



*Mother Drexel was the subject of a recent cover story in U.S. News and World Report.*

Hers was a special vocation. The Sisters of Mercy realized this, so Katharine was given a broad training. She was introduced into all phases of the ministry of the Mercy Sisters. She worked at Mercy Hospital and taught black children at St. Joseph School, which was then located on the Hill.

On Nov. 7, 1889 Sister Katharine was formally accepted as a novice at St. Mary Convent. Mother Sebastian, R.S.M., suggested Mary Katharine as her name in religion. Katharine was pleased because it was a form of her baptismal name, Catharine Mary, and called both of her patronesses, St. Catherine of Siena, and Mother Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy.

During those Pittsburgh years, 13 candidates applied for admission to Katharine's new congregation, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. On Feb. 12, 1891, Katharine pronounced her vows as the congregation's first member and superior. Mother Inez, R.S.M., who had served as Novice Mistress for the fledgling band was loaned to them when the sisters returned to Philadelphia. Mother Katharine always spoke lovingly of the Sisters of Mercy and Pittsburgh. She would sometimes stop at St. Mary Convent as she traveled to work with her beloved Indians of the West.

*This article was condensed from a paper lecture given by Sr. Ursula Kelly, an educational consultant to the Diocese of Pittsburgh and a member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.*

## From Pittsburgh to Mexico: A Pilgrimage of Two Generations

By Tom Krill

The city park, known as the "21st of May," lies between the Church of the Immaculate Conception and city hall in the center of Cordoba, Veracruz, Mexico. The snow-capped volcano Mt. Orizaba overlooks the scene. There in the park, facing the church, is a bronze bust of Father Frank Krill.

My Great-Uncle Francis Joseph Krill was born in on June 10, 1866, near Pius Street in on the South Side of Pittsburgh. The son of German immigrants, Frank received his primary education at St. Michael's parish school, where classes were conducted half in German and half in English. He entered the Passionist Order in 1884 and was ordained in 1891.

Family history has it that he left the Passionists in 1895 when he was denied permission to visit his ailing mother. Shortly afterward, he went to Mexico.

"Padre Francisco Krill" arrived in Mexico in around 1896, during the presidency of Porfirio Diaz. Diaz, who ruled Mexico for 40 years, tolerated the Church, in spite of the laws to the contrary. So Father Krill rode in amid a rebirth of the Church in Mexico.

In Cordoba, Father Krill went to work on the restoration of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, which was the centerpiece of the town. But Father Frank was also dedicated to the improvement of the city. On donated land, he built a park. Within the park, he diverted water from the river to

form a system of canals and a lake, where picnickers could rent small boats or fish. The author of a local history recalled how Father Frank taught him to play baseball at the park, with a ball the priest had made himself, out of thread.

Perhaps Father Frank is best known for founding the local fire department and acquiring the first fire engine. Even today, in the firemen's parade every year, a huge float commemorates Father Frank founding of the department.

Radical changes came with the revolutions of 1910 and 1913. With President Francisco Madero's assassination in 1913 came the seizure of Church property and the persecution of priests and nuns. The election in 1924 brought even harsher treatment. In 1926, foreign priests and many bishops were banished. Most went into exile in Louisiana. Many priests went into hiding or were jailed. Those who fought back in the Cristero Rebellion were executed.

Family history says that Father Frank was jailed a number of times and that he had to say Mass in people's homes. A system of tunnels was constructed to allow Father Frank to leave the confines of the church to reach the homes. The authorities learned about the tunnels and made futile attempts to find them, including excavation of the floor of the crypt under the main altar.

Father Frank died in Puebla, Nov. 17, 1942. He is buried beneath the main altar of the church he served so well and which I visited in November 1998.