

Lewiston History Mysteries

Stella Niagara Celebrates 100 Years of Education and Service

Little Chapel on the River cited as location of miracles

If you've driven down Lower River Road (Rt. 18F), you have probably seen the small chapel that sits near the river, across the road from Stella Niagara. There is no access road to it and it's not open to the public. However, there are some amazing stories about it.



Amazing stories about about
Stella's Little Chapel

When the sisters came into possession of it, they found it in a very dilapidated condition. They wanted to turn it into a little sanctuary. They contacted a friend, Brother Stamen for help. Meanwhile, a Mr. Heusinger, a mason living in Buffalo, who was ill, promised that if he recovered he would build a chapel in honor of Our Blessed Lady. He was cured, and as Brother Stamen told him of the sisters' wish, he transformed the old ruin into a pretty little chapel.

But there are other stories as well. The small chapel has survived several Niagara River ice jams, the most well-known being in 1955. Pictures appeared in papers all over the country. When ice threatened to destroy the chapel many of the nuns, and sometimes the students, would go out and stand above the hill and pray for St. Anthony's intercession to protect the chapel. That year, huge slabs of ice surrounded the chapel, mere inches from its walls -- and yet, the ice never touched it and it remained unscathed. Inside the chapel there is some sgraffito artwork and a part of it depicts the ice jam story.

Stella Dedicates "Peace Site" and Hosts Conference Center



Early on, families and children enjoyed the sisters' hospitality each summer as they fled the heat of nearby cities. Retreats were offered at Stella for many years and in 1974, The Center of Renewal, opened as a retreat center. Today, it is a conference and retreat venue. Stella has also been dedicated as a "Peace Site."

In the past, the sisters have planted vineyards, orchards, and gardens, and even raised animals. Today there is an emphasis on caring for the environment. They say, "Like Francis of Assisi and Magdalen Damen, we trust God's goodness and providence, living the gospel in our time with gentle courtesy toward all creation."



Stella Niagara in 1908: Massive structure paid for with nickels and dimes from needlework and parish bazaars.

Located on Lower River Road, Stella Niagara is one of the most impressive architectural structures in Western New York. It consists of five floors, and is home to 50 sisters, a private school and a conference/ hospitality center. It is the Eastern U.S. headquarters for the Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity, an international congregation with a presence in 11 countries.

After the sisters had been living in Buffalo for over 25 years, they moved to Lewiston in 1908. Quickly constructed, the cornerstone for Stella was laid in June the same year. Dedication ceremonies were held on October 4, 1909.

From the beginning the place has been known as Stella Niagara, a name suggested by a Jesuit friend who was inspired by the old Latin hymn, Ave Maris Stella.

A school had been part of the plans from the beginning, and in September, 1908, four boys and two girls became the first registrants. Today, the school offers Montessori (ages 3-5), Kindergarten, and elementary classes to 8th grade. You can learn more about Stella here: www.franciscans-stella-niagara.org

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Stella Tour Scheduled for October Will Provide Rare Glimpse of Interior Design and Architecture

The Historical Association of Lewiston is sponsoring a fascinating tour at Stella Niagara on Monday, October 22, 2007, at 6:30pm. Make plans to be there. The tour is free and open to the public. The tour will begin at the rear of the building at the main entrance.



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