

The Beginning of The Little Franciscan Sisters of Mary Home for the Aged

The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi

The Franciscan Sisters

The French Orphanage on Bleeker Street

The St Francis of Assisi French Orphanage on Bleeker Steet

The Little Franciscans of Mary

The Third Order of St. Francis

The Little Franciscan Sisters of Mary

The Little Franciscan Sisters Home for the Aged

There are two different versions to the beginnings of the ‘**Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi**’, the newspaper accounts related to them at that time, and the history of the order referenced in the Catholic Free Press story called, Sacred History - **Little Franciscans of Mary** - By William T. Clew

Newspaper accounts during the 1890s referred to the ‘**Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi**’ as a group of young, oblate sisters. The ‘Sisters of St. Francis’ had eight sisters of the order and had two houses in New England. The head house was in a Fall River orphanage and the other at the South Worcester Orphanage. In June of 1890 the remaining Sisters of St. Francis discontinued their house in Fall River, MA and Worcester became their permanent house. Not being professional nuns of the catholic church became an integral part of the dramatic episodes that helped change the course of its history. The **Third Order of St. Francis** was never mentioned in any newspapers searched.

The story in the Catholic Free Press said, according to the history of the order two teachers at St. Anne’s Parish in the Manchaug section of Sutton, MA took simple religious vows and wore the habit of the **Third Order of St. Francis**. Father Brouillet asked these ladies to teach and care for the new school and orphanage he was building in South Worcester. He recruited more young ladies into the order, including an 18-year-old **Marie Louise Rondeau** who became the order’s first noviate, taking the name **Sister Marie-Joseph**. She would soon become the superior of the order. You can read the story in our PDF file called the ‘Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi’. The story also said that Fr. Brouillet sent some of these noviate sisters to an orphanage in Fall River, Ma. This could not have happened as he had no jurisdiction there.

Note: Only one newspaper clipping I found, dated August 5, 1891, affirmed this information when it talked about Sister Francis d' Assissi, known as Julia Charpentier, who had come from Manchaug and once had charge of the South Worcester Orphanage.

Reverend Father Charles Zotique Durocher came to Worcester in late summer of 1889 from Ottawa, Canada where he was the purser of a college. He called upon Reverend Father Joseph Brouillet in a very destitute condition. Father Durocher told him he was very anxious to get something to do immediately, as his widowed mother was entirely dependent upon him for support. He listened to his story with a very willing ear and invited him to stay for a while in his house and gave Father Durocher money to send for his mother. Father Brouillet gave Father Durocher a place among his curates, at a salary of \$500 a year, and soon put him in charge of the orphanage as chaplain. He also gave Father Durocher a house nearby the new orphanage.

You've heard the stories – NOW
'Here's the Rest of the Story'

According to my merging of news articles and other historical references.

August 7, 1889, brings about **the founding of the South Worcester Orphanage**. This orphans' home was built at the corners of **Southgate and Grand** streets in South Worcester by the Church of Notre Dame for their French parishioners. St. Anne's Church and parochial school were already in this area. **Reverend Father Joseph Brouillet** asked the '**Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi**', a group of young, oblate sisters to take charge of the newly build orphanage and school. In August of 1889 we find the first of many eye-popping news articles about **Reverend Father Charles Zotique Durocher** who became the **first chaplain** of the new South Worcester Orphanage.

Everything seemed to be going well until the following year. Father Durocher began to grow careless regarding his duties as chaplain. Before this he went to Father Brouillet every day and asked his opinion regarding what should be done, and Father Brouillet gave him counsel in all these months. He began to furnish his home in an elaborate manner and sent the bills to Father Brouillet who refused to pay them, claiming they were Father Durocher's personal bills, and he alone must pay them. From August to October of 1890 Father Durocher's actions grew stranger to him.

More trouble ensued when Fr. Durocher tried to run the orphanage to suit himself. He turned over the property he received from Father Brouillet to the orphanage and made it responsible for the bills. He then encouraged the 'sisters' to incorporate the orphanage without Father Brouillet's consent or knowledge and did other things that were in direct opposition to Father Brouillet's will. He finally tried to carry things with such a high hand that Father Brouillet discharged him. About this time, he learned that Fr. Durocher was expelled from the college, where he also has some trouble.

