

## THE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE OF SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS

1840



✂ In this log chapel Mother Theodore Guérin and her companion Sisters made their first visit to the Blessed Sacrament at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods on October 22, 1840. (Courtesy of Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods Archives)

The arrival of Mother Theodore Guérin and her five companions at their destination in the United States revealed what life in their new home would be like. Conditions were primitive, humbling, perhaps even shocking to them. After a rough journey through swollen river waters and muddy trails, the Sisters stepped from their stagecoach into a dense forest; no village, not even a house in sight. The chapel to which they were led had an altar made of two planks driven into the ground with a plank placed across them.

From that humble origin, a vibrant congregation of women religious was given life sustained through Mother Theodore's foresight, legacy and energy that continues to motivate the sisters who have followed her footsteps.

The French Sisters immediately began to study English. They worked to clear a parcel of land for vegetable gardens. With assistance from the bishop of Vincennes, they negotiated with a local family to purchase a small cabin for their motherhouse and use the structure they were building to establish an academy for girls.

The first student at the academy arrived for enrollment July 4, 1841. The Sisters' reputation as outstanding educators grew, and more requests came for their assistance in founding and staffing other schools. Sisters would eventually staff schools across Indiana, and extend their ministry into Illinois, Massachusetts, California, Florida, Texas, Oklahoma and other states. The Sisters of Providence were the first women's congregation of the United States to establish a mission in China, and they formerly had missions in Peru and Antigua. Currently missions are in Taiwan, China and the Philippines.



✂ Sisters of Providence prepare a meal in a foods class during a 1950 summer session at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College. (Courtesy of Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods Archives)