

Kentucky's Nuns: Providing educational, health and social services since 1812

Some of the earliest communities of religious women in the U.S. were established in Kentucky. These communities established schools throughout the state, especially in rural areas, providing health care and social services to communities in need. While their impact is evident as early as 1812, many religious orders still remain active in the state today.

The Sisters of Loretto, founded near Bardstown in 1812, is considered one of the first Native American communities of religious women. What began as a solitary log cabin where children could learn to read and write developed into a desire among the teachers to become sisters and form a religious community. More than 40 schools were established by the order in Kentucky by 1900, from Owensboro to Maysville.

The Sisters of Charity of Nazareth of Nelson County opened a one-room school for girls in 1814. By 1858, they served 13 schools, two orphanages, the St. Joseph Infirmary in Louisville and also worked as nurses during the Civil War.

The Ursulines, founded in Brescia, Italy in 1535, established a community in Kentucky in 1858. They had started Ursuline Academy in Louisville and opened five elementary schools in Kentucky by 1868. Since its establishment, the Kentucky Ursulines have served in 300 schools and ministries in Kentucky and 25 other states and countries.

Sisters in Eastern Kentucky have also impacted the state through their establishment of health care centers and educational outposts.

Oral history interviews with and about religious sisters in Kentucky can be found at <http://passtheword.ky.gov>.

"Pass the Word" is a discovery tool for oral histories throughout the state of Kentucky. To learn more about this topic, visit <http://passtheword.ky.gov>.

