

Past Forward

PROVIDENCE ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

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

Rules To Live By: The History of the SP Constitutions

Loretta Greene

Last summer, the Sisters of Providence met in Montreal for the General Chapter of the congregation. Two major goals of the chapter were approval of proposed revisions to the *Constitution and Rules* and election of the new general leadership team.

A few weeks after the sisters from Mother Joseph Province returned from Montreal, Sister Beverly Dunn proudly presented us with a facsimile

of the *Rules of the Sisters of Charity*, hand-copied in 1843, that served as the foundational rules of the nascent Sisters of Providence. We were excited to receive this document! We had only read about it in secondary sources on Providence history; the facsimile completes our series of historic constitutions and rules for the religious community. As we looked over the pages with cross-outs, notes,

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Road Trip to the Past: Revisiting Sacred Heart School in Ward

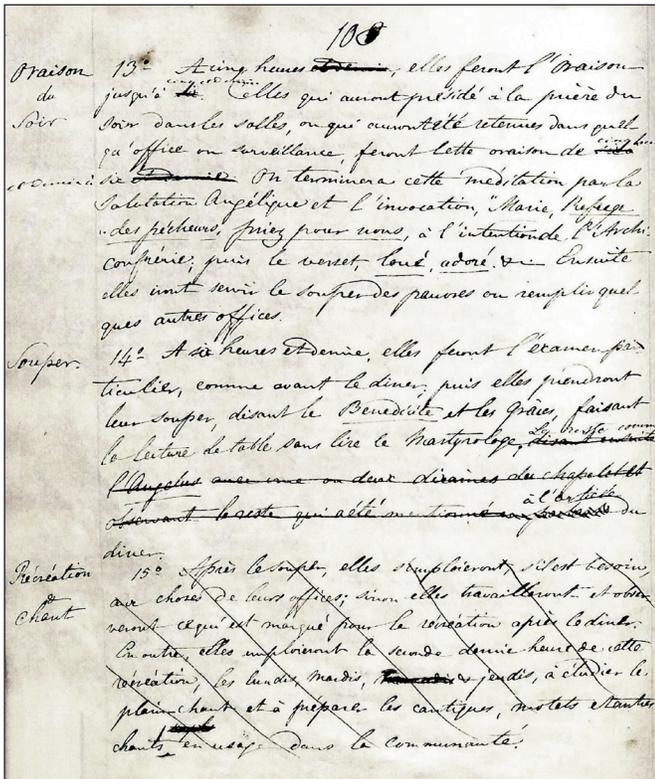
Jessica Long & Pamela Hedquist

“Anyone want to stop at Starbucks?” Pam Hedquist asked as she drove out of Spokane, Washington the morning of August 31, 2017. The hour and forty-five minute trip to Ward, Washington, located between Kettle Falls and Colville, was comfortable in the air conditioned SUV for the three passengers: Pam, assistant archivist – technical; Jessica Long, artifact collections cataloguer; and Sister Rosalie Locati, director of mission and values at Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center. Satellite radio, laughter, and cushioned seats were a luxury compared to the nine-day journey of the sisters who had traveled there in 1873.

Petitioned by the Jesuits beginning in 1865, the Sisters of Providence finally agreed to help educate the children from the Colville Indian Reservation by establishing a school near the

Colville Valley. Sisters John of the Cross, Marie Aurelia, Marie Hyacinth, and a young orphan named Mary Jane Goyner (later Sister Mary Alexander) set out from Vancouver, Washington on the morning of September 12, 1873 to found Sacred Heart School in Ward. Traveling east by boat on the Columbia River, then by coach, the sisters arrived at their destination on September 21st. For the first few weeks they lived in the house adjoining the church of the Jesuit Fathers with nothing but straw mattresses to sleep on. Immediately, they began teaching a few of the white and Native American children in the area, in addition to taking care of the linen used for church services. The fledgling ministry was in good hands, as Sister John of the Cross, first school superior from 1873-1876, had previous experience with children at orphanages in

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A page from the annotated 1843 copy of St. Vincent's rules shows modifications to sections on evening prayer ("Oraison du Soir"), supper, and recreation and chant. Courtesy Providence Archives, Montreal.

Rules

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additions and signatures, we wanted to refresh our understanding of its origin. The research was an eye opener, and changed our understanding on two important points: that the goal of Emilie's journey to the United States was more than to get a copy of the rules; and that Emmitsburg, Maryland was not a planned destination.

