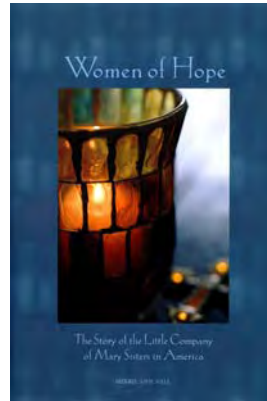


**Review of Merrie Ann Nall's
*Women of Hope:
The Story of the Little Company of Mary Sisters in America***

By Deborah M. Nilles (1)



Evergreen Park, Illinois: RR Donnelley Co., 2005
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Women of Hope by Merrie Ann Nall is a masterfully researched and written history of the Sisters of the Little Company of Mary and their mission of love. This telling of the compassion and care of incredible women, spanning several continents, is compelling. Once opened, this book is difficult to put down.

The Little Company of Mary (LCM) is a Roman Catholic religious institute of women (also referred to as the Blue Sisters) dedicated to caring for the suffering, the sick and the dying. It was founded in 1877 by Mary Potter. 'In the spirit of Mary on Calvary our vocation impels us to enter into the sufferings of others, to bring about equality and dignity for all and to collaborate with others to create a world of justice, love and peace. In this way we make visible the healing presence of Jesus' (Venerable Mary Potter).

For over a century the dedication of these amazing women has touched the lives of many. In April 1893, three sisters of the LCM made a pilgrimage to Chicago led by Mother Veronica Dowling, first superior of the Chicago foundation. Later that year two more sisters would be sent by Mary Potter to join them on their mission: Sister M. Evangelist Touhy and

Sister M. Laurence Delaney. It was on this journey that the future of the LCM and the people of San Antonio de Areco and greater Buenos Aires would become perpetually intertwined.

The Maria Clara Morgan Hospital at San Antonio de Areco (province of Buenos Aires, Argentina) is built on a foundation of tragedy, forged in love and spirited on the wings of a chance encounter. For the Sisters of the Little Company of Mary, the mother of a lost child and the people of greater Buenos Aires, it is a legacy. The story of the Little Company of Mary and the Morgan Family of Argentina originates on the sea, crosses in Chicago, Illinois and becomes one in a rural area northwest of Buenos Aires.

According to *Women of Hope*, on board ship the Irish-born Sisters met Margaret Morgan (*née* Mooney) and her only living daughter Maria Clara, who were travelling to Chicago to attend the 1893 World Columbian Exposition (also called the Chicago World's Fair). (2) A friendship between these women ensued, one that might have later been lost, save for a tragic circumstance. While visiting Chicago Maria Clara Morgan became seriously ill. Sister Laurence and Mother Veronica came

immediately to her side but the young lady of twenty-eight years lost her life on 1 August 1893. Her grief-stricken mother Margaret Morgan made a vow that she would build a hospital near their home in Argentina to commemorate the memory of her daughter. She never forgot the kindness of the LCM Sisters and offered ownership of the hospital in turn for their care of it. Her only stipulation was that the name of the hospital never be changed.

This act of remembrance and love became reality, and the Maria Clara Morgan Hospital was built. Four sisters of the Little Company of Mary arrived in Argentina on 13 May 1913. They were: Mother M. Columba Kealy, Sister M. Philomena Haslem, Sister M. Raphael McCarthy and Sister M. Rita Carroll. Welcomed into the community, the mission and capacity of the hospital increased over the years as the Sisters of the LCM cared tirelessly for the ill and comforted the dying. Their generosity of heart shown to the community was offered in turn. On more than one occasion through the decades, the people of San Antonio de Areco repaid this kindness in the form of donations and food for the Sisters and hospital patients.

The Sisters of the Little Company of Mary maintained the hospital at San Antonio de Areco until 1956, when their mission brought them to serve a larger population and eventually in the nation's capital. 'For forty-three years, the promises made good by two loving mothers resulted in a mission of hope and healing in a remote section of Argentina by a small group of nursing sisters - mostly of Irish or Irish-American heritage - who soon became known by their Spanish name: *Pequeña Compañía de María*'

Their impact endures, as do the lessons of Mother Mary Potter, founder of Little Company of Mary. Mary Potter was declared 'Venerable' by Pope John Paul II in 1988 which is the initial stage of the canonisation process.

Chapter Six of *Women of Hope* is dedicated to the LCM mission in Buenos Aires and it alone makes this book worth the read for anyone interested in Irish migration to Argentina and subsequent spiritual and medical care afforded to these immigrants and their children of Irish descent. Published by RR Donnelley Company in 2005, it is a delightful and recommended read.

Deborah M. Nilles

Notes

1. The reviewer is the great-great niece of Mother Veronica Dowling (LCM Chicago). Emily Agnes (Mother Veronica) Dowling was born in Dublin, Ireland in the same era that the author's great-great grandmother Eleanor O'Connor was born in Carmen de Areco, Argentina. These families would be joined in the next generation by marriage, leading to research of both ancestors and the peculiar connection that made this review possible. Acknowledgements: thank you to Merrie Ann Nall for her incredible work, and to the modern day Sisters of the Little Company of Mary in Chicago for taking the time to visit with me and teach me the history of the LCM and my family history.
2. See Margaret Morgan's biography by Gonzalo Cané at *Dictionary of Irish Latin American Biography*, website (http://www.irlandeses.org/dilab_morganm.htm), accessed 9 November 2008.