How did it happen that the community found the ideal place for a Motherhouse in the tiny town of O’Fallon?
And, once we were here, how did the property develop?

In 1869, eighteen German families in the O’Fallon area appealed to Rev. Peter Richard Kenrick, Archbishop of St. Louis, for a church and school of their own, having grown weary of traveling either to All Saints in St. Peters or St. Paul in St. Paul. The Archbishop turned the matter over to the German Vicar General, Msgr. Henry Muehlsiepen who approved their request. **In September, 1871, the new church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in O’Fallon, Missouri, was dedicated.** A week after the dedication of the church, the Catholic school opened with twenty pupils attending. The children were taught by a German-speaking lay teacher. This was only a temporary arrangement, since the pastor, was searching for a teaching order of nuns to come to staff the school.

Meanwhile, our sisters had come to America in 1870 and had settled in Belle Prairie, now Piopolis, Illinois. But when Mother Augusta found Bishop Baltes’ restrictions unacceptable, with the help of Msgr. Muehlsiepen, she brought the community to St. Agatha’s parish in south St. Louis. **The Sisters moved into St. Agatha in February 1873** and began to teach in the school. St. Agatha soon proved to be inadequate to house the 32 sisters. And more sisters were coming shortly.

In Germany, laws were issued, prohibiting all religious schools and missions, and as a result the Convent at Gurtweil was dissolved by government decree, forcing our sisters to leave the country.

Mother Augusta needed to go back to Germany, but before she went, **sometime in the spring of 1873, the decision was made to erect the motherhouse away from St. Agatha.**

Msgr. Muehlsiepen assisted Mother Augusta to locate a site for the motherhouse in O’Fallon, Missouri.
1873: The Assumption parish gave the sisters a piece of land across from the present property. This parcel was considered to be too small and was sold.

Msgr. Muehlsiepen selected a better site and oversaw its purchase from Mr. Theo Kulage of St. Louis.

In addition, a Mr. Engelberts Gehrs of O’Fallon sold property with a log house on it to Msgr. Muhlsiepen who in turn deeded or sold it to St. Mary’s Institute in 1880. This formed the nucleus of our present property.

In the fall 1873, Sr. Camilla Oberle and Sr. Blanche (most likely Mother Augusta’s niece, Blanka Blank) moved into the log house in O’Fallon [torn down in 1902] and immediately organized Assumption School along traditional Catholic school guidelines.

Two more sisters [their names have not been recorded] came to live in the log house. The erection of what is now the north wing of the motherhouse (Villa Theresa) was begun in spring 1874. These two sisters helped prepare the ground which had to be cleared and leveled since the area had originally been used as a brick-yard. They supervised (and helped build) the convent, overseeing the work and cultivating a little garden, whose fresh vegetables greatly pleased Mother Augusta.

Work was begun in August 1876 on a new wing of the convent for the Ecclesiastical Embroidery Department and a girls’ boarding school. [In 1882 when the Schiller residence was obtained, the school was transferred to St. Louis under the title St. Elizabeth Institute and later renamed named St. Elizabeth Academy.]

1886: Mother Armella bought the north-western part of our present property. This property [about 2 ½ acres] extended from the main drive to about 20 feet north of the old Lourdes grotto, and from Main street to the northwest corner of our cemetery.
1889: The public school grounds [about an acre], together with the school-house, were purchased. Mother Armella arranged this little woods and the public school property into a park, had walks laid out and a lake put in which furnished the water for our laundry for over 30 years.

In October 1923, this lake was drained and converted into a sunken garden, in the midst was erected an image of Christ the King and High Priest on the cross in the center of a water fountain. Much later, in 1963, the sunken garden was filled in and converted into a park, as it is today. Now it is the site of the new Lourdes Grotto.

1899 St. Mary’s Institute purchased “Northland,” an area of 40 acres. Interpreting the language of the deed, it would seem that this is the area north of the Grotto but not contiguous with Main Street.

February 1903: West wing of the Motherhouse was erected.

1908: St. Mary’s Institute bought a parcel of land of about 20 acres. On this land stood or was built St. Joseph’s Home which served first as an orphan home [1908-July, 1914], then guest house and workmen’s quarters. It was torn down around 1991.

May 1925: Groundbreaking for new Chapel.

June 1925: Building of cloister corridor connecting the central building with new chapel, also building of the infirmary on first floor (“Sacred Heart Hall”).


Sometime around 1926-1927: Mother Wilhelmine authorized the purchase of land from the Ahrens family in the southwest corner [between the railroad tracks and St. Joseph Chapel] of our property. In turn, three acres of land bordering the orchard to the north beyond St. Joseph's Home was sold to the Ahrens.

1930-1931: The novitiate building was built on the land purchased from the Ahrens.
June 1949: The water tower was moved from its original location to the railroad tracks, in anticipation of the construction of the east annex. This building was begun in September, finished in 1950. In the annex are (were) the present dining room; above the dining room, the former community room, now the Precious Blood chapel; the former kitchen; above the kitchen, the former Infirmary on 2nd & 3rd floors; these latter are now apartments.

1954: Construction of the new laundry and gym

May 1962: Dedication of St. Joseph Chapel annex and St. Mary’s College

March 1997: three buildings [the Novitiate, College and Gym] on south side of our campus and eight acres of land were sold to the town of O’Fallon.

2009-2010: The transformation of the motherhouse into Villa Theresa Senior Apartments and Villa Theresa Haven (Skilled Care—now Mount Carmel Senior Living O’Fallon).

St. Mary’s Institute continues to retain ownership of the Precious Blood Center which includes St. Joseph Chapel and the courtyard between the chapel and City Hall, our administration buildings (the old aspirant and novitiate dining rooms, kitchen, and scullery — the Archives records are housed below the old kitchen); above is the Ecclesiastical Art Dep’t — and the adjacent building (former Sacred Heart Hall) is used for meeting and guest rooms. We also retain ownership of our cemetery, and the north and east sections of our property, twenty-seven undeveloped acres.

AND THAT BRINGS US TO 2016

February 1, 2016: Mount Carmel Senior Living took over the management of Villa Theresa, Villa Theresa Apartments and The Inn at Villa Theresa. In April 2016, Mount Carmel purchased Villa Theresa Haven and The Inn.