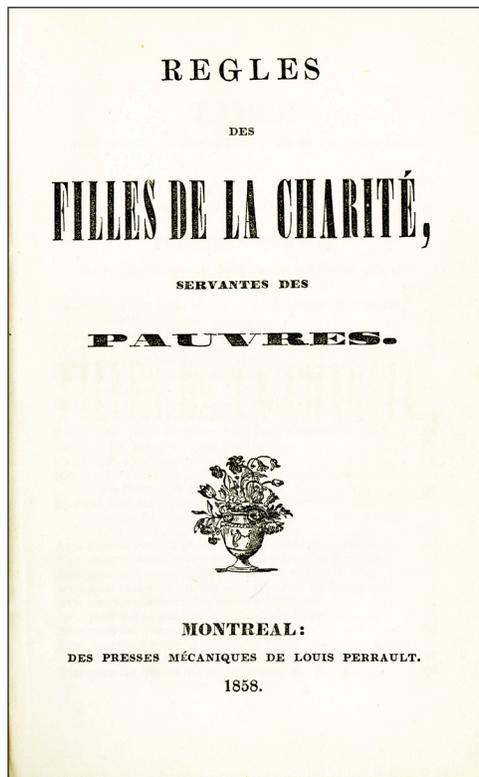
As we know, Bishop Ignace Bourget of Montreal asked the Sisters of Charity in France to assume the charitable works of Emilie Gamelin. The Sisters accepted and later turned down the invitation. In the meantime, on March 25, 1843, Bourget had already welcomed seven women as novices. Without the Sisters of Charity to guide their religious formation, he desired a copy of their rules to teach his prospective sisters. After one of the novices left, Emilie Gamelin was permitted to take her place. Prior to Emilie's entrance as a novice, Bishop Bourget had assigned two important tasks to her: visit the Sisters of Charity in the United States to observe their daily ministry and religious life; and obtain a copy of their Rules, Constitutions and Customs," he directed. "Try above all to secure the Rule of St. Vincent to his Daughters of Charity, beg for it as a loan, if they will neither give nor sell it to you."

On September 11, 1843, Emilie Gamelin left Montreal with three companions to visit with the Sisters of Charity. In New York and Boston she carefully observed their work to gain practical knowledge of their care of the poor, sick and orphans, and in education of youth. She wrote to Bishop Bourget that the Sisters of Charity urged her to travel to their mother house in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Emilie had high hopes that she could satisfy Bishop Bourget's request. When she learned that the rules were in Emmitsburg she had no choice but to go there to try to get them, even if it took her far from the original itinerary. As we know, Emilie was not disappointed! She was loaned an authentic copy of the Rules of St. Vincent de Paul that Bishop Bourget so eagerly desired. Upon her return to Montreal on October 6, she presented the copy to the bishop.

Bourget's secretary, the young Father A.M.A. Blanchet, copied the rules into a medium-size composition book. (Blanchet later was appointed Bishop of the Diocese of Nesqually and in 1852 requested Sisters of Providence for his fledgling diocese in Washington Territory). The document he held in his hand was itself a copy of the original 1672 rules. The first chapters formed a constitution which set forth the spirit in which the sisters were to dedicate themselves in service to God and to those in need. Subsequent chapters contained specific rules for religious life which required modification to suit time, place and purpose. It was these constitutions and rules that Bishop Bourget used for the novices in formation.

The 17th century rules of St. Vincent in France were not all applicable to 19th century ministry needs in Montreal, nor the pioneer Northwest. As the community and its works grew, the handwritten constitution was revised with cross-outs, additions, subtractions and annotations adapting them to the new sisters' own time, place, and purpose. This contemporary revision of the constitution and rules helps us understand why Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart would occasionally ask Bishop Bourget for guidance on specific acts. In addition, there was debate within the religious community whether education was a proper ministry for the sisters. In December 1858, she wrote to Bishop Bourget:

"I wish to add to this present letter the list of the points of the Rule which are not regularly observed and those which we believe must be exercised with exemption. ... I add also the prospectus of our boarding school, in case it proclaims an education program contrary to the spirit of our institute. Please signify if we should suppress it next year." She continued, "I shall summarize briefly all the counsels which I have taken the liberty to ask in this letter. ... What should we do when near Protestants during sickness, especially during their agony and after death? Is it proper for sisters to care for small children? Is it contrary to the spirit of the Rule to admit into the boarding school [older] young ladies who wish to be instructed? You know, my Lord, that in the United States, they remain in school longer."



