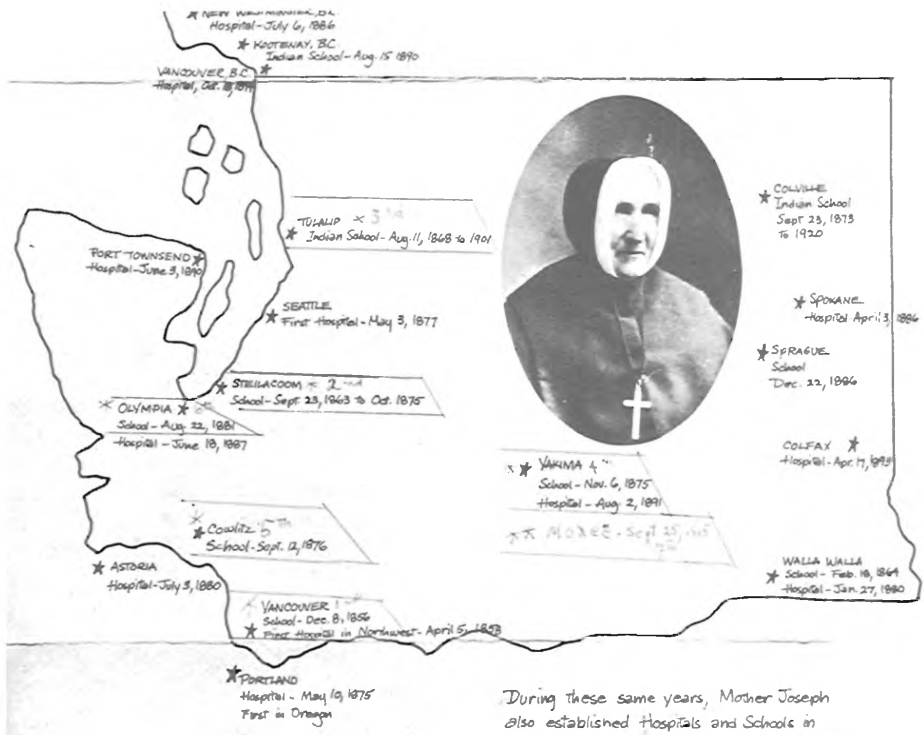




*The Way It Was*  
*in*  
*Providence Schools*

Stories of  
Seven Providence Schools in the West  
Founded Between  
1856-1920

*by*  
*Sister Dorothy Lentz, S.P.*



During these same years, Mother Joseph also established Hospitals and Schools in Montana in Missoula, Fort Benton, St. Ignatius, Great Falls, and in Wallace, Idaho.

Between 1856 and her death in 1902 Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart Pariseau founded twenty-six Providence houses in Washington, Oregon, Montana, Idaho and British Columbia. Of the seven schools treated in this book, she founded all but Moxee's Holy Rosary School.

# Preface

This book is one of a projected series of books telling the stories of Providence schools and hospitals established in the West between 1856 and the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century. The author is one of several Sisters of Providence collaborating with Sister Irene Richer, Providence Historian, in writing the history of the Sisters of Providence founded by Mother Emilie Gamelin in Montreal, Canada in 1843.

Under the leadership of Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart, five Sisters of Providence came west, arriving in Vancouver, Washington in 1856. Here they began their works of charity among the poor, the sick, the aged, children and young people. As time went on, more Providence Sisters joined the founding group and established schools, hospitals and homes for the aged from Alaska to California.

Before a Health, Education and Welfare Department existed in the civil government, the sisters conducted schools and hospitals of superior quality. They knew the way of compassionate care for the needy wherever they found them. Today, Sisters of Providence serve them on three continents.

The first part of this series takes up the apostolate of the Providence Sisters in seven schools established by them between 1856 and 1915. The schools chosen were all located in what is presently (1977) the Province of the Sacred Heart. Each of these schools had its own identity, its own set of circumstances and people to make it special. Each left its mark on the students and families and citizens it served.

None of these first schools exists today; but the teaching of the sisters lives on in the many generations who experienced their influence. It lives on in the many Providence Sisters today who had their early education in Providence schools. Many of them have chosen an education apostolate as their way to best serve Christ and His people. Some are teaching in Providence schools; some in diocesan or other school systems; others of them are serving in health, social service or other fields of charity.



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In 1844, the ways of Providence made Madame Gamelin, the sisters' Mother Emilie Gamelin, foundress and first superior. In 1836, when she had moved into the Yellow House nothing had been further from her thoughts. But the impelling motive, basic to all Providence Sisters, had already taken deep root in Madame Gamelin's life: "The love of Christ leaves us no choice." She had a sensitive perception of need wherever it existed and a faith that made the needy person one with Christ. Thus motivated, hers was a compassionate response that knew no difficulty too great for her trust in Providence to overcome. She had an empathy with Mary, Mother of Compassion. Maybe God was inviting her to become a religious. She sought out her bishop to help her discern God's plans for her.

The story of how Bishop Ignace Bourget of Montreal, Canada came to found a community of sisters using as a starting point, Madame Gamelin's works of charity is a story of many Providential interventions. He had expected the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul to come to Montreal from France. Then, when everything was ready for them, he received word that they could not come. The need was urgent; so he decided to begin a new community of sisters modeled on that of the French community. Seven Canadian women responded to his call for members.

On March 25, 1843, in the refuge of Montreal called the Yellow House, the first novices of the Sisters of Providence received the holy habit and began their religious life. On March 29, 1844, in the new Providence Asile, Montreal, seven sisters made their first vows, among them Emilie Gamelin who was elected their first superior. The community grew rapidly and so did its institutions of charity. The first House of Providence, already caring for the aged, almost immediately added new works and new wings.

Mother Gamelin could not resist the orphans, many of whose mothers or fathers she had attended at the time of their deaths. She opened a department for them and then for lady boarders who told her that they, too, had needs and could help with finances. Of the first nine missions that Mother Gamelin started in Montreal and in nearby villages, four of them responded to the requests of parish priests for teachers in their village schools. All of the Providence houses, whether their main work was that of a hospital, school or home for the aged, included the work that they called "their most-loved work," that of visiting and caring for the poor, the sick, and the needy in their homes.

In 1847, the typhus fever that had come to Montreal with the Irish immigrants, reached epidemic proportions. Twenty-seven Sisters of Providence contracted the disease while caring for the victims in make-shift hospitals. Three of these sisters had died. Then, in the fall of 1851, the terrible disease struck Mother Gamelin and she was dead within a few hours.

In the Community's first eight years of existence, Mother Gamelin, with Bishop Bourget, had given it a firm foundation. She had begun, too, its works of charity beyond the mother house, thus firmly establishing its multiple apostolates.

Before Mother Gamelin died, she had heard missionaries tell of the Indians and the Canadian fur traders of the Far West. Then Canon A. M. A. Blanchet, who had been the Providence community's chaplain in Montreal, became Bishop Blanchet of Walla Walla in the Oregon territory. Mother Gamelin had foreseen that one day Providence sisters would be helping him serve his people in their primitive land.

## MOTHER JOSEPH OF THE SACRED HEART PARISEAU

Mother Joseph had known Mother Gamelin's hopes. She had been close to her from the time when, in 1843, her father had brought his daughter, Esther Pariseau,

# *Introduction*

The story of Providence Sisters and all their works of charity on the West Coast provinces of the Sisters of Providence begins with the stories of two exceptional women, Mother Emilie Gamelin and Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart.

Both shared an impelling motive, a call of the Church to fill multiple needs, and total self-giving in their response. The one, in 1843 founded the international community of the Sisters of Providence; the other, in 1856 led a group of those sisters to the American West where she started the works of charity that today challenge Providence Sisters from California to Alaska. Gifted with leadership and organizational abilities, both knew great suffering and great success. Mother Gamelin and Mother Joseph had shared community life for eight years. They knew each other well.

## MOTHER EMILIE GAMELIN

Mother Gamelin's preparation to become the foundress of the Sisters of Providence began when she, as four-year-old Emilie Tavernier, answered a beggar's knock at the door and gave him all her treasures. Saddened because they did not satisfy his needs, she saw Providence intervene in the person of her mother who filled his bag. Then six deaths in her family circle, before she had finished her teens, drew her close in faith and love to Christ suffering for others. They gave her an experience of grief that sensitized her to others' needs. So it was, all through her life. Sorrows kept coming to her; persons in need kept knocking at her door; faith and compassionate love kept prompting her to respond.

Mr. Jean Baptiste Gamelin, a charitable business man, a lonely man of fifty years of age, came into Emilie's life when she was twenty-three. When he asked her to marry him, she surprised everyone by saying, "Yes." The marriage of four years duration had many joys and sorrows. Three babies came to bless the union, but death soon took the lives of the first two boys. Then Madame Gamelin's husband died and left her alone with baby Toussaint. Her sorrows were not over yet. Within a year, her last baby died. Then it was that Mary standing at the foot of The Cross became very real to her. Jesus had given Mary to all mankind to be their Mother. Her Son's death had given her a mission. Madame Gamelin wondered, "Had her son's death a message for her?"

Providence made clear to Madame Gamelin that the poor of Montreal needed her. No family ties kept her from them now. She had a God-given mission. Visiting homes as a member of the newly-formed Ladies of Charity of Montreal, she had discovered the most needy of the poor, elderly women left alone and uncared for in miserable shelters.

In the orchard where her home was located were two other houses. To one, she had already brought an idiot boy, Dodais, with his mother to care for him. The other house she made her first refuge for a few old ladies. The number quickly grew, and space and money became problems, so she sold the orchard and houses and moved her old ladies to the basement of a parish school.

When this second refuge became overcrowded, Madame Gamelin rented a double house for her ladies and herself. She needed to be easy of access to settle disputes to maintain order in the refuge. Then, in 1836, a benefactor gave her a house located at the corner of St. Catherine and St. Christopher Streets. In this Yellow House was born the Institute of the Sisters of Providence.

to join Mother Gamelin's new community. It took courage to become one of a group of eleven women, none of whom had yet taken vows. Mother Gamelin immediately saw that Sister Pariseau would, in time, give the community the valuable assistance that her father had promised.

The two religious quickly formed close ties. Sister Pariseau learned from her superior how to clothe, feed, and house over fifty people with no regular income. She learned the ways of Providence. Most of her novitiate and young professed days she spent helping Mother Caron who was the treasurer and pharmacist as well as supervisor of the kitchen, garden and carpenter shop. It was in-service training for Mother Joseph's future work. In the summer of 1845, Sister Pariseau became Sister Joseph, the thirteenth Sister of Providence to take vows.

Mother Gamelin was dead before the Oregon country became Providence country. In 1856, when Bishop Augustin Magloire Blanchet came to ask for Providence sisters, Mother Joseph's hopes ran high. Mother Caron and her council accepted the Vancouver mission and appointed Sister Joseph as superior of the group of five professed sisters and novices.

The story of the voyage through Panama, the arrival in Vancouver on December 8, 1856 to find nothing ready for the sisters, the first year of uncertainties and dire poverty made real to the superior the meaning of trust in Providence.

Things began to happen at once, and the first permanent Catholic school in the Northwest was ready to open on April 15, 1857.

At first the sisters worked for the Catholic Mission of Vancouver at its expense. Mother Joseph soon saw the wisdom of the sisters' administering their own financial affairs. Bishop Blanchet agreed with her and helped her get property outside the mission boundaries on which to build a Providence House of Charity. Mother Joseph then began her long career as a unique financier and a builder of Providence houses in the West.

Each institution had a central apostolate to which the sisters dedicated themselves. Each was also a "providence", a place where people could come with their needs and know that sisters there would do their utmost to supply them. The 1860 chronicles of Providence Academy lists its works of charity carried on between 1857 and 1860. The sisters took care of the sick, spent nights with the critically ill, consoled bereaved families, and gave meals to the poor who came to their door. This they added to the work of educating orphans, boarders and day pupils.

Mother Joseph saw the need for a hospital and, in 1858, St. Joseph Hospital began in a little building on the mission property in Vancouver. Schools at Steilacoom, Walla Walla, and St. Ignatius, Montana came next, all requested by the clergy during Mother Joseph's first ten years in the West. By the twenty-fifth jubilee year in the West, she had founded eighteen missions, twelve of them schools, six hospitals. For most of them Mother Joseph had planned the buildings, supervised their construction and begged much of the money to pay for them.

Mother Joseph was an organizer and a builder. Other Providence Sisters excelled as educators, dieticians, hospital and business administrators, and as nurses. For the first ten years in the West, Mother Joseph held the office of superior. After that, Mother Praxedes of Providence Lamothe became the mother vicar. Even then, when bishops or priests wanted Providence Sisters to establish missions, they went to Mother Joseph, too, with their requests. They knew that they needed her approval. Everybody knew and respected Mother Joseph.



## PROVIDENCE SISTERS AS EDUCATORS

The mandates given the Providence Sisters by Bishop Ignace Bourget and by Bishop A. M. A. Blanchet list teaching as one of their important works. Schools came first in the apostolates of the West. Mother Joseph started schools even though she lacked trained teachers because Christian education was the most pressing need of the people at that time.

Immediately she used the means available to educate teachers on the job. She bargained with Father J. B. Brouillet, Vicar General, who was running a school for boys in Vancouver. The sisters would do the washing and cooking for the boys in exchange for lessons from the teachers. By 1859, Mother Joseph could write her superiors in Montreal, "Our school enjoys a good reputation."

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Mother Mary Antoinette brought to the teachers their first community-planned educational program. Appointed as the first general directress of schools in 1890, she took immediate steps to fill in the lacunae that she found in the Eastern Canadian schools of the community. She came West in 1893 to bring progress to the schools in the West. Her first stop was in Missoula, Montana. Here she came in contact with Sister Mary Loretta Gately, a sister then in her twenties. The experienced Mother saw in her a promise for education in the West.

### SISTER MARY LORETTA GATELY

The sisters of Providence in the west remember Sister Mary Loretta as their remarkable, far-sighted educator. To her they owe, in great part, their education through the years of first certification of sisters, first accreditation of schools and the development of grade and high schools of recognized excellence.

When just twenty-four years old she had organized the eight-four system for the Providence school in Missoula. She had planned and taught a curriculum that enabled her students to compete with the best. She herself had had no formal education beyond one year of high school in Portland, Oregon. She had acquired a love of culture, of drama, opera, natural sciences and books while in her teens living in San Francisco with her aunt. By reading, asking questions, opening her mind to the wise and the beautiful, she became well educated.

Early in her life she had come to know Providence Sisters of great stature. Mother Theresa Muller and Sister Benedict Joseph Larocque introduced her to a confidence in Divine Providence and a love of the needy in Portland, Oregon. Mother Mary of the Resurrection and Mother Hilarion discovered her potential in Missoula, put their confidence in her and gave her responsibilities. Before she left Montana in 1911 to become directress of studies of Sacred Heart Province, Sacred Heart Academy, Missoula had received its accreditation.

Back in Vancouver after twenty years of absence, she knew the challenge ahead of her. The fall list of teacher assignments included names of sisters she knew to be self-educated women; but only one on the whole list held a teachers' certificate. She immediately set her goals: the education of all the sisters, the certification of all Providence Sister teachers, the accreditation of all Providence schools. She knew the obstacles she would have to face: too few sisters, no money, prejudice against higher studies for sisters, apathy, and the daring in the idea of going away to college.

Sister Mary Loretta's first brave step was a success. During the summer of 1912, she sent all the teachers to live at St. Vincent Hospital, Portland while attending a week-long diocesan institute at St. Mary's Portland. Then she took thirty young



*Mother Emilie Gamelin founded the Sisters of Providence in Montreal, Canada, in 1843. As Madame Gamelin she had served the poor and the elderly until she was forty-three years old.*



*Sister Mary Loretta Gately, Directress of Schools, did much to bring Providence Sister teachers and schools to a high degree of proficiency.*



*In 1894 Mother Mary Antoinette, General Directress of Schools, assembled the teachers of the province in Vancouver to give them professional help in the education of youth.*

sisters to Olympia where she taught them methods of Christian education in their first summer school.

As her next move she solicited and received permission for the sisters to take the State teachers' examinations. Many of them easily acquired certificates. After that came summer school for Providence Sisters at Holy Names Normal, Portland, Oregon, and university studies at Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska. When Sister Mary Loretta succeeded in getting a whole sabbatical year at college for one teacher and then for more of them, she felt the joy of progress. For the most part, though, the sisters continued to earn degrees piecemeal in summer quarters and occasional quarters during the year.

An in-service program kept them learning and applying their knowledge. It was of various kinds. She offered the sisters correspondence courses in English, college algebra, literature and Latin. She encouraged groups to work together on the same course. "While sisters have an intellectual interest," she said, "they will have no time for small talk." Group and private lessons in speech, music or painting interested some. Other classes offered opportunities to all the sisters during the school year. They were always having some class once or twice a week to keep them alert to learning and to help them earn credits. Many doors to the education of sisters were open now, never to close again.

By 1920, Sister Mary Loretta saw as an attainable goal: all Providence schools staffed with certified teachers. The time had come for applying for accreditation of the schools. One State inspector's report after visiting a Providence school is typical of most, "It is one of our better schools . . . Students make exceptional records at the University of Washington. . . All high school teachers are legally qualified . . . Accreditation recommended."

The pressure of certification and the struggle for school accreditation once over, Sister Mary Loretta attacked the more subtle problem of inertia. "We have reached the place in education where we should consider our continued professional growth," she wrote. "Teachers should never cease learning music, history, poetry, literature, science, theology; otherwise they will be at sixty what they were at twenty."

Her struggle for excellence in teaching included all subjects. Through the years, though, religion teaching meant most to her. She left nothing undone to equip the sisters with education in theology, with methods, texts, maps and charts. She knew, however, their futility in religion teaching if the teacher herself was not filled with love of God and His Kingdom.

She spurred the teachers on to ever greater union with God and she never ceased challenging them with high ideals. In her selfless zeal for God's glory and her great love for her teachers, Sister continued to the end to inspire them to even greater efforts to excel as teachers reflecting the Spirit of God dwelling with them.

# *Acknowledgments*

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# Chapter 1

## *The Way It Was In Vancouver*

1856-1966 VANCOUVER WASHINGTON

*A Story of Providence Academy*

### MOTHER JOSEPH, ORPHANS, PROVIDENCE HOUSE and the FORT

Colonel George Wright of the garrison tied his horse to the post in front of the House of Providence and smiled as he watched the children skipping rope, playing hopscotch and singing Sister Blandine's favorite song and dance, "Sur le Pont d'Avignon." Orphans they were without a worry in the world. Mother Joseph had told them that Providence House was their home.

Without a penny of her own, she took in any orphan who needed the sisters' care. The 1860 census of Vancouver lists thirty-seven of them between the ages of four and thirteen, living at the "Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum." She had total trust in Providence; but she knew, too, that God and St. Joseph expected her to use all available human resources.

The colonel had come that day at Mother Joseph's request. She needed lumber. The garrison, she had heard, was wrecking some vacant homes. Could she tear down the houses and use the lumber for buildings for her orphans?

She knew that he would say "Yes,"; knew also that he would have his men do the tearing down and furnish the good superior with all the lumber that she needed. For the seven buildings that soon would be a part of Providence property, each housing a different work of charity, she needed plenty of materials.

### ARRIVAL OF PROVIDENCE SISTERS DECEMBER 8, 1856

Mother Joseph was resourceful. She needed to be from the first moment that she, the leader of her four companions, stepped off the good ship, Brother Jonathan, docked at Vancouver on the Columbia River. Perceptive as she was, she realized immediately that the vicar general, Father J. B. Brouillet who had come to meet his bishop, A. M. A. Blanchet, was upset when he saw five sisters with him. His problem gradually became clear to the bishop as he and his vicar led the way to the bishopric.

Father Brouillet had no lodging ready for the sisters, having presumed that their first mission would be in Olympia, which seemed the logical place for a school. Besides, he did not consider the country ready yet for sisters, but here they were. The bishop had no answer as they made their way along the path.

What the sisters saw as they walked the half mile through the frosty winter grass had little of the romantic to stir their hearts: the stockade of the Hudson Bay Company barracks, a hotel, a few stores and houses on Main Street and then the cathedral, a tiny building of rough wood with a cross on top.

Father Louis Rossi, who had traveled West with them, showed his dismay and disgust. Then the cathedral bells began to ring a welcome, a familiar sound to the

sisters, a sound that meant to them only joy and hope and promise. They did not yet realize that the bell was not one of welcome for them.

When the priests settled the sisters in one room and then withdrew to a second, the sisters began to understand. Through the thin walls of the partition they heard the two priests and the bishop discuss the difficult problems of where to lodge the sisters. The sisters expected sacrifice, so once they knew the vicar general's predicament, they had a solution for it.

Mother Joseph opened the door between the rooms and became a part of the discussion. Quite obviously, Vancouver had no empty house but she asked, "In this three-room bishopric isn't there an attic?"

There was one filled with old clothes, quilts, cast-offs and straw. In no time the sisters readied it for their dormitory. There they slept the first week. In the meantime they had taken over the domestic duties of the bishopric and the housekeeper's lean-to off the kitchen which was empty. It became the sisters' dormitory, dining room and living room for the next two months, months of remembering and months of new beginnings.

How had it happened that these five sisters in the winter of 1856 were sharing a tiny room in the bishopric of the new diocese of Nesqually in an undeveloped land in the Far West? In 1853, Divine Providence had sent another group of Providence Sisters to this same Oregon country. These sisters had met with failure and had had to turn back without even starting a western mission. The same Bishop A. M. A. Blanchet who had wanted the Providence Sisters in his diocese then still wanted them in 1856. His needs had changed but little.

Most of the Indians who had been his first concern in the early 1850's had fled to the mountain country after the 1855 Indian wars. Few remained in Vancouver. The bishop was still concerned about these few, especially those who had married white settlers. These men, mostly Canadians retired from the Hudson Bay Company and now farming an acre or so of cleared land, had forgotten their religion and fallen into habits of vice. The bishop saw an urgent need to reclaim them to the faith and help them establish Christian homes.

Above all, he wanted the sisters to provide a civil and religious education for the youth of Vancouver as a prime means of forming families to a Christian way of life. He wanted the sisters to visit families, caring for the poor and the sick in their homes. To fill the practical needs in his mission, he needed sisters to care for the bishopric, sacristy and cathedral.

## THE FIVE FOUNDRESSES

Although Mother Caron, Superior General in Montreal, Canada, had few sisters to spare, she and her council realized Bishop Blanchet's urgent needs and agreed to respond favorably to his request. They chose Sister Joseph Pariseau, then thirty-three years old, as superior of the group of five sisters who were to travel west with Bishop Blanchet and Father Rossi, his secretary and new recruit for the missions.

Their forty-five-day voyage on land and water had given these five sisters an opportunity to learn to know each other intimately. They recalled those days as they rested in the tiny lean-to in the bishopric of Vancouver after a day of cleaning, mending and planning.

The departure date from Montreal had been November 3, 1856. Sister Mary of the Precious Blood Norton and Sister Vincent de Paul Theriault were new postulants just six days in the community. Mother Caron had delayed Sister Mary's



entrance because of her youth. Then when she knew the need for an English teacher in the West, she had decided to accept the attractive eighteen-year-old girl from New York trusting God to take care of her. Sister Vincent was thirty years old then.

Mother Joseph felt the support of Sister Praxedes of Providence Lamothe, age thirty-six, a prudent, understanding and experienced sister. Sister Blandine Collin, eighteen years old and three months professed, kept the journal of their voyage.

She and Sister Mary, the two youngest, could laugh now about experiences as they recalled a popcorn incident in San Francisco and a rough train ride across the Isthmus of Panama. All four stages of their voyage were still real though already tempered by time and preoccupation with a new way of life.

The emotions that they had felt as they had left the Mother House on November 3, 1856, never expecting to see their dear ones again, remained vivid.

So did the farewells to Mother Caron on the dock in New York where they boarded the steamship Illinois on November sixth for the Isthmus of Panama. They reached the Isthmus on the sixteenth and took the train to the Pacific Ocean the next day. There they embarked on the steamship Golden Age for San Francisco where they remained for two days, staying with the Sisters of Mercy. As a souvenir of their visit, the sisters gave them an accordion that Sister Blandine lost no time in mastering.

The last lap of the voyage included a rough crossing of the frightening bar at the mouth of the Columbia River. When the Brother Jonathan had made the crossing successfully, Sister Blandine played the "Stabat Mater" and the sisters sang their gratitude. The ship finally cast anchor at Vancouver on the afternoon of December 8, 1856.

As the five sisters in the lean-to at the bishopric talked about the voyage, they were not too sure whether their emotions had run deeper while they were journeying toward the unknown or after they had arrived at the bishopric with no place ready for them. Mother Joseph in suggesting the attic had saved the day.

By now the sisters had seen a bit of the city. They had gone to the home of Bishop Blanchet's nephew to care for his sick wife and had visited a destitute consumptive patient to ease his pain and bring him food. Along the way they also discovered a lonely half-breed young man and an Indian family. All were baptized Catholics receptive to the words of the sisters which reanimated their faith.

The sisters made their way through paths and trails as they sought out those in need. For years there were no streets penetrating the uncleared timber land interspersed with small farms. The settlement had gradually pushed back from the river bank as pioneers felled trees, built rough homes, plowed the rich soil and planted gardens and fruit trees.

The 1850 census of Vancouver gives a total population of 322 "free inhabitants," thirty-eight per cent of them in their teens or younger and only four persons above the age of fifty. Omitted in this listing are 283 men at the Columbia Barracks. By 1860 the census had the "Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum" to add with its eleven sisters, 37 orphans and six domestics.

The total population had risen to 1249 with thirty-eight per cent still below the age of twenty. In addition, the garrison, now Vancouver Barracks, numbered 604 men.

The occupation listed for most of the citizens was that of merchant, saloon keeper, farmer, clerk or laborer. By 1860 between twenty and thirty professional people served the city: ministers, teachers, doctors, an apothecary, a surveyor and a lawyer.

In 1856 Vancouver was considered the best situation for a town in the Territory of Washington. It was the head of ship navigation on the Columbia River and a point



of convenient communication with all parts of the country. It gave promise of becoming the emporium of the territory. The sisters scarcely guessed this future for Vancouver as they first planned their services to the two hundred families then in Vancouver.

## THE FIRST PROVIDENCE ACADEMY

On February 22, 1857, the sisters moved into a two-room house with an attic which the bishop had built for them. For a few months one room was the chapel; the other, everything else except the dormitory. A stairway led up to the sleeping quarters furnished with straw ticks and plenty of blankets and pillows.

In their own convent now, the sisters could organize the work assignments and plan their apostolic works. Sister Praxedes took over the kitchen work, Sister Vincent, the washing and yard, and Sister Joseph the sacristy, sewing, mending of linens and the bishop's wardrobe. The two teachers, Sister Mary and Sister Blandine, had already begun preparing their school work. The garrison band master taught them music and, in no time, Sister Blandine could manage the cathedral organ for Mass and Vespers.

On March 15 the mother of a mulatto baby girl left her child with the sisters. When they realized that the mother had abandoned the child, they had her baptized "Emily Lake" on May 30. As for many more orphans to come, Providence became her home. The sisters educated her, taught her music and later placed her in St. Mary Hospital, Astoria, until she was ready to fare for herself.

It was in the little grey convent that the future Providence Academy had its first day of school. On April 14, 1857, Easter Tuesday, four little girls came in the morning and three more in the afternoon to be the first pupils in what was to be the first Catholic school of over a hundred year's permanence in the present State of Washington.

News of the school quickly spread and applications for boarders began to arrive. Sister Mary and Sister Blandine began lessons in English letter writing, using models prepared for them by Father Brouillet.

On May 4, Susan and Willie Ryan enrolled as boarders. Thus began the boarding department that was to provide an income for the school. They were the children of a pneumonia patient whom the sisters had cared for and had converted to the faith. Before she died she had asked the sisters to help her husband care for her two children.

The Ryan children remained for five years paying a little over a thousand dollars in that time. Payments came regularly from their father, either in cash or kind. As part payments, the ledger records five head of cattle, rent of a piano, labor at harvest time and pasture for five cows. Their bills included such items as school books, music, stationery and two French merino dresses costing \$22. Two other boarders soon joined the Ryans.

May brought Emily Lake's baptism and daily May devotions. Sister Blandine had put up a primitive May altar in the church and taught the children Mary hymns and the Rosary. In May also another apostolate had its beginning when eighty-year-old Mr. Lompré asked for a corner in the crowded convent. Sister Praxedes, unable to turn him away, made a bed for him in the kitchen.

On June 8 a destitute Protestant widow brought eight-year-old James Wilkes to the sisters. She begged them to keep her son, saying that they could baptize him and rear him a Catholic. Before the school year ended, the bishop asked Mother Joseph

to accept two orphans that he had taken from the disorderly house of an Indian. The bishop seemed pleased with all that the sisters were doing.

While the sisters could see progress in religious living in the children, they knew that they needed to improve their teaching before the next session. They had caught the message buzzing around town that people discredited their knowledge of English fundamentals; so they decided to use the summer to rectify their inadequacy.

In their first year in Vancouver, the sisters had opened a day school, a boarding school and an orphanage and had taught, as the chronicles say, "twenty docile and pitifully ignorant pupils." The chronicles then sum up the year.

"During the short space of about six months Divine Providence has given us the consolation of scattering seeds that will grow slowly but surely. What have been our works and who our recipients? An old man, an orphan boy and two orphan girls, a young protégé, sick people visited, the uninstructed initiated into the truths of our faith. All this seems to us to promise a good future."

It was August and vacation time from teaching but not from multiple works that filled the summer days. Mother Joseph wrote to Canada to ask for an experienced teacher. "Grammar, arithmetic and geography must be well taught," she insisted.

Knowing the probable impossibility of her request's being granted, she engaged a professor from Father Brouillet's college to give Sister Mary and Sister Blandine intensive courses, especially in arithmetic. The sisters planned to add French, embroidery, and sewing classes to attract pupils. Mother Joseph, with Father Brouillet's help, prepared and sent out a printed prospectus to cities in Washington Territory, Oregon and California.

As the works of charity grew the bishop knew the need of new building arrangements. He gave his house to the sisters and took up lodging in two rooms behind the church sacristy. The priests took over the sisters' house to which they added a class room and a dormitory for resident college boys. (The term "college" at that time designated a preparatory school, usually a high school.)

What had been the small bishopric that the sisters knew on their arrival in Vancouver, now had added wings. Though intended for Father Brouillet's boys, the bishop gave them to the sisters for classrooms, a girls' dormitory and the sisters' living quarters. Within a short time, the sisters moved their sleeping quarters to the loft above the church.

The bishop gave the sisters two acres of uncleared land on which he had built a cabin for a half-breed man and his wife whom he had hired to clear the land and help with housework. On these two acres, in the next ten years, all of the works of charity of the sisters came into being, each at its own moment of Providence. The multiple works and the buildings that housed them were first known as Providence Holy Angels.

The property the bishop gave the sisters was part of the land claim disputed by the government; so Mother Joseph decided to put little money into buildings for it. With money from the board of the clergy and the college students and the small income from the school, the sisters could at first support their works of charity.

The bishop gave them five thousand dollars to improve and add to the buildings, money that Mother Joseph made go a long way. As her first project she built a laundry and bakery.

When school opened in September, 1857, ten day pupils and ten boarders enrolled. The chronicler reflected the joy of the sisters when she exclaimed, "Isn't that number magnificent for a new, wild country!" Satisfied now that the school had a future and with it the other works of charity that she envisioned, Mother Joseph took a step to provide for that future.

Bishop Blanchet agreed with her that the sisters should, as soon as possible, become financially independent of the bishopric. When they built, they should construct their houses on their property and should have their own act of incorporation.

Because of the unpredictable outcome of the disputed mission land claim, the bishop and his clergy helped Mother Joseph find property outside the claim. On March 6, 1858, the sisters acquired for a payment of \$1,500 half of Block 33 with a two-storey house on it. In 1861 and in 1867 she purchased Blocks 41, 42, 47, 48 and the fractional blocks 40 and 49.

Far-sighted Mother Joseph took the first steps in December, 1858, to set up the legal corporation of the sisters. Father Brouillet helped her prepare the act and send it to the legislature. Because of prejudice, the sisters thought, the bill was at first defeated. Mother Joseph then asked for Father Louis Rossi's help.

When he re-wrote the act, retaining all essentials but leaving off the names of all the sisters except Mother Joseph's, he succeeded in having the bill brought to the floor of the legislature again. It passed without difficulty on January 28, 1859, becoming the second oldest act of incorporation in the present State of Washington.

The act gave Mother Joseph the power to add whatever members she needed to form a corporation. It gave as the ends of the corporation "the relief of needy and suffering humanity, the care of orphans, invalids, the sick and the poor and the education of youth."

As its first business, after adding Sister Blandine and Sister Praxedes as members, the little corporation named St. Joseph its president and protector. It also promised to feed, lodge and maintain a poor person in St. Joseph's name and in his place.

## REALITIES OF MISSION LIFE

Mother Joseph saw an immediate need for a hospital. The sisters visited the sick in their homes, but they could not give adequate care to the many who needed it. A hospital could not wait for money and time to renovate the building on the newly acquired property as the endurance of the overworked sisters was nearing a breaking point.

Mother Joseph, physically strong, impulsive and full of compassion for the poor, measured the sisters' potential by hers. In her zeal, she assumed the responsibility of overseeing all the departments. She wanted each sister to excel in her assigned work and, at times, she had to acknowledge her brusque manner of speaking to them. She herself was the first to humbly admit her shortcomings which were really the defects of her virtues.

To her incessant work, she joined immense personal sacrifice and a compulsion to alleviate pain, characteristics of the great religious woman whose achievements later generations lauded to the full.

In 1857, faced with the reality of too few helpers and too much work, she saw the need for balance in the number of works of charity the sisters could manage; but she knew that she lacked that sense of balance. Sister Praxedes and Sister Blandine told her that she was overloading the sisters with work; yet they, too, could not resist the cry of the needy. The situation was difficult.

Sister Praxedes, sensitive to the moods and feelings of the sisters detected undertones of discontent in Sister Blandine and even in Sister Mary who was usually cheerful and zealous. Their attitude disturbed the two older sisters although they knew that these sisters were experiencing the normal, daily human faults

decisions again, among them one to build a house for himself and give his two rooms to the sisters for a novitiate and a music room. Thus Sister Mary Peter had her place for a piano and her thirteen music pupils. The prospectus sent out for the fall of 1859 included music and met with an immediate response especially from boarders.

The rates for boarders seemed high to the sisters for those days. The boarders paid sixty dollars a quarter. Day pupils were charged eight dollars for the quarter, and pupils taking music or French paid ten and fifteen dollars respectively. Food was imported and exorbitant in price, and wages for women workers were three dollars a day. In many cases the sisters adjusted the rates to the ability to pay.

Through Mother Joseph's years and in later years, treasurers wrote "gratis" on many entries. They were keen business women, but they understood poverty and the sufferings of the poor.

## PROVIDENCE HOUSE CONTINUES TO GROW

The poor and the orphans had first place in the hearts of the sisters. Providence Holy Angels' main object was known to be "the proper training and education of destitute orphans." The sisters admitted all who applied, relying on Providence to provide an income to support them. People brought children to the convent with no thought of how the sisters would support them. The sisters asked no questions as to the creed or race of the parents. The fact that a child needed a home gave him admission. The sisters gave the orphans a good education and provided them with clothing, food and housing.

An editorial in an 1869 *Vancouver Register* speaks of the orphan asylum of the sisters as "made up partly of scholars whose relatives pay tuition and partly of those who have no friends but God and the sisters." Most fell into the latter category.

Among those brought in were half-breed children, victims of the immorality of white men and more pitiful even than orphans. The orphans had often had loving homes before one or both parents died. In the days before today's sophisticated medicine, early deaths from ruptured appendix, unsuccessful operations, child birth, pneumonia and typhoid fever left homes without dear ones to hold families together.

By 1860 the orphanage had eighteen boys and twenty-five girls. The sisters saw an immediate need to build. Mother Joseph directed the construction of the first St. Vincent Orphanage for boys for which the bishop had provided the lumber.

By the next year the increased numbers again required new housing arrangements. St. Vincent's boys moved to the house on Block 33 transformed from a tavern and hotel to the new St. Vincent Orphanage. The tavern became the chapel and the former bar counter, the altar. The chronicles remark that "Mother Joseph had transformed what had once served in the interests of Satan to an altar of God." The little boys were happy as kings. The orphan girls moved into the house built for the boys now called St. Genevieve's Orphanage.

The cost of boarding, clothing, educating and providing a home for each orphan averaged a hundred dollars a year. Some financial help for them came through the "Orphan Asylum Association of Oregon and Washington" organized by Father Brouillet in 1860. Its aim was to direct the public attention to the needs of the dependent children cared for by the sisters. It made clear to the citizens that, in the absence of any public provision for these children, the people had a clear duty to give what alms they could.

brought on by loneliness, fatigue and the coldness and indifference of the people of the city toward religion.

Mother Joseph, too, had her moments of dryness and discouragement that she shared with Bishop Bourget, the founder of the Providence community. In her letters to him in Montreal she confided her grief over the discouragement of her sisters of which Sister Praxedes had made her aware. She determined to do something about it. Why not use for a hospital the house that she had just built for a laundry and bakery?

The opening of a hospital would make easier and more effective the care of the sick. It would lessen the burden of the sisters and relieve tensions. Mother Joseph had made her decision.

On April 9, 1858, St. Joseph Hospital became the first such institution in the present State of Washington. It started in the twenty-four by sixteen foot wooden house built for a laundry and bakery. The Ladies of Charity came into being with the opening of the hospital. These generous, efficient women helped the sisters with voluntary work and fund raising. Mother Joseph wrote Mother Caron of the pressing needs of the mission in the West and begged her to send sisters. In the meantime, she hired a woman to help with the washing.

Then out of the clear blue sky Marie Beauchamp, fresh from Montreal and all alone, appeared at Providence Holy Angels.

She was one of the personable, jovial, devoted young women of little education but diversified talents, who devoted their lives to voluntary service to aid the Sisters of Providence in the early days. Mother Joseph put her to work with Sister Praxedes in the kitchen where she learned English as she worked with the girls there. It was the "Get go dere!" and the "Dish here!" type of English that brought results.

Although she was in command insisting on their addressing her as "Miss Marie," they enjoyed working with her. The chronicles have three pages of "Miss Marie" anecdotes that tell how she raised the spirits of the whole household.

Then came spring. When Miss Marie described Vancouver weather by saying "She rains; she rains; she rains," she spoke only too truly of the winter months and of April and May.

Then in June and July a riot of blossoms filled the woods. Sister Blandine and Sister Mary and their pupils experienced the exhilaration of walks through the lush woods on the mission grounds. Here the children, native to the West, became the teachers, telling the sisters the names of the trilliums, dogwood, bracken fern and rhododendrons.

The tramps through the winding trails freshened the minds of the children who were preparing for the first end-of-school public examinations. Father Brouillet had thought it important for the school that they have them. He gave the sisters the help of a college professor all through June.

In mid-July, in a room decorated with flowers and ferns, parents and public officials assembled to witness the effectiveness of the sisters' teaching. Everything went off magnificently, but there was no music and the people missed it.

To the Canadian sisters, music meant "higher education" which their mandate did not include. The sisters, seeing that they could no longer resist the American demand for music, wrote to Montreal asking permission to teach it and requesting a music teacher. Both requests were granted. Before autumn, the first new recruits from Canada arrived, Sister John of God Pinard and Sister Mary Peter Cusack, a music teacher.

Where would she find a place to put a piano? Providence would provide, she knew. After recovery from a grave illness in the fall the bishop began to make

As the orphans came from many sections of the country, the association sought members and contributions in Oregon, Washington, California and in the East. At the end of their first year the association turned over to the sisters \$1,474. It kept the orphans in the public mind and although it lasted only a few years, while it functioned it relieved some of Mother Joseph's constant financial worries.

She had other friends, too. In the early days a main support of the orphans came from the military. The doctors of the garrison gave their skill and attention gratuitously to serve the sick of the whole institution of Providence. The first begging tours were at the fort where the sisters had permission to collect from the men on pay day.

Few could resist the cause of orphans or Sister Mary, gentle, beautiful and obviously embarrassed. Commissioned by obedience to beg for the orphans, she did so simply and effectively. Her first tour, with an orphan at her side, netted \$350. Even when regulations forbade such collections, the commander in charge exempted the sisters whose plea for orphans was unquestionably a worthy cause.

Even more than finances, Providence Holy Angels constantly needed more sisters. Sister Agnes States of Irish origin and Sister Prudent Laroque providentially arrived from Montreal in October of 1859, just as the first separate orphanage building needed supervisors.

Sister Prudent with Sister Mary took over the care of the orphans, living with them day and night. Sister Agnes took charge of the boarder girls and, with Sister Mary and Sister Peter, taught the classes in the school.

Sister Agnes was the first of the remarkable "first teachers" who organized the curriculum, teaching techniques, text book selection and extra curricular activities of Providence schools in the West. Each school functioned as a separate unit. Mother Mary Antoinette was to change all that later, but until her time, the first teacher in each school directed her school independently. Sister Agnes was thirty-two years old with ten years' teaching experience in Canada before she came to Vancouver.

Mother Joseph recognized her gifts and put the direction of the school in her hands. Quickly esteemed by students and parents, she began to set the high standards that Providence Academy enjoyed for many years. She had diversified gifts, among them, the ability to bring peace among sisters of divergent views.

Such views later became vocal when Mother Joseph began to broaden the western apostolates beyond Vancouver and Washington Territory. Some questioned the prudence of establishing the Montana missions when Vancouver needed sisters so badly.

Sister Agnes and Sister Prudent had travelled west with twelve Holy Name Sisters and two sisters of St. Anne, one of them Sister Blandine's blood sister. The St. Anne sisters went to Victoria, B.C. where their convent became a stopping off place for Providence Sisters enroute, later, to Steilacoom and other Puget Sound foundations.

The twelve Holy Name sisters, led by Sister Alphonse, were starting their first school in the West in Portland, Oregon, just across the Columbia. On that 1859 arrival date in Vancouver, the three communities, neighbors to each other, began a close friendship.

The Holy Name Sisters went on to Portland to experience the trials and joys of founding a western mission. Mother Joseph knew them well, especially Mother Veronica who came four years later. She assisted them in ways that the Holy Name Sisters never forgot. Both communities cherished the gatherings that they enjoyed together, sometimes on the Portland side of the river, sometimes on the Vancouver side.



The tight bonds that developed among the St. Anne, Holy Names and Providence Sisters lessened the loneliness for Montreal Mother Houses that all three communities of sisters felt.

Because of the loss of pupils from Portland and Victoria, the 1860 school year's enrollment of boarders in Vancouver dropped considerably. Still, Mother Joseph and her sisters were happy to know that the young people could now receive in their own vicinity, a good education including the knowledge of the things of God. They rejoiced as they saw these sisters prosper. Each of these communities had only the apostolate of teaching.

On June 5, 1860, Providence added one more apostolate to its multiple charities. The sisters had two little cabins built to house a few insane men and women with no place to stay except the city jail. Later, in a larger house, the sisters received a government contract to care for the insane of the Territory of Washington at eight dollars a week. The contract ceased after five years when the government re-located the patients.

## SEVEN LITTLE HOUSES

By 1863 the few sisters in Vancouver were caring for the sacristy, decorating the church, serving in the bishop's palace, doing the washing and cooking for over seventy people, teaching classes, taking care of boarders, orphans, the sick and the insane and bringing solace to the poor and the sick in their homes.

The mission complex then provided separate houses for boarders, old ladies, the sick, the insane, orphan boys and girls and the combination convent and classrooms. Providence in Vancouver had reached a prophetic number of "seven" little houses in the seventh year of the mission.

In those seven little houses, the sisters had forgotten themselves to the point that they had for their own use only a room off the kitchen and a dormitory in the church attic. When some of the pupils expressed the desire to enter the Providence novitiate, the sisters knew that they had to have more space.

Mother Joseph again began planning, this time a wing on the bishop's old house. The sound of hammers filled the summer months. By September, the sisters moved into a cheerful community room whose windows looked out on the wharf where the steamers landed, steamers that brought news of the Mother House and new recruits for their mission. The addition included a superior's office and a third room set aside for a novitiate.

When the sisters received their mandate for Vancouver in 1856, they also received a go-ahead to establish a novitiate. Two postulants had come as part of the first group of five sisters. With the 1859 arrivals from Montreal came a young lady who immediately became a postulant. Before she made profession, the first American girls had been admitted to the novitiate.

Thus from 1856 to 1864, when the novitiate was temporarily closed, and again from 1872 to the present day, God has blessed the western novitiate with a continuity of vocations to perpetuate Mother Emilie Gamelin's charism of compassion for the poor and the needy, trust in Divine Providence and devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows. Young women have learned of the Providence way of life in a variety of ways, all dependent on the mysterious grace of God.

In the first fifty years, fifteen students of Providence Academy, Vancouver, answered God's call to become Providence sisters. An increased number of vocations from Vancouver and elsewhere continued through the years.

