Firmly cemented in the building’s foundation, they hold secrets as old as the edifice itself. Yet people walk by them everyday and seldom glance at their inscriptions. Cornerstones, that is, those marble or granite blocks of stone placed in prominent corners of each Providence building symbolizing Christ as foundation of the church.

Cornerstones are inscribed with the name and erection date of the building and hollowed out to receive a small copper box filled with mementos—a time capsule. In the Sisters of Providence tradition, such items can consist of medals and statuettes of Christ and saints; photographs of religious community leaders, the facility, personnel and the area; coins and current newspapers; letters written to future administrators; and other items limited only by imagination and space. The stones are blessed during the dedication ceremony.

Over time, as Providence facilities were divested or torn down, some cornerstones and their contents have been transferred to Providence Archives for indefinite storage or until they can be remounted elsewhere. Recently four cornerstones were relocated around the West Seattle campus of Providence Mount St. Vincent and Saint Joseph Residence.

At the east entrance of the long-term care complex (called “the Mount”) is the cornerstone for the House of Providence which was built on the grounds in 1924 to serve as provincial headquarters, novitiate, and infirmary. The House of Providence and its operations fully ceased in 1966 when Saint Joseph Residence was built.

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Under a spruce tree on the western driveway is the cornerstone that belonged to the School of Nursing at St. Vincent Hospital in Portland. The school educated nurses from 1892 until its official transfer to the University of Portland in the early 1960s. The building was razed in the late 1970s.

Nestled under trees in the gardens of Saint Joseph Residence can be found the cornerstone for Providence Heights, College of Sister Formation, located in Issaquah, Wash. The college offered advanced degree programs for women religious for nearly eight years until it closed in 1969. Nearby another nursing school is represented by the cornerstone from Providence Hospital, Oakland, Calif., founded in 1904.

Another cornerstone, in place for many years, rests in the upper garden behind Saint Joseph Residence. It is the original 1923 stone for the Mount, inscribed with its former name of St. Vincent Home for the Aged.

On your next stroll on the grounds of the Mount keep your eyes out for these new reminders of our past.—LG

Mother Judith Lang with Bp. Egidio Vagnozzi, Apostolic Delegate, and other clergy at the blessing of Providence Heights cornerstone (1961)

Removing cornerstone for the School of Nursing at Providence Oakland prior to demolition (1975)

A Century of Caring: A Pictorial History of Alta Bates Summit Medical Center, 2005

The Sisters of Providence, considered “founding visionaries” of this East Bay, Calif., healthcare facility, figure prominently in the commemorative book celebrating over 100 years of service to the Oakland and Berkeley communities. Providence began its work in 1902 and lasted until 1992 when the facility became Summit. The book is an extended and detailed timeline that includes numerous archival photographs and historical facts and stories.

Erratum
In the last issue (fall 2004) the photo caption for the new Leadership Team and Provincial Council for Mother Joseph Province incorrectly stated the members’ term as four years. The governing group will serve for five years beginning this year.

Reader’s Corner

New titles relating to the history of the Sisters of Providence:


The new biography immerses us into the life of Mother Bernard Morin, foundress of the Sisters of Providence in Chile. Rojas does not merely investigate her personal life and work within the religious congregation, but also the unique and influential role she played in the history of the Catholic Church of her adopted country. A worthy addition to the biographies of Providence founders.

Legacy in Stone

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Contents of the Mount’s 1923 cornerstone box were examined by (l-r) Srs. Philias Denis, Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Dolorita, Beatrice Duval, Mary Priscilla Frank (1968)
For most women in the 19th and early 20th centuries, work outside the home and farm—much less a career—was an option that was very foreign. But as industrialization spread, immigration grew, education improved, and attitudes shifted, large numbers of them began entering the workplace. A profession that saw a spike in membership as it modernized was the field of nursing. The Sisters of Providence, many of them pioneering nurses themselves, paved the way for many would-be caregivers by building schools of nursing affiliated with their hospitals. The impact of these schools was felt in nursing education and practice and in the area’s health care. Likewise the impact on archival collecting of closed schools’ photographs and records has been abundant and wide-ranging. An excellent example is the student portrait collection from the School of Nursing at Providence Hospital, Seattle. Numbering a total of 1,057 photographs, portraits of students from 1913 to 1960 were glued on unwieldy wood panels measuring three by two feet and weighing about 20 pounds each. Needless to say reproducing the photographs was extremely difficult. Thus digital imaging and cataloging of each photo became necessary. The in-house project took two weeks to complete. As a result staff can now search for portraits by name or year using the Archives image database.

Digitization has allowed us to provide portraits and other information to researchers, many having genealogical interest in relatives who attended the school. In fact, previous requests for photos that were thought inaccessible have been fulfilled much to the delight of the researcher. Through these images the progress of women in nursing is made real and personal.
2005: A Year of Providence Anniversaries

Congratulations to facilities and ministries celebrating founding anniversaries or anniversaries of sponsorship by Mother Joseph Province.

125 years
St. Mary Medical Center, Walla Walla, Wash.

100 years
Providence Everett Medical Center, Everett, Wash.

50 years
Providence High School, Burbank, Calif.

20 years
Vincent House, Seattle, Wash.
Providence House, Yakima, Wash.

15 years
St. Joseph Medical Center, Polson, Mont.
Heritage House at the Market, Seattle, Wash.

10 years
La Papalota Local Community, El Salvador
Vashon Community Care Center, Vashon Island, Wash.
Providence House, Portland, Ore.
Deer Park Hospital, Deer Park, Wash.
Providence Horizon House, Anchorage, Alaska
Providence ElderPlace, Seattle, Wash.

5 years
Brookside Manor, Hood River, Ore.

The former Monte Cristo Hotel was the home of Providence Hospital, Everett, from 1905 to 1924.

New facilities in 2005
Providence Valdez Medical Center, Valdez, Alaska
Providence Holy Cross Health Center, Valencia, Calif.