

Saint Mother Cabrini

Early 1900s



As was generally the case with her, Francesca began in a small way. The city of Denver in which she settled was to see a large, well-equipped orphanage conducted by her nuns, but she was content to start with a poorly equipped parochial school on Palmer Avenue, a school that would deal with the problem of children who had little or no parental attention.

Denver was also the *point d'appui* for what she meant to do in the mines. As the miners were scattered in camps throughout the state, the only way of reaching them was by going to them. This meant journeying in rough country, visits to the dwellings of the miners (which were often underground), and more frequently, the plunging in cages

or bucket-like contrivances hundreds of feet into the depths of the earth. From there the Sisters sometimes had to walk miles along the galleries before they came to the men at their work. Then the conversation had to be very brief, during a moment's pause in the toil with pick and drill or during the lunch-hour. But it meant much to these miners, isolated and buried and forgotten. Italy and the Church was coming to them in the persons of these smiling, kind-faced nuns.

The Superintendent of the Mines, aware of the good effect of such visits on the morale of the men, provided a room for the Sisters, and there they would sometimes stay for several days, in the evenings talking in the dining-shed or in front of the bunk-house to the hands. It was from these contacts that Francesca discovered how urgent was the need for a hospital and an orphanage. The miners were often badly injured in their dangerous work, sometimes fatally so, and then their children were left destitute. When accidents occurred the men, helpless on account of their illiteracy and their ignorance of English, were frequently defrauded by the more unscrupulous mining corporations — which meant that they could make no provision for their dependents. Though Francesca could see no immediate means of opening the institutions which she saw to be necessary, she at once began to plan for them.

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Her biography states that she would go down into the mines and pray with miners where the miners were of Italian descent. Erie did have Italian miners, so she MAY have gone into the mines here too.