## A NEW PROVIDENCE ACADEMY

By 1873 it was time for Mother Joseph to plan something different from the seven little houses scattered about the mission property they lovingly called Providence Faubourg. When in the 1860's, Mother Joseph had purchased the property bordered by Tenth, Twelfth, C and Reserve Streets she had had a vision. At that time the property was well out of the city. Not so in the 1870's.

Mother Joseph ran into some difficulty when she petitioned for closure of two streets within the four-block square. They had been surveyed but never opened. When the city refused her request she described the \$50,000 brick building that she planned, prayed to Divine Providence and was granted her request. She still needed the Mother House's permission to build.

Mother Caron, Superior General, arrived in Vancouver on May 20, 1873. As she visited the Faubourg she realized the pressing need for building a convent. Nothing could please Mother Joseph more than to find a ready listener to her fully prepared plans. Some criticized their magnitude; but not Mother Caron. She said to the overly cautious, "My Sisters, fear nothing; Divine Providence will never fail you provided you never depart from the beautiful simplicity that will be the chief attraction of this religious house."

Things began to happen immediately. On a sunny June day, five important people watched Mother Joseph, tape measure in hand, pace up and down the center section of the four-block square. Bishop A. M. A. Blanchet, Father Aegedius Junger, Mr. J. B. Blanchet, Mother Caron and Mother Praxedes caught the enthusiasm of Mother Joseph. She described the plans that she and Mr. Blanchet had made. For days they had worked together on the blue prints, Mother Joseph training him to be her assistant and construction superintendent.

The following Wednesday, June 11, 1873, St. Joseph's day, Mother Caron, the sisters' council and a group of orphan boys took part in the simple ground-breaking ceremony. Mother Caron turned the first shovelful of dirt and the boys continued the digging. The construction had begun in earnest and continued with astonishing speed. The whole city became interested, all eager to have a part in this charitable work.

The building was to be of brick Mother Joseph had announced. No brick yard existed anywhere near Vancouver but clay was abundant; so, Mother Joseph reasoned, why should not someone begin to make brick! That idea started the Hidden Brick Company in Vancouver. It opened a furnace; and Mother Joseph gave the company a contract for enough hand-pressed bricks to build a three and a half storey structure. As soon as the workmen had completed the stone foundation the first brick was ready to be laid. It was August 3, 1873.

On September 21, 1873 before Mother Caron had left for Montreal, a solemn ceremony of the blessing of the cornerstone took place. Led by the First Infantry Band from the Fort, a grand procession started at St. Joseph Hospital. Sisters, orphan girls and boys, boarders, acolytes, clergy, Bishop Blanchet and citizens in fine carriages went slowly down Reserve Street and into the sisters' grounds, stopping at the place where the workmen had laid the foundation of the future academy.

Mother Caron was jubilant at seeing the solid foundation of the convent where Providence Sisters would serve orphans, boarders, the poor and the youth of the city. She had seen beautiful virtues in the sisters in the four months that she had spent with them. Soon they would have space and an adequate building in which to carry on their apostolates. Her mission accomplished, she returned to the Mother House happy.



In 1861 three young women became the first western Americans in the Providence novitiate. Sister Mary Augustin Sullivan belonged to a well-to-do Portland family. Sister Philomene Wall, from a prominent Vancouver family, had attended Providence as a day pupil, and Sister John Baptist Crate was the Nancy Crate whom Mother Joseph had known and loved in the Vancouver boarding school since she was twelve years old. It was at her family home in Oregon that early missionaries enroute to and from Vancouver received hospitality. She lived only three months after her profession, a victim of "quick consumption". She was the first Providence sister to die in the West.

In 1864, after these three sisters took their vows, the novitiate temporarily closed. Events that led to the breaking of ties between the Sisters of Providence in Chile and the Mother House in Montreal in 1863 made the community cautious about receiving members from distant missions.

In 1864 the community organized its government into vicariates and was in the process of seeking papal approval of its Rule. Until Rome had studied the Rule and until the rapport of the Mother House and the bishops of other dioceses would be clearly understood, the community thought it wise to await papal approval before receiving young women preparing for the Providence life. Rome works slowly, but finally in 1872 Vancouver received word that it could reopen the novitiate.

St. Joseph Hospital, in the process of building an addition, provided space for the new novitiate. The novices could learn the apostolate of the care of the sick as their mistress formed them in the Providence way of life. To accomplish this delicate task, the community chose Sister Mary of the Blessed Sacrament Roy, experienced in teaching young people what it means to be a Providence Sister.

She had spent five years helping the Providence Sisters of Kingston, Ontario, begin their community modelled on her own. At St. Joseph Hospital in Vancouver she had the dual role of Sister Servant (the title given the superior at that time) and of novice mistress.

The first to enter in the newly opened novitiate in 1872 was eighteen-year-old Louise Kratz. Later, as Sister Mary Conrad, she was to become a legend in Seattle. Stories of her service to the poor, startling as some of them are, can all be verified. Part of Providence Hospital's greatness is Sister Mary Conrad. She had imbibed from her mistress, herself trained by Mother Gamelin, much of the foundress' love of the poor.

In 1873, the year of the ground breaking for a new Providence House, four more American postulants entered the novitiate. Among them was Sister Mary Wilfred Ranney, an orphan forgotten by her father after he had placed her in the orphanage.

Years later when he came to Vancouver to claim his beautiful daughter, he offered her all that money could buy. She told him that she had already finalized her plans to give her life to God as a Sister of Providence. These sisters, she told him, had made her the attractive young lady that he now saw her to be. She never again heard from him.

She, with Sister Aloysius Padden, a Vancouver day pupil, Sister Aegedius Ferschweiler, a boarder, and Sister Paul of the Sacred Heart McCullough, a California girl, joined Sister Kratz and Sister Dore, a novice from Montreal. The six young women prepared to take their vows. From then on Providence Holy Angels expanded its education apostolate to include the formation of sisters.

The joy of moving into the new convent all too soon faded when a winter of physical and emotional suffering began. It was the kind of severe winter that comes to Vancouver every twenty-five or thirty years. With rooms heated only by wood stoves, and with doors and windows unfinished, the cold penetrated the building. The sisters took turns fueling the stoves at night, but even then the pipes froze and broke.

Added to the suffering from the cold, was Mother Joseph's discouragement that she could not hide from the sisters. They could sympathize with her and try to raise her spirits, but they could do little about the \$20,000 debt that she saw no way of cancelling. She herself worked into the night painting and finishing window sashes and door frames as she had no money to hire workmen.

When the time for Sister Mary Conrad's and Sister Anna Marie's profession was fast approaching Mother Joseph concentrated her efforts on the chapel. On March 19, 1875, St. Joseph's feast day, Mother Joseph opened the doors of the chapel, not entirely finished but already an artistic gem. The profession ceremony for the two sisters on that March day was a glorious event. The sisters' joy could scarcely be contained.

Everything about that chapel represented the prayerful planning of Mother Joseph. It was not until 1883 that it was completed with its niches for Our Lady of Sorrows and the patron saints and its unique altar of the Sacred Heart. That altar above and to the right of the sanctuary fulfilled a promise of gratitude that she had made to the Sacred Heart on her arrival in Vancouver. It was a striking piece of design with its nine choirs of angel heads forming a crown around a golden heart!

In July, 1876, Mother Joseph left for an extended trip East in quest of money. She spent the first four months begging in the United States, meeting with more rebuffs than successes. Her appeals for the distant missions and for the orphans in them found a better response in Canada. Many families there had given their daughters to the western missions and had a special interest in helping them.

After twenty months, Mother Joseph returned to Vancouver refreshed and satisfied that Divine Providence and St. Joseph would somehow keep the academy doors open to orphans and to all others in need.

Even before the interior of the building was finished, it was already too small to house all the children and sisters. In 1885 the chronicler wrote, "Our house that seemed as big as the world when we moved in, is now too small. May God be glorified in it! And may Mother Joseph who directed the work with so much wisdom and devotedness be praised also!"

Mother Mary Godfrey, Superior General, came West in 1889 and saw the need for an addition to the 1873 building. Seeing also the lack of funds, she appealed to the Providence missions of the West to come to the aid of Vancouver. The response from all the houses was encouraging; but their gifts of \$27,000 did not warrant starting construction.

They could, however, pay for the installation of a hot water heating system throughout the house, electric lights in some of the rooms, painting and repairs and the start of work on a well, a water tower and a reservoir.

In 1891 Sister Madeleine, Treasurer General, visited Vancouver and encouraged the sisters to build immediately. She realized the impossibility of continuing to live in the cramped conditions she saw. "Trust Providence," she said, "and go ahead as the need is only too real. Build without fear."

The enrollment in 1890 was ninety-eight orphans, twenty-nine boarders and 111 day pupils. Also living in the house, were novices, professed sisters and some employees; and as many as a hundred additional sisters came at retreat time each year.

Financial problems aplenty remained in Vancouver, but each new climax generated in the sisters renewed confidence in Providence. They had begun building with about a fourth of the money needed for materials and labor. Most of that money had come from collections made in the mines of Idaho and Montana for the purpose of a building for the orphans.

In 1865, Mother Joseph with Sister Joseph of Arimathea had begun the begging tours in Idaho and then in Montana mines, collecting over \$5,000 in two trips. Then Sister Catherine Ennis and Sister Prudent had spent the summers of 1867 and 1868 travelling on horseback with Indian guides leading them to the Montana mines. Their appeals netted \$4,800. Once the building had begun these amounts dwindled quickly; so in 1873 Mother Joseph started off for Idaho again with Sister Joseph of Arimathea. After three months of travel they returned with \$2,800.

By 1874 the sisters needed a new field in which to beg. Then it was that Sister Peter of Alcantara and Sister Olivier undertook the difficult mission of asking help in Santiago, Chile, where they had a painful meeting with the Providence Sisters who had separated from the Montreal Mother House. In the end, the reunion was a happy one and a financially successful one. That begging tour continued in Peru and ended in British Columbia. The sisters collected \$10,000 in this exhausting trip.

Although begging trips brought in the larger amounts of money, lesser amounts collected in Vancouver had deep meaning. The poor gave their labor, the rich their alms and support. Dr. David Wall donated a statue of St. Joseph at the foot of which he placed a money box and a register on which those who gave an alms wrote their names. In two months the box contained \$2,000.

Father J. B. Brouillet and Mr. Blanchet paid for all the brick for the orphans' department and Bishop Blanchet paid the workmen for the interior partitions. A former orphan grown to manhood, gave a ciborium for the new chapel with the message, "When I was a child, God inspired the sisters to give me a wooden home; now that I am grown, I want to give God a golden home!"

## A BELL RINGS

Mother Joseph paid the employees every week and always had the needed money, often from unexpected sources. In three months time, Providence Academy, the largest building in the Territory of Washington, was ready for occupancy. Its cupola with a statue of St. Joseph in it was a beacon to ships coming up the Columbia River.

Its bell that rang the Angelus at sunrise, high noon and dusk, and the De Profundus at nightfall, became a part of traditional Vancouver life. From that cupola went out a message of God's Providence and love. For almost a century that message was to speak in minds and hearts of young and old for miles around.

September 7, 1874, was moving day. Sisters and a few old men and women carried bedding, furniture, pots, pans and dishes to the new building, emptying the seven little "shacks" now covered with moss and shaded with thick acacias. Not without a pang did the sisters close the doors of the poorly built homes that harbored memories of eighteen years of joys and sorrows. For the seventy orphans, each carrying personal treasures to bright, airy new dormitories, the move was pure joy.

Although the interior was not yet finished, the sisters took delight in setting up the furnishings in the beautiful big rooms. The parlor remained the chapel for a year and a half for want of funds to complete Mother Joseph's elaborate plans.

In June, 1891, Mother Godfrey was again in Vancouver. She urged the sisters to give out the contract and begin building. They did so immediately. The day that she left, July 17, 1891, Father Louis Schram, Chaplain, blessed the corner stone of the "Wing of the Sacred Heart." Mother Joseph and Mr. Blanchet were back in the business of building, pushing to be finished by the opening of school in September. As usual, they often had no money when payments came due, but always, Divine Providence came to their rescue in amazing ways.

## VANCOUVER A PROVIDENCE SISTER CENTER IN THE WEST

In 1863, Providence, Vancouver had begun to establish missions beyond that city. As soon as the school and the service of the sick and needy of Vancouver had proved themselves, bishops and priests started bombarding Mother Joseph with requests for her sisters. The scarcity of available sisters and the lack of money limited the number of houses the superiors could accept.

Back in 1863 when the Vancouver personnel numbered only nine professed sisters and three novices, the first Providence Sisters ventured out on a mission to open a school in Steilacoom, Washington. Mother Joseph had already left for the first of her six trips to Montreal on behalf of the needs of the West. More sisters and more money were her chief business on these trips. With her on her return trip from her first visit were ten new recruits.

The founding of the new missions followed in amazingly quick succession. In the 1860's traveling across the Rocky Mountains on horseback, Providence Sisters went as far as St. Ignatius, Montana, to establish a hospital there. Other sisters started an Indian school on Puget Sound and St. Vincent Academy in Walla Walla.

The 1870's brought three more schools and three more hospitals in different cities; the 1880's, another three schools and five more hospitals. These missions extended from Washington to Montana and to British Columbia. Until 1891 they all belonged to Providence Holy Angels in Vancouver.

In that year the Holy See had looked with favor on the Rule of the Sisters of Providence and had given the community a Decree of Praise. It had requested the establishment of a generalate and a division of the houses into vicariates (later called provinces). By 1891, the western vicariate had twenty-three houses at great distances from one another. These were then grouped into three provinces.

Eleven houses, all in the State of Washington, were to belong to Sacred Heart Province, the name now given the vicariate that had been Providence Holy Angels. Included in the St. Vincent de Paul Province with its provincial residence at St. Vincent Hospital, Portland, Oregon, were five Providence houses, one each in Portland and Astoria, Oregon; Port Townsend, Washington; and New Westminster and Kootenay, British Columbia, Canada.

St. Ignatius Province had its provincial house in Missoula, Montana. It included seven houses, two in Missoula, one each in St. Ignatius and Fort Benton, Montana; Spokane Falls and Co'ville, Washington; and De Smet, Idaho.

Bishop Bourget wrote to the sisters in Vancouver telling them of the appointment of their provincial superior. "Sister Joseph," he wrote, "has been named your mother provincial because of her zeal for the glory of God, her attachment to her Rule and her love of the poor."

Mother Joseph retained that office for two years when she became the treasurer and supervisor of buildings for the province. Mother Praxedes Lamothe then became the provincial superior of Sacred Heart Province for the next thirteen years.

Re-groupings of provinces and houses in provinces took place in 1912, and again in 1925. Vancouver remained the central house of a province until 1923 when the provincialate moved to Seattle. God had His Hand in supplying personnel for the works of charity in the ever-growing number of houses in the province.

By 1906, the Providence Sisters' golden jubilee year in the West, 178 young women had made their vows in the Vancouver novitiate. Of these 139 were Americans and thirty-nine were English-speaking Canadians who had come from Montreal as postulants or novices.

Practically each year after the novitiate reopened in 1873 up to the present day, from one to as many as twenty or more young women have made profession of their vows in the western novitiate. Until 1923, when the novitiate moved to Seattle, novices and postulants were very much a part of the Providence House in Vancouver.

Among the outstanding early religious who guided these generous young people in a new way of life, two sisters held the position of mistress of novices for many years: Sister Providence Brissette for twelve years and Sister Tarcisius Dwyer for fourteen years. They made an unforgettable impact on their novices. In later years, Mother Mary Mildred did the same for her novices.

So did Sister Martin LeFrançois who was mistress of postulants from 1907-1950. During these forty-three years, it was she who welcomed the newcomers to the community. It was she who saw them through days of loneliness, frustrations and bewilderment. In her unique way, she taught them the details of how to live community life joyously, how to make their lives one with Christ's.

There are those who say that Sister Martin shaped the spirituality of Providence Sisters in the West for a half century. Many would agree.

## SISTERS COME FROM MONTREAL

Besides new Providence recruits coming from the western novitiate, missionary sisters continued to come from the Mother House to help with the constantly expanding works of charity in the West. Mother Joseph and Bishop Blanchet kept requesting the Mother House to send sisters, especially English-speaking sisters. Bishop Bourget wrote from Montreal that the sisters there were ready "to bleed themselves" for the West, and they did. Although there was no dearth of volunteers, leaving the Mother House for missions three thousand miles away took courage.

Sister Hyacinth Boucher's experience was typical. When she received her appointment for the West with the understanding that she was free to accept or not, she struggled with the Lord before she made her election to go West. With Bishop Bourget's help, in a prayerful discernment, she weighed the pro's and con's of the sacrifice asked of her.

She had fears: loneliness, possible failure, fear of hostile Indians, the danger of the journey, ignorance of the English language, separation from family and Mother House, perhaps forever. "Shall I go to Oregon?" she asked herself.

The answer came when she remembered that she had chosen the religious life so as to glorify God, save souls and sanctify her own. Here was an opportunity for total self-giving. She went to Bishop Bourget to have him confirm her election. She had said "Yes" to God.

Sister Hyacinth's journey west included all the weariness and fatigue and danger that she had feared. Seven Providence Sisters, nine St. Anne Sisters, thirteen Holy Name Sisters, Bishop F. N. Blanchet of Oregon, two priests and several Canadians

seeking a fortune in California joined American passengers at New York on the steamer "America" of the Nicaragua Line. That line offered the lowest prices.

Enroute, they encountered rough weather and sea sickness; the main axle of the ship broke causing a delay in Cuba; a hurricane almost dashed the vessel onto the rocky coastland of Nicaragua.

Suffering from heat and hunger, they spent five days crossing Nicaragua on a little river boat. At the river's end in the complete darkness of a torrential rain, they walked in mud to the row boat that would take them out to their steamer on the Pacific Ocean. The trip to San Francisco on the Pacific Ocean and then on to Oregon was peaceful.

Finally, after six weeks of travel, they reached Vancouver. The church bell rang out a joyous welcome and they were with their sisters in Vancouver singing the "Te Deum" at the foot of the cathedral altar.

Not all the voyages made by the Providence Sisters who came west were as difficult as the 1863 one; but none were easy. After 1869, the sisters traveled by rail to San Francisco and from there by water. By 1874, the railroad trip in jolting cars took nine days, the ocean voyage on the Pacific, another three days, ending at the dangerous bar at the mouth of the Columbia River. Once past the bar, the river was peaceful to Vancouver.

Between 1856 and 1873 fifty-three professed sisters from Montreal became missionaries in the West. Over a hundred sisters came in the first thirty years and over two hundred had come by the 1906 golden jubilee year in the West. Until very recent years, Canada continued to reinforce the Providence religious personnel in the West with its generous sisters.

As the sisters would leave the Mother House, their superiors and Bishop Ignace Bourget, their founder, had a message for them. In 1863, the bishop put it in writing for all the Vancouver sisters: "Keep irrevocably united to the Mother House; keep tight the bonds that unite you with your sisters in Canada; observe the Rule; honor the Mother of Sorrows; be humble, simple, charitable."

While Providence, Vancouver, always remained primarily an educational institution, it also functioned as a central house, a house that all the sisters of the province called "home." This fact had an impact on Providence Academy, the title by which the school became known.

Postulants from the novitiate helped in all the departments, working with the boarders and orphans. Some of them taught classes or music. Not too far apart in age, they easily related to each other and became friends.

At times members of the provincialate taught in the high school or performed other offices in the academy. The excitement when sisters arrived from Canada or from the missions vibrated throughout the house. Academy girls chatted with the infirmity sisters and prayed with them in the chapel. Thus they learned to know Providence Sisters in all stages of their religious life. That in itself was a valuable education.

## PROVIDENCE SISTERS' WAY OF LIFE IN THE EARLY 1900's

The Providence Academy chronicle writer opened her account of the 1907-1908 school year with this summary paragraph: "The chronicles are repetitive from year to year. They record a chain of events that only Divine Providence could have brought about. Clearly, God keeps us always in His Heart. He continually asks sacrifices of us, a share in His Cross. He just as surely sends us joys and blessings. We are happy to be His Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Poor."



The sisters lived by a Rule, guided by obedience to superiors and faith and trust in God. They followed a horarium that filled their days from five in the morning until nine at night. In it sisters found the deep joys, hearty laughter, shared sorrows and painful sufferings that characterized Providence community life in Vancouver and in other schools at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The day began with a regulation bell that startled even heavy sleepers out of bed and onto their knees to ask God's graces for the day. In a half hour, the sisters put on an intricate habit with ample foundation garments beneath it, made their beds and arrived in the chapel, some with time to spare for a Way of the Cross. Their days were God-centered as they remembered His Presence each hour when the clock struck, as they interspersed a total of three and a half hours of community prayer through the day.

In a life of recollection, many sisters grew to know God intimately as a Friend and Lover. Many went out to their neighbor in love and service.

They needed the knowledge of God's love to carry them through hard spots in their daily routine. Yard supervision was one of them. On rainy, windy, cold days, the yard sister had little time to snatch a bit of lunch after her replacement arrived. The cleaning of class rooms after a day's teaching required self-sacrifice. The chronicles repeatedly speak of "over-worked sisters, sickness and financial worries."

To visualize dormitory life, one needs only to read an inventory of the sleeping quarters of the sisters in the first quarter and more of the 1900's: a bed, chair, stand and wash basin in each of twelve curtained "cells", a mirror and a bell. Three bath tubs for two dormitories of as many as twenty-four sisters retiring between eight-twenty and nine o'clock, necessitated bath night schedules. Stools in the dining room and stiff chairs in parlor and community rooms demanded a disciplined life.

The sisters kept strict silence of place in halls, dining room and dormitories at all times, as well as silence of time after night prayer and during an hour in mid-afternoon. Somehow, though, they found opportunities to form deep friendships with one another.

There was much togetherness. There were congés with whole days to recreate. And there were canning days with hours of messy peeling of fruit in a steamy kitchen. Then would follow a relay line through which passed from kitchen to cellar as many as the 2800 fruit jars listed in one inventory, jars filled with peaches, pears, apricots and cherries. The 400 jelly glasses were also filled each year.

Laundry days, mending bees, house-cleaning days were cooperative hard-work projects that brought out the best and the worst in the sisters. They knew each other and most of them felt the close bond of community. "Remember when we were here in Vancouver together," came as a joyous statement from sisters from all over the province as they reminisced together at summer retreat times.

As the years went on enrollments increased which necessitated additions to the building along with constant improvements. The chronicles repeatedly tell of one superior tearing down walls and the next superior putting them up again. By 1906 the whole house had electricity.

In 1911 hardwood floors in corridors, chapel and first floor rooms added distinction to the building and lessened work somewhat. That same year a complete new heating plant was installed to serve both the hospital and academy. Annexes built in 1912 and in 1930 as towers for toilets and bath rooms, made life easier for everyone. New buildings provided additional class room space.

Mother Joseph and Mr. J. B. Blanchet had constant calls for their planning and construction services both in Vancouver and in the Providence missions in Washington, Idaho, and Montana.

Mother Joseph had discovered Mr. Blanchet in 1866 when he had come West to give his life to works of charity. A grand-nephew of the two famous Blanchet bishops, he had accepted an invitation to come to the Oregon missions with them. Mother Joseph immediately saw his talent for the compass and square and engaged him as the community architect. He became also its business advisor, public relations expert, counsellor, construction superintendent and loyal friend, working closely with Mother Joseph until her death in 1902.

From the first days of Providence Academy the clergy and the sisters worked together for the church, each in his way supplementing the other. Bishop A. M. A. Blanchet, Father J. B. Brouillet, Father Louis Schram and Father Felix Verwiligan in turn, as the sisters' chaplains, directed the sisters in their spiritual lives, helped them make decisions, encouraged them and saw them through difficult days.

The sisters did much for the clergy, too; among other things, taking care of the church sacristy, singing and providing altar decorations. When the bishop began building the new cathedral and needed financial help, he turned to the sisters to sponsor bazaars for that cause.

Up to 1883 the profits from bazaars conducted by the sisters had been for their own needs and those of the orphans. They counted on the \$1,000 that bazaars brought in each year to balance their accounts. To prepare a bazaar required months of gathering and making of articles for sale and of begging supplies and finished products from Portland merchants and from Providence missions. It was a fatiguing task, but a necessary one to sustain their works of charity.

Now the proceeds were to go elsewhere. The Vancouver people admired the sisters for working as hard for the bazaars for the cathedral as they had for those to benefit their own house. The proceeds of the first cathedral benefit bazaars amounted to \$2,000 and those of following years to well over \$1,000. After 1903 bazaars came to an end as regular events.

The sisters continued to have a part also in the boys' college, another work of the church in Vancouver. They had provided board for them from the early days. Later, on the hospital grounds, they built a separate building for the boys. In 1880, when the sisters discontinued their services to these boys, they sold the building to the priests who moved it to property belonging to the cathedral, where the school functioned until 1897.

Because boys above twelve years of age then had to go to the public school, the bishop petitioned the Christian Brothers to come to Vancouver to reopen the college as a day school. They did so in 1897 under the title of St. James College. Eighty boys immediately enrolled and the school thrived for a time, but it closed again in 1911 when the Christian Brothers left Vancouver.

At this point the sisters received permission to teach boys through their first eight grades. The college gym was moved to the sisters' property, renovated and partitioned into four classrooms to serve as the boys' school. The enrollment of the orphans and parish boys totalled 197 the first year.

## SISTERS CARE FOR ORPHANS

For a long time the Providence House in Vancouver was known popularly as an orphan asylum, although it had always sponsored the education of boarders and day students as well as of orphans. Benefactors, especially those from the garrison, liked to single out the orphans as the beneficiaries of their gifts and services.

On some occasions their kindness met with criticism from the A.P.A.'s (American Protective Association). Prejudice ran high at the turn of the century.



When a sergeant from the Fort came to direct weekly physical education classes for the boys, a rumor started that the sisters were training orphan boys for future revolution and were even storing ammunition in the convent “dungeons”.

At times money gifts for the orphans came from unknown sources, gifts ranging from a few dollars to legacies of as high as \$5,000. Children of army officers caught the spirit of their parents and sponsored a mini bazaar for the orphans. Groups of women provided outings for the children, coming for them in gaily decorated carriages to take them to picnics in the woods. On one of their “best ever picnics” they ferried across the Columbia to the park and zoo in Portland.

Sister Martin had a story about that picnic. She was holding the hand of a little girl wearing a hat with pink flowers and a velvet ribbon. As the child offered a fist full of peanuts to the elephant behind the bars, he twirled his trunk and snatched her hat instead of the peanuts. That wasn’t funny for the child, but Sister Martin told her story over and over with hearty laughter.

She was one of the sisters who, as orphan mistress, opened her heart wide to the motherless little girls. Providence Academy was blessed with many such sisters.

During her 1910-1916 term as superior of the academy, Sister Rosanna Berard cared for the sick children at times of epidemics. Before that she had supervised the orphan boys for almost ten years. Some came as toddlers, all were under twelve and needed a mother’s understanding and constant self-giving. Sister Rosanna, with a heart of gold, knew how to bandage their cuts and bruises, pick up after them, overlook their noise, and respect their collections of bugs and snakes.

A genius at the kind of good housekeeping that lets children live without fear of nagging, she never hurt anyone. Rather she gave help to all in need who crossed her path.

Sister Rosanna beautifully lived the words Mother Joseph had bequeathed to the Vancouver sisters in her dying days. “I recommend to you the care of the poor in the house and outside it. Receive them, help them, never say, ‘They are not my affair. Let others take care of them.’ The poor are always our affair.”

Other sisters working in the boys’ department discovered the many ways in which little boys are “the poor” and they truly made these children their affair. Sister Florence McLaughlin beautifully met the challenge that the boys gave her. So did Sister Xavier Nibler and Sister Ursula Ahern who was killed while on duty with the little boys. Sister Ursula was walking with them to the cemetery when a passing car went out of control and struck Sister and the boys beside her, killing her and one of the little boys. In lesser ways, Sister had given of herself repeatedly during her years of service in the boys’ department. Many a grown man, in the years after his Providence Academy days remembers with gratitude the lessons he learned while with the sisters at the academy.

Local superiors there also showed concern for the orphans. As their number kept increasing, Sister Mary of the Blessed Sacrament, superior in 1894, saw no reason why the orphans, boarders and day students should not have their classes together.

Her decision came after she had assisted at an end-of-school prize-award session. She noted that no orphans received prizes for achievement in studies. Asking why, she learned that the orphans missed school on laundry days and at times when they helped in the kitchen or accompanied sisters to town during school hours. No longer would their opportunities for learning be less than those of the paying students. From then on, their classes were together.

The orphans continued having separate living apartments from the boarders until Sister Anna, Superior, saw the wisdom of ending all distinction between the two groups. From 1918 on, all girls in grades seven and above became part of St.

floor of the bakery. Because of the skill and devotedness of these two sisters most of the children came through these epidemics with few if any after effects. There were deaths at times, though, in spite of the sisters' care and the professional skill given gratuitously by such doctors as Dr. David Wall.

By May all the children were usually well, and normality had returned to the departments. It was time for the traditional May picnic that took different forms each year. A memorable one occurred in 1905 when Mrs. Harry Day paid the expenses of the orphans and sisters and obtained reduced ferry fares for the boarders so that all could attend the Lewis and Clark Exposition in Portland.

Sister Joseph of Nazareth Hanlon while teaching in the high school, directed the big girls' department of Providence Academy from 1902-1915 before she began a twenty-year period as superior of various academies. During her eighteen years with boarders she became a highly qualified and well-loved boarding school mistress. Sister Mary Donalda Stefans was another such sister who had practical and kind solutions for young girls' problems. If a girl lacked an appropriate dress for a social event, she made one for her. Once, the only material she had was cheap curtain yardage, but she turned it into an elegant gown.

The little girls required a different kind of attention, and there were sisters whose innate sense of a child's needs dictated their response to them. Self-educated professionals in child care they were. Sister Geraldine Champagne combined teaching French, sewing and singing with a thirty-five-year apostolate with boarders. She was in the little girls' department in Vancouver from 1907-1912.

For years Sister Elizabeth of the Cross Sundough mothered little boarder girls or boys and taught primary grades in Vancouver. She knew the size and kind of furnishings and play equipment little girls loved and she took steps to make their departments cheerful and child-centered. Dressed in blue serge uniforms with white braid on their sailor collars, the little girls always looked attractive but not too, dressed up to have fun.

The era of boarding schools has gone. In its day, it had a function at Providence Academy and resulted in the forming of strong leaders and many life-long friendships. Living close to the sisters in a house with a chapel and daily Mass and prayers, and following a regular life had a powerful influence on many resident students. The sisters who directed the boarding departments were specially selected for their empathy with young people. They guided them through the problems and joys of youth and thus helped many of them to mature into fine young men and women.

## STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Motivated by the desire to educate youth for God's Kingdom on earth and in the next world, the sisters made every effort to instill in their students a love of religion and of its truths. Each age group had its confraternity. To belong to any of these organizations made one special. They required a period of probation, held weekly meetings and had annual receptions. A number of students, ranging in age from below six to their late teens, each year received baptism. Seeing the faith lived attracted them to Catholicism and made them determined to become a part of it.

Processions on Corpus Christi Day were all-school events. On All Souls Day, they walked the mile to the cemetery to pray for the dead. First Fridays, annual retreats, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, meal prayers and opening and closing prayers in the classroom wove religion into their lives.

Elizabeth Department, and those below of St. Genevieve's; the boys already had but one department. In 1900, the peak year of enrollment of orphans, the sisters cared for 130 of them.

Something important for orphans and for Mother Joseph happened in 1977. The State of Washington voted to have a statue of her in Statuary Hall in Washington, D.C. where she will be publicly honored for her concern for the poor, the sick and orphans. When Governor Dixie Lee Ray signed the legislation into law Sister Grace Hebert, one of Mother Joseph's orphans, was present and received the signature pen from the governor.

## SISTERS CARE FOR BOARDERS

Boarders had been a part of the Providence House life from 1857 on. In the early 1900's Providence Academy acquired a reputation in the Western states and in Alaska. An advertisement described it as "a select boarding and day school for young ladies, pleasantly situated on elevated ground in East Vancouver, offering every facility for a thorough and refined education."

The girls learned the finer things of life along with the practical. In their recreation room they played games in the evening or conversed while embroidering, tatting or crocheting. On Friday nights they released their energy in song and dance. Sister Mary Eunice Judson taught them dance steps, calling directions in rhythm, "Right heel, toe — and a one, two, three; left heel, toe — and a one, two, three."

Other nights they gathered around a professional story teller, all sitting on rugs listening avidly to Sister Margaret Hamel or Sister Agnes Mary Nicholson. Sister Margaret could hold them spellbound as she spun original stories that went on and on before arriving at a climax and a denouement. Sister Agnes Mary preferred Agatha Christie mysteries, gradually arriving at a crucial suspense point and then stopping abruptly with a calm, "We'll continue the story tomorrow night."

Many of the girls worked for part or full payment of their board. They cleaned and swept, set tables, washed dishes and helped with cooking and laundry. Typical of most boarders, they grumbled about food, one girl writing home complaining that they had ice cream three times a week!

The girls learned etiquette by doing, as Sister supervised them at meals or checked for gloves, hats and polished shoes as they prepared for church, shopping or a home visit. As status symbols in the early 1900's girls who could afford it wore gold rimmed glasses and big watches pinned to their blouses.

For thrills, they crept up the dark, winding stairs to the belfry for midnight snacks; or they stole out of the dormitory to roast marshmallows on the Bunsen burners in the science room. A French-bed trick was their favorite practical joke.

Sickness of epidemic proportions among the boarders and orphans worried the sisters almost every year. The chronicles of one year say, "January and February were scarletina months; in the spring it was measles and chicken pox." Another year diphtheria ravaged Vancouver and took its toll in the boarders' and orphans' departments. As many as forty children were quarantined at a time on the second floor of the laundry building.

Sister Melanie nursed them for six long weeks. At one point she told St. Roch, the patron of the sick, "You have to cure this child or I will die of fatigue." Immediately the diphtheria membrane in the child's throat dislodged. Rid of it, she was instantly cured.

Many times Sister Melanie and, after her, Sister Rosanna isolated themselves with the patients quarantined either above the laundry, at the farm, or on the top

it. It provided a means of giving the orphans and the poor as well as the rich a religious and secular education concerned with the whole person. She insisted that it be the best education available at the time.

In 1860, she wrote to Mother Philomene, Superior General, "We must keep our school in good standing; we must be superior to the public schools. We have, among others, the children of the highest officers of the Post who pay eighty-four dollars a year as day scholars."

When in 1894 Mother Mary Antoinette, General Directress of Studies, came west to improve the curriculum and methods, she assembled the teachers in Vancouver and taught them the best ways of forming children and imparting solid and lasting knowledge. She gave the teachers a new orientation that generated enthusiasm and bore results. Before she left Vancouver, she appointed Sister Mary Wilfred directress of studies in the West to give continuing guidance to the teachers.

After the 1905 retreat, the teachers left from Vancouver each day for a week to attend their first Catholic school institute held at Holy Names Academy in Portland. Sister Mary Wilfred had arranged that they join sisters from Washington, Idaho, Montana and Oregon to hear Dr. Shields' lectures and to share experiences and methods of teaching. During the 1907 summer institute, the teachers spent the week at St. Vincent Hospital in Portland paying, the chronicles state, "A dollar a head and taking care of the dining room and dormitories."

In 1907 Sister Mary James succeeded Sister Mary Wilfred and worked for the unification of courses of study, text books and general policies for all the Providence schools in the West. These two sisters laid foundations for the education of sisters in which Sister Mary Loretta Gately began to build in 1911 when she became the third directress of studies in the West.

From 1915 on Sister Mary Loretta succeeded in getting sisters replaced in the class room to attend normal schools and colleges and universities for a quarter or even for a whole year at a time. Sister Edward John Frey with Sister Lucia Sullivan of Montana were the first Providence Sisters to go away to college. In 1915 Sister Mary Loretta received permission from Mother Mary Julian, Superior General, to send two sisters, one from each province, to go to Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska.

Mother Vincent Ferrier, Provincial Superior, set up criteria of choice of the sister from Vancouver when she said, "She must be strong, physically as well as spiritually." "Intelligent, too, and still young," added Sister Mary Loretta. The council summoned Sister Edward John then teaching in the Providence Academy high school. She qualified in all four points; and they gave her the novel obedience of summer at college away from the community.

That summer Sister Lucia and Sister Edward broke the ground for Providence Sisters at Creighton University. The next summer Sister Mary Loretta accompanied these same two sisters and found out for herself Creighton's plan for helping sisters earn degrees. She decided that Providence Sisters were to have a large part in it; so, in the ensuing summers, more and more of them went to Creighton. From Vancouver went Sister Mary Mildred and Sister Mary Aquinas.

At the turn of the century, few sisters had had a college education before becoming Providence Sisters. Among those who did have one was Sister Tarcisius Dwyer. She had finished at Ames College in Iowa and had a teaching position in Eastern Washington when she met the Providence Sisters in Sprague and chose to be one of them. At the time the sisters started going to Creighton she had had charge of the novices in Vancouver since 1909.

The Lord was always near. Many of the Providence Academy students kept Him near as they established their own homes.

Music became a part of their lives, too. They sang as they played many of their childhood games. Before the shrine near the playground they praised Mary with song. The orphans had their own choir and received invitations to perform for the public. In more sophisticated style, the high school choir sang intricate Masses, motets in three parts and plain chant.

Enrollment for piano and organ lessons kept increasing. From eight in the morning to five in the evening students practiced on eight to ten pianos going simultaneously, stumbled over difficult measures, practiced scales and chords, and repeated passages over and over in a way that could scarcely be called music. But they finally achieved results.

Providence Academy produced some fine musicians. In 1917 Nellie Pittendrigh's solo recital merited a diploma of graduation in music for her. As Sister Dolores Mary, Nellie made a reputation for herself as an outstanding choral director.

It took a Sister Mary Afra Houle to sponsor recitals that kept audiences sitting on the edge of their chairs to see young pianists performing difficult compositions. Sister Afra was a genius with special ability to discover musically talented young people and then persuade her superiors to let her give them lessons, money or no money.

That her class load was already too large made no difference to Sister Afra. She convinced her superiors that she could teach evenings and on Saturdays. Talented or not, her pupils learned to play and even to enjoy coming to practice if just to find out what new fun idea Sister had for them that day.

A composer herself, Sister Afra wrote hymns that attracted the novices who sang them on feast days. She and Sister Rose of Jesus Burns both wrote music used in the repertoires of the early 1900's. Other early excellent music teachers, among them Sister Mary Afra's sister, Sister Mary Amata, Sister Cecelia Harris and Sister Euthalia Bourret also taught at Providence Academy.

The music hall itself with two rows of columns, a stage and a high ceiling was a multi-purpose room. Here historic events took place. In 1896 Agnes Hill, a young lady from the garrison, received the first Providence medal and diploma of graduation issued from Providence Academy. After that one or two or as many as five girls finished each year of the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Until the 1920's, graduates from high schools in the whole country were few in number. Graduation from the eighth grade was important and so were Palmer Method certificates for proficiency in muscular movement writing. In 1912 twenty-nine academy graduates met to form the first Providence Academy Alumnae Society. Alumnae members and new graduates increased rapidly in numbers after World War I.

Before 1900, after Mother Joseph's gift of library cupboards, students began to show initiative in modernizing their school by fund raising activities for the library, play ground and tennis courts. They first filled a small library room with shelves to the ceiling. Later the Providence Academy library became a valuable source of history, art and religion.

## EDUCATION OF PROVIDENCE SISTERS

Although teaching became the first apostolate of the Providence Sisters in the West by necessity and not by preference, Mother Joseph wholeheartedly supported



inaugurating it by printing her two favorite prayers, "You are All Beautiful, Mary," and "Petitions to the Sacred Heart."

Then she turned the press over to the students who began publishing *Nonpareil* under the guidance of Sister Tarcisius.

This school paper included news of other Providence schools in the province. It showed the close bond that existed between students and sisters of the academies in Missoula, Walla Walla, Yakima, Sprague, Ward, Olympia and Vancouver. Evident, too, in its articles were the loyalty, sincerity and gratitude that Sister Tarcisius impressed on her students. The school paper came out monthly from 1900 to the end of the 1903 school year. While it lasted, it did much to stimulate student writing and school spirit.

Sister Tarcisius was her students' friend and confidante. It was not easy for them to let her leave them to become superior in Sprague. They did not know then that she would be coming back in 1909 as novice mistress; but they knew that she would want them to welcome Sister Mary Mildred as their new principal.

In 1907 Sister Mary Mildred Curtin, still in her twenties, had become a member of the provincial council in Vancouver and was to remain a part of it until 1923 when she replaced Sister Tarcisius again, this time as novice mistress. Until then she also had charge of the high school and taught there full time. She shared Sister Tarcisius' love of books and continued to add to the library and to encourage reading among the students.

Subscriptions to the *Catholic World*, *Current History*, *Benziger Magazine* and the *Home Journal* kept the students alert to the changing world. Academy albums show young ladies in middy blouses relaxing in hammocks reading books. They became familiar with Kathleen Norris, Pearl Buck, Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot and Cooper. Mystery novels captivated them even more than did the classics.

The school grew slowly into a two-room high school with an enriched curriculum. Sister Winifred Flynn set up an art studio at the top of Mother Joseph's architectural conquest, the circular stairway that wound its way from the first to the fourth floor with no other support than that which the genius of design gave it. In her unique art room, Sister Winifred taught painting, drawing and the art of making molds for the production of statues on a large scale. Large crucifixes were her specialty.

Sister Mary Loretta realized that Sister John Gabriel Ryan's specialty was nursing schools and hospital administration, but she persuaded her to take time for domestic science in the schools. In 1916 against all odds, so short of space was the academy, she succeeded in equipping two rooms and started classes in foods and sewing. Sister Agnes Mary Nicholson became her apprentice teacher and took over the class the next year. After her, Sister Margaret Hamel became the domestic science teacher, instructing the girls in sewing and in the preparation and serving of meals.

The high school, no longer a one-room, one-teacher school now had sisters more broadly educated and beginning also to be specialists in the fields they taught. Sister Joseph of Nazareth taught ancient, medieval, English and American history; Sister Mary Mildred had the English classes; Sister Mary Aquinas Burns, mathematics, French and Latin; and Sister Edward John, science.

Each teacher had a religion class that required much preparation, as high school religion texts and courses of study were non-existent. One summer a Providence Sister team gathered in Vanouever to create such a course. It was so unique and so well-constructed that Notre Dame University printed it for wide distribution.

The sisters began attending the county education institutes and taking with them students who gave demonstrations. Providence Academy was becoming visible in

Intensely interested in the college education of the sisters, it was she who contacted her brother-in-law, Mr. Harry Day, a wealthy Idaho miner. At her suggestion he financed the summers at Creighton for twenty sisters, among them some of Sister Tarcisius' former novices and students.

With summer school permissions for normal school and Creighton no longer difficult to get, Sister Mary Loretta took her next step. In January, 1918, she succeeded in getting time off for sisters during the regular session. Sister Ignatius Regan left Vancouver to join Sister Adelaide Birchfield for a semester at Holy Name Normal, Oswego, Oregon.

The education of Providence sisters teaching in Vancouver and elsewhere had begun. It was to continue and was to realize Sister Mary Loretta's goal of the certification of all the Providence Sister teachers. Over twenty of them earned degrees from Creighton in the 1920's; more received normal school certificates from Holy Names Normal schools in Portland and Seattle. Sisters began attending other colleges and universities either for summer quarters or for a quarter or two during the school year, or even for a sabbatical year of study. By 1920 Sister Mary Loretta saw as an attainable goal Providence schools staffed with all the teachers certified by the state.

## PROVIDENCE ACADEMY HIGH SCHOOL

It was time to apply for accreditation of Providence Academy. Almost a quarter of a century had passed since 1896, the year of its first graduation. The forward thrust given by Mother Mary Antoinette at that time had found enthusiastic response in Sister Tarcisius, then one of Providence Academy's great high school teachers. With no thought of preparing for state accreditation, she with Sister Mary Mildred Curtin, who later replaced her as high school principal, really laid the foundation for future State approval.

Both of these sisters carried out the objective of Providence Academy given in its 1901 *Catalogue of Grammar Grades and High School* namely: "to impart a thorough and refined Christian education to young ladies, using methods combining solidity and simplicity . . . to develop character by culture of the mind, heart and body . . ."

The high school offered a three-track curriculum: literary, commercial and scientific with all students taking core subjects of religion, English, mathematics and history. With grammar pretty well conquered in the grade school in those days, English classes stressed rhetoric, composition and literary analysis. Poetry writing and weekly compositions challenged the girls' creativity.

Sister Tarcisius had a flair for writing and a way of developing originality in her students. She taught in a one-room high school, taught almost all the subjects herself. Physics, botany, zoology, geology and astronomy were taught as non-laboratory sciences that gave explanations for everyday experiences in the home and the outdoors.

These studies took some of the mystery out of nature and also left the students with a deep appreciation of the beauty, order, power and variety in the world about them.