As time slipped into 1891 the discharged Fr. Durocher kept inciting the oblate sisters against Father Brouillet. This was an easy matter, as some of them were already dissatisfied with some of the pastor's regulations. They were not professional nuns, but novices referred only as a body of women banded together for charitable purposes. There was only one professed nun at the orphanage. An

August 5, 1891, article said Sister Francoise d'Assissi nee Julia Charpentier was the Franciscan sister in charge of the South Worcester Orphanage. One of the actions to which the 'sisters' took umbrage was Father Brouillet's displacement of their first superior and putting at their head an older woman. Some of the 'sisters' went to Springfield to see the bishop, but he refused to settle the matter one way or the other, as they were not professional nuns.

According to the history of the order two women from Manchaug were the original sisters of the order. Apparently, they both were having problems with the situations unfolding at the South Worcester Orphanage. One day the Sister Superior didn't show up for Mass. Her habit was left on her bed, and she just left the institution behind. The bishop had to discharge the second who apparently had conflicts with the new novices so he could not allow her stay.

In mid-January 1891 a scene was caused, when some of the women from the order decided to move their order to a new location on Bleeker Street, taking furnishings and things with them. Their work was well under way when they were stopped by Father Brouillet and Deputy Sheriff Jandron. Besides this abandonment of the orphans by the oblate sisters Fr. Durocher had also attached the orphanage to a lawsuit in hopes of recovering money which he claims was due him for extra work as chaplain of the institution. Many believed that Fr. Durocher and some of the younger women were at the bottom of the trouble. Court room scenes eventually played out over the following years.

NOTE: Other writings indicate that Fr. Durocher stayed with the revolting oblate sisters and became the chaplain at the new **Orphans' Home of Saint Francis of Assissi**, which lasted from 1891 through 1897.

In a January 15, 1891, news article Father Brouillet stated that the oblate sisters who left the institution would never be allowed to return. Those who remained received the assistance of the ladies of Notre Dame Church, and he would provide for them in every way. He further said those who had departed broke a written agreement with him. When he established the orphanage, he placed these women in charge, promising to care for them while they lived, if they attended faithfully to their duties. They had only themselves to blame for their predicament. He continued to say the institution would not be allowed to break up keeping it under its present management until he could secure the services of the **Grey Nuns of Montreal**. (This is the first time the 'Grey Nuns of Montreal' were mentioned.)

On January 31, 1891, the Grey Nuns of Montreal arrived in Worcester. The doors to the orphanage were opened on February 1, 1891, and the Grey Nuns officially took responsibility of the orphans' home. By the end of May there were 58 girls and 55 boys, the children's ages ranging from 1 year to 12 among the boys, and 16 among the girls. There were only nine grey nuns to oversee these inmates with more ordered down from Montreal. The buildings were getting overcrowded and there was no play area for the children. New accommodations were already being planned.

It was reported in later years, and our book, that an agreement was readily made by all parties. Not so, as the controversy continued for many years, both in and out of court and the Catholic Dioceses. An article in March of 1895 reported about the opposition many French people of Worcester had against Father Brouillet. However, in 1896 a decision made by the Catholic prelate, Cardinal Sartolli said the St. Francis of Assisi French Orphanage on Bleeker Street was to disband and return to their headquarters at Bale St. Paul, Canada stating that their work conflicted with that of the St. Anne's French-Canadian Orphanage at 133 Granite Street. The issue went all the way to Rome before the decree became final.

They were allowed to stay in Worcester to care only for the aged and not the young orphans who were transferred to the Granite Street Orphanage. They became known as the Petites Soeurs Franciscaines de Marie (**the Little Franciscan Sisters of Mary**). They regrouped and opened **The Franciscan Home for the Aged**. A Newspaper clipping 1904-03-02_5 mentions the purchase of land on Thorne Street opposite to Bleeker Street, thus encompassing the block. The Little Franciscans of Mary persevered and continued to operate the home until 2000, when Sister Jacqueline Alix, administrator, retired. The sisters moved out of the home in 2006. Since 2009 it has been owned and operated by an affiliate of Landmark Solutions.

