



## Research Reveals Many Sacred Heart Secrets

*By Katie Love, Marketing and Communications Assistant*

Sister Barbaralie Stiefermann's forthcoming book, *Sacred Heart Sanitarium and Its Many Faces*, will take readers on a journey through time as it examines the School Sisters of St. Francis' history as it relates to the facility known today as Sacred Heart. The title of the book is apt because the original facility, which opened in 1893, has continued to evolve over the years to meet the needs of the times.



Sister Barbaralie began her research on Sacred Heart Sanitarium (SHS) in 2019 and began writing during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. She said she frantically started writing for fear she might succumb to the coronavirus herself. She wanted to be sure to complete this history of another health care story that began over a century ago.

Fortunately, she had already completed the research, so she was able to engage in a write-a-thon while simultaneously writing a journal on life during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sister Barbaralie has previously written three books, including a memoir and biographies of Mother Stanislaus and Mother Corona.

Sister Barbaralie states that the catalyst for writing *Sacred Heart Sanitarium and Its Many Faces* dates back to the first day she entered the community. After seeing SHS for the first time as an

aspirant in 1946, “the building mesmerized me by its beauty as well as its sense of majesty and mystery.”

Further inspiration for writing the book was derived from an image of SHS’s indoor horse track (below), which was discovered amidst some of her research in the Archives. This fascinating



ATHLETIC FIELD, SUSPENDED RUNNING TRACK. TALL WOOD FLOOR FOR HORSEBACK RIDING

image uncovered one of the many facets of the building no one seemed to know about and thus fueled Sister Barbaralie to begin her story on the facility’s history.

The Archives served as her main source of information for this book. The most challenging aspect of the entire project was that it didn’t offer human-interest stories regarding SHS.

“We learn lessons from stories told and that data is what makes history,” she said. “There

unfortunately are no human-interest stories in this book—only facts and timelines from our Archives. But this is also what makes the book so intriguing: Not a lot of people know the many things this building was, or the tremendous legacies that have been left behind.”

When asked who some of the most fascinating characters are that have emerged from writing this book and what makes them so interesting, Sister Barbaralie did not hesitate.

“Mother Alexia,” she said, “for her courage, strength, and humility in the undertaking of Sacred Heart Sanitarium, and her ability to follow through with her plans for the facility. Gospel people are basically indestructible—that’s who I think Mother Alexia was.” She also credits Mother Alfons, “for her dedication to take over and run the facility based off of the needs of the times; and Dr. Stephen Stack, for his competency and persistence through such challenging times.”

This book is great for anyone wanting to learn more about our history. It includes many photos, and this is helpful for those who are visual learners, as the book can easily be read through its photographs.

Sister Barbaralie is hopeful that the book will be published and available for purchase within the next year and that she can share it with our community. She feels it would be a great gift for the congregation’s sesquicentennial celebration in 2024, which will mark 150 years for all who are a part of this lovely religious family. Sister Barbaralie states, “The community’s fidelity to our charism is found in the Sacred Heart story.”