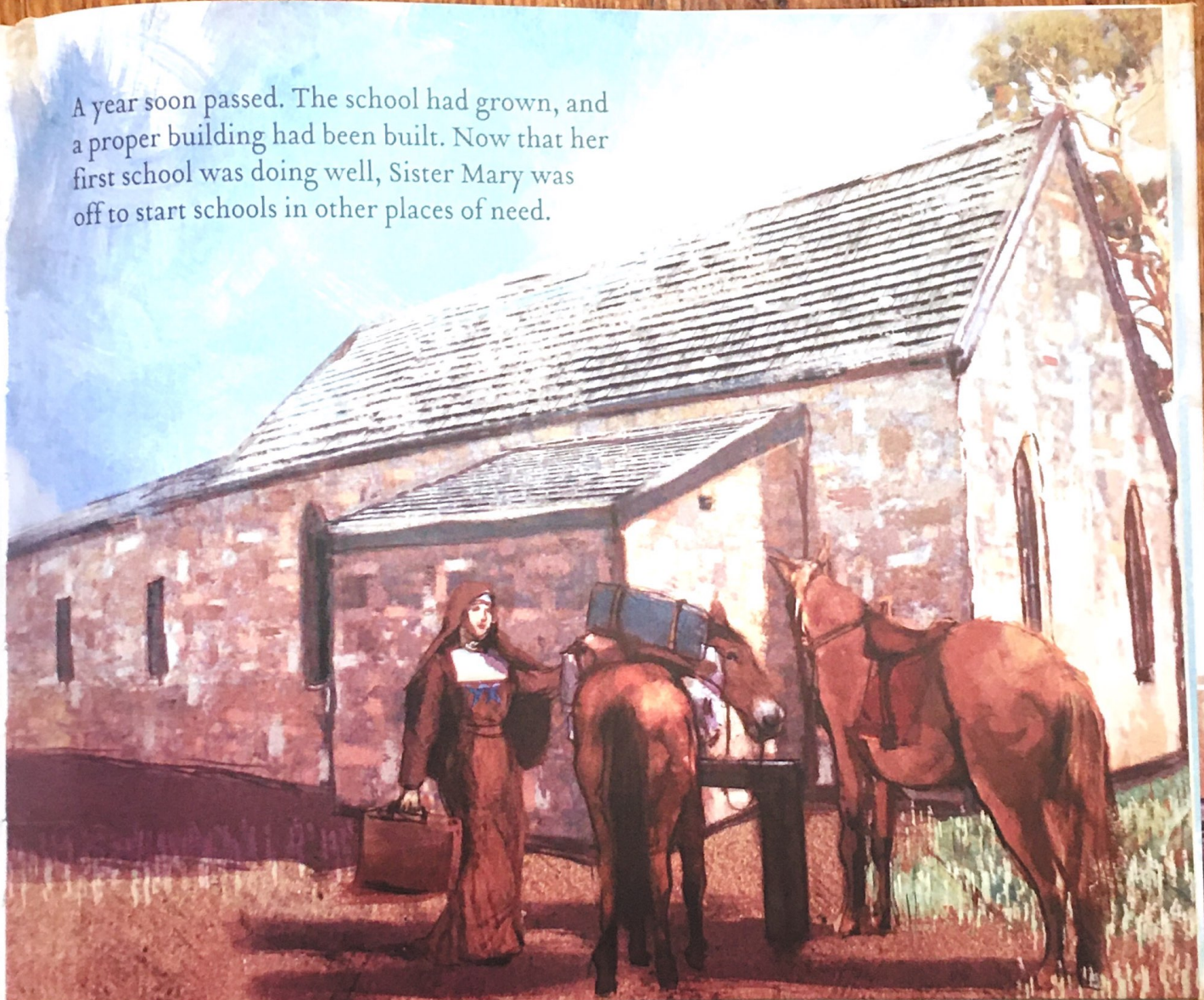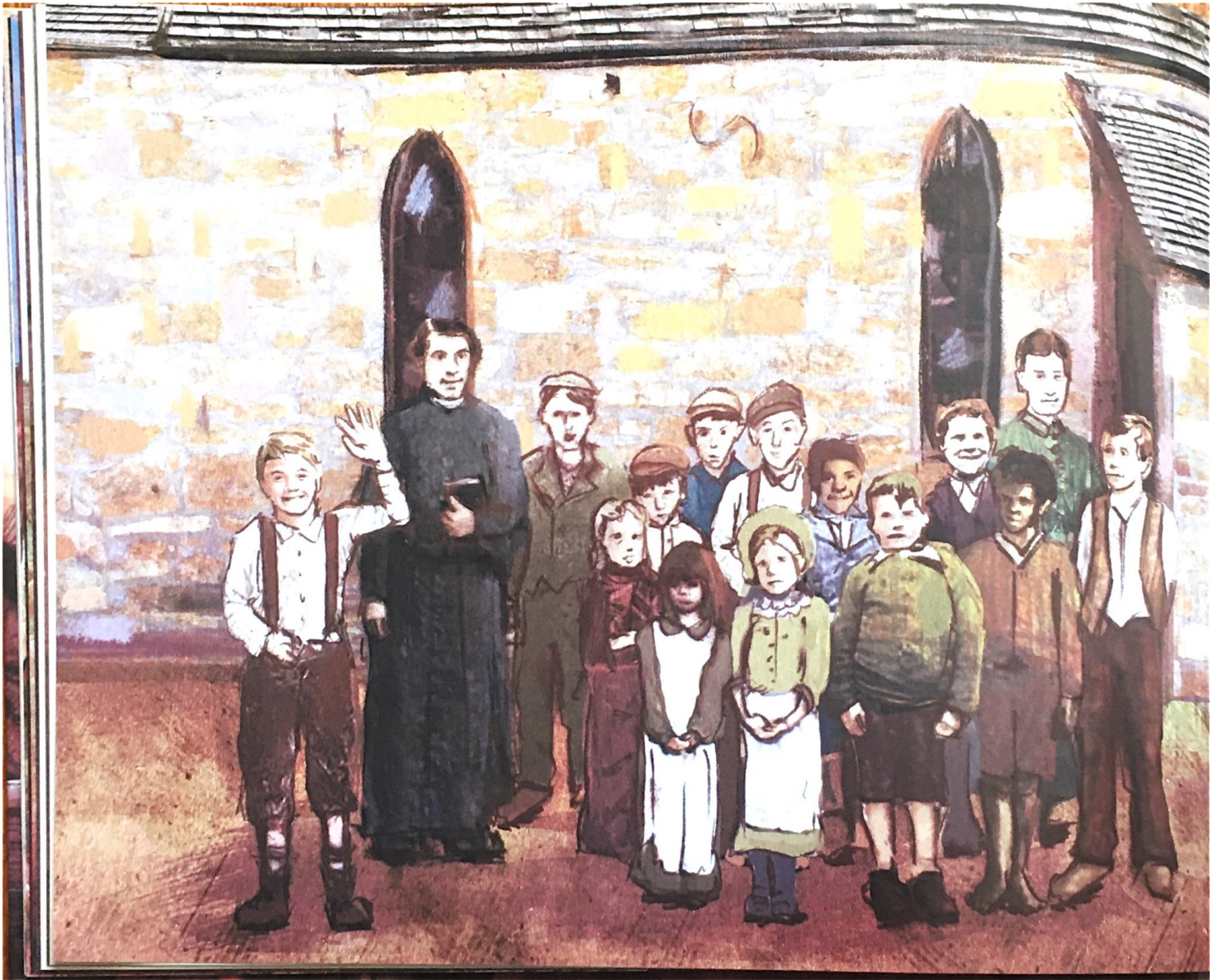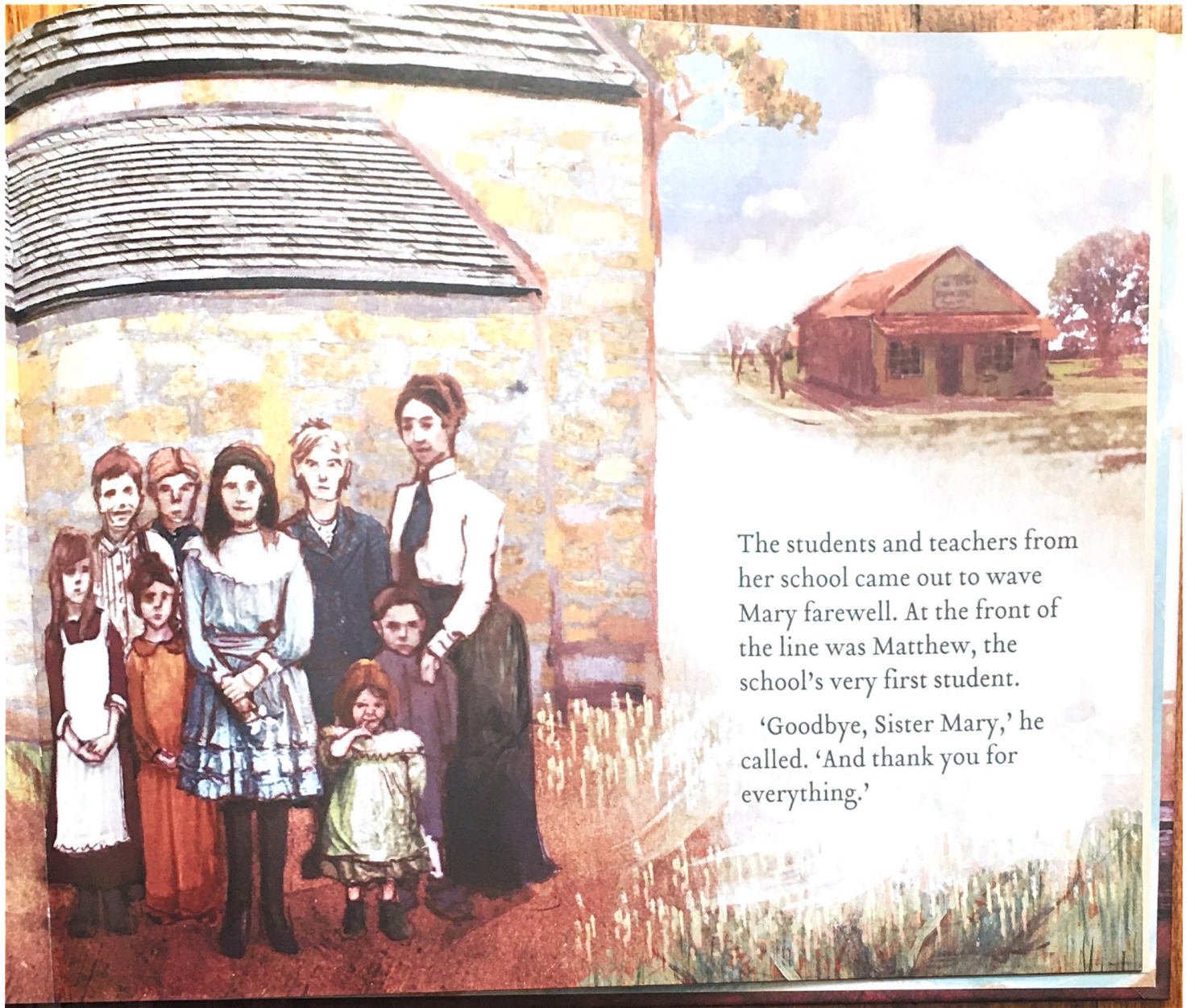A year soon passed. The school had grown, and a proper building had been built. Now that her first school was doing well, Sister Mary was off to start schools in other places of need.

