
PAST FORWARD

The Newsletter of the Sisters of Providence Archives, Seattle

Autumn 1996 Volume 4, Issue 1

WE'RE STILL HERE!!

Perhaps you've noticed that you haven't received anything from the Archives in the mail recently. Did you think that either this newsletter wasn't around anymore or that you had been deleted from the mailing list? Well, we are here to tell you that the newsletter is **still** here and you have **not** been deleted from the mailing list!

It is true that the last Past Forward was published in the summer of 1995. At that point we were ready to plunge into the installation of movable shelving in the Archives. Anyone who has ever moved and had construction going on at the same time can appreciate the predicament we were in. Thank you to everyone for your patience and support during this process. The beauty and pleasure of working in a renovated area far outweigh the woes of construction.

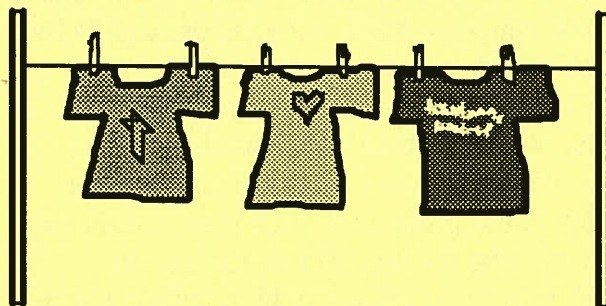
OPEN HOUSE

To celebrate our new "home," we hosted an Open House on February 22, 1996. Eighty people celebrated with us that day, and the rest of you are welcome anytime to see our transformation. We will be happy to show you the Archives in which your history is preserved and made available to researchers.

STAFF HAPPENINGS

Meanwhile, **Terri Mitchell** joined the staff as full-time Assistant Archivist. She transferred to the Archives from her position as Coordinator of Religious Community

Chronicles. We greatly benefit from her knowledge of the Sisters, religious community and institutions. From March to May, Terri and **Sister Rita** ably held down the fort while **Loretta** was on maternity leave for the birth of her daughter, **Julie Rose**. Currently, we are blessed with **Victor Coupez**, a volunteer who assists with data entry for the Sisters' biographical database.



CALLING ALL T-SHIRTS!

Fun runs ... health fairs ... dedications ... graduations ... events such as these in the Health System are often celebrated with commemorative t-shirts. These fun, colorful Providence designs are so creative, we can't resist having a "clothes-line exhibit." So, whether you are planning t-shirts for an upcoming event or cleaning your closet, please add us to your distribution list. (And while you are packing, don't forget mugs, caps, ribbons, buttons, posters, paperweights or any other commemorative items you can share.) We'll keep you posted as the exhibit unfurls. Thanks!

HISTORICAL NOTES

With this issue of Past Forward, we begin a new column to share some of the history of the Sisters of Providence and their ministries. Our first topic takes us back to the early 19th century, before the founding of the community.

Mother Emilie Gamelin, foundress of the Sisters of Providence in Montreal, lost all of her children to early death: her first two sons lived only three months, and the third about eighteen months. We were asked recently about the cause of these untimely deaths, which along with the death of her husband, engendered in Emilie her great devotion to Our Mother of Sorrows.

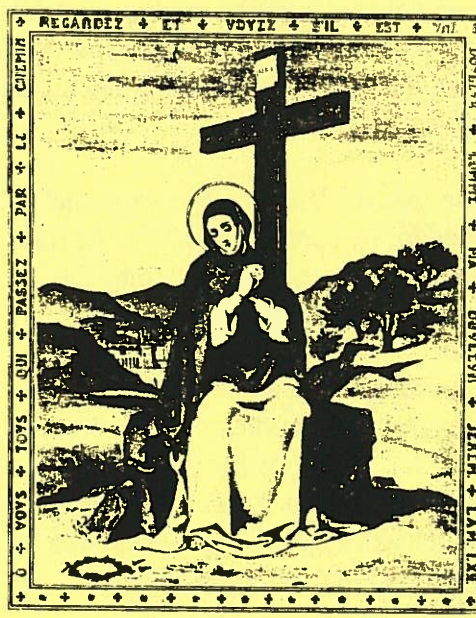
Although records of the time give no cause of death, a clue can be found in research being done by Sister Edyth Borthwick for her biography of Mother Gamelin. Emilie's children were born in the 1820s, well before the advent of pasteurization and vaccinations. Unsanitary water and milk supplies and common childhood diseases made the first months of life difficult for any child of the time. But Sister Edyth has found that the infant mortality rate in Montreal was unusually high throughout the 19th century.

Sister cites some surprising statistics from Terry Coop's **The Anatomy of Poverty**: "[At the end of the century] Montreal was the most dangerous city in the civilized world to be born in. Between 1899 and 1901, 26.76 percent of all new born children died before they were one year old. This was more than double the figure for New York City, and it was customarily cited as being lower than only one large city--Calcutta. . . ."

Apparently, the infant mortality rate among French Canadian families was even higher

than for other poor working-class families in Montreal. Mr. Coop notes: "French Canadian doctors had long argued that the high infant mortality rate in Quebec was primarily due to the tendency of French Canadian mothers to wean their infants very quickly and bottle feed them, often on a mixture of beef extract and cereal--*la bouille traditionnelle*." Immigrant mothers who breast fed longer had fewer children but brought more safely to maturity.

We are grateful to Sister Edyth for sharing her research and insights. If you have a question of general interest, please let us know. We will do our best to answer in future newsletters!



Picture of Our Mother of Sorrows given to Emilie Gamelin after the death of her third son in 1828. The picture became a life-long source of consolation and an inspiration for her ministry.

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