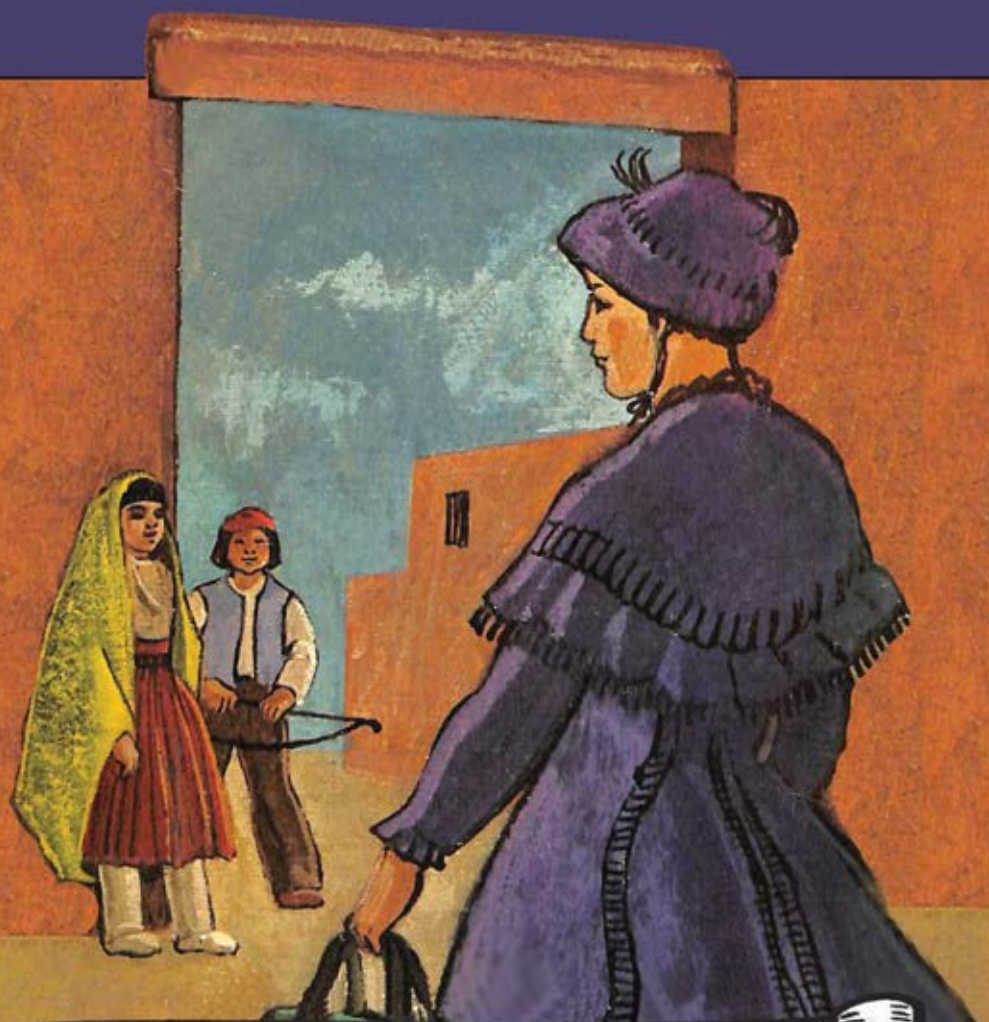


# The Door of Hope

## The Story of Katharine Drexel



*Portraits in Faith and Freedom*

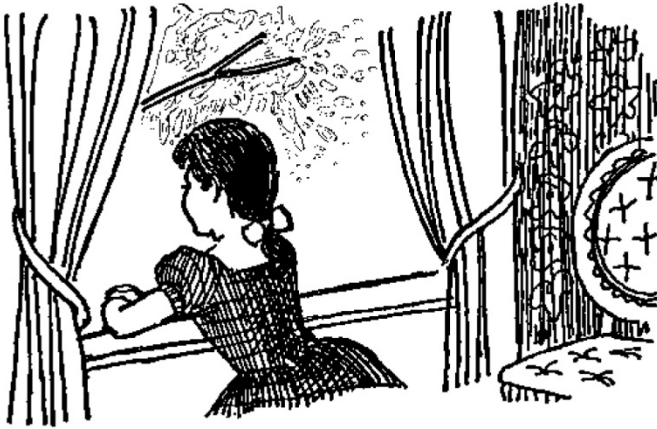
**Katherine Burton**



# The Door of Hope

## *The Story of Katharine Drexel*

by Katherine Burton



Illustrated by Irene Murray

Bethlehem Books • Ignatius Press

Print book originally published by  
Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1963  
187 pages in original print book edition

eBook formatting © 2016 Bethlehem Books  
Maps and added material © 2016 Bethlehem Books  
Cover design by Melissa Sobotta  
Mapwork by Margaret Rasmussen

