

PROVIDENCE ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

Sisters of Providence, Mother Joseph Province • Providence Health & Services

Myth Busters!

Loretta Z. Greene

If you have ever visited Providence Academy in Vancouver, Washington, you may have heard the story that Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart was very unhappy that the building was enlarged while she was in Montreal. The truth is that Mother Joseph was not only aware of the expansion in 1891, but helped to plan it and supervised the construction. The part of the building in question is the auditorium wing on the Academy's west side.



Providence Academy, showing the 1891 addition highlighted at left; note that trees have been cleared in front. Image #22.K1.001

The Academy Chronicles and *The Bell and the River* clearly state her involvement. On page 247 of *The Bell and the River* we read that “Through the planning and workmanship of Mother Joseph and through the financial backing of the superiors of the Western missions, an extension of one hundred feet had been added in 1891”. But it is the Chronicles that provide the details.

For several years, the Sisters contemplated enlarging the Academy but postponed plans due to lack of funds. In April 1891, Mother Madeline, treasurer general in Montreal, came to Vancouver. During her visit, she encouraged the sisters to build as soon as possible. “Do not defy Providence,” she said. “The need is real, the help of Providence will be the same and more.” The decision to build was made on June 15. In preparation, fruit trees in the orchard were cut down to accommodate a road to bring in supplies and make space for workers. Finally, on July 17, the cornerstone was blessed containing the council's decision, medals, and other precious mementoes. The ceremony was attended by clergy, Sisters from the general administration, and the three living foundresses: Mother Joseph, Sister Blandine of the Holy Angels and Sister Vincent de Paul.

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Anniversaries Celebrated

On December 8, 1856, more than 160 years ago, Mother Joseph and her four companions disembarked at Vancouver, Washington Territory, after a long and arduous journey. The Sisters of Providence of Mother Joseph Province marked the 160th anniversary on December 8, 2016 with celebrations in Seattle and Spokane, in which the Archives department was pleased to participate.

In Seattle, a celebratory Mass at Saint Joseph Residence (SJR) was followed by a special luncheon for attendees, which included Sisters of Providence, Provincial Administration staff, and Providence Health & Services executives and staff. During the Mass, Providence Archives was pleased to display significant artifacts beside the altar; other artifacts were carried in the offertory procession. The Archives also prepared two exhibits during the celebration at SJR.

On display during the Mass was the Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart, a unique, ornate piece crafted in honor of the 50th Anniversary of the Sisters in the West, in 1906. This piece holds at its center an embroidered Sacred Heart which was discovered by the five foundresses in the attic of Bishop A.M.A. Blanchet's house shortly after their arrival. Surrounding the Sacred Heart is the “Guard of Honor,” a devotion which dates to 1863, as well as the

names of all the sisters in the West from 1856 to 1902.

Also showcased were the tabernacle made by Mother Joseph out of a candle box and a large portrait of the five foundresses whose individual contributions to the community were noted by Provincial Superior Sr. Judith Desmarais during her remarks. Offertory items included the pectoral cross worn by Mother Joseph, its Seven Sorrows insignia well-worn from prayer.

The 50th anniversary of Saint Joseph Residence

(SJR), dedicated in May of 1966, was also commemorated at the Dec. 8th Mass. In honor of that anniversary, the decorative trowel used by Sr. Cecilia Abhold to seal the cornerstone was carried in the offertory procession.

Two other exhibits were prepared by Archives staff. In SJR's lobby were photographs and other images telling the story of the Sisters in the West, from the arrival of the foundresses to the establishment of ministries in education, healthcare and social services. Sisters living at SJR particularly enjoyed photographs of the nursing school classes. In the Archives reference room an artifact-focused exhibit highlighting religious life, education, and healthcare will remain for

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“Today, the 17th of July, 1891, the undersigned Louis de G. Schram, Vicar General, chaplain of this house, has blessed the first stone of this new addition under the name of ‘The Sacred Heart of Jesus Wing’ In witness whereof, I, Sister Marie Godefroy, superior general, have deposited with the present deed...a medal of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Sacred Heart of Mary, Our Lady of Seven Sorrows, and St. Vincent de Paul. This construction is made under the auspices of our first Mother foundress of our mission of the West, Sister Joseph of the Sacred Heart, first superior, and is also being built during the life of our two other sister foundresses, Sister Blandine of the Holy Angels, first mistress of novices, and Sister Vincent de Paul, first hospitalaire of the orphans.”