The 1858 Constitutions

In 1858, the first edition of the customary rules was printed after 14 years of fluctuating rules. New editions were printed every few years until 1900 when, after 40 years of waiting, the constitution was finally approved and printed in Rome. In 1904, the first English edition of the constitutions appear, translated by Bishop Edward O'Dea of Seattle. By its nature, the constitutions give the basic principles that guide the religious community and are not easily changed. However, the constitution did not remain static and was revised in 1925 according to the latest code of canon law. Further study of the constitutions demanded by the Second Vatican Council resulted in an *ad experimentum* text in 1968 and 1970. Later revisions decided by the General Chapter of 1982 were submitted to the Apostolic See and approved in 1985. And here we are today with the General Chapter of 2017 submitting constitutional changes to the Apostolic See for approval. During this Chapter, the facsimile of the original hand-copied constitution was placed prominently in the meeting room as an inspiration and reminder to the current sisters of the origin of their constitution that guides their lives as women religious. ✍



Road Trip

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Chile, Montreal, and Vancouver, and helped establish other early missions in the West.

On November 12, the sisters took possession of a new home belonging to the Jesuits, known as St. Francis Regis Mission. This small structure of mud-chinked logs was divided into four rooms. The sisters had to walk a mile daily to attend Mass until the end of the year when a room could be prepared for a chapel. By January of 1874, the mission served thirty-six boarders and twelve day students, but winters were harsh for the new little school, as recorded in *Chronicles*: "For three months the Sisters could not take off their mittens for five minutes, without their fingers getting numb. To have the opportunity to eat a few slightly warm mouthfuls, they had to line up around the little kitchen stove, as close as possible, and quickly eat the crepe before it froze..."



Inset, Sacred Heart School in the 1910s, with present view in background

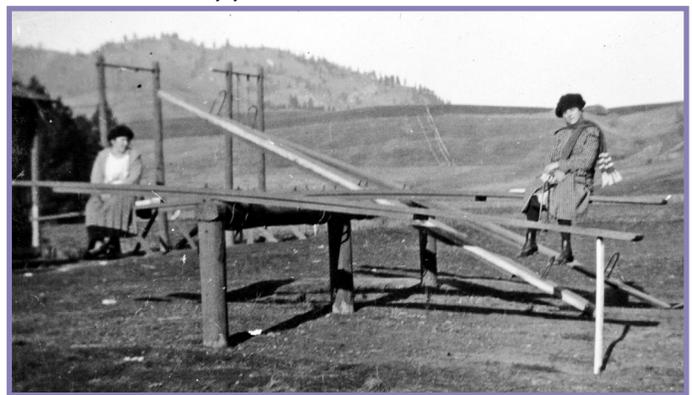
Enjoying our sunny twenty-first century afternoon, we safely arrived at our destination and were greeted by Beverly (Bev) Parent, who welcomed us to her home. A friend of Sr. Rosalie, Bev and her husband, Alfred, had acquired the old Sacred Heart School property in 1989 and ran it as a bed and breakfast for several years. Our host graciously offered a tour, which began in the main house, built in 1913 and used for the sisters' apartments, chapel, parlor, and classrooms for the boarders. The building was a home now with a modernized kitchen, living room, several guest rooms, and little evidence of its rich past. One clue was on the third story, where the original wood floors had been refinished, and dark lines remained where walls had once divided the space into classrooms. Bev reminisced about all the hard work it took to remove the slate chalkboards, lath, and plaster while remodeling the top floor, which had been damaged from roof leaks and bats.

The hard years faced by the building were not unlike those endured by sisters and students at Sacred Heart School. Within the first year, an order was received from the government to close the school for lack of funds to pay the teachers and feed the children (Native American boarding schools were at that time funded through the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs). Rather than send the students home, the sisters elected to sacrifice their salary to

continue teaching as long as Divine Providence provided the bare necessities. Thanks to extra provisions provided by John Simms, the government agent at the Colville Indian Agency, the school survived until July, when Congress appropriated \$1,500 for the sisters' salaries. In later years, financial worries gave way to sickness among the children in the area, including brain fever in 1874, scarlet fever in 1903, diphtheria in 1908, and Spanish influenza and small pox in 1918. Occasionally an epidemic would claim a student's life, but the sisters worked hard to care for their charges and sometimes managed to contain the spread of illnesses. *Chronicles* also note that the sisters would venture out to sick Native Americans to dispense medications, ranging from 10 to 75 visits a year.

Despite the many hardships at Sacred Heart School, there were joys as well. The first railroad through Ward in 1889 brought a huge relief to sisters, students, and visitors alike. Travel to and from the school was greatly improved with the convenience of this railway, which is still located on the Northeast edge of the property. More to the children's liking, swings and "teeters" were built and a basketball court laid out in the summer of 1915 by Sister Ethelreda, superior, who was very interested in outdoor sports for the children. In 1916, an end of school year performance put on by the students in nearby Colville was a great success and concluded with a ride home in eight automobiles provided by local business men. During the holidays when students and boarders could not go home due to weather, the sisters would decorate Christmas trees in their recreation hall and one year the children even enjoyed a fourteen-mile sleigh ride!

