

PastForward

PROVIDENCE ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

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

New exhibit explores the Sisters' early days in Vancouver

Jessica Long

Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart was a fitting focus for the opening exhibit in the Legacy Room at the Mother Joseph Province Provincial Administration offices. A little more than a year later however, it's time to return her traveling trunk, tools, and jubilee souvenirs to collection storage and shift that focus to other stories from the early days of the Sisters of Providence in the Pacific Northwest. I am happy to announce that a new exhibit, *The Cabin Era*, is now installed in the Legacy Room!



A portion of the Cabin Era exhibit showing everyday items the Sisters may have used, and the Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart above

This new exhibit explores the eighteen years between when the five foundresses landed in Vancouver, Washington Territory in 1856 and when Providence Academy was built in 1874. During this time the sisters managed to establish a surprising number of ministries with limited resources, all while living and working in cramped quarters and a harsh frontier environment.

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Bibliographic description project

Viviana Martinez

Viviana Martinez is a student at the University of Washington iSchool. As a directed fieldwork project toward her degree, Viviana worked on a bibliographic description project at Providence Archives. We asked her to share her experience with our readers.

Through a partnership with the iSchool at the University of Washington, I was able to complete 200 hours of directed fieldwork at Providence Archives over two academic quarters. I was brought into this project with the purpose of collaborating with the archives staff to propose an appropriate level of bibliographic description of the book collections, which would enable an assessment of which items fit best within the archive's collection development policy. Initially, the project was intimidating due to the archive's vast collection and lack of a call number system for the books. Also, books are shelved in various places throughout the stacks, which consist mainly of archival boxes. However, I was able to quickly learn how

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Seven Dolors stations rededicated September 23

Peter Schmid

Devotion to Our Sorrowful Mother was at the center of Emilie Gamelin's life, and is at the very heart of the Sisters of Providence congregation. Blessed Emilie wrote in her 1846 retreat notes, recalling the loss of her husband and her three children:

Fr. Saint Pierre gave me a picture of Our Lady of Sorrows. Every day I used to pray before this picture asking the Blessed Virgin for courage like her to bear the crosses and trials offered me by Our dear Lord. The greatest one at that time was the loss of my husband and my precious children. My heart seemed literally pierced with a sword of sorrow, and in my grief I found no greater comfort than that of meditating upon the sorrows of my Heavenly Mother.

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New exhibit

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When they first arrived, Sisters Joseph of the Sacred Heart, Praxedes of Providence, and Blandine of the Holy Angels, along with the novices, Sisters Vincent de Paul and Mary of the Precious Blood, lived in Bishop A.M.A. Blanchet's attic. They endured that awkward arrangement for eight days before moving to a small room off the kitchen. It would be weeks before a modest cabin, which measured only 16 x 24 feet (about twice the size of the Legacy Room!), was built for their specific use. Their first act of charity was that of accepting a three-year-old orphan girl,



The exhibit includes the tabernacle that Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart fashioned from a candle box (left), colorful crewel work by a student at Providence Academy, and books from the sisters' library at the Academy published between 1853 and 1870

Emily Lake, into their care.

Mother Joseph would go on to build six additional multi-purpose cabins as their works of charity grew. The first ministry, later known as Providence Academy, began classes on April 14, 1857, with four girls in the morning and three in the afternoon. The second was St. Joseph Hospital located in a cabin that was also used as the sisters' bakery. These days were difficult as only a few of the French-Canadian sisters spoke English, and there was always more work to be done than the small group of sisters could accommodate. Help would arrive through sister reinforcements from Montreal beginning in October 1858, and eventually the Vancouver novitiate would be placed under the direction of English-speaking Sister Praxedes to guide the local American women interested in religious life.

The 1860's brought an influx of requests from across the Northwest for the sisters to establish schools and hospitals in communities of need. This necessitated making difficult decisions about which appeals to approve or deny based on availability of sisters and finances. Mother Joseph and others embarked on lengthy, dangerous journeys by horseback and river boat begging at mining and logging encampments for precious gold dust, nuggets, and money to help fund new ministries in Steilacoom, Walla Walla, and Tulalip in Washington, as well as St. Ignatius and Mis-

soula in Montana. Back home in Vancouver, however, it was easy to see that the cabins were no longer sufficient to hold the increasing number of students, boarders, orphans, hospital patients, and sisters. Something needed to be done, so the hospital was moved to a large pre-existing structure in 1866, and Mother Joseph began planning for a grand brick school building capable of meeting their current and future needs – the future Providence Academy.

Objects in the new exhibit embody the simplicity and practicality of these early years. On display are items representing possessions the sisters might have had while living in the cabins, such as a trunk, an apron, sewing supplies for mending clothes, woodworking tools, medicines for consumption, a school bell, and a ceramic washbasin. Visitors will also see the tabernacle Mother Joseph repurposed from a candle box for their small makeshift chapel in the first cabin, spiritual and medical books from the Providence Academy library printed before 1874, and a piece of crewel work by a Providence Academy student, ca. 1860. Mother Joseph's silver pectoral cross and Sister Vincent de Paul's profession candles from 1858 are also on display, as well as rarely-seen photographs of the foundresses in Montreal prior to their departure to the West. The show-stopping piece in the exhibition, however, is unquestionably a Sacred Heart depicted in needlework and centered in a large, gilded frame. The Sacred Heart was discovered by the sisters tucked away in the bishop's attic on their second day in Vancouver in 1856. The frame was made by Mother Joseph herself. 50 years after the establishment of the mission in Vancouver, all the names of the sisters who served in the West from 1856 to 1906 were added around the embroidery as a "Guard of Honor" to celebrate the golden anniversary of the community. The Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart is a Catholic devotion and confraternity popularized in the 1860s in which members' names are added to a dial, similar to a clockface, corresponding to specific hourly prayers. A reference in the 1883 Providence Academy chronicles suggests there may be an older Guard of Honor underneath the 1906 dial.