The stranger who saved the Sisters from financial woe in paying construction debt for the 1891 extension provided a loan of 1,000 piastres. This currency term is occasionally seen in early chronicles and correspondence - so what does it mean and how much was it worth?

Catholic Northwest historian Roberta Brown defined piastre in her volume, *Selected Letters of A.M.A. Blanchet, Bishop of Walla Walla & Nesqually 1846-1879*. In French Canada, “piastre” referred to the silver coin valued then at approximately one dollar. It was a popular term for the dollar in species (coin), as opposed to paper (pg. 67).

Thus, the stranger’s loan of 1,000 piastres would have equaled approximately \$1,000. Accounting for inflation, the 2016 value would be approximately \$25,280 – quite a sum indeed to pay construction debt.

The Chronicles continue with a brief description of the addition, which comprises about forty percent of the length of the Academy. “The foundation has excellent stone, is very solid and well made. The body of the house is of brick, in all similar to the old, except the balconies: the same height, the same proportions. In front, there is no balcony except on the first floor which abuts onto the first extension; in back, there are balconies on all three floors which go from one end of the house to the other; there is also a gable over the first two stories, which is a little larger than those on the sides.”

Mother Joseph supervised the construction with her faithful assistant, architect Jean Baptiste Blanchet, nephew of the two bishops of the northwest, A.M.A. Blanchet and F.N. Blanchet. Construction halted in the winter and resumed in April 1892.

Although the Sisters took to heart Mother Madeline’s initial exhortation not to ‘defy Providence,’ their previous concern for funding remained. On October 1, 1892, with no funds available for building payments the Sisters sought recourse in prayer. Needing 1,000 piastres (see inset article), they began a novena to God, patrons of the Institute and others and sang the traditional “O Douce Providence.” Their prayers were heard. A “stranger” knocked on the Academy door and offered the needed sum. “My sister,” he said, “here are 1,000 piastres which I should like to put into your hands for a very modest interest. I am a poor man, earning my bread by the sweat of my brow and I have already lost a lot of money I have

deposited at banks and elsewhere. Though I am a Protestant, I have said that there is no honest person like the nuns, and if you wish to take this little deposit, you will favor me very much.” The annalist concludes by reflecting on the mystery of faith: “Our dear Mother General and our good Sister Madeleine were right to tell us to build without fear, and to place all our confidence in Divine Providence, that the help would come to us in time. In fact, we are ourselves surprised and cannot understand the things have come to us if it is not of our very amicable Mother, Divine Providence.”

Exhibit Celebrates Sacred Heart Medical Center 130th Anniversary

Pamela Hedquist



What better way to help celebrate 130 years of hospital and nursing services at Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center than to display historical artifacts near the administration offices? Staff members Sister Rosalie Locati, SP, Sister Resource for Mission Heritage, and John Kleiderer, Director of Mission Integration, approached the Archives in August to ask that we create an exhibit to coincide with the hospital anniversary (1886-2016).

The theme “then and now” was used to explore the history of Sacred Heart, with the exhibit divided into three sections: construction and buildings; medical equipment; and patients. Some of the unique items include: the first volume of Chronicles (1886-1904); the trowel used to lay the cornerstone of the relocated hospital in 1907; hand-drawn plat maps created in 1919 of the first and second hospitals; medical-related images (1900’s to the present); the first page of the patient ledger from 1887; historic and modern medical equipment; and a bottle of alcohol that was purchased by a patient in 1904 - for medicinal purposes only, of course! The exhibit will remain for a few more months.

The Sacred Heart School of Nursing display case in the hospital lobby was also updated to reflect the 130th anniversary. This case

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the next few weeks. The exhibit includes a medicine bottle recently acquired by Providence Archives.

In Spokane, the anniversary was honored with an exhibit in the Doctor's Building on the Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center campus. Featuring personal items from Sisters, a collage of traveling photographs, and ministry artifacts, the exhibit showcases brief glimpses into what it means to be a Sister of Providence, and the many institutions they founded to meet the needs of the poor and vulnerable in the West. Visitors, who have been complimenting the display since it was installed in early November, are usually first drawn to an old pair of leather boots on the second shelf! Other notable items include a communion wafer cutter from St. Clare Hospital in Fort Benton, Montana; a set of *Jeu de Cartes* ("card game" in French) created by Sisters Pierre d'Verne and Jean Leonard in 1943; a 1950's academic letter from Providence Academy in Vancouver, Washington; and a box for opium and belladonna plaster. This exhibit is expected to remain in place for the next few months so there is plenty of time to stop by and check it out!

