



# Past *Forward*

PROVIDENCE ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

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

## Archivists Without Borders

Loretta Z. Greene

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For three days in September, the staffs of the North American Sisters of Providence Archives met at Providence Archives for a meeting hosted by Mother Joseph Province. Because we share a common history and similar records, the purpose of the meeting was to renew professional relationships, share best practices, discuss similarities and differences, and plan for future collaboration. In attendance were Marie-Claude Beland from the General Administration (Montreal, Quebec), Mary Flynn from Holy Angels Province (Edmonton, Alberta) and Peter Schmid,

Emily Hughes Dominick, Pamela Hedquist and Loretta Greene from Mother Joseph Province (Seattle, Washington). This meeting provided an opportunity for Marie-Claude and Mary to see the collections and environment of the Mother Joseph Province archives and for all of us to get to know the individuals with whom we frequently consult via e-mail.

The agenda included topics submitted by all the attendees: policies; use statistics; outreach programs; collection description standards; collections development for paper records, visual resources and artifacts; records management; database develop-

ment; preservation/conservation; digitization; electronic records; and disaster planning. Discussion of these topics was energetic and enlightening.

Although the three repositories are sponsored by the Sisters of Providence, there is a difference in purpose that impacts the scope, content and use of the collections. Similar features of the three archival repositories include policies for archives administration and database development for ease of information retrieval. Also, we all face challenges in information retention and technology. Two major differences relate to the administration of artifact

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## What's New in the Archives?

### NEW ACCESSIONS

If you have been to the archives at St. Joseph Residence in Seattle recently you probably noticed the stacks of boxes lining our hallway. These boxes, numbering over 100, are filled with newly received records from across the system.

The largest group of records comes from the former Providence Services, which was located in Spokane, Washington, serving ministries throughout Eastern Washington, Montana and Idaho. On January 1, 2006 Providence Services and Providence Health System were unified and became Providence Health & Services. These re-

ords consist of board minutes, by-laws, bills of sale, contracts, and other materials related to the sponsored ministries under Providence Services, 1991-2005.

Other records received include over 25 boxes of medical staff files from Providence Alaska Medical Center (Anchorage); 121 volumes of patients admission and diagnostic ledgers, from St. Vincent Medical Center (Portland), 1940-1974; 10 boxes of archival materials from Providence High School (Burbank), 1955-2009; several boxes of records relating to the now dissolved Service League at Sacred Heart Medical Center

(Spokane), 1962-2009; and 14 boxes of nursing transcripts and related records from the Sacred Heart School of Nursing (Spokane), 1899-1973.

### SPOKANE EXHIBIT CASE

We have added one more exhibit case to our rotating exhibit schedule and now we are able to offer historical exhibits on both sides of the mountains! Our newest addition can be found near the entryway of Mount St. Joseph in Spokane. Other exhibit spaces include those in the archives reference room (Seattle) and in the conference space at the System Office (Renton). 



## SP Spotlight: Sister Vincent Ferrier Proulx

*Emily Hughes Dominick*  
*Associate Archivist*

*This article is an excerpt from a larger paper titled “‘To Do What Needs to Be Done’: Sisters of Providence as Hospital Administrators.”*

**M**arie Rose Proulx was born in St. Aimé, a small town near Montreal, in 1853. In 1875 she took her vows as a Sisters of Providence in Montreal and became Sister Vincent Ferrier. She was missioned to the Northwest in the 1880s; by 1898 she was named the administrator of St. Peter Hospital in Olympia, Washington. From this point forward, Sister Vincent Ferrier held leadership roles—either as the administrator of a hospital (a position she held in Spokane, Seattle, and Portland), or as Provincial Superior of Sacred Heart Province.

Sister Vincent Ferrier hadn't received any formal training, but rather learned nursing skills on the job as was common in this era. Likewise, her promotion to a position of authority rested on her learned and innate abilities to lead a group.