As our morning continued, Bev directed led us to an old hay barn at the back of the property, overlooking a small glen. Beside the barn were a granary and large chicken coop. According to Bev, the sisters had a naturally irrigated vegetable garden on the bottom of the glen. This fertile land must have been a blessing for the sisters (never numbering more than nine at a time) and their additional one to three staff members, who had an average of 54 students and boarders to feed every year!



Playground at Ward showing teeter-totters installed in 1915

Inside the barn, Bev was excited to show us what at first looked simply like two large piles of wood. She told us that when a previous owner, who purchased the property in 1983, was remodeling the main building into a private home, they uncovered a hand-hewn log cabin inside the walls of one of the buildings. The logs, held together by square pegs and a clay mixture dating back to the 1800's, were behind a layer of pine paneling and wallpaper dating to about

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Hand-hewn logs from the original mission cabin

the 1910's. Those logs, now stacked neatly inside the old barn, are thought to be from the original mission built by the Native Americans for the Jesuit missionaries and where the sisters first took up residence. These objects provided a perfect segue to our next stop: a beautiful fenced garden behind the main house. The raised rose garden beds are placed on top of a foundation, discovered by Bev and her husband, where the log cabin once stood. Chronicles corroborate this with an entry dated May 3, 1912: "The little log house which has been used by the Sisters for thirty-three years, has been moved to the rear of the house, and will be used for the Indian girls dining room and class room, also a pantry for the kitchen." The rose garden has the same dimensions as the old foundation and was created as a marker for the original St. Francis Regis Mission log cabin.



A fenced garden outlines the cabin site

Most of the original structures from the time of the Sisters of Providence are gone now, having been remodeled and replaced over the years by later owners. The Dominican Sisters bought the site in 1934 and used it as their Lady of the Valley convent. The decision to purchase the Sacred Heart School property was partially caused by the Great Depression. The Dominican Sisters left Germany and arrived in Helena, Montana in 1925. Their first provincial

home, Our Lady of the Pines, was founded on a farm outside of Chewelah, Washington in 1931, but income from the farm was not sustainable and led to them moving to Ward (30 miles north). During this time period, they constructed a home for the hired help, built a greenhouse, planted several trees, added a gym called St. Thomas Hall with a half basketball court and rooms for classes in art and printing, and established a cemetery on the west side of the property.

The aging of the Dominican sisters and lack of new vocations, the remote location, and changes in the finances of their school and hospital ministries necessitated relocation of their convent to Spokane in 1970. The Sacred Heart School property passed to Circle Bar J Ministries, a juvenile rehabilitation center for boys, in 1972. The gym must have come in handy for the 30 boys who lived there! In 1981, Washington State did not renew the home's contract and the Circle Bar J Boys Ranch went out of business.

Today, several of the Dominican sisters' buildings still survive. Bev led us across the property to the gym where the former art classroom is now a gorgeous guest suite and the basketball court has a shiny refinished floor. Next, our group walked slowly through a small grotto to the Dominican sisters' cemetery where twenty one identical white concrete crosses are neatly arranged in rows. The sisters' remains were exhumed in 2012 to be reburied with their fellow sisters at Holy Cross Cemetery in Spokane. Because Bev and her husband, Alfred, had cared for the registered cemetery, Alfred felt that the spirits of the sisters were still present and so he hand-poured the crosses currently on the site to represent their former graves. He crafted two additional crosses for him and Bev, and when Alfred died in 2016 he was buried in a new row behind the sisters' graves. When it is time, Bev will join him.

Nearing the end of the tour, we walked along a path where the Dominican sisters had once arranged the Stations of the Cross on posts. All that remains now are the "Crown of Thorn" trees they planted, brought as seedlings from the Holy Land. We were all amazed at the two- to three-inch long thorns, plucked from one of the trees with Bev's encouragement. It was here that we attempted to find the location of a photograph taken of Sister Mary Cyrilla standing in a potato patch with hills in the background (see photo next page). Sr. Mary taught and nurtured the children at Sacred Heart School from 1918 to January 1921, and utilized her nursing skills during disease outbreaks.

