

PROVIDENCE ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

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

University of Providence

90th anniversary

Loretta Greene and Jessica Long

One of the many (many) jobs of Providence Archives staff is to keep track of significant dates related to the institutions founded by the Sisters of Providence in the West, so the announcement of University of Providence's 90th anniversary this year came as no surprise. While Nic Estrada, director of campus ministry, was busy planning the events, he reached out to the archives and we were happy to lend a hand, or more accurately, photographs and artifacts. A few months later, a lovely surprise arrived in the mail for Loretta: a formal invitation to the anniversary celebrations. As Providence would have it, Loretta and Jessica were in the middle of a project to have the collections of Galerie Trinitas appraised, a job which required them to travel to Great Falls to work directly with the Galerie's collection and assist the appraisers. Sister Mary Trinitas Morin, SP, for whom the Galerie is named, was a highly skilled artist in liturgical metalwork, ceramics, calligraphy, painting, and other media. Her work forms the nucleus of the gallery on the UP campus. Arrangements were then made to combine the anniversary festivities with archive responsibilities, and soon Loretta and Jessica found themselves navigating busy airports on Sunday October 16th with a full four-day schedule ahead of them.

The first item on the itinerary was the President's Dinner and Civic Reception held Sunday evening in the new University Center. As guests

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Deaccessioned object finds new home with Poor Clare Sisters

Jessica Long

The mission of Providence Archives is to "collect, organize, preserve, and administer access to records," so it can seem odd to others when they learn that we occasionally get rid of things. In fact, permanently removing records from a collection, known as deaccessioning, is part of responsible collections management for both archives and museums. It is meant to refine and strengthen collections with respect to mission, collection scope, goals, and available resources. Each situation is unique, but the decision to deaccession something is always based on one of the reasons outlined in our collection policy. A common one is that an item is a duplicate. Another is an object being in such poor

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Collaboration results in new Columbus Hospital accession

Loretta Greene

Serendipity often plays a role in the work of archivists. What began in September with a question from the Great Falls Genealogy Society (GFGS) regarding records for St. Thomas Home ended in October with the transfer of two Columbus Hospital patient admissions ledgers from the genealogy society to Providence Archives.

The Sisters of Providence founded three ministries in Great Falls, Montana: Columbus Hos-

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in formal attire mingled outside the banquet venue, they were treated to an exhibit created by Nic Estrada. The exhibit featured objects from the archive's artifact collection. The objects included pennants, a College of Great Falls beanie hat, and an Argo pinback button, all of which complimented the university's own collection of items, such as yearbooks, pins, and an Argo basketball jersey. At the dinner, guests sat at beautifully decorated tables and listened as Fr. Oliver Doyle, president of the University of Providence, Dr. Rod Hochman, president and CEO of Providence St. Joseph Health, Sister Barbara Schamber, provincial leader of Mother Joseph Province, and Terry Cosgrove, chair of the university Board of Trustees, gave speeches in front of a large lit "90." Photographs from the archive's visual resources collection were prominently displayed on two



Sr. Rosa Nguyen, SP, wearing the traditional habit of the Sisters of Providence, processes the reliquary to the Blessed Emilie Gamelin shrine in Trinitas Chapel

screens throughout the evening.

The following day was the public anniversary Mass in the Trinitas Chapel followed by a luncheon. Bishop Michael Warfel presided over the Mass, assisted by Coadjutor Bishop Jeffrey Fleming, who gave the homily. A splendid choir accompanied by musicians comprised of students



Reliquary in the Blessed Emilie Gamelin shrine, Trinitas Chapel

and staff provided the music. University students were also included in the celebrations when pairs processed down the aisles dressed in styles of clothing from different eras. For us though, the star of the day may have been the golden monstrance carried by Sister Rosa Nguyen dressed in the traditional Sisters of Providence habit. The monstrance is from Providence Mount St. Vincent, Seattle and has a beautiful large sunburst design around the lunette with an ornate surmounted cross and square base. It is also a part of the archive's artifact collection, and is on long-term loan to the university specifically to display a first-class relic of Blessed Emilie Gamelin. It

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was wonderful to watch as the new reliquary was blessed and dedicated by Bishop Warfel, and then gracefully displayed in its new home at the back of the chapel. Before Mass ended, members of the women's basketball team presented flowers to the Sisters of Providence in attendance. The next day, the team headed to Mexico to represent Team USA at the International University Sports Federation Games.

