

# 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.

## Lights, Camera, Action!

The Sisters of Providence have hit the silver screen! Last month, Sister Barbara Schiller was filmed demonstrating and explaining the process to iron the garniture, the softly curved part of the traditional habit head dress reminiscent of a calla lily. A second part of this project was to film

the correct sequence to dress in the traditional habit which has not been worn by Sisters of Providence since 1966.

The cast and crew included Sister Barbara, who spent 5

years in the Roberie teaching novices how to sew the habit and iron garnitures as well as a career teaching Home Economics; Emily Hughes Dominick, Associate Archivist, who dressed in and modeled the habit; and Sister

Felma Cerezo, videographer, who has more than 25 years photographic experience.

Ironing the garniture - a skill largely unknown to day - was learned by all new novices until 1966. The garniture

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## Alaska Connections

This past May Visual Resources Archivist Peter Schmid and I had the chance to visit Alaska. Our purpose was twofold: to visit Providence Alaska Medical Center; and to attend the annual meeting of the Northwest Archivists held at University of Alaska, Anchorage (UAA).

Our time, then, was split between the University of Alaska Anchorage campus and the Medical Center campus which are conveniently located next to one another. Our first day was spent at the Medical Center

and the adjacent Providence Alaska Region offices where we received a tour of both facilities by Kathleen Barrows, Manager, Mission Services at Providence Alaska Medical Center. In addition to meeting our Anchorage colleagues, we also were charged with assessing some materials set aside after the recent

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*Kathleen Barrows and Peter Schmid posing in front of the 1/4 sized Mother Joseph statue at Providence Alaska Medical Center*

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Coadjatrix Sisters

*Coadjutrix*  
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last of these devoted soldiers of pioneer years in the West leave us and thereby closing a span of devotion never to be replaced by recruits bearing the title Coadjutrix Sisters. ... We loved them in life and their memory will always live in our Community."

For an extended photo gallery see the online version at: [www.providence.org/phs/archives/past\\_forward/5main.htm](http://www.providence.org/phs/archives/past_forward/5main.htm)

Sources:

*Circulars*, 1898; 1900; 1902; 1904; 1909; 1910; 1916; 1966.  
*Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity Servants of the Poor*, 1904.  
*History of the Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity Servants of the Poor*, 1957.  
*With Charity For Ensign*, 1943.

Endnotes

1 In the interest of consistency, I have used the term "coadjutrix" as both adjective and noun. Community documents have also used the words "coadjutrice" and "coadjutant".

2 A vocal sister is one who participates fully in the religious life of the community, can vote in community meetings, and who can hold positions in governance and administration.

3 Provinces are administrative districts of the religious community; a provincialate is the physical and administrative seat of that district.

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disassociation of Mary Conrad Center from Providence. These materials will be incorporated into our archival collections.

Later in our trip, we attended the Northwest Archivist conference which was held in the recently renovated Consortium Library on the UAA campus. At the meeting we gathered with approximately 80 archivists from around the Northwest to listen to presentations given by our archives colleagues about their recent archival innovations and projects. The day and a half long meeting provided a good opportunity to

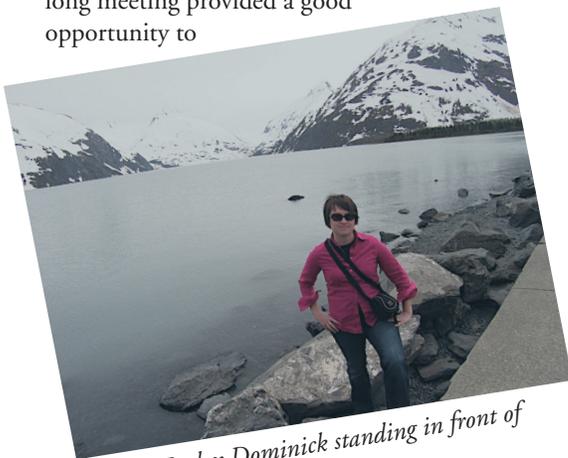
meet or reconnect with other archivists while discussing our common struggles and triumphs.

Besides our indoor activities, we made some time to experience the natural beauty of Alaska. On the advice of Kathleen, we took a driving tour up the Seward Highway along the Turnagain Arm of Cook's Inlet. We stopped at the Alyeska Resort in Girdwood, Alaska where we took a tram ride up to Mt. Alyeska. Some visitors were skiing atop the mountain (yes, there was still snow at the end of May!), but we were there for the breathtaking

views of Cook's Inlet and the surrounding mountains. We continued our drive up the Seward Highway to Portage Glacier to a spot where several Sisters of Providence had been photographed in 1964. The retreat of the glacier is apparent in comparing these photographs.

