

## PROVIDENCE ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

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

### A story in stone

Jessica Long

For over a century, a composite stone statue of St. Elizabeth of Hungary - patron saint of hospitals, nurses, and charity - has looked over the grounds of the former St. Elizabeth Hospital in Yakima, Wash. Donated by Mr. and Mrs. Phillip Ditter in 1918, the beautiful statue depicted St. Elizabeth, also a principal patron of the Sisters of Providence religious community, wearing a crown and holding roses in her arms. The statue was seven feet tall, painted white, and stood on a base inscribed with the donors' names.



St. Elizabeth statue above the hospital entrance in 1923

Phillip Ditter was not just a one-time donor, but a dear friend and benefactor of St. Elizabeth Hospital. He was born in 1868 in Shakopee, Minn. and moved with his family to the Yakima area in 1884. His father, Henry Ditter, was a pioneer merchant in Yakima and operated a store that Phillip and his brother Joseph would later take over and operate as the Ditter Brothers, selling dry goods and ladies' ready-to-wear clothing. Phillip married Mary

### Excluded assets in the archives

Loretta Greene

My office phone rang the morning of January 9<sup>th</sup>, and I greeted Sister Fe Sumalde. Sister Fe was the chaplain at Astria Regional Medical Center, the former Providence Yakima Medical Center (PYMC). What I didn't expect to hear was Sister Fe's distraught voice as she told me that the prior afternoon the medical center declared bankruptcy and would be closed within one week. One week. A host of thoughts and questions swept through my mind as our conversation settled upon the safe-keeping and retrieval of the Providence excluded assets that remained on the campus after the sale of PYMC in 2003.

Excluded assets are materials having historical or religious significance to Providence that are identified when a Providence-sponsored ministry is sold or transferred to another entity. Providence retains the right to leave the assets on campus as a loan, or to remove them at any time. They can be historical records, artifacts, religious objects and other items that document the history and ministry of that particular ministry. Chronicles, historical ledgers and committee minutes, photographs, framed school of nursing graduate portraits, statues, and the contents of a cornerstone box would all be considered excluded assets. The abrupt closure of Astria Regional Medical Center necessitates removal of our excluded assets.

Originally known as St. Elizabeth Hospital ("St. E's"), the institution was founded in 1891 by the Sisters of Providence in response to the urging of the local priest and executives from the railroad and the U.S. Reclamation Service. The Sisters were not newcomers to the Yakima area, having established St. Joseph Academy in 1875. The first St. E's opened with 13 beds in a rented house for \$12 a month. The hospital outgrew this location and moved the next year to a larger building, with expansions and a new building in 1914 to follow. A nursing school was opened in 1907 and closed in 1971, with 1,085 graduates over its 64-year history. The Sisters of Providence nursed the Yakima community through epidemics such as typhoid, 1918 influenza, polio, and twins. Yes, a record

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A. Duffey in 1894, and they had five children together. According to early St. Elizabeth Hospital chronicles, the Ditters furnished two patient rooms when the hospital opened and provided the silk for the interior of a tabernacle. Phillip also gave a chalice to the sisters in 1892, which was used in the first Mass in the small chapel of the new 25-bed hospital building. Mr. Ditter died at St. Elizabeth Hospital on September 9, 1942 after several weeks of illness and Mrs. Ditter died in 1946.

The statue was originally installed above the main entrance to the 1914 building on April 5, 1918, the feast day of Mother Vincent Ferrier, the provincial superior of Sacred Heart Province. Although St. Elizabeth was moved sometime in the 1940's to the garden in front of the hospital and again in 1962, she kept a steadfast watch over the years as the buildings and people of Yakima changed around her.

In spite of its beauty, in January vandals pushed the statue over and broke it into pieces after the abrupt closure of what is now Astria Regional Medical Center. (See related article on excluded assets).

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## Excluded assets

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of six sets of twins were born within a two-month period in 1935! St. E's claims several firsts in coronary care in Washington State. In 1994, the name was changed to Providence Yakima Medical Center as part of a branding campaign for Providence-sponsored facilities. Despite the medical center's long and distinguished service in Yakima, it fell prey to regional competition and was sold to Health Management Associates in 2003. Ownership changed hands again in 2017 when the hospital became Astria Regional Medical Center.

Soon after the closure announcement, Sister Fe and some of the medical center staff began the process of gathering some of the excluded assets on our official list. The week after the announcement I traveled to Yakima to confirm the ownership of our excluded assets and to relocate them to one central place. I was warmly welcomed by the few remaining senior staff – the department heads of security, nursing, executive administration, facilities, and the COO. Everyone was eager to identify anything related to Providence and the religious community. It was eerie walking through the empty and silent corridors, and riding the elevators knowing that just one week earlier patients were being cared for and staff were busy about their duties. It was important to find a central location to secure the movable excluded assets. Sister Fe offered the chapel.

As we walked the halls and checked offices, closets, former classrooms, and the attic of the school of nursing building, we not only located the objects on the 2003 excluded assets list but also other Providence materials of which I was not aware. These materials included 6 over-size bankers' boxes of slides, identified photographs and videotapes, and scrapbooks from the PYMC marketing and public relations departments, as well as books from the St. E's school of nursing library, and assorted medical artifacts. Three small ledgers recording the meeting minutes of the medical staff, 1919-1927, reveal a glimpse into the organization of the staff and its standardization at the hospital in the early years of its ministry to the people of Yakima.



