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The Independent Record

St. Joseph's

*For more than 70 years,
a haven for kids*

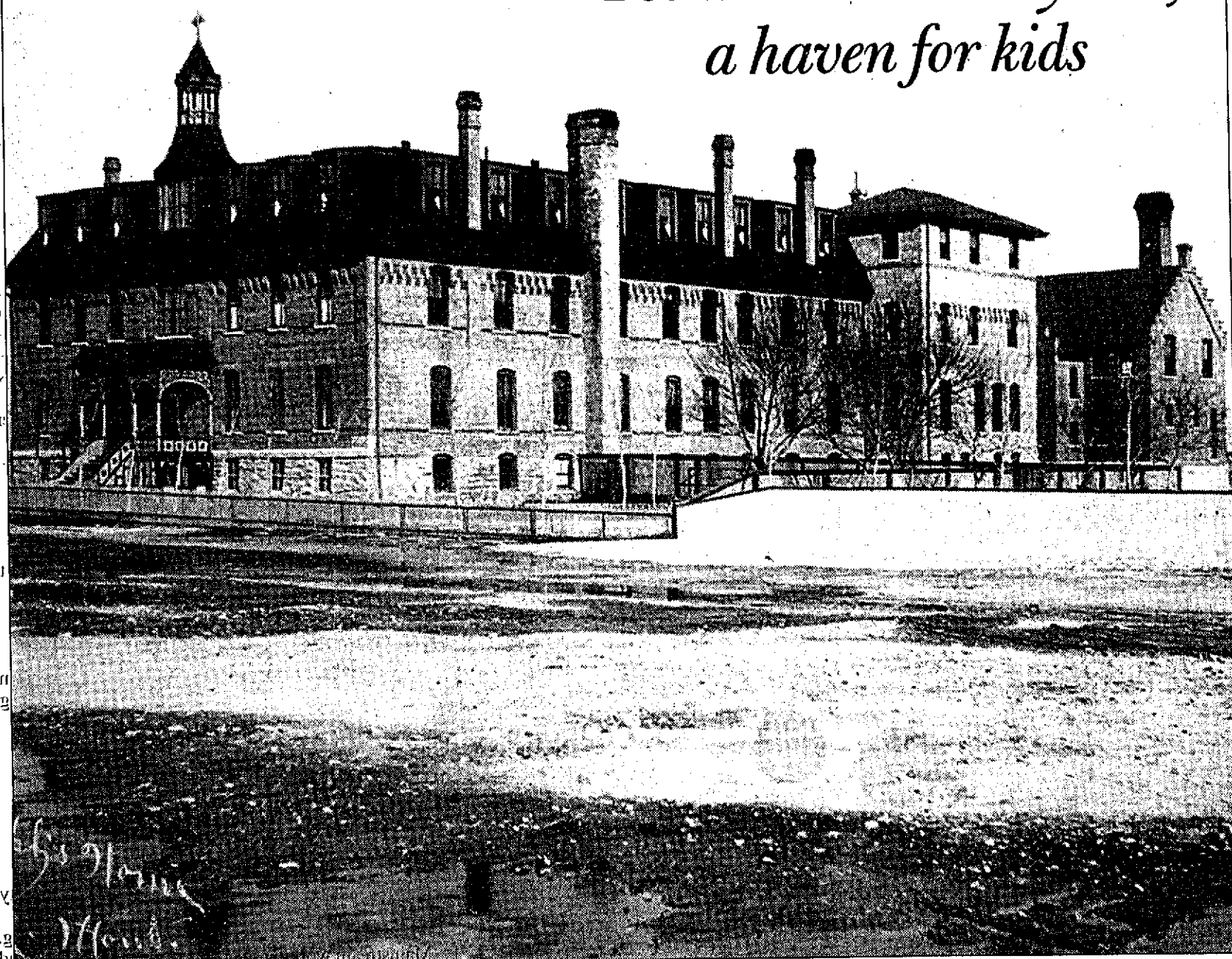


Photo courtesy of Montana Historical Society

On the northeast corner of North Montana and Custer Avenue, on land now occupied by SkopKo, Albertsons and other businesses and their adjacent parking lots, a substantial brick building emerged in a little over three years.

In 1869, only five years after gold was discovered in Last Chance Gulch, a group of five dedicated women arrived in Helena by stage-coach with an awesome mission: to educate and guide young adults, to serve the sick, the insane, and the growing numbers of children left without care, often as the result of the death of one or both of their parents.

