

# Past *Forward*

PROVIDENCE ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

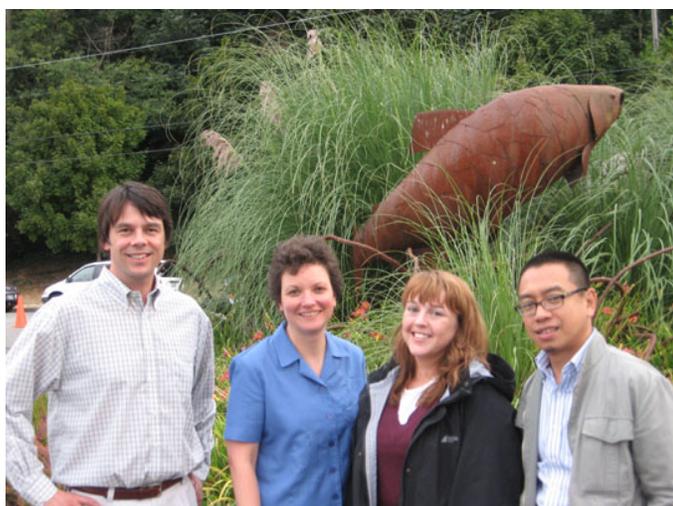
Sisters of Providence, Mother Joseph Province • Providence Health & Services



## FROM THE ARCHIVIST

by Loretta Z. Greene, M.A., C.A.

### Collaborate...Naturally!



After a meeting that went swimmingly, western Providence archivists, (l-r) Peter Schmid, Loretta Greene, Leslie Hall and Norman Dizon, pause at Alki Beach.

their repositories in administrative issues, policies and procedures, collections content, databases, photographs and artifacts, digitization and outreach activities.

They shared a lively discussion about collaborative projects and sharing resources among them and Marie-Claude Beland, General Administration archivist in Montreal. Collaboration, a natural desire with the three archives sharing common history, record types and sister personnel, can take the form of research, interprovince meetings and assistance to Providence archivists outside North America (see Past Forward, Winter 2005). The MJP sesquicentennial celebration  
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August 22-23 were historic days in the Archives, days for archivists of the western provinces to meet. The Mother Joseph Province (MJP) Archives staff was pleased to host Leslie Hall, the newly appointed archivist of Holy Angels Province (HAP), headquartered in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

During her visit Leslie received an orientation to the MJP paper, photograph and artifact collections, databases and Web site. This enabled the colleagues to identify similarities and differences between

## Q & A: Leslie Hall, Archivist for Holy Angels Province

*Ms. Hall is based in Edmonton, Alberta. She was in Seattle to learn more about the Mother Joseph Province archives and meet with fellow archivists (see above article).*

### Describe your educational and professional background.

I studied Canadian history at the University of Victoria and the University of Manitoba, where I received my BA and MA respectively. My studies focused primarily on Western Canadian history, gender history, Aboriginal history and oral history—areas I encounter regularly in the HAP archives! During my studies I was fortunate to work in various archives in addition

to being a professional researcher. Projects I worked on involved establishing new archival collections and developing databases. My historical research background comes in handy as I develop archival techniques and search out the best ways to conserve the collections.

### Why did you choose the archives field?

I chose to work in archives because of my love for history. As I studied history in school, and as I worked in other

archives, I grew to have a great respect for the profession. I became very intrigued by the work and how it supports and shapes the history of our culture.

### What attracted you to working for Holy Angels Province?

I was attracted to working in a small archives because it gives me the opportunity to use the full range of my skills and experience, while at the same time providing learning  
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## Inside

Sirop de Gomme

Treasure Hunter

Tale of Two Ships

# The Case of the *Sirop de Gomme*

by J. Norman Dizon, Associate Archivist

The three-decade old community of the Sisters of Providence in Montreal in the 1870s faced many struggles to sustain and advance their work in Canada and America. During this time they encountered an entirely new challenge—a civil lawsuit—that shed light on how they were perceived by others. The claim could be seen as a sign of growing prominence, even influence, of the tight-knit community. On the other hand it could be interpreted, and indeed it was, as an attack on the community's aims of charity to the poor and, therefore, on its *raison d'être*.

As part of their repertoire in treating and controlling diseases, the Montreal sisters formulated various mixtures and compounds that became the materia medica of the community (see *Past Forward*, Summer 2004). One compound they patented in Ottawa and the U.S. in 1875 was spruce gum syrup or *sirop de gomme*, likely used as



*The medicinal compound contained in this bottle (actual size) became the center of a cause célèbre.*

mucilage for ingredients in cough and cold medicines among other drugs. An innocuous-sounding substance, it seemed. Yet by the end of the same year, a pharmacist had filed suit against the motherhouse contesting its right to sell the compound. The lawsuit lasted for three years.

The Rev. Elie J. Auclair, in his 1914 book, *Life of Mother Caron*, vehemently defended the sisters' side:

“Certain persons went so far as to bring law proceedings against the good and compassionate Mother [Caron]...Despite her advanced age, somewhere about 1875-1876, she was obliged to appear before the Court, defending the rights of her Community as regarded the “Compound Syrup of Spruce Gum.” People are always found to declare, that the Sisters enter into unfair competition with business people. But they do not take into account that these

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## On the Lookout for Artifacts

Providence Associates hold dear many things relating to the religious community. There is one unique member who keeps a watchful eye for objects that have direct connection to its history. No one can match the doggedness of Phyllis Silva-Keith, P.A., of Kirkland, Washington, who happens to be the Associates co-executive director. She calls herself an “e-Bay watchdog” of all things Providence, referring to the Internet auction site.

