and guided to their rooms.

After a night's sleep, they rose on the morning of January 25th to be greeted by the expectant sisters, excited students and the faculty of the Seishin Koto Jo Gakko School. Next they met Bishop Ross, S.J., the bishop of the Hiroshima diocese and other local priests. Sisters Frances and Ellen took many photos of the students, buildings and of the neighbors who had been of assistance to the sisters.

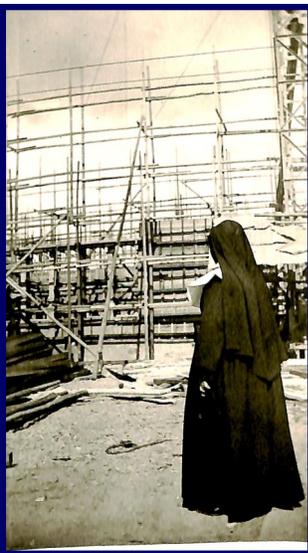
On Monday January 29th, the sisters were taken on tour of the local museums and markets before being shown the first stages of the new school. In an amusing aside, Sr. Frances wrote that she was "*caught napping*," no doubt still exhausted from her long journey. In her scrapbook, she assembled her pictures and made notations of how to phonetically pronounce various common Japanese phrases and words. On January 30th, after taking a picture of the sisters receiving their Japanese lessons, Sr. Frances wrote, "*Majoring in Japanese! . . . It is fascinating and logical when one gets to the root of the complicated Japanese roots.*" In addition to the classes in Japanese for the sisters, Sr. Frances also snapped photos of the sewing classes, the boarders' lavatory, the cooking department, students at their tennis practice, the outdoor laundry [which she noted with an exclamation point], music lessons for the older students and pictures of the school's faculty.

The cornerstone ceremony was held on February 2nd and Sr. Frances included notes on the processions and ceremony. Once the primary reason for her visit was completed, she toured the local shopping districts and observed the Feast of the Japanese Martyrs. She also bought a pair of ornate chopsticks to include in her scrapbook.

Sr. Frances and Sr. Agnes St. John departed Okayama on February 17th, taking the tram back to Kobe to meet the S. S. *President Cleveland*, which as Sr. Frances noted was "*five hours late.*" The *President Cleveland* sailed passed Yokohama where the sisters viewed Mt. Fujiyama from the deck. Brother Janning came on board for a short visit before the ship set sail for Hawaii. They passed by Bird Island, but Sr. Frances noted that they "*saw no birds.*" Their welcome in Hawaii began with the bestowing of the leis and visits to the Sacred Heart Church and St. Louis' College, which was run by the Brothers of Mary. They also had the chance to visit the Maryknoll Sisters and several gardens.

On Feb. 28th, they "*sailed from Honolulu at 6:00 P.M., Lights all over the Island.*" She noted that the steamer sailed over 400 miles a day and while they arrived in San Francisco on time, they were once again delayed at customs. At last they arrived in Belmont for a brief respite before beginning the next leg of their long journey home.

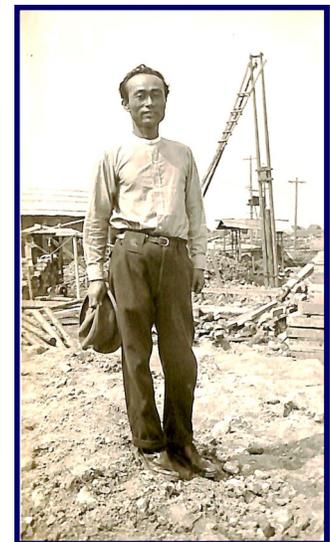
To see all of Sr. Frances of the Sacred Heart's Scrapbook, click [here](#)



Sr. Frances of S.H.
visiting construction site



Sisters working on their
Japanese lessons



Takagi San, School Architect

Sources consulted for this article

- ◆ Sr. Frances of the Sacred Heart Cahill Scrapbook, 1929. 2015.16.05. SND New England Archives.
- ◆ Japan Mission Papers. 2013.60. SND New England Archives.