On December 8, the Archives staff, along with many sisters, associates, and friends, paused to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the arrival of five foundress Sisters of Providence in the Northwest. Through the sesquicentennial celebrations we are more familiar with our heritage stories about the sisters, clergy, and assistants who stepped off the S.S. Columbia at Fort Vancouver in Washington Territory. The visible part of the anniversary celebration focused on the three public liturgies and receptions, a commemorative calendar, an historical timeline, exhibits of artifacts and photographs, and an online chronology of the sisters’ journey (see article below). From the Archives point of view, the less visible but perhaps more valuable components were the historical facts that were discovered, enhanced, or clarified through our research for these events. This was what the staff relished—the opportunity to dig deeper into the historical record, to discover new and clarify old facts, to gain a greater understanding of the sacrifices of the religious community in accepting this mission and the stark realities of international travel in 1856, and to analyze and weave together various resources for a larger picture of the sisters’ journey to the Northwest and the growth of the religious community.
community and ministries over 150 years. We always acknowledged that the sisters did not operate in a vacuum, and two years of research confirmed this once again. Our sesquicentennial research could not have been possible without the insight of Sisters of Providence who have lived the history and the assistance of local and international archivists and librarians. We always assumed that the sisters’ history is documented in repositories other than ours in Seattle or in Montreal and the sesquicentennial research proved that there are many untapped sources waiting to be discovered. We are encouraged to continue our research without waiting for a celebratory event. One of our most constant research assistants was the Internet. While it did not hold all the answers to our questions, it certainly had a great impact. There was sufficient material to enhance our research and provide information that in earlier decades would have required time and funds for a personal visit to archives and libraries. However, nothing can take the place of the personal touch since all pertinent sources cannot be identified or studied online. Our Internet studies once again demonstrated how the research environment is shifting electronically and the value of publishing more of our inventories and resources online for public access. So where does the conclusion of the sesquicentennial leave us? For starters, we are taking a collective sigh of relief and catching up on archival projects and routine activities that were put on hold during 2006. Next, we will continue sesquicentennial research that needs fleshing out. And in the long term, we look forward to projects to make archival material more accessible including processing collections for hospitals and schools from both sides of the Cascade mountains and from Alaska to California, providing web access to the database of images, and “optical character recognition” of typescript documents.

We have enjoyed sharing 150 years of the Sisters of Providence history in the Northwest with you through various formats in 2006. Please let us know if there is something you would like to know more about so we can address it in future archival publications.

Chronology Leading to the Arrival of the Sisters of Providence in Washington Territory, 1856.” The exhibit is a retelling of key events prior to, during, and soon after the journey made by Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart, Sisters Praxedes of Providence, Blandine of the Holy Angels, Vincent de Paul, Mary of the Precious Blood, and their companions.

To relive how the journey came to be and retrace its itinerary and significant moments, visit the Archives site at http://www.providence.org/phs/archives/history_online/journey/chronointro.htm

Picturing Providence continued from 3

was good: Providence Academy could be repaired and would reopen. The loss was estimated at about $37,000, with insurance paying most of the bill. Records show the Academy’s share of repair expenditures to be at least $1,500.

As work progressed on the building, resident sisters split up and moved to neighboring houses: St. Joseph Hospital, St. Vincent Hospital in Portland, and Our Lady of Lourdes parishioners’ homes. Two sisters stayed on at the Academy along with the Local Superior, Sr. Dolorosa (Violet Dufault).

By October 24, the high school had reopened, and the first quarter extended until November 16 to make up the lost time. The old Providence Academy had weathered the storm, and 44 years and many storms later, still stands proud.

December 14, 1856: Sr. Maryann Benoit writing in the May 1968 issue of Providence Outlook (St. Ignatius Province) newsletter on changes to chapter meetings
One of the first things that people do after a big storm is compare it to others, and almost always, someone had it worse. For Oregonians and Washingtonians who were around in 1962, the windstorm that blew through here December 14 cannot help but invite comparisons to the Columbus Day Storm of October 12, 1962, still known as “the mother of all storms” in the region. The gale claimed 46 lives, downed 15 million board feet of timber and caused $235 million in property damage.

These pictures show damage to Providence Academy in Vancouver, where winds reached ninety-two miles an hour, though other parts of the region recorded speeds in excess of 100 m.p.h. The storm began at about 5:00 p.m., as the sisters were finishing spiritual reading and were assembling in the refectory for supper. As the wind began flinging pieces of roofing to the ground, the sisters gathered in the first floor hallway to avoid any flying glass should windows begin to break (as they did at St. Joseph Hospital across the way, which lost 18 windows and had minor injuries to patients from flying glass). Power and phone soon dropped, and branches and whole trees were coming down all over the property. Retired teacher Sr. Mary Catherine McGuire remembers that the fire alarm had been set off and would not stop ringing, adding to the chaos. By 10:00 p.m. water pouring in from the roof and the broken sprinkler system began saturating the third and fourth floors. Sisters spent hours mopping and moving library books before getting any rest for the night.

As these images attest, the morning light revealed extensive destruction. “Looking over the damage after the storm had subsided it seemed futile even to think of repairs, and we were resigning ourselves to the dramatic closing of the historic cradle of the West and our much loved home,” wrote Sr. Imelda Lambertini to Sr. Mary Berchmans (Murphy). The day after the storm, Mother Judith (Teresa Lang), Provincial Superior, arrived from Seattle to survey the damage and to confer with insurance officials and local pastors. The news continued on p. 2
2007: A Year of Providence Anniversaries

Congratulations to facilities and ministries celebrating anniversaries of their founding or of sponsorship under Mother Joseph Province! Here are some them.

120 years
Providence St. Peter Medical Center
Olympia, Washington

75 years
University of Great Falls
Montana

65 Years
Providence St. Joseph Medical Center
Burbank, California

20 years
Sojourner Place
Seattle, Washington
Mary Conrad Center
Anchorage, Alaska

Srs. Rita Mudd, Mary Regis Dufresne and other educators from the College of Great Falls circa 1956. Co-founded in 1932 by Bp. Edwin O’Hara, the Sisters of Providence and the Ursuline Sisters, the junior college was exclusively for women during its first two decades.

10 years
Spokane Visiting Nurses Association (VNA)
Washington

Providence Kodiak Medical Center
Alaska

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Past Forward is published in the spring, fall and winter.
Editing and design:
J. Norman Dizon