Please stop by to check out *The Cabin Era* exhibit and don't forget to pick up the accompanying exhibit booklet for even more insights into early Sisters of Providence history! ♡

Seven Dolors

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Emile resolved not to pass a day without invoking the name of Mary, Mother of Sorrows.

Depictions of Our Mother of Sorrows, her heart pierced by seven swords - each representing a particular sorrow, are found throughout Sisters of Providence history. Stations, similar to the Stations of the Cross found in most Catholic chapels, were placed in various chapels of Providence institutions to be prayed especially on the feast of Our Mother of Sorrows, September 15.

The stations recall each of the Sorrows of Mary:

- ✚ The Prophecy of Simeon
- ✚ The Flight to Egypt
- ✚ Jesus is Lost in the Temple
- ✚ Mary meets Jesus Carrying the Cross
- ✚ Jesus is Crucified
- ✚ Jesus is Taken down from the Cross
- ✚ Jesus is laid in the tomb

One particular set of Sorrows stations familiar to those living at St. Joseph Residence (SJR) stands in the garden outside the south end of the building. The stations were created by Sister Norma Montoya, SP in 1965, as a second-year novice at Providence Heights in Issaquah. Norma was artistic from an early age, and in fact created several official postage stamps for the Philippines government before immigrating to the United States. In addition to the stations, we have other beautiful examples of her work in the Archives.



The Third Station: Jesus is Lost in the Temple

The stations, made of terra cotta, and each housed in a frame of cedar, were made at Providence Heights in 1965. They are highly conceptual, and focus on Mary's face as she mourns and accepts each sorrow. They remained in the novitiate garden until they were installed in the garden at St. Joseph Residence in November of 1973. Over the ensuing

years, time and weather took their toll: the terra cotta was cracking in places, and the wood frames were disintegrating and covered with lichen and moss. In 2018, archivist Loretta Greene began the process of getting the stations restored. Loretta contacted a conservator, Linda Roundhill, who removed them from their posts and took them to her studio in Everett. Linda has done many projects for Archives and does beautiful work. She removed the crumbling frames, repaired cracks, and cleaned and stabilized the terra cotta. Next, new housings for the stations were needed.

A couple of plans were envisioned for their return to our garden, and finally last year I asked Dan Hodo, who has worked at Providence Mount St. Vincent for over 20 years, if he would take on the project. Dan is known to us in Archives not only as a long time Mount employee in the paint shop and maintenance, but also for his handwork in creating a beautiful oak wood shrine for the Sorrows statue in the Mount's Our Lady of Sorrows chapel in 2015. Dan's station housings honor the originals made by Sister Norma, and are designed specifically to handle our Northwest weather with the finest materials including marine plywood and cedar which are sealed against the elements. Each image has a slightly different size, so they all had to be custom fit, and the bases are angled so they shed water. They will last for many years to come. ♡

Bibliographic description

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to navigate through the archive and find other systems to complete my work. My daily work consisted of loading shelves from the collection rooms onto my assigned cart, and searching each title in an online public access catalog (OPAC), extracting the cataloging metadata, then adding it to a spreadsheet. The OPAC selected was WorldCat, due to the vast variety of items within its database, allowing me to find the majority of books I was searching for.

Although I was able to find a good routine in my work, I did encounter some challenges throughout the process. One challenge was not being able to find the metadata for certain books in any OPAC. This meant that I could not add subject tags to the spreadsheet, which will be a future issue when the archivists transfer this data onto a database. These subject tags are important as they would serve as another access point when searching for an item in a database. Another challenge was finding the metadata for books in foreign languages, as I am unfamiliar with many of them, except for Spanish. Because the Sisters of

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Bibliographic description

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Providence trace their origin to French Canada, many of the books within the collection are in French. These books were incredibly difficult at times to translate, making it a longer process for me to find the book's metadata. While I was able to translate many of them, there were some books I simply could not find in a variety of databases due to their age or scarcity. An additional challenge was being able to find the metadata for books that are damaged, as some lacked information that I need to search for the item. It was very difficult to find some of these items as some books were in poor condition, and a handful had missing title pages. When I encountered a book with missing information, I would try my best to investigate the item and use contextual clues to find vital information that would help me locate the book online. Ultimately, over the course of 5 months I was able to process a total of 1,572 items.

Overall, it was a pleasure to intern at Providence Archives and I learned a lot from the staff. As I have just scratched the surface in some collections, I hope that my work has laid a good foundation for the rest of the project. Based on my evaluation and some connections I've made to my library and information science courses, I feel that



Viviana Martinez

when the archive decides to add call numbers to retained items, they should select something like the Brian Deer Classification System. This type of framework allows the archivist to develop a system that best fits the archive and its collections, rather than trying to fit into a structured framework that covers too many subjects. I cannot wait to see the final results of this project and am excited to see how the shelves within the archives look in the end. Having the book collections available online will be great not only for the archivists, but for the whole Providence community. ♡

Providence Archives
4800 37th Ave SW
Seattle WA 98126-2793

Manager
Peter Schmid

Senior Archivist
Elizabeth Russell

Visual Resources Archivist
Grant Mandarino

Artifact Collections Curator
Jessica Long

Assistant Archivist-Technical
Pam Hedquist

Telephone: 206.937.4600
Fax: 206.923.4001
E-mail: archives@providence.org
www.providence.org/phs/archives

Editing and design by Peter
Schmid.

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