

Past Forward

PROVIDENCE ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

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

Finding the Pieces of the Puzzle: The Life of “The Bell and the River,” Part I

Loretta Z. Greene

Editor's note: This is the first in a two-part series about the history of “The Bell and the River.” The series will conclude in the next issue of Past Forward. An expanded history with illustrations will be published on the History Online page of the Providence Archives website following the Spring issue of the newsletter.

Imagine trying to complete a puzzle without all the pieces; the scene takes shape but holes remain. In places you guess what fills the hole and in others the missing remains unknown. Transfer that imagery to historical research and you will have an idea why a history of the publication of “The Bell and the River” is incomplete.

Correspondence, chronicles, council deliberations and minutes in Providence Archives and the General Administration Archives in Montreal were used to piece together the history of this heritage biography.

Published in 1957 to celebrate the centennial of the Sisters of Providence arrival in the West (1856), “The Bell and the River” has become the go-to reference about Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart. Authorship was shared by three sisters: Mary Leopoldine Throll, Mary of the Blessed Sacrament McCrosson and Maria Theresa (Mary) Gleason. Little did these sisters realize the future value of their work.



To begin the puzzle, read “SP Spotlight: Mary Leopoldine Throll,” Page 2. Sister Mary Leopoldine’s four years of diligent research were passed to Sister Mary of the Blessed

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SP Spotlight:
Sister Mary Leopoldine

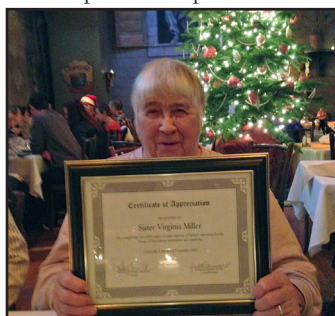
Picturing Providence:
Films on YouTube

Archives Volunteer Recognized for Milestone

Archives staff was pleased to present Sister Virginia Miller with a Certificate of Appreciation for her ongoing volunteer work in the archives. The award recognizes Sister Virginia for surpassing 5,000 pages of chronicles transcribed over her several-year tenure as volunteer. Since she started on this project in 2010, Sister Virginia has transcribed the handwritten English chronicles for over 25 Providence institutions.

In general the chronicles written for each institution were handwritten in French until sometime in the 1920s

when they switched to English; typescript chronicles started in the 1950s. The English transcriptions coupled with our



Sister Virginia Miller holding her certificate, 2013.

recent project of scanning the institutional chronicles allows unprecedented access to these

valuable documents. Through the scanning process, the typescript entries become keyword searchable (with the help of optical character recognition (OCR) technology). Sister Virginia’s work opens up several additional decades of searchable text.

Transcription can be painstaking work as it is often difficult to decipher handwritten text, but Sister Virginia does a marvelous job and always greets the challenge with a smile. The certificate was presented to Sister Virginia at our annual archives staff Christmas luncheon this past December.✍



SP Spotlight: Mary Leopoldine Throll

Emily Hughes Dominick

When Sister Mary Leopoldine was appointed by the General Council to research and compile the history relating to Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart for a biography, she was overjoyed. And who better to conduct this research than her? She had known Mother Joseph personally for a number of years while at Providence Academy, Vancouver, Wash., and she was no stranger to historical research. In fact, she had recently authored “Fifty Golden Years: 1886-1936,” the anniversary booklet of Sacred Heart Hospital, Spokane, Wash.

A letter dated August 10, 1947 from Sister Mary Leopoldine to Mother Berenice, Superior General, indicates that the project was proposed while Mother Berenice was visiting Sacred Heart Hospital, after her official visit of Sacred Heart Province. Mary Leopoldine, obviously keen to begin this important work, spells out some of the details including logistics of travel and finances and her desire to speak with “old timers” who could offer personal stories of their work and interactions with Mother Joseph. She also requested a portable typewriter and possibly a secretary be provided to her.