Sister Tarcisius moderated the first school paper published by Providence Academy students. On her last trip to Montreal, Mother Joseph had brought back a printing press that would make a school paper possible for the students. At the age of seventy-six, she thus started the apostolate of the press at Providence Academy,

the public education world and was seeking accreditation. Sister Mary Mildred and Sister Mary Aquinas checked requirements, were satisfied that the academy qualified in all of them and requested a visit of the state inspector.

Mr. Edwin Twitmeyer, State High School Inspector, came several times and was impressed with the order in the class rooms, the quality of teaching and the relaxed and joyous response of the students. He immediately recommended the school for accreditation.

In 1920 Providence Academy received state accreditation and, in 1925, the University of Washington gave its approval of the school, basing its accreditation on the achievement of Providence Academy students at the university.

## PROVIDENCE ACADEMY GRADE SCHOOL

All this time the grade school sisters were not only becoming educated and certified, but increasingly more of them were becoming master teachers. Sister Ursula Ahern's reputation spread throughout Vancouver. She loved to teach slow learners, using all the techniques that she had learned until she finally found one that would work for each special child. Sister Mary Loretta sent her to every new methods course that came out.

If a child could not learn by the phonics method, Sister could fall back on the sight reading method, the word method or the sensory method. Her success with so-called "impossible cases" surprised parents and teachers. It took patience and love to achieve the results, and Sister Ursula had both.

Sister Mary Berchmans Murphy, another primary specialist, excelled not only in teaching children but also in training primary teachers. She began teaching first grade in 1911 when the classrooms were bulging with pupils, as many as seventy to a room.

It was in Yakima that she had her early success at making readers of all seventy before the year was over. Later, as supervisor of primary teachers, she spread her methods among all the schools of the province, Vancouver's included. Like Sister Ursula, she had a bag full of ideas, one of which would always work on the most hopeless case.

A sister attending a special summer seminar for primary teachers in 1977 learned about the "new" kinesthetic method of teaching reading; Sister Mary Berchmans had had children forming letters in the air with fingers and noses in 1917. The 1977 seminar taught the use of senses as a reading aid; more than forty years earlier, Sister Mary Berchmans had encouraged her teachers to have children utilize eyes, ears, taste, smell and touch to draw meaning from the written word.

With great success Sister Mary Berchmans substituted phonics for the word method of teaching. By June many of her students read two or more grades above their level. She taught every subject whether it was religion, mathematics or art according to the child's way of learning. Today, many Providence Sisters admit that, although Sister Mary Berchmans' supervision was strenuous and often hard to take at the time, they owe their teaching success to her; and they are grateful.

She was one of three Murphy girls who came from Prince Edward Island, Canada, to become Providence sisters. Sister Mary Pius, an expert primary teacher also, won Moxee parishioners' hearts.

Sister Benedict Joseph was the versatile one. In Vancouver, Sister Benedict mothered the little girls among the boarders. She read their moods and knew when they needed special attention. Later, she became a superior, a typing and a



bookkeeping teacher and then an expert in the business offices of hospitals where she initiated current methods of bookkeeping.

Whether Sister Benedict worked with Vancouver's little orphans or with air force men in Walla Walla, who attended her night classes during World War II, or with sisters learning new ways to keep records, she still read moods and responded to them in helpful ways.

While some of Vancouver's primary teachers remained primary teachers, many of them moved on to teach a higher grade, often moving up one grade or two a year. By the time they taught the eighth grade, they knew the experiences and curriculum of all the earlier grades. Many eighth grade teachers at the academy understood the emotional and growth stages of their adolescent students and had their confidence.

To prepare eighth grade students for state examinations required a happy balance between memorizing facts and understanding content. Teachers had collections of tests given in previous years that they used to drill the students. If over-used, this method interfered with real learning even though it often insured good grades on the tests. The academy teachers saw the danger and welcomed the day when state examinations were abolished.

In the meantime they filled the minds of students with a wealth of poetry. Sister Imelda McBride, herself a product of such teaching, took over the eighth grade in Vancouver in the middle of the year, never an easy assignment. She established her credentials with the girls when they tried her out on naming titles and quoting from the poems. She could do that by the hour with evident joy, reciting every stanza of poem after poem.

Sister Mary Vivian Huls' specialty was mathematics. Teachers as well as students sought her out to solve involved problems. She went the whole way in mathematics spending her last teaching years at the College of Great Falls. A very human mathematician she was, the kind who could innocently introduce a young man to a young lady and not be surprised later to be invited to their wedding.

When the state reading circle lists of required reading for eighth graders came out each year, Sister Mary Herman was the first to read every novel on the list and then get her students excited about reading far beyond the minimum number expected of them. She used fiction characters to show how to meet conflicts of life and how not to meet them.

Sister Mary Inez Dunn was the foreign mission enthusiast. Between their learning geography and number combinations, she had her fourth graders preoccupied gathering pennies to buy pagan babies.

Each Providence Academy teacher was unique. They may have looked alike with their long black habits, white garnitures circling their faces, blue aprons and big pockets; but the students knew how to react to each. They chose their confidantes and sought them out when they had joys or difficulties or uncertainties to share. At the foot of the circular stairs, groups of girls would wait to catch one sister or another going to dinner, to make an appointment with her, or just to let her know they cared. Some of their teachers they valued as good teachers; some as good friends; some as both.

To find time for individual needs of students took ingenuity. Each teaching sister also had another assignment, usually as a companion in a boarding department. As such she rose at five in the morning then went to the boys' or girls' dormitory to get the children out of bed, washed and dressed and in the chapel for six o'clock Mass. At night, again in the dormitory, she calmed them down and urged them to undress, get bathed and in bed in record time so that she could tell them a story. She had

thousand poor men each year. Strength and the eagerness to carry on their work came to these sisters as they joined one another each day for prayer, recreation and meals.

Somehow the pieces all fit together before they retired together in huge dormitories and asked the Lord to “bless the repose they were about to take.” At the sound of the five o’clock bell, they were ready to “Bless the Lord”, rise simultaneously and “rejoice on the new day that the Lord had made.”

## INTO MODERN TIMES

The enrollment showed a steady increase from 1911 on, reaching over 400 in specially good years. In the 1956 centenary year the academy enrolled 605 day students and forty boarders, some of them orphans. The high school had 107 girls and the music department sixty-three pupils.

The academy always served the poor as well as the rich. In the financial ledgers of day students, all through the years, the word “gratis” appears after the names of from a third to a half of the students. Often the boarders paid in part; and most of the orphans depended wholly on the sisters.

Mother Joseph died in 1902; but “whatever concerned the poor” remained “the affair” of the Providence Academy sisters. Times changed and new circumstances kept offering new challenges. In 1907, the episcopal see moved to Seattle and St. James Cathedral, Vancouver, became St. James Church. Its pastor had the church renovated and he drew his parishoners together in continued loyal service of God and the church.

In 1924 the provincialate offices moved to Seattle and with them the novitiate, the infirmary and the annual retreat gatherings of sisters. Providence in Vancouver was no longer the sisters’ home in the West. When, on January 24, 1924, the novices, postulants and the infirmary sisters boarded a special car to take them to their new home, an era ended in Vancouver.

More than 300 American girls had taken their first steps in the religious life there, drawn to become Providence Sisters by the love of God, the poor and the needy that they saw exemplified in followers of Mother Emilie Gamelin and Mother Joseph. Novices in white “wings” and postulants, a bit awkward for awhile in their long black dresses, were a special part of Providence Academy. The students missed seeing them once they were gone.

But Providence Academy was all theirs now and they determined to keep it important. The novitiate room became Room I for the juniors and seniors; the library spread out into the postulate; the freshmen and sophomores moved into an infirmary dormitory. The grade school was scattered in three buildings — the second floor of the academy, the St. Vincent Annex and the former college building. The school had badly needed expansion room; so almost immediately it filled all the vacated space.

The high school had newly achieved accreditation, new courses were challenging students and the publication of a year book, *The Providencian* had brought prestige to its staff. Grade and high school teachers were attending normal schools and colleges on a regular basis and bringing back to their classes a new richness. Students took pride in wearing the Providence Academy uniform, in marching as a group in the Prune Festival Parade and in winning first places in debate and tennis tournaments.

In 1956 the whole school united to commemorate the centenary of Providence Academy. Together with a good part of the city folk and friends from away, they

things to do for herself when the boarding mistress replaced her, more than enough things to do and be in bed by nine o'clock.

## THE SUPPORTING STAFF

Teaching sisters, sisters with boarders, sisters working in the laundry, kitchen, garden, business office, sisters visiting the poor and the sick in the city, novices, provincialate members, infirmary sisters all lived together in the convent home at Providence Academy. The teachers shared experiences with each other between sessions and after school as they cleaned their classrooms. The other sisters they knew less well.

However, many teachers felt a special kinship with Sister Constance Dubrule, Sister Blanchet and Sister Joseph Alphonse because of what they did and who they were. Sister Constance came to Vancouver in 1913 to visit homes. For the next twenty years, she sought out the poor, the sick and the troubled and did remarkable things to lessen their sufferings.

The teachers knew who were poor when they saw the scanty lunches, patched clothes and worn shoes of children in their classrooms. They gave their names to Sister Constance and she visited their homes and supplied many of their needs.

Sister Constance lived the Providence Sister's title "Daughter of Charity". As she set out with a basket of provisions each day, she took a child with her. One of these companions, now a Providence Sister, testifies to the utter poverty she saw in the homes that Sister Constance visited. She listened to the complaints of the poor, gave them material help, referred them to those who could assist when she could not do so, and turned their minds to God.

In her broken English, Sister Constance taught prayers to the children and won many fallen-away Catholics to a return to the church. Her total charity was irresistible.

In the hard winter of 1919, she trudged through the snow bringing supplies to the needy. The mayor of the city took note of her heroic charity and eulogized her in an article printed in the local paper. When after twenty-eight years in the West, she planned a trip to Montreal for a first visit to her homeland, the mayor gave her a purse in token of her life of service to Vancouver's poor. The pastor, Father John Egan, called her the best-loved woman in Vancouver. Having heard their pupils speak of her so often, the sisters knew he was right!

The teachers understood Sister Blanchet's language. She was a coadjutrix sister doing what some called menial work in the laundry and garden. She did it with professional skill, asking the teachers for science books from the library. She needed to learn the best kind of soap to clean and not destroy clothes; she wanted to understand the mechanics of washing machines, mangles and steam-heated dryers. In the laundry, she worked out the most effective and least tiring ways for her helpers to feed the mangles and fold the clothes.

Sister Blanchet grew flowers to beautify the altar and grounds. To keep an all-year supply of flowers for the chapel, she learned the processes of hot houses and became an expert at flower and plant culture. Her trays of feast-day divinity fudge and peanut brittle proved that she understood sisters too.

All the sisters at Providence Academy were busy people, serving the children, serving the sisters, serving the poor in the city or the poor who came to their door for a meal. Hungry men came when the mission first opened, increasing in numbers when times were hard and work scarce. From the 1900's on the sisters fed well over a

celebrated a glorious Mass. They staged a pageant for which Sister Cecelia Mary Kucera was responsible, a work of art that retold in a beautiful way the academy's history.

Hundreds of people accepted the sisters' invitation to revisit the historic academy building, the work of Mother Joseph, the first architect of the Northwest to work with the wood of Washington's forests. The bell that Mother Joseph loved for its symbolism of welcome to all, sounded a hundredth anniversary message to come to Providence. The bell was still a part of the past and of the present in 1956.

But not for long. Ten years later, 1966, Providence Academy announced its closing, as so many other private schools had to do in the '60's. The problem of financing the academy had never really been solved. The era of boarding schools had ended. Vancouver parishioners had already built first one then two Catholic grade schools staffed by Providence sisters; so the grade school had moved out of Providence Academy before 1966 and the local children could continue to learn the Providence way.

The public preferred other ways than the institution way of caring for orphans and dependent children. High schools needed numbers to support modern curriculums which offered many electives and required much equipment; and the high school enrollment at the academy had never become large. Still in its many years of developing minds and hearts and bodies, Providence Academy had succeeded well with hundreds of young people.

Many were sad to see it go. An elderly gentleman came to see it once more before it closed its doors. He had had a happy boyhood in it. A young man from California came, too, to see again the boarding department that he said had started him off on a good life. The students lingered around their high school teachers on the last day of the 1966 school term, reluctant to let them go.

Providence Academy had an impact on them as it had on hundreds of people before them. The challenge that Mother Joseph gave her sisters, they in turn had given to others, "Whatever concerns the poor is your affair."



*Day students, boarders and orphans of the 1902 P.A.V. student body.*



*Side view of  
House of Providence about 1880.*



*Boarder and orphan boys  
at P.A.V. in 1898.*



*Orphan girls  
at P.A.V. in 1898.*





*P.A.V. boarder girls' recreation room in 1898.*



*Eighth grade graduation picture of (Sister) Grace Hebert 1906.*



*Sister Mary Afra Houle, one of the talented early music teachers.*



*Sister Tarcisius Dwyer, beloved teacher at P.A.V. and, later, novice mistress.*



*Orphan girls in 1900 with Sister Casimir and Sister Lea. Number 12 became Sister Anna Baker and No. 9 became Sister Mary Donalda Stefans.*



# Chapter 2

## *The Way It Was In Steilacoom*

1863-1875 STEILACOOM, WASHINGTON

*A Story of Providence St. Joseph*

Mother Joseph Pariseau and her Sisters of Providence had known seven years of missionary life in the West by 1863. So far they had performed their works of charity taking care of people in Vancouver, Washington only. Their boarding school had brought in children from far and wide, and the reputation of the Providence Sisters had spread among priests and people.

Requests to establish missions outside of Vancouver began to come to Mother Joseph. She knew that the sisters had formed close ties with each other as they lived together in Vancouver where they shared the challenges of a pioneer country very different from the Canada they had left.

They were only a dozen sisters, too few for the number of calls made upon them. Besides carrying on multiple works of charity beyond the limits of the House of Providence, these sisters that year had cared for and taught sixty-two orphans and twenty boarders. But Mother Joseph and her sisters realized that they had come west for a wider apostolate than that of one city.

As they had given an unconditional “Yes” to the Lord when He had asked them to leave their mother house in Montreal, Canada, they would give a like “Yes” should He call them to leave the Vancouver community home. Mother Joseph knew her sisters. They as well as she were eager to go forth to serve in new places. Which place would be the first?

By an act of Providence it was to be Providence St. Joseph, Steilacoom, Territory of Washington. The city’s name is as beautiful as is its location. One legend gives as its derivation the name of a famous Indian chief, Tail-a-Koom. Another associates it with a small pink wild flower that covers the surrounding meadows in spring.

Steilacoom began as a military fort in 1849, to help establish United States claims to the surrounding territory. Soldiers were based there also to protect frontier American families. The security and the availability of supplies that the fort provided attracted settlers, especially during the 1855-1856 Indian wars that plagued the whole territory.

Plans to build a road between the “city of Steilacoom and the town of Seattle” and plans to run a railroad between Steilacoom and Vancouver promised a future for the city. A military road already existed between the fort and Walla Walla. The city’s population grew because it was a trading center between Olympia and Tacoma and also was a stopping place between Fraser River and Colville during the 1858 gold rush.

In 1854, Steilacoom became the first incorporated city in the Territory of Washington. By the time the sisters arrived in 1863, Steilacoom had a post office, newspaper and two dancing schools for “waltz, schottische, polka, gallop and the dash away.” In 1863, its people needed the sisters and seemingly would need them for the years ahead.

Since 1861, Father Charles Vary had been ministering to seven widely separated missions in the Puget Sound area. He was to continue that arduous task for five more years before leaving to become a Jesuit priest. At the time, missionary priests travelling up and down the Sound had their headquarters at Fort Steilacoom. They served the Indians and whites of Steilacoom, Cowlitz, Olympia, Port Townsend, Whatcom, Whitby Island and Ports Gamble and Madison.

Steilacoom was the central city of the Sound. Numbers of pioneers, some of them Catholics, had chosen to settle there. Father Vary saw their needs and decided to ask Mother Joseph in Vancouver for help.

The two were well acquainted. Just the year before, Father Vary had collected over a thousand dollars for Mother Joseph's orphans. She knew his calibre. She had heard of how he hesitated at no danger, weariness or suffering when people needed him. Now he needed her. He was asking for three sisters to come to Steilacoom to educate the white children and visit the sick. Primarily, he wanted a school.

Most of the first missions of the Providence Sisters in the West were schools. With them as centers that provided a source of income, the sisters could care for the sick, the poor and the needy, giving them services that at the time had no funding.

Mother Joseph wrote to Montreal in the 1860's and the 1870's, "Portland is the only place now where the people are able to support the works of charity. Boarders, music and day pupils pay well. Protestants pay eighty-four dollars a year for music and tuition. They provide the means of educating our poor Catholics. Americans do not count the cost when it comes to education. Their liberality to our schools will help us to work for our poor."

Money then was one of the reasons that Mother Joseph gave her superiors in Montreal as an inducement to grant her request for opening schools. But it was not the only reason. The missionary priests requested schools because, Mother Joseph continued, "The influence of the schools makes easy the administration of baptism. The bishops want schools. The priests are powerless without the aid of religious schools."

There was still another convincing argument for opening schools. Mother Joseph's perceptive mind knew it to be a good one. "Later on they should supply us with subjects for the novitiate," she wrote Mother Philomene, Superior General in 1863, as she petitioned her for missions in Steilacoom and Walla Walla. The answer was favorable to both requests.

Mother Joseph was ready now to hear the details of Father Vary's request. The Protestants as well as the Catholic people wanted the sisters, he said. To that reasoning Mother Joseph replied, "Americans are keen enough for their own interests to know that our establishments are preferable to their own."

Father had better arguments. Many Canadians lived in Steilacoom, retired military men and men who had been with the fur traders. These men with their families, most of them nominally Catholics, badly needed instruction and renewal in the Catholic way of life. They had lived too long away from Sunday Mass and the sacraments. Especially was there an urgent need to give the children a Christian education.

True, Canadians and Catholics were in the minority at Steilacoom and the Freemasons were numerous; but the sisters had faith in God's ways among His people.

The most respectable citizens of the town, nearly all Protestants, had already bought a piece of land for educational purposes in the central part of the town, and they were eager to help with the building of a school. Father Vary promised that the property would belong to the sisters and that he would build on it a two-storey

convent. The sisters were to teach, visit the sick and carry on the other works needed in the new community. The convent would be ready before the sisters would come.

On September 23, 1863, Mother Joseph accepted the mission in the name of the Sisters of Charity of Providence. She accepted it under the conditions specified by Father Vary. On the next day, September 24, she signed another contract, one with Father J. B. Brouillet, Vicar General of the Diocese of Nesqually, for a mission in Walla Walla. She chose the sisters who were to pioneer the Walla Walla mission, convinced as she was that it would be the first of the two to open. She was to be away for a time but she expected to be back in Vancouver before the terms of the Steilacoom contract would be fulfilled.

By that time, she would have more sisters from the mother house in Montreal to help staff the missions. Then she left immediately for an extended visit in Montreal. This was the first of her six trips to Montreal in the interests of the Providence missions in the West.

### STEILACOOM BECOMES PROVIDENCE FOUNDATION NUMBER 31

The provincial chronicles for 1863 record what actually happened. Scarcely had Mother Joseph left for Montreal when the citizens of Steilacoom asked Father Vary to go to Vancouver to plead that the sisters come there before the bad weather began. Father went as requested and strongly insisted that the sisters come immediately. The people, he said, had promised to give the sisters lodging until funds could be collected for building the convent.

What were the sisters to do? For the first time in their seven years in this missionary country, they had a momentous decision to make without the leadership of Mother Joseph. The four other foundress sisters were there, Sister Blandine of the Angels, Sister Praxedes of Providence, and the two who had come as postulants to take their vows in Vancouver as Sister Vincent de Paul and Sister Mary of the Precious Blood.

Four other professed sisters from Montreal had come to join them. These sisters assembled in the community room as a council, prayed, weighed the pros and cons and knew the decision could not await communication with Montreal. They had to act.

With the approval of Bishop A. M. A. Blanchet, they decided to send two sisters to Steilacoom as soon as possible. They named Sister Catherine Ennis as superior, Sister Mary of the Precious Blood Norton and Miss Honora Fitzgerald, a former boarder, as the foundresses. Preparations began quickly for the leave-taking.

The sisters packed trunks with bedding, kitchen utensils, dishes, chapel furnishings, a few books, ledgers and clothing. The amount of baggage that they could take was limited, but the needs of the sisters were simple. In a short time the three were ready to leave.

The Steilacoom and the provincial chronicles combined tell of the first departure ceremony of the sisters now doubly missionaries. "On November 12, 1863 after having received Communion and the blessing of the bishop of Nesqually, their first pastor, the three left full of courage. A few sisters went with them as far as Portland.

"They were to travel by way of Victoria, British Columbia, because, at that time of the year especially, the overland route across mountains and marshes in wagons and in stage coaches that ran without regular routes, was so fatiguing as to be almost beyond the strength of women."

Sister Mary in a letter to her sisters in Vancouver headed Victoria, British Columbia, November 19, 1863 gives an account of their trip. "I thought my heart

would break when I saw the Vancouver boat push off with the sisters in it and we left behind in Portland. Some Holy Name Sisters took us to St. Mary's Academy in Portland where we had supper.

"Then we boarded the steamer not knowing when it would leave. Friday morning, still in port, we went to Mass in the parish church, dined with the sisters at the academy and returned to the steamer. It left at six that evening.

"At three in the morning on Saturday we reached Astoria, remained there until noon and then went as far as the Bar. As it was too rough to cross that terrible Bar, we waited in the bay until eight o'clock Sunday morning.

"From that point on until we arrived in Victoria on Tuesday, all of us except Sister Catherine, were sea sick. However we had some hearty laughs with an Italian count on board. He said that he was collecting animals for King Victor Emmanuel. He had foxes, coons, elks, and quail on the steamer. He himself resembled a great baboon. The waiters on the boat outdid themselves to serve us.

"We arrived in Victoria on Tuesday; and I was glad to leave the evil-smelling steamer. We stayed with the Sisters of St. Ann who gave us a cordial welcome. The sisters have thirty boarders and seventy day pupils. Those who teach have no other occupation but study. Four are studying music two hours a day. They teach English in the morning and French in the afternoon in their school.

"We visited the town on Wednesday and found that the people look like people in Montreal and not like those in Oregon.

"My love to the boarders particularly Mary Kratz and Annie McDonald."

Signed Sister Mary of the Precious Blood

The sisters remained in Victoria for a week. On November 25, 1863, feast of St. Catherine, after almost two weeks of travel the missionaries arrived at Steilacoom where Father Vary met them accompanied by notable citizens of the town. Father brought the sisters to a rented house while awaiting the completion of repairs on his own house that he was remodeling to accommodate the needs of the sisters.

The house that he had agreed to build never became a reality. The Civil War, stepped up with the Gettysburg victory in July of 1863, was having its effect on Steilacoom's population growth; and Father Vary had not had the success that he had anticipated in collecting funds.

The three remained in the rented house for five or six weary weeks of comparative inactivity. It was winter, the Advent season and then Christmas; and they were undoubtedly lonely. They visited some sick people while awaiting the completion of the convent but that did not satisfy the eager three. Sister Mary wrote her feelings to Mother Joseph in Montreal.

"It is now about seven weeks since we left Vancouver and we haven't opened school yet, as our house is not finished. We are in a little cottage a short distance from our future home. This is a wild looking place, though the scenery on the Sound is beautiful.

"I feel lonely here. There is no church. The one Father Vary had built was taken down and brought over to the garrison about a mile from town.

"I fancy that we will not have much to do the first year; but I know a good Catholic school is greatly needed here. Many children need to learn Christian doctrine. They all seem ignorant of everything regarding religion . . ."

## NEWS REACHES MOTHER JOSEPH IN MONTREAL

Sister Mary's letter was not the only news that Mother Joseph had received regarding Steilacoom, and she was not happy about much of it. In a letter dated in

Vancouver November 3, 1863, Sister Blandine gave Mother Joseph her first knowledge of the decision to send to Steilacoom the personnel intended for Walla Walla.

Sister Blandine was worried about the outcome, as her letter shows. "Father Brouillet does not cease to demand sisters for Walla Walla," she tells Mother Joseph, and adds, "I do not know what to say to him if he cannot have sisters this fall." (1863).

Father Brouillet, indeed, was upset. He had planned his Walla Walla school with Sister Catherine as superior and Honora Fitzgerald as second teacher. In early October he had written to Sister Praxedes saying "Mother Joseph promised me Honora Fitzgerald as a second teacher. Have her well prepared and don't fail to have some private lessons given to Sister Paul Miki, especially in arithmetic. We cannot afford defective teaching or the opposition will use it against us. We must meet the opposition advantageously and respond to the public expectations."

Father Brouillet's October 28 letter to Mother Joseph was disconcerting. It read in part, "Steilacoom has started; Sister Catherine and Sister Mary and Honora have gone there. Now Walla Walla claims the right to have promises fulfilled. What sisters are there to send?"

The impact of all this news on Mother Joseph, miles away from her sisters in the West, came through to them in parts of letters written in December. Though she would have made different decisions, she appeared sympathetic and unruffled.

"I learn from your letters," she writes, "that Sister Catherine is appointed to Steilacoom. No doubt this is a good decision. The new recruits from Montreal will help to open Walla Walla.

"Do give me news of Steilacoom. Their sacrifice and painful separation of the sisters is even more poignant than that of leaving the mother house. It is a second separation in a strange land. Poor Sister Catherine! How did she accept the appointment? And dear Sister Mary? Did she make the sacrifice generously? She seems destined to be a foundress."

In another letter she wrote, "I grant permission to the Steilacoom sisters to have a piano in the community room so that they can play and sing together."

By January Mother Joseph had promises of sisters for the West from Montreal. Sisters there were more than eager to volunteer for the Western missions. Mother Joseph had whetted their appetite for missionary life in all its forms. But there were problems.

The steamship companies' best offer from New York to Portland was three hundred dollars for six sisters. Bishop Ignance Bourget, the Providence Sisters' founder and guide, wrote Bishop A. M. A. Blanchet, "The community is ready to bleed itself to furnish you with subjects. The greatest difficulty is to find the travel money needed."

Somehow or other, the sisters kept finding the travel money and new arrivals kept coming to Vancouver. When Walla Walla was ready to open in February, 1864, Sister Mary of the Nativity and Sister Columban were there with Sister Paul Miki and Miss Rose Pellan, an orphan and former pupil from Vancouver. Father Brouillet was satisfied. But Mother Joseph was not satisfied with the latest news from Steilacoom that reached her in Montreal.

## FIRST YEAR AT STEILACOOM

In the last days of December, 1863, Sister Catherine, Sister Mary and Honora left the little rented cottage and moved into their convent on Lot 3, Block 17, Nesqually



Street. Father Vary had promised the sisters a large two-storey building. The substitute one, father's own house repaired, was badly built and was only a twenty-five by twenty-foot house.

Mother Joseph was not pleased but had to be resigned. The Provincial chronicles quote her as saying, "Just the same, our sisters are now installed there. What can we do?"

The Steilacoom chronicles show that the three there were relieved to be in their own house. Though lacking much the sisters would have desired, their new home had a redeeming feature. Built on a high hill in the eastern part of the city, the convent had a magnificent view. Puget Sound Bay, calm one day, rough another lay at the foot of the hill. Everywhere they looked they saw beauty: sea gulls, snowcovered mountains in the distance and dense woods close by. The scenic beauty surrounding them brought peace to them.

But they had sacrifices to make too. The chapel was in the center of the garrison, a mile and a half away down the hill. At the request of the sisters, a Canadian sergeant promised to negotiate to get the chapel moved to a site near the convent. In the mean time, the sisters prepared an oratory with a tabernacle for the Blessed Sacrament. "It had no lock," the chronicles state, "as the town had none for sale."

With the Lord in His tabernacle, the sisters and Honora prepared for the children. On January 4, 1864, classes began in the convent home, now Providence St. Joseph, with fifteen boys and girls. Sister Mary had some pupils in the first class; Honora Fitzgerald had the rest in the second class; Sister Catherine, among her other duties, ran a beginning boarding school. The Rigney family, wishing to encourage the sisters brought their little girl to board.

Sister Catherine was the well-educated, personable sister that Father Brouillet had understandably wanted for Walla Walla. She had taken her vows in Montreal in 1849 at the age of twenty-six. Fluent in English as well as in French, she began her religious life visiting the Irish patients at St. Jerome Hospital, Montreal. She then went as superior to New London and afterwards to Burlington, Vermont.

She came west as an experienced administrator with the added advantage of having English as her native tongue. The chronicles give evidence that she could cope with the problems of Steilacoom and be companionable with her two younger co-workers. She was forty and they were in their twenties.

Sister Mary Norton had come west as a postulant with Mother Joseph in 1856. Before entering the Montreal novitiate she had taught English at Long Point. So beautiful was she that some of the sisters had questioned sending her to the "uncivilized and corrupt" west. Bishop Bourget had said simply, "Let her go."

She had proved her worth in a novitiate of hard work, poverty, great prayerfulness and loving concern for all she met. After she and her companion Sister Vincent de Paul, made their profession, the first in Vancouver, Sister Mary began her twenty years of educating youth before she died of typhoid fever at the age of thirty-nine. She was twenty-five when she taught in Steilacoom.

Of Honora Fitzgerald, Sister Mary wrote in a letter to Mother Joseph, "I fancy that she will be married to John Murphy next summer when we return to Vancouver. She does much better here than she did in Vancouver."

The little group of pupils responded well to the teaching they received. As the little Rigney girl was too young to be away from her parents, the boarding school closed for the year. The Rigney's, however, brought gifts from the farm to the sisters every Sunday. The sisters added other friends as they visited homes, especially in times of sickness.

But, the chronicles inform us, "This humble beginning was not all rosy. More



than one thorn pricked. Boredom, discouragement and privation of Mass and the sacraments made for a hard life. We sisters suffered great spiritual privations.

“Father Vary, being the only missionary on the Sound then, was forced to take frequent long absences so that the sisters were as many as five or six weeks without the consolations of the sacraments. They felt these deprivations keenly.

“The devil, too, was watching this mission. Jealous of this beginning of a mission beyond the limits of Vancouver and foreseeing that it would not be the last, he brought into play all the resources of his malice to ruin the foundation.” Difficulties succeeded difficulties. As there was real question of discontinuing St. Joseph Mission, when classes ended on June 22, the sisters packed their belongings. Bag and baggage, they left Steilacoom on June 25, 1864. They did not expect to return.

For this first mission from the Vancouver central house to end in failure concerned all the sisters. The community was young and this trial humiliated it; but they remembered that humility was one of their characteristic virtues and they knew that in humility Providence works take root; so they trusted. The chronicler writes, “God knew how to draw good from seeming failure as you will see.”

Mother Joseph returned from her nine-month trip to Montreal on July 11, 1864. Among the many business priorities awaiting her answers was a new request from Steilacoom.

The sisters' departure startled Father Vary into realizing that he had, indeed, not fulfilled his part of the agreement. He greatly regretted the result of the whole affair. In his disappointment, he went to Vancouver to make new arrangements. He had already spent over four hundred dollars repairing the house he had given the sisters. Now he could not afford to build a convent. The Civil War was not helping to increase the population. So he proposed to give the community his house (which they already had) and add a wing to it.

On November 21, 1864 Mother Joseph agreed to buy Father's property and the furniture that he had bought for the sisters for \$700 to be paid as the mission would furnish the means to do so. The deed lists the furniture: four chairs and a rocker, one desk, two tables, two clocks, one alarm clock, sixteen iron beds, a piano and a sawhorse.

The contract signed, Mother Joseph promised that the sisters would return as soon as the house would be ready.

## A NEW START IN STEILACOOM

This time there was to be no mistaking. Mother Joseph herself had a part in the planning of what would now be a two-storey wooden building considerably larger than the one originally planned. The completed Providence St. Joseph complex also included a carriage house and stables, a chicken coop, a garden and an orchard of Gravenstein apples.

Mother Joseph had her way this time in the choice of sisters for Steilacoom. Originally destined for Walla Walla, Sister Catherine in time arrived there. Sister Mary remained in Vancouver for a time, but she was to go back to St. Joseph's later and was to be there at its close.

By 1864 new arrivals from Montreal had swelled the number of professed sisters in Vancouver to nineteen. From this number three sisters newly arrived from Montreal were chosen to staff the re-opened mission in Steilacoom: Sister Mary

Joseph Humas, Superior; Sister Mary of Mt. Carmel Marquis, teacher; and Sister John of God Pinard, music teacher.

They were a well-prepared team. After her arrival in the West in 1862, Sister Mary of Mt. Carmel had studied English intensively to prepare to teach the more advanced pupils. Gratifying as was to be her success with the Steilacoom pupils, it was to be short-lived. A victim of the prevalent disease of consumption (tuberculosis), she was taken to Vancouver in 1870 to die at the age of twenty-five. Sister Mary Joseph had entered the Providence community at a mature age and had held the position of superior at Burlington, Vermont, before coming west.

Coming west right after her profession in 1858, Sister John had experienced the privations and hard work of the first Vancouver days. Her education in music would be valuable in her new mission.

In late November 1864, this new team of Providence Sisters left Vancouver for Steilacoom taking the route the first group had taken. Father Vary was at the wharf to greet them when they arrived in Steilacoom.

He brought them to the expanded Providence St. Joseph that the *Inventory of Providence Properties* describes as a 250' by 125' two-storey building that eventually, in 1867, was given to the sisters by Bishop A. M. A. Blanchet "for the instruction of the children of both sexes, boarders and day pupils."

The three sisters stood on the convent porch and held their breath as they looked down the gently rising hill to the panorama of Puget Sound with the South Sound Islands in the distance and snow-covered Mt. Rainer rising majestically to dominate the view to the east.

Pines and spruce trees mingled with orchards of apple trees close to well-built homes. They, too, the sisters decided, would have their orchard of Gravenstein apple trees. Little did they dream that the trees they were to plant would, a century later, knarled and sturdy, still be bearing heavy loads of apples.

At the foot of the hill, they saw the city center with its stores where they would be getting supplies. With their initial debt of \$700 for the furniture, they would live sparsely for awhile. They were pleased with everything about their simple, comfortable convent.

And the church! It had been moved from the Fort and there it was right to the left of the convent. Board by board, the soldiers had taken it apart and rebuilt it conveniently near the convent. A gem of a building it still is (1977) after over a hundred years of almost continual use. The bell in its tower still calls people to worship as it once rang the Angelus and Mass hours for the Providence Sisters, their pupils, and the town's people in 1864. Its Stations of the Cross, steel engravings tinted by a soldier artist, still remain an example of devotional art.

## ST. JOSEPH'S BECOMES KNOWN AS A GOOD SCHOOL

Almost immediately Sister Mary of Mt. Carmel began teaching the seven boarders and eighteen day pupils on the roster. Sister John of God started giving music lessons and singing classes. The curriculum offered the basic three R's drawing heavily on memorization, drill and competition as tools of learning. In public examinations at the end of each school year, the pupils demonstrated marked achievement in all basic subjects. But St. Joseph's had other attractions, too.

The Pierce County education records describe the school as having a "considerable reputation on account of its excellence in instruction in music and domestic science." Because of these extras, St. Joseph's drew pupils, many of them non-Catholics, from as far away as California.

The Catholic school operated a full nine-month's term while the public school in the Steilacoom district could finance only a three-month's term or, at best a six-month term each year.

The school roster included names of such prominent Steilacoom families as McKay, Harmon, Rigney, Groves and Keach. Mary Jane Goyner, the future Mother Mary Alexander of the Providence Sisters' generalate, had been a St. Joseph, Steilacoom pupil. So also were numbers of orphan girls, most of them placed originally in Vancouver. Among these was Emily Lake, the first orphan to be received in Vancouver.

As new missions opened, Mother Joseph often brought an orphan or two with her when she visited the houses. She left them there if she saw that they would benefit by living in a smaller house than was Vancouver's Providence. In 1872 the sisters returning to Steilacoom after retreat had four orphans with them. In a peak year like 1865-1866 the pupils numbered ten boarders, thirty-two day pupils, two orphans and ten boy "scholars."

Central in the school's curriculum was the teaching of religion. On special days, like Corpus Christi, an outdoor procession of the Blessed Sacrament dramatized publicly the faith and love of all those in any way connected with the school and parish. When Father was away on Sundays, and that was often, the sisters prepared what today might be called a para-liturgical service. Sisters, pupils and a few faithful people responded to the invitation of the church bell and assembled in the church at ten o'clock for the Rosary, the Way of the Cross and the singing of hymns.

At the Christmas midnight Mass sometimes four young people, sometimes as many as six received their first Communion. Preparation for this event included a three-day retreat preached by Father John B. Brondel. He had replaced Father Charles Vary in 1868; and he was later to become Bishop of Victoria, B.C. and then of Helena, Montana. Providence Sisters in Steilacoom enjoyed his guidance and pastoral concern for them for seven years.

Among these sisters were some notable Providence Sisters. Sister Mary of the Blessed Sacrament Roy had trained under Mother Emilie Gamelin and had received her admission to profession from her the night before the foundress died.

It was she who formed the Sisters of Providence of Kingston, Ontario, a community modeled on Mother Gamelin's community. Coming West in 1869, she took charge of the Steilacoom mission from 1871-1875 when it was closed. She left Steilacoom to become mistress of novices in Vancouver.

Another great superior of Providence St. Joseph was Sister John of the Cross Beaudoin. She too had known Mother Emilie Gamelin in her novitiate days.

She was among the twelve Providence Sisters to go to Santiago, Chile, in 1855 to join the five Providence Sisters and one postulant there after the failure of the first attempt to locate in Vancouver, Washington. Ten years later, when the sisters in Chile chose to separate from the mother house in Montreal, Sister John was one of the first to return to Montreal in loyalty to her mother community.

In 1866, when the Providence Sisters set up a generalate system of government, the first general chapter elected Mother Philomene as superior general. With the new mother general, Sister John made the month-long trip to the West where she took charge of the boarders in Vancouver. From 1871-1873 she held the post of superior of Steilacoom. The influence of both of these superiors had lasting effects on those who knew them there.

Among the talented and influential teachers who taught in Steilacoom were Sister Mary Dorothy Burke, prominent later as teacher in Yakima and Walla Walla; Sister Agnes States, the teacher most wanted in every school at that time; Sister Mary of the Precious Blood, and Sister Mary of Mt. Carmel.

Music lessons, besides attracting pupils to Providence schools, were their bread and butter. Chronicles of Walla Walla, Yakima, Olympia, Vancouver and Steilacoom sing the praises of Sister Providence Brissette. Her career of seventeen years as music teacher ended in 1889 when she began a second career of twenty years directing novices. Sisters too like Sister Amarine Lemaitre whose work included that of seamstress, cook, gardener, infirmarian, pharmacist and laundry worker, left their mark on the people of Steilacoom. In the twelve years the Sisters of Providence were there they touched many lives.

## SOCIAL SERVICE APOSTOLATES

At the foot of the hill on Starling Street stood a formidable jail, a two-storey brick building with grim barred windows. Built in 1858, the first jail in the territory, it served as a federal and a territorial prison. In a rough, pioneer country, the prisoners were hardened men to whom justice was meted out harshly. Violence erupted there more than once. To these men, the sisters sought to bring the message of Christ's loving mercy.

When Mother Philomene visited Steilacoom, she acceded to the sisters' request and authorized the apostolate of visiting the prisoners there. Two sisters began regular visits to the prisoners, sometimes writing letters for them, giving them news or just listening to them. The men appreciated their coming and some asked for Baptism. Although the sisters tried to be discerning, the men at times deceived them.

A man condemned to die on the scaffold seemed so touched by the concern of the sisters that he appeared to make his peace with God in preparation for death. He played the conversion role so well that he fooled the sisters and guards alike and thwarted the hands of justice by escaping in the night.

The Protestant jailer recognized the quieting effects on the inmates of the sisters' visits and welcomed them. He even permitted the men to go to the church for Sunday Mass and exempted them from prison work on Sundays. As a fringe benefit of this apostolate, in the fall of the year, the sisters brought home baskets of the finest blackberries on the coast, berries that grew near the jail.

The sisters made it a practice to visit the sick in their homes, answering calls for help or volunteering aid where they saw a need. They tidied homes, cooked meals and brought medicines and delicacies when the need existed. Sometimes they went in a carriage five or seven miles away to respond to calls from Protestants and Catholics alike.

If a child was sick, they relieved exhausted parents, sending them to bed and taking over the care of the child. In this way they were able to baptize more than one child they saw to be in danger of dying. The baptism of infants was important to the sisters. According to the popular understanding of theology at that time, unbaptized babies went to a place they called "limbo" and never attained heaven.

Among their pupils, too, the sisters exercised the skills of a nurse. During epidemics of measles, scarlet fever, pneumonia, a whole boarding school was often bed-ridden. Boarders learned the kindness and skill of the sisters and grew close to them in love and appreciation. A doctor, unnamed in the chronicles, gave gratuitous service to the sisters when they needed his professional help. "And he was a Protestant," the chronicles tell us.

The *Personnel and Works* ledger in a typical year's chronicles, records ninety-five visits to homes, nine all-night watches with the sick and a hundred twenty-five meals given the needy. The number of personnel members varies from the two

sisters who began the mission with a laywoman to five sisters, one third order sister and a handyman.

When the sisters returned in 1864 for the second start of Providence St. Joseph the addition to the convent still needed finishing. When an old man knocked on the door to ask for work, Sister Superior discovered that he had some knowledge of carpentry and of gardening and was willing to try anything. She hired him for room and board and a small salary. With two orphan boys, he occupied the attic of the building. For the next eight years, he cared for the garden, apple orchard, animals and grounds and kept up repairs on the building.

Then, in 1873, the chronicles say, "Our handyman left us. St. Joseph had to come to our aid. He did so in the person of a remarkable old man who offered to stay with us and give us his services."

## MONEY PROBLEMS

In 1867 the sisters had spent three hundred dollars to ready the land adjoining the convent for planting an orchard, a garden and pasture for the animals. The farm provided food for the sisters and pupils and brought in a little income: eighty dollars one year, fifty dollars another. As ordinary sources of revenue the school relied on music lessons; tuition; boarders, who paid a hundred and ten dollars a year if they could afford to do so, and Father Brondel's check for fifteen dollars a month for his meals. This income, far from sufficient to meet running expenses, needed constant supplementing.

When Mother Joseph visited Steilacoom in 1865, she suggested that the sisters go on a begging tour in the Bay area to collect the money and lumber needed to complete their building. In Olympia she collected enough money to defray the travel expenses of herself and companion thus sparing Steilacoom the necessity of reimbursing her. The chronicles tell of the begging experience.

"Sister Mary Joseph and Sister Augustin, although they dreaded going begging among prejudiced and unbelieving people, carried out the wish of their superior. God blessed their obedience with gifts of \$200 and enough lumber to serve their needs. That year, too, a pay performance at Christmas time brought in enough money for current expenses."

Bazaars provided the usual way of meeting money crises. Such a crisis came when Sister Olivier Caron took office as superior in 1866 with a twelve hundred dollar debt on the books and an unexpected expense draining the money box. Since, the people said, the church had been moved to its present location to benefit the sisters and not the townspeople, the sisters must assume the expenses of lighting and heating the church. How to raise the money? The sisters gave a Christmas bazaar and netted \$330, enough to tide them over this crisis.

The sisters sponsored three more bazaars, using every free minute and working into the nights to prepare articles for the bazaars and then going to the bazaar sites to set up and staff booths. In each of these the sisters received only half of the proceeds. In the first, half of the \$570 earned went to Father Mans to help build his church in Port Townsend. Father Brondel received half of the proceeds from the Olympia bazaar for the church there; and Father Prefontaine, half of the Seattle proceeds for his church.

This means of raising money made inroads into the sisters' time and energy. Yet the chronicles show no evidence that the sisters found anything unusual about the bazaar financial arrangements. In the three cities above, Providence Sisters, in time, established hospitals and a school.

For crisis times Providence kept providing generous people to tide the sisters over their difficulties. In 1868, following a cold winter, the Steilacoom crops were poor so the thirty-eight day pupils could pay little tuition. The chronicles testify to rewarded faith. "St. Joseph had to do something for us," they say. "On January 2, a parent brought his little girl to board with us. As he left, he gave the sisters a hundred dollar cash payment."

Another entry reads, "By the spring of 1873, we could not meet our bills. Then Providence sent us Mr. Atkinson, a Protestant, who saw the poverty of the sisters and offered to help. With his wife, he put on an entertainment and bazaar for the mill workers, a soiree that netted \$212 for us.

Such providential happenings often changed to discouraging news. In the three sentences that follow the announcement of this gift, the chronicler wrote three terse sentences: "Then came a new trial. Two of our cows died. We have Mass only every other week and then for only half the week."

## TRIALS AND JOYS

The spiritual deprivations and their isolation in Steilacoom caused the sisters their greatest suffering. Mission life away from Vancouver was still new in the West. A sister's day normally radiated out from its central event, participation in the daily Eucharistic Sacrifice of the Mass. Repeatedly to be deprived of its graces for days in a row challenged the faith and hope and love of the little group missioned in Steilacoom.