This story was posted in the Catholic Free Press

Sacred History

Little Franciscans of Mary

By William T. Clew

A memorial wall was unveiled June at the St. Francis Rehabilitation and Nursing Center to honor the founders of the center, the Little Franciscans of Mary, a religious order with its roots in Manchaug and Worcester. Superior General Francoise Duchesne, pfm, of the order's Mother House in Bale St. Paul, Quebec, Can., spoke to members of the order from Worcester, Maine and Quebec, priests from the Worcester Diocese, St. Francis Center officials, workers, residents, and friends.

In remarks in French, translated into English by Sister Rena Mae Gagnon, pfm, of Worcester, Sister Francoise said the theme of the gathering was "keeping the memory alive."

She said it was in Worcester that "the sacred history of the **Little Franciscans of Mary** had its beginnings in 1889. It is here that the foundresses, those 11 courageous women with generous hearts, placed the 'cornerstone' of the congregation. "In Canada, in Quebec and here in the United States they built a spiritual edifice which is still the pride of those who followed after them and all of those who spread the love of God in collaboration with the local churches through the education of youth, the loving care of the elderly and the compassionate care of the sick."

The establishment of the order was not easy. It was accomplished only after disagreements with a pastor in Worcester who first helped them get started, a bishop who first approved the forming of the order and then ordered them out of the diocese, the loss of the first two sisters around whom the order was born and a change in their mission from running an orphanage to caring for the elderly.

According to a history of the order, two teachers at St. Anne's Parish in the Manchaug section of Sutton sought permission from **Father Alexis Delphos, pastor of St. Denis Parish in East Douglas**, of which St. Anne's was a mission, to taking simple religious vows and wear the habit of the **Third Order of St. Francis**.

He granted that permission. They received the habit of the Third Order of St.

Francis, took vows for one year and continued to teach. Father Delphos soon got together with Father Joseph Brouillet, pastor of Notre Dame des Canadiens Parish in Worcester, who wanted to build a school and orphanage in Worcester. Father Brouillet also wanted a religious order to teach and care for the orphans and elderly people in the growing Franco-American community in Worcester. Thus began the Third Order of St. Francis.

He spoke to Mr. and Mrs. Remi Rondeau about recruiting their 18-year-old daughter Marie Louise. She became the order's first novice, taking the name Sister Marie-Joseph.

Father Brouillet recruited and trained new members of the order over the next year, according to a history of the order. He was Father Superior of the order. He named his assistant at Notre Dame des Canadiens, Father Zotique Durocher, as their chaplain.

Father Brouillet started an orphanage in 1889 in a three-story building at Grand and Southgate streets. Within four weeks it had 20 orphans and two elderly women needing complete care, according to a history of the order. Eight novices had to care for them and clean, cook and provide clothes, furniture and keep the building in good repair. Every day, two of them went out into the community to beg for money, food, clothing and other supplies. It was their only source of income.

They received support from the Franco-American community, from many in the city's large Irish community and even from some in the Protestant community. They built a two-story annex in the fall of 1889 to house and teach the growing number of orphans, thus stretching their funds even thinner.

The two women from Manchaug who had been the order's original sisters apparently were having problems. One, the Sister Superior, didn't show up for Mass one day. The other sisters went to her room and found she had left her habit on her bed and she was gone. The other apparently had conflicts with the new novices and the bishop would not allow her to renew her vows, according to the history of the order.

When it came time to pick a new Sister Superior, Father Brouillet's choice was turned down. Instead, the sisters picked Sister Marie-Joseph, now 19, the order's first novice. Father Brouillet then asked them to expand their ministry to an orphanage in Fall River and to an old farm in the Stoneville section of Auburn. There were only 14 novices to work at all three places and it proved too much.

Two Sisters of Charity from Quebec eventually took over in Fall River. The Stoneville farm lacked water and the buildings were in disrepair, according to the order's history, and some of the orphans were getting sick.

Despite Father Brouillet's opposition, the sisters returned to Worcester. The sisters wanted to incorporate their order. Their chaplain, Father Durocher, suggested that the talk to Bishop Patrick. T. O'Reilly, Bishop of Springfield, without informing Father Brouillet. Bishop O'Reilly had allowed Father Delphos in Manchaug to give the two schoolteachers their habits but when the sisters met with him he said he didn't know who they were. He said he had authorized the two women in Manchaug to wear the habit but had not authorized the founding of a new religious community in the diocese. He suggested that they join an existing order. He also said they had a right to be incorporated by the state.

