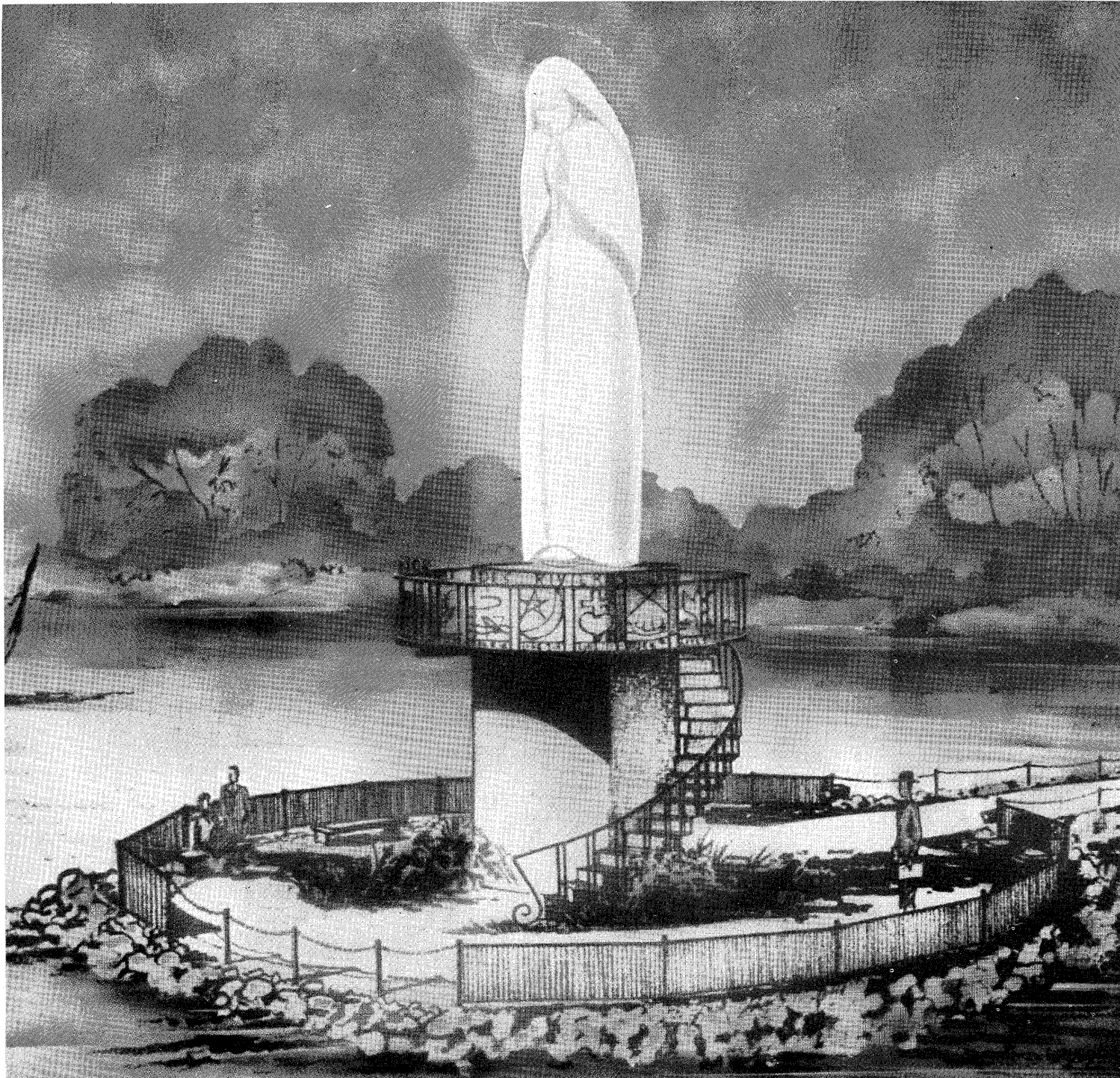


# Our Lady Of the Rivers

**SCALPS AND SCULPTURE.** Painted faces of Sioux braves grimaced with each stroke as they paddled frantically down the muddy stream. Their scalps were at stake. Behind, the angry Missouri Indians were gaining. Frenzied by murderous assaults on some of their villages, the pursuers dipped their paddles deeper and faster. Rounding a bend in the river, the Missouri redmen were startled to find their quarry had disappeared. Angered, they forced themselves to greater effort. Concealed by thick riverside growth, the Sioux watched silently. The Missouri canoes swept around the next bend and out of sight. Legend says, the pillaging Sioux hoisted their canoes over their heads and portaged the two-mile neck of land separating the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. Their crafty maneuver saved 25 miles and a host of Sioux scalps. Where the wily Sioux completed their portage later became a trading post and eventually the town site of historic Portage des Sioux, locale for "Our Lady of the Rivers," see page 21.



