

Mercy Foundation To Ballina, Co Mayo

By 1855 the Community had grown to eight members, including four Postulants. The house was inadequate, so the Sisters moved to two houses in Teeling Street near the school and they paid €46 a year in taxes, as well as money spent renovating the houses. They suffered great poverty and many became ill and died as young Sisters as the cemetery bears witness. But their very poverty made them close to the people they served, for in many ways they shared the common lot with them.

We can only marvel at the work these women did in such hard times and in uncomfortable circumstances, with meagre resources. Within a few years of coming to Ballina, they were teaching in three schools and visiting the poor of the parish every day bringing them food and support. In 1862 Rev. Patrick Irwin became Administrator of the Cathedral in Ballina and he took an immediate interest in the Mercy Sisters. He saw the great need they had of proper accommodation and so he set about providing a convent for them. He obtained a 999 year lease on the ground where the convent now stands and work began on the building. On September 13th, Bishop Feeney laid the foundation stone. Funds were collected in Ballina and surrounding parishes. Four years later, work was sufficiently advanced to allow the Sisters take up residence in the completed part and so on May 31st 1867, the Sisters walked up Upper Garden Street or Convent hill as it was to be called, to their new home.

The Convent Ballina



Ballina Convent

The Convent cost €20,000, which was a huge sum of money. In 1873, the new Bishop Dr. Conway, allowed Fr. Irwin to go to America to raise funds for the convent. He was very successful in this and he raised enough money to complete the front wing of the convent. However, he overstayed his leave and when he returned he found that his parish had been given to another priest. His new parish was Kilglass. The Mercy Sisters remembered Fr. Irwin with gratitude. A framed picture of him hung in the Convent parlour and he was remembered in prayer daily.

Many young women from different parts of Ireland, entered the convent down the years. Sleeping conditions were relatively cramped with some sharing bedrooms while others slept in dormitories. A major extension, undertaken by Sr. Marie Celine Halloran was completed to the West of the cut-stone building in 1978/79 which greatly relieved congestion and provided individual comfortable rooms for everybody, in keeping with modern conditions.

In the 80's and 90's, as needs arose in the Convent, outside help was employed which ensured comfortable caring. An elevator was installed and a new roof was put on the Convent by Sr. Maura Flynn, Local Leader. A special bathroom was fitted with a very modern bathtub to meet the needs of less able-bodied members, by Sr. Mary Gallagher Local Leader, who oversaw many necessary improvements. She renovated the Chapel tastefully, to the satisfaction and delight of the Sisters.