At first with only one priest and, later with only a few priests serving the whole Puget Sound, daily Mass, even regular Sunday Mass, at any one place was an impossibility. The sisters saw God's will in the situation and used their initiative to strengthen each other and their pupils in the bonds of a two-fold love of God and of all His people. The chronicles are beautiful on this subject.

"December, 1867: We were tired and lonesome when we thought of the sisters in Vancouver together for midnight Mass and Christmas holidays. Besides, the mothers from the generalate in Canada had just arrived in Vancouver. For three weeks we have had no priest here, no Christmas Mass. At midnight, on Christ's birthday, one of the sisters got up and began singing, 'Nouvelle Agréable.' All the sisters rose and went to the chapel to praise God for the gift of the new born Jesus to mankind. They offered Him the gift of their isolation and loneliness. In the morning, they celebrated Christmas with their orphans, giving gifts and candy and singing carols."

In the priest's absence, the sisters celebrated as best they could all the feasts dear to them. One March 19, St. Joseph's day and that of Our Lady of Sorrows, too, they had all the ceremonial of the renewal of vows, with decorations on the altar, the singing of the "Ecce Quam Bonum," dedication to Mary, the "Kiss of peace" and a treat.

When in the spring of 1868 the monotony was broken by a visit from Mother Mary Philomene and Sister Mary Joseph, there was great rejoicing. But the best breaks came in the summer when school closed in late June and the sisters went to Vancouver for an eight-day retreat and a vacation. July and August included part-time work in Vancouver, work in the companionship of their sisters. Sisterly friendships deepened, learning took place and a strengthening within each sister of the common Providence goals. At vacation's end the sisters left for their missions renewed.



But some sisters always had to forfeit the Vancouver summer experience. The Steilacoom mission remained open the year round, with orphans to care for, the sick and the prisoners to visit and the farm to oversee. Usually the superior remained home with another sister. These two would make a private retreat under the direction of the mission priest. One summer, after a year of financial difficulties and little money for travel, Father Brondel gave a retreat to all six sisters on the mission.

After 1868, when another Providence mission opened on the Puget Sound at Tulalip, some Steilacoom sisters went there to share retreats directed by Father Eugene Chirouse, the famous O.M.I. Indian missionary. The Steilacoom sisters, as true missionaries, expected to experience the mysteries of the Cross as well as those of the Resurrection. Quietly, zealously, they used the opportunities available to them to spread God's good news in this city that had, in 1863, given promise of growth.

## THE CLOSE OF THE MISSION

That promise gradually dwindled. Initially, it had been the fort at Steilacoom that had attracted pioneers to settle near it for protection against the Indians. By 1858 the danger from Indian skirmishes pretty well ended in the Puget Sound area. The soldiers staffed the fort for another decade then, in 1869, abandoned it. Effects of the fort's imminent closing had begun to have bearing on Providence St. Joseph already in 1867, when many families of the garrison personnel moved away. The school enrollment, never great, dropped to five orphans and six boarders and a few day pupils from an already declining city.

The opening of a new federal prison on McNeil Island in 1873 left only county prisoners in the Starling Street jail; so the services of the sisters there lessened. The relocation of the federal prison and its personnel also affected the school enrollment. After the Christmas vacation of 1873 very few boarders returned, reducing the classes to ten pupils each.

But the real cause of Steilacoom's decline was the railway situation. The railroad, invented in 1829 and pushing westward by 1830 gave rise to countless, gripping human dramas. Other books recount some of these colorful stories. The railroad had special impact on Providence Sisters in Steilacoom and in Yakima City. It was the chief reason for the closing of the Steilacoom mission; and it caused the happy move of the Yakima City mission to North Yakima. Cities rose and fell on decisions made by railroads. Steilacoom fell; North Yakima rose.

The Northern Pacific Railroad began construction in 1870. By 1872 officials of the company came west to select its western terminus. They cruised the Puget Sound area and listened warily to land prospectors who had gambled on possible sites and bought huge acreages in one or other of them. Among other likely sites, the scouting committee selected Tacoma, Seattle and Steilacoom. In 1870, Seattle was a small town; Tacoma, platted only in 1869, had a population of one hundred. Its name was not even mentioned in a directory that devoted six pages to Steilacoom.

But Tacoma had some convincing men with immense capital. Among others, Mr. Charles Wright, on the Northern Pacific Board of Directors, and General M. M. McCarver had heavily invested in Tacoma land. Their influence and that of others prevailed. On July 14, 1872 Tacoma received word that it had been chosen for the terminus. On December 16 the final spike linked Portland with the Sound. Steilacoom had little future now.

It remained a farming town, rich in its mild climate, its fertile soil and its scenic beauty. Life centered about its homes, churches, farms and its Ladies Aid Circles. People enjoyed rural patterns of living with social gatherings featuring fried chicken, coffee, pickles, cheese and cakes. It remained a comfortable small town in which to live.

With calls for schools in other places unanswered, the sisters saw now a greater challenge to their apostolic zeal elsewhere. The Catholic church remained open; but the Methodist and the Presbyterian churches closed in 1875; and many business houses along the water front gradually moved to Tacoma.

The sisters must have watched with anxiety as more and more people picked up and left the city. Yet the chronicles of 1875 end in June with no hint of closing the mission. Rather do they end on an upbeat. The last paragraph reads: "School closed June 24, our pastor's feast, without examinations. This year St. Joseph provided all our necessities and even let us build a stable and make some repairs, all valued at \$150."

There are other indications that it had been a good year. The sisters had taught and cared for six orphans, eighteen boarders, and twenty day pupils. Their social service apostolate showed: fourteen home visits, eighty-eight families helped when the sisters took care of one hundred ten sick people in their homes, thirteen visits to the county prison and 325 meals given to the poor who came to the convent for food. The education and social service apostolates were flourishing. The financial books closed showing \$2,017.00 expenses and \$2,118.00 receipts leaving a balance of \$101.00.

A specially strong community of sisters had staffed Providence St. Joseph that last year. The chronicles give evidence that the four sisters had common objectives in their apostolates and in their religious living and that they constructively discussed the affairs of the mission.

Their superior, Sister Mary of the Blessed Sacrament Roy was the kind of person who wanted their input. Sister Providence of the Sacred Heart Brissette, Sister Mary Eugene Marchand, in her youth still but with the potentials of the future provincial superior, and Sister Mary, a foundress in Steilacoom in the West were all sisters who had the pre-requisites for shared decision making.

They most likely had a part in the making of the decision to close the mission on October of 1875. The provincial chronicles announced the decision as the most important event of 1875. The reason for closing given there is the fact that "they had scarcely any pupils because of the departure of families for Tacoma and other places where business seemed more flourishing." The community owned the building and land in Steilacoom and did not immediately abandon the idea of returning to it should the city grow. In the meantime, the new mission in Yakima City, made possible partly by the release of personnel from Steilacoom, took the name St. Joseph Academy.

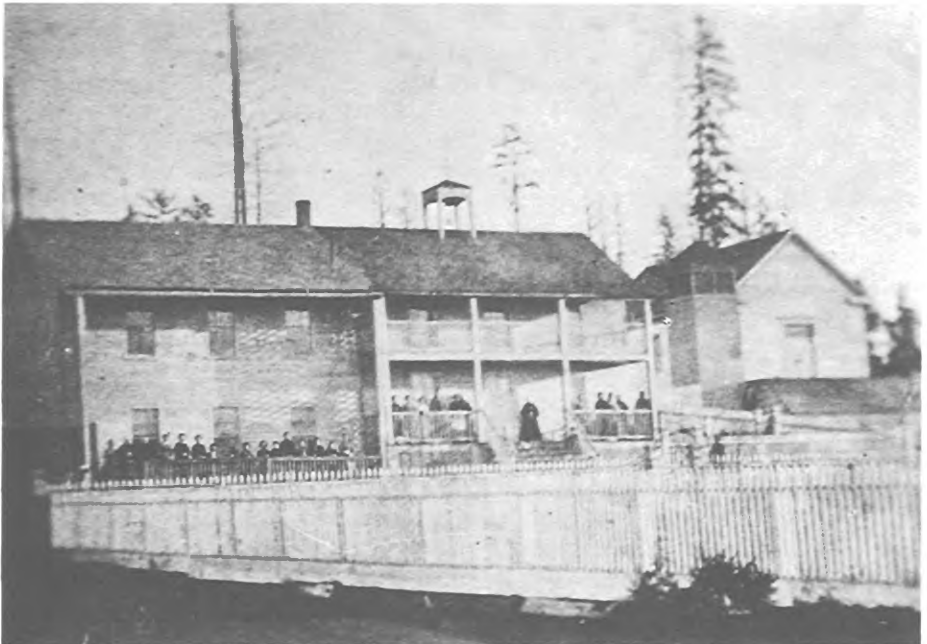
As a striking memorial to their apostolate in Steilacoom, the sisters left in the city one of their own Providence Sisters. Sister Mary Peter Cusack had died there of a stroke in March, 1871. She had been the English teacher when a stroke and paralysis quickly claimed her life. As it had so often happened in this mission that the sisters had to go without Mass, by a strange set of circumstances, Providence decreed that Sister Mary Peter be buried without a funeral Mass.

Father Brondel, ready to begin the Mass, had a severe stroke of apoplexy and was unable to say Mass. But he could not think of Sister's being buried in unblest ground; so he asked to be carried to the grave site on the mission grounds for the final blessing. Later, in 1887 Sister Mary Peter's remains were moved to the

cemetery in Vancouver. In 1875 the sisters reluctantly left the lonely grave as they closed the doors of the school and convent.

The three-storey Providence house on Starling Street, Steilacoom, stood empty for many years. No boarders looked out from its porches to the city at the foot of the hill. No bells rang out the hours from the convent belfry. No sisters were there to bless the Lord with a prayer as they rose each morning before dawn or to pray the “De Profundus” for their departed ones as they retired each night at nine.

But the good that they had accomplished between 1863 and 1875 lived on in the lives of pupils, prisoners and families whom they had touched. Steilacoom, the sisters felt, by the grace of God was a better place because they had been there.



*Steilacoom school and church about 1870.*



*Sister Providence of the Sacred Heart, early music teacher in Steilacoom and other Providence schools, later became mistress of novices.*



*Sister Mary of the Precious Blood Norton, foundress and beloved teacher in Steilacoom was among the first five sisters to come West in 1856.*

# Chapter 3

## *The Way It Was In Tulalip*

1868-1901 TULALIP, WASHINGTON

*A Story of Our Lady of Seven Dolors Industrial School*

### A DESIRE FULFILLED

The opening of Our Lady of Seven Dolors Industrial School in 1868 stirred the hearts of many of the Providence missionary sisters in the West. Back in Montreal in their novitiate and young-professed days they had listened to bishops and priests tell of their Providence missions in the Far West. Anecdotes of Indians with their novel customs and colorful dress had captivated eager listeners among the sisters.

More than that, the fact that hundreds of these “poor children of the woods” had never heard the Good News of Christianity had whetted their apostolic zeal. They had volunteered and been accepted for the Oregon missions. Then after a long, difficult journey, they had reached Vancouver and had begun serving God in the person of their neighbor, a white neighbor almost exclusively.

No one had deliberately misled them in Montreal; nor were all the sisters in Vancouver praying for an assignment to work with Indians. Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart who had founded the Sisters of Providence in the West made periodic business trips to the mother house. Visiting Montreal in 1863 and 1864 she had given the sisters an existential picture of the apostolate then being carried on in the West. They knew, too, that the Church of Canada in sending priests to the Church of Oregon had given them as a first mission to care for the Christians there, mostly of Canadian origin and white.

But for some the dramatic faded slowly and the urgency of bringing Christ’s message to an infidel people persisted. These sisters had renewed hopes when they heard the news of the Tulalip Indian mission. In 1864 St. Ignatius Mission in Montana had opened to offer opportunities for the apostolate among Indians to a founding group of four sisters from the Vancouver vicariate. Now two Indian missions would be needing sisters.

The glamor of the imagined appeal of the Indian apostolate wore off soon enough. Something much deeper and much more rewarding replaced it as the sisters came to know and love the Indians as persons. They learned that they are a sensitive people with soft voices and a reverence for nature. They are a people who find beauty and meaning in cloud formations, the smell of the air, the lap of the waves, the feel of wet sand.

When they meet a stranger they react slowly examining his every movement, facial expression and tone of voice and words. They must be sure of the sincerity of his mission. Keen at distinguishing selfish interests from genuine concern for them, they wait cautiously before extending their friendship. Once convinced of a stranger’s honesty, courage and proven interest in them, the Indians become true friends. The “black robes” and the “women of God” won their love and their loyalty; as the Indians saw their courage and their willingness to sacrifice self to bring

them knowledge of the Christian God Who is Father, Brother and Lover to all of them.

The Indians' way of life, as the sisters came to know it, was different from that of the white man's. Its simplicity, family ties and values provided a solid foundation on which to build Christianity. Puget Sound Indians especially loved their children and their families.

A visitor entering their long house saw a beautiful family life lived there. Smoke and a distinctive odor greeted him as he gradually distinguished groups of women seated on the floor braiding mats or baskets, weaving blankets or singing softly to their papooses. Men, if it was winter time, would be carving bowls and ladles or making tools for hunting and fishing.

Such were the houses into which the Providence Sisters were to find a welcome as they would come to visit the homes, care for the sick or convince parents of the value of sending their children to Our Lady of Seven Dolors Industrial School.

## CHRISTIANITY FLOURISHED AT TULALIP BEFORE 1868

Before the Providence Sisters arrived in Tulalip, Oblate priests and brothers of Mary Immaculate (O.M.I.'s) had already baptized hundreds of Puget Sound Indians and had begun a school for boys there. The calendar year 1858 began a new era for Puget Sound Indians, many of whom later spoke of "the times before Father Chirouse came" or "after Father Chirouse came." He arrived among the Snohomish Indians at Tulalip to found St. Anne's Mission.

In the 1856 treaty with the Indians, the government had promised that "an agricultural and industrial school would be ready within the year and equipped to teach a thousand pupils free of charge . . ." In 1859, the government formally ratified Tulalip as an Indian Reservation and appointed Father Eugene Casimir Chirouse as official teacher of the Indians with permission to build a school and church on the reservation.

In 1861, Governor Stevens signed the contract making Father Chirouse's little log school the first government contract Indian school in the country. It opened with twenty-five pupils and inadequate funds. The Indian agent pleaded for money, and the government authorized the building of a boys' school with a dormitory. In 1864, authorization came for a similar school for girls. It was built but, until 1869, no appropriation of funds came to run it.

There should have been no problem about getting money, even after President Grant's recommendation that reservations be assigned to various religious groups. At that time, while Presbyterians and Methodists were given charge of all the other reservations on Puget Sound, Tulalip was given to Father Chirouse by the U. S. Department of Indian Affairs. It was one of the eight assigned to the Catholic religion.

Of the seventy-two Indian agencies then existing, only these eight went to the Catholics; this although thirty-seven of them had been Christianized by Catholic missionaries. Eighty thousand Catholic Indians passed thus from Catholic influence to Protestant control. Father Chirouse was grateful that the Tulalip Reservation was assigned to Catholics.

Indian superintendents and agents continued to praise the marked success of Father Chirouse's school and to petition for more money. The territorial government recommended that the United States Government honor Father's request for \$5,000 for the school; but no immediate response came through.



As soon as the government had authorized the building of the girls' school and dormitory, Father Chirouse had requested the Providence Sisters to staff the mission. At almost the same time, Father De Smet, S. J., Superior of the Mountain Missions, had asked for Providence Sisters to accept an Indian school for girls in Montana. Mother Joseph was in Montreal at the time; and Sister Blandine, who had been waiting for eight years to teach the Indians, lost no time in writing her the good news. She knew her superior's desire to serve the Indians. Mother Joseph, in 1857 had written Bishop Larocque in Montreal, "I am in hopes that Providence will find places for us to live among the Indians. These poor unfortunates have been driven to the mountains by the whites."

The mother house in Montreal readily granted permission for both Indian missions. By October 17, 1864 led by Sister Mary of the Infant Jesus, Superior, four Providence Sisters ended their drama-filled journey across the Rocky Mountains to St. Ignatius, Montana. Here in dire poverty, they began St. Ignatius Indian School.

Sister Blandine had four years to wait for her turn to open Providence of Our Lady of Seven Dolors in Tulalip. In the 1860's, the officials in Washington, D. C. were busy about secession, Negro problems and new western territories opening up. The Indians of Puget Sound were peaceful; peaceful in great part because of the influence of Father Chirouse. They were far from Washington, D. C.; and it was easy to forget promises the white man had agreed to keep. One Indian agent remarked, "No one pays any attention to the Indian."

The territorial legislature in Olympia, Washington, tried its best to awaken the national government to the urgent need for a girls' school to educate the girls and also to show them how to live wholesome lives. A letter to the U. S. Commission of Indian Affairs tells the sad facts when it says, "Almost universally these girls fall victims at an early age to habits of the most degrading morality." The Indian parents wanted help.

The Tulalip chronicler wrote, "The Oblate fathers have given hope to these Indians that the sisters would come to teach their girls lessons that would make them fervent Christians and good mothers of families. The Indians waited patiently. Sometimes weary of waiting they would say, 'We have waited so long that our hearts tell us that the sisters will not come.'"

The boys of Father Chirouse's school were concerned enough about their Indian sisters to write to the authorities in the nation's capital this touching appeal, "Four years ago the government promised us that Sisters of Providence would come to take care of the Indian girls. Please have pity on our girls and send those Sisters of Charity. Tell Andrew Jackson, our father in Washington, that the children of the Indians of the Sound, both boys and girls, have the feeling of children toward him . . ."

It was 1868, and still the girls' school remained empty for lack of response to all the pleas sent to Washington, D.C. Father Chirouse had no funds to operate on his own.

## THE SISTERS ARRIVE IN TULALIP

Finally Father took drastic measures, trusting Providence to get the \$5,000 that he had requested from the government. He decided to start the school without the funds. The chronicler tells a vivid story of his preparations, the trip of the sisters to Tulalip and their arrival there. "For the feast of the Assumption, 1868 Father invited the tribes of Puget Sound to assemble at St. Anne's Mission for an important announcement. He asked Bishop A. M. A. Blanchet to come for the

occasion. He appealed to Mother Joseph in Vancouver to have the sisters destined for the mission in Tulalip come for the feast and ready to open the school.

Mother Joseph had been awaiting the request as had the three foundresses of the mission; Sister Blandine Colin, Superior; Sister Hyacinth Boucher and Sister Mary of Faith Jacques-Duhaut.

The chronicler takes up the story. "Everyone wished to contribute something as our apostolate with the Indians had a special appeal. Our imminent leave-taking created a great stir. We profited by the enthusiasm and generosity of our friends to fill our trunks with everything that we would need to complete our chapel and our convent home which we supposed would not be very sumptuous. The officers of the garrison contributed twelve blankets, twelve linen sheets and fifty dollars' worth of medicine.

"The hour of departure arrived. On August 5, feast of Our Lady of the Snows, with mixed feelings we said good-bye to our sisters in Vancouver. We had spent the first twelve years of our missionary life there. Now we were leaving for a new field of endeavor different from any we had known. The more difficult the place, the more glory God would receive! Confiding ourselves to Divine Providence we started our trip to the Snohomish Indians." Bishop Blanchet was with the sisters.

Enroute they stopped at Steilacoom for a few days awaiting the boat to take them to Tulalip. Providence St. Joseph in Steilacoom was in its fifth year. The sisters there excitedly welcomed their bishop and the new missionaries. They already knew much about Tulalip and Father Chirouse's boys. More than once on his fund raising tours, Father had brought his choir to Steilacoom. They would sing a high Mass in the church where they impressed the congregation with their training and voice quality. In the afternoon and evening they would give concerts in the Town Hall and collect funds for their school. On these occasions Father Chirouse would visit the sisters and give an instruction to their pupils. Yes, the Steilacoom sisters felt that they knew something of the life their sisters would be living on the Indian mission. In the two or three days the sisters spent together, they shared news, reminisced and enjoyed each other. Visits of their sisters were rare breaks for sisters on the missions.

Then on August 10, early in the morning, it was time for the travelers to move on. That evening at 10:30 their boat reached the Tulalip reservation at a point about a mile from the mission buildings. Here an Oblate brother directing a crew of Indian boys in two large canoes, welcomed them and took them aboard. Singing gaily the boys skillfully paddled the canoes to the mission landing. From here they proudly escorted their bishop and their long-awaited sisters to Father Chirouse's residence for a late dinner. It was after midnight when Father took the sisters to their new home, gave them his blessing and left them.

Alone now the three sisters felt very close to each other. "Tulalip! An Indian mission at last! God bless our work here!" They spontaneously breathed the prayer. Tulalip! The name had a melodious ring. In the morning they would ask its meaning; and they would see for themselves the appropriateness of calling their bay "Duh-hlay-lup," the Indian word meaning "land-locked." Without looking beyond their dormitory that night, they fell asleep repeating the musical name, "Tulalip."

The chronicles continue the foundation story. "So excited were we that we rose at four o'clock in the morning. We remembered that it was August 11, St. Philomene's day. By coincidence Mother Philomene, Superior General, had visited this mission during her 1867 visit in the West. She had even slept one night in this very room. So we feel that we have a right to consider her as the first foundress of this mission. Then Mass time came and we received Holy Communion.

"We spent the day of the eleventh receiving the visit of the men and women of the agency and in unpacking our trunks. The next day we had holy Mass in our little

chapel and Our Lord came to stay with us day and night. In the afternoon, we had the blessing of the house. The days before the feast, Indians kept arriving from all sides and were busy setting up their temporary lodgings. Indian chiefs, men, women and children came to greet us. They shook hands with us and with gestures and signs assured us of our welcome. We had come to teach their girls!

“The fourteenth was a Friday, Our Lady of Sorrows day. Why not open the doors on Our Lady of Sorrows day. Why not open the doors of Our Lady of Seven Dolors Indian School immediately? Two pupils presented themselves: Stephanie, a child of seven; and Judith, a woman who after her conversion had moved to a little cabin on the reservation to be away from temptations. She was serving the missionary fathers, doing their washing and mending and teaching catechism to the children. At her request Father Chirouse had promised her the first place in the school when the sisters would come. First place she had.”

The great feast of the Assumption arrived, a day to be commemorated with like celebrations for many years afterwards. Hundreds of Indians from Father Chirouse’s wide-flung parish of five reservations on Puget Sound assembled for Mass inside and around St. Anne’s Mission Church newly built and ready to be blessed. Father Chirouse’s parish included, besides the Tulalip reservation, those of Swimomish, now in Skagit county; Lummi in Whatcom County, Muckleshoot in King County and Fort Madison in Kitsap County, as well as other Indians not on reservations.

The congregation was colorful. Men draped in bright colored blankets, children of all ages, women wearing skirts of cedar bark or tanned animal hides, many with long colored shawls sat on the meadow grass, knelt, or stood in reverent silence. Bishop A. M. A. Blanchet sang the high Mass alternating with the boys’ trained choir and the music of the school band. A few people received Communion, and after Mass a great many were confirmed. The initiation to the religious customs of the Indians and to their characteristic reverence impressed the sisters and gave them courage.

The afternoon assembly began with Benediction outdoors on the sandy beach and grassy meadows sloping gently to the bay. Then followed an oft-to-be-repeated school ceremony called, “public examinations and distribution of prizes.” Father Chirouses’ boys presented their note books to the Indian agent, recited their catechism and answered questions. The top scholars received prizes and all demonstrated their singing and musical ability. The superintendent, the agent, and men and women of the reserve present for the occasion were impressed. Indian parents were proud of their boys.

Speeches came next: boys’ addresses to the bishop, to the agent, to the sisters and to all the guests; then speeches of the principal Indians and finally, talks by Father Chirouse and by Bishop Blanchet.

The bishop, the Oblate Fathers and brothers and the sisters remarked the tone of triumph of the whole day. This same group assembled in the convent chapel in the evening for the erection of the Stations of the Cross. All parted with a feeling of satisfaction and peace. The next day, as the Indians broke camp to return to their homes, several of them left their girls with the sisters to begin school.

## THE SISTERS WORK OUT THEIR APOSTOLATE

The excitement of the first days over, the three sisters took time to make plans. Sister Mary Faith, naturally timid, although she felt relaxed in the small group, showed a readiness to cooperate rather than offer suggestions. Sister Blandine, the

superior, an experienced western missionary, a solid and hard-working sister, needed the imagination and keen mind of the third sister in the new community.

Sister Hyacinthe, six years professed and twenty-five years old, cheerful and full of ideas, sized up the needs of the school and of community living, suggested ways to meet them and offered to take the hardest work for herself. This was the first of five missions that she was to help found before beginning her second career of forty years soliciting funds in mines, fisheries and logging camps. "To serve the Lord with joy," kept recurring to her after her daily meditations as her "Thought for the Day."

The three needed only to look out on the glories of the Tulalip scenery to become enthusiastic about the place. The reservation surrounded the bay with a jagged shoreline forming a huge semicircle that opens into the main waters of Puget Sound. The Indians' homes, made of rough planks, faced the bay in long rows. They lived with the sound of water always in their ears, the lapping of waves or the fury of white caps on stormy days and the quiet flow of water as the men paddled their canoes. Often the fishermen would catch the tune of clam diggers on the beach and berry pickers in the woods and join both groups in a symphony of song.

The mission buildings near where Mission Creek empties into the bay were part of the shore line. In 1868 the church and the rectory were a few feet away from the boys' dormitory on the right and the girls' dormitory and the sisters' apartments on the left. Father Chirouse and his boys had cleared, fenced and planted over fifteen acres of the mission grounds. By August and September the garden was yielding potatoes, cabbage, peas, corn, melons and squash. In the orchard, apples awaited a frost to give them color before harvest time. That they were hardy trees is evidenced by their continued abundant harvest even today (1977).

The sisters realized that much of the foundation for their work had already been laid. The Indians had responded to the Oblate priests' preaching and no other religious sect had tried to evangelize these Indians. By the time the sisters arrived, the moral level of the Indians had risen so that few polygamists were left; few relied on the magic and sorcery of the medicine men; and a temperance society had lessened the prevalence of alcohol.

## CIVILIZATION — WHAT?

By the contract of August 11, 1868, the school was to educate, clothe, feed and civilize the Indian pupils in return for a government payment of \$118 a year "per head." Father Chirouse's request for \$5,000 finally came through after military men became the Indian agents. Agent Howe recognized that knowledge of moral and social and religious duties as well as progress in literacy was the only solid foundation for the education and "civilization" of the Indians.

The sisters wondered about the meaning of the word "civilization." In what ways did the Indians lack civilization? Or did they, really, lack it? The prevalent idea that the white man's ways provided the norms for civilization must have influenced the sisters, even though they quickly came to see value in the Indians' native customs, and felt a real affection for their pupils. They loved them as important people. The current thinking of the white man about the Indians' way of life must have puzzled the sisters at times; but they saw, too, ways in which the white man's way could raise Indian standards of living in good ways.

How did the white man live? He had a diet of meat, vegetables, poultry, fish, cakes and desserts. The Indians' main food was roots, berries, and fish and elk meat dried over smoking fires and stored in baskets high on shelves in their houses. The white

man sat at a table and ate with knives and forks and spoons. The Indians sat on the ground, serving themselves with their hands or a ladle, from a common pot.

The Indians lived, several families together, in long houses of cedar. Cattail mats separated families, each of which had its own fire for cooking, light and heat. Smoke filled the houses. While the white man's one-family home had furniture, stoves and comforts, the Indians had few, if any, conveniences. They wore clothes made from pine or cedar bark or from the hides of deer or elk. The white man fashioned his clothes from woven cotton, wool and silk. Each Indian tribe had its own language; but all understood Chinook. The white man spoke English. He understood little of the native culture of the Indian, of its beauty and simple reverence of nature.

An Indian woman speaking in the 1970's told the writer of her childhood memories of her father, the tribal chief, who when nineteen years old had attended the Providence Sisters' school to learn English and to prepare for his First Communion. They were happy memories of a life close to nature. The woods they roamed were full of berries, timber wolves, deer, elk, bears and chipmunks.

On Sunday mornings after church they would sit by the creek and eat bread, butter and slices of beef. They drank from the clear stream using skunk cabbage leaves for cups. Her father would say, "Be still and listen to the water talk." He taught them a love of nature and a reverence that spared and preserved it.

After lunch they picked trilliums and ferns, watched the blue jays circle in the air and listened to the sea gulls scream. On the beach at dusk, their father called their attention to the fish hawk as he dashed under the waves for his evening meal, never failing to come up with a fish in his beak.

In the long house, her mother taught her to weave mats and baskets and to sew the deer skin clothing. She learned her family history from their totem pole that depicted it in symbol, and from the stories that she heard as they sat on mats around the fire.

If civilization meant speaking English, worshipping God the white man's way, using knives and forks, keeping spotlessly clean, and sewing and dressing the white man's way, then, yes, they lacked civilization. But if civilization meant a great culture, that they did have.

On this native culture the sisters could build, careful not to destroy its good points. The first aim of the sisters was to teach them Christ's message. The social and moral values would follow from that. From parents and brothers, these Indians already knew much about Christianity.

Classified as an industrial school, Our Lady of Seven Dolors had a curriculum including reading, writing, catechism, basic arithmetic and, for the more gifted, history and geography. In band music, singing, spelling and mental arithmetic the Indian children excelled. In an apprenticeship manner, the girls learned to cook, sew, care for the younger girls, wash, iron and do general housework. They worked and lived with the sisters and grew close to them. In spite of the rigid regime, the girls said lovingly, "There is no one like the sisters."

The children followed a regular horarium, a demanding one for "children of the woods" for whom time had no meaning. They rose at five, had Mass at six, followed by breakfast eaten in silence. Then they did their chores in the dormitory, dining room, stairways or kitchen. The sisters worked with them, checking also, in each room, oil for lamps and fire wood supplies for stoves.

Only in 1899, thirty years after the foundation of the school, did the school have any electricity and then only to light a few rooms. Outdoor toilets had to be cleaned, root cellars kept orderly and wells and pumps in running order. "Civilization for the Indian included a savoir-faire in the white man's way of life. Its price was hard work.



They had little time for play, what with stockings to mend and baths to take in turns in the afternoons after school."

Superintendents of Indian affairs in their reports on the sisters' school spoke of the excellent seamstresses the girls had become. They made and wore the white man's clothes with pride. When they could supply extras, the sisters added "finery" to the girls' wardrobes. Reports of the agents repeatedly remarked the appearance of the whole school. With French Canadian expertise, the sisters trained the girls in order and cleanliness.

Sickness and death came before the sisters had been there a fortnight. The priests brought one of their young pupils, the son of a Lummi chief to the infirmary to be nursed by the sisters. They could not save him. They used the occasion of his death to teach their girls the "civilized" customs of burial.

Father Chirouse and his helpers had already changed the Indian custom of laying the dead in a canoe that they then hoisted to the top of a fir tree and left there. They now had a cemetery that the Indians reverently cared for. On All Souls Day they went there praying and singing in solemn procession. But the fear of death lingered on. When death visited a home, the Indians vacated it, often burning it.

And death visited the sisters' school several times each year. Each time it came to claim a child the sisters felt uneasy, fearing the parents would withdraw their children. The Indians were easy victims of sickness, much of it a legacy of the white man. Measles, scarlet fever, consumption, pneumonia annually struck in epidemic proportions. When the infirmary was full, the sick and the well had to remain together. If the sisters sent the sick children home, they would very likely die in their damp, unventilated houses.

Clearly, one of the Tulalip apostolates was the care of the sick in their homes as well as at school. On home visits the sisters entered the smoke-filled, dimly lit houses, strong with the smell of dried fish and damp clothes. Lying on mats, the patients needed running sores cleaned and bandaged. They needed medicine, a commodity promised by the government treaty with the Indians, but one in which they were repeatedly shortchanged.

Doctors had likewise been promised but failed to materialize in many cases. The sisters did what they could to nurse the sick, sit up with the dying and bring food to the children. "Kind women of prayer" the Indians called them.

Sister Martin Lefrançois was among those who served at the Tulalip mission. During her many years as postulant mistress after 1907 she amused and instructed the young sisters with anecdotes of Tulalip. She told her stories in quaint English with a French accent, but her love for her Indians came through strong and clear. She had spent eight years with them either in the sewing department, the sacristy, or as "matron" of the school. This last duty brought her in contact with the parents and the sick in their homes. She was in her twenties then.

## THE SCHOOL PROSPERS

The chronicler sums up the first four years of Our Lady of Seven Dolors School. "Our school," she writes, "since its humble beginning has prospered well. Bishops, priests and lay people who have visited us have expressed satisfaction with our teaching methods and the progress made by our pupils. Of the twenty-four pupils that we now have, twelve have received their First Communion either on Christmas, Easter or the Assumption feast.

"Seven have left the school to get married. These had a Christian wedding and are an edification to whites and Indians in their homes. This fact encourages the parents



to confide their girls to us. They are so attached to their children that they would not part with them did they not see in our former pupils the advantages of a good education. The gaiety and happiness and affection for us that characterize our girls pleases their parents.

“We try to make our pupils’ stay with us a happy experience, giving them pretty clothes, varying the day’s occupations with games, round dances, and with singing for which they have an aptitude. They love flowers. Each one has her garden plot in front of our house. When their flowers blossom and their vegetables ripen, it is their joy to bring them to us to surprise us. What they like most is a congé of canoeing and blackberry picking.

“Generally, the girls are docile and obedient. They have almost insurmountable difficulties in learning the English language. They grow weary of the continual drills in the language which is so foreign to them! Our children of the woods have talent for things not too demanding on mental ability. Writing, sewing, singing and cooking we give them as rewards.”

Adapting the teaching of religion to the Indians’ natural attractions, the sisters celebrated feasts with processions, established confraternities and made days of First Communion, Confirmation and Baptism special days, For the Holy Thursday and the Corpus Christi processions, Indians and whites of the reservation joined the children of the school. They made their prayerful way along a decorated path that led to an altar arranged on the shores of the bay. Little boys scattered flowers, leaders of confraternities carried banners, the band played. The adoration of the Holy Eucharist instilled solid piety.

August 15, feast of the Assumption, called for an all-Puget-Sound-Indian religious celebration. Each year, Indians came from the surrounding reservations, as they had come the summer of the sisters’ arrival in Tulalip. They stayed for a week of feasting.

The sisters made First Communion days memorable by careful preparation and a three-day retreat preached by the priests, at times by Father Chirouse even after he had left Tulalip. The girls wore wreaths and veils and white dresses; the boys had new suits and wore white arm bands. An elaborate dinner for parents and first communicants followed the Mass. Bishop Aegedius Junger came every year to visit his Indians of Tulalip and to confirm them. Again, the ceremony enhanced the sacredness of the day.

Confraternities stressed the importance of purity. Each age group had its own: St. Louis of Gonzaga’s for the boys, the Holy Angels’ for the lower grades, the Infant Jesus for the youngest and the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin for the older girls. The period of probation for membership insured a selective group of sodalists. On reception day, the chosen girls felt their importance as Father read Mary’s acceptance of them. “I choose you today to be my favored children. Among all the children in the world, I choose you. Be faithful to this honor. Let riches and pleasures be valued no more than the dust of the road. Come to me; I will always be your mother.”

The Indian standards of morality had a different stress from that of the sisters. For Indians, prime sins were impatience, anger and cowardice and not impurity. The sisters knew that only the Blessed Mother would help them value purity in an environment where the Indian men had many wives and the white man was too often willing to pay for prostitutes.

Devotion to Mary’s sodality, Mary’s month and Mary’s hymns and the Hail Mary attracted the Indians. They turned to her as to an understanding mother. They learned that the sisters, too, were Mary’s children. Father Chirouse

cooperated with and led the sisters in all religious activities for the children and the people and was also their confessor, director and friend.

The sisters had worked with him and his Oblate helpers for ten years. It was a blow to them to hear, in 1878, that the Oblates were leaving the United States to work in Western Canada. It was a greater blow to the Indians to lose their cherished Father Chirouse. The diocese provided devoted priests to replace the Oblate fathers, and the sisters came to appreciate each as he came.

## TULALIP THE SCENE OF JOYS AND HARDSHIPS FOR THE SISTERS

When the Oblates left Tulalip, the government asked the sisters to assume the responsibility of teaching the boys as well as the girls. They took over the half-day teaching of classroom subjects while hired men taught manual work the other half day. An engineer, a carpenter, a butcher, a farmer and a shoe maker each taught a rotating group of boys in an apprenticeship with them. The boys thus learned trades that would serve them well after they left school and also aided the mission while they learned.

The sisters served the boys at meals teaching them table manners. They taught them to care for their clothes and to value cleanliness. When they became sick, they cared for them as they did for the girls. The workload of the sisters increased after 1878.

To direct the constant call to hard work and to lift it to a labor of love, and to help the sisters to joyous community living, Tulalip had some strong women of faith as superiors. Sister Benedict Joseph Larocque replaced Sister Blandine as superior after the first year. Then for twelve years, Sister Benedict set wise patterns of living for an isolated Providence apostolate for which there was as yet little precedent. Fluent in English and French and with an easy way with people, she had natural leadership qualities.

In her twelve-year tenure at Tulalip, the Indians and sisters got to know her devotedness, her union with God, her love of all children and her willingness to work. It was always her turn to sit up at night with the sick. She spared her sisters wherever she could. In Tulalip she had her first experience in the leadership role, a role that she would continue as local superior of Olympia's academy and then of its hospital and as provincial superior of the Sacred Heart Province and of the short-lived Oregon Province.

Sister Mary Damien Telmosse, as infirmarian and then as superior, spent thirteen years at Tulalip, a long enough time for her to become a household name among the Indians. They spoke of nourishing soup that she gave the sick children and the sick in their homes. Her prescriptions that worked cures among the children included cleanliness, hot milk with a dash of whiskey and merry laughter.

Many children arrived at the school full of scrofulous, running sores that took weeks to clear away. Sister Damien did not spare herself, nor did the other sisters. The care of the sick entailed daily sacrifice. The sisters did not complain nor did the Indians who endured pain patiently.

In the sewing room and in the kitchen, the older girls gave practical help as they learned. In both of these departments, the girls grew close to the sisters as they talked freely in a work situation. They prepared and served vegetables, a new part of their diet that they had to adjust to. Later in their own homes, they could serve the menus of the white man, nourishing meals that attracted suitors to them.

There was no mistaking the love of the Indians for Sister William Berard who had spent seventeen years in Tulalip, the last one as superior when the school closed. At

her silver jubilee in Seattle in 1908 a delegation of Indians arrived bedecked in tribal finery. When the reception committee offered them an automobile tour of the city to see whatever they wished, they said simply, "We want only to see Sister William and Sister Vincent Ferrier." Sister Vincent, in her early thirties had had charge of the Tulalip boys for three years.

Tulalip was an early mission for such sisters as Sister Mary Florence Flynn, Sister Mary Leopoldine, Sister Mary Aurelia Rivet, Sister Pacifique Legris, Sister Mary Mathias and Sister Adrian. There they learned to live joyously amidst good times and bad.

Some of the things today's sisters would call hardships, the pioneer sisters took for granted. They did not expect running water in the rooms nor bath tubs, toilets, electric gadgets nor furnaces. Nineteen years after 1868, the first modern equipment came to Our Lady of Seven Dolours School, when the sisters installed, partly at their own expense, wash machines and running water piped to the laundry from the well pump that ran by horse power. That gave more time to the girls for class work and helped the sisters teach them how to lessen work. The next year, they dug a new well and purchased a steam pump to provide running water in all the departments.

Four years later they added a clothes dryer composed of large drawers heated by steam pipes. Until the time these improvements were added, the sisters and girls had been washing clothes by hand for over a hundred children. The lack of plumbing put burdens on the school until near the time it closed. In 1894 Father Dubble, as superintendent of the school, succeeded in getting toilets and bath tubs for each department.

At times needless red tape made difficult the getting of food supplies. The sisters made the lists early in the school year and had them approved by the Indian agents who then sent them to Washington, D.C., where an agency purchased the food and shipped it to the mission.

The patience of the chronicler breaks down now and then when the work exceeds her toleration point. "It was no small job," she admits, "to prepare meals and carry them to thirty children in their beds." And again, "We sisters have much work to do; we know we need to bear the Cross, but we would like it to be less heavy at times!" They petitioned the Vancouver provincial house for another sister; and their personnel then went as high as eight sisters. In time of special stress, Providence Hospital in Seattle sent them a tertiary sister to help out.

When the sisters needed to travel, they went the hard way by canoe, horseback or on foot. When the number of pupils fell below the contract number, sisters went to the five reservations seeking pupils. To get to the Lummi reservation, two sisters had to take a canoe for a two-hour ride to reach the steam boat that finished the day's journey for them. After five days of visiting the homes and sleeping in the long house, they returned home tired but successful.

To accomplish the good works recorded in a year's record of social services required fatiguing walking. The 1892-1893 record is typical: "forty-five home visits and twenty-four visits to the sick in their homes, ten night watches with the sick and forty-five visits to the poor or on behalf of the poor."

For the first nineteen years, the sisters and girls shared one building. Then in 1887, the provincial council gave the sisters permission to build, at community expense, a small house for the sisters. The school carpenter with his boys took pride in felling the trees for the lumber that they milled on the reserve.

With it they built a forty by twenty foot house as a residence for the sisters. Its kitchen, dining room, dormitory and community room were all theirs! "Our little palace," the sisters called it. It had beds for six sisters, and two other sisters slept in

the girls' dormitory. Four years later a covered porch joined the dormitory with the church and, the chronicler states, "Now we can make more frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament."

## WORKING IN A GOVERNMENT SCHOOL

As early as 1786 the U. S. government began setting aside reservations for the Indians. During the Westward Movement, as the white people sought Indian land, the government increased the number of reservations, locating a number of them on Puget Sound. For years the government considered Indians its wards. Treaties with them, poorly kept or not kept at all, promised them many benefits, free education among them.

In 1860 the government established Tulalip Reservation and appointed Father Chirouse as provisional agent. The next year Mr. S. D. Howe became the first regular agent. For the first ten years, civilians held the office; then came a series of military men and, later, civilians again, among them Father Chirouse who added the agent's duties to his pastoral and teaching duties between 1871-1876. Until the Oblates left Tulalip in 1876 the fathers handled most of the business with the Indian agents; the sisters had little direct contact with them except to be present at inspection times.

So when the government accepted Father Chirouse's resignation as superintendent of the boys' and the girls' schools, the sisters were fearful. Then Father J. B. Boulet, a cultured, able and experienced Indian missionary of the diocese, replaced Father Chirouse and gave new confidence to the sisters.

Other worthy priests of the diocese came and went, each leaving an impression on the Indians. Noteworthy among them were Father J. Simon and Fathers Power, Saindon and Dubble. The tenure of most was brief; but each sponsored the cause of the sisters. Likewise the new agent, after Father Chirouse's departure, assured the sisters that he would do his best to get sufficient funds to continue the good work. Many of the agents sponsored the school's cause; but not all believed in it. Rightly or wrongly, the sisters saw prejudice in many of them when they made exacting demands regarding the curriculum, horarium, discipline and food service.

While work fatigued them and Indian ways of living bothered them, the sisters knew how to cope with these difficulties better than they understood what to do about the frequent lack of response from government officials. They ran a government contract industrial school, dependent for funds on government allotments. The Indian agents controlled the school in many details and came several times each year for minute supervision of the plant, the curriculum and the living conditions of the children. They visited their classes, watched them at meals and inspected their manual training facilities and the care taken of the equipment.

"Civilization" of the Indians remained the government's main purpose in establishing the school. Because at the time the government considered religious training and environment among the best means to accomplish their end, even government authorities not sympathetic to the Catholic religion recognized the "humanizing" effect of religion on the natives.

When a Protestant held the position of agent the sisters dreaded the inspection visits, expecting him to be unsympathetic. When word went around to the sisters, "Take off your aprons, have the children put on their good clothes, the 'government' is coming," a strained, ill-at-ease atmosphere permeated the house.

Yet the reports sent to Washington D.C. after inspections had nothing but praise for the school. Some parts of them here given are typical.

Superintendent Hale in 1868 reported, "Too much cannot be said in praise of the good work accomplished here. But, I am sorry to say, the funds appropriated are inadequate for the needs of the schools. Within a month after the sisters came, there was a marked improvement in cleanliness and general deportment." U.S. Inspector E. C. Kemble in 1873 wrote, "I attribute the success of the Tulalip school in great part to the devoted efforts of the sisters who are engaged in running it."

Major Mallet in 1876 says, "The great civilizing agent here is the school. The girls' school is as good an Indian school as there is in the country. The morals are good and the girls are well instructed. Two thousand dollars more should be appropriated for it."

Most of the agents recognized the constant need for more funds and kept petitioning the government to provide for greater numbers and more equipment and space. In 1880 the agent succeeded in getting approval for an addition to both buildings. The 1882 contract allotted a thousand dollars a month if the school would enroll seventy-five children. By October only thirty-five had enrolled; so the sisters travelled up and down the Sound soliciting pupils. Thirty children from the Lummi reservation and nine others left the enrollment just one short of the required number.

