

## Sister Mary Rose Lynch

Catherine Lynch was the daughter of Margaret and Richard Lynch of St. Paul's Parish in Dublin. No information is available of her early years, but it can be assumed that she received a good education, since she was assigned to teach in pension schools operated by the Sisters of Mercy.

Catherine entered the Convent of Mercy at Baggot Street on July 3, 1838 and was accepted into the novitiate by Catherine McAuley on January 21, 1839 as Sister Mary Rose. She was a novice when Marianne Creedon entered the community in July of 1839, and from February to December 1840, they were in the novitiate together, with Sister Mary Cecilia Marmion as their novice mistress.

Sister Mary Rose was professed on December 15, 1840 and within a couple of weeks, was sent on the new foundation to Birr in central Ireland, where she was named assistant to the superior, Sister Mary Aloysius Scott. Deep divisions in the town of Birr between a heretical sect called the Crottyites and those who remained orthodox made it a very difficult and demanding mission, but Sister M. Rose seemed to have proved herself there.

Since Catherine was accustomed to spend a month with each new foundation, she would have been able to observe and inter-relate with Sister Mary Rose during the time she spent with her in community and in ministry. After her time in Birr, Catherine mentioned Sister Mary Rose in several of her letters. From these references, we learn of Sister Mary Rose's diminutive stature, her ready wit and her sense of humour. Perhaps it was Catherine's personal experience of Sister Mary Rose at Birr that led her to recommend her for the Newfoundland mission.

Sister Mary Rose returned to Baggot Street in February of 1842, remaining there until she, along with Sisters M. Francis and M. Ursula, boarded the *Sir Walter Scott*, bound for Newfoundland on May 2, 1842. At this time, Sister M. Rose had only been professed a year and a half and was likely totally unprepared for what awaited her in St. John's – the rigors of a harsh climate, the state of the hovels they visited, the poverty and disease encountered on a daily basis, the ever-present danger of contagion, the distances they had to walk in difficult and sometimes treacherous terrains, the total separation from all that was familiar.

As a Sister of Mercy in a mission land, Sister Mary Rose would have expected to meet poverty and its accompanying misery in any ministry to the poor. Still, walking the paths and laneways of Birr and Dublin could never compare with trudging up and down the steep hills of St. John's pelted by sleet and snow, or struggling through the huge snowdrifts that blocked the byways and doorways of the town. The loneliness of such a distant mission, removed from family, friends and homeland would likely have brought a sense of loss and isolation as well.

One strand of oral tradition suggests that Sister Mary Rose was the designated leader of the Newfoundland foundation. This is supported by the fact that her signature is found at the end of the first financial statement of the mission, covering the period from May to

October 1843. This is recorded in the Mercy Convent Accounts book, which is preserved in the Archives of the congregation in St. John's.

As a member of the first teaching staff at Our Lady of Mercy School, Sister Mary Rose's talents would have been utilized to the full and her contribution valued. But six months after school opened, she and Sister M. Ursula left the mission to return to Ireland.

Sister M. Rose remained at Baggot Street in Dublin for four years after returning from Newfoundland. In 1847 she went on the foundation to Dundalk, Ireland, and in 1859 she volunteered for the mission in Geelong, Australia, but returned after two years. Her subsequent history is a sad one, and after many years of illness, isolation and moving from place to place, Sister Mary Rose died in a hospital in Toulouse, France, on August 6, 1890.

## **Standing On Their Shoulders**

Stories of the "Irish" Sisters of Mercy in Newfoundland

**By** Charlotte Fitzpatrick, rsm