Their disagreements with Father Brouillet continued, but eventually a solution was worked out. They were invited to Baie St. Paul in Quebec by Father Ambrose-Martial Fafard, the pastor to care for mental patients in a parish there. Father Fafard became their Father Superior, helped them form their Mother House there and helped the sisters finish their novitiate and take their vows. They were officially the Little Franciscans of Mary. Because their Mother House was in Canada, the bishop accepted them into the Springfield Diocese as missionaries, with the provision that they care for the elderly instead of orphans, who were placed in the charge of the Grey Nuns.

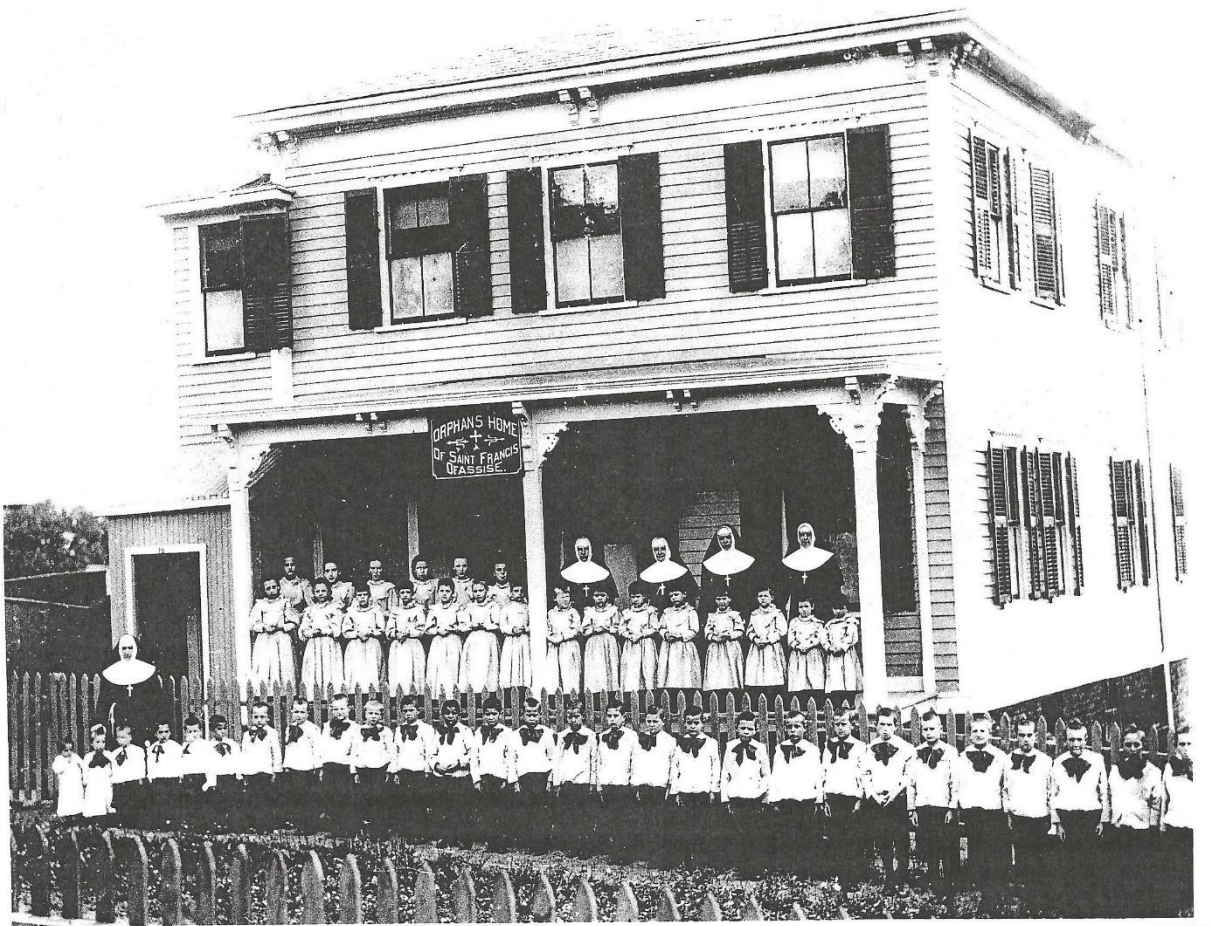
In Worcester the order had moved its orphanage from Southgate and Grand streets to Bleeker Street. When the change to caring for the elderly came, they moved to Thorne Street. (**Newspaper clipping 1904-03-02_5 mentions the purchase of land on Thorne Street.**) When it opened it housed 90 elderly people, according to a history of the order. The St. Francis Aid Society was formed to help support the home, which was named the St. Francis Home. (*Note: The St. Francis Home & Rehab Center is now located between Thorne, Plantation and Bleeker Streets.*) It has grown over the years and its address now is 101 Plantation St. Its name is now the St. Francis Rehabilitation and Nursing Center. It has 137 beds, two secure dementia units, a rehabilitation gymnasium, and an adult health center. There also is a chapel where Mass is celebrated for residents and participants, according to the center.

