On Oct. 1, Mother Katherine Drexel will be formally named a saint of the Catholic church. Part of the reason for that is that she did so much in South Louisiana.

Mother Katherine Drexel started or financed nearly 50 schools for young Native American children in the southeastern United States.

The remaining $64 million was wired to the three sisters, each of whom elected to continue the family’s philanthropy.

Elisabeth, the eldest daughter, concentrated on building Catholic orphanages for young black children.

Katherine had for some years done work that could not be done at the present of American Indian reservations.

Through O’Connor, Katherine was put in touch with some prominent personalities in the Indian missions.

There were those—including O’Connor—who advised her against such a choice. They believed that she could do far more good by remaining in the world and devoting her time and talents to charity O’Connor may have had a selfish motive. He was afraid that she would have to give up her role as the prime financial backer for the Catholic Indian missions.

In 1926, the school in Prairie Bourbeau was built and named SI. Elizabeth for Mother Katherine’s sister, the one who had attended this school.

In addition, she was benefactress to schools at Pointe-aux-Chenes, Agassiz, Medinahville, Tibodub, Edgar, Raceland, Monteville, Alexandria, Breaux Bridge, Duson, among others. As well as six elementary and one high school in New Orleans and Baton Rouge there. Mother Katherine’s legacy lives on.

One of the reasons for that is that she did so much in South Louisiana.

Today it is hard for people to fathom what it was like being a child of color in the 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States.

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With that blessing, O'Connor finally had to consent to her becoming a nun, but suggested that, rather than join an established order, she found her own congregation to work exclusively among Native Americans and blacks. The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored came into being in 1891.

Mother Katherine, as she was now known, opened St. Catherine's school in Santa Fe, her congregation's first school, in 1894. That same year she purchased an estate in Rock Castle, Va., where she built St. Francis de Sales School, a boarding school for black girls. Many other schools and missions would follow. Very often there was such extreme prejudice that the schools had to be purchased through a third party. Sometimes there were threats against the schools and the teachers. According to one famous story, Ku Klux Klansmen threatened to burn down a school Mother Katherine opened in Beumont, Texas. She refused to leave and started to pray for guidance.

That day, lightning struck the Klan headquarters. Mother Katherine quickly built or financed more schools than her little congregation of nuns could staff. She needed to train lay teachers, and seized the opportunity in 1915, when Louisiana education officials relocated Southern University from New Orleans to Baton Rouge. She bought the vacant campus and reopened the school as Xavier College (now Xavier University) to train lay teachers to staff schools for black children in rural Louisiana.

But there were financial problems now. Mother Katherine's charities quickly outstripped even her fortune, and what charities didn't take, federal income taxes did. She prayed some more, and someone listened.

In 1924, in a move that would be hard to imagine today, Congress passed a bill providing that any person who gave at least 90 percent of their income to charity for the preceding 10 years would be exempt from federal taxes.

There was only one such person in all the land: Mother Katherine.

Katherine Drexel continued her mission to Native Americans and African Americans until her late 70s when failing health forced her retirement. She died in 1955 at the age of 96.

At her death there were more than 500 sisters teaching in 63 schools throughout the country founded by Katherine Drexel. She financed many other schools that were not staffed by her Sisters.

Mother Katherine's case for sainthood was presented to Rome by the Philadelphia bishop in 1964, nine years after her death.

Since her death, two miraculous cures have been attributed to her saintly intercession.

In 1988, she was beatified after the church confirmed her first miracle. Robert Guatherman had lost part of his hearing when an infection destroyed the tiny bones in his ear. After his family prayed to Mother Katherine, the bones grew back.

In 1993, Constance Wall heard about that cure. Her own 8-year-old daughter, Amanda, was deaf and she decided to pray to Mother Katherine. Within a year, Amanda's hearing was restored.

(Kathleen Toups of Acadiana Catholic assisted in the preparation of this article.)