Now at this time, Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census of the whole world to be taken. This census—the first—took place while Qurinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to his own town to be registered. So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee and traveled up to Judaea, to the town of David called Bethlehem since he was of David's house and line, in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to a son, her first born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because "THERE WAS NO ROOM FOR THEM AT THE INN." Luke 2:1-7

[This bulletin is a compilation of two articles written by Sr. Virginia Volkerding: "No Room in the Inn." Archives Bulletin, December, 1986, and "Buildings in Our History," March 27, 1993. Sister Virginia’s words are enclosed in quotation marks. The rest of the text was supplied by the editor.]

“O'Fallon Precious Blood Sisters, in their history, have shared in the mystery of 'There was no room for them at the inn.' At STEINERBERG we used an existing parish building. It proved to be inadequate.... We were overcrowded, we sickened, we were not favored by the Swiss government, and we found it necessary to leave for the sake of life.”

“During Christmas Week of 1847 an advance group of ten Sisters was preparing to leave Steinerberg. The DIARY records the following entry:

‘12/30/1847 Ten Sisters from St. Anne left for the Alsace in order to find a place to live. Our Spiritual Father had already for some time been making contacts in the Alsace because he was aware that we would be driven out of Switzerland. He had written to the priests with whom he was well-acquainted and who wished that the Sisters of the Precious Blood would expand into the Alsace. These priests informed him that if the Sisters were driven from Switzerland, they should just come; the priests would provide. Mother Theresa did not hesitate long after getting this information but immediately sent ten Sisters on their way, for she said that there was no future for them in Switzerland. She wanted to send a few on ahead to prepare a place for the rest.'”
“It is significant that the ten Sisters left for The Alsace, not for Ottmarsheim, which, of course was in the Alsace. Their destination was Blodelsheim; the pastor of the town knew Mother Theresa from the time she had made a Mission there prior to her entrance at Steinerberg. On the way, now, the Sisters passed through Ottmarsheim to attend Mass. Here they were greeted by the pastor, Father Behe, who invited them to remain. The pastor at Blodelsheim had contacted him and told him there was opposition in the town to their coming because there were so many poor people and no vacant houses. In other words, ‘There was no room’ in Blodelsheim.”

**Ottmarsheim** did have room for them. There were “some old monastic buildings vacated during the French Revolution some fifty years earlier. There was the abbey church now being used as the parish church, and there was the friendly Thuett family who would lend their home.”

“A convent was built eventually, but for one group things just did not feel right. The thrust of the ministry to the needy at Gurtweil, and the call of the homeland uprooted them once again.”

In December of 1857, six Sisters left for **Gurtweil** in response to Rev. Kessler’s request for them to open a home for orphans and neglected children. “In Gurtweil we occupied a building formerly used, in succession, as a monastery, a military hospital, a residence of the Grand Duke, and as a factory for dyeing cloth. Our Sisters spent ten good years there.” The school was a success and the work of embroidering church vestments began there.

Then, in 1870, the community “confronted the infamous May Laws of Chancellor Bismarck whose political career rested on a demand of loyalty to the newly created German Empire; to him the loyalty of Catholics to Rome was suspect. There simply was ‘no room’ for our Sisters in the land of their birth so they moved on to the new world.”

Arriving in New York in mid-February, the sisters began the long overland journey.

In Vincennes, Indiana, they received a very chilly welcome from the pastor who disapproved of their destination, Belle Prairie. No room in his heart for them there.

Once they arrived in **Belle Prairie**, Illinois, the pastor of St. John the Baptist parish, Father Blaise Winterhalter, and the people greeted the sisters warmly and made a home for them.
“Mother Augusta Volk confronted a serious challenge when Bishop Baltes laid down conditions for remaining in the Alton Diocese. In her judgment, it was better to leave than to accept his inflexible conditions. Again the community began its search for ‘room.’”

With the aid of Msgr. Henry Muehlsiepen, the Vicar General for the Archdiocese of St. Louis, Mother Augusta moved the community to St. Louis; Msgr. Muehlsiepen found a place for them in St. Agatha’s parish where they staffed the parish grade school. “Here we lived in the priest’s house where many years later some of our early correspondence was found. Some slept on the desks of a school building no longer there; some lived for a while with the Ursuline Sisters. So the first motherhouse actually had no building.”

Through no one’s fault, the situation again became one of “no room.” The living quarters at St. Agatha were inadequate to house the number of sisters; they needed a larger place. In 1873, once more with Msgr. Muehlsiepen’s help, a site was found in O’Fallon Missouri, across from the German-speaking parish of Assumption. Two sisters taught in the Assumption parish school and two oversaw the building of a permanent motherhouse. By 1875 the motherhouse was ready for occupancy.

“Here we took root, and grew and flourished. We made beautiful liturgical music, cooked good meals, nursed the sick; and we moved beyond to teach children, to minister to orphans, the sick, the elderly, the poor—and the buildings grew with us: from the north wing to the central wing, to the west wing, to the novitiate, to the new chapel, to the college, to the chapel annex, to St. Joseph Hall.”

“These buildings which house us so graciously have undergone much change to accommodate our changes and adaptations.
Just think about the kitchen location, the community room, the dining room, the chapel, the administrative offices. Stretch your memories to other changes.”

At one point [in the 1970s], once again there was no room, but not for any lack of hospitality—the Motherhouse was crowded to overflowing. What had been dormitories in the novitiate building became double-occupancy bedrooms for the academy and college faculty. Permanent residents had beds in the transients’ large dorm. Some sisters lived in rented quarters in the O’Fallon area. Then, gradually, over the years the crowds thinned out.

St. Mary’s College (1988) and St. Mary’s Academy (1990) closed. For a while, St. Charles Community College used SMC’s facilities, but moved out when their own campus was completed. Now the community found itself with too much room. In 1997, these now-empty buildings—the Academy (formerly the novitiate building), the College and the Gym—were sold to the city of O’Fallon to be renovated as City Hall and the Police Station.

In the Motherhouse itself, empty spaces accumulated as fewer sisters lived here. What to do with all that room? Several leadership teams did much research into possible uses of the space. Finally, in 2007-2008, the community contracted with McEagle Properties and St. Andrew’s Management Services to transform the motherhouse buildings into senior-living apartments and a skilled nursing facility. The result was

**Villa Theresa Apartments**

**and**

**Villa Theresa Haven.**

In the 139 years since the sisters moved into the Motherhouse in 1875, the community, so often homeless for the first 50 years of its existence, now finds itself able to offer a home to the many who want to come and live with us.

**There IS ROOM AT THE INN**

We are providing it. And all are welcome.