The Little Franciscans of Mary continued to operate the home until 2000, when Sister Jacqueline Alix, pfm, administrator, retired. The sisters moved out of the

home in 2006. Since 2009 it has been owned and operated by an affiliate of Landmark Solutions.

Despite their disagreements with Father Brouillet, the original sisters in the order had good things to say about him. Mother Marie Anne de Jesus, Superior when she resigned in 1908, wrote;

“Even though Father Brouillet makes us suffer so much, we must admit we owe him a great deal. Without him where would we be? Let us remember that because of him we have acquired much merit. Since he has been God’s instrument in entrusting this beautiful community to our care, let us cause him no grief or harm. Let us pray for him and abandon everything else to God.”



The Orphans' Home of St. Francis of Assisi - 1895

We found this one and only photograph of the Orphans' Home of St. Francis of Assisi in the St. Ann's Orphanage folder at the Catholic Free Press on Elm Street in Worcester, Ma. It was a very confusing find since we knew the sisters of St. Francis of Assisi were the first order to care for the South Worcester Orphanage before leaving in 1891 after a dispute. The initial publications we collected indicated they started a home for the elderly right after leaving the orphanage. But as we continued our search, we located many newspaper articles from the 1890s proving the Orphans' Home of St. Francis of Assisi existed between 1891 and 1897. The photo shows 28 boys, 21 girls and 5 sisters. We believe this photograph was taken in 1895 after we found two separate newspaper clippings stating there were 49 children/orphans in the institution during that year.

These last pages have Clippings from the Worcester Daily Spy
Dating from 1901 to 1904

The St. Francis Home for the Aged will have a donation day tomorrow. The home is at 10 Bleeker street. About 1500 donation cards have been sent out, but donations unsolicited in this manner will be just as gratefully received by the nuns in charge of the home, where many an aged heart is cheered and many a weary traveler long past the meridian of life is sustained at his years' decline. The donations asked are linens, sheeting, pillow cotton, underwear, towels, groceries, provisions, vegetables. Money gifts will be very acceptable, also. The sweet, odd name of the nuns is, in full, "The Little Franciscan Sisters of Mary."

1901-06-25_7

**OLD FOLKS REMEMBERED
WITH USEFUL GIFTS**

The old folks who occupy the Home for Aged People on Bleeker Street, in charge of the Franciscan Sisters were not forgotten in the general good time yesterday. Many kind friends sent useful articles for their use and these were distributed yesterday with candy and fruit on the side. There was no Christmas tree but the recipients of the gifts had just as good a time.

1901-07-31_4

**TONIGHT'S LECTURE AN
ASSURED SUCCESS**

From the large sale of tickets, the illustrated lecture on the Philippine Islands by Thomas B. Lawler, which will be given in Mechanics Hall, will be an assured success, and the Franciscan Sisters, who have charge of the Home for the Aged, will be greatly aided in their noble charitable work. Rev. A. E. Langevin, pastor of St. Joseph's Church, will preside. An orchestra will furnish music.

1902-02-23

**LITTLE SISTERS
THANK THEIR FRIENDS**

The Little Franciscan Sisters of Mary, on Bleeker Street, return sincere thanks to all who aided them in raising funds for the home of the aged under their charge. The lecture given by Thomas B. Lawler in their behalf netted \$440. The expenses were \$80—hall \$50, orchestra \$10, stereopticon \$10, printing \$5.75, hack \$3, incidentals \$1.25. Donations of money to the amount of \$400 were raised by friends of the institution. Three tons of coal were given by charitable merchants.