At this point a white logger brought in a half-demented girl that he had found abandoned in a chicken yard. The sisters welcomed her as God's answer to prayer. The 1885 contract provided for a hundred children at ten dollars a month each for board, room, clothing, health care, schooling and the upkeep of the buildings. The sisters could make ends meet on that amount.

The enrollment remained at over a hundred for the next ten years. Always the sisters took in more children than the allotment covered, partly to convince the government of the need to enlarge the buildings. Even with a hundred and twenty children in the school, the sisters had to refuse as many as thirty for lack of space.

The government responded in 1888 with an appropriation for repairs and for enlargements that would increase the capacity to one hundred fifty-five. With Father Simon's help, the work was completed. As superintendent of the school, Father Simon often accomplished the impossible.

The government payments reached an all-time high of \$12,076 in 1888. For the next ten years, except for frequent tardy payments, the school ran on a good financial basis.

While many of the agents praised the school, some of the Protestant agents lacked an understanding of the sisters' methods of working for a better life for the Indians. These remained a disturbing element in the lives of the sisters until they had to leave the school in 1901. Some of these agents felt that the Indians would receive a better education in a non-religious environment.

A superintendent inspecting the school, pleased with what he saw, noticed a specially intelligent eleven-year-old boy and a talented eight-year-old girl. He offered to send them to a white man's school in Washington, D.C. thinking that they and their parents would feel complimented. However, when the children understood that in this school they would have to give up the opportunity of practising their Catholic religion, they declined the offer.

Another time a visitor told the children of opportunities in other schools to learn trades not taught at Our Lady of Seven Dolors. Two boys and a girl did leave the sisters, one to learn carpentry and violin, another to practice shoe making, and the girl to become a nurse. The next year, the sisters added the trades of shoe-making, carpentry and baking to the curriculum.

In 1893 the government inspector and Father Power, the superintendent of the school then, came to grips when the inspector ordered seven children to transfer to a



school in Salem, Oregon. Before school closed in June, he had a doctor give a health examination to the brightest children. All knew that he was selecting some to send away to school. In the fall, the parents who usually delayed for weeks to get the children back to school, this year sent them on time to avoid a contest with the inspector.

Father Power received the names of the seven children selected for Salem and the order that they await the inspector's coming in readiness to leave. Instead Father told the four boys to disappear at a signal of the inspector's arrival if they did not wish to go away. Sister William took the three girls to Providence Hospital, Seattle, for a week; as they did not want to leave Tulalip.

When the superintendent arrived, he gave orders that the seven children chosen be at the boat on Monday morning to go with him. But on Monday morning seeing no one at the dock, he came to the school to face Father Power. Father upheld the constitutional rights of the natives who could not be forced against their will to leave the school.

Besides, he said, the government had contracted with the Tulalip school for the education of the Indians who came to them. Angry, the inspector said that he would report the missing seven as run-aways, subject to punishment on their return. However, within three days he returned to apologize, realizing the danger that he ran of being censured by the government. The sisters knew that a like incident would perhaps not occur; but the tension remained. "Our enemies are trying to overpower us," the chronicler wrote and added, "Although government officials now favor us, we have to watch constantly for intrigues of influential Protestants against us."

## THE APOSTOLATE PHASES OUT

As early as 1881 the chronicles report rumors of a Protestant take-over of the school. From 1888 on, the inspectors made frequent visits to the school, as many as four a year. In 1889 the government built a school on the Lummi reservation. The sisters thought that it would hurt their enrollment; as it eventually did. However, by December of 1890 it had not yet opened; so Sister William went there to gather twenty-three pupils to bring the total for the 1890-1891 year to a hundred thirty-five pupils. That year saw the last of the Lummi children in the sisters' school.

Rumors that the school would close increased and affected parents and children. "This mission is not what it used to be," wrote the chronicler. "Faith is lessening and parents hesitate sending their children to us, uncertain as they are of its future."

When the United States congress passed a law in 1895 abolishing all sectarian schools on Indian reservations, the inevitable seemed certain. The law permitted the contract schools to receive allotments for five more years, each year diminishing the amounts by twenty per cent. By 1897, the contract was for fifty children. The sisters apparently did not realize the implications of the law and the lessening of the allotments as inevitable.

The 1899-1900 contract paid for twenty-four Indians and gave notice that this would be the last allotment. The government said that the sisters could continue the school without government aid if they wished to do so.

The sisters turned to the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions for guidance and financial help. Since 1898 this bureau had supplied for the deficit in government payments. Now it urged the sisters to continue as usual promising to finance it for at least another year.

In that year, the sisters outdid themselves preparing the children and parents for when, they feared, they must leave. For the Corpus Christi celebration, more



resplendent than ever, the mission invited Father Classens to bring his parishioners from Olympia and the Dominican sisters to bring their pupils from near-by Everett. They joined the Indians from all the Puget Sound reservations to form a procession from the church to the altar improvised on the shores of the Sound. Faith came alive as it had in former years, and the sisters knew that they could trust Providence to keep His "children of the woods" in His care.

That year the Catholic Bureau for Indians paid for seventy-seven children, and the sisters added seven more. The bureau assured the sisters that it would continue to help them. However, in February of that school year, 1901, the government gave notice to vacate the school buildings by June 30 for the government's take-over on July 1.

Without a building, the Catholic bureau could do no more for the school. It would continue, though, to do what it could to preserve the faith of the Puget Sound Indians. This bureau first came into existence in 1874, in President Grant's time when the faith of the Catholic Indians was sorely threatened. Father J. B. Brouillet, then Bishop A. M. A. Blanchet's vicar general, was its first director. Now that the religious future of the children was at stake, it would address itself to their needs.

Bishop E. J. O'Dea had hoped against hope that the school could continue; but no one could offer the sisters a satisfactory way of carrying on the work. The priest also had to move off the reservation and the church became non-sectarian, open to all religions for services and even for dances and socials. The year after the sisters left, fire destroyed the church and the sisters' house, the only building that belonged to the Providence Sisters.

The last weeks in Tulalip were hard on the sisters. The unrest and uncertainty showed itself among the Indians in a hesitancy on their part to show friendliness to the sisters as the new administration was moving in.

The removal of crucifixes and statues in the school symbolized for the sisters the departure of all evidences of religion in the education and "civilization" of the children. In the thirty-one years the sisters had worked with the children their response had encouraged the missionaries.

In spite of the Indians' strong superstitions and their difficulties in living a Christian moral life, the truths and practices of Catholicism appealed to the Indians. Most of them received Baptism, especially the children. But their resistance to counter influences was weak. They needed the priests and sisters to keep reminding them. So the sisters grieved as they prepared to leave them.

As quickly as they could, they packed the little they planned to take with them from their convent. Much they gave to the Indians who watched the preparations in bewilderment. As they saw the sisters drive away they knew that they were losing their best friends and they wept. The sisters wept with them.

Thus ended for what is now Sacred Heart Province the apostolate of conducting Indian schools. At that time Ward, Washington, belonged to Sacred Heart Province. It continued to function until 1921 as a school for Indians and whites in separate buildings. The Catholic Bureau for Indians financed the Indians there after 1901, but the number of Indians dwindled to eight at the close of the school. The Indian school in North Yakima had already closed in 1896.

In 1912 when Rome ratified a new arrangement of houses and provinces for the Providence Sisters, Holy Angels Province came into existence. It included seven thriving Indian mission schools in Western Canada. Sacred Heart Province was very much a part of those apostolates.

For a number of years teaching sisters went to these missions as missionaries to Canada from the United States. Many of them left Vancouver, and later Seattle,

immediately after their profession. To obtain Canadian teaching certificates they forfeited their United States citizenship and devoted themselves to the Indians during many years of hardship amidst the primitive conditions of Northwestern Canada. Sister Jean LaBissoniere, one of these sisters, has just written the heroic story of the Providence Indian missionaries of the North.

## LEGACY OF GOD'S LOVE

What happened to the Catholicity of the Puget Sound Indians? For a few years some of the sisters' pupils kept contact with them. Sister William had taken with her Annie Volpie, an orphan Indian who had lived at the school from the age of four. Annie remained in Vancouver until she was married.

While there, her friends from Tulalip wrote to her giving her and the sisters news of their new teachers. "Tulalip is lots different than it used to be," one wrote. She added, "I will keep my religion Catholic." A girl named Agnes Jules, wrote several letters of gratitude to Sister Martin. "I remember how kind you and Sister William were to me," she wrote. "What a good school it was! You sisters taught us good things." But such contacts with the Indian children and people they had learned to love were short-lived. The sisters prayed for them and often relived memories of Tulalip days but saw few of their Indians again.

For some years a priest from Everett, twenty miles distant, went each Sunday by carriage to say Mass in Tulalip. When Providence Hospital, Everett, opened in 1905, the hospital chaplain served Tulalip; and a sister also taught catechism there on Sundays.

At the present writing (1977) the Sisters of St. Dominic stationed in Everett carry on an apostolate on the Tulalip reservation. A Catholic church stands near the location of the old mission close to the sisters' apple orchard (still bearing abundant fruit.) In the church are statues from the original church rescued by Tulalip Indian boys from the burning church.

In the Indian community building on the Tulalip reserve, hang three large, cherished photographs: one of Father Chirouse, another of the 1890 boys' class room showing hanging kerosene lamps, desks and a statue in a corner oratory. The third photograph shows Sisters of Providence with their pupils. Mary Kosch gave the pictures to the reservation.

On the Tulalip Sound, "the almost land-locked bay," the waters on calm days lap the shores in gentle rhythm or churn in angry waves on stormy days. The reservation on its shores is God's land and the land of His Indian people. The legacy of God's love and of God's Kingdom that the sisters, under God, helped spread among these "children of the woods" remains their heritage. It still needs fostering.



*The boys' and girls' dormitories, the convent and church faced the beautiful Tulalip Bay.*



*Sister Blandine, one of the five foundresses in Vancouver, had her wish to serve the Indians fulfilled in Tulalip.*



*Sister Martin often spoke of her Indians of Tulalip.*



*As superior and infirmarian at Tulalip for 13 years, Sister Damien won the hearts of the Indians and sisters.*

# Chapter 4

## *The Way It Was In Yakima*

1875-1969 YAKIMA, WASHINGTON

A Story of St. Joseph Academy

### SEEDS IN A FRUITFUL VALLEY

1875 and 1975

At harvest time, 1975, the view from Lookout Point on the top of the Selah hills above the Yakima valley has a message for those who ponder. Acres and acres of apple orchards in the valley bustle with activity. Limbs of the trees bend with the weight of ripe fruit. Pickers fill their bags with red winesaps and golden delicious apples and then gently dump them into bins. In the open air packing houses, young people and experienced packers wrap and box the famous Yakima apples for a world market.

A hundred years ago, the valley was desert land.

Lush lawns, flowering bushes and tall shade trees surround hundreds of houses, many of them homes of former St. Joseph Academy students. Yakima ranks among the important cities in the State of Washington. In tall buildings professional and business men and women have their offices. Hotels, motels, restaurants, shopping centers and department stores serve tourists, lower valley farmers and local people. The city has an artistic sky line as viewed from Lookout Point.

A hundred years ago, a few stores lined a lone street seasonally muddy or dusty.

In four Catholic churches, one a cathedral, large numbers of parishioners worship God weekly, many daily. Yakima has St. Elizabeth Hospital, three Catholic schools and a system of religious education centers that reach out to hundreds of Catholic children. A Catholic laity collaborates with sisters and clergy in planning liturgies, retreats and community happenings. They sponsor family clusters, marriage encounters and prayer groups. They play an important role in the religious education of youth and adults. A deep faith permeates many families.

A hundred years ago, Yakima had no Catholic church. Religion, except for a very few people, had little meaning.

When the Jesuit fathers asked the Providence Sisters to start a school in the valley to help them plant seeds of Catholicity and foster their growth, the soil seemed unpromising; but they trusted Divine Providence and began St. Joseph Academy.

That was five generations ago. The seeds have borne abundant fruit.

### THE VALLEY AND THE PEOPLE

In 1875 St. Joseph Academy began in Yakima City that later became Old Town and then Union Gap. Washington was a territory until 1889.

Word had reached the East and Middle West of rich land for cattle and sheep raising and for future orchards in the Yakima valley. Men with families came in

covered wagons. Businesses began: a general merchandise store, a hotel, livery stable, saloon, bank and a post office. The city is situated within a ring of sage brush hills that open in a gap through which flows the Yakima River. On either side of the gap, in the 1897's, lay rich valleys waiting to be watered by a sophisticated irrigation system.

Already in 1852 the priests at St. Joseph Mission had irrigated, by primitive methods, a small area of the desert land. In 1872 the Schanno brothers, soon to be the first benefactors of the Providence sisters in Yakima, constructed the Schanno Ditch from the Naches River to their farm in Yakima. But by 1875 when the sisters arrived, irrigation was still experimental with only one out of ten farmers using it. The desert would become rich orchard and farm land; but in the 1870's the wealth was only a promise.

The land was still primitive. Sage brush had to be grubbed out, alkali patches drained, hard soil broken up and tilled. All this was the work of sturdy farmers and their families who worked long hours from early spring to late fall. They were pioneers living a pioneer life. Most of them were men of high moral caliber, family men who had a heritage to give to the next generations.

The Yakima valley was Protestant country in an era when prejudice ran high. There was little communication between Catholics and Protestants, too many half-truths and too much misinformation. Secret societies flourished and their condemnation by Catholics caused bitterness. When the Providence Sisters came from Vancouver to establish St. Joseph Academy, there were two practicing Catholic families in the city and three or four in the country. It took courage to practice Catholicism and human respect took its toll. Many of the people were busy about material things and gave little attention to the spiritual. Getting to church was difficult and priests were few; it was easy for them to cease practicing their religion.

On their first Easter Sunday in the valley, the sisters deplored the fact that only one person in the city and one family in the country made their Easter duty that year. Indifference toward religion was a barrier to the sisters' work for a long time. Faith was weak. To live and work among an unbelieving people saddened and challenged the sisters. It deepened their faith and trust in Providence.

There was no Catholic church in Yakima City, none nearer than the Ahtanum Indian mission, fifteen miles away. Its primary purpose was to serve the Indians. Whites avoided mingling with Indians. There was prejudice and there was fear. True, the Indian wars were, for the most part, history; but not entirely so. A massacre that touched the sisters' lives occurred in 1878. The Kittitas Indians on the war path because whites had killed one of their men, set out to scalp in retaliation.

It was Mrs. Perkins, who had been one of the sisters' pupils in Steilacoom, whom with her husband the Indians ambushed, tortured and murdered. The Yakima whites planned reprisal. They enlisted the help of the friendly Chief Ignace of the Yakima tribe to strike back. On the morning of December 11 fifty white volunteers left with Chief Ignace and his Indian warriors to seek out the murderers. Before they left Yakima the chief and his men met in the sisters' chapel to go to confession, hear Mass and receive Communion. After a bloodless victory, the white people respected Chief Ignace as their savior; but they continued to mistrust other Indians.

For many years the sisters were to see the Indians come to town wrapped in their colorful blankets. Men and women with their long braids of black hair sat on the street smoking long pipes, saying nothing and disturbing no one. Yet the whites feared them.

Not so the Black Robes. In 1847 when Chief Kamiaken had asked Bishop Blanchet to send missionaries to teach his Indians how "to pray and have a good



heart,” the Oblate fathers had established St. Joseph Mission on the Ahtanum. It flourished until the Indian wars of the 1850’s when the church and house were burned; and the Oblates were forced to abandon the mission.

Ten years later Father Louis St. Onge and Mr. J. B. Boulet re-established the mission and won the love and trust of the Indians. In 1871 Father St. Onge became ill and asked the Jesuits to come to the Ahtanum to serve the Indians. Thus it was that Father Joseph Caruana, S. J., a young Jesuit missionary, came to the Yakima valley with his fellow Jesuits. He was a tireless worker. His mission parish included the Yakima and most of the Kittitas country.

Yakima City belonged to Father Caruana’s parish too. He was concerned about the apathy and indifference of the white people. He saw no future for the Catholic faith there unless he could get the children in a Catholic school and preserve the faith for future generations. He had no money, no land, no teachers but he had faith; he knew that he would have a school.

## PREPARATIONS FOR A SCHOOL

In the spring, the season of planting and cultivating, hope runs high in the hearts of Yakima farmers. Father Caruana read the signs of the times and chose the spring of 1875 to begin preparations for a Catholic school. He solicited help from the townspeople who recognized the need for education for their children. In no time he had collected \$700 and had an offer of land on which to build.

He went to Vancouver to ask the Mother Vicar for the Sisters of Providence to staff his school. Foreseeing a future hospital in the valley, he chose these sisters who were founded for multiple works of charity. The answer that Mother Praxedes Lamothe gave him satisfied him sufficiently for him to proceed with his project.

On April 9, 1875, Charles and Emma Schanno gave gratuitously to the Sisters of Providence eight lots of Block Fourteen in Yakima City. This block, the site of the first St. Joseph Academy, has as its boundaries Rose, Emma, Second and Third Streets. The gift was to belong to the sisters as long as they used it for the education of youth.

Father Caruana now was sure that the school would soon be a reality. But in his eagerness to have the Providence Sisters, he had taken Sister Praxedes’ encouragement and interest as a promise to send sisters. The Sister Vicar had really made no such promise. Requests for the few sisters that she had were many. There followed a series of letters written in broken English by Father Caruana. They were insistent. He needed an immediate affirmative answer. The house on the property had to be rebuilt and furnished. He promised to give a retreat to the Vancouver and Portland sisters in July; and he wanted a superior to be appointed before that time. He asked that she be “the good sister from Portland.”

He gave the retreat but returned to Yakima without any sisters. When he wrote to tell Sister Praxedes of the disappointment of the people he offered a suggestion. “I know,” he wrote, “that three or four novices will make profession in September. Why couldn’t I go and fetch them?”

He reinforced his request with a letter signed by Mr. Schanno but written in Father’s hand-writing. He had read in the Portland *Sentinel* that the school in Steilacoom had closed; “So maybe,” he wrote, “there are sisters to dispose of for this poor place. Send whom you please just so they can give the school a good start; but remember the sister from Portland!”

Finally Father Caruana received word to come to Vancouver to “fetch” three sisters.

## THE START OF ST. JOSEPH ACADEMY

On the morning of November 6, Father Caruana, Sister Blandine Colins, the sister from Portland that Father had wanted, Sister Mary Dorothy Burke and Sister Mary Melanie Landry said “good-bye” to the sisters in Vancouver. In good, crisp fall weather they ferried across the Columbia River to Portland where they boarded the Daisy Ainsworth for The Dalles, Oregon.

From here they went by open stage coach to Goldendale, a thirty-five-mile ride. John Kenny met them and drove them to his home in Centerville, a frequent stopover place for missionaries. They made the last lap of their journey, a four-day trip, with Mr. Kenny in a heavy wagon drawn by a team of four horses. They slept in tents on the way and ate the “grub” they had brought with them.

At nine o'clock in the evening, November 12, 1875, the six-day trip ended in Yakima City. Father Grassi, S. J. was awaiting them and welcomed the sisters to the little house that was to be their convent. The next morning, the feast of St. Stanislaus, Father Caruana said the first Mass in the convent and left for the Ahtanum. Father Grassi remained for the next two days, Sunday and Monday. Then the sisters were on their own.

## THE SISTERS

Who were these sisters, these three religious of Mother Emilie Gamelin's foundation? They had had her dream. They, too, wanted to witness to Christ in the person of the poor and the needy. They, too, wanted to live as a religious community, united to reinforce each other in their love of the Lord and in their service of Christ in others.

Sister Blandine as a child may have personally known Mother Gamelin as she had entered the Providence novitiate at sixteen in 1854. Mother Gamelin, the foundress of the Providence Sisters, had died in 1851. Before her death the Colins family had worked with her in her service to the poor. Sister Blandine's mother was a Gadbois, and her close relatives had names of other prominent families who had sponsored Mother Gamelin's work from its start.

In 1856, as a new professed, Sister Blandine was one of five sisters who had left Montreal with Bishop A. M. A. Blanchet and Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart to start Providence Academy, Vancouver. She had been a teacher there, and had studied English and music. By 1875 Sister Blandine, a mature religious, experienced in founding missions and in understanding youth, gracious and well-liked, was ready for St. Joseph Academy.

Her companion, Sister Mary Dorothy Bourke from Vermont, had already won the hearts of pupils in Walla Walla. She had made her vows in Montreal and had come west in 1865. With a natural talent for teaching, she influenced youth in their intellectual and moral development. Years later, her pupils in Yakima were to join those in Walla Walla in telling their children about their Sister Mary Dorothy.

The third companion, Sister Mary Melanie Landry had taught in Montreal before coming west two years after her profession. She had diversified talents needed in the kitchen, sewing room, garden and boarding department. These three sisters were now beginning a new mission to give voice to Mother Gamelin's and to their own faith experience urging them to love Christ in Himself and in the person of His people. “The charity of Christ impelled them.”

The weekend of their arrival the sisters arranged, as best they could, the house that was to be convent and class room for a few years. Yakima City itself was drab;

but beauty surrounded the city. The barren hills rotated colors as the seasons progressed. Beyond them, Mt. Rainier and Mt. Adams, snow-capped all year long, reflected the abundant sunshine. Above them constellations of stars, the planets Venus and Jupiter and the full moon shone in the clear skies to bring peace and quiet during the sisters' first autumn evenings in the valley.

The first week they prepared for the children, visited homes, made acquaintances and assessed the needs that they might fill. They divided the work and set up a community horarium with times for prayer, work, rest and recreation. They had a Rule to follow, a Rule that they adjusted to their mission life. Mass and Communion they could have perhaps twice, maybe only once a week when a priest could come from the Ahtanum on horseback. No room was available for a chapel in which to reserve the Blessed Sacrament.

Father Caruana paid a surprise visit to the sisters on Thursday of the first week. He was pleased. Back in Ahtanum, he wrote his joy to Sister Praxedes. His dream of St. Joseph Academy was a reality now. Of the sisters he said, "I came in unexpectedly to see how my good children were doing in the midst of many privations. Thank God, they are cheerful and in the best of spirits. People are satisfied with them."

Among the sisters' privations was the non-arrival of their baggage. Mr. Kenny had volunteered to bring it with his team; but he could not make the trip because of storms. "Maybe," Father told them, "he will bring it some day next week."

## SCHOOL OPENS

On Monday, November 22, 1875, St. Joseph Academy welcomed nine pupils: Josephine Bowzer; Emma, Antoinette and Emil Schanno; Walter and Lillian Gervais, Frankie Cook and two others whose names are not recorded. By the end of the school year the enrollment had increased to forty pupils, thirteen of them Catholics, twenty-seven Protestants. The school was off to a good start. The chronicler wrote, "Although living in the midst of an unbelieving people, we enjoy the esteem and confidence of all. Prejudice is gradually disappearing."

In the second year, as more and more pupils enrolled, the classroom would not hold them. Sister Mary Eugene came to replace Sister Blandine as superior and immediately took steps to build a convent. Mother Joseph came to help with the plans and gladden the three sisters so far away from their companions! Just to have her with them gave them new enthusiasm.

When she had to move on, Sister Eugene took over the supervision of the building that was ready for September classes. The chapel that could open into a classroom and accommodate the people for Sunday Mass, and the freshness of the new two-storey convent encouraged the sisters. They now had space in which to move around. As they planned the year ahead they looked forward to the opening of school.

Then came a setback. St. Joseph's had run ten-month sessions of school while the public school had functioned only three or four months a year. Now the public school extended its session to nine months and attracted a good number of St. Joseph pupils. The sisters attributed the loss of pupils to prejudice; but they did not lose courage. Instead they increased their efforts to better satisfy pupils and parents.

Besides studying catechism and learning to read, write and figure, the children were introduced to far-away people and far-away times using an atlas, a history book and Sister Mary Dorothy's story hour. The children celebrated Christmas with a public program of recitations, drills, songs and tableaux. Their performance

helped establish a reputation for the training the school offered; but the struggle against opposition of Protestants continued.

A Methodist lady began a private school that attracted a capacity number of pupils. The sisters saw a concerted effort to oppose their school and lessen its enrollment. Forty-seven pupils registered that year but only eighteen remained until the end of the year. A fourth sister came the next year so that they could divide the class, thinking to attract more pupils that way. Instead, the numbers lessened and Sister George left for Vancouver where pupils were plentiful.

Mother Amable, Superior General, visited Yakima in May and decided to close the mission because of the great privations of the sisters and the meager results of five years of work. It took Mrs. Bartholet and Mrs. Schanno to dissuade her from doing so. When they fell at her knees begging her to let the sisters stay, she reversed her decision. "Get up, good ladies;" she said, "the school will not close."

All three sisters went to Vancouver that summer for retreat and vacation. Because they returned just on time to start school, they had had the people worried. Great was the joy of the people to see the sisters ready to continue the school. The enrollment grew considerably — but not for long. A magnificent public school, built, as the sisters thought, at the crafty suggestion of the devil, arose on the same street as the convent. When it opened, pupils transferred to it. But in a month people complained of it, withdrew their children and sent them back to St. Joseph's.

The academy had good teachers. In the years before it moved to North Yakima all its teachers after Sister Mary Dorothy, had been educated in Providence schools and had made their novitiate in Vancouver. These schools had a reputation for excellence. Best of all, they gave their students a love of learning and an incentive to keep advancing in wisdom.

Sister Mary Francis Pinto came from Cowlitz Prairie where her Spanish father had run a merchandise store. Her mother, of a distinguished Bordeaux family, had given her a bilingual heritage. All her children received a good education with the Providence Sisters in Cowlitz and in Steilacoom. Sister Mary Alexander Goyner had studied in Steilacoom and Sister Mary Aloysius Padden and Sister Mary Emily in Vancouver. Yakima youth and their parents learned in time to value the dedicated service these teachers gave them.

While teaching always remained the main work of St. Joseph Academy the convent early became a center from which the sisters went out to meet the needs of people. Many came to the convent with their joys, sorrows and problems knowing the sisters would listen and help if they could do so. Only three sisters staffed the convent the first nine years, but their charity reached out to many people.

Sister Mary Eugene Marchand and Sister Monaldi Fafard, each in turn superior for six years, discovered the needs of the people as they made regular visits to their homes. The chronicles of 1882 record the apostolic works of the three sisters. They cared for and taught two orphans, six boarders, fifty-four day pupils and seventeen music pupils. They visited fifty sick people, assisted at seven deaths and gave four hundred meals to the poor. In May, 1876, Mr. Agapit, an Indian in an advanced stage of consumption, pitched his tent near the convent, knowing that the sisters would care for him. He died a beautiful death a few weeks later.

Each year, first communions, baptisms of children and adult conversions consoled the sisters. In days when infant mortality was high the sisters often had calls from distraught parents of sick children. Sometimes the sisters could help the child to health; often not. During a summer epidemic the sisters spent many days caring for the sick, often staying in homes all night. They baptised nine children, seven of whom died. "This," they wrote, "was ample recompense for the privations we have to bear here."

## JOYS AND SORROWS OF THE SISTERS

With only three sisters to share community living in a place where indifference to religion prevailed, isolated from their sisters by distance, and deprived of the spiritual helps of daily Mass, the sisters suffered from loneliness. Human emotions ran deep.

Breaks like a Christmas and Easter vacation at the Jesuit Mission in Ahtanum helped them forget the privations they felt in not being with their religious family. While summer time brought most Providence Sisters in the West to Vancouver for a retreat and vacation together, Yakima sisters often had no such joys. The first two years, they made their retreats in this little convent still without a chapel. Father Caruana did his best to direct a rewarding retreat for them; and the sisters responded to the challenge.

One year Mr. Schanno and his daughter Emma drove the sisters to Vancouver in his wagon. Their joy was great. A whole summer with their sisters lay ahead of them — or so they thought. But Father Caruana came to take them back to Yakima a month earlier than they had planned.

Life could become discouraging in spite of the apostolic zeal that motivated the sisters' lives. Even their best efforts often met with inadequate response. Yet a refreshing note of confidence in Providence and a felt satisfaction in working for God and people runs through the pages that chronicle the 1870's and the 1880's.

There were years of dire poverty. From the beginning they had wanted to buy the corner lots of their property, "to prevent Protestants from building near them;" the chronicles say, "but it would cost a jolly little sum and we are poor missionaries." They finally did purchase the lots for two hundred dollars; but then they had no money to renovate the house that badly needed repairs. The only income of the sisters came from tuition (paid by very few families) and from music lessons and boarders.

One day Sister Monaldi discovered a sister in tears. Why? After eating nothing but salt pork for three months in a row she could take no more. Yakima City had no butcher shop, and no farmer had offered to bring the sisters fresh meat when he butchered. Until Mr. Kenny brought the sisters a cow from the Klickitat, they lacked an adequate supply of milk, butter and cheese.

Often accounts ran in the red by over a hundred dollars. At times there were no boarders and little income from day pupils. Only when the boarders numbered six or eight did the ledger end in the black. St. Joseph Academy never became rich in money; its wealth was always in the lives of its students.

As the years went by difficulties lessened somewhat for the sisters. In 1883 the Jesuits started a college a mile from the convent; and the sisters had Mass more frequently. In 1884 a parish church was completed and the Jesuits now lived in the city.

By that time the day school had grown to fifty-four students. A fourth sister and then more students came; so the sisters made renovations and built an addition to the house. As the music class grew, the school purchased a second piano for student practice. A bright future seemed certain at last. Then again hopes dropped. The Northern Pacific Railroad offered to reimburse the influential people of Yakima if they would move to the new railroad center three miles away.

The move took place gradually, as the decision to move was a difficult one. The sisters became more and more concerned though when one after another of the families chose the new city. For months the sisters watched the strange exodus. Stores, churches, the restaurant, saloon, livery stable and boarding house slowly moved down the street on skids and rollers. The sisters were living in a dying city.



But the new city did not at first seem to thrive. Besides, what would be the best location for a school there was not immediately evident. The sisters renewed their trust in Providence and waited for two more years. The day-pupil enrollment dropped to thirty-nine, but the boarding department grew to twenty girls and two orphans. The music department flourished. Times were not all bad, but the city now had only twenty families left. It was time to make a decision.

Judged by some standards, St. Joseph Academy in Yakima City had more failures than successes. Yet here seeds of faith, hope and love were planted; here Catholicism began to take deep root. The sisters could see gratifying results of spiritual growth during each of the years in the old city.

## NEW PHASE IN THE HISTORY OF THE ACADEMY

When the railroad workers uprooted Ditter Brothers' Dry Goods and Bartholet's Merchandise Stores and rolled them off to North Yakima, the sisters knew the wisdom of a move for them, too. Mother John of the Cross, Mother Vicar and Mother Joseph, shrewd business women both, had been watching the progress of the new city and had put a lien on a probable site for the school.

The location was a happy choice. The city architects had an eye for beauty as they planned Naches Avenue, a divided street with a strip of grass and trees and park benches along its center. Mother Joseph, practical as she was, loved beauty too. The property that she and Mother John had chosen had Naches Avenue as one of its boundaries.

Located just a few blocks from the depot around which the city centered, the site had many advantages. It would be easy of access for students; it was near Yakima Avenue where many businesses were prospering. The sisters could hear the train as it whistled through the gap and clanged its bell when it neared the station. Sometimes it would be bringing sisters from Vancouver!

Mother John and Mother Joseph arrived from Vancouver in April, 1887, to reassess the situation in the new city and to assure themselves that the papers were in order for the property they had reserved. On May 26, 1887, the Sisters of Providence bought eighteen lots of Block 87. They paid \$1,500. The next year they purchased the remainder of the block for another \$1,500. It was Providence property now.

Mother Joseph relished the opportunity to use her expertise in the project that lay ahead. She had already drawn plans for and supervised the building of Providence schools and hospitals in the West since her arrival in 1856. For good reasons, the American Institute of Architects has acclaimed her the first architect of the Pacific Northwest. She had been her father's child prodigy when he had let her work along with him at his carpentry trade.

Mother Joseph was the first of a wealth of gifted and dedicated Providence Sisters in the West who knew how to plan and build and manage a business. These sisters did their work quietly, effectively, and firmly. Men listened to them and went along with their suggestions, knowing that these were great women believing in a cause.

What better season to start construction than lovely spring in the Yakima valley? Mother Joseph walked up, down and across Block 87 to decide on the location of the first building. Then she went to the house the sisters had rented and took out her drawing board. When she was satisfied, she called in Mr. J. Blanchet, the architect whom she had trained, to go over the sketches with her. He was to be the construction superintendent when Mother Joseph would leave for other building



projects. He knew her standards of high quality workmanship. He had learned from her how to handle workmen.

All summer long building went on. Of the year 1887 the chronicler wrote, "This year has been extraordinary. Our mission moved to the new city. Not having a house there, we had to rent one. Not finding one big enough to accommodate our boarders and us, we used free of charge, a little house of Mr. T. J. Clark, our benefactor. It served as a dormitory for our boarders for three months. Then because of the cold, we had to move out of this house. It was built on stilts; and the wind whipped through the cracks, making it impossible to heat. We crowded into the upstairs of the convent laundry which was still under construction.

"From September to March, the Jesuit priests let us use three of their rooms for our classes. Not having a single quiet corner in our house for our meditation, we went to the Jesuit chapel for our prayers. We thus used three houses in the middle of winter and had plenty of exercise.

"On January 2 we left our rented house to move to two rooms in the convent. One of them, planned for the boarders' dining room, we used for a kitchen, dining room and recreation room. From January until March, it would be difficult to say where we slept; as we were constantly moving our beds from one place to another.

"March 5, 1888, was moving day when at last all were to be together under one roof. The plaster was still wet and March weather had a nip in it, but no one took sick. Father Kansters, S. J. celebrated the first Mass in the chapel on March 9 and Father Garrand erected the Way of the Cross. Then priests and sisters toured each room as Father blessed the house. It was a tour of gratitude and joy. The bell in the belfry rang out our joy."

The chronicler was happy when she wrote, "Now that our building is almost finished we have only to enjoy its conveniences and pay our debts! We hope to make our payments; as up to now the people have been generous and seem disposed to continue to help us."

Another event brought joy that year. For the first time in the valley, the feast of Corpus Christi was celebrated with a procession of the Blessed Sacrament. Repositories at the school and parish church had been decorated. A hired band played as children, sisters and Protestants and Catholic adults followed Father carrying the Eucharistic Lord and blessing the people at each of the stations.

The record of the achievements of the five sisters at St. Joseph's that first hectic year in the new city challenges belief. In addition to the sixty-eight pupils they taught in three classes and the twenty music pupils, they took care of twenty boarders, helped sixty-five sick people in their homes, staying over-night on twenty nights. They consoled seven bereaved families and baptized three dying people. Besides this, they visited 250 homes and gave meals to 1150 hungry men who came to their convent door.

The convent had a convenient location for men who rode the rails as the railroad company's uninvited guests. Tramps and hobo's marked a trail from the depot to the school. Word got around that the food was good and the sisters asked no questions. Sometimes the men offered to chop wood, work in the garden or clean the barns; but not always. Sister Monaldi saw that the social apostolates begun in the old city would continue in the new St. Joseph's. The charity of Christ did urge them on.

## APOSTOLATE WITH THE INDIANS

Christ's love challenged them to move into another apostolate during their first year in North Yakima. From the beginning of the mission, the sisters had been conscious of the needs of the Indians. As soon as they were well settled in the new St. Joseph Academy their thoughts turned to building a school for the Indians. Prejudice in that day made interracial mingling of the pupils unthinkable.

By the end of April, 1888, the wooden structure on the D Street side of Block 87 was ready for occupancy. Through Father Victor Garrand, S.J., the sisters applied to the Indian Agency for an allotment of funds to educate children from the reservation. This request and the appointment of Father Lauer, S.J. as superintendent of the school received approval. Immediately nineteen Indian girls began a new kind of life at St. Joseph's.

Accustomed as they were to the freedom of the open spaces and little concerned with cleanliness and order, they had many adjustments to make. To sit in desks for hours a day strained them to the breaking point. Runaways were common. The children were especially hard to control in the fall when they came in from the hop fields where they had mingled with older workers who easily stirred them to discontent.

Pupils from the reservation schools transferred to St. Joseph's where liberty was more restricted. One year three sisters came and went within two months before someone was found who understood the ways of the restless children of the woods and knew how to combine discipline with freedom and how to make both attractive.

Devotion to Mary attracted the children to religious programs. They took enthusiastic part in May devotions, decorating altars, forming processions and praying the Rosary. Gradually they came to trust and love the sisters and to value the education they had at first resented. The chronicler could write, "We are consoled by the way our Indians are responding. The school is thriving."

An 1888 addition to the Indian school made room for boys with a man teacher in charge. Each year saw much sickness among the Indian children. There were deaths too. One year two children of chiefs died. Another time some of the youngest children ate poisonous roots during a hiking trip; and, although given the best of medical care, two of them died in convulsions. A boy fell into a tub of boiling water and was badly burned. He almost died because, as the chronicler wrote, "Wounds heal with difficulty on these Indians, so full of scrofula are they."

Bright days came when the children received their first Communion at a solemn ceremony to which the parents came in tribal robes. Many children received baptism. The Catholic faith spread anew among the Indians first Christianized by the priests in the middle 1800's.

Mr. Leak, Superintendent of Reservation Schools, inspected St. Joseph's twice a year, although it was officially independent of them. He examined minutely the class room procedures, dormitories, meal service and recreation programs. He always found everything satisfactory even saying that he could not run his schools on the reservation as well. "He said that, even though he was not favourable toward Catholics," added the chronicler.

The school was at its best when, in July, 1896, the United States Department of the Interior began to withdraw all further allotment of funds to private sectarian schools. That was a death blow to the St. Joseph Indian school. The Indian apostolate so long anticipated by the sisters came and went within seven years. It had just begun to enter deeply into the lives of the Indians.

Now the sisters entrusted their Indians, easily influenced as they were, to the care

of Providence and Our Lady of Compassion. Sisters and children were in tears as they said good-bye.

## ST. JOSEPH'S IN THE 1890's

The Indians were gone and so were the regular government payments — that in a time of grave depression following the 1893 panic. Government funds for the Indian school had made up a substantial part of the income of St. Joseph Academy during the few years of the Indian school's existence. To balance the books with some 4,000 fewer dollars a year required all the faith and genius of the Providence Sisters' financial managers. A determination to succeed and a trust in Providence characterized all of them. Providence schools had functioned before without adequate funds and they would do so again.

The school depended on boarders, music pupils and tuition for its income. The Book of Receipts for the 1890's show only ten families who paid the two-dollar-a-month tuition or the five-dollar-a-month music fee. Paying boarders became fewer and fewer during hard times. The sisters supplemented the income in ingenious ways. The financial records show payments for cream, vegetables, fruit and fancy work. The sisters sold pigs for nine dollars, a ton of potatoes for ten dollars and wheat for fifty cents a bushel. Besides bringing in income, the garden, orchard and animals provided much of the convent food.

Besides poverty, sickness tried the children and the sisters. One year, the boys' teacher became sick and died within six days; then students and teachers alike fell victims of the grippe that threatened to become pneumonia. At the same time, the few well sisters were carrying trays for twelve children in bed with colds and fever. The chronicler admitted, "Instead of saying 'More, Lord!' we said, 'Enough, Lord.'" After that prayer the sister cook fell down the cellar steps and for nine weeks the sisters took turns at kitchen duty.

Poverty, sickness, disappointments and joys, everyone took in stride. Engrossed in their day by day apostolates and loving God in prayer and work, they found peace and companionship. Sister Mary Aurelia's necrology speaks of her as "prayerful, frank, generous, cheerful, charitable." That description more or less fits many of the sisters at the time she was superior of the academy.

The sisters shared community prayer, work and living. Their days included times of silence, regulation bells, striking clocks, hearty laughter and intimate friendships. From five o'clock rising time to nine o'clock retiring, they lived a meaningful and a full day.

With the coming of the railroad there was less isolation than in the earlier days and more trips to Vancouver in the summer. With the passing of the years, their numbers in Yakima grew to eight then to nine, reaching sixteen sisters by 1920.

Once when the mother general came with three other sisters to visit Yakima, the chronicler rejoiced, "For four wonderful days we had twelve sisters in our mission," she wrote. When, in 1891, St. Elizabeth Hospital opened in North Yakima, other Providence Sisters lived just a few blocks away from them. The joy of the academy sisters was great then.

## BRIGHTER DAYS

"This was a year of great consolation!" With this sentence the chronicles for 1899 end. In 1897 Sister Mary Eva Connor became the first American superior at the

academy. Father Diomedi, S.J., the pastor of St. Joseph Parish saw, as she did, the need for new financial arrangements at the academy. The loss of income from the government made the situation grave.

Father consulted his people, received the approval of Mother John of the Cross and made the grade school a parochial school with the teaching sisters paid a salary by the parish. With this salary along with the income from music, boarders, high school tuition and fund raising projects the year could end in the black. In 1900 they could afford improvements in the building. They installed a sewage system and electric lights and completed two bath rooms. In their silver jubilee year, these comforts had finally come!

Sister Mary Eva, reared in the West from childhood, understood the people and knew the necessity of involving them in the school. She worked with the sisters, the pastor, parents, young ladies' sodality and the students to begin traditions that made everyone proud to be a part of the school.

Increased numbers challenged the sisters and priests to initiate ways to interest young people. Father Diomedi preached a three-day retreat in the convent chapel for the first Communicants and gave them a new appreciation of the Eucharist. They agreed to have a representative of their group receive Communion each day of May. With processions, May altars and hymns, the sisters instilled devotion to Mary.

In an all-school annual picnic, everybody had a share: pastor, sisters, parents, students. At the fair grounds or Sumac Park near the river, all had a day complete with ball games, contests, races and plenty of food. A once-a-year program at the opera house on North Front Street brought out good crowds for a pay performance.

School closing exercises in late June were all-day affairs. The day began with high Mass, general Communion and breakfast. Students then viewed the sewing and art exhibits with prize winning entries identified by blue or gold ribbons. Then the pastor gave report cards and deportment and attendance ribbons; everybody sang and all said good-bye's with promises to be back in September.

Sodalities were in their hey-day at the turn of the century. The students had theirs; as did the young men and the young ladies of the parish. Sister Mary Eva invited the young ladies to meet at the convent one Sunday a month. They recited the Little Office in the chapel, listened to an instruction and then socialized with the sisters.

One May, the girls came two afternoons a week to help make twenty quilts. The sisters served them lemonade and cookies and ended the day with May devotions. The girls learned to know and love the sisters as they worked with and for them. One of the group went to the novitiate that summer.

The elusive term "school spirit" had caught fire at the academy, never really to die.

Sister Mary Florence Flynn, a Westerner since 1867, made her vows in Vancouver in 1874. She replaced Sister Mary Eva as superior in 1901 and continued her policies of involvement of the people. Experienced in running schools, she kept raising standards of instruction by helping the teachers, giving them opportunities for study and by providing equipment. She visited the homes, identified the needy and found solutions to their problems. They came to her with confidence knowing that she would follow through on their problems. In the six years that she directed the academy it made progress.

The parochial system was functioning well. Because the number of boys was small, they moved from Marquette to the academy, thus adding another sister to the payroll. Substantial money gifts to the academy were never numerous; so Mr. J.

Cunningham's gift of three thousand dollars in 1901 came as an unprecedented surprise. With it the academy could have new conveniences.

Smaller gifts, however, regularly helped the academy bank balance grow and, more important, showed the cooperation of the Yakima people. Program proceeds of eighty-six dollars paid the bill for new desks. A Ladies' Aid benefit card party added thirty dollars. An opera house performance netted two hundred thirty dollars. When the city put in a sidewalk along the Naches Avenue block, the ladies paid a hundred fifty dollars of the assessment charge. Things were looking up.

Boarding schools had popularity the first part of the twentieth century. Almost from the beginning of the school, girls came to board. Through the years the number of resident pupils varied according to available space and the state of the economy. The boarding school, as such, closed in 1907, reopened after the new building was ready for them and closed again in 1925. Many boarders came from homes with parents who wanted a Catholic education for their girls and had no Catholic school near them. Often girls boarded just while preparing for first Communion.

Most of these girls responded to the sisters' training and valued the opportunities they received. There were study, fun and work for all. The older girls helped with the younger ones, shared housework with the sisters, attended classes from nine to four, had a study hour in the evening and were ready for retiring at nine after evening prayer and hymns in the chapel. They lived a scheduled life.

The boarding school mistress, kind but firm, filled the role of "mother" to the girls. Sister Anna, Sister Mary Eva, Sister Mary Mathias Spexart and Sister Xavier Nibler were among the favorites. The tassled boarding caps that the girls wore when they went out evoked different emotions in each girl. They symbolized an era.

So did the Roman architecture of the magnificent new St. Joseph church with stained glass windows and frescoes filling the sanctuary and ceiling. Father Conrad Brusten, S.J. had taken over the parish and the supervision of the construction when the corner stone was laid in 1904. The local newspaper account of the ceremonies described the church as "the finest structure of its kind in North Yakima."

As the congregation filled the eight hundred seats that day and many Sundays afterwards, the sisters thought back to 1875 when their Providence Sisters arrived in the valley and found only a few strong Catholic families and much apathy and indifference towards religion. It had been hard going the first twenty-five years. Memories crowded their minds as they celebrated Mass with the people of deep faith who made up the now large parish. Had their work in the valley made a difference? Under God, they thought that it had.