Revised edition  
All Rights Reserved

ISBN 978-1-932350-61-6

Bethlehem Books • Ignatius Press  
10194 Garfield Street South  
Bathgate, ND 58216  
[www.bethlehembooks.com](http://www.bethlehembooks.com)

# Portraits in Faith and Freedom

## SET 4: WOMEN OF FAITH AND COURAGE

*Star of the Mohawk: Kateri Tekakwitha*  
*Margaret Haughery: Bread Woman of New Orleans*  
*The Door of Hope: The Story of Katherine Drexel*

## **Statement on Portraits in Faith and Freedom**

Bethlehem Books is bringing back this series of biographies originally made available in the 1950's and 60's by publishers who wished to introduce young people to a wide range of arresting and faithful Catholic lives. Slightly edited now for the modern reader, these biographies present key people and events from the past that help us reflect anew on the meaning of freedom. They depict how powerfully men and women of faith have formed and influenced the world in which they live.

## **Web Resources**

To access printable maps, a timeline, and other information, visit <https://www.bethlehembooks.com/door-hope-story-katherine-drexel-848>

## **About Referring to “Indians” and “Negroes” in This Book**

The terms “Indians” and “Negroes,” though mostly rejected for usage nowadays, were accepted terms in the long lifetime of Katharine Drexel. In her case, it is clear that she had only respect for the innate dignity of the minority peoples she sought to benefit through the offering of her life and resources to God. St. Katharine’s story is full of letters, conversation, projects and events that responded to the fundamental desire of the Native Americans and African Americans of her time to have freedom and opportunity in the pursuit of knowledge. Working with pioneering priests and bishops, she did all she could towards assisting these Americans who, in those difficult years, were seeking a way forward. Thus, in this re-publication of her story, the decision was made to let the terms remain as originally written.