With only one and one-half days to work with the Galerie collections at the end of the trip, Loretta and Jessica had a strict list of priorities. The first was to assist Stephanie Miller, the appraiser tasked with assessing the metalwork, particularly the chalices made by Sr. Mary Trinitas. Since Stephanie was only onsite for one day, she photographed, weighed, and took notes for the metalwork. The other appraiser, Dena Rigby, is focusing on the ceramic pieces made by Sr. Mary Trinitas and other Montana artists. Having been involved with the design of the new Galerie exhibits in 2019, Dena was familiar with the collections but requested that Loretta and Jessica photograph a selection of ceramics in storage, as well as assess the conditions of artifacts both on and off display.

For Stephanie to access the objects in the Galerie display cases the plexiglass vitrines had to be removed. Geoff Stocking at the C.M. Russell Museum, who helped install the art and exhibits when the new Galerie Trinitas was designed, assisted with this heavy chore. Complications arose when some of the vitrines were reluctant to part with the bases, but after a few tense moments and a rubber mallet, Geoff and Jessica were able to carefully lift each one. They then discovered that some of the chalices and ceramics were also sticking to the display case bases. When Geoff returned at the end of the day to replace the vitrines, he brought Mylar, which is a clear polyester film employed in a variety of ways in archives,

museums, and art galleries. This was used to create custom barriers between each object and the case, shelf, or wall where it is displayed. To round out the day's work, Loretta and Jessica took the opportunity to dust the interiors and polish the exteriors of the cases, and do other light cleaning around the gallery. At the end of the hectic visit, Galerie Trinitas was ready to be re-opened after the two-year Covid closure!



Artifacts Collection Curator Jessica Long secures a vitrine at Galerie Trinitas

Deaccessioned object

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physical condition that it is impossible or excessively expensive to preserve. Once a decision is made and the formal deaccessioning process is complete, records can have various fates. Some are simply disposed or recycled while others are offered back to the original donor. A recent deaccession let us experience the best kind of ending, the one where the record gets to live on in a new, more appropriate home.

The object in question was a typical rectangular copper cornerstone box not unlike others in our artifact collection. The lid was partially opened and bent upwards with a label that iden-

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Collaboration

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pital (now sponsored by Benefis Health System), St. Thomas Home (now St. Thomas Child and Family Center), and the College of Great Falls (now University of Providence). Each ministry continues today, though in different iterations. St. Thomas Home was established in 1910 as an orphanage, boarding and day school. Today it is a full-day child care and early childhood learning center. Providence Archives holds the admission ledger, 1910 to 1974, which contains valuable genealogical information so it is no wonder that the genealogy society wondered where the records are kept.

As plans took shape to attend the University of Providence anniversary celebration, it was a perfect opportunity for Loretta and Jessica to visit the genealogy society as well as the Cascade County Historical Society in Great Falls. The goal of the visits was to make professional connections and to share information about historical collections related to the three Great Falls ministries and the Sisters of Providence. Their first stop was at the Cascade County Historical Society for a detailed behind-the-stacks tour of the historical paper and artifactual collections. What an extensive collection, in all media, for Cascade County and Great Falls history!

At the genealogy society, conversation focused on St. Thomas Home. The genealogists have few resources for the ministry, but frequently receive inquiries from relatives and others seeking information about past residents and students. Then, out came the two Columbus Hospital admission ledgers, September 1923 to May 1927. What a surprise to find these records in their collection! For the 114 years this hospital was sponsored by Providence, the only other patient information in our collection are surgery records, 1901-1918. Loretta immediately thought that the ledgers would be more appropriate in the Providence Archives collection and how the information

could be made readily accessible for genealogical and historical research. She also thought about Sister Virginia Miller and her volunteer transcription work. Transcribing the ledger contents would take a lot of work but would make the information available to both repositories. Hoping that a records transfer could be negotiated, Loretta proposed that the ledgers be transferred to Providence Archives with the promise that the archives would transcribe them and provide the genealogy society with the transcription and the scans. Their research would be infinitely easier by searching the transcription for individual names, and they would have the scans to check the original if needed. Janet Thomson, GFGS vice-president, agreed. In no time at all, she completed the transfer form, the document was signed, and Jessica and Loretta happily left the genealogy society with a treasure they had no idea existed. This was a beneficial agreement for both of our repositories.