St. Joseph Academy by this time had had two high school graduations. The enrollment in grades one through twelve totalled over three hundred. Cora Starrit, Anna Heiser and Beatrice Navarre had received the first graduation diplomas in 1903. Father Fussi, S.J. awarded the diplomas and Providence graduation pins; and Senator W.J. Jones addressed the class. The four graduates of 1904 took the State teachers' examinations and all four received the teachers' certificates that entitled them to teach grades one through eight in any school in the state of Washington.

St. Joseph's was ready to move on in the twentieth century. All Providence houses in the West experienced a forward thrust as they passed from pioneering foundation days to a feeling of assurance that they could cope with the problems in their apostolates. Providence had provided in the past, Providence would continue to provide. An era of prosperity throughout the country followed the hard times of the so-called "gay nineties." The sisters concentrated on perfecting what they had

already begun. Expansion, professionalism and certification became key ideas in the early 1900's.

## AN ERA OF GROWTH

In the first decade of the twentieth century, North Yakima was fast outgrowing its pioneer beginnings. Husbands who had enticed their wives to come West with the promise of a periodic trip back home to Iowa, Minnesota or Illinois had few trips to finance. The expected rugged living was not all that primitive!

Even by 1898 the train came to a halt at a fine-looking brick depot. By 1900, business and office buildings served a clientele with practical or fastidious tastes. Ladies purchased ankle length, silk, lawn or dotted Swiss dresses with name brands they had known "back home." Electricity had replaced kerosene lamps in many homes. On cranked magneto-type phones, they got "Central" and the party they wanted in instant communication. By 1909 nickle-in-slot pay phones made the telephone available to the public. The *Yakima Republic* came out weekly with news and advertisements.

In the early 1900's the first horseless carriage drove down Yakima Avenue; and automobiles, although still a sensation in Yakima, began to replace hacks and horses and buggies. The Model T Ford had arrived, and chauffeurs drove the ladies down the avenues in Cadillacs, Buicks and Oldsmobiles. With the advent of the automobile came the necessity for better roads. In 1908 the city paved Yakima Avenue with red vitrified bricks. No longer would women need to lift gracefully their stylish long skirts to walk through shoe-top-high dust in the summer and a sea of mud in the winter.

Providence Sisters, too, in ankle length dresses until the 1960's profited by the new cement side walks and paved streets. So too did they benefit by the street cars that by 1910 facilitated their apostolic visits to outlying districts and brought pupils to the academy. In many ways modernization served the sisters' purpose of spreading Christ's kingdom on earth.

As life in North Yakima was becoming more sophisticated, the influx of people was growing by leaps and bounds. Between 1900 and 1910, the city tripled its population to reach the significant count of 14,082.

The time had come when in the East, Middle West and the West, fruit of all kinds: peaches, pears, apricots, cherries, apples, especially apples began to symbolize Yakima. Real estate agents pictured the valley as rich orchard land and lured more prospective farmers west. These men bought the five, ten and twenty-acre tracts pictured in the brochures. Fruit dealers began to line Fruit Row along the railway tracks with packing houses popularizing Yakima fruit.

Since their 1875 arrival in Yakima, the Providence Sisters had seen the desert land become a fruit bowl; the population growth turn a village into a city; people of faith emerge from a handful of Catholics. The sisters were a part of that history. Now they must be a part of the trend toward expansion and excellence.

Mother John of the Cross, Assistant General, visiting from Montreal in 1908 recognized as valid the sisters' request for more class room space. Bishop E. J. O'Dea, too, saw the need of a larger academy. The shortage of space had been challenging the ingenuity of the sisters for some time. St. Joseph's was fast acquiring a reputation for excellence. Good teaching had gone on in the frame building originally built for the Indians, and in the class rooms improvised for boys and an overflow of girls in the old church across the street. The main building had only one or two classrooms now.



In 1907 Sister Mary Eva, Superior again for a year, closed the boarding school thus releasing space for classrooms. Now all seven classrooms were in the brick building. Yet the problem of two grades in a room and too many pupils to a grade remained. It was a problem but not an excuse for inadequate teaching.

By careful planning the sisters strove to become master teachers with the brighter children helping some of their classmates if need arose. The classrooms became bee hives of purposeful activity. This method of teaching necessitated hours of preparation of materials, preparation that filled every spare minute of the sisters' so-called free time. Its reward came in the results. Yet the teachers knew results could come in an easier way; and they awaited the day when they could teach maybe thirty pupils in a single-grade class room.

## NEED TO BUILD

That day did not come for some time. The increase in enrollment kept pace with the addition of class rooms. Because of a new compulsory school attendance law requiring children between the ages of eight and fifteen to be in school the entire school year, enrollment increased in public and private schools. Public schools were building in Yakima, too. When the public high school with its Lincoln Annex grade school burned in 1907, the new Lincoln was built on the same site near the academy, but for grades only.

In 1908 the city built Yakima High School, a handsome structure in the West Side of town, costing over a hundred thousand dollars. A good faculty staffed it; and the academy had competition. The sisters knew that they could meet it; but they needed more physical space. In 1908, they had to turn away Catholic children seeking to enroll. That fact hastened the decision to build an addition to the present structure.

Sister Mary Alice Woods who had begun in 1902 her close to forty years in the leadership role of local superior, was just finishing a six-year term of office in Olympia. In September 1908 she came to Yakima as superior and she came to build. When she took office, the ledger showed a balance of cash on hand of three dollars and ninety-six cents. With that as initial capital and with confidence in Providence, she began her plans to build a three-storey addition in brick.

A building fund began to take shape. St. Joseph Academy already had staunch supporters, Father Brusten among the strongest of them. In a previous year he had called a meeting of the parishioners to tell them that, while money could never repay the sisters for their work in the parish, they should consider some better means of support for them than currently existed. The parish immediately agreed to give the sisters \$2,000. In January 1909 the men of the parish council pledged \$10,000 on the cost of the new building.

Sister Gertrude of Providence O'Brien, one of the truly great superiors of Providence hospitals, had come to St. Elizabeth Hospital, Yakima in 1907. She knew the poverty of schools and she knew Sister Mary Alice from Olympia days when they had boarded and gone to school together at Providence Academy there. Their being together in Yakima now was a happy coincidence. Sister Gertrude began her financial help to the academy with a \$1,000 gift on Sister Mary Alice's feast day.

With amounts that might seem small taken separately, the children of the school and the parents increased the building fund by projects that showed support and enthusiasm for their school. A strawberry and ice cream festival on the academy lawn was a financial and a social success. The spacious lawn shaded by two tall

sycamore trees, a black walnut tree, cherry and locust trees and a picturesque grape arbor made a gracious setting for the guests.

Entertainment put on by the children such as plays, musicals and dramatic readings made parents and pupils happy and brought in revenue. The sisters and ladies sponsored needlework sales, raffles and benefit dinners.

All told, though, these amounts could not build a school. The regular income from high school tuition, music lessons and a twenty-dollar-per-month salary for the grade school teachers could barely meet the operating expenses of the school and the sisters' living costs. Other sources of funds had to be found.

The bulk of the building cost moneys came from loans from Providence institutions, notably from St. Elizabeth Hospital, Yakima. To pay the interest on these loans, to say nothing of the capital payments, strained the academy budget for years to come.

The money situation under control for the time being, Sister Mary Alice began preparations for the addition. It was to be a three-storey addition adjoining the old brick building on the north. As Sister Mary Alice and her sisters studied the architect's sketches, they were learning the art of building. As soon as school closed in June all the sisters except Sister Mary Alice went to Vancouver for the summer months; and work began on the new school. Sister Mary Alice lived at the hospital, a few blocks down the street. Sister Gertrude's proximity for consultation was an asset to her.

Her biggest asset, though, was her own personality. Always gracious, intelligent and kind, she was a public relations department of one. Fabian Regimbal quickly recognized her abilities and her needs. He knew building materials, workmen and business management. When Sister Mary Alice asked him for advice, he responded by temporarily turning the management of his grocery business over to others and offering to supervise the construction at St. Joseph Academy. In a manner different from that of Mother Joseph, Sister Mary Alice got things done and done well.

By September 20 the opening of school could be delayed no longer so classes began in whatever rooms were ready. Eventually they would have eight large classrooms, a spacious room for community gatherings, a parlor, office and a new chapel. The music rooms, kitchen, dining rooms and living apartments for boarders were being renovated.

By December 12, 1909, the work was completed and Bishop O'Dea blessed the new addition. Then all shared a benefit dinner served by the ladies at Marquette hall. During Christmas vacation the teachers set up their new classrooms and were ready to teach in the new building by January 3.

New challenges awaited the sisters and they were ready for them. Among these challenges was one especially dear to Providence Sisters. Pope Pius X by his decrees of 1905 and 1910 on early, frequent and daily Communion made possible a powerful means to grow in the knowledge and love of the Lord. With Father Brusten as pastor and spiritual guide of the school, St. Joseph Academy saw the decree fully implemented.

Before Pope Pius, a child had to be ten or older to make first Communion. In April, 1910, one hundred twenty-eight academy pupils of these ages formed the first group ready to receive the Holy Eucharist. In May another hundred boys and girls aged seven to ten received their Eucharistic Lord.

From then on, Father Brusten and the sisters encouraged all to frequent reception of the sacraments. First Friday celebration, confession preparation, singing at daily Mass, sodality communions and retreats made attractive the Eucharistic approach to the Lord. The academy chronicles of Father Brusten's time made this statement "The sisters enjoy unusual spiritual advantages in this well organized Jesuit parish."

Marquette College was a part of the parish, too. Starting as a grade school for boys in 1909, it formally became a high school in 1918. Jesuits and laymen conducted the school; but the sisters had their part in it too.

## S.J.A. BLESSED WITH GOOD TEACHERS

St. Joseph Academy sisters had a part also in events that marked the progress of education in all Providence schools in the West. It had its Sister Mary Eva and Sister Mary Florence to follow through on Mother Mary Antoinette's recommendations for the improvement of the school. They strengthened the teaching methods and curriculum in the eight grades and started a four-year high school. Sister Mary Wilfred, the first provincial directress of studies, helped the Yakima sisters begin the new arrangement.

The second sister to hold that office was Sister Mary James Padden. In 1907 she visited St. Joseph Academy for two weeks and was pleased with what she saw. Instead of functioning independently under the direction of a "first teacher," as was formerly the case, the school was now a part of a larger unified system that called for a sharing of Providence ideas.

The Yakima sisters had helped gather and review courses of study from many states and public schools in the country. They had examined books and helped arrive at uniform programs of study and text books. School meetings of all the teachers of the province, advocated by Mother Mary Antoinette, had begun to achieve a goal of unification. Sister Mary James furthered this aim, continued to arrange teachers' meetings, and added summer school for the teachers. In all this, the Yakima teachers took an active part.

Sister Mary James came to Yakima to be the academy superior from 1911 to 1915 and returned in 1921 as a high school teacher. She was one of the many strong, self-made teachers who flourished not only in the early Providence schools but in the early public schools, too. That was before normal school, college and university education became requisites for teacher certification.

The Providence novitiate in the West had early attracted American girls of deep faith, staunch character and keen intellect. They knew the school to be a powerful means of spreading Christ's Kingdom; and many of them felt privileged to become, as Sisters of Providence, a part of the teaching staff of Providence schools.

Yakima girls were among the one hundred forty American young women to give themselves to God as Providence sisters in the first fifty years of the Western missions. Theresa Kenny, the first St. Joseph Academy girl to enter the novitiate, in 1890 became Sister Mary Rosinda. After her came a wealth of Yakima vocations. Many of these girls had studied and worked closely with their academy teachers. They knew something of their way of life and wanted to learn more. A look at the backgrounds of a few of Yakima's strong teachers in the early nineteen hundreds reveals reasons for the respect, appreciation and love the girls had for the sisters.

Sister Mary Mt. Carmel Moore had had wide experiences. She entered the novitiate in Vancouver after her high school graduation there. After taking her vows she taught primary grades, did the cooking and supervised Indian children in seven different schools. All this time, she was utilizing every spare minute reading, studying, learning. In 1895 she began teaching the eighth grade in Walla Walla and later in Olympia. By 1901 when she went to Ward, Providence schools were opening high schools, and Sister Mary Mt. Carmel was ready for the challenge.

Coming to Yakima in 1903 she taught algebra, logic, botany, astronomy, zoology, rhetoric, literature, Latin and religion. When she went to Creighton

University she had already acquired a broad general education. In a short time she earned her bachelor's degree. All her forty-six years with students she loved learning and loved passing on her knowledge to students.

Sister Edward John Frey was a powerful Yakima high school teacher, brilliant, happy, original, lovable, of large build and great physical strength. She made learning a joy. One of her pupils says that Sister Edward had taught her in her ninth grade general science class, almost all the physics, chemistry and biology she later studied in college.

Sister Edward taught students not just subjects; she stretched their minds to capacity learning. She was a product of the Providence Sisters in Sprague where her teachers had been her best friends. She and Sister Lucia Sullivan, who in 1915 were the first Providence Sisters to attend Creighton University, started college classes with a rich background.

Sister Isidora Mondor, reared in Tampico near Yakima, attended St. Joseph Academy and entered the novitiate after her graduation. She taught in Yakima as one of the strong seventh and eighth grade teachers who brought distinction to the academy. Year after year, its chronicles read, "All the eighth graders passed the state examinations." Sisters like Sister Isidora challenged the pupils to opt for success and to take the means to attain it. The acquisition of knowledge was its own reward.

As a supporting staff, the class room teachers had sisters of different talents sharing the apostolate of the academy. The music department brought culture and much needed revenue to St. Joseph's. In Sister Cecilia Harris' time, the music class had grown so much that two full-time teachers taught from after breakfast until five o'clock prayer time.

The one-to-one lessons with metronome beating time and fingers stumbling through difficult measures could be tedious for the teacher. But the children enjoyed having Sister all to themselves. Many of them loved their music teacher. When they heard that Sister Reparata Hebert, one of their favorite teachers, was leaving Yakima they signed a petition and sent it to Mother Provincial. Sister Reparata was certified, they told her, to teach the Progressive Series and they needed her. Their power technique did not work and Sister had to leave Yakima.

Academy pupils remember Sister Mary Veronica directing the singing at church. In the right side pews sat the boys resisting all her endeavors to get them to sing. The girls, in the left-hand pews, responded better, but often the total volume was too weak to prevent a practice session after Sunday Mass. Father Brusten would come to support Sister and to hear the church filled with song. The penalty produced quick results.

After the 1920's another music teacher came to the academy and brought its choral group to a high degree of proficiency. Sister Dolores Mary Pittendreigh, not a gifted singer herself, developed a remarkable talent for conducting singing. Her choirs helped make celebrations of the liturgy glorious. Her concert groups received invitations to perform for civic and social events and for radio broadcasts in the valley. Music at the academy reached an all-time high under Sister Dolores Mary.

Boarding school mistresses became favorite sisters too. In peak years, boarders filled two departments and required two sisters to care for them. Before Holy Rosary School opened in Moxee in 1915, girls from there made up a sizeable part of the boarding school.

Of all the sisters who did the cooking in Yakima, Sister Baker was long remembered. Anecdotes about her abound. Besides good food, she provided many occasions for hearty laughter among the sisters. They knew how to coax the "last jar of jelly" from her, knowing well that the cellar was filled with an abundance of jelly.

Sister Baker was a tertiary sister, with a frilled bonnet tied with a bow under her chin and a triangular cape in front and back. In 1900 when these sisters took vows and formed a part of the Providence community, she changed her habit but kept her rosy cheeks and big smile. Children begged cookies from her. Repair men, plumbers, delivery men, all the city knew and loved Sister Baker.

And there were always the lay teachers from the very early days. Without them the school could not have functioned. Teaching for small pay, capable, loyal, loving, they endeared themselves to faculty and students through the years.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, discipline reigned in homes and in schools. With her desk raised on a platform, the teacher had a clear view of any would-be mischief maker. A cow bell at recess time called the children from hop-scotch, jump rope or hide-'n-seek. It signaled them to line up in silence in two-by-two ranks. To the beat of a triangle they climbed the stairs, forming square corners on each landing. All stopped on second floor, faced Our Lady's statue and the flag, and sang a hymn each morning and a patriotic song each noon.

For the most part the pupils lived a joyous, secure life, taking for granted restrictions on liberty, trusting the wisdom and love of parents and teachers. They expected punishment for exceeding limits but they risked it for the thrills of going through the front gate, stealing into the mysterious sisters' departments, leaving the yard during the eleven-thirty to one o'clock noon hour or skipping school to skate on the mill pond. Their mischief making seldom caused real worries. Life was still simple.

Teaching needed less equipment than that essential to success today. Much of the learning process required memorization, imitation of patterns and constant skill drills. With these methods, teachers needed and provided strong motivation techniques.

They also gave classes that inspired, captivated and challenged young people to think. Poetry, nature study, biographies of saints, history, Bible stories, literature, music and art were part of early curriculums. Library books and Reading Circle books were required reading. Classics came with outline questions that stretched minds. Picture study pamphlets familiarized Yakima's youth with the masters. Students at the academy received a good education.

## ST. JOSEPH'S GAINS ACCREDITATION

Before World War I the sisters teaching in Catholic schools had things pretty much their own way. St. Joseph sisters were little involved with civic affairs in Yakima. They had the esteem and support of the people, and they educated their children to their satisfaction. The people cooperated with the sisters and were their friends. In 1914 the first alumnae organization began and graduates showed their loyalty to the academy. By their lives and in their support of the school they have been the academy's best advertisement.

Things began to change all over the country with the rumbles of the war in Europe. Even Yakima felt the unrest, and terms like I.W.W. and K.K.K. began to have a meaning and to arouse emotion. Old prejudices against Catholics reawakened, hooded clansmen accosted Catholics, fiery crosses on the Yakima hills startled the people of the valley. Pamphlets and speakers stirred up prejudices. Children passing the academy scribbled slogans against Catholics on the high board fence around the yard. Taunts tossed back and forth among the children of Barge School and of St. Joseph's, "Catlickers" received an equally ugly reply "Puplickers".



In 1913 twenty-four girls finished the eighth grade with state diplomas. Many of these did not enter the academy high school. Some terminated their education, then a pretty common occurrence; others went to Yakima High School. They gave Father Brusten, as their reason, the need to go to an accredited school to fulfil college entrance requirements.

Father Brusten immediately asked the sisters to apply for accreditation for the academy. Before the school year was over, in the spring of 1914 a state inspector visited St. Joseph's and placed its first three years of high school on the state's accredited list. On November 19, 1915, Mr. Edwin Twitmyer, State High School Inspector, accompanied by the Yakima County Superintendent of Schools came to St. Joseph's for a minute inspection. They left promising to recommend the academy for full accreditation. That came on June 22, 1916. Mr. Twitmyer continued to visit annually, pleased with what he saw.

The library met accreditation requirements immediately. With Sister Mary Loretta's visits beginning in 1911, new emphasis had been placed on the library. The room was small at first with shelves to the ceiling and a movable ladder to make the top books available. High school girls gathered there to check out books to read and to talk. They also used the Carnegie Public Library built in 1916 a block from the academy.

Stimulated by Sister Mary Loretta, the sisters broadened the academy curriculum to include elocution, commercial courses, and an improved religion course. Sister John Gabriel Ryan, as supervisor of domestic science, outlined new courses for the academy in sewing and cooking.

The enrollment grew. By 1919 grade school rooms were crowded with as many as seventy pupils in a room. The boarding school became two departments again and the music pupils numbered a hundred. For the first time in academy history the chronicles could write, "We had temporal prosperity this year. To thank St. Joseph for this unusual situation, we took in five boarders gratis this year."

The high school grew slowly. The idea of going to high school was still new enough in the West. In 1902 even Seattle had its first separate public high school building. Enrollment in high schools in the state rose from near zero in 1890 to a slow but steady increase after 1910. It is not surprising, then, that the number of academy graduates beginning with three girls in 1903 continued with a slight increase each year but not exceeding eight until after 1920.

## TEACHERS BECOME CERTIFIED

The thirty or forty high school girls in St. Joseph Academy before 1920 wanted an education and a good one. Their teachers made sure that they received the best. With the move for state accreditation of the high school went a concomitant move for state certification of teachers. Sister Mary Loretta welcomed the challenge and saw to it that her teachers went the whole way. The Yakima sisters were among them.

The 1917 chronicles record Sister Edward John's leaving for Creighton University. She had been a St. Joseph's teacher. Its 1918 chronicles show an exodus of teachers from Yakima in June, some going to Vancouver to study for the August teachers' examinations, some going to the University of California at Berkeley, four attending the University of Oregon's extension courses in Portland and others going to the Marylhurst Normal extension courses in Portland. In a surprisingly short time, all the academy high school teachers held state certificates based on college degrees.



## WORLD WAR I

When World War I years came, the patriotism of St. Joseph Academy blossomed publicly in full participation in parades, food conservation sacrifice and prayer. The chronicle entries for 1917 and 1918 verify the deep concern of the faculty and students. "The United States had entered the war. We need to pray and sacrifice for peace." "The war drags on. We redoubled our prayers and sacrifices. Many of our sisters are seeing their loved ones depart for over-seas."

Finally on November 11, 1918, came news that the Armistice had been signed. The whole city burst forth with joy. People sang and shouted and tooted horns as they raced up and down Yakima Avenue all night long releasing pent-up joy and thanking God for peace.

But the rejoicing was short-lived. The Spanish Influenza ravaged the land in plague proportions just at the war's end. It broke out in Yakima with alarming results. All schools, churches, theatres and other public buildings were closed; yet the disease spread. It took the lives of two academy graduates and of a Providence sister. Then eight boarders and Sister Mary de Sales broke out with scarlet fever and more sisters and boarders caught the influenza. St. Elizabeth Hospital sent Sister Dacien; Mother Provincial sent two Vancouver sisters to help care for the academy sick.

The 1918-1919 school year, tried by sickness and blessed by peace, ended with the beauty of the spring blossoms and the delicate unfolding of leaves, Yakima's signs of hope.

In many ways World War I ended an era and began a new period of history. The academy had a bright future to begin the 1920's with its high school fully accredited, its teachers certified, its total enrollment reaching capacity numbers and its reputation established. Its next fifty years were glorious years, years for a later historian to record with satisfaction. By the time that St. Joseph Academy closed its doors in June, 1969, the seeds planted in 1875 had produced a harvest only God can evaluate.

Providence Sisters and St. Joseph Academy have left a mark on the Yakima valley. Because they were, and continue to be, a part of it today, it is a better valley than it would have been without them.



*The sisters opened St. Joseph Academy in North Yakima in 1887. In 1888 they opened a school for Indians on the academy block.*



*Gertrude Kohls (seated) was graduated from S.J.A. in 1905. She then entered the novitiate to become Sister Mary Theodora, S.P.*



*Of the 21 girls shown here as the 1911-1912 high school student body of S.J.A., one, Dorilda Dulude, became a Sister of the Precious Blood and five became Providence Sisters: Sisters Mary Raymond, Rose Anita, Mary Esther, Yvonne Benoit and Mary Mathias.*



*Sister Dolores Mary's choral groups brought distinction to the academy in the 1930's and later.*



*Sister Mary Berchmans knew how to make readers out of seventy first graders in one room.*



*Sister Mary Eva was a favorite teacher and boarding school mistress in the early days of the academy in North Yakima and in Walla Walla.*

# Chapter 5

## *The Way It Was In Cowlitz Prairie*

1876-1898 COWLITZ PRAIRIE, TERRITORY OF WASHINGTON

*A Story of Providence Our Lady of the Sacred Heart*

### A HISTORIC PRAIRIE

A roadside marker today identifies the place where two Providence sisters on September 13, 1876, climbed from the wagon that had brought them on the last lap of their journey from Vancouver, Territory of Washington, to Cowlitz Prairie. They were to start a school here in this beautiful flat prairie land. The spot was historic.

Here on December 16, 1838, Father F. N. Blanchet had said one of the first Masses in what is now Washington state. Cowlitz had been agreed upon by the Hudson Bay governor and the priests as the site for the first Catholic mission in the territory. By March, 1839, Father had obtained from the government a grant of six hundred forty acres for the mission.

By October of that year, Father Modeste Demers was gathering his flock in the little log church in the very place where now, thirty-seven years later, Sister Mary of the Rosary Boucher and Sister Hyacinth Boucher had just arrived to open a school. They were Providence Sisters.

Father Peter Hylebos, the pastor, had met the sisters at the Winlock station five miles from Cowlitz. They had left Vancouver the day before and were weary after sitting up all night in the straight-back coach seats. The train, it seemed to them, had come to a jerking halt at every farm house they passed to load the fruit of the fall harvest and the products of the surrounding dairy farms. The open windows had let in soot and noise, and the sisters were relieved to be off the train. The drive along the tree-lined Jackson Road refreshed them.

Father knew the history of the countryside and of the lovely road they were on. It was a part of the old Oregon Trail travelled by pioneers and such notable men as General U. S. Grant and Governor Isaac Stevens. They passed the Jackson home that had served as court house, home and lodging place for early settlers. The log cabin still stands today (1977) in a meadow of grass and wild flowers closed in by a cobblestone fence.

As they neared their destination the sisters sensed an uneasiness in the pastor. He had something to tell them. The convent was not ready as he had promised it would be. He was giving them his rectory for their lodging for the present. The opening of school would have to wait.

The foundation of this mission in a prairie so full of history had a history of its own. In 1864 Father Charles Richard, then pastor of the original log church, had established a small mission day school taught by a lay teacher. He needed sisters for the school.

When Mother Philomene, Superior General, had come West in 1866, Father had received her acceptance of this mission as soon as a convent and school would be built. She with Father and Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart had chosen the spot

on the mission land on which she wished the convent built. By 1868 the framework of the two-storey building was completed, built by the volunteer help of the men of the parish. Then word reached them of a delay in the sisters' coming and work on the interior came to a halt. The men had given up hope of the sisters' ever occupying the convent.

When Father Peter Hylebos became pastor in 1873, he again sought out the Providence Sisters, finally succeeding in getting a promise of sisters for the fall of 1876. The men had been disappointed before and mistrusted this new promise. They decided not to recommence work until they saw the sisters on the spot.

The sisters were there now and comfortable enough in the rectory. It was not the first time that Providence Sisters had arrived on a new mission with no place ready for them. The sisters recalled Mother Joseph's plight in Vancouver in 1856 when she and her sisters had spent fruitful weeks living in the attic of the tiny bishop's "palace". Sister Mary of the Rosary and Sister Hyacinth now in Cowlitz could be creative, too, and find other apostolic work to do while waiting for the completion of the convent school building.

They were the Boucher sisters from Montreal. Sister Mary had worked with the boarders in Canada for three years after her 1861 profession and had then come West. She learned to know American youth as she cared for them in Vancouver and then, for eleven years, in Walla Walla. Now she was to be the superior of the Cowlitz mission. Her sister had come with her to help start another one of the five missions of which Sister Hyacinth was a co-foundress. She was the sister who had struggled over her decision to come West. When she said "Yes" to God, she knew that she would give herself unreservedly to the mission apostolate.

The two sisters were in their early thirties in 1876, young enough to decide to tour the Cowlitz countryside on horseback on a multipurpose mission. Providence had provided time for them to get to know the families of the children before they met them in the classroom or boarding department. Maybe they would find some sick people, maybe some poor whom they could serve. Of the rich or comfortably fixed families, they asked alms to help to buy furnishings for the convent and provisions of food for the winter months. September was the harvest season, and farmers were generous.

Each day the sisters rode off on horseback. The glorious fall weather exhilarated them. The reds, yellows and browns of vine maple trees and sumac shouted joy. Children and grownups were busy in the fields harvesting corn, wheat, hops and black berries.

The sisters explored the Cowlitz River, historically a water route to early villages and forts and originally one of the most important waterways. It wound in and out of trees, its waters clogged with tree trunks and its bank steep and wild. Near its many rapids, some farmers had built grist mills. Others had located their mills in the fields and used horsepower to grind the grain. The sisters' explorations told them much about the way of life of these people.

They found a warm welcome in the farm houses. Descendants of the first Catholic white settlers had preserved the faith without much instruction in it. The Plamondons knew that their grandfather, Simon Plamondon, had made his way to Eastern Canada to plead for priests to come west to bless marriages, baptize and instruct children and unite the people in the worship of God.

The sisters came to know the families of Germans, Hollanders, Scandinavians and Canadians. Many of the Canadians belonged to the fur traders' families who had settled on farms here after leaving the Hudson Bay Company. It was largely a Catholic population but one that had little of the basic knowledge of the truths and

practices of the faith. In these visits the sisters discovered that one of their major works would be the preparation of girls in the late teens for their first Communion.

## THE SCHOOL READY TO OPEN

Mother Praxedes, the vicariate superior, came herself to see the new convent and give advice on the placement of departments. She saw with joy the devotedness of the people to the sisters, the generosity of Father Hylebos and the expert workmanship of the men. Mother brought with her Miss Honora O'Brian who had offered to teach the boys gratuitously for a year. Sister Louis of Gonzaga Costin, the girls' teacher, arrived with a Vancouver orphan, the first pupil to register. The apostolate of Providence Our Lady of the Sacred Heart had begun. It was November.

Sister Louis had two weeks to prepare for the opening of the girls' classes set for November 13. Honora was to start the boys' classes two weeks after that. The two unpacked books brought from Vancouver, sized up the class room situation, cleaned and arranged the rooms and made plans that could adjust once they knew their pupils. Sister Louis and Honora were to teach in the district school house, a brisk walk away from the convent. The public school was not in session that year. In April 1877 the school board asked the sisters to sign a three-year teaching contract for forty dollars a month, an offer they gladly accepted.

Monday morning, November 13, Sister Mary, Honora and Sister Louis had planned to get to school early to meet each girl as she galloped in on horseback and tied her horse to the hitching post or jumped out of her father's wagon or arrived red-cheeked from a two or three mile walk in the nippy air.

But as they turned the bend in the road the three heard laughter and chatter of the children who had arrived before them. They saw little girls carrying dolls, teenagers in ankle length dresses with long sleeves and white collars, fifth graders in high-top laced shoes. Sister Mary knew most of them from her pre-school home visits and could introduce them to the teachers. She was delighted. The one-room school would be crowded.

On November 27 Miss O'Brian met the boys, a less exuberant group than were the girls and fewer in number. Father Hylebos promised to help her cope with their pranks. Before the first year ended, fifty pupils had enrolled. On June 25, the pupils surprised their teachers and parents by their performance in the public examinations conducted by the public school commissioners.

Sister Louis, who remained at the school for six years, had become a favorite teacher. She knew first-hand Mother Emilie Gamelin's sensitiveness to the needs of people. She had entered the Providence novitiate in Montreal, Canada, in 1847 and had lived closely with the foundress of the Providence community for four years. She had experienced the typhus tragedies, had gone on the first pilgrimage to the church of Our Lady of Good Help to petition an end to the epidemic and had shared the anguish of the sisters when Mother Gamelin had died of the dread disease in 1851. Sister Louis had much to share. She impressed the girls with her depth of charity and her personableness. She lived joyously in community with Sister Mary and Sister Hyacinth.

That first year, carpenters continued to work on unfinished rooms well into the winter months. Father Hylebos gave generously of time, money and talent when he was home. The two-storey building was beautifully designed with arched windows and door in the entrance tower, a side porch and a bell in a cupola on the slanted



roof. Four snow-capped mountains visible from the convent windows gave the sisters an ever new thrill that lifted their spirits. The prairie had no better view than that from the convent site.

Bishop A. M. A. Blanchet had deeded the sisters the use of the convent and of about eighty-four acres of land for as long as their work would continue in the mission. By spring the sisters could start a garden and plant fruit trees. The fathers already had an apple orchard adjoining the sisters' land.

As in all early Providence schools, sisters in the convent carried on supportive apostolates associated with the education of young people. The two who had started home visits in Cowlitz knew the families. If sickness should come, the people knew the sisters were available, but sickness rarely visited these sturdy farmers. In the first ten months the sisters discovered only five sick people to visit, and only one bereaved family, where a five-month old baby had died.

But Sister Mary of the Rosary and Sister Hyacinth had plenty of other things to do while Sister Louis taught school. They were Canadians, and Canadian sisters have a passion for cleanliness and finesse in all that they do. Their ordinary meals had Cordon Bleu quality. Because housekeeping was an art for those two sisters, it readily became an apostolate of love.

Gardening and caring for chickens, churning butter, canning fruit, washing and ironing left little time for extras. People came to consult the sisters about their children, a crisis in the family, plans for a wedding or a trip, or just to visit. They always left the warm hospitality of one or other of the convent sisters who always had time for them. They brought flowers for the altar and sometimes helped with the sacristy work, cleaning, ironing and mending linens and vestments.

What the people of that day did not have, tells much of their daily lives. They had no telephone, radio, television, automobile; no plumbing, running water, electricity, frigidaire, vacuum cleaner or typewriter. A list of words like pump, water pail, wash board, flat iron, outdoor toilet connote hard work. Today's families can scarcely visualize the meaning of Saturday baths, wash bowls and pitchers, root cellars, sauerkraut barrels, lamps or lanterns; yet all these inconveniences were taken for granted by the people of less than a hundred years ago.

The sisters had no carriage, but Sister Hyacinth had become accustomed to horseback riding by now. Several times a week she rode to the general merchandise store for mail and supplies. The men sitting on kegs of nails debating territorial politics grew accustomed to seeing Sister ride up to the store, check the mail box, make her purchases, pack them in two flour sacks to balance the load and then gallop away, the sacks bobbing up and down. If the post office in the back of the store had a letter for the convent, Sister Hyacinth breathed in the cool air with special joy as she rode home on the rough road.

The letter would be several weeks old before it reached Cowlitz. Mail came from the east coast to Portland. From there a steamer dropped it off at Kalama. It then went to Cowlitz Landing, Olympia or Tacoma in which places it was sorted and sent by stage to post offices north of the Columbia. The sisters always treasured news from the mother house, the vicariate house or from any of the other eight Providence missions established in the West. A special bond of closeness existed among these sisters with common experiences. Just to have spent days together traveling to the missionary west in a cramped, dusty train coach, had made them well acquainted with each other. Other shared experiences had created ties that letters helped to keep alive.

## SPREADING THE KINGDOM

Most of these sisters had anticipated some apostolate with Indians when they had left Montreal. The Cowlitz Indians had been numerous when first priests had come to serve Indians and whites on the prairie. For these Indians the fathers had devised the famous "Catholic Ladder" the teaching aid that helped instruct many other tribes in the truths of religion. The Cowlitz Indians had eagerly accepted the missionary's message of Christ and His Kingdom.

But the priests knew well not to count on their perseverance. Native customs of the Indians had too strong a hold on them to resist for long the sorceries and vengeance of the medicine men, the lure of games of chance that too often ended in fighting and murder, and the practice of polygamy. The Canadians themselves, to return to the practice of their Catholicity, had to give up several squaws who were bearing children. Simon Plamondon had thirteen Indian wives before he married Bishop Blanchet's niece. Life was difficult and temptations were powerful in frontier days.

By 1896 only a few Indians still lived in Cowlitz. The Indian wars of the 1850's had driven them to Puget Sound areas. Those who had remained near the Cowlitz River were poor and knew little English. Once they knew that the sisters had made their home near them, they found their way to the convent door. They wanted food and medicine and received both in generous amounts.

Food for the body and food for the soul went together in Sister Hyacinth's thinking. She knew some Indian dialects and could speak to them of the truths of religion. Her joy was complete when on March 19 an Indian asked her to prepare him for baptism. He knew that he had not long to live and he wanted to be with God after his death. The day Father Hylebos baptized him was a special day for him and for the sisters too.

Other special events recorded in the chronicles of the first year testify to the simplicity of convent life in the country. By December Father Hylebos, with some volunteer help, had completed the chapel. To have daily Mass in the chapel and the Blessed Sacrament in their convent meant much to the sisters. Father gave the convent the tabernacle intended for the new church which was being built. On February 2 a poor man asked for hospitality for a few days and stayed on for months. He slept at the rectory, ate at the convent and helped with chores. Indeed, he earned his room and board.

On Easter Sunday the twelve- to-nineteen-year-old girls received their first Communion. The sisters rejoiced also on June 7 when Bishop Aegedius Junger confirmed these same girls in an impressive ceremony. The bishop assured the sisters of the value of their work for the Church in Cowlitz Prairie. Another event impressed everyone on June 3. The people gathered in an enthusiastic display of faith to form a procession of the Blessed Sacrament from the pioneer log church to the sisters' front lawn where Father gave Benediction. The sisters felt they had a good first year.

On July 3, Sister Hyacinth and Sister Louis left for retreat in Vancouver. Sister Mary of the Rosary remained in Cowlitz with Honora and the old man who had become part of the mission family. Father Hylebos was in Vancouver, too, giving the retreat to the Providence Sisters. Early school convents seldom closed in vacation time. Education, although the main apostolate in schools, was never the sole one. Sisters remained available the year round for those who sought counsel, a free meal or medicine, or who just felt good about the sisters being there.

And summer was gardening time and canning time. The chickens, horses and cows needed tending; the root cellar and smoke house received their annual

cleaning. Except for a near-tragedy, Sister Mary and Honora alone for over two weeks, enjoyed some relaxation from the year's schedule of events.

July 19, St. Vincent de Paul's feast day, the convent roof caught fire. Sister Mary rang the bell furiously, the signal to the countryside for help. As she rang it, she prayed to St. Vincent. Only one man responded to the call. He climbed to the roof and poured water as fast as the four-people bucket brigade could supply it. He never knew how he alone could have put out the flames that had already devoured much of the dry roof.

The next day Sister Hyacinth came home with Sister Gabriel Flynn and, later, Sister Mary Faith Jacques arrived with Mrs. Wall of Vancouver with her five little children. The healthy, mild climate, the peace, quiet and beautiful scenery made Cowlitz a favorite vacation place for sisters and benefactors. This first summer brought Our Lady of the Sacred Heart convent its first of many future opportunities to serve in the apostolate of hospitality to summer visitors.

## THE SCHOOL APOSTOLATE GROWS

Patches of Michaelmas daisies on the side of the road, cattails in marshy places, leaves turning colors signaled the end of summer and time to begin school again. The teachers returned, Mother Praxedes with them, for a week's visit. She helped set up a music department, an important part of the school, partly because of the steady income it provided.

Sister Mary Emily Wright, the first music teacher in Cowlitz, came there fresh from the novitiate. Her father, an army man stationed at Fort Vancouver, had placed her and her sister in the boarding school there when their mother died. He, too, died shortly afterward; Mother Joseph kept his children as orphans.

Music was a status symbol at Providence Academy. When Mother Joseph and the superiors in other Providence schools saw talent in poorer children, they gave music lessons to them along with the rich. Sometimes the sisters discovered unusual ability in these children. Marcella Wright had that kind of talent. Once graduated from high school, she entered the novitiate and gave her life with all its talents to God in the Providence sisterhood.

The response the pupils gave her teaching showed itself in their church choir performances and in spring song and piano recital. Sister Emily attracted young people as she worked with them on a one-to-one basis giving piano lessons as well as when she supervised boarders in their more relaxed moments when sharing comes easily.

Sister Emily taught music in Cowlitz for ten years. Sister Mary Georgetta, another music teacher who taught there later, had a childhood background in Vancouver similar to Sister Emily's. She too won the love of the Cowlitz children. One of them perpetuated the remembrance of her favorite teacher by naming her child "Georgetta".

The chronicles give as one of the principal apostolates of this mission the preparation of young people for first Communion. Many Catholic families on the prairie lived too far away to send their children to day school and were too poor to pay board. Three or four times each year the sisters sought out girls of these families, girls already seventeen or nineteen years old. They invited them to be their guests for several weeks and attend classes to prepare them for the sacraments.

These girls came from isolated homes never visited by the busy missionary priests. Their parents seldom went to church and gradually lost contact with Catholic practices. These girls had received baptism and welcomed this opportunity

to know their religion. After receiving their first Communion they returned to their homes to reactivate in their parents the joy of being Christians and to pray with them as they had prayed in the convent. They had had an unforgettable experience.

Providence Sisters' Rules originally allowed them to teach only girls. True, they had included boys in the school when the Cowlitz school opened, but with a lay person as a teacher. Now that they had no lay teacher in Cowlitz at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart school, who in Cowlitz was to prepare boys for first Communion?

That was a problem Father Hylebos asked the mother superiors to solve for him. Mother Praxedes knew the privileges accorded missionary countries and found no difficulty in getting a Papal Indult permitting Providence Sisters from then on to teach boys under twelve. Twelve boys enrolled on February 1, 1879, and made the Cowlitz Providence school a co-educational school.

## SISTERS AND STUDENTS MAKE A SCHOOL

The school had devoted teachers. Sister Louis of Gonzaga, in the first six years, had set precedents. Other strong first teachers set policies and supervised the other teachers, many of whom came as new professed sisters. Among the first teachers, Sister Paul of the Sacred Heart McCullough and Sister Mary Florence Flynn came to Cowlitz as experienced, self-made teachers. Their love of learning influenced pupils to find joy in education.

The first-teacher method of responsibility for a school prevailed until Mother Mary Antoinette, in 1894, came West to unify the school system and introduce a wider curriculum than they had been using. The Cowlitz teachers went to Vancouver to hear her series of summer lectures and came back enthusiastic. The new secular subjects helped the pupils to broaden their outlook on the world.

The religion text remained the Catechism, but the teachers enriched religion classes by showing God's Providence in the world. Geography and history and literature were opening up a new world to these country children. Before Mother Antoinette went back to Montreal, she appointed Mother Mary Wilfred as directress of schools in the West. When she visited Cowlitz for a week each year, she gave the teachers individual help and encouraged the pupils in their successes.

Late nineteenth century girls living on prairie farms responded readily to a teacher's guidance. Most of them had learned obedience, responsibility and housekeeping at home. The school had little need for home economics classes when mothers taught their daughters how to bake bread, can peaches, churn butter and turn out tender roasts and featherlight angel food cakes. Families shared work at home; children grew up learning homemaking, progressing from positions of dish wiper to meal planner. They felt secure and loved in their homes.

The school broadened their outlook on life and challenged their minds to inquire and create. It gave them friends and opportunities to exert leadership. Until Mother Antoinette's coming, the curriculum included only Catechism and the three R's with some singing and calisthenics for breaks.

Most of the pupils in Our Lady of the Sacred Heart school were Catholics. The chronicler writes, "This condition is seldom found in this country. It is easier to foster religion with no Protestant influence around us. Catechism teaching has made a big difference here in the lives of children and families."

Another kind of learning took place on the playground where greater freedom risked personality clashes, stubbornness, jealousies and selfishness. Hop scotch, jump rope, soft ball and croquet had built-in character development techniques that

early sister educators knew about. They knew also the value of social activities. The school sponsored such activities that became traditions. The sisters joined their pupils on hay rides in the fall and sleigh rides in winters when enough snow fell in Cowlitz. In spring and summer, the gatherings the day before picnics to make potato salads, sandwiches, deviled eggs and lemonade was a picnic before the picnic. Working together tightened bonds between pupils and sisters.

The Cowlitz music teachers knew how to direct choirs. Beginning with untrained voices they discovered natural altos and first and second sopranos and practised them in parts and then as a group. On special days like Christmas and Easter, their performances surprised the congregation made up of parents, friends and relatives. The reputation of the choir spread to the neighboring churches which invited them to sing on special days. The girls took pride in singing for the dedication of churches in St. Urban's German district, in Chehalis, Napevine and Little Falls. Success quickened the loyalty of the girls; school spirit grew.

The boarders for the most part came from the near-by regions where church missions had been newly built. Having practically the same background as had the day pupils, they all formed a unified group. Living with the boarders, about six or eight orphans made their homes in the Cowlitz convent each year.

While boarders had some housework assigned them, the orphan girls and the sisters did the heavier work. These girls sometimes had to miss class to help with the laundry or food preparation. In a small school like the Cowlitz Providence, these misses were fewer than in Vancouver's Providence where the orphans and boarders had separate departments.

Mother Joseph and later Vancouver superiors made it a practice to send orphans to the smaller missions when they had room for them. With fewer numbers the homelike atmosphere could increase for these girls whose only home was the convent.

The sister superior had close contact with the orphans. During Sister Mary of the Rosary's last year at Cowlitz, five orphans joined the three already there. Trusting Providence to provide for their needs, Sister made the rounds of the country homes with a dual purpose, as she and Sister Hyacinth had made them on their arrival on the prairie. She knew the people would welcome a visit and would respond to her appeal for help for the orphans.

The day pupils and boarders wanted to help too and periodically delighted in putting on benefit programs that brought in a few dollars for the orphans and taught the girls concern for others. Sister Mary's five-year stay in Cowlitz came to an end when an injury to her leg confined her to bed.

For the next seven years, Sister Marie of Jesus, coordinated the activities of the mission as its superior. In the community of four sisters, one of them the teacher, another the music teacher and boarding school mistress and the third the cook, the superior had many-faceted duties. Understandably, she seldom sat at a desk in a superior's office. She may not even have had an office.