Sister Mary Cyrilla would be one of the last Sisters of Providence to minister at Sacred Heart. In September 1920, the school was obliged to ask the Native Americans to pay a small sum of ten dollars for their children's board due to the high cost of food. This resulted in the majority of the children not returning for the beginning of school. With no more than eight children attending during the entire year and the dire financial conditions of the house, the decision was made to close the school after 48 years. After a month of packing, the sisters left on July 30, 1921 with the thought "No doubt, but our beloved Mother John of the Cross [school founder], looked down upon us, from her Heavenly Home, as the train carried us away from the Colville Mission, where she had started the noble work of education of the Indians, under many hardships and sufferings."

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Carrying a copy of our image of Sr. Mary Cyrilla in the potato garden, Pam and Jessica located almost the exact spot that she stood, in about 1918. Note the matching contour of the hills in background.

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Back at the main house and after walking in the footsteps of these remarkably brave women and witnessing Bev's passion for her historic home, it was clear to us what a special and beautiful place the Sacred Heart School property still is. Seeing the trees, rolling hills, and breathing the fresh air it was easy to understand why the school's *Chronicles* frequently mentioned sisters visiting to regain their health, "for our humble little Mission, situated among the mountains, seems to have received from Almighty God the gift, or blessing, of restoring health to the sick and strength to the weak." As we said our goodbyes and heartfelt thanks to Bev, and returned to our comfortable car for the short trip back to Spokane, we felt humbled and strengthened as well. ✍️

Book Corner

Peter Schmid

Three new books published in 2017 relied on Archives resources.

Benefis Health System: 125 Years of Excellence by Karen Ogden (144 pages; Brookfield, MO: The Donning Company Publish-



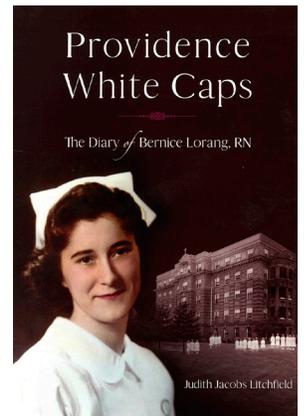
ers) recounts the history of the health system, including the earliest institution founded by the Sisters of Providence in 1892 as Columbus Hospital (see our Fall

2017 issue for an article about the old chapel at Columbus).

Methodist missionary Rev. William Wesley Van Orsdel sought the help of Deaconesses to establish a Protestant hospital in Great Falls, and Montana Deaconess Hospital opened in 1898.

In 1996, Columbus Hospital and Montana Deaconess Medical Center consolidated to become Benefis Healthcare, governed by Providence Services based in Spokane, Washington. Governance issues led Providence to withdraw from Benefis in 2006, ending over 100 years of Providence healthcare in Great Falls.

Ogden presents a very readable and well-organized history of the institutions, and of course relied heavily on sources from Providence Archives, including dozens of photographs.



Providence White Caps by Judith Jacobs Litchfield (289 pages; softcover \$24.99) is the annotated and illustrated diary of Bernice Lorang, the author's aunt, from 1942 to 1946. The story centers around Lorang's experience as a student of St. Joseph Hospital School of Nursing in Vancouver, Washington. (St. Joseph Hospital was one of the earliest foundations

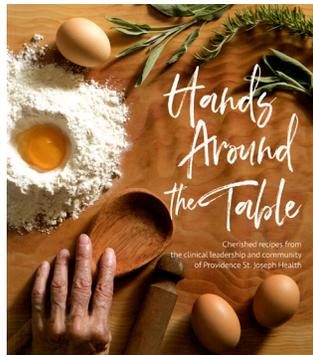
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of the Sisters of Providence in the west, established in 1858). Litchfield augments the diary with information gleaned from extensive interviews with her aunt and other alumni of the nursing program, as well as archival resources from Providence Archives and other repositories. Email the author at julitch@comcast.net to buy a copy.

Hands Around the Table: Cherished Recipes From the Clinical Leadership and Community of Providence St. Joseph Health (134 pages; Renton, WA: Providence St. Joseph Health) presents a wide array of recipes, from appetizers to desserts. But *Hands Around the Table* is more than just a cookbook. The book was developed as a mission project in support of teen suicide awareness: “Knowing that



adolescent suicide is often motivated by feelings of depression and isolation, we were inspired to focus on the table as a center of healing and community.” Recognizing the preparation and serving of meals as a “sacred gesture,” the book includes recipes submitted by PSJH caregivers, along with recipes, anecdotes and photographs from the archives of both the Sisters of Providence and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange. To obtain a copy, contact Hilary Kesner at Hilary.Kesner@providence.org.



Sr. Mary Florence Gaetz with one of her lamb cakes for Seder supper, 1987. The image appears on page 62 of “Hands Around the Table.”

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