The pale white plastic statue of Mary, mother of Jesus, will rise soon in the Mississippi River at Portage des Sioux, near St. Louis.

The entire statue was cast in a polyester mold, reinforced with glass fibers, permitting true conformation and delicate finish.

**T**ORRENTIAL RAINS whipped across Kansas, Oklahoma and Missouri in early July, 1951. The floods that followed left 41 dead and property damage estimated in excess of \$1 billion.

While the streets of many river-bank communities disappeared beneath the rising waters, something important was happening at Portage des Sioux, Mo. Father Edward B. Schlattmann, pastor of St. Francis Church.



The idea for the statue belongs to Father Edward Schlattmann. Serving a parish of 135 families in Portage des Sioux area, he frequents village store to talk up plans for big dedication day.

called upon his parish Legion of Mary to pray to the Blessed Virgin. For the first time anywhere, Mary's protection was sought under the appellation, "Our Lady of the Rivers."

The surging current swept over the roads leading into Portage and lapped hungrily toward the town. Isolated and frightened, Portage people watched helplessly as the water inched nearer their homes. After two weeks, when the flood finally crested, their community was still high and mostly dry.

Father Schlattmann, determined that the memory of the many mercies shown his community by the Blessed Virgin must be eternally preserved, wanted a shrine. "A memorial to Mary," he pleaded, "will be a reminder to all people of her saving grace when our town faced the perilous waters."

The dream of the priest might have been forgotten except for the deathbed act of a well-known Mississippi boatman. Converted to the Catholic faith before his demise, he asked that his friends and relatives send gifts for a statue to Mary—instead of buying flowers for his funeral. These contributions marked the beginning of a campaign to raise \$50,000 for a memorial to "Our Lady of the Rivers."

The concept appealed immediately to the solid Christian families in the Portage and St. Louis areas. Religion has deep roots in this section where two major rivers spill their surging currents into the Mississippi—the Missouri from the west and the Illinois from the north. French Catholics set up a mission in Portage des Sioux prior to 1799.

People of all faiths opened their hearts and their purses, contributing generously to the memorial fund.

Many spent long hours trekking through the region to keep the fund growing. As Father Schlattmann aptly put it, "Mary, after all, belongs to all peoples and to all generations."

When the Alton Dam was constructed near Portage des Sioux in 1938, the rivers flooded some low-lying areas. A submerged street was chosen as the underwater base for the monument and the 550-foot causeway from the Portage shore. A statue design submitted by Mrs. Anthony McClory of Mattoon, Ill., was eventually chosen for the memorial.

With design and site okayed, the nine-man board of directors for Our Lady of the Rivers, Inc., turned to the problem of finding suitable material for the statue. They agreed that it must have a resistance to dampness and severe weather changes, and be of a color that could not be affected by the intense rays of a summer sun. Various stones were considered, but the old stand-bys, granite and marble, quickly wound up in the rockpile because of an unusual weight problem. In fact, all of the stones exceeded the weights considered safe for the mid-river foundation.

While the directors wrestled with their perplexity, Philip Hammond, a representative of a St. Louis display firm, recommended a polyester statue—plastic reinforced with glass fibers. Here was a material, he asserted, that met all requirements of lightness, toughness and beauty. In fact, it was proven by its success in luxury liners, passenger planes and railroad cars.

The board was deeply impressed with Hammond's presentation, especially his point that the statue's finished weight would be less than 4,000 pounds, 30 times lighter than its counterpart in stone. Plastic was cheaper, too,—\$13,000 as contrasted to \$50,000 for stone—no small point for the budget-minded representatives of Our Lady of the Rivers, Inc.

The G. C. Kirn Advertising Sign Company of St. Louis was hired to see the memorial through to its erection. Kirn representatives worked with Sculptured Advertising of Minneapolis, Minn., where the molds and the statue itself were built. After considerable research, a new plastic resin\* was developed for the monument—a substance which withstands deterioration and retains colorfastness.

The Lady will be in place at her river outpost this Spring. After its installation, the Coast Guard plans to mark its location on Mississippi River navigation maps. The statue by day, and its halo by night, will guide and inspire boatmen as they ply the great central waterway of mid-America.

\*Containing Monsanto's maleic anhydride, phthalic anhydride, styrene monomer, and adipic acid. The fire-resistant polyester resins were manufactured by Mol-Rez Division of American Petrochemical Corporation, Minneapolis, Minn.