Exhibit

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displays memorable images of the early students, Sisters and lay staff of the school; nursing artifacts; and educational materials that have been used over the years.



All Bottled Up

Jessica Long

Nestled safely in acid-free tissue in the Archives artifacts storage area in Spokane, Washington are 20 glass pharmacy bottles that were once unceremoniously discarded along the banks of the Spokane River. From tiny 2.5-inch bottles to a large milk glass bottle, this fragile collection spent a lifetime in an old dump site until excavated by Brian Martin of Spokane, Washington during the 1980's and 1990's. His entire collection, dated ca. 1880 – 1930, is comprised of over 13,000 antique bottles, containers, and china pieces, including a few from the old Davenport Hotel.

After Mr. Martin's death in 2014, parts of his bottle collection were displayed at the Museum of Arts & Culture, Spokane, in their "100 Stories" exhibit (2014-2016), and more recently at Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center in a window exhibit inside the new cardiac unit. Eventually Providence Archives was presented with a box of leftover bottles and the opportunity to select a few to preserve in our collection. But which to choose? Here is where some real detective work began!

Though their early history is about as clear as the dirt they were found in, the bottles themselves provide the first clues. Embossed on the glass in raised letters are the names of several pharmacies located mainly in Spokane, but a few were from Seattle and Colfax, Washington, and even Anaconda, Montana! Based on the years the pharmacies were in operation, the bottles are estimated to be from the early 1900's. By using the pharmacy dates to narrow down a search through financial account ledgers from Providence hospitals in Spokane and Seattle,

references to a few of the pharmacies were found. Examples of expenses include those for surgery and pharmacy in 1916 from Murgittroyd's Drug Store, Joyner's Drugs, and Stewart & Holmes Drug Company. With this information in hand, a selection of bottles was carefully chosen based on the pharmacies found in the ledgers, the location of the pharmacies in areas with Providence hospitals, and the bottles' conditions. The lucky few were finally photographed and cataloged into the Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center collection.



Owl Drug Company bottle, artifact #A-68.130

Although it is impossible to know if these bottles were ever used at any Providence ministries, the connections between the pharmacy bottles and archival materials provide exciting insight into early Providence healthcare and the pharmaceutical industry. The old adage "trash to treasure" holds true for these bottles now tucked neatly away in Providence Archives!

To learn more about the bottles, visit our digital database on our website!

Traditional Habit Exhibited

Elizabeth Russell

A replica of the Sisters of Providence traditional habit from our collection will appear in an exhibit at White River Valley Museum in Auburn, Washington: "Women at Work," an exhibit of women's vocational clothing worn during the 20th century. The exhibit features the uniforms of women in the working world such as nurses, soldiers, and teachers along with profiles of the women who wore them. The SP habit is showcased in the exhibit as an example of a different sort of vocational clothing, one that was symbolic of a life-long choice. The habit is presented along with biographical information about Sister Mary Philothea, S.P. (Genevieve Gorman). Sister Mary Philothea's life was chosen for the profile because of her significant role in SP education ministries, including many years as a teacher and principal, and later, her work as founding Dean of the College of Sister Formation at Providence Heights, Issaquah, Washington.

Sister Mary Philothea's belief in the importance of professional qualifications is exemplified by this quote: "The Sister is not a Sister first, a nurse or teacher or social worker secondarily: she's unique --- she's a Sister-nurse, or Sister-teacher or Sister-social worker, and she must maintain the highest standards of her professional calling."

The exhibit runs from January 18 to June 18, 2017. Visit the White River Valley Museum website (www.wrvmuseum.org) for more information.

2017: A Year of Providence Anniversaries

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FOLLOWING FACILITIES CELEBRATING ANNIVERSARIES
AS PART OF PROVIDENCE HEALTH & SERVICES!

130 years

☞ Providence St. Peter Hospital, *Olympia, Washington*

85 years

☞ University of Great Falls, *Great Falls, Montana*

75 years

☞ Providence Saint Joseph Medical Center, *Burbank, California*

20 years

☞ Providence Kodiak Medical Center, *Seattle, Washington*

☞ Providence Visiting Nurses Association (VNA Home Health),
Spokane, Washington

5 years

☞ Providence Joseph House, *Seattle, Washington*



Providence Saint Joseph Medical Center, ca. 1943. Image #167.A3.1

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