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Mother Francis Shanahan

On January 25, 1916, Mother M. Francis, formerly Bridget Shanahan of St. _____[?] Parish, Chicago, ex-Superior General of the Congregation, peacefully departed this life in the 75th year of her age and in the 49th of her entrance into the Franciscan Order at Joliet.

Born in Limerick County, Ireland, she emigrated when a mere child with her parents, brothers and sisters to America. For a short time they resided in New York City; then they went westward to little Chicago. There she attended St. Patrick's parochial school, and when twenty-one years of age, she joined the Sisters of Mercy at Omaha, Nebraska. When her novitiate had expired she found that she was not called to the Order of Mercy and applied to the Rev. Dr. Dunne, V.G., and chancellor of the Chicago Diocese for advice. He counseled her to apply at the newly founded congregation of Franciscan Sisters at Joliet for admission. She called on the Mother Superior and was assured of a favorable reception, forming one of the first applicants to the little Sisterhood. She was then in the 26th year of her age. As she had already had a period of religious instruction and training, and as religious teachers were scarce in those pioneer days, she was vested in the habit of St. Francis, August 24, 1867, in St. John the Baptist Church, Joliet, by the Rev. Joseph Wissel, C.S.S.R. of Saint Michael's, Chicago, and in the next scholastic year sent respectively to school in St. Boniface Parish, Chicago, St. Joseph's, Freeport, Illinois, and St. Wencelas, Chicago. In 1872 she was transferred to St. Peter's

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Mansfield, Ohio, and put in charge of the school, which at that time consisted of two classrooms.

In the year 1877 she was appointed first local Superior of the Motherhouse in Joliet, and two months later Bishop Foley of Chicago proclaimed her Mother Superior of the Joliet Congregation, as Mother Alfred had established the new Congregation of the Sisters of St. Francis at Rochester Minnesota. Sister Francis was the immediate successor of Mother Alberta Stockhof, who declined to hold the term of office any longer than the year which obedience had forced upon her. While she was Mother Superior, the Constitutions were revised with the advice and efficient aid of Rev. Clementine Deymann, O.F.M. and opportunities provided for the Sisters to advance in higher studies.

Rev. Clementine himself gave lessons in advanced German grammar and mathematics and algebra besides his regular weekly conferences. Professor Russel was engaged for Bookkeeping and Commercial Law which Sister Siena taught in turn to the Academy students; Sisters Cecilia and Aloysia Bernert studied music at the Ziegfield Musical College, Chicago, the former piano and harmony, the latter harmony and guitar. Sister Petronilla Foley went to Chicago for the study of Physiology, which was taught her and Sister Camilla by Dr. Warren at St. Francis, Chicago. She gave her fullest consent to the opening of the Institute for Indian girls in Bayfield, Wisconsin.

She declined a second term of office, but in the election of 1881 she became member of the council and first assistant to the new Mother Superior, Sister M. Celestine Sontag. During the following years she was appointed local superior of our missions in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, in Mansfield and in

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Lorain, Ohio.

In January of 1905 she was recalled from the latter place to enjoy the well-earned quietude of convent life at the Motherhouse. Thirty-eight years she had devoted to the noble work of educating youth in the parochial schools, yet even after her retreat within the convent walls, she found it a delightful task to superintend the aspirants in their recreational hours and at meals. Besides this, Mother Francis must be credited with many a good counsel given to the Community. She also had a special tact in advising and encouraging young disheartened religious, and this trait of character to which she added fervent prayer, not seldom proved effective and earned for her the lasting gratitude of those whom she had spiritually benefited.

Some years before her death Mother Francis' sight began to fail. This was a sore trial for her as it deprived her of her coveted occupation of reading spiritual books.