1902-03-16_[1]

—Mrs. Alexander Sharbie, for a number of years a resident of Millbury, died at the home of the Franciscan Sisters, 10 Bleeker Street, Worcester.

1901-07-31_4

The Sisters of Mercy, with the orphans from the High Street Orphanage, and also the Sisters of St. Francis of the Bleeker Street home for the aged, were present during the church services.

At the offertory Mrs. Daniel Downey

1902-08-21_5

FRANCISCAN FRIAR VISITS IN WORCESTER

The Little Franciscan Sisters were honored yesterday morning by a visit from Father Matthew, a Franciscan friar from Washington D. C. The sisters are in charge of the Bleeker Street Home for the Aged. Father Matthew said mass in the pretty little chapel at the home. Before leaving the city he visited at the home of James W. Doon, 38 Oxford Street. Mr. Doon is a personal friend of Father Matthew.

1902-04-09_[7]

RUMMAGE SALE WILL CONTINUE ALL WEEK

The committee in charge of the rummage sale for the Franciscan Sisters at 20 Green Street has decided not to close the sale until Saturday night. It was the original intention to have the sale three days, but so many contributions of costly clothing and other articles have been received that the committee deemed it best to prolong the sale. The committee hopes to be able to add considerable to the treasury of the Franciscan Sisters home on Bleeker Street.

1903-07-16_4

BEGINNING OF MOVEMENT FOR WORKING GIRLS' HOME

A sewing school will be opened Oct. 31 in the basement of the Notre Dame Church by two Franciscan missionaries of Marie, who came to Worcester this week. This is to be the first step toward the establishment of a working girls' home. The home will be in charge of sisters of the order.

The two sisters who have already arrived in Worcester are Sister Marie of the Blessed Sacrament and Sister Marie Itha of the Sacred Heart, the former coming from Canada and the latter from Ireland. Four more sisters are to come to Worcester.

The home is not to be for French-speaking girls alone, but for all girls of the Catholic faith.

1903-10-16_4

FRANCISCAN SISTERS ADD TO THEIR PROPERTY

The Little Franciscan Sisters of Mary, Bleeker Street, who conduct an asylum for the aged, have purchased a piece of property on Thorne Street adjoining their property. The purchase was made from Levi Wright and consists of a cottage and 10,000 feet of land. The deeds were passed through the office of Attorney John F. Jandron, and were filed yesterday.

The sisters will enlarge the present home, which now consists of a wooden building.

1904-03-02_5

FATHER BROUILLET WILL NOT SELL TO CAPITALISTS

All offers received by Rev. Joseph Brouillet, rector of Notre Dame Church, for the sale of the church property on Park Street for the erection of a hotel or business block have been declined. Fr. Brouillet will sell the property to the Franciscan missionaries of Marie. The edifice will remain on its present

1903-10-16_4-1

location and will continue as a place of worship.

Several offers have been received for the property, one of which was for \$150,000. The offer came from a syndicate of Boston capitalists and several individuals and syndicates have been interested in securing the property.

1903-10-16_4-2

—The St. Francis Aid Association, which is arranging for an entertainment in May for the benefit of the Home for Aged People on Bleeker Street, is to meet at the home this afternoon at 3.30 o'clock.

—There will be a meeting of all who are interested in the proposed new Home for Aged People under the charge of the Little Franciscan Sisters of Mercy at the home on Bleeker Street, at 3.30 p. m. today.

1904-03-27_[1]

PLANNING FOR FAIR IN AID OF AGED PEOPLE'S HOME

There was a meeting at the Bleeker Street Home for Aged People yesterday afternoon at 3.30 o'clock, when arrangements for the entertainment in May were discussed. The affair will be for the benefit of the home, and is planned by St. Francis Aid Association for the Little Franciscan Sisters of Mercy, who are in charge of the home.

1904-03-28_3

PLANS COMPLETED FOR TWO NIGHTS' KERMISS

The St. Francis Aid Society met yesterday afternoon at St. Anne's Orphanage, Bleeker Street, and completed arrangements for the kermis to be held in Mechanics Hall Wednesday and Thursday nights. The committee in charge reported a large amount of tickets sold, and predict the affair will be a success beyond the anticipation of those who have it in charge.

Several novel features will be introduced at the entertainment. A ladies' orchestra has been secured to play during the evenings for dancing.

1904-04-25_8