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LORETTO HEIGHTS – 126 YEARS OF HISTORY, NOW LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

"... The good Sisters of Loretto...came into this land when it was nothing but a waste. They crossed these plains...when dangers and perils of every description assailed adventurer and soldier alike, to fulfill their promise that they would carry the teachings of God into the land"

Bishop Nicolas Matz

BY BECCA DEERBROW, PRESERVATION AND RESEARCH COORDINATOR
AND LILY NEISWONGER, INTERN AT HISTORIC DENVER

IN THE FALL OF 2016, Colorado Heights University announced that it would be closing its doors. Located on the historic Loretto Heights campus, CHU had occupied the site since 1989. With the announcement of the college's closure, questions now swirl about the fate of this iconic and beloved community institution.

The founding of Loretto Heights began in 1864 when Father J.P. Machebeuf was sent as a missionary to Colorado. He was accompanied by three Sisters of Loretto from the Kentucky Motherhouse. Upon their arrival to Colorado, they lived in a two story framed house on what is now 15th and California Street. This building would become St. Mary's Academy of the Loretto Order, a boarding school for young girls in the Denver area, teaching them foreign language and refined skills. While enduring the hardships of the developing West, the Sisters of Loretto gained high esteem and attracted

many daughters of Colorado pioneers to their academy. As the number of pupils increased, the Sisters expanded, continuing their mission of education and tradition.

On March 19, 1888, Mother Pancratia Bonfils (a cousin to the prominent Bonfils family), Superior of the Academy and alumna of St. Mary's Academy, sought to start a new Academy, far distant from the expanding "downtown" Denver area. Mother Pancratia and the other Sisters chose a hilltop site approximately 7 miles southwest of Denver with a stunning panoramic view, which they called "Loretto Heights." From this view, the Sisters could see the Platte River in the east where miners had left their mark, and to the southwest they could see Fort Logan, beyond that it is recalled that "the view was uninterrupted by any habitation of man."

Soon after, architect Frank Edbrooke was contracted to design the main academic building and construction began in 1890. By November 2, 1891 the Sisters and pupils were moving into the new building. Despite minor difficulties

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

The tower of Loretto Heights is a landmark that can be seen for miles around southwest Denver. It was designed by Frank Edbrooke in 1890. Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History and Genealogy Department

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