Usually a poor man made his home at the mission and did the heavy work in the orchard and garden and took care of the animals. But not always. The chronicler for 1883 writes, "In the midst of winter our hired man left us. Sister Superior had to go out in the rain and snow to do the chores. One morning, after an all-night downpour, she found the cows almost swimming in the stable. She began digging a ditch to let the water drain off. By noon she had the situation under control."

Sister Marie became a nurse when children or sisters had measles, scarlet fever, grippe, or stomach cramps. As no doctor served the prairie people, they came to rely on Sister's care in times of illness. She gave them medicine and medals along with words of comfort. One winter she herself became so sick that the sisters feared she



would die before they could get help from Vancouver. Their medicine supply was depleted and washouts from swollen creeks had closed the roads.

Their isolation and privations could have weighed heavily on the sisters but the chronicles give evidence of joyous community living in the service of God and His people. The beginning paragraph of the 1882 chronicles summarizes life at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart convent and school. "The year slipped by peacefully in this mission where anything important rarely occurs. We teach with tranquility in this peaceful spot. Each day has its duties; and we are poor."

## FINANCES A PROBLEM

When the mission began in 1876 the Provincial Chronicles indicate its financial status, one that did not change throughout its twenty-two years of existence. "Let's hope," it reads, "that this poor mission, hardly able to subsist, will prosper under Providence for the spiritual good of this native population." The sisters lived the poor way, supplementing their meagre income by begging, by giving entertainments and by putting on bazaars.

Bazaars are part of Providence Sister history. The first one that the sisters sponsored in Cowlitz was for the benefit of the parish church. For months before the December event the sisters tatted handkerchiefs, knitted sweaters, crocheted table cloths and embroidered towels and pillow slips. They, with the help of the children, packaged grab bag prizes and made candy and pastry. Father Hylebos paid the expenses of all the materials they used; and the men made frame booths that the girls decorated with colored bunting.

That first bazaar brought in \$6,000 for the church. Every two years the sisters sponsored a bazaar for their own benefit and though the receipts were never great, the few hundred dollars cleared enabled them to make needed repairs in the house.

One year they asked Mother Joseph to come from Vancouver to examine the roof. The winter's snow and wind had damaged it and they feared it might collapse. The chronicler writes, "This mission is so poor!" They knew that Mother Joseph would find a way out. She sent Mr. Blanchet, the builder that she had trained, to oversee the local men who volunteered to do the repair work free of charge.

That year's chronicles end with gratitude. "This year", they read, "we thank Providence that we can pay the debt we contracted for the roof repair work and for the support of eleven poor children." Another year the house needed new flooring, painting and carpeting. The sisters trusted St. Joseph to bless their bazaar with receipts to equal the two hundred dollar repair bills. In spite of bad weather and almost impassable roads the chronicles say, "St. Joseph saw to it that we made two hundred twenty dollars."

The sisters had friends among the Cowlitz people, few if any of them wealthy, but many with willing hearts, generous with what they had. The chronicles name Mr. Henriot as their benefactor for more reasons than one.

After ten years of riding horse back to visit the sick people on the farms, the sisters welcomed his offer of an easier mode of travel. Mr. Henriot donated thirty-five dollars to be raffled off among the patrons of his store for the benefit of purchasing a horse and buggy for the sisters. Some time after 1876 the Pinto family had sold their general merchandise store to the Henriot brothers. Situated at the fork where the road branches off to Toledo, the store was a stopping off place for travelers and a gathering place for the prairie people.

The sisters had known the Henriot store from their arrival at Cowlitz and had made all their purchases there. The Henriot's ledger of their account there records



the simplicity of the sisters' life in the late 1900's. Among other things they bought: 16 yards of gingham at \$1.60, 8 pairs of hose at \$1.00, corset stays at 40¢, rubbers at 30¢ a pair, a pair of shoes at \$1.50, lace at 25¢. Food items include ginger, 10¢; 100 pounds sugar, \$11.70; 11 pounds coffee, \$3.00. The sisters paid their bill monthly, partly in cash, partly in music lessons and tuition for the Henriot children one of whom is Cleo Henriot, the father of a scholarly Jesuit son.

The chronicles repeatedly state the poverty of the house, not as a complaint but as a fact. Their poverty did not deter them from teaching the poor gratis nor from giving them free board and room. Each year the number of meals given the poor reaches numbers like 258, 634, 400 meals given especially to the Indians who came to the door for food, medicine and for a word with the sisters.

The sisters felt the support of their provincial superior who visited them regularly. They valued the interest of their bishops who came annually for confirmation and for a pastoral visit, always ending with three grand holidays called conges.

## PASTORS AND SISTERS WORK TOGETHER

The Providence Sisters' apostolate in Cowlitz existed during the terms of three pastors of St. Frances Xavier Mission. All three supported their work in every way possible. The sisters and pastor worked together to serve the people of God. The parish benefited by the sisters' care of the sacristy and linens, directing of the singing, organization of feast day processions, participation in the liturgy and in all other church activities.

The sisters added these duties to their principal work of instructing and counseling students and carrying on an apostolate of visiting people and discovering and filling their needs. All three pastors realized that sisters make a difference in a parish and appreciated them.

Father Peter Hylebos, pastor from 1873-1879, had requested the Providence Sisters for Cowlitz and welcomed them to the mission in 1876. When Bishop Aegedius Junger visited Cowlitz in 1879, Father Hylebos asked and received permission to resign as pastor for reasons of health. The parish lost a good priest and a real benefactor when he left St. Francis Mission on December 27.

Father Emil Kauten, brother of Sister Anna Marie and friend of the Providence Sisters, arrived on December 23, 1879, as the new pastor. The Kautens came from Belgium. In his seminary days there, a call for missionaries had come from Vancouver, Territory of Washington. He answered that call, setting out for the Far West right after his ordination in 1875. He learned to value the Providence Sisters in Vancouver, and it was he who looms large in the foundation history of Providence Hospital, Seattle. When he visited his homeland in 1886, he brought back with him his nineteen-year-old sister who entered the Sisters of Providence novitiate in Vancouver a month later.

Needless to say, Father Kauten fully supported the sisters in Cowlitz. He came at a time when question of closing the school began to gain strength. He understood the problems of poverty, infrequency of Mass, small enrollment and the difficulty of accomplishing Providence works on the prairie. In his eleven-year pastorate there he did all that he could to at least partially solve these problems. In 1890 a new assignment to Spokane Falls took him away from St. Francis Mission, Cowlitz.

Father N. Frye, a Benedictine Father from Lacey, Washington, replaced him. Providence Sisters knew the Benedictines from Lacey's proximity to Olympia where a Providence school and hospital already existed. The history of that hospital includes a record of Benedictine kindness. The sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred

Heart, Cowlitz, experienced a like concern in the trying times of the closing of their mission.

The difficulty of having daily Mass had existed to some degree almost from the beginning of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Convent. It became more pronounced in about 1890 as more and more farmers began to settle in the territory around Cowlitz. New little towns grew up, each with a general merchandise store, a post office and, before long, a mission church.

Such missions called stations dependent on St. Francis Xavier Church became more and more numerous. Its pastor with no assistant had to make regular rounds of the missions saying Sunday Mass, giving instructions and administering the sacraments. He rode horseback often in drenching rains, saying Mass and hearing confessions at one station; then he rode off to another station. In those days when the Communion fast permitted not even a glass of water or a bite of bread before saying Mass, the priest often broke fast only after a noon Mass.

As the number of stations increased, the frequency of Mass at each decreased. When the Chehalis church was blessed and a resident priest stationed there the sisters had hopes of having Mass oftener. However, within the next few years, the bishop dedicated more and more station churches. By 1897 St. Francis Xavier Church itself had Sunday Mass only once a month; and often, no daily Mass as many as ten days in a stretch. The sisters felt keenly the deprivation of Mass and Communion.

The poverty of foundation days had little chance of improving. The chronicles record the year by year struggle in simple language. "The people here are so poor that we can charge little for tuition and board."

Other years they say, "We could scarcely meet our expenses." "Considering the poverty of our house, the strangling of thirteen of our sheep by dogs was a real trial, but Mother Vicar sent us two boarders. The income from these enabled us to meet our expenses." For 1887 we read, "We were worried about continuing our mission but once we opened school we had more paying boarders than ever."

The enrollment peaked in the 1890's. The 1891 chronicles say, "After having vegetated for so long a time, our mission seems to have taken on surprising new life." Sister Mary Florence Flynn had become superior in 1890. Experienced in administering schools and an excellent teacher herself, she knew the interests and needs of young people and capitalized on them.

The building was run down. She risked running up bills to buy a French range for the kitchen and to purchase a new pump with a wind mill. They now could have running water in the house. She enlarged the laundry and installed a furnace. Then, in 1891, she invited Mother Provincial and Mother Joseph to visit Cowlitz. Before they left she had plans drawn up and permission to build an addition to cost \$1,850.

The enrollment continued to rise, reaching its highest point in 1893 when the school registered forty-nine boarders, two orphans and twenty-three day pupils. In 1896, Miss Georgie Grenier received her diploma of graduation, the first to be given from Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School. There is no record of any afterwards.

## LAST DAYS OF THE SCHOOL

In 1897 Sister Bernadine of Sienna replaced Sister Mary Florence as superior. For reasons not given, the enrollment dropped drastically to eleven boarders, two orphans and eight day pupils. Otherwise things went on as usual. The problems of poverty and privation of daily Mass continued.

Three events highlighted the year. Bishop E. J. O’Dea, Bishop of Nesqually since September, 1896, came to confirm thirty-two parishioners, visit the classes and give the children a holiday and candy. Father Emil Kauten, their former pastor, arrived in Cowlitz on a non-Mass Sunday. He rang the bell and the news spread. Within an hour the church was filled. The people filled it again for afternoon Benediction. They were eager to attend religious services.

The third event took place at the close of school. The chronicles read, “The pupils gave a pay performance that brought in little. The school is poor. Some Catholic families have withdrawn their children to send them to the public school.” In this discouraging tone the chronicles come to an abrupt end with no mention of the sisters’ withdrawing from the school. Yet Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School did come to an end in 1898.

Its twenty-two years of existence on the prairie had left their mark. The early pioneer women who had received their education and training there established their homes on the principles and religious truths and practices that they had learned from the sisters. God had chosen three of the Cowlitz pupils to become Sisters of Providence: Sister Rose of the Cross Henriot, Sister Mary Frances Pinto and Sister Mary de Sales Dubeau.

History shows Cowlitz Prairie remaining just Cowlitz Prairie to praise God in quiet ways. The view of mountains and stretches of prairie grass bespeak God’s glory. In 1858 Cowlitz was the most populated area in the territory with prospects of becoming the railway terminal. No one pushed the project. Today, the nearest railway station is still five miles away at Winlock.

Cowlitz passed up the chance of having the University of Washington located there because no one contributed the 160 acres of land the territorial bill asked the farmers to donate. In the middle 1800’s the missionary priests of the territory met periodically at Cowlitz to discuss common problems and successes and to pray together. It was the central point of missionary activity. In 1975 a group of diocesan priests of the Seattle diocese revived those historic meetings by coming together each month at the Franciscan school convent to do what the early priests had done.

That school no longer functions as a school either. The Franciscan Sisters took over, in 1911, where the Providence Sisters had left off in 1898. Their school, renamed St. Mary’s Academy, flourished for a time. In 1869 the sisters built a modern high school there. By 1975 this school, too, had come to an end.

St. Francis Church remains on the mission grounds, the fourth one to replace the original log church. Fire had destroyed three others. Catholicism flourishes in this parish of farming people. The pioneers buried in the cemetery, a stone’s throw from the church, had a legacy of faith to hand down. Headstones bear the names of these historic men of faith: Simon Plamondon and his wife Celeste, Rochon, Dubeau, Grenier, Henriot, Bernier.

A cherry tree and a few Gravenstein apple trees planted by Providence Sisters in the school yard still bear fruit even as the sisters’ lessons live on in new generations of Cowlitz families.



*The school in Cowlitz reached a high point in enrollment in 1895 with Sister Mary Florence Flynn as superior.*



*Sister Mary Rosary was the first superior of the school in Cowlitz.*



*Sisters travelled on horseback to visit homes and to shop in Cowlitz.*



# Chapter 6

## *The Way It Was In Olympia*

1881- ff. OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON

*A Story of Providence Academy (St. Michael School)*

### A CITY AND A PROVIDENCE ACADEMY GROW TOGETHER

Florence Curtin knocked at the door of the governor's home around the corner and up a block from Providence Academy. She was inviting the governor and his wife to attend the academy girls' presentation of "Marie Antoinette". Would they come as honored guests? The high school senior hoped they would.

That was before a capitol dome dominated the skyline of Olympia, and landscaped grounds and protocol and a mansion might make a young girl hesitant to knock at the door of a dignitary. Life in Olympia in the early days may have been simple but it was always gracious. Providence Academy's evening of drama was an opportunity for its students to develop a taste for the finer things of life.

The academy had become a part of Olympia in its growing years after the city had had thirty-some years of history. Already in 1856 when Mother Joseph had led the first group of Providence Sisters from Montreal, Canada, to the West, Olympia had a unique importance. Comparing it with Vancouver, Father J. B. Brouillet, Vicar General of the Nesqually diocese, had decided that Olympia should be the site of the first Providence school in the West.

Strong in this conviction, before building a convent, he had awaited the return from Montreal of his bishop with the first five sisters. Bishop A. M. A. Blanchet had another opinion that prevailed. So it was that at Vancouver the sisters began their first mission. Olympia's school had to bide its time.

In the meantime the town that a pioneer named Levi L. Smith had founded at the southern end of Puget Sound had become a small incorporated city called Olympia. A captain of a ship on the sound named Captain Doane had capitalized on the natural beds of oysters found in Budd Inlet and had started the industry that has made Olympia oysters world famous. A thriving lumber industry was exporting rich forest products that loaded at Tumwater and served emerging towns on Puget Sound as well as far away cities in a beginning world market.

Farmers coming to Olympia by ox cart to sell their produce and shop for city merchandise were proud of a new brick building, the first of its kind on Main Street. Some of these farmers came from nearby villages on the narrow-gauge Tenino-Olympia railroad. The ride cost them a dollar from Tenino or a bit from Tumwater. The capital city of Washington Territory was looking up by 1881.

Catholicism, too, had had over thirty years of history in Olympia. The Oblate Fathers, in 1848, had purchased a large tract of land at Priest Point and had established an Indian mission there with a school. They also served the few white Catholics then in Olympia where, in 1854, they built a small church. When these Fathers withdrew from the mission in the early 1860's, the bishop of Nesqually acquired property for a new church and appointed Father J. B. Brondel pastor.



Father built the first St. Michael Church on Columbia Street and Tenth Avenue and served there until the middle 1870's.

In 1879 Father Peter Hylebos became the pastor of St. Michael's. He came from Cowlitz Prairie where he had succeeded in getting Providence Sisters to staff a school in 1876. Bishop Aegedius Junger had replaced Bishop A. M. A. Blanchet in 1879. It seemed a good time to negotiate the opening of a Providence school in Olympia.

On September 28, 1880, Bishop Junger contacted Mother Amable, Superior General in Montreal, requesting the new foundation and sister teachers to staff it. The answer, though not too encouraging, left the decision to the bishop and the Providence superior in the West.

Mother Amable explained the scarcity of sisters prepared to teach English, the many requests for schools in the United States that she had had to refuse, and the already heavy debts contracted in the Western mission. Knowing the trust in Providence and the courageous daring of her western sisters, she suspected that they would use the principle of subsidiarity that she had given them in her letter to the bishop and would make preparations to open a school.

Bishop Junger's next letter to Montreal described a good property buy available in Olympia. Sister Blandine Colins, one of the western foundress sisters, and Sister John of the Cross knew the location, he said, and approved of it. He begged for a school and teachers, as Catholics and Protestants were pleading for the school.

Mother Amable came west in April, 1881. She saw designs of Providence for this city that had once been selected as the place for the first Providence mission in the West. Twenty-eight years before, she had been one of the group of sisters who, in 1852, had arrived in the West only to have to turn back.

At that time, the California gold rush had lured too many of the people in the Oregon Territory to the gold mines. The return trip, full of tragedies, never reached Montreal. Instead the sisters found themselves deported in Chili, South America. Mother Amable had been a part of the designs of Providence for Chili then. Now, by a strange coincidence, she was to have a part in His plans for Olympia.

## THE SCHOOL OPENS

In July Mother John of the Cross Beaudoin became the new mother vicar. On August 22, 1881, she left Vancouver with Sister Benedict Joseph Larocque and Sister Mary Gabriel Flynn who were to found a school in Olympia. With them on the dusty train were Bishop Junger, also enroute to Olympia for a pastoral visit, and a Jesuit priest scheduled to preach a retreat there. The five important people had time to discuss the needs of the diocese before they changed trains at Tenino. There they all boarded the noisy, jerky narrow-gauge train that took them to their destination. Father Hylebos was at the station to meet them.

The carriage stopped at an unpromising looking building on Ninth Street between Columbia and Main Streets. Father welcomed the sisters to this tiny house at their temporary Providence St. Amable. Later it was to become Providence Academy and, still later, St. Michael School.

The sisters had a pretty good idea of how long "temporary" could last and began at once to turn a "shack" into a convent school. Well it was that Mother John had planned to stay a week to ease the sacrifice of Sister Benedict Joseph, the superior, and Sister Mary Gabriel, the teacher.

Olympia was fortunate in its first superior. Sister Benedict Joseph had come west the year after her profession in 1865. Reared as a child in a large Quebec family, she

had grown up in graciousness, love and concern for others. Her family ties remained strong throughout her life.

Her Providence community recognized her empathy with people and appointed her to leadership roles as local or provincial superior from the time that she was twenty-six years old until she became ill at the age of sixty-six. Olympia benefited by her administration at the school for its first six years and then at St. Peter's Hospital for its first eleven years. She had come to Olympia from Tulalip where the sisters and the Indians had loved her as their superior.

In gratitude to her, two of the former Tulalip pupils offered their services to Sister Benedict to ready the run-down Olympia house for occupancy. Joseph Henry, then a young man, stayed on for four months using his carpentry skills to fashion desks and benches for the classroom, and his knowledge of farming to clear the land for spring planting. He had learned skills in the Tulalip industrial school and he had experienced the meaning of concern for others' needs during his years there with Sister Benedict directing the school.

Theresa Forsythe, too, wanted a way to show her gratitude for Sister's care of her in Tulalip. She remained at Providence St. Amable the whole of the first year doing the work of a full-time sister.

At ease with Indians, with ecclesiastics, sisters and businessmen, Sister Benedict quickly adapted herself to the socially oriented people of Olympia. Early Olympia was known as the high society town of Puget Sound. Its costume balls, theatre parties, receptions for legislators and dinner parties for the governor and his family made up the society columns of early newspapers.

Sister Benedict's directness, simplicity and sincerity won these people and quickly broke the prejudice towards the sisters and the school that the sisters had initially felt. They were happy now about the support of all of the Olympia people, rich and poor, Catholic and Protestant.

In the three weeks before school started, Sister Benedict and Sister Mary Gabriel visited homes to identify the needs of the people and to publicize the opening of the new school. Thus began in Olympia the visitation of homes by Providence Sisters.

The convent was a Providence house besides being a school. The four hundred ninety-four meals that the sisters and Theresa Forsythe served the poor that year witness to the many who quickly caught the meaning of the term "providence" and knocked at the convent door with assurance. But Providence St. Amable was above all a school. Sister Providence of the Sacred Heart Brissette joined the two sisters to teach music when it was time to start classes.

On Monday, September 12, 1881, school began with thirty-five girls in attendance, "a good number" the chronicles say. A little later the academy was to expand to include grade-school boys also; but it started as an all-girl school.

Many of the pupils were Protestants. Three were boarders from outlying villages, one was an orphan and the rest were day scholars. The 1881 school roster included girls from prominent families: three Shields girls, three Judsons, Annie Connolly, Belle Chambers and Maggie Kearney. Most of the girls had such nineteenth century first names as Sadie, Tillie and Fannie that identified them as belonging to an era.

Sister Benedict welcomed the mothers as they registered their little girls, and Sister Providence helped the older girls get acquainted. When the mothers saw her assembling all thirty-five of them in the yard for a song and game opening exercise, they left for home satisfied. The game ended with two-by-two ranks and silence. Sister Providence struck up a march on the piano and Sister Gabriel led them to their places in the classroom.

A reading class helped group the children by ability. Once given their books, they

learned to concentrate on spelling, figuring or diagramming sentences while Sister taught each group in turn. She utilized the better students as teacher assistants. It took strong organizational ability to teach effectively in a one-room school. Sister Gabriel had her successes but she had her problems too. There were times when Sister Providence would take over the class with a singing lesson to restore order; and all would go well again for a time.

When it became evident that teaching was not one of Sister Gabriel's best talents, she left Olympia without an immediate replacement. Quick to see the sisters' difficulty, Mrs. Chambers (Connolly) entrusted her two children to the care of a servant for three weeks and taught Sister Gabriel's class.

Then Sister Mary Wilfred Ranney arrived on her first mission away from Vancouver and quickly won the affection and confidence of the students. She had the gift of being able to keep everyone busy learning in an atmosphere of discipline and happiness. That was the atmosphere in which she had lived her childhood and teen-age years at Providence Academy, Vancouver.

Placed there by her father when she was four, she had experienced the warmth of Mother Joseph's love. Her teachers had recognized her brilliant mind and had encouraged her to ever greater challenges. They introduced her to the world of books and fostered in her an avid love of reading. They gave her music lessons preparing her to be the organist at St. James Cathedral. At seventeen, she had finished high school and eagerly asked admission to the Sisters of Providence novitiate.

Now, after five years as teacher and organist in Vancouver as a professed novice, she was ready to direct a classroom on her own. She loved the challenge.

It was in Olympia that she gradually moved up from grade school to high school teaching, deepening her insights into the psychology of each age group as she studied the young people entrusted to her. She was to have a long career of teaching in Olympia. Now, in her first year there, she was a joy to the young people and to the two older sisters with whom she formed community. The school's reputation spread quickly. Its full nine-month session was an added asset; and so were its three sisters.

The territorial government since 1854 had made some provision for tax-supported public schools, but they were few in number. The buildings were crude, equipment scanty and the terms short, often only three months long. Olympia parents wanted more for their children. Two private academies, one established in 1855 by a Presbyterian minister, another in 1856 by the Methodists, already served the city but they were not adequate for the growing population.

Protestants and Catholics alike in the capital city were awakening to the need of education for citizenship for the many. Olympia people had heard of the successful Providence academies in Vancouver, Steilacoom, Yakima and Cowlitz Prairie. Now they had one of their own, one they whole-heartedly supported. By the end of Providence St. Amable's first year, the enrollment had increased to five boarders, three orphans and seventy-seven day pupils.

## LOOKING BACK ON THE FIRST YEAR

As they looked back over the year, the sisters found reason for the chronicles to state, "Our mission was founded on the Cross." The convent, even after repairs, was cold. With stoves in each room, the sisters tried to keep the dampness out. That meant getting up at night to re-fuel the wood and coal heaters.

Counting boarders, orphans and sisters, nine people slept in one dormitory. In

the 1880's, Olympia's convent was not unique in having no plumbing, electricity or running water. All girls in that day, though, learned housekeeping arts, so all shared the morning work of sweeping, dusting, washing and filling the wood and coal bins. They took work for granted.

The young children, accustomed to Olympia's rainy season that lasted from October to June, played marbles in holes filled with water and skipped rope in the wet grass while the sister supervising them held up her umbrella and waited for the bell to signal everyone indoors again. The room would smell of wet coats drying around the stove. The classroom was overcrowded and equipment scarce.

Sickness among the children plagued the little boarding school; but the children recovered quickly. Not so did Sister Benedict who became seriously ill in April. For a good part of three weeks her condition was of grave concern to the sisters and to the doctor attending her. The sisters prayed to the Sacred Heart and to Our Lady of Compassion, their two mainstays in good times and bad. The ladies of Olympia in their kindness, helped nurse Sister Benedict back to health, even sitting up with her during five critical nights.

More than the trials of sickness and material poverty, the sisters felt keenly the spiritual poverty of the first years in Olympia. The convent had no chapel as the house was too small for one. The pastor had missions up and down the Sound.

His parish included all of three counties and most of Pierce County with stations at Steilacoom, Nesqually, Yelm, Shelton, Montesano, Aberdeen and Hoquiam. Olympia had Sunday Mass only every three weeks and daily Mass only a third of the time. Olympia's Providence foundress sisters, like those of Steilacoom, Cowlitz Prairie and Yakima, accepted the spiritual privations mission life included and strengthened their prayer life in their felt need of God.

Money, too, was scarce. Providence schools always had to struggle to make ends meet, and St. Amable's was no exception. The first year, tuition, music lessons and board brought in \$700. With hard work and judicious spending the sisters managed to keep the running expenses and debt payments below \$2,000.

Sister Benedict knew the two principal ways that Mother Joseph had used from the first foundation days in the West to balance Providence house ledgers — begging tours and bazaars. Both methods supposed the good will of people convinced of the value of Providence Sisters and the worthiness of their cause. Olympia had such people from the start of the school.

In requesting the school, Bishop Junger had assured Mother Vicar that Olympia could raise eight hundred dollars in a first bazaar. While it fell a little short of that amount, the November bazaar of 1881 was a monetary and a social success. Half of the proceeds went to the Church; the other half of the \$750 helped considerably to pay the convent bills.

Mother John of the Cross had sent Sister Peter Claver from Vancouver to help with the bazaar. Before coming, she had solicited from sisters and merchants in Portland and had arrived in Olympia with a trunk full of articles for sale or raffle. The Olympia sisters had organized women to make and gather embroidery pieces, aprons, towels, patchwork quilts and toys to stock booths and a fish pond. They had asked the men to build and set up booths. By involving many people, the sisters interested many in the event.

The evenings of the three-day bazaar resounded with noisy gaiety as the men spun wheels of fortune and society women in high-necked dotted Swiss blouses with rustling, long silk skirts enticed buyers to the booths. The bazaar was big business carried on with gaiety and fun and willingness to work overtime for a cause. It brought people together and helped build friendships among both the laity and

sisters. Mingling among the gay crowd were beautiful young ladies, daughters of the society set, selling chances on prize pieces. Among these enthusiastic workers were the Chambers girls: Faith, Hope and Charity and the Connollys, pioneers in Olympia country and united in marriage to the Chambers family. It meant much to the sisters to have these people as their supporters that first year.

When school closed in late June, the sisters at first thought of making repairs on the convent; but they decided against it. They foresaw the possibility of building within a year's time; so they saved their money. They closed the house for the summer and all three went to Vancouver for retreat and a joyous reunion with the rest of the community.

On August 10, Sister Benedict Joseph and Sister Providence returned to Olympia to re-open the house. When Sister Mary Wilfred arrived on August 19, it was time to embark on another year of school.

## THE SCHOOL GROWS

Classes began on August 21 with twenty-seven pupils. By September 1, the number had considerably increased. As a one-room school was no longer adequate, Sister Benedict asked Mother John of the Cross for another teacher. By September 15, Sister Alfreda Houle had joined the three foundresses and now they were four sisters to work, pray and live together in community.

Sister Benedict needed no formal job description of a superior's responsibilities to know how to fill her days. In pioneer days, for mothers of families and for sisters, the day was never long enough to do all the things that needed doing. Overseeing the convent and school made constant demands on her time. Her responsibility to the sisters, the employees, the short-time and all-year boarders, and to the people of Olympia required unselfish devotedness. All learned to know that Sister Benedict was never too busy to listen to them and help them.

While the days of the other three sisters never lacked variety, they had clearly defined duties scheduled for definite times that allowed little deviation in the day's horarium. Having established a reputation as a music teacher the previous year, Sister Providence welcomed her old pupils and the new ones who enrolled.

Sister Mary Wilfred divided the pupils into two classes grouping them by the progress that they had made in the three R's. Roughly speaking, the first teacher had grades five to eight; and Sister Alfreda had grades one to four.

In much of their teaching the sisters used the individualized method. When a student mastered one reader, she progressed to the next. When she achieved fluency in adding, she learned to subtract. When she could identify nouns with the *Reed and Kelley Grammar* as a tool, she was introduced to verbs. She memorized the *Baltimore Catechism* at her own speed.

Concentration, a desire to learn, self-discipline and the teacher's interest in individuals played important roles in education in the late 1800's. An atmosphere of restrained freedom and joy encouraged learning. The enrollment increased to seventy-nine by the end of the second year, with thirty-six of the girls taking music lessons.

For more reasons than an increased enrollment the first temporary Providence Academy was in need of replacement. In 1883, as well as through the years ahead, repairs, remodeling, additions to old buildings and then their replacement taxed the finances of Providence Academy. The sisters and their higher superiors realized that in justice they had to give their pupils adequate facilities for learning. Yet in spite of



real efforts, delays often occurred. The sisters and students remained in the first poor convent for a year and a half.

Mother Joseph, the remarkable foundress of the Sisters of Providence in the West, drew the plans and supervised the construction of all the Providence houses. In Olympia, her plans met with constant delay. She directed the beginning of the ground leveling and foundation laying and then moved on to another city and another building project. She had left Olympia only a few weeks when the men broke their contract and stopped work.

The sisters recalled Mother Joseph. Within a few days, she had twenty-five men on the job. In the meantime, the sisters had moved to a rented house, as the old one was to be demolished. The construction, due for completion for the opening of the 1883 session, was further held up because of a delay in lumber deliveries. For six months, living and school went on in two rented houses "each less than comfortable", the chronicles say in an understatement.

During these trials, Mother Joseph and Mr. J. B. Blanchet, her assistant architect, reassured the sisters and kept the project moving, if only slowly. They considerably lessened the debt by the work that they themselves did. Once the building was completed Mother Joseph came to visit regularly to check on their building needs and to assure herself that the sisters had the comforts that they needed. She brought them community news and made them feel one with the Providence family no matter how many miles separated them from each other.

The chronicles give an example of Mother Joseph's concern for them. It is a typical incident of her decisive acting and her determination to get what she needed when she needed it, trusting always in Providence and St. Joseph to see her through.

While in Olympia, she had an immediate need to go on a business trip for the convent. To get to the nearby mill town to do her business, Mother Joseph with Annie Connolly as companion, had to take the logging road through a forest where a fire was raging. The driver of the horse and carriage skirted the burning trees, and all reached their destination safely.

The business accomplished, the three left the next morning. The fire was contained by now, the charred trees showing the previous day's fury. Trees were falling on all sides. One fell in front of the carriage frightening the horse who started running toward a precipice. He stumbled, fell and the carriage lurched and then caught on a tree at the edge of the precipice.

Divine Providence, as always, had protected Mother Joseph and her companions. As usual, too, she accomplished her mission despite difficulties.

## A NEW BUILDING READY

By February 13, 1884, Mother Joseph could tell the sisters to move into the new Providence Academy. The eighty by fifty-four foot, two-storey, wooden building situated between Columbia and Main at Ninth Streets was simple and roomy. It was cold though; but the sisters were happy.

The back porch looked over clumps of trees beyond which lay the smelly mud flats rich in Olympia oysters. Japanese families lived in flats there and worked the oyster beds. From lumber mills on the further side of the bay, came the musical sound of buzzing saws and the piney odor of damp sawdust. The academy site had many points in its favor.

The school continued to prosper as it added classrooms, teachers and pupils. By 1889, a few little boys in knickerbockers had joined the girls, lining up first in the



ranks when the clock in the tower of the capitol building struck nine and the school bell simultaneously rang for silence. The boys created new learning situations for the little girls who had to cope with teasing, love notes furtively passed down rows of desks and with competition in spell-downs and in states-and-capitals matches.

In a class picture of 1889, ninety boys and girls are standing at attention on the porch steps. In the back rows are about twenty-five teenage girls who look like young ladies with hair piled high and twisted into a knot on top. Most wear dark ankle-length dresses with high necks and tight-fitted blouses. Sister Mary Wilfred had followed most of these girls from the primary grades into high school. The little girls in the front rows are obviously following directions with one hand in the other and palms up.

These young people, at school and at home, lived regular lives with much togetherness and little variety, but initiative and emotions had ways of surfacing so that the sisters knew each of their pupils as young people with needs and hopes and frustrations. Olympia parents valued the personal interest the sisters gave their children; and they cooperated with them in their decisions.

Financing the school remained a major problem. Because the sisters wanted the poor in their school, they kept tuition as low as they could, one dollar a month for the primary grades, a dollar and a half for the grammar grades, and two dollars for the high school. Tuition was often in arrears, and the sisters wrote it off for those who could not pay.

The Olympia school, as all Providence houses did, depended on Divine Providence. It had been built on money borrowed from banks, laymen, clergy, and from other houses of the Providence community. The meeting of interest payments more than once necessitated new borrowing. When a little headway on the debt seemed imminent, street assessments, drainage payments and sidewalk installations imposed new costs.

The 1884 school building was serving them well when, in 1890, "progress" passed by their back door in the form of a public road that took a large chunk of their land. The excavation for the road made it necessary to build a retaining wall at great expense. The road was part of a new railroad project. The sisters considered selling their house and property, hoping for a good buy from the railroad company. However, receiving no favorable offer, they decided to make repairs and modernize.

A city ordinance required them to install an outside fire escape and indoor plumbing. It was 1904 before they had steam heat and a warm house; 1908 before the boarders' dormitory had curtains around the beds. In 1909, practice rooms with glass partitions lessened the annoyance of pianos drum-drumming in parlors, dining rooms and corridors. These improvements tell much of the inconvenience the sisters along with all other people of pioneer days had borne patiently for years.

In 1902 Mother Mary Antoinette, Superior General, and Mother John of the Cross, now assistant general, addressed a letter to the provincial council of the Nesqually province asking it to request the hospitals of the province for financial help for the Olympia school. Her appeal was strong. "In the hospitals," she wrote, "you have astonishing conversions; in the schools you strengthen and preserve the faith for generations. Our school must rival without ostentation the public schools that have physical features to attract pupils."

She asked that they wipe out half of the school debt and provide electric lights, comfortable furniture and landscaping in good taste in keeping with the social standard in which they lived. "The teachers," the letter adds, "are discouraged and paralyzed in their inability to pay their debts." Mother Antoinette herself sent a thousand dollar gift.

The hospitals responded generously and Providence Academy, Olympia, survived a financial crisis. St. Peter's Hospital, Olympia, was perhaps the academy's kindest benefactor. Often Sister Mary Martina Lefrançois, one of its superiors, would go to town to pay her wood bill and ask for the academy's bill too. When she bought bolts of material, she bought for two houses. Medicines and hospitalization were always free. Providence did provide and the academy sisters trusted always.

The hospital and school sisters formed one Providence community. Before nurses and teachers required certification, and when young sisters learned techniques of an apostolate from older sisters, there was frequent interchange of personnel among the various apostolates. Schools required a good command of English for the classroom teachers, but sisters with some English ability could be the school superior, teach music or care for boarders. Not until 1902 did American sisters become superiors of the academy in Olympia.

Stern-wheel steamers ran between Olympia and Seattle when Providence Hospital, Seattle, and Providence Academy, Olympia, were both young. The Christmas vacation of 1883 provided an opportunity for a get-together. The Olympia sisters joined the steamer passengers in a holiday mood on New Year's eve. At Steilacoom, the sisters and Father Claessens left the jolly group and walked up the hill to the convent the sisters had had to abandon in 1875. Father had invited the sisters to decorate the church, play and sing for the New Year's day Mass and renew Providence Sister friendships with the parishioners.

After that the sisters again boarded the steamer bound for Seattle. They stood on the deck in the brisk winter wind, revelling in the scenery as they went through deep channels, past Vashon Island and Alki Point, and then docked at the Seattle pier. A buggy awaited the travelers to take them to the hospital for a week of relaxation.

## ST. PETER'S AND THE ACADEMY SISTERS

Excitement ran high at Providence Academy when in 1887, Bishop Junger and Mother John of the Cross arrived there to meet with citizens to discuss the building of a hospital in Olympia. They chose a site on Columbia Street a few blocks from the church and about three blocks from the academy. Sister Benedict Joseph, first superior at the school, was to become the first superior at St. Peter's Hospital, Olympia.

Workmen began on the hospital in April, 1887, and continued through the summer. Meanwhile Sister Benedict Joseph had solicited patients for the forthcoming hospital. In the lumber camps around Olympia, she had sold admission tickets to the loggers. These tickets entitled them to hospital care in case of sickness or accident.

On June 21, 1887, with the hospital far from finished, the first patient came to present his ticket to Sister Benedict and ask for nursing care. Sister Joseph Hercule, Superior of the academy, rose to the occasion. In short order she and the teachers readied a house built for workmen. It may not have passed modern sterile requirements; but it was clean and comfortable; and Sister Joseph knew by experience and intuition what to do for the sick. Before August 10, when St. Peter's opened its doors, she had cared for thirteen patients, one of them a leg amputee. However, after five sisters came to staff the hospital, the school sisters left the care of the sick to them and they concentrated on their education apostolate.

The sisters in the two major apostolates in Olympia grew close to each other as they served many of the same families and shared the liturgy and community

gatherings. They met daily at Mass in the church about half way between the two Providence houses. On crisp October evenings they said the rosary together there, and met there in the spring for evening May devotions. The ties became closer still when, in January, 1896, because of the small number of boarders and the general financial crisis, the academy sisters moved in with the hospital sisters.

Sister Benedict Joseph knew the needs of the teachers and set aside the second floor for them and their few boarders. She often provided treats for them and relaxing outings. They took all their meals at the hospital, replacing each other to walk the few blocks to get a hot lunch. In return, the academy supplied fruit, meat, garden produce and their cooking utensils. The revenue from tuition, board and music went to the hospital. The teachers helped with the housekeeping, laundry and sewing and took overnight duty on the patient floors on Friday and Saturday nights.

Sisters who grew in stature with the years, were young in those shared Olympia days, sisters like Sister Mary Alexander Goyner, Sister Tarcisius Dwyer and Sister Mary Mt. Carmel Moore. They could learn and laugh together. When little boy pranks kept Sister Ermelinda Moore's primary class in constant turmoil, the sisters raised her spirits and helped her to forget — until the next day's battle began again. Tantalizing older boys with mirrors would catch the rays of the sun and shine the blinding light into her eyes. Sharing joys and sorrows offset the weariness of hard work.

Yes, there were problems. At first a sister "first officer" took care of the day by day living of the teachers in the hospital. At times, not sufficiently aware of hospital routines, she gave directions that caused conflicts. The naming of Sister Vincent Ferrier superior of both groups when she replaced Sister Benedict Joseph, lessened friction.

When the number of boarders, in January, 1899, made feasible the return of the teachers to academy living, they rejoiced; yet they knew that the experience of living together had been a good one. They kept the close ties that they had formed with each other. Sister Vincent invited the teachers to continue having their lunch at the hospital. "You teach all morning," she said, "and you need a good meal at noon." Academy sisters, at this time especially, needed the understanding of their own sisters.

Providence Academy was having strong competition as public schools began to expand and to extend their school terms. At first, prejudice existed on the part of the public schools and of the sisters' school. Both sought to increase their enrollments, and a number of academy pupils left for the public school. Although most of the pupils who transferred to the public schools were Protestants, the sisters depended on the support of Protestants as well as of Catholics for a successful school.

Some sisters spoke of the public schools as "Godless," and blamed politics and the devil for enticing pupils away from their school. They saw the West as a land of coldness toward God or, at least, as a Protestant land. Their zeal to spread Christ's Kingdom urged them to win for Catholicism all the people that they could. Education they saw as a powerful means to lead young people to God.

On the other hand, the public schools needed a large enrollment too. They used their own advertising techniques. They had public financial support and were making progress in educational standards. Everyone in the West was in the early stages of the science of education, and Horace Mann's ideas of tax-supported education for all were beginning to have weight. John Dewey's philosophy had not yet had its impact, but forward looking teachers and parents were already learning by doing.

Both public and private schools gradually saw that it was no time for prejudice to hamper progress in the educational world. Cooperation in Olympia grew stronger as the years progressed, and public and private schools began to share more and compete less. Some remarkable sisters contributed to good public relations in Olympia.

## SISTERS WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE

Three sisters who later became Mother Mary Mildred, Mother Mary Wilfred and Mother Vincent Ferrier grew close to each other in Olympia, one as a pupil, one as a teacher, one as a sister friend. Sister Vincent Ferrier Poulx and Sister Mary Wilfred had each, when in their twenties, helped found the Olympia Providence houses. They had experiences in common.

When Florence Curtin (the future Mother Mary Mildred) did not appear at school one morning, Sister Mary Wilfred wanted to know why. The two Curtin boys told her that their sister had quit school. That did not answer the "Why?" for her teacher. As soon as school closed that day, Sister Wilfred and Sister Vincent walked the three miles to the Curtin home. Mrs. Curtin spoke for Florence.

She had always wanted her one girl to go to a sisters' school. When they were young she taught her children reading and arithmetic and the answer to the question her daughter kept putting to her, "Who is God?" Florence loved to hear her say, "God is Love." None of the children had yet been baptized. Their father kept telling them that they were Catholics and would be baptized as soon as they were able to get to church to practise their religion.

When the two oldest boys were old enough, the parents sent Florence with them to Providence Academy. She was then thirteen. Lunch pails in hand the boys would run ahead and periodically sit by the roadside to wait for their sister trudging along behind them.

This went on for a year. Then, one day, Florence just did not feel up to the long walk and her mother said, "This is the end; it's too far for you to walk." This was the decision that she now told the two sisters.

Sister Vincent had a solution to offer. The hospital needed a girl to tidy the dining room and serve the state senators and representatives and the district judges who boarded at the hospital when the legislature was in session at the capital. Florence could serve their breakfast and supper, live at St. Peter's and go to school at the academy. It was a happy arrangement, one that continued until Providence Academy gave Florence her diploma of graduation; and the state gave her a teacher's certificate.

In the summer of 1898 she entered the religious community of the Sisters of Providence in Vancouver. Her mother, her brother Charles and Sister Benedict Joseph accompanied her on the train as far as Tumwater where she said "Good-bye" to Sister and her mother. Her brother continued on with her to Tenino to make sure that she got on the right train to Portland where Mother Melanie met her. The two took the ferry across the Columbia to Vancouver. She was well prepared for her new life. Her church, her family, the sisters and especially Sister Mary Wilfred all had helped form her into a lovable, gracious young woman.

Sister Mary Wilfred Ranney influenced, in a similar manner, many other Olympia girls during her twelve years of teaching at Providence Academy. At ninety-two years of age, Mother Mary Mildred Curtin reminisced on her one-time teacher. "Lydia Patnoude and I," she said, "used to walk to school together. We talked girl talk some; but mostly we talked about Sister Mary Wilfred's classes. She

was a great reader and saw that we had books to read. Always eager to learn more, so that she could quicken our minds, she studied the natural sciences and opened to us the world of stars and planets in the heavens and of flowers and plants at our feet. She had a wonderful mind and a big heart. She loved God and the prayers of the church.”

When Mother Mary Antoinette from Montreal visited the West in 1893, she broadened the curriculum of the Providence schools and introduced new techniques of teaching. To follow up her work, she appointed Sister Mary Wilfred to go from school to school as the first directress of schools in the West. That meant Providence, Olympia, was to lose its “pillar of the mission.” The chronicles add, “She had been so loved that we feared that the school would suffer from her leaving.”

Sister Tarcisius Dwyer came to provide excellent continuity to Sister Mary Wilfred’s good teaching; and she soon won all hearts. During her five-year tenure there, the high school subject offerings expanded and the twelfth year students began to take teachers’ examinations. It was Sister Tarcisius who had suggested to Florence Curtin that she should take these examinations. When Florence went into the big room full of tense young women waiting for the test papers, she, too, felt some nervousness.

As soon as she had her test copy, all tension vanished. She relaxed, wrote with assurance, completed the test in twenty minutes and handed in her paper. The puzzled examiner said to her, “You’re not giving up, are you?” “No,” she said simply, “I’m finished.”

In a few weeks she received a top-grade teacher’s certificate. Each graduating class prepared for these tests in a senior course called, “Review of Common Branches.” Almost all had success comparable to Florence’s. Most were graduated with a diploma and a state teacher’s certificate.

The well-prepared sisters of Providence Academy, however, did not seek such certification. They associated the need for it with employment in the public schools, until an incident occurring in Olympia alerted the Providence Sisters to think otherwise. A pupil of Sister Isabella Brainard put a challenging question to her one day. “Do you have a teacher’s certificate?” she asked, certain of a “yes”; as she had full confidence in her ability to teach.

But Sister Isabella had to tell the girl that she did not hold such a certificate. She had earned one at the end of her high school days; and she had taught in a public school with a Washington certificate before she became a sister. Seeing no need for state certification for teaching in academies recognized for scholarship, she had let her state credentials lapse. Other sisters had acted likewise. Her pupil’s question now awakened Sister Isabella to challenges ahead.

The whole educational world was gearing itself toward progress. It was Sister Mary Loretta Gately, Directress of Schools, who succeeded in requiring that Providence Sisters pass the state examinations and later earn normal school diplomas and university degrees.