They were Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, Kan., whose compassionate presence in Helena and the Helena Valley spanned nearly a century. A scant year after their arrival in 1869, the sisters established St. John's Hospital on South Ewing. It was the first of many institutions, housed in a succession of buildings, that would occupy what became known as Catholic Hill.

At St. John's they cared not only for the physically ill, but until 1881 for the mentally ill as well. The latter patients were housed in a small building in back of the main hospital. When the territorial legislature awarded the contract for care of the insane to a private partnership in Warm Springs, the sisters almost immediately found a new and desperately needed use for the vacant little building on the hospital grounds.

SISTER MARY BAPTIST CARNEY, administrator of St. John's at the time, was asked to accept and care for three motherless brothers from Butte. "This is an opening for the use of the vacant building," Sister Mary Baptist was quoted as saying, "and I believe the Lord intended us to get into this work."

The sisters cleaned and refurbished the building and renamed it St. Ambrose's Orphans Home for Ambrose Sullivan, the oldest of the brothers, all of whom would spend their youth in the care of the sisters and would distinguish themselves later in life. Both Ambrose and his brother, Stephen, entered the priesthood, while their younger sibling became a physician, practicing for many years in New York City.

The Sullivan boys were soon joined by many other children whose parents were either deceased or unable to care for them. By the end of the first year at St. Ambrose's, there were 18 more children, and still they kept coming until there were 40 and dozens of others had to be turned away. It was obvious the little building on the grounds of St. John's could no longer hold them.

In 1890, Mother Josephine Cantwell, once superior at the Mother House in Leavenworth, Kan., and now Superior at St. John's, launched her determined campaign to acquire land and build a facility for the care of children in the Prickly Pear Valley just north of the city limits.

On the northeast corner of North Montana and Custer Avenue, on land now occupied by Shop-Ko, Albertsons and other businesses and their adjacent parking lots, a substantial brick building emerged in a little over three years. The *Weekly Herald of Helena*, in its issue of Sept. 14, 1893,

VIVIAN PALADIN



MORE FROM THE QUARRIES OF LAST CHANCE GULCH

reported on the successful completion of the building in spite of the financial panic then gripping the country.

"To Mother Josephine of St. John's Hospital is due the credit for originating the project, which, with the help of the good people of Helena, and other Montana cities, she has pushed to successful completion in spite of the hard times," the paper said. "The building, which will be ready for occupancy in about two weeks, is one of the finest structures in the State. . . It is a three-story brick, standing on a high foundation of blue stone. It fronts the west and is 100 feet long north and south and 80 feet wide east and west."

THANKS TO THE GENEROSITY of suppliers of materials and labor, low interest, long-term loans granted by local bankers, and donations of everything from shade trees to iron bedsteads and bedding, the cost was kept in the \$35,000 range. The home was dedicated on Oct. 8, 1893, with U.S. Sen. Thomas H. Carter delivering the address of the day.

From the beginning, there were no ethnic or religious priorities for acceptance at St. Joseph's. The criteria was need. The mission was to see that the children were well dressed, well fed, trained to perform useful work, and well grounded in basic education.

From all accounts, most of the boys and girls were healthy, well-adjusted and happy, although as a reporter for the *Montana Daily Record* of Helena wrote in a long article published on Oct. 5, 1903, there were sometimes signs of sadness. "Some pairs of big eyes turned to the visitor contain an appeal in them for the mother or the

father from whom they were lately separated," the article said, "but time and kindness cures all that and eventually these unfortunate little waifs will enjoy life with the vast majority of the merry children about them."

The main theme of the long *Record* article was, however, the need for expansion. In 1903, the original building was bursting at the seams, housing 214 children in a facility designed for no more than 175.

"The children are placed so close together at the dinner table that there isn't room for their cups beside their plates and they are packed on the benches like peas in a pod," the newspaper reported. "The beds in the girls' dormitory are placed so close together that the children can with difficulty edge their way between them."

By this time, another administrator with formidable credentials had taken charge at St. Joseph's. She was Sister Rose Vincent, who had been a member of her order for nearly 30 years and had spent 22 of them in Montana.

"FOR MANY YEARS Sister Rose Vincent taught in St. Aloysius School for Boys in Helena," the *Record* said in its article. "Perhaps that is why she has never had any trouble with them. 'Whip them?' she said in reply to a query. 'It is very rare indeed that we find it necessary to punish any boy. Contrary to the belief held by many, boys are not naturally bad. Through associations boys become bad; through associations they become good.'"

