

Marycrest

SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS

In 1835, Catherine Damen, a Dutch peasant who devoted herself to teaching religion and caring for the poor and sick, founded the Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity. The Order sought to follow the example of St. Francis, with Sisters taking a vow of poverty and dedicating their lives in service to God and their communities with unfailing charity and humility. The Sisters first arrived in the United States in 1874, settling in Buffalo, New York. The work of the Order quickly spread throughout the country, with missions in West Virginia, Ohio, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Colorado, Oregon, Washington, and California.



History of the Franciscan Sisters, by W. J. Metz/Public Domain

Mother Catherine Magdalene Damen, founder of the Sisters of St. Francis.



Mary Therese Anstey/Historitecture

Statue of St. Francis, namesake, patron, and exemplar of the Order, at Marycrest.

Hughes was the first Provincial Superior and postulants and novices arrived in late 1938 and 1939.

The first Sisters came to Denver in 1917, teaching at St. Elizabeth's School. Division of the North American Province in 1938 required a new site to serve as headquarters for the Denver-based Sacred Heart Province. On May 4, 1938, Mother Lidwina Jacobs purchased entrepreneur John Brisbane Walker's former Willowcrest estate for \$25,000. The Sisters then converted the existing mansion for use as a convent. Mother Erica

Deus Providebit ♦ God Will Provide

The living conditions of the nuns and novices at both Marycrest and throughout the Order were austere, humble, and routine. The women ate simple meals of whatever was available. The furniture inside each bedroom, or cell, was simple. Rituals filled daily life. Sisters awoke at five, responding to a caller who knocked on the door of each cell and said, "Arise, you who sleep, Jesus Christ will enlighten you." The response was "*Deo Gratias*" ("thanks be to God"). Each day included prayer, meditation, mass, and service to the community. At ten the lights in the convent darkened.