All in all, it was a great trip! Whether at Providence or UAA, we were warmly welcomed. There is much that we did not have time to do on this trip, but you can be sure I will be back.

-Emily Hughes Dominick



Emily Hughes Dominick standing in front of Portage Glacier, May 2008



Historical photo of six Sisters of Providence at Portage Glacier circa 1964. (Photo #198.B1.1)

## PICTURING PROVIDENCE

Peter F. Schmid, CA, 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.*

# “These Dear, Faithful Helpers”: The Coadjutrix Sisters of Providence

*Author’s note: When I began work here as Visual Resources Archivist, one of the first things that intrigued me were these “other” sisters who appeared in photographs, wearing an unusual habit and a large crucifix. My curiosity about these sisters led to this article. -PFS*

## I. The Third Order of the Servites of Mary (Tertiaries)

The history of the tertiary, later coadjutrix<sup>1</sup>, order of the Sisters of Providence begins in Montreal in 1845, when the religious community had been in existence but two years, also the year that the first manuscript customary was distributed to the sisters. Rose Dutaut de Grandpré, a woman of 42 who entered the

novitiate that year, was refused vows in the religious community by the General Council “after some months.” Not to be discouraged from service, Rose requested that she be given work in the most difficult of circumstances on the St. John of God Ward of the Providence Asile, which housed mentally afflicted patients. Stories of her sacrifices and self-effacement indicate that whatever difficulties she may have had in dealings with others, and whatever lack of

education, her charity towards the poor and sick was appreciated by community founder Bishop Ignace Bourget, and in 1849 he permitted her to make vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. She made these vows before foundress Mother Emilie Gamelin there in the ward, and received from the bishop a silver ring and a cross bearing the effigy of Our Lady of Seven Dolors.

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*Coadjutrix of St. Ignatius Province. This photograph likely taken on the occasion of the fusion of the tertiary sisters (Third Order of the Servites of Mary) with the religious community as coadjutrix sisters in 1900. (Photo #SIP.A2.48)*



*Coadjatrix Sr. Josephine Guyard milking a cow in the former St. Ignatius Province. Note her striped apron. (Photo#SIPA5.233)*

In 1864, Bishop Bourget established the Third Order of the Servites of Mary, also known as tertiary, for those who wished to serve the poor and to be associated with the religious community, but who, for a variety of reasons, were either unfit or unwilling to commit to the life of a fully professed, or “vocal,”<sup>2</sup> sister. At the age of 61, Rose Dutaut de Grandpré was received as a tertiary along with five others.

From the beginning, the work of the tertiaries was confined to menial tasks, and they had no voice in the governance of the community, but were a separate, though associated order, making an annual (rather than perpetual) vow only of chastity (vows of poverty and obedience were not required at this time, though some women chose to make those vows as well). The tertiaries even had a separate novitiate from the vocal sisters. In return, the religious community promised to care for these sisters, and provide them with sustenance and shelter for their labor.

Girls and women who became tertiaries did so for a variety of their own reasons, or, like Rose Dutaut de Grandpré, because they were refused for full membership in the religious

community. They were often much younger than the women entering the novitiate of the professed; in one extraordinary example, Sr. Celine Dupuis entered the Servites at the age of fourteen in 1891. They were often from farming families, and used to manual labor, or were simply too humble to imagine themselves part of the vocal religious community. Sometimes they entered the religious community novitiate, left, then returned to join the tertiaries instead, or were steered toward the tertiary order by clergy or by religious community leaders.

## ***II. “Fusion” and Establishment of the Coadjatrix Sisters of Providence***

By 1900, the tertiaries had grown to number 383 professed and 66 in formation. In seeking approval of their Constitutions (governing rules), the Sisters of Providence were required to address what was a discrepancy by the Sacred Congregation in Rome: religious communities were not permitted to maintain under their aegis a separate, though affiliated congregation, with different title and different rules (prior applications for approval had omitted mention

of the tertiaries). Faced with the choices of separating the order from the community into a different institute, completely dissolving the order, or putting off the question until the next General Chapter in 1904, the leadership of the community decided to “fuse” the tertiary sisters with the religious community by instituting perpetual vows, and incorporating them into the novitiate and religious life of the vocal sisters. Thus, the coadjatrix Sisters of Providence were established. Those sisters who, as tertiaries, had made annual vows for five consecutive years as of 1900 were now allowed to pronounce perpetual vows. Those tertiaries residing in the Canadian provinces pronounced vows at the Mother House, while those in the “distant missions” of the west were allowed to do so at the local provincialate.<sup>3</sup>

## ***III. Standing in the Community***

The essence of the coadjatrix’ ministry was the menial or “material works” (Constitutions, 1904), often in the sacristy, kitchen, or on the farms at various institutions. But of course there were exceptions: Sr. Anna Magnan was a licensed engineer and built the altar and pews at the academy in Missoula, and Sr. Emma Chauvin earned her nursing degree in 1906 at Sacred Heart Hospital in Spokane. There were also some differences in religious observance, as well as habit. And, these sisters did not take part in the governance or administration of the community, or hold administrative positions in any of the works (also called “ministries”) of the community.

