

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

NAAS LOCAL HISTORY GROUP



PIONEERING NUNS

You will find peace and tranquillity in most graveyards but none more poignant than in a little burial ground enclosed within the grounds of St Mary's College in Naas. Here lie at rest those Sisters of Mercy who served the community in Naas for so many years and who made a huge contribution to education in the town.

However on looking closer there is a unique story of four courageous women who braved the wilds of Indian country in Arkansas to spread the Christian message. Volunteers were needed to go to the diocese of Little Rock Arkansas. Sr. Teresa Farrell, a native of Naas, and who had joined the sisters in 1841 was chosen as superior. She was joined by three other sisters, Sr. Agnes Greene, Sr. de Sales O'Keefe and Sr. Stanislaus Farrell.

The nuns left Naas in Nov.1850 and sailed from Dublin on the good ship "John O'Toole". They had a perilous journey when a severe storm broke out and they were lucky to survive the trip. They finally reached New Orleans on 23rd Nov 1851, the feast of the Espousels of the Blessed Virgin coinciding with a day of special devotion to their order. They then took passage on the steamer "Pontaic" up the Mississippi and arrived in Little Rock on 6th Feb. 1851.

It should be remembered that Naas was one of the first houses to send a colony to the New World. They lost no time in getting on with their work, visiting the sick and instructing adults. They opened a school with thirty five pupils, mostly non-catholic. Their religious garb was a source of great amusement among the local people who had never seen anything like it before. They continued with their educational and humanitarian work and opened a house at Fort Smith on the borders of Indian Country. This was followed by schools for both boys and girls. The four sisters who left Naas in 1850 suffered great hardships but continued with their great works of mercy in the local community for many more years. They all lie at rest in America a place they served so well.

One should not forget the great humanitarian spirit, the courage and dedication of these nuns who took their beliefs and values to help the disadvantaged people thousands of miles away in the wilds of America. A sole reminder to these great women is their head stone in the graveyard of St Mary's, lest we forget.