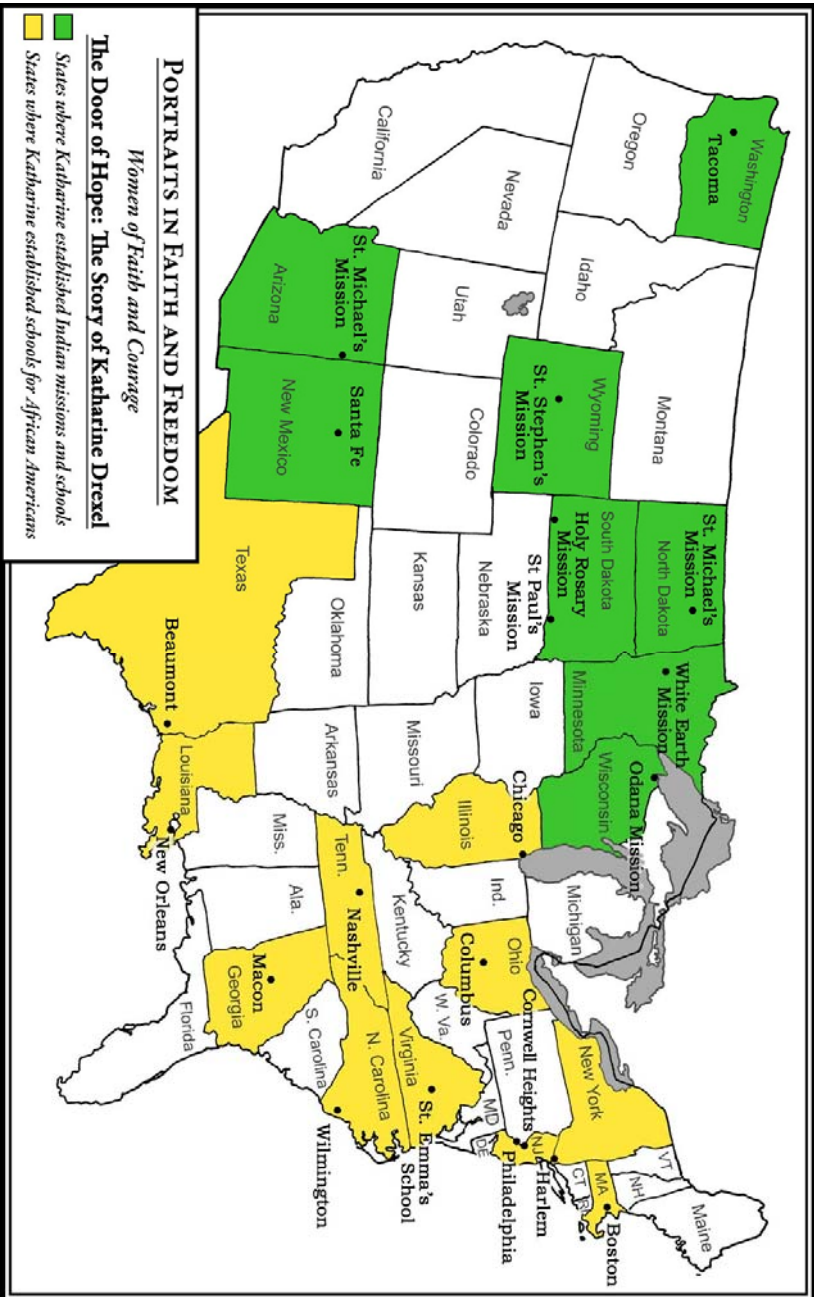
Bethlehem Books



# Contents

Web Resources	vi
Map	1
1. A New Home	3
2. St. Michel	13
3. Young Debutantes	26
4. The Course Is Clear	38
5. To Far Places	52
6. An Unusual Farmer	65
7. The Poverty Bag	75
8. Bronze Angels	87
9. Her Work Goes On	96
10. The Last Journey	105
About the Author	113
Historical Insights by Daria Sockey	115
List of titles in Portraits in Faith and Freedom	118

## Map







## 1. A New Home

KATY DREXEL STOOD at the long window in her Uncle Anthony's drawing room, her sister Lizzie beside her. They both knew that something wonderful was going to happen, but even Lizzie, who was almost six years old, was not quite certain just what it could be. It had something to do with being with their father all the time now instead of just on special days. As for Katy, only two years old, she was too young to realize anything. They were going somewhere with their father and that was enough for her.

Aunt Ellen was standing behind them. When Lizzie turned around to speak to her, she saw her aunt was trying not to cry. Katy turned too, and when she saw her aunt's tears, her own lip began to quiver. If Aunt Ellen felt bad about something, then so did Katy, and she held up her arms to be lifted up.

She was patting her aunt's cheek comfortingly when the sound of clapping hooves was heard coming down the cobbled street. A beautiful span of brown horses, their silver harness gleaming in the sun, came in sight. The coachman in fine livery brought them to a halt before the house.

"It's father," shouted Lizzie and dashed for the door as the butler was opening it. Mr. Drexel came in and kissed his elder daughter and held out his arms for his younger. The expectant Lizzie,

seeing that his arms were empty of packages, asked, "But you told Aunt Ellen you had a surprise for us. Where is it?"

He and Aunt Ellen smiled at each other over Katy's blonde head. Then he said gently, "There is a surprise, but I couldn't bring it to you. I am going to take you to the surprise instead. Are they ready, Ellen?"

"All packed and ready," said his sister-in-law, and then in a low voice which Lizzie could not hear, she added, "We'll miss them terribly, Francis. But I comfort myself with knowing that they will now have a mother of their own."

"And I'll never forget what you and my brother did for me these past two years, Ellen. Each time I came to visit Lizzie and Katy, I could see that your children and mine were equally dear to you."

"They truly are," said Ellen Drexel. "The only thing I didn't let them do was call me mother. In fact, it is going to be a brand new word for Katy. Now good-by, children. Francis, give Emma my dear love, and tell her that her happiness is mine too."

His children sat one on each side of him in the carriage, a warm robe over their knees, for it was sometimes chilly in Philadelphia in October. Now he began to explain why he could not bring the surprise to them.

"There are really two surprise presents," he said. "One is a house, and you see I couldn't possibly bring that. But there is another present."

"Is it the brush and comb sets we both want?" asked Lizzie, but Katy said nothing. She merely snuggled closer to her father and said contentedly, "Present for Katy."

Mr. Drexel tried to explain further. "The second present is a mother for you both." This was at least partly clear to Lizzie, for at Uncle Anthony's her little cousins called Aunt Ellen mother. Her small sister simply began to change her phrase about a present for Katy to a singsong repetition of "Present for Katy. Mother for Katy."

The horses were reined to a stop before a big house and the father said solemnly, "This is the present that is a house. Look at the big green figures over the door. They say 1502 Walnut Street, and this is where you are going to live."

Before the wide front door stood a lady with brown hair, waiting for them. Mr. Drexel was carrying Katy, and Lizzie walked

beside them, a little hesitant now because this was a stranger. Katy did not hesitate at all. She smiled happily and held out her arms. "Katy's present," she said. The "present" held out her arms, and the baby went into them as if she had always known her.

Holding one child in her arms, Emma Drexel stooped and caught up Lizzie too. Her husband simply stood there and looked at the three, and in his face was contentment and love.

Then the family went into their house together.

Two years earlier, Francis Drexel had brought the children to his brother Anthony's home. Lizzie was three then and Katy a baby of less than two months. His young wife was dying. A few days later she was buried in the plain little cemetery of the Dunkards, the religious sect to which her family belonged.

Anthony and Ellen offered to keep the children as long as Francis wanted them to, and he gratefully accepted. They had two children of their own, and he knew his two would be happy there.