The students and teachers from her school came out to wave Mary farewell. At the front of the line was Matthew, the school's very first student.

'Goodbye, Sister Mary,' he called. 'And thank you for everything.'

As she turned to go, Mary wondered what lay ahead. Would she find teachers for her new schools? And buildings? And books?

She looked back, remembering the stable where it had all started not so long ago.

'The need is being met,' she said to herself. 'I must keep doing what I can and leave the rest to God.'

TIMELINE

1812: Alexander MacKillop, Mary's father, is born in Perthshire, Scotland.

1816: Flora MacDonald, Mary's mother, is born in Fort William, Scotland.

1826: Alexander travels to Rome to study for the priesthood. After six years he returns home to Scotland for health reasons.

1838 (January): Alexander arrives in Australia, hoping to start fresh in a young country full of opportunity.

1840 (April): Flora arrives in Australia with her mother and brother.

1840 (May): Alexander and Flora meet. Three months later they are married.

1841 (April): The MacKillops purchase a small home in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne.

1842 (15 January): Mary Helen MacKillop is born, the first of eight children. She is baptised on 28 February at St Francis' Church, Melbourne.

1843: Margaret MacKillop is born.

1845: John MacKillop is born.

1847: Alick MacKillop is born, but dies at 11 months of age.

1848: Annie MacKillop is born.

1850: Alexandrina MacKillop is born.

1853: Donald MacKillop is born.

1856: Having been homeschooled by her father for much of her childhood, Mary begins work as a clerk for the printers and stationers Sands and Kenny, in Collins Street, Melbourne. Her wages help to support her large family and contribute to her father's meagre income.

1857: Peter MacKillop is born.

1860: Mary leaves home to work as a governess to the children of her Aunt Margaret and Uncle Alexander Cameron in Penola, South Australia. It is here that Mary begins to feel the need to offer education to poor children. She invites disadvantaged children to her lessons on the Cameron estate.

1861: Mary meets Father Julian Tenison Woods, a priest at the Catholic Church in Penola. They develop a close friendship and share the dream of offering education to the poor in rural Australia.

1863: Mary takes a position teaching at Portland Catholic Denominational School.

1866: Father Julian Tenison Woods invites Mary and her sisters Annie and Lexie to return to Penola to open a Catholic school.

1866 (March): The first St Joseph's school opens with 33 students in a converted stable in Penola. All children are welcome at the school, no matter how much they can afford to pay.

1866 (19 March): On the Feast of Saint Joseph, Mary decides to begin wearing simple black dress to signal her devotion to God.

1867 (15 August): Mary takes her formal religious vows and becomes Sister Mary of the Cross in a little chapel in Grote Street, Adelaide. Mary becomes the first Sister and Mother Superior of the Order of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, the first nuns in Australia.

1869: The public response to the Josephite Order and their schools is overwhelmingly positive. By 1869, the Josephites are in charge of 17 schools and are responsible for the education of about 1,600 children.

1869 (December): Bishop James Quinn invites Mary and a group of Sisters of St Joseph to establish a Josephite community in Brisbane.

1870: Mary establishes a number of Josephite communities in Queensland. But certain members of the Catholic Church are not happy that the Order is an independent body.

1871 (April): Mary returns to South Australia to find the Order in turmoil, with many Sisters unhappy with Father Woods' management.

1871: Bishop Sheil of Adelaide orders a commission to examine the Order of the Sisters of St Joseph. The Commission makes a number of recommendations, including placing each convent of the Order under the authority of the local priest.

1871 (22 September): Bishop Sheil excommunicates Mary after she opposes his changes to the Josephite Order.

1872 (23 February): Bishop Sheil rescinds Mary's excommunication on his deathbed.

1872: Father Christopher Reynolds is appointed administrator of the diocese of Adelaide following the death of Bishop Sheil.

1873 (11 May): Mary travels to Rome to seek papal approval of the rules of the Sisters of St Joseph. She travels in plain clothing and under the name of Mrs MacDonald, to avoid potential persecution. Pope Pius IX gives the Order his blessing and grants the group the right to determine its own direction.

1873 (November): Father Reynolds is consecrated as a bishop.

1874 (December): Mary returns to Australia.

1875 (19 March): The Constitution of the Institute of St Joseph is accepted at the first General Chapter meeting of the Congregation of the Order of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart. Mary is elected as the first Superior General of the Order.

1876: Bishop Matthew Quinn refuses to accept the independence of the Institute, forcing the Sisters to leave Queensland.

1883: Mary relocates to Sydney after being dismissed by Bishop Reynolds in Adelaide.

1885: Pope Leo XIII gives the final approval to the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart.

1889 (7 October): Father Woods dies.

1891: Mary begins to suffer the first of many bouts of serious illness.

1894–1902: Mary spends time in New Zealand. In 1902, Mary suffers a stroke, which leaves her in a wheelchair for the rest of her life.

1909 (8 August): Mary passes away in the Josephite convent in North Sydney. Her last resting place is in the memorial chapel on the same site.

1995 (19 January): After a long process proving Mary's reputation of holiness and intercessory powers, Mary is beatified in Sydney, with Pope John Paul II presiding at the mass.

2009 (19 December): Pope Benedict XVI approves the Catholic Church's recognition of a second miracle attributed to Mary's intercession.

2010 (17 October): Mary is canonised by Pope Benedict XVI in St Peter's Square at the Vatican. To date, Mary is the only Australian to be recognised by the Catholic Church as a saint.