Several weeks after her letter to the Mother General, Mary Leopoldine’s research had officially begun. She set up her headquarters at Mount St. Vincent in Seattle on September 22, 1947. From here she



Name in Religion:

Mary Leopoldine

Given Name:

Theresa Felicite Throll

Number in Religion:

730

Date of Birth:

1871

Entrance to Novitiate:

1887

First Profession:

1889

Date of Death:

1962

ventured near and far collecting stories and information. Chronicles from this and other institutions note her comings and goings. Her travels took her to various ministries and libraries in Washington, Oregon, California, British Columbia, and Montreal. Among her major feats were translating the annals, or chronicles, for Providence Academy from 1856 forward. She also saw to it that over 100 of Mother Joseph’s letters were translated from French. She consulted newspaper articles, many of which she copied by typewriter and compiled. In Montreal, she used the annals of the Mother House for information about Mother Joseph’s seven trips to Montreal and regarding various begging tours.

By the time Mary Leopoldine started this research she was 76 years of age. She had already lived a full life of ministry as a Sister of Providence. She notes that she first saw Mother Joseph when she was 12. A year later, she was sent to Providence Academy in Vancouver, Wash., for her secondary schooling. This introduction was to begin a more than 75 year association with the Sisters of Providence.

She earned her high school diploma at St. Amable Academy in Olympia, Wash., and soon after returned to Vancouver to enter the novitiate. She took vows and assumed her religious name 25 months later.

She spent her earliest years of ministry as a music teacher and later was entrusted as bookkeeper at various schools and hospitals--though she never was without music to some degree. Of all her ministries, she spent the most time at Sacred Heart Hospital in Spokane, where she worked between 1924 and 1959 (with a few interruptions) as a bookkeeper, chronicles annalist, organist, sacristan, and choir director. This was her final ministry before retiring to nearby Mount St. Joseph.

Her detailed research was passed along to Sister Mary of the Blessed Sacrament for the compilation and final writing. And though the path to publication was twisty and long, it was her great joy to see the book come to fruition when it was published in 1957. She personally autographed dozens of copies when she was honored at a party held at DeSales Catholic Book Shop in Spokane. ✍

Picturing Providence: Digitized Films Now Available on YouTube

Peter F. Schmid

You may remember that in a previous issue I wrote about discovering and digitizing the film of *Land of Loo-et*, the play written in honor of the centennial of the sisters' arrival in the Northwest in 1856 ("Archives Mystery Solved: Missing Film Found," Spring 2013). That film is one of over 200 reels held in Providence Archives, and I am pleased to announce that nearly all have been digitized! Now I am in the process of adding them to our YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/ProvidenceArchives).

Most of the original films are 16mm, in both black-and-white and color. While the majority are silent there are a few with sound. Much of the footage was taken by Sister Anna (John of the Cross) Foley (1899-1993), who will be remembered by many who read these pages. We have evidence of Sister Anna making films as early as 1937, and in her role as supervisor of the schools of nursing from the three western

provinces, a position she held from 1938 to 1941. Before and after that time, Sister was the directress of nurses at several institutions. She was a member of the Amateur Cinema League, but also took still photographs with a medium-format camera.

While much of the early footage is not of great technical quality, there are some standouts. A movie made at Providence Hospital in Everett, Wash., shows a patient being admitted to the hospital in a wheelchair, and taken on the elevator to a ward. Later we see a medical staff meeting, a surgery in progress, the pediatric ward with murals painted by Sister artist Vincent of Foligno, and nursing students playing ping-pong. Another remarkable 1938 film, shot in color, shows members of the Coeur d'Alene tribe at Sacred Heart Mission in DeSmet, Idaho; women show off buckskin clothing with patriotic designs, and children play a game with pegs. In some shots Mary Immaculate School can be seen in the background.



Sister Anna Foley taking pictures with her medium-format camera during Hospital Week at Providence Hospital, Anchorage, 1957. Image #160.D59.2.

Later film with sound includes a tour of Providence Heights, Issaquah, Wash., and one of the first profession ceremonies held there, with Sisters Teresa Lang (provincial superior) and Genevieve Gorman (dean of the College of Sister Formation) introducing the new campus, which opened in 1961.

