When the IHMs opened the novitiate house at the former rectory at St. Patrick Wyandotte, they returned to a parish they had first served in 1885.

Called St. Charles Borromeo at its founding in 1857, the first building, a two-story frame structure west of the present church, housed a chapel on the second floor with an altar, backless pews, an organ and oil lamps. For the next 16 years it served intermittently as church, rectory, meeting place, "Sabbath School" and finally, the first Catholic school in town.

In 1871, the people of the parish began building a new brick church. Men, women and children all pitched in to construct the church themselves. Many materials had to be shipped by boat from Detroit and progress was hard and slow. At one point, before the workers had been able to add the roof, the newly raised west wall blew down in a winter storm. In 1883, the church was finished and consecrated by Bishop Borgess. It seated 700 and was the largest building in Wyandotte.

In the same year, many of the German parishioners left St. Charles to found their own church, St. Joseph. Most of those who remained were Irish and they renamed the parish St. Patrick in late 1883 or early 1884.

In 1885, the old frame church was refurnished and became a school. Three IHM Sisters (Henrietta Glynn, Cresentia Costigan, and Borromeo McDonnell) came to Wyandotte on Sept. 3, 1885, to open the school where they taught 150 students in two classrooms. When Henrietta was transferred to Marshall, Mich. Jan. 16, 1886, she was replaced by Sister Domitilla Donohue.

Reversing the usual sequence, a convent was constructed for the sisters in 1886 before a rectory was built. The sisters moved into the two-story, brown-frame convent on Dec. 12, 1886; IHMs continued to live there until 1955. Over the years, it was often referred to as the "Brown Derby." By the 1950s it had become a “fire-trap” and the pastor, Rev. Clarence Doherty, knew it had to be replaced. "The old house is almost held together by strings. I think it is only the prayers of the Sisters that keep the roof from falling in."

Once again, the people of the parish helped. For some years they raised money for the project by holding annual festivals and harvest turkey dinners, serving as many as 1,200. A new brick convent was built on the north side of Superior Boulevard at a cost of $225,000. On Oct. 27, 1955, when the ladies of the parish hosted an open house, 2,000 people went through the building and contributed a sizable amount of money. When the school closed and the sisters left in 1968, they had been there 83 years. Today the former convent is used as an office building.

The original rectory, a two-story frame building was built in 1889 on the corner of Superior Boulevard and First Street. A new red-brick rectory was built in 1922. It was comfortable and roomy enough to house parish offices as well as the pastor and his assistants.

On July 1, 2013, St. Joseph and St. Patrick Parishes re-merged and became St. Vincent Pallotti Parish, with worship sites remaining open at both places.

The circle, it would seem, has been completed with the merger of the parishes and the return of the IHMs.
Two realities of life for women who were students at Marygrove College during the 1950s are the basis for this story. One was the fact that smoking was absolutely forbidden on campus. This regulation was so strictly enforced by dismissal from the college that even the most adventurous didn’t challenge it. Instead they found “hangouts” near the campus where they spent untold hours. The most popular—The College Coffee Cup, Lou’s Delicatessen, and George’s Drug Store—were located close to the front entrances on McNichols Road.

The other reality was that the Dean of Women, Sister Anna Marie Grix, was a formidable figure who was on top of things and didn’t miss much. The girls called her SAM, her initials.

At the time of this story, the College Coffee Cup had recently changed its owner-manager, whom we’ll call “Mac.” Anna Marie made a practice of periodically checking in with the owners of these hangouts about how the girls were behaving. On the day in question, Anna Marie walked through the front door of the Cup and made her way by the booths filled with Marygrove girls until she spotted Mac through the smoky haze. She introduced herself and explained that her practice was to check with the owners of establishments her “young women” frequented about how they were behaving. Mac enthusiastically replied that her girls were always well-behaved and that she should be proud of them. It was clear that Mac basically liked his customers from Marygrove; in fact, they were most of his business.

If he had left it at that, all would have been fine, but he had to add, “There is some guy named Sam that they talk about all the time. And they really tear him apart.”

Anna Marie smiled, thanked Mac for his feedback, and left. Interestingly, she never reprimanded the girls, although on occasion she did tell the story of her visit to the Cup.

The First Sister Henrietta

According to Mother Theresa Maxis’ notes, Kate Moroney, born in 1840 in Philadelphia, applied for entrance into the IHM congregation before the Reading Foundation. The reason for waiting to accept her is not known; the possibility of building a Pennsylvania foundation has been suggested.

In the first group to receive the habit in the new Reading novitiate on Dec. 8, 1859, Kate took the name Henrietta; she was professed one year later.

From the beginning, Henrietta was trusted with congregational responsibilities. In 1862, she was appointed sister assistant to the general superior, Mother Magdalen, which required this young sister to assume a share of the charges and responsibility of the head of the new foundation. In 1865 she replaced the superior of St. John Academy, Manayunk; in 1867 she became the superior of St. Mary, Lebanon; and, in 1869 she was transferred to St. Alphonsus Academy, Susquehanna. When Pennsylvania IHMs split into the Reading and Scranton communities, she chose to be a part of the Scranton group.

In 1871, she requested permission of Bishop Wood to join the parent community; and, on Nov. 29, she arrived in Monroe. A talented musician and very capable teacher, Henrietta became head of the music department at St. Mary Academy in 1872. She remained in this post until her death of what was described as lung congestion on Sept. 8, 1876 at the age of 36.

During her years as a religious she had been a member of each of the three IHM communities.