Two years later he came to tell them that he was marrying again. His bride was Emma Bouvier of Philadelphia, and Ellen, who knew her well, was delighted. By that time the Drexel family was an established part of aristocratic Philadelphia, but Emma's family was equally so. The Bouviers had come from France with Lafayette, and several had remained after the Revolution ended. They became good American citizens, but they kept their gracious French manner of living. So Ellen was happy not only for Francis but for Lizzie and Katy: she knew Emma would mother them and rear them in her own gentle traditions.

It was from their grandfather Drexel, who lived until Katy was six years old, that his grandchildren learned about the Drexel origins in America. He had come from Austria when he was a young man.

"So many wars there," he told the children, "and it made the people very poor. Some friends of mine who had come to America wrote me that it was a fine place to live and earn a living, and so I came. But what a trip—two and a half months in a sailing vessel. Most of the time I was seasick and wished myself back in Austria."

He shook his head over the memory of that voyage. Then he smiled. "But when the ship docked in Philadelphia, I decided right away to stay. I loved the city as soon as I saw it. It looked so much

like Vienna. The houses were like the ones in Austria and the people were kind. Many of them could speak German—but I learned the English very soon. I loved America and here I stayed.”

The children were surprised to learn that he was a painter of portraits when he came. It had been his craft in Austria, and it was by painting the people of Philadelphia that he made a living during his first years in the New World.

They listened absorbedly to stories of his childhood; of the mountain climbing and the skiing, and the beauty of his little Alpine village of Dornbirn. “I painted many pictures there, and once for my mother I painted on an outside wall of our house a fine picture of our Lord and his Mother. I called it Mother of Hope. And when your father,” he said to Lizzie and Katy, “took a trip to Europe and went to Dornbirn, there he saw my picture on the wall, a little faded, but he said the reds and blues were still bright.”

“You don’t paint pictures any more, grandfather,” said one of the grandsons. “Why don’t you?”

“Well, when I married and had a family to support, painting didn’t give me enough of an income,” he said. “That was when I went into the banking business. And that was hard work at first—much harder than painting. Your father,” he said directly to Lizzie and Katy, “was just fourteen years old, and yours,” he looked at Anthony’s young son, “was twelve when I started my bank. We didn’t make much money at first, and we all worked hard. Your grandmother used to put up a cold lunch for us and we ate it right in the office. The boys acted as watchmen on alternating nights and slept on the counter of the bank. And Francis helped me by making extra money on Sunday. He had taken music lessons and now he played the organ in one of the churches and got paid for it. Later on your Uncle Joseph was old enough to work with us. And right from the beginning we called the firm Drexel and Sons!”

He looked around at the children. “The end of the story is that after a good many years your fathers thought I had worked hard enough and long enough, so they agreed to run the business for me. And that is why I have time right now to tell you the story of my life.”

They were in the library in the house on Walnut Street, and from the great hall came the sound of music. Francis Drexel had come home for lunch and was playing, as he always did at that

time, on the pipe organ he had had built into the house. When Katy grew restless, her grandfather picked her up and whispered in her ear, "Quiet, darling. It isn't every little girl whose father can play Beethoven like that on a big organ." And Katy sat very still and listened.

In another part of the house Mrs. Drexel had set up an oratory, a place where anyone who wished could come to say a prayer and where the family always came for night prayers. Emma Bouvier was a devout Catholic, as was her entire family, and her own deep faith had increased that of her husband.

She taught the little girls simple prayers, but no doubt what drew them to the little chapel at first was its beauty. Emma had made it very lovely, with a great ivory and ebony crucifix and a marble statue of our Lady. Back of it hung blue velvet curtains, and flowers were always fresh in the silver vases.

In 1863 a child was born to the Francis Drexels and named Louise for her Grandmother Bouvier. The nurse came to the children's bedroom early in the morning to tell Lizzie and Katy the wonderful news.

"The angels have brought you a baby sister," she said, "and you are to come to your mother's room to welcome her."

They flew to see the baby, not stopping for bathrobes or slippers. Katy, who had expected to see, if not an angel, at least someone who looked like her best wax doll, was not at all pleased with this crying red-faced mite.

"My doll is prettier," she said flatly.

"Oh, she'll get prettier," said Lizzie consolingly, but Katy, after another appraising look at the baby in her crib, was not so sure.

Grandmother Bouvier came later in the day to see her new grandchild. "You'll need another nurse right away," she said practically, and Emma agreed. "I'll send you Johanna Ryan." A few hours later Johanna stumped in, a hearty pink-cheeked girl who announced that she had come "just for a while." By the time Mrs. Drexel was up and around again, Johanna was in charge of the baby and the little girls too. "High-handed" the other servants soon called her, but Mrs. Drexel found her a treasure, and the children loved her. The "just a while" became years, and as long as she lived she never left the family.