It was under the leadership of this wise and good woman that the critical expansion work at St. Joseph's took place. With the remaining \$20,000 construction debt paid off, new buildings rose on the grounds, which by now had grown to 99 acres from the modest three and a half acres first acquired by Mother Josephine.

Expansion work eventually resulted in additional dormitory space, a three-story schoolhouse, separate buildings containing a laundry, a bakery, and a spacious barn for the dairy herd. There was a large vegetable garden, even an outdoor swimming pool. And there was room for 225 children.

There was never a time when the Sisters of Charity failed to receive full community support for their work. Women of Helena regularly met to sew for the children, their work consisting mainly of refitting and making over used donated clothing. The annual fall Turkey Shoot under direction of the men of Helena was major fund raiser for many years.

(More HOME, page 6A)

City manager search begins

Verwolf's replacement expected by September

By EVE BYRON
IR Staff Writer

The search is on for a new city manager in Helena. Less than a week after City Manager Bill Verwolf resigned to take a job in Monroe, Wash., ads are being placed in the major newspapers in Montana, in the *Spokane Spokesman Review*, on the Internet and in a national city manager publication.

"I would not advise advertising in other out of state papers," Human Resource Manager Harry "Salty" Payne wrote in a memo to the Helena City Commission. "This would only increase the number of applications received and not the quality of the applicants. We can reach those qualified and interested individuals through the means noted."

ACCORDING TO A TIME LINE presented Monday night by Payne, he hopes the new city manager will start work by September. In his memo, Payne also laid out a suggestions for interviewing and selecting the city manager.

Unlike the usual hiring process, city employees won't be screening candidates because the city manager is their boss. Instead, Payne recommends that a committee of private citizens review applications. "I have asked to be on the committee just to keep the process moving along," Payne said. "I will not be reviewing the applications, interviewing the candidates or making any recommendations. I'll just do administrative support, like schedule meetings or get the candidates set up for interviews."

The committee would weed through the initial applications, then conduct telephone interviews of the top 10-12 candidates. The commission later would do in-person interviews with the top four contenders. Previously, Mayor Colleen McCarthy said she hopes to involve the public in those sessions.

PAYNE ALSO SUGGESTS that department heads be allowed to spend some time with the finalists, and that a "public social" be held so citizens can meet the city manager candidates.

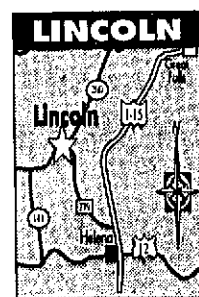
The four commission members at Monday's meeting seemed receptive to Payne's suggestions, but didn't want to discuss the process — except for placing the ads — until all commission members are present. They've set a work session for 5 p.m. March 13 to decide what course to follow. The meeting will be held in room 326 in the City/County Building.

"That also gives us time to digest this and come up with some ideas," McCarthy said. "We'll have a lengthy discussion about this at the work session."

Commission members also must decide how much to pay the new city manager, whether to cover the cost of bringing the top four candidates to Helena, and how to fill the vacancy that will be created when Verwolf leaves on April 25.

A committee of private citizens could review applications.

Snow Warriors plan poker run, snowcross finals this weekend



Lincoln's Ponderosa Snow Warriors Clubhouse on Sucker Creek Road is the registration site for Saturday's annual Charity Poker Run. The first hand leaves the clubhouse at 11 a.m. with last hand out at 2 p.m. Riders will travel a marked route collecting cards from checkpoints hoping to draw the winning high and low hand. Cash prizes as well as door prizes will be awarded. The clubhouse will offer hot chocolate and snacks throughout the afternoon. Enjoy incredible snow conditions while riding a new route. For information call 362-4078 or 362-4335.

Lincoln's snowcross finals

Be sure to turn out for the Snowcross Race Final at the Stonewall track in Lincoln on Sunday, March 9. Competition will be fierce for this last race of the series. Registration is from 9-11 a.m. with races beginning at noon. Classes include Traction 440/540/600/880+, Non-traction 440/540/600/700/800+, and Powderpuff. This is the third in a series of races in which cash prizes will be awarded. Additional main event prizes will be awarded. For more information call 362-4849 or 362-4696.

Church women plan World Day of Prayer service on Friday

The World Day of Prayer 1997 Service will held Friday, March 7, at 9:30 a.m. at the Salvation Army Church, 1905 Henderson. The ladies of the First Presbyterian Church will conduct the service.

This year's service was written by the World Day of Prayer Committee of South Korea. John Kim will be speaking on Korean culture. Kim is a native-born Korean. He and his wife came to the United States in 1965 and have lived in Helena since 1968.