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The tertiary, later coadjutrix, sisters occupied a carefully regulated position of submission to the vocal sisters. An 1898 *Circulars of the Superior General* warned the sisters that “In some houses, the tertiary sisters are not treated with enough charity; they are spoken to in a harsh manner; we fail in delicacy towards them.” Though a vocal sister was always placed “in charge” of the coadjutrix at each house, it was a delicate relationship; the vocal sister was not a supervisor (the coadjutrix sisters were under the immediate authority of the local superior), but rather an “intermediary” between the sisters and the local superior. Since many of the early tertiaries and coadjutrix were uneducated, and often illiterate, a successful relationship within the community must have required a good deal of sensitivity on the part of vocal sisters. A 1900 *Circular* emphasizes that the menial labor of the coadjutrix was to occupy their time, with few exceptions: “...there may be class for those coadjutrix sisters who have no education; but they will be taught only the principles of reading and writing. ... [they] may sing in the choir if...their employments do not suffer thereby.” Clearly, the houses of Providence relied greatly on the labor of these sisters. Sr. Mary Olive wrote to Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart, who was visiting Montreal in 1898, “I hope Montreal will send us good Tertiary sisters. We are to be pitied. We stay up nights to sew and look

after the minor offices; the dormitory and refectory are at our mercy.”

#### **IV. Habit**

The early habit of the tertiaries included a white bonnet and large brass crucifix, and we see this in some of the photographs taken prior to 1900. After 1900, the habit became more like that of the vocal sisters, with notable



*Sr. Rose Dutaut de Grandpré, first tertiary sister of the community. (Photo #TCN 294)*

exceptions. The coadjutrix continued to wear a crucifix rather than a cross, and on their costume chaplet the medal of the Third Order of the Servites was replaced by that of Our Lady of Seven Dolors. There was no headband, and the garniture was slimmer and formed differently. Additionally, the sisters wore a bow at the neck - this was instituted prior to 1900, and was omitted in 1916. Sleeves were made to “admit the concealing of their hands in coming from Holy Communion”. It was not until the 1966 integration that the

coadjutrix habit would become the same as that of vocal sisters. Of course, modesty in dress and bearing was required. A rather quaint admonition (by today’s standards) in the 1916 *Circular* warns: “Some [coadjutrix sisters] make a wave in their coiffure which gives them a certain appearance of worldliness.”

#### **V. Integration**

As the decades passed, social conventions and sensibilities changed, and so did religious life. People had more access to education, and a heightened awareness of social and racial justice. The most massive revisions to the Sisters of Providence community, of course, were brought about by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The Council stated: “To strengthen the bond of brotherhood between members of a community, those who are called lay brothers, assistants, or some other name, should be brought into the heart of its life and activities. Unless the state of affairs suggests otherwise, care must be taken to produce in women’s communities a single category of sister.”

There were by 1966 only twenty-three coadjutrix sisters. On July 2, 1966, in a ceremony at the Mother House, the coadjutrix were received and given the habit of vocal sisters, ending a chapter of community history. Though she died just a few years prior to the integration, perhaps the experience is best summarized by the words of the necrology for Sr. Anais Girard, the last coadjutrix in the former Sacred Heart Province: “We miss these dear, faithful helpers...the community at Mount St. Vincent feels a certain sadness in seeing the *continued on p. 2*

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is linen cut on the bias, heavily starched, and then pulled and stretched while being ironed. The process can be tricky since newer linen is harder to “work up”. “The challenge for young novices was to learn to iron without scorching the starched linen,” commented Sister Barbara. Typically, each sister had 12 garnitures. A garniture could be worn for one or a few days, depending on the environment in which it was worn. They were washed and starched by one person in the laundry but were ironed by each sister herself.

After completing the garniture process, the filming continued as Sister Barbara dressed Emily in the full tra-

ditional habit, including the under dress, long dress sleeves, and work apron. Sister Barbara explained each step and provided historical background for the habit pieces. Asked what it is like to be dressed in the habit, Emily commented that it is “very warm and heavy.” Imagine wearing the habit in the summer in California!

Filming these two processes – ironing the garniture and dressing in the traditional habit – has now preserved the procedures for current and future sisters and for anyone interested in the historical method. The video will be edited to create a final film which will be available for reference in the archives, along with samples of the traditional habit that Sister Barbara sewed for the archives two years ago.



*Emily and Sister Barbara after the filming*

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