The Monroe IHMs planned many ways to celebrate their first 100 years. One was the creation of the centennial chalice and paten, beautiful vessels for use on special occasions. They were to be inaugurated at the liturgy celebrating the centennial in 1945. Although that plan didn’t materialize, they were completed the next year.

The delay occurred because World War II was still being waged in 1945 and the company hired was required to give preference to the projects it was doing for the armed services. The story of how the vessels evolved is an interesting one.

During the early 1940s, Sister Miriam Raymo was already thinking ahead to the celebration. On one occasion she showed Mother Ruth Hankerd jewelry made of gold, diamonds, and other gems that had been turned in for 100 years. Much of it had either belonged to members of the congregation before they entered the novitiate or came to them later as gifts or inheritance; some were donations from alums of IHM schools. Miriam proposed using them to have a special chalice and paten made for the 1945 celebration. Mother Ruth agreed.

Miriam consulted with the Gustave A. Fuchs Co., a religious supplies store in Detroit. The owner suggested the project be given to the Gorham Co., of Providence, R.I. Subsequently, Miriam, Fuchs and another sister went east to negotiate. Gorham agreed to take on the project.

Once images were selected for the surface of the chalice and paten, Sister Nazarita Joly, an IHM artist, sketched each image to exact size.

Then, Gorham artisans took over. By May 1945, Edward McAlice had completed the design of the vessels. A cross outlined by matched diamonds would be on the front panel of the chalice and the seal of the congregation on the rear panel. On the base there would be four images of the Blessed Virgin: the Immaculate Conception, the Annunciation, the Nativity and the Coronation of Mary.

As the process began, one artisan fashioned the various parts out of blocks of 18-karat gold and a spinner prepared the cup. A silversmith fashioned the base, shaft and calyx by hand from a flat sheet of gold. Next, a chaser brought into relief by hand the figures in the heavy gold base and fashioned the delicate tracery of the calyx, shaft and node. The paten was also hand-chased with the scene of the Last Supper. The final step was the studding of the chalice with 115 diamonds.

The chalice is 9 ½ inches high and 7 inches at the base. The paten is 6 inches in diameter. Made of 18-karat gold and studded with 115 diamonds, the vessels were valued at $25,000 in 1946.
IHMs’ Brief Encounter with a Saint

St. Katharine Drexel, Philadelphia heiress and philanthropist, founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in 1891 to bring the Gospel message to the poor, especially among black and Native American people. She made a visit to Monroe in November 1921, while on her way to Oklahoma City. Here, she and a companion were given hospitality by Mother Domitilla Donohue. Only a few brief notes document the visit, but they serve to show the warmth of Mother Katherine.

On Train Nov. 17

I think the Superior who started your College & Boys’ Institute must have been such a large hearted spouse, & He who inspired the good work will rejoice in perfecting it still more just as He did in enlarging & spreading out the first Institute of your congregation in which you so kindly gave us rooms.

You are dedicated, you & your sisters to the Immaculate Heart & your care of us suggests the heart of Mary. May she, dear Reverend Mother show you & yours, in return her own sweet maternal care.

M.M. Katharine

Appearances Can Be Deceiving

During the early 1960s, the sisters teaching at St. Frederick School in Pontiac did not have a car and often depended on borrowed cars and friends and relatives to get them where they were going. One of the sisters (Ann Dolores Weisner) was in need of transportation to Marygrove College in Detroit one Saturday to attend a meeting. As hard as she looked, she was not having much luck in securing it. Two high school boys, whom she taught, had said they would drive her, but she had to refuse their offer because the sisters were not allowed to drive alone in a car with "men."

The boys, whom I’ll call “Jason” and “Blake” for purposes of this story, really wanted to help her out and they had an idea of how to make it all work.

“Sister, we found you a ride with two girls. They’ll pick you up in front of the convent at noon. It would help if you could be ready and just come out when they get there.”

She was grateful. And, the boys got to work. They went to a resale shop and bought what might have been described in those days as “showgirl outfits.” They also picked up a couple of wigs, high-heeled shoes and some heavy makeup.

Sister was watching for her ride to arrive as promised and another sister kept her company while she waited. At the appointed time, the drivers showed up in front of the convent. She went out to the car and the two “girls” greeted her. One got out to hold the door open and help her into the back seat. It’s not entirely clear who she thought the two were. The sister at the front door of the convent waved good-bye, but she was so concerned about the appearances of the girls that she went to find the sister superior. “I’m really worried about Sister’s well-being. The two that picked her up looked like real floozies! They had very heavy makeup on, a lot of frizzy blond hair and spiked heels. Do you think we should notify the police?”

It is not known whether the superior knew something of what was going on. She did assure the fretting sister that she was confident that Ann Delores would get to her meeting and safely home. Women who would spend a whole Saturday afternoon providing transportation to and from Marygrove must be decent people.

At the end of the afternoon, Sister and her students, “Jason” and “Blake,” all made it back to Pontiac safely.

Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
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Photos of vessels by Nancy Uselton
Writer: Anne Crane, IHM

St. Katharine Drexel (1858—1955)
Image from a commemorative envelope marking her canonization Oct. 1, 2000

St. Frederick School
Pontiac, Michigan
Image from Class of 1961 25th Anniversary Booklet

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