With the support of her religious community's leadership, Sister Vincent Ferrier was able to ensure the longevity and competitiveness of the Providence hospitals in the Northwest by leading several large scale building projects that incorporated the latest emerging technologies in medicine and building. She also embraced and encouraged the growing movement towards hospital standardization.



*Name in Religion:*

**Vincent Ferrier**

*Given Name:*

**Marie Rose Proulx**

*Number in Religion:*

**335**

*Date of Birth:*

**1853**

*Entrance to Novitiate:*

**1873**

*First Vows:*

**1875**

*Date of Death:*

**1945**

In 1907, Sister Vincent Ferrier, then administrator at Sacred Heart Hospital in Spokane, visited leading hospitals in Chicago, Minnesota, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Montreal to get new ideas that could be incorporated into building plans for the new hospitals needed in Spokane and Seattle. Along with Sister Macaire, who was the treasurer of the Northwest province at the time, Sister Vincent Ferrier visited 16 hospitals in a few weeks time. In a letter to the Superior General upon her return, Sister Vincent Ferrier recounted with much excitement the whole of the trip. When she got to the specific construction issues, she excitedly conveyed what she had seen noting, in great detail, the types of building materials used, methods of construction and specific building features.

Before she had adequate time to implement any of these ideas into a new hospital building in Spokane, Sister Vincent Ferrier was named as administrator at Providence Hospital in Seattle. In Seattle, as in Spokane, a new building was desperately needed. She couldn't have been in a better position to make recommenda-

tions about erecting the most modern and functional hospital. And so, with the necessary permissions, new building plans were drawn up. Sister Vincent Ferrier saw to it that the work was completed well and with the best materials.

In Sister Vincent Ferrier's role as Provincial Superior between 1913 and 1919 and then 1925 to 1931, she oversaw the construction of several other new hospitals. The council also approved new additions to the hospitals and enacted smaller approvals including upgrading facilities with newer technologies.

While Sister Vincent Ferrier was undeniably important in the physical construction of modern facilities, she also facilitated organizational change. The call for hospital standardization, led by the American College of Surgeons, began gaining momentum around 1916. Under the leadership of Sister Vincent Ferrier, in 1920, the administration of Providence Hospital of Seattle followed the guidelines for establishing a medical staff and a medical records department and upgrading their laboratory and x-ray departments. 🌿

### *Pacific Northwest History Conference Presentations*

Emily Hughes Dominick and Loretta Greene presented research papers at the 2010 Pacific Northwest History Conference held at the Davenport Hotel (Spokane) in November. Emily's paper was titled “‘To do what needs to be done’: Sisters of Providence as Hospital Administrators.” The paper focused on Sister Vincent Ferrier and Sister John Gabriel. Selections of this paper pertaining to Sister Vincent Ferrier are printed as this issue's SP Spotlight feature.

Loretta shared research about the Sisters of Providence and other women religious in her paper titled “The Impact of the Sisters of Providence and Other Women Religious communities on Education in the Northwest.”

Providence Archives staff Peter Schmid and Pam Hedquist also attended the conference.

## PICTURING PROVIDENCE

Peter F. Schmid, Visual Resources Archivist

*A column highlighting archival photographs and other resources that provide visual documentation of the Sisters of Providence. Contact Peter at 206-923-4012 or peter.schmid@providence.org.*

In this early image of Tulalip, we see the boys' school and rectory at left, with the girls' school at center. Outbuildings at right include the laundry. The steeple of St. Anne Church is just visible behind the girls' school. Note the apple orchard in foreground, with the mudflats extending toward the camera to the edge of Tulalip Bay behind the photographer.

St. Anne Mission was established by Fr. Eugene Casimir Chirouse, a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate (OMI), upon his arrival to the territory in 1858. The U.S. Government formally established the Tulalip Reservation the following year and appointed Fr. Chirouse as the teacher with permission to establish a church and school. In 1861, the school became the first government contract Indian school in the country.