Her searches have resulted in her acquiring first-edition books, jubilee memorabilia, a 1940s commemorative vase, postcards of the Montreal founders, and other collectibles from as far as Oklahoma. Phyllis won a bid on a medicinal bottle which contained a compound called “syrup of spruce gum” used in the late 1800s (see above article). Of her online experience she says, “You never know what you’ll find on e-Bay. I

was so surprised when I found this bottle and delighted when I won the auction. I just couldn’t picture it on any other shelf but ours!” A sharp eye, computer skills and sense of history make Phyllis one savvy treasure hunter.—JND



*Phyllis Silva-Keith, P.A., holds the late 19th century medicinal bottle she donated to the Archives.*

## PICTURING PROVIDENCE

by Peter F. Schmid, C.A., Visual Resources Archivist

A column highlighting archival photographs and other resources that provide visual documentation of the Sisters of Providence. Peter selects notable materials from the collection of over 50,000 photographs. He can be reached at 206-923-4012 or peter.schmid@providence.org.

# A Tale of Two Ships



### verbatim

With deepest gratitude, an 8th grade boy approached his teacher and announced, "Sister, Father is going to let me clean the schoolyard on Saturdays so that I can work off my intuition!"

—*Caritas newsletter*,  
April 1, 1964

The centennial of the arrival of the Sisters of Providence in the Northwest was celebrated at Providence Academy in Vancouver, Washington, in April-May of 1956. An open house and tea was held on April 8, and included art and historical artifact exhibits. Here, Sr. Cecilia Mary (Agnes Ann Kucera) shows a model of the ship that brought the sisters from San Francisco to Vancouver. (The model originally was presented to Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart in 1895 on the occasion of her golden jubilee.) The rather whimsical and nostalgic three-masted ship was dubbed the *Gamelin*, a fictional ship. The actual ship was the *Columbia*, a paddle-wheel steamer with sails, as seen in this illustration. The *Gamelin* is on display in the Archives.

Sr. Cecilia Mary taught music at the Academy for many years beginning in the 1930s. She also wrote a musical for the anniversary entitled "Land of Loo-et."

## *Sirup de Gomme* continued from p. 2

servants of the poor only keep the barest necessities for themselves; that whatever they can earn by their industry is for the benefit of their works...and that finally the large houses which they build are for the accommodation of the needy of every description, and that in such establishments, they are obliged to meet all expenses...These cavillers will not see that in the exploiting of some commercial article, as for instance, medicine [sic], that the only reason it can be sold cheaper

by the Sisters is because each one does her share of the work, simply for her keep, and then, they cry out upon the house tops that a wrong is being done. Poor short-sighted humanity! Some of the very persons who have spoken so strongly against the Sisters may be only too glad, some day, to find an asylum with them, for themselves or for their relatives."

The dispute "which at that time had quite a vogue" lasted until Sept. 18, 1878 when the community, represented by

two eminent lawyers, was found to have the right of commerce of the compound. According to Mother Caron, "It is only the desire of God's glory and the good of the poor that could give the necessary courage. Heaven has vouchsafed to bless that act of self-denial by permitting us to win our suit."

Tested in the courts of law and public opinion, the sisters would tap into the well of "necessary courage" in future challenges.

## **HAP Archivist**

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opportunities through new challenges. I am thrilled to have the chance to work with all key archival functions including conservation, access, research, outreach, collection development and more.

### **How do you view the history of the HAP sisters and their contributions to the region?**

I find the work of the sisters, both past and present, to be a true inspiration.

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## **From the Archivist**

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tion this year is a recent example of teamwork as the MJP staff solicited information and images from Montreal and Edmonton for the commemorative calendar and timeline. Leslie and

Marie-Claude have also been invited to contribute articles for *Past Forward*. And in 2007 they will identify other ways to cooperate across the miles.

But collaboration doesn't have to wait for planning. The archivists discussed the potential transfer of historical records, images and artifacts that best belong in the other's repository. Over the years, sisters have transferred between provinces or had relatives in another province, resulting in materials collected and preserved away from their province of origin. By exchanging materials, items will be more accessible to staff and researchers. Leslie began this process by reviewing HAP images to identify gaps in her collection. Images will be scanned for reference in

Seattle with originals for transfer to Edmonton. Copy prints will be obtained from Leslie and credit given to HAP Archives.

Most visits end too soon and this one was no different. However, a new camaraderie was developed with a new colleague in Holy Angels Province. We look forward to its continuation in the years to come.



*An example of a photo that best belongs in Holy Angels Province. Srs. Justinien and Angelica picnicking with their young ward in Kootenay, BC, c. 1900.*

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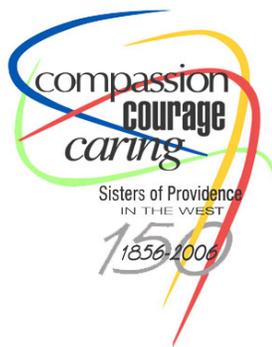
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