

Franciscans Under Fire: Twenty Nuns, a Girl, and a Dog; The Story of the Sisters of Saint Francis of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mount St. Clare, Clinton, Iowa, 1864-1907. From the unfinished manuscript of Msgr. Mathias Martin Hoffman as told by Sister Augusta Carrico, OSF, edited by Duane Hutchinson. Lincoln, NE: Foundation Books, 1990. xx, 190 pp. Notes, timeline, appendix, name index. \$7.95 paper.

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Franciscans Under Fire is an account of the trials, tribulations, and eventual triumph experienced by a group of Franciscan Sisters. Established in 1864 to staff a school for poor girls as an adjunct to a school for poor boys conducted by the Trappist monks of Gethsemane, Kentucky, this community of religious women suffered one defeat after another. Poor leadership, difficulties with ecclesiastical superiors, and simply bad luck pushed the community to the edge of dissolution. So desperate were these sisters that they survived on one occasion only by begging for assistance from door to door. Under these conditions the community decided in 1890 to abandon its Kentucky home and move to Iowa. After overcoming difficulties with the Mother Superior and with the bishop of Dubuque, these Franciscan Sisters made their home in Iowa, teaching in various locales in that state and elsewhere. With its motherhouse and college located in Mount St. Clare, Clinton, Iowa, the community became a permanent part of the religious and educational scene in Iowa.

Anyone interested in the lives of Catholic communities of women of a hundred years ago will find this book interesting. The difficulties encountered by these women will illustrate that humility, patience, and obedience were the virtues required of the Sisters of that day. Also of interest is the appearance in these pages of leading Iowa Catholic personalities, such as Archbishop John Hennessy.

The reader should be warned that the narrative method used is not historical. The author chose to present the story in the first person, as if it were the recollection of Sister Francis Walker, one of the three founders of the community. The title page of the book adds to the confusion when it states that the story is told by Sister Augusta Carrico, OSF. In fact, as the editor informs us, "most of the conversation reflects almost verbatim from the records and written annals of the community" (19).

This unusual method of presenting historical material should not prevent us from reading and enjoying the book, for it is both readable and interesting. If it has its limits as a historical work, it remains a good story which can be enjoyed by all who read it.

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