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# PAST FORWARD

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The Newsletter of the Sisters of Providence Archives, Seattle

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## WASHINGTON HERITAGE DAY

On February 27, Loretta Greene and Terri Mitchell presented papers and a slideshow at the annual Washington Heritage Conference, sponsored by the Washington Historical Society, in Olympia. The theme of the weekend conference was "Fields of Dreams: Washington's Agricultural Heritage."

Terri organized and chaired a session on "The Poor Farms in Western Washington," which focused on historic and contemporary efforts of non-profit organizations to support their work with the poor through farming. Her paper was entitled "The King County Poor Farm as the Origins of Harborview and Providence Medical Centers, 1877-1934." Loretta researched and spoke on the Sisters of Providence farm at Providence Academy, Vancouver, 1871-1935 (see "Did You Know..."). Other panelists were Beth Stucker, President of the Monroe Historical Society, who spoke on the history of the Snohomish County Poor Farm, and Carrie Little, of the Guadalupe House Catholic Worker Farm, who manages nine organic gardens in inner-city Tacoma.

The session was well received, with many in the audience commenting on the interesting contrast between the historic and current operations. One member of the audience had grown up on a poor farm, and another, from the Vancouver Historical Society, spoke passionately about the works of the sisters and the health system as the basis for contemporary social services in the state.

## MOTHER JOSEPH HONORED

By now you've probably heard that April 16, Mother Joseph's birthday, has been declared a non-observed holiday in Washington state, thanks to the interest and enthusiasm of the 6<sup>th</sup>-grade "EXCEL at Burton" class of the Evergreen School District, Vancouver. The archives staff assisted the students with research materials, attended several legislative hearings, and planned an appreciation luncheon program hosted by Providence St. Peter Hospital on the day the Governor Gary Locke signed the bill into law.



The students have also commissioned a granite bench for Mother Joseph's grave, washed the tombstones of the sisters at St. James Acres cemetery, Vancouver, and planted flowers in the memorial garden at Southwest Washington Medical Center (formerly St. Joseph Hospital, founded by Mother Joseph in 1858).

The Mother Joseph Day bill takes effect in July, so the first official holiday will be April 16, 2000. Mark your calendars!

## DID YOU KNOW THAT...

### The Sisters of Providence once operated a large, waterfront farm in Vancouver, WA?

Among the earliest works undertaken by the sisters was care for orphaned and abandoned children. The success of this ministry required funds, which were a constant worry for the early sisters. Although the sisters received a small stipend from the bishop, the receipts from the boarders at Providence Academy was the primary support of the orphans. Beginning with a small parcel purchased in 1860, the sisters eventually acquired 197 acres of farmland bordering the Columbia River. Writing to Bishop Bourget in 1861, Mother Joseph proudly stated: "We have acquired a small farm which will be a big expense for us this year, but later on it will be a source of income for our poor, besides being a place where we can put our boys to work."

There were several buildings along the shoreline at the "Farm on the River Road": barns, pigsty, hen house, stable, workshop, houses for the sisters and farmer, cellar, and coach house.



Detailed monthly reports list the farm produce, including wheat, onions, oats, carrots, peas, milk, and hay. In 1876, "one-half acre produced 600 bushels of potatoes, some weighing three pounds." Unfortunately, the farm was prone to flooding, and many years entire crops were lost.

The farm was not all work. It was also a place of recreation and rest for the sisters and children, where pancake picnics under the trees and bowls of honey from the beehives were special treats. Sister Frances Ignatius MacDowell, who entered

the community in 1922, still remembers going to the farm and eating ripe tomatoes from the vines!

As commerce along the waterfront increased, the sisters' land, with its river access, became too valuable to farm. Beginning in 1910, small portions were sold to the railroad, the city, and commercial interests. As the number of orphans declined, and the sisters planned to move their provincial administration to Mount St. Vincent in Seattle, there was no longer a pressing need to retain the farm. In 1935, the final 20 acres were sold to the Port of Vancouver. For more than 70 years, the farm provided income and produce to support the orphans and boarders who depended wholly on Providence for their care.

## *Let's Celebrate!*

For the first time, our annual list of Providence anniversaries covers three centuries. Congratulations to all!

- 1799: Birth of Bishop Ignace Bourget, co-founder of the Sisters of Providence (October 30) - 200 years
- 1859: Sisters of Providence in Washington Corporation (January 28) - 140 years
- 1924: Providence Mount St. Vincent, Seattle (January 25) - 75 years
- 1979: Providence Newberg Hospital - 20 years of affiliation with SPHS
- 1979: Providence Hospitality House, Seattle (September 1) - 20 years
- 1989: Sisters of Providence mission in the Philippines - 10 years



### MARY'S MONTH AT THE MOUNT

In celebration of May, the month devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary, we have installed a temporary exhibit of rosaries, statues, holy cards, and other devotional items in the lobby of Providence Mount St. Vincent. The exhibit features beautiful Marian artifacts from the Mount, Saint Joseph Residence, individual sisters and residents. It will remain in place through June, so please stop by!

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