The Australian
Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4437

Frayne, Mother Ursula

(1816 - 1885)

Born	18161005, Dublin Ireland
Died	18850609, Fitzroy Victoria Australia
Occupation	Educator, Religious Leader, Religious Sister

Summary

In 1845, Ursula Frayne, along with five other Sisters of Mercy and one postulant, sailed for Western Australia with the goal, among other things, of establishing the first Mercy school in Australia. This they did on 2 February, 1846, with planks, bricks and packing cases as furniture. Instead of the 4,000 children they were promised when they left Ireland, only one child turned up for school on the day it opened. By August, however, enrolments stood at 100.

In 1849 she opened the first secondary school in Western Australia, a ‘select’ fee-paying school catering for an almost exclusively non-Catholic clientele. Its success determined the pattern of future Mercy expansion, which was to establish, almost simultaneously and often within the same building, three separate schools: a ‘select’ fee-paying school, a primary school and an infants’ school. By 1856 the schools of the Sisters of Mercy in Western Australia were flourishing.

Her reputation as an educator spread to other colonies and in 1857 she accepted an invitation from Bishop James Gould to found a school in Victoria. There she established the Sisters of Mercy as the first teaching nuns in Victoria. She oversaw the development of a boarding and day school for girls, together with two primary schools and a domestic training school for orphans. She founded the St Vincent de Paul’s Orphanage at South Melbourne and managed it until the Christian Brothers took over the boys’ section, leaving the girls under the care of her Sisters. She established a country foundation at Kilmore in 1875.

Published resources

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Book
Ursula Frayne: a biography, Killerby, Catherine Kovesi, 1996

Resource Section
Frayne, Ursula (1816-1885), Palmer, Imelda, 2006,
http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A040239b.htm

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