In 1868, Fr. Chirouse requested Sisters of Providence to come and teach the Indian girls. As with so many early Providence institutions, it was a small group who arrived at the mission on August 10, 1868: Sr. Blandine, Superior; Sr. Hyacinth; and Sr. Mary of the Faith. That Friday, August 14, was the feast of Our Lady of Seven Dolors (Sorrows), so the sisters dedicated the school to her.

When in 1878 the Missionary Oblates were called to work in western Canada, the sisters began teaching the boys as well. The school flourished until being taken over by the federal government in 1901. Though the sisters were asked to stay, they declined teaching in a secular institution. And so the short-lived mission, for the sisters, came to an end. The school continued to operate as a federal institution until 1921. 🌱



*Our Lady of Seven Dolors School, Tulalip, Washington Territory, 1880s. Image #36.A1.1*

### **Researcher Toby Langen, a teacher from the Native Language Department at the Tulalip Tribes, describes how she has used Providence Archives in learning about the history of the Tulalip mission:**

Two years ago, the Lushootseed (Native Language) Department at Tulalip began to put together a textbook that included language lessons and information about people, events and traditions important in tribal heritage. People at Tulalip are familiar with the names of Fr. Chirouse and Fr. Boulet, whose Lushootseed work is well known, but no one recalls the name of even one of the Sisters of Providence who staffed the mission school from 1868 to 1901.

In my reading about the Tulalip boarding school, I was finding references to prac-

tices and events at “the mission school” as of 1907 or 1911. It seems that not only in tribal memory, but even among professional historians, the mission school, which closed in 1901, was being confused with the federal boarding school.

I thought a good way to resolve the confusion between federal and mission education at Tulalip would be to present the information as part of a brief biography of Sr. Blandine, first superior, in our textbook. I got in touch with the staff of Providence Archives and asked to see any material available about the mission.

In a written response to an enquiry from a new priest at Tulalip who wanted to know more about the work of the sisters, a sister begins to quote from a standard description of the Indian children, to the effect that they were docile but not

industrious, and that they were homely in appearance. After the word “homely,” this Sister added in parentheses, “but not to me.” This personal testimony of a bond with the children at Tulalip was provided by Sr. Martin, who was at the school when it was forced to close and wrote the last entry in the Chronicles. The staff at the Archives has made available to me several files of information about Sr. Martin. I have come to see that it is not possible to talk about the work of the sisters without talking about vocation and the life of a religious.

The generous support of the staff at Providence Archives, despite the changing direction of our research, is greatly appreciated, as is the chance to meet with several sisters who remember Sr. Martin from their time as postulants.

## Archivists

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collections and outreach. At the General Administration, the artifact collection is overseen by the Emilie Gamelin Center rather than the archives, as in Mother Joseph and Holy Angels Provinces. As for outreach, Mother Joseph Province has the most developed program that includes a website, newsletter, and exhibits; the other two archives have limited outreach programs.

The challenges our archives face are the same issues faced by many archival repositories. Implementing records retention schedules and preserving electronic records are major issues that need to be addressed. There are no easy answers. Electronic records are particularly difficult to deal with. At this point, none of the

Providence Archives repositories has a policy or procedure for retention of these records that include e-mail and other born-digital material. Another consideration is digitization of audio/visual resources and documents for preservation and research purposes. Our fast-paced internet society demands more and more information at a quicker rate but digitization is time consuming and expensive and must be balanced with other processing priorities.

The final agenda item was discussion of a partnership among all Sisters of Providence archivists to communicate with and assist each other when possible. Not all archivists in other provinces and sectors of the religious community are professionally trained and this group hopes to be able to provide assistance. We also plan to

continue meeting via conference calls and develop collaborative projects such as creating a thesaurus of common terminology, sharing catalogue records, co-publishing a newsletter and sharing best practices.

Our gathering was not complete without having some fun so the final day included meeting the Provincial Administration staff, visiting Providence sites in the Seattle area and playing tourist at the Space Needle and Pike Place Market.

When our time together ended, we all recognized the importance of this meeting. We gave each other ideas, encouragement and inspiration and developed friendships that we will value personally and professionally. We look forward to working together on future projects! 🌿

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Postage