The day ended with a visit to the original Columbus Hospital, now known as Columbus Place and transformed into offices, shops, and restaurants (see *Past Forward* Fall 2016-2017 for an article about the hospital chapel), followed by: the original site of St. Thomas Home; the current location of St. Thomas Child and Family Center; the second location of Columbus Hospital, known as Benefis West; the main campus of Benefis; the old Calvary Cemetery; and Mount Olivet Cemetery where Sisters of Providence are buried. It was a whirlwind day!

Deaccessioned object

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tified it as being from “St. Joseph’s Home / 707 East Mission Avenue.” The Sisters of Providence founded St. Joseph Home for the Aged in Spokane in 1925 to provide housing and nursing care for the elderly. At the suggestion of the Most Rev. A.F. Schinner, Bishop of Spokane, the sisters purchased the monastery of the Poor Clares, who due to financial difficulties needed to sell the property and relocate. The Poor Clares had con-



The 1915 cornerstone box and a Blessed Virgin Mary medal found inside

tracted with the Huetter Construction Company only 10 years earlier to build the monastery, so with a little bit of renovation, including the installation of an elevator, laundry machinery, and terrazzo floors, it was a perfect fit for the new Sisters of Providence ministry. The first residents and staff were those transferred from the former Blanchet Home in Vancouver, Washington and they arrived in Spokane on the evening of August 20, 1925, via the S.P. & L Railroad. Today the institution lives on as St. Joseph Care Center now located near Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center.

What’s missing from this historical summary is the story about the 1925 cornerstone dedication... because there isn’t one! There is not a single mention of a cornerstone in the chronicles

or other paper records related to the foundation of St. Joseph’s Home. So where did the copper box come from? The key to that question was in its contents: eight religious medals and, more importantly, a tattered envelope with broken wax seals and a document folded inside. Handwritten on the front of the envelope and along the top of the document was the name “The Franciscan Monastery of St. Clare.” The document, dated October 17, 1915, also included a list of names of Catholic clergy and several sisters, as well as the note “all our good benefactors in Spokane and Omaha and all that have helped us in any way. May God bless and reward them all. Mr. John Huetter Contractor of building.” The community to which the Spokane Poor Clare sisters belong, the sisters whose former monastery was built in 1915 and later became St. Joseph’s Home, was established in Omaha, Nebraska in 1878.



Jessica Long presents the cornerstone box to the Poor Clare Sisters

These new revelations led to the decision to offer the cornerstone box and its contents back to the Poor Clares. Jessica contacted them in early July and their archivist, Sister Colleen Byrne, OSC, responded enthusiastically. On July 28th, Jessica and Loretta made their way with the carefully-packed treasures to the sisters’ current

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monastery tucked away in a quiet neighborhood of North Spokane. The walled property spanned a whole block with a large brick house in one corner and a variety of fruit trees just visible along the back.

Sister Marcia Kay LaCour, abbess, greeted us in the foyer through an interesting architectural feature known as “the turn”: an opening in the wall with sliding doors which allows those inside the monastery to see and speak to someone in the foyer before they are allowed to enter. Sr. Marcia Kay led us into a charming and simply-furnished parlor. The other sisters of the house slowly trickled in as we exchanged introductions, eager to see the historical objects that we had brought for them. After everyone was assembled, Jessica unveiled the cornerstone box and presented it to Sr. Marcia Kay. The “oohs” and “aahs”

only increased as the objects were passed around. As each sister read the 1915 document, they wore expressions of wonderment on their faces, especially as they recognized the names of the early Poor Clares. Sister Colleen, the archivist, kindly brought out a book about the history of their congregation and pointed out early photographs of the sisters who founded and built the monastery that would later become St. Joseph’s Home. That sparked an interesting discussion about the history of the Poor Clares in Spokane and the United States.

It was a lovely visit and Jessica and Loretta enjoyed meeting the sisters. It’s wonderful to know that the cornerstone box and its contents will be cherished by those who are directly connected to their history.

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