Currently, there are over 60 films available online, but more are being added so check back frequently or subscribe to our YouTube channel! ✍️

Reader's Corner: "Selected Letters of A.M.A. Blanchet"

Anyone seeking a personal view of events in Washington history will savor "Selected Letters of A.M.A. Blanchet, Bishop of Walla Walla & Nesqually 1846-1879" by Roberta Stringham Brown and Patricia O'Connell Killen (University of Washington Press, 2013).

This book presents an insider's view of the Catholic Church in the Northwest and is important to Providence history because of Bishop Blanchet's close ties to the Sisters of Provi-

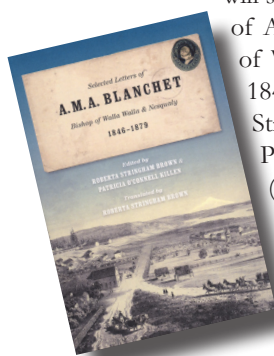
dence, from their foundation in Montreal to his retirement and death at St. Joseph Hospital, Vancouver, Wash. It was Blanchet who made two requests for sisters to work in his diocese, the second bringing Mother Joseph to the Northwest.

Brown and Killen spent more than 10 years researching and translating Blanchet's 900 French letters. Of the 45 selected for inclusion, one is addressed to Mother Joseph, another to Mother Caron, Superior General, and 13 others incorporate details about the works and life of the sisters. In

addition, 18 images from the Providence Archives collection are part of the book's 52 illustrations.

Blanchet's letters offer a window into historical events in Washington, hardships of frontier life and struggles to establish social services. Each letter is preceded by an introduction that provides historical background and context and is followed by explanatory notes and references.

The book is available at bookstores and the Sisters of Providence Religious Community Library. ✍️



Puzzle

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Sacramento who wrote the first eighteen chapters before her sudden death in May 1954.

In June, the General Council appointed Sister Maria Theresa to complete the manuscript hoping it would be finished by the summer's end, allowing for time to publish for the centenary celebrations. Maria Theresa's task was enormous. She had to use one person's research, study the style and tone of the deceased author, and determine the proposed story line. Although the Superior General relieved Maria Theresa of all summer duties so she could concentrate on the manuscript, she continued as senior advisor and later principal at St. Joseph Academy, Yakima, Wash., while working on the book.

The manuscript was finally completed in August 1955 and

returned to Mary Leopoldine for proof-reading while a fourth sister, Cecilia Mary Kucera, was assigned to arrange for publication. This included selecting and negotiating with the publisher and choosing the title and illustrations. Cecilia Mary was also appointed to coordinate all the anniversary celebrations and produce a centennial pageant (see article in the Spring 2013 issue of *Past Forward*, "Archives Mystery Solved: Missing Film Found" about the "Land of Loo-et" written by Cecilia Mary).

At this point the records reveal conflict. Mary Leopoldine, from St. Ignatius Province, felt that her "brainchild" was being taken over by Cecilia Mary, from Sacred Heart Province. Mary Leopoldine spoke her mind freely to Mother Mary Philothea, Provincial Superior, Sacred Heart Province and

Mother Berenice, Superior General, who first appointed Mary Leopoldine. Her letters express her concern for the outcome, personal ownership of the work, and her authority in the facts due to her first-hand relationship with Mother Joseph. The Sacred Heart Province council, however, was concerned about her health and age as well as a successful outcome for the biography.

Mothers Mary Philothea and Berenice frequently corresponded regarding the book's progress. The apparent solution was to conclude Mary Leopoldine's work on the manuscript. In terms of management of the project, the General Administration urged the Sacred Heart Province council to handle the details relating to the book's publication. The rationale for this decision was that two of the authors belonged to that

province and the centennial celebrations were being planned there. Mary Leopoldine respectfully accepted this solution but maintained that Mother Joseph was foundress of many missions in St. Ignatius Province as well. From this point, publication was in Mother Mary Philothea's hands.

A column in the next *Past Forward* will conclude this story and will describe the publication details such as determining the title, illustrations and author; publication accolades and reception; reprint editions; and contemporary formats. ✍



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