**Snow dusts the cornerstone of the 1914 building, an excluded asset on the grounds of the present hospital**

Not all aspects of the survey process were successful. I knew that since 2003 some of the smaller objects on the excluded assets were gone, but the most disturbing act was the vandalizing of a composite stone statue of St. Elizabeth. (See related article). For now, the excluded assets and other historical materials and artifacts are secured in the chapel. They cannot be moved until after the building is auctioned and the sale closed. We will move the artifacts to Spokane with the rest of our artifact collections, and the paper records and photographs will be moved to Seattle. Arrangements will also be made for removal of architectural objects such as the brass box containing dedication mementoes, placed within the building's cornerstone.

I am grateful to Sister Fe Sumalde and all the Astria Health staff who assisted with this excluded assets process. It was a difficult time considering what the staff had endured in the prior week. In the spring the Archives staff looks forward to transferring the excluded assets to the archival collection so the history and ministry of St. Elizabeth Hospital/Providence Yakima Medical Center will be preserved.

## Keeping the legacy alive - electronically!

Pamela Hedquist

For each Sister of Providence, a biographical file is created to include her religious community information and personal data. Providence Archives houses about 1,800 biographical files for sisters who have ministered in the former Sacred Heart and St. Ignatius Provinces dating back to 1856, as well as the current Mother Joseph Province. These files include the deceased, and those who have transferred to other provinces or left the community. Files on the 110 currently living sisters are maintained by the provincial secretary of Mother Joseph Province.

Due to changes in technology and record-keeping, it was decided years ago to move the sisters' files to electronic storage. Separate databases were created for the two former western provinces, and over the last two decades data was entered as time allowed. When the two provinces merged as Mother Joseph Province in 2000, a single database was created and a database committee was formed. Our current database is in a software called Salesforce. Team member Susan Selbach is responsible for updating changes for the living sister records, while Pam Hedquist is responsible for entering the deceased sisters' records. Not all of the data from the two former record-keeping systems was transferrable, so Susan and Pam continue to update missing information, solve arising issues and enter new data.

When a sister dies her record is completed in Salesforce and her paper file transferred to Archives. Of the 1,800 combined paper files, approximately 500 are completed records in the database. Some of the early files are in French and will require translation before entering.

Entering a deceased sister's record can be challenging as there could be very little information in her file. There are many reference books, ledgers and papers in Providence Archives, Seattle. Some of these resources have been digitized, such as the Little Journal of Providence and the historic chronicles. Because the early chronicles were handwritten and therefore not machine-readable, all of those written in English have been transcribed. Thanks to this work and with the invaluable help of sister volunteers, research has become so much easier!

Pam is located in Spokane, so she uses the electronic resources for filling in missing information. Some examples of missing information include: birth city, family information, death information, awards, ministry and education dates and places. The former St. Ignatius Province database records were printed and scanned to use for entering that data. The archives at the General

Administration in Montreal is also a resource for the early sisters who entered there before missioning to the west. If necessary, Pam completes any final research in Seattle and organizes the records before closing the file. The average time to process a file is about two hours; however, research on some information can take much longer. Pam travels to Seattle about four times a year.

Sometimes one file reveals a connection to another sister who is a relative, providing double rewards for your research effort! The Sisters of Providence share a rich history full of wonderful accomplishments while impacting the lives of many people where they lived or worked. One such example is Sister Gertrude of Providence.

### A SISTER TO REMEMBER

Gertrude of Providence (Clara Ann O'Brien, 1871-1948), a Sister of Providence for 76 years, devoted her life of ministry to the hospitals in the west, which she served as pharmacist for nearly 25 years and as a local superior for 26 years.



Born the third of five daughters, her four sisters also became women religious, one a Sister of Providence (Sister Alfred of the Sacred Heart, 1863-1908) and three Benedictines. The town of Woodburn, Ore. was a junction for railway branches from the main line. The O'Brien family home became the way station for many Oregon priests and sisters on their way to another destination. Mother Mary Theresa, superior of St. Vincent Hospital in Portland, and Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart also frequently visited the family. It was their kindly visits that attracted young Clara Ann and her sibling to join the Sisters of Providence community.

Sr. Gertrude was most known for the impact she made on the people of Yakima, Wash. Upon the announcement of her death in 1948, a Yakima newspaper wrote, "Whatever stone may mark her final resting place, for Yakima her monument will always be St. Elizabeth Hospital, built during her service as superior." Sister Gertrude served at St. Elizabeth Hospital as superior for twelve years, and pharmacist for ten.

## To everything there is a time...and in Providence Archives, it is time for a change of supervisor!

**W**e are happy to share that Sister Jacqueline Fernandes, as a member of the new Mother Joseph Province leadership team, has been appointed as our new liaison! Sister Jacqueline is no stranger to us in light of her most recent position as administrator of Saint Joseph Residence, where the archives are located. Because of that relationship, Sister Jacqueline is looking forward to getting to know us better through the work that we do and to learn more about the archival collections. Our archives are in her blood – many years ago as a young sister, she volunteered with Sister Rita Bergamini, foundress of Providence Archives. Sister Jacqueline hopes that someday the province will be able to provide more space for the Archives to really share its treasures with the public.

Loretta, Peter, Elizabeth, Pam and Jessica gratefully thank Sister Judith Desmarais, outgoing liaison, for the seven years of support, interest and friendship she shared with us. Maybe she'll return as a volunteer?



**It's smiles all around as the Seattle staff meet with their new supervisor, Sr. Jacqueline Fernandes. Quarterly meetings are already planned and the first agenda is full!**

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