In the meantime, Olympia academy pupils continued to have strong devoted teachers. The grade school teachers laid a solid foundation in the basic subjects, teachers like Sister Isidora Mondor, herself a graduate of Olympia. Her eighth grade pupils repeatedly took top honors in state proficiency examinations. Primary teachers like Sister Mary Mathilda and Sister Ursula had every pupil reading at least at their grade level by the year’s end.

Only the few went to high school at the turn of the century. In 1900 the whole state of Washington enrolled only 4,186 pupils in secondary schools. They were the



students interested in literature, rhetoric, history, languages and science. At Providence Academy their teachers found delight in helping them expand their minds.

As the business world began to open its doors to young women, the academy began offering commercial courses. Business and law firms applied there for well-trained stenographers and bookkeepers. Some of the advanced students passed civil service examinations and went into government positions. The Olympia academy girl stood apart.

## TRADITIONS HELP MAKE THE SCHOOL A COMMUNITY

Academy girls were happy, well-integrated young people who either boarded or attended the school as day pupils. From the beginning of the school certain traditions, typical of the Olympia school, united pastor, parents, sisters and pupils. The May picnic was perhaps the most joyous of them.

It all began in May of 1883 when Father Claessens rented a steamer for the day. When the big boat docked at the Fourth Street Pier, eighty chattering girls of all ages rushed up the planks and climbed to the upper deck to watch the lap of the waves. Little girls wearing wide-brimmed hats with velvet streamers scrambled to retrieve hats caught by the sea breeze. Older girls sat in groups on benches chatting about fashions, parties and friends. Mothers and sisters passed around mid-morning snacks and kept well aware of the doings of every child.

The boat docked at a mill town near a wooded spot with grass and pink rhododendrons. It was lunch time for the picnickers whose appetites were sharpened by the salt water air. Later in the day there was time for a short trek in the woods before all returned to the steamer for the return trip. At twilight the twelve-mile excursion ended, but the ties of friendship had grown closer that day and continued to live on.

The 1886 picnic in Arcadia, an eight-mile boat trip from Olympia, included little boys and hence tighter supervision. That is the only year until 1911 that boys are listed on school registers. Another year, the picnickers "rode on a special train to Woodland and had a great day," the chronicles say. At Bishop E. J. O'Dea's first confirmation visit to Olympia, he sponsored the holiday in the woods and was part of it. The bishop, priests, sisters and parents were always much a part of the Olympia school.

Following a Providence tradition dating from Mother Emilie Gamelin's time, the women of Olympia organized themselves as a Ladies of Charity group. As such they cooperated in the apostolate of the sisters, assisting them in many ways. Olympia people loved festivals and had a know-how in turning them into fund raisers.

On the spacious lawn of an elegant home, celebrities gathered on a June afternoon to chat, eat strawberry shortcake with whipped cream on top, and contribute to the school fund. Another day, home-made ice cream, angel food cake and a "cause" attracted ladies in fine dresses to a stately home to help pay the street pavement assessment.

More than once these ladies replaced a sick sister in the class room or helped with school plays, making costumes and directing dance routines. An annual play became a tradition and a fund raiser because of necessity, but more because of the opportunities it offered the students for development. The chronicles called the productions they staged, dramas.

Graduation exercises took on tone, too, attracting large audiences. In 1896 two



graduated in ankle-length ruffly dresses. Each read an original essay, one entitled "Morning," and the other "Evening". The chronicles say, "They developed their themes simply and beautifully." In 1916, the silver jubilee year, graduation took place in the Olympia theatre, one of the finest theatres in the Northwest. Graduation from Providence Academy had become a civic attraction.

By 1906 the enrollment had reached about 150 day students and 25 boarders, a high point which held steady until World War I. Usually almost half of the students were non-Catholics, many of them children of legislators, judges, the governor and prominent business and professional men. The academy's reputation for excellence came to the attention of President Taft in 1911 when he visited Olympia. He sent a special greeting to the sisters.

The academy was blessed with gracious personable superiors. From 1902 on, when the chronicles began to be written in English, all the superiors were American born. Among them were the two Woods sisters, Sister Mary Alice and Sister Louis Angela. Sister Anna, whom the boarders specially loved, and Sister Isabella, the teacher and scholar dear to the high school students, were also very effective teachers at the academy.

The priests of St. Michael parish gave full support to the sisters' efforts and involved themselves in their interests. Father Charles Claessens, coming to the parish the year after the school opened, saw the children grow up and knew the families well during his thirteen years as pastor. He helped the sisters of the school and hospital through their founding difficulties.

Most of the pastors who followed him had long tenures and close relationship with the school. History tells amusing stories of Father John Malley's joyous nature and of Father Matthew Britt, O.S.B., who bicycled from Lacey to offer daily Mass.

Because sodalities attracted youth in the 1900's, Father Malley organized the pupils in age groups, each with its own sodality. To become a Child of Mary challenged especially the older girls who loved to recite the rhythmical Office of Our Lady and honor her with May crownings and Living Rosary events.

In 1911 Father P. J. O'Reilly, S.J. introduced these girls to a silent three-day retreat. Father could dramatize the power of angels and devils and make shudders run up and down backs with his vivid portrayal of hell. He caught some girls giggling during one such sermon and tried to impress them with a story of Smarty. The story ended with the sentence, "And Smarty went to hell!" Father's Irish brogue turned the climax into spasms of giggles.

At the end of the retreat four Protestant girls asked to prepare for Baptism. All the students asked Father to return for a repeat performance the next year.

## THE PUSH OF PROGRESS

In the first two decades of the twentieth century Olympia, like other cities, felt the push of progress. With the advent of the automobile the 1891 six-mile-an-hour speed limit became outmoded. Streets were paved and sewage systems installed. New buildings and new fronts on old stores gave a tone to Main Street. In a new public high school, six hundred pupils were enrolled in 1900. The academy made changes in its physical plant and, more especially, changes in educational offerings and techniques.

In spite of ever-present financial problems, the needs for expansion beyond basic classroom teaching necessitated the building of a two-storey annex to the school in 1914. It housed an auditorium, dormitory, new chapel, a library, science laboratory and a well-equipped domestic science laboratory.

Even then some of the grade school classrooms were still over-crowded. Sister Eleanor Mary had a solution for her room that overflowed with boys and girls. She proposed it to Father Malley who had just finished building the brick church on Columbia Street and Tenth Avenue. He was about to tear down the old church building with its water-soaked basement and sinking floors. Why could not the lumber be used to build a classroom, she asked him. So it was that this young sister had a spacious room for her class of high-spirited boys and girls.

Summer schools, lecture series and a participation in city and state offerings beyond the walls of the convent had opened the minds of the sisters to new riches to share with their students. All the academy sisters took the ferry to Seattle for a day at the Yukon Pacific Exposition of 1908. As they enjoyed the displays, they learned new ways of teaching geography, history and the understanding of peoples. On holy-day holidays the sisters visited classes in the public schools and returned home with fresh ideas and diminished prejudices.

Then came whole summers of study arranged by Sister Mary Loretta to prepare for state teachers' examinations. Thirty Providence Sisters spent a month together in Olympia, tutored by Sister Isabella and Sister Rose Marie Tully. They surprised the public by their competence. When the result of the examinations came out, the newspaper headlines read, "Sisters Receive Highest Grades in Teachers' Examinations."

That summer was a joyous summer for the sisters who had studied, recreated, emptied the jelly jars and sugar bin, and had run up grocery bills. Sister Mary Loretta found a way to fill the pantry shelves and pay the bills. She sent to Vancouver for Sister Michael who knew what to do. She asked for a companion.

Together, Sister Michael and Sister Margaret Hamel asked for money at the door of the loggers' mess hall. They were rough but kindly men who gave something as they went in. There were huckleberry pies inside, of Sister Michael's making. After dinner, the bookkeeper and engineer locked the office door and told the sisters to climb into the cab of the logging train and go up into the hills to contact more loggers at work felling trees. The experience thrilled young Sister Margaret, new at the occupation of begging and always vivaciously hyperbolic. All told, they collected a hundred dollars.

As a next step in the education of the Sisters, Sister Mary Loretta arranged that the sisters spend summers at Creighton University, Omaha, or at Holy Names Normal, Portland, Oregon. College correspondence courses became popular at this time, and sisters working for degrees often pursued them. Some teachers were released from teaching for a quarter or two to attend college or normal school.

Teachers in public schools, first certified by examinations at the end of their high school, followed a similar program of learning and credit gathering as certification requirements continued to change. The sights of sisters and students continued to rise. Both were ready to proceed to ask for state accreditation of Providence Academy.

In 1920 Mr. Edwin Twitmyer, State Inspector of High Schools, made his first visit of the school and was pleased with what he saw. He recommended the academy for temporary and later for full accreditation. It came in the aftermath of World War I which ushered in a new era in the whole country.

Providence Academy, Olympia, so-called by popular designation, always remained a small but highly respected school, strong in scholarship and character formation. Its enrollment rose to a hundred by 1890 and remained between a hundred and hundred fifty until it peaked at over two hundred in World War I and post-war years. It had spanned the years when life was simple and followed a

pattern. It had planted and watered and fostered deep roots as it weathered seasons of sorrow and of joy.

In 1918, Spanish influenza left its mark although it claimed no lives at the academy. It tightened bonds again with St. Peter's Hospital sisters. They had sent Sister Bernardo to help care for boarders and sisters sick with the potent epidemic. They had taken in Sister Eleanor Mary, stricken with small pox; and they witnessed her final vows made in bed at St. Peter's.

The war and the epidemic left bereaved families to visit and console in Olympia. The shared sorrow deepened friendships among sisters and people. Olympia families have always been responsive to the Providence Sisters' interests. This fact encouraged the sisters to keep going, in spite of continued financial problems.

From the start the school had gone through rough financial periods. It could not have survived without the help of the Providence community. In 1904 the provincialate in Vancouver cancelled a debt of \$10,000 because, it said, "The academy would never be able to pay it."

By 1914 the academy was still borrowing from Vancouver and from St. Peter's, as well as from prominent Olympia businessmen. Not until 1926 did the financial burden come to an end when St. Michael's parish bought the academy property and buildings for \$11,000. With this money the sisters paid off their debts.

The boarding school and the high school came to an end then; but the grade school continued as St. Michael Parochial School with Providence Sisters continuing to direct the school under the pastor. In 1966 the parish built a new St. Michael church, school and convent for the Providence Sisters on Tenth and Broadway.

While, today, only a few Providence Sisters are on the school staff, the Providence influence lives on. Here still and in generations of former Olympia academy students, the Providence spirit challenges good people to live out the Providence Sisters' motto, "The charity of Christ overwhelms us."

*Florence Curtin (Mother Mary Mildred) spent her high school years at Providence Academy, Olympia.*



*Students used the back entrance of Olympia's convent school. Father O'Dwyer, as pastor, purchased the academy for the parish.*



*Sister Isabella, while teaching in Olympia, awakened to the need of State certification.*



*Sister Mary Wilfred, "pillar of the mission," taught in Olympia during its first twelve years.*

# Chapter 7

## *The Way It Was In Moxee City*

1915-1968 MOXEE CITY, WASHINGTON

*A Story of Holy Rosary School*

### A NEW MILESTONE

On Sunday morning, September 21, 1915, the Moxee parishioners could hardly wait for Mass to end to voice their excitement. Father had just announced the arrival of the Providence Sisters in the valley. Holy Rosary School was to open on Wednesday. Grandma Rivard, Grandma Regimbal, Grandma Gamache wanted to know, “Elles parlent le Français?” “Oui, oui, oui,” the trustees assured them.

Much gesticulating, fast flowing French, everybody talking at once, no one listening — this continued beyond the usual half-hour of exchange of the week’s gossip on the church steps. *C’est la vie à Moxee!*

The Catholic community of French Canadians in Moxee had just reached another milestone in their faith life. Church, family, parish hall, Moxee City, Holy Rosary School now, and — *le Français!* — such were the basic units around which life revolved in this tightly knit community when the Providence Sisters became a part of their lives in 1915. Active lay initiative had built a parish where God held first place. The people were the Church. That’s the way it always was in Moxee!

### GO WEST!

The story of its French-Canadian people begins in Quebec, Canada. In the 1880’s the slogan “Go West!” captivated the minds of youth. The Israel Desmarais family and others like them feared their boys would take to the trail and endanger their faith. They consulted their parish priest who advised, “Go West with them.” Thus many families, to preserve the faith, left Quebec to settle in the Minnesota Red River Valley. They prospered there; but the lure of the Far West now beckoned their young men, married and single. A Deeringhoff, a Fortier, Mose Regimbal and Fred Mailloux found their separate ways to the Moxee valley, liked what they saw and decided either to buy land or homestead it. Fred Mailloux, in a letter to his sister, Mrs. Raoul Langevin in Minnesota, described the valley as “a promised land”.

His letter came in 1895. By the spring of 1896 the Raoul Langevins with their eight-month-old baby, the Francis Riels with their three children, Louis Mailloux and the Sylvan Poirier family were in the Moxee valley pioneering a new land, a new language and a new way of farming.

They were not the first white people to settle in Moxee. F. E. Deeringhoff, on a research project for the Northern Pacific Railway, had found the valley as early as 1892 and had moved his family there when there were only two families in the district. By 1897 five or six non-Catholic families lived about a mile and a half east of the present city. The Artesian School was there with Mrs. N. J. Dickson, a former



pupil of St. Joseph Academy, Yakima, as its teacher. Near this cluster the new arrivals built their homes, and the Moxee Catholic community began to thrive.

Those few families looked out on acres and acres of sage brush surrounded by hills of more sage brush. They tasted it in the wild jackrabbits they ate. The brochures of the Moxee Company, a Bell Telephone Company development project, spoke of the rich virgin soil of the valley, and of the promise of canals to bring life-giving water to its thousands of acres.

A winter of above zero temperatures and a summer in the eighties or low nineties contrasted sharply with the extremes of Minnesota heat and cold. Yet it took faith to believe in this as a "promised land" isolated as they were in this sea of sage brush. These first French Canadians of Moxee had that faith. They wrote letters home of a glowing future; and Minnesota buzzed with the vibrant slogan, "Go West."

By the fall of 1897 ten families and three bachelors, forty-one people all told, had sold out in Crookston, Minnesota, packed their belongings and boarded a special immigrant train. They traveled in box cars. Each family had a stove for cooking and warmth, cots and packing boxes for chairs and tables. As they left the flatlands of the Middle West and crossed the jagged Rocky Mountains, the men must have discussed land purchases and crops over games of cards. The women exchanged recipes; and teenagers began deep friendships, more than one of which deepened and led to marriage vows later.

When the train finally puffed into the North Yakima station, a flurry of excitement rang through the families as they gathered up their children and suit cases. Matt Bartholet, a Yakima member of the Moxee Company, was there with a fleet of flat bottom wagons to take the travelers to their new homeland.

Within days the men had drawn up contracts for the purchase of twenty-acre tracts from the Moxee Company or from J. W. Peck, a non-Catholic who had bought up land near the Artesian school. Well drilling came next. An abundance of warm sulphur water gushed out of the earth once the water level was tapped. The pressure was so great that it needed a system of valves to tame the flow of water. A deep well could water as many as sixty acres.

The Sauves, father and son, with a knack for mechanics, made well-drilling their business. Perfecting an original well-drilling device, they hired themselves out for fifteen dollars a well.

Of necessity, houses went up quickly; and grubbing of sage brush likewise progressed rapidly. Yakima residents, looking toward Moxee and seeing the fall skies lit up with huge bonfires, knew that the Frenchmen were at work. The tang of sage brush smoke filled the air day and night.

In the spring, the ground was readied for planting. The farmers first set out apple orchards and planted potatoes, grain and hay fields. Hops came only later. In fact, when Louie and George Desmarais decided to put in hops in 1904, their neighbors thought it a foolish venture. A third-rate crop with no money in it, they judged hops to be. The Desmarais brothers were tempted to agree when their yard of frail cottonwood poles blew down and the prices slumped below an already low level.

But they persevered, improved their methods and convinced their friends to help make Moxee the hop capital of the Northwest with a multi-million dollar annual business. Years of struggle and poverty, however, preceded financial success.

## THE PEOPLE BUILD A CHURCH

Nor was money of first importance in the lives of these French-Canadians. They had brought with them from Quebec and from Minnesota a love of their religion.

When they found no church in Moxee, families like the Gamaches and Regimbals made the nine to twelve-mile trip to St. Joseph's in North Yakima for Sunday Mass.

It was an all-day affair in horse-drawn wagons, on sage brush trails deep in dust, the children sitting on the wagon floor. If they arrived early, they visited with the Providence Sisters at St. Joseph Academy. Sometimes they ate their picnic lunch in the academy yard. Back home in the late afternoon, they knew that God would bless the week just begun.

When the Moxee Catholics numbered ninety-six children in thirty-two families, a delegation of Frenchmen went to the Jesuit fathers at St. Joseph's to ask for a priest to come to their valley for Sunday Mass. Since 1848 no Mass had been said there.

Father Charles Pandosy, the Oblate missionary, had wintered in the "Mook-see" valley in 1848 serving the Indians there. Hostility of the Indians had forced him to abandon the mission in the spring. Now a devout, dominantly Catholic community wanted God to bless their valley with a church.

The Jesuits could spare a priest once a month, they said. So on May 13, 1899, Father Edward Griva, S.J. celebrated the first Mass for white people in Moxee. On the Sundays when there was no Mass some of the families continued to go to North Yakima.

All Moxee went to St. Joseph Church in holiday attire for one of the first Moxee weddings, that of Melina Gamache and Wilfred Sauve in July of 1899. Father L. Taelman, S.J., officiated. The two had met on the immigrant train when Melina was seventeen. After about a year in their new environment, Wilfred began to court her in earnest, coming to her home every Sunday to take her to church or go for a ride.

Thus began a Moxee generation of Sauves whose direct descendants, in 1977, numbered 254 children of five generations. Melina was still living then, the last survivor of the pioneers to remember the 1897 train ride West.

One or other Jesuit priest continued to come to Moxee once or twice a month, saying Mass in homes or in the Artesian school. Then one day an incident occurred in the school that brought Father Griva to a decision. An unfriendly non-Catholic who had objected to the Catholics using the building for Mass, walked in during Mass and laid his books on the desk being used for the altar and voiced his protest in an insulting way. The acting priest called a meeting of the people to urge them to build a church.

Five men responded to the call and became forerunners of the trustees of the parish. Each pledged twenty dollars and promised to collect the rest of the money needed to build a church. With the gradual influx of new families important to the life of the community, some eighty fervent Catholic families now lived in the valley.

Door to door soliciting raised an additional three hundred dollars. In addition, men offered to do the hauling and carpentry work free. Non-Catholics like the Ganos, Dicksons and Conrads offered services and money, too. Mr. Peck donated two and a half acres of land for the church and future rectory, hall and cemetery. Work began immediately. The buzz of saws and the rhythmic strokes of hammers mingling with French banter had a joyous ring. These men were building a house for their Lord.

On March 21, 1900, Father Edward Griva, S.J., offered the first Mass in Moxee's own church. It was a celebration of the first rank with a board for altar, planks resting on sawhorses for pews and strips of sheets starched and stitched by Mrs. Charles Gamache for the Communion cloth. The new church bell announced the Mass hour and Mrs. Deeringhoff began playing the organ.

The eight First Communicants led the way into the church, three girls in white dresses, veils and wreaths, five boys in new suits with white arm bands. They were

the pride and joy of Mrs. Gamache who had taught most of them the French Catechism and prepared them for this day. After Mass the ladies began a tradition. Their parish dinner was the first of many that were to make the French cuisine of the Ladies of St. Anne famous throughout the Yakima valley.

Father Griva blessed the church and named it Holy Rosary on April 23, 1900. Three months later Bishop E. J. O'Dea came for an official visit and administered the first baptisms. Among the four baptized was Florida, the first child of Melina and Wilfred Sauve.

The first wedding in the new church united Alma Bergevin and Stephen Patnode on August 20, 1900. Tragedy and sorrows entered lives too. A Patnode baby died in 1901, and the little community had to think of setting aside land for a cemetery. At first it was near the church. The site was changed to higher ground on the opposite hill when the new irrigation canal water seeped into the low land of the first cemetery.

The Jesuits continued to serve Moxee for six more years. Then, in 1906 Bishop O'Dea named Father A. T. Burke as the first resident diocesan pastor. For the Moxee people to have their very own priest living among them and to have daily Mass was the gratification of their most cherished wish. Church, rectory, the parish hall became the center of Catholic life. People and pastor worked together to form a choir and a church band. They added wings, a sanctuary and a choir loft to the church. Mr. Julian Sauve made a hundred cedar pews with hand carved embellishments. The hall resounded with song, dance and events that catered to the whole family. Holy Rosary parish had really come alive!

About 1910 things began to happen a mile and a half to the west of the Artesian district. Moxee City was taking shape. In 1883, Mr. Henry Ditter had come to the Yakima valley with his family. By 1910 his sons Phil and Joe were highly successful businessmen in North Yakima.

When the Northern Pacific Railroad thought of building a line from Yakima to Moxee, the company contacted the Ditter brothers. They, as liaison men, after discussing with the farmers and businessmen of Moxee, decided on a location for a city. The Ditters then bought forty acres of land and planned it for a town site. In 1910 the Northern Pacific Railroad completed the tracks for a twelve-mile spur line terminating in the new city.

Phil Ditter, well aware that the people's lives centered around their church, made an acceptable offer to the people to exchange city property for the first church site. After harvest time, 1911, the men of the Moxee parish with Father B. Garand, pastor since 1908, moved the church, rectory and hall to Iler Street in the new city.

Arthur Champoux moved his store to the new town, and then Harvey La Bree and X. Regimbal's butcher shop also went the way of the church. These two young men had started business by killing a cow and a hog and peddling the meat from door to door. The city store became Regimbal Brothers' store which sold groceries as well as meat and feed.

Paul La Framboise located his blacksmith shop on Iler Street across from the church. His jolly laughter, the ring of the anvil and the flying sparks popularized his shop. Farmers coming to town met there to talk crops and politics.

When Phil Ditter put up a two-storey building across from Regimbal Brothers and made the second floor a community center, Moxee City began to take on character. The Frenchmen loved the matchmaking fostered at basket socials, the wedding dances with fiddlers playing all night and wine flowing freely and the food the women supplied in generous quantities.

Boyer's drug store occupied the lower floor of the Ditter building. Its soda fountain became a gathering place for the youth. By 1914 the city had a bank,

hardware store, tavern, two lumber companies and more. It vibrated with activity on week days and closed down completely on Sundays.

## THE PEOPLE BUILD A SCHOOL

The trustees of the parish thought the time had come to have a Catholic school. Country schools scattered about the valley left much to be desired, especially in the way of discipline. Some parents sent their children to boarding school with the Providence Sisters at St. Joseph's in Yakima or Providence Academy in Vancouver. Louie Desmarais sent his oldest daughter to her grandmother in Quebec to get her first three years of schooling. When a central school absorbed the small schools, learning improved but not to the satisfaction of the trustees. The pastor, Father S. J. Arsenault, went along with their thinking.

In 1912 the parish purchased land from Alcide Capistran for a school. Louie Desmarais held the note for eight hundred dollars; but the land lay idle for three years. Then he destroyed the note, thus making the first financial contribution to the school. In 1915 Father William Chaput agreed to come to Holy Rosary as its pastor on condition that the school would be built. Mr. Mineau, George Desmarais, Fabian Regimbal, the Rivards, Brulottes and others immediately made loans to the parish, most of the notes which they later destroyed.

A drive was on and Father Chaput was in the midst of it. In three days the men had gathered pledges amounting to \$25,000 and in addition promises of free labor and the use of equipment and horses. Father Chaput telephoned the bishop in Seattle for the go-ahead to build.

Father then contracted Ed Desmarais of Yakima to draw the plans and supervise the construction. Parishioners, most of them unskilled carpenters, plumbers and brick layers, did much of the work and did it with joyous hearts. At the end of three months the school neared completion.

It was a natural to ask for the Providence Sisters to teach in the Moxee school. Many knew them from contacts made in Vancouver, Yakima and even in Montreal, Canada. These sisters and the Moxee people had much in common. They shared a trust in Providence that prompted both to risk all for God. Pioneer Moxee families, as did the Providence Sister foundresses, bequeathed to those who came after them the Providence way of meeting milestones.

They shared, too, a concern for the education of children in God's ways and the building up of His Kingdom. They spoke the same language; they could teach their children the beautiful French that they loved almost as much as they loved their religion. It was a natural for the Providence Sisters to accept the new foundation.

Thus it was that on September 25, 1915, the sisters arrived. Three of them spoke French: Sister Catherine of Genoa Crevier, Superior; Sister Mary Maurice Jannelle, music teacher; and Sister George Arthur Demers, French teacher. Sister Mary Pius Murphy and Sister Brendan Cassidy had just made profession. Sister Mary Cyrilla Zillig, with the versatility of one who had grown up in the Vancouver boarding school, took over the kitchen and sewing.

Sister Mary Loyola McDonald would quickly become the idol of the seventh and eighth grade boys, all of them big enough and many of them old enough to be men. They were soon to meet their match and would love finding a teacher who could handle them. Each of the three classroom sisters was to have two grades with Miss Catherine McLoughlin (later Sister Florence) and Miss Valerie Nibler taking grades three and four.

Classes were to begin on Wednesday and this was Saturday. The sisters' first look at the unfinished classrooms would have discouraged a less dedicated group. They could laugh about the horrible sulphur smell of the artesian water that came out of the faucets. "Straight from hell," a surprised visitor was to exclaim as he turned the tap thinking to quench his thirst on a hot day.

They could wonder about a solution to boarders' and sisters' baths with sleeping quarters on the third floor and the water pressure too low to do better than a trickle at that elevation. The plank on sawhorses for dining room table, the miniature elevated bath tub and the tiny bedrooms amused the sisters. But the rooms were private. What difference that the occupant had to open the door to get enough space to turn around in!

The two young sisters were ready for anything but for the shock of seeing a whole beef strung from the ceiling when they ventured out to fill the grocery list at Regimbal's store.

Sunday morning Mass at church had other surprises for them. The usher led them up the side aisle to steps leading to a balcony reserved for the sisters. The family pews on the main floor, he said, had been auctioned off, at times in heated contests, and paid for by the year. The sisters liked their vantage point on the "shelf" and did not mind the French sermons.

After Mass the sisters easily mingled with groups of friendly parents, grandparents and children most of whom were speaking French but nobody listening anyway. The sisters did not need to know French to smile and shake hands. They knew immediately that the people loved and trusted them. What Sister said would be law for their Raouls and Walters and Annettes.

## A UNIQUE SCHOOL BEGINS

On Wednesday, September 29, one hundred eighty students enrolled, the first generation of Moxee-born children. The district public schools felt a drastic drop in their enrollments. The Moxee City school had not expected its numbers to go from sixty-five to seventeen, nor was the French school prepared for its drop from fifty-six to seventeen. Headlines in the North Yakima paper recorded the unusual historical event — "Too Many Teachers — Too Few Pupils".

Many of the first Holy Rosary pupils spoke little English; few had ever seen a sister. Activity began in the yard as horses and buggies drove up, children piled out of them and the older ones tied the horses to the hitching posts. Some came with pony and cart, some on horseback and some on foot carrying their shiny lunch pails. Most of those who lived four miles or more were to remain at the school as weekly boarders. Many paid their board in produce in this tuition-free school.

When the school bell rang the teachers lined up their pupils; and discipline and love and learning began at Holy Rosary School. The first weeks brought constant disturbances. Father Chaput, trustees and carpenters went in and out of classrooms, pounding a nail here, testing a radiator there, installing up-to-date slate boards and talking fast French oblivious of teachers and pupils. It was weeks before all the equipment had arrived and was put in place.

In the lower grades as many as fifty pupils challenged the ingenuity of the young teachers. Sister Mary Pius' first and second graders, sheltered in their French-speaking homes, understood little English and she no French. But few problems baffled Sister Mary Pius. With a sparkle in her Irish eyes, she could say, "Patnodes, keep quiet," and a whole row would get the message. "Champoux, time to get your



rubbers, mittens, coats and caps!” and as many as six children would respond. Everybody was related to everybody else in Moxee — so it seemed.

Sunday, October 6, 1915, all Moxee celebrated the blessing of the new school as only Moxee knows how to celebrate. The trustees sent automobiles to North Yakima to bring Providence Sisters to Moxee, among them Mother Vincent Ferrier, Provincial, and Sister Mary Mildred, Provincial Councillor. Knights of Columbus sent cars for Bishop E. J. O’Dea in Yakima for the occasion, for the priests of the valley and for the mayor of North Yakima. When they crossed the Yakima River, they were met by a contingent of fifty mounted horsemen on gaily decorated horses.

A procession formed at the church and proceeded on foot to the new school. Here the bishop blessed the corner stone and then addressed the people in French. The formal ceremony over, the people crowded into the three-storey, red brick building, eager to see their school.

The sisters immediately loved the Moxee people and their children. Where else than in a Moxee school would you find every child a Catholic, all pupils from thrifty, hard-working families of deep faith, families in which love, prayer, and a shared concern for each other reigned.

Teaching these children in overcrowded classrooms with little equipment required hours of preparation of materials; but the sisters enjoyed the children’s response to their teaching. The perceptive chronicler, however, caught some pent-up feelings of that first year when she wrote, “Christmas vacation finally arrived! Eight full days of freedom!”

Then shortly after came spring, announced by the meadowlarks with songs more glorious in Moxee than anywhere else. The bob-white answered the children’s calls and the woodpecker pecked away at the lone tree that was counted on for summer shade.

March started a tradition of student retreats. In May sixty children made their first confession and first Communion. The same day one hundred fifteen were confirmed. On Monday, everyone was ready for the holiday that the bishop gave the school. What a joyous day to climb nearby Mt. Elephant and pick violets and buttercups!

School closed on May 30 with the distribution of eighth grade diplomas and prizes. The one hundred seventy-five pupils and the twenty-eight boarders who had weathered the first year took home their books that would lie idle during the summer and be used by younger brothers or sisters in September.

The twenty-five music pupils went home with Sister Mary Maurice’s strong reminder to practice during the summer. The four teachers left for retreat and summer school; and the three French-speaking sisters remained to keep house, can fruit, care for the church sacristy, visit homes and be a joy to the people. The sisters had become a part of Moxee that first year.

## C’EST LA VIE À MOXEE

Each year’s chronicles begin the same way. “School opened only in October because of hop picking.” To begin school earlier would have broken the perfect attendance record coveted by as many as thirty pupils a year. Some of them had a five, even a ten-year-in-a-row record. More important, though, Moxee families earned their school shoes, books and winter’s groceries in the hop fields.

Families worked together, the older ones at top speed filling barrels of the highly



scented hops, then dumping them into huge bins. Children filled small horse-shoe-nail barrels, supplied by Mr. Hugh La Framboise on request, and contributed their share of earnings. Moxee-size families could bring in as much as twenty dollars a day.

Pickers formed a colorful picture, women in the ankle-length styles of the day, young girls in middy blouses and ties, and all with huge sun shades. Pickers imported from the outside, mostly Indians and Filipinos, lived in tent cities during the month of picking. At night, the sound of ukuleles and soft singing mingled with the glow of kilns, fired to dry the day's pickings.

Not all Moxee sisters were home to learn first-hand the process of hop picking and drying and baling and shipping. The directress of studies in Vancouver was well aware of Moxee's school calendar pattern. She profited by the late opening of Holy Rosary by sending some sisters to schools certified by Holy Names Normal to fulfill practice-teaching requirements. Other years, she had the Moxee teachers replace for a month in another Providence school. Often the Holy Rosary faculty met only the day before the opening of school to make hurried first-day plans.

Some of the best Providence sister teachers taught in Moxee. Reading could have been a problem for the many beginners coming from French speaking homes. Experts like Sister Mary Dolorita Bartholet, Sister Pauline of the Cross Kronberg and Sister Mary Berchmans Murphy put phonics to work with flash cards, drills and small group methods. It was intensive teaching and it worked.

Upper grade teachers had discipline problems to cope with. Not all had Sister Mary Loyola's knack of being "tough" and beloved. Moxee boys did not fit easily into a regime of sitting at desks, diagramming sentences, laboring over poetry or completing a list of required reading-circle books. Their minds functioned better at planning ways of getting one step ahead of the teachers. It never worked. But then the penalty of copying pages of history after school could trigger inventive minds to new ways of baffling the teachers.

For sure, these boys sapped the energy of devoted teachers like Sister Mary Theodora Kohls. But she recognized their innate goodness and struggled with them to develop their potential. In the end, these teachers won. Today's fine Catholic leaders of Moxee testify to their success.

A strong curriculum based on essentials included a half hour a day of French for all grades except the primary. The parents felt that they must preserve "le beau francais." To lose it could be to lose their religion, they thought. Sister George Arthur and Sister Gustave Marie, both of them more familiar with hospital work than with teaching, used the grammar approach. Though it lacked the freshness of the methods used in the English classes, the children made progress and pleased their parents.

They approved also of the sewing and cooking classes that Sister John Gabriel of the provincial house in Vancouver introduced in 1916. The kitchen was the food laboratory where Sister Mary Cyrilla had the girls plan and prepare meals in a learn-by-doing context. The sisters assigned to cook at Holy Rosary kept coming and going, as many as three or four in a year.

Using flexible schedules, the school took time for exhibits, programs, processions, spell-downs and baseball games. Semi-annual displays of pupil work brought proud parents to the school. Moxee children excelled in penmanship, drawing and map making. Best of all, they loved making papier-maché maps, a messy process project but blue ribbon products when dried, mounted and tinted.

After the parish moved the hall to the school property in 1920, the pupils gave programs of wand drills, bible story dramatizations, plays and songs. Jerome

Perrault, at age seven, astonished the audience by reciting from memory the whole of “’Twas the Night Before Christmas”.

All Moxee applauded the operetta, “What Dora Dreamed” starring the La Framboise sisters. Sister Mary Maurice had a hand in these performances, expecting perfection in singing and acting and getting it in her own determined way. She taught music in Moxee for nine years and turned out true musicians. Her pupils practised scales, counted aloud and followed the tick, tock, tick, tock of the metronome. If pupils stayed with Sister long enough they received a diploma in music. Not all musically gifted “Jigger Gamaches” and “Whistling Perraults” could meet the practice-hour demands of Sister Mary Maurice; so they found outlets in mouth harps, song and dance.

## THE UNUSUAL CAN HAPPEN

Every year Moxee had its share of the unusual; but 1918 stands out. The fall began with changes of several sisters, this time including Sister Catherine. That upset the people, fearful that the next superior might not speak French. Then Sister Euthalia Bourret arrived in October and satisfied the hopes of everyone.

Reared and educated in Quebec, she had taken advanced studies in music in Montreal and had then entered the Providence Sisters’ novitiate. After taking her vows, she came west and learned English in the boys’ department of Vancouver. The boys could not resist taking advantage of her joyous nature to teach her their vocabulary. So she shocked the sisters by telling them to “Shut up” and “Make it snappy,” phrases that brought instant response in the boys’ hall. Sister was an apt learner of American ways.

She brought to Moxee her happy nature, her impeccable French and her English improved by twenty years of use and study. As superior, she taught music and French and sponsored all the work and play events of the convent. Five rings of the regulation bell that assembled the sisters for a treat, a visitor or a canning bee would find her first to respond with her contagious gaiety. She could make hanging clothes outside in icy January weather, a fun experience.

Music was her specialty. Her pupils learned rhythm by bouncing balls and skipping rope. They sang in groups to catch the melody; and heard chords in altos, sopranos and basses. Practice became fun. Life was happy with Sister Euthalia around — joyful even if it asked sacrifices. And it did ask them in Moxee’s 1918.

Sister Mary Thecla Beaudry, intermediate grade teacher, received word to leave Moxee for the Indian missions in northwest Canada. She was the first of a half dozen or more Providence Sisters whose homes were in Moxee to leave their country to bring Christianity to the outposts of Canadian civilization.

These sisters have been remarkable for their whole-hearted devotedness to the difficult missions assigned them. They studied to earn Canadian teacher or nursing certification. They learned the ways of the Indians and won their confidence. Reared in Moxee, they took with them the sterling qualities of dependability, perseverance, sense of humor and deep faith. For the sisters and people to say “Good-bye” to Sister Mary Thecla in 1918 was an emotional experience.

That year also brought the nation-wide epidemic of Spanish influenza to Moxee. Many people had the dread disease there; but few died of it. The school closed for seven weeks leaving no vacation days for Thanksgiving or Christmas. When the pastor, Father Van De Walle, and his housekeeper came down with severe cases of the flu, the sisters cooked their meals, waited on them and did the housework. Father’s illness was so severe that he had to resign his pastorship in Moxee.

The teachers had just begun to relax, finding their students caught up in their work and ready for the second semester, when word came of the appointment of Sister Mary Loyola as superior of the school in Ward, Washington. Who could replace the first teacher who had the affection and control of the high school boys and girls?

Sister Mary Esther Kuhn arrived in March when the fresh spring air and the tangy smell of earth turned over by the plow in the fields created an unrest in teenage boys confined in classroom desks. All of Sister's intellectual prowess could barely cope with the resistance to book learning created by the lure of the outdoors.

It was still the 1918-1919 school year. Three sister cooks had come and gone that year. But there were bright spots, too. During Lent most of the children chose to go to daily Mass. To the some fifty who received daily Communion, the sisters served free breakfast of toast and café au lait.

## C'EST TOUJOURS LA VIE À MOXEE!

The year reached its climax with the first high school graduation on May 29, 1919. Ruby Beaudry, Louina Belair and Olive Patnode had pioneered in Holy Rosary high school as ninth graders in the fall of 1915. All Moxee celebrated with the first graduates. Their school had reached a milestone and the whole parish shared the glory of the day.

The student body of two hundred pupils, with their teachers, escorted the graduates from the school to the church where the graduates had places of honor in the sanctuary. The three-part high school choir sang the Immaculate Conception Mass that ended with Benediction and a reception in the parish hall.

By now the high school had a room of its own. In that one room a versatile teacher taught the twenty or thirty students all the required subjects with some electives — better still, she taught many to love learning. The high school enrollment never exceeded forty with three or four graduates a year; but Holy Rosary high school graduates still today exert a powerful influence wherever they are.

The high school boys, who had been a part of the total school from its beginning, parted company with the girls in 1919. Many of them went as boarders to St. Martin's College, Lacey, Washington.

The trials and joys of 1918 were over; and then it was summer. Father Placidus Hootmeyer, O.S.B., had come in February, 1918, as pastor of Holy Rosary parish. The inadequacy of the sisters' salary disturbed him; and he felt that the people did not realize fully their teachers' needs. Generous as the parishioners had been from the start in bringing eggs, milk, vegetables, fruit and, occasionally, a quarter of beef, they apparently seemed unaware of the many other needs of the sisters.

The sisters had visited each family the summer of 1917 and had asked for donations of farm products. Now Father Placidus undertook to canvass the parish in behalf of the sisters. In his own irresistible way, he went from house to house with a money box in his hand. By the end of June he had collected over three hundred dollars for the grateful sisters.

Father Placidus made another conquest that summer. When Florida Sauve came to him with her plans to marry a Dutch Protestant, he knew how to respond. A mixed marriage was unheard of in Moxee. With his Dutch name, heritage and language ability, Father Placidus made his way to the Dutch settlement to the northwest of the French settlement in Moxee.

Here lived a number of immigrant families from Holland with their Dutch

Lutheran Church as its center. They mingled little with the Frenchmen; although they had worked together to build the Fowler, Hubbard and Moxee irrigation systems that preceded the Selah-Moxee Canal project. Communication then was limited to sign language and broken English. It ceased when the canals were completed. Few even of the younger generations saw each other socially; but love broke the barriers for Florida Sauve and Ed Mieras. Only a Father Placidus could have persuaded a Dutchman to take instructions in the Catholic religion. Father accomplished not only that, but he converted Ed and officiated at Florida and Ed's Catholic wedding.

If the church had always been the center of the lives of the Moxee French, it entered their social lives with new vigor with Father Placidus as pastor. By that time the parish hall had been moved to the school grounds. On warm summer and fall nights the sisters could hear the dance music and laughter that came through the open hall doors. Unsuspecting young people talked freely beneath their windows. The sisters understood. *C'est la vie à Moxee!*

The sisters became a part of the excitement during the early hours of bazaar nights. The men of the parish found great fun in entering the sisters in games of dexterity and seeing their skill in winning prizes. Sister Mary Claudia Flynn was an expert at hitting targets. The school each year ran a booth of articles made in the sewing class and sponsored a bicycle contest for the boys and, at times, a diamond ring popularity contest for the high school girls.

Spirits ran high and money poured in when Father Placidus himself auctioned a horse and cutter. Up and up went the bids. Then they closed with a clamorous SOLD, and Father brought out a sawhorse and saw, his version of a horse and cutter. When the audience roared with laughter, what could the tricked buyer do but join in the joke and pay his bid!

## SISTERS SHARE MOXEE LIFE

Alongside of the parish hall was another rendez-vous, particularly attractive to the young people. In all seasons the sisters grew accustomed to the thud, thump of balls hitting against the handball alley. The upper grade boys worked off energy and became expert players during recess and noon hour periods. In the cool evenings, playing until dusk, young men with speed and force and accuracy became near professionals. When the alley was empty of spectators, the sisters, too, became more than amateur players.

The sisters were very much a part of the whole of Moxee life. They shared a country telephone party-line, knowing full well the ease with which receivers could be picked up. Often they cranked the gadget for their turn to call out, only to hear Central's "Line's busy, please."

They picked up their mail at the post office in the railway terminal where they learned the price of hops, who had the measles or mumps, whose baby was due any day now, and some whispered, "Did you hear's?" They knew the church bell signals and could pretty well figure out who had died as they counted the strokes of the bell tolling for each year of the departed's life. When the church bell announced a fire, the sisters and their pupils said a prayer as the bucket brigade rushed to the scene of danger.

Maybe because of the artesian water, Moxee people were a healthy lot. Before a doctor took over a practice there, home remedies sufficed for most illnesses. When babies came, one or other of the Moxee women served as midwife. Mrs. Alcide

Capistran is credited with delivering four hundred Moxee babies! By the time the sisters came, though, Dr. William Conklin and then Dr. E. J. Bittner had an office in Moxee and answered home calls day or night. They patched up cuts and bruises of accident-prone children on the playground and were friends of the sisters.

When the sisters needed to go to Yakima, they had three choices of transportation. The freight train that picked up and delivered Moxee produce had a passenger section in the caboose. It took on patrons anywhere between Yakima and Moxee and obligingly waited for expected fares. The trip could be a three-hour one.

The stage coach took less time but had its inconveniences. Automobiles gradually replaced horses and wagons for travel after Mr. Andrew Slavin and Mr. George Desmarais invested in the first new cars. By 1915, automobiles, though not numerous in Moxee, had ceased to be curiosities.

The sisters would watch them come down Iler Street at a good clip, then put on their screeching brakes as they neared the school. They raised a cloud of dust as they turned the corner and stepped on the gas again. Automobiles became the young men's toys.

The sisters never became accustomed to Moxee dust but they learned to live with it. In the spring plowing season, it rolled in with the twilight winds. Summer whirl winds arose without warning, picking up everything in their path as they circled and bounced through fields and then settled down at will depositing their debris.

Cars increased the dust in the air; but they offered convenience, too. Kind parishioners offered to drive the sisters to Yakima to shop, keep appointments or visit their Providence Sisters. Not until 1929 did the sisters have a car of their own. Even then, Sister Benedict Joseph, Superior, had permission to drive only around Moxee. What fun it was for the sisters, though! And what joy for the parishioners to have the sisters drive up to their homes for a visit!

Families and sisters grew ever closer in Moxee as more and more of their daughters responded to the call of God to become Providence Sisters. It was natural for vocations to the religious life to be numerous in a valley where all of living gravitated around religion. Every home had morning and evening prayer, grace at meals and Sunday worship at Mass in a family pew. Parents esteemed priests and sisters and taught respect for virtuous living. Religion was made a joyous experience with celebrations with song and music, flowers and banners.

Announce a procession and children and teenagers, parents and grandparents responded, dressed in Sunday best. And Sunday best meant high fashion! Moxee women knew how to choose clothes for themselves and for their children. They loved occasions to wear their artistic creations.

Their clubs, societies, social get-togethers were church oriented: St. Anne Society, Sodality of Our Lady, Holy Name Society, Knights of Columbus. Their farm crops depended visibly on God's sending rain and sun for the growing seasons and cold and snow for the dormant months. They called on Him to hold back the wind and the rain at harvest time. They needed God; they turned to Him in faith.

In the fall of the year when the grain and the potatoes and the hops were harvested it became, for awhile, almost a custom in Moxee to expect God to harvest some vocations among Moxee's youth to work full time for the Kingdom of God. Before Holy Rosary School began, five Moxee girls had made their vows with the Providence Sisters.

The influence of the school on vocations began to have its effect after the first graduations. In the 1920's, nine girls left Moxee for the Providence novitiate in Seattle; in the 1930's another twelve entered. They sensed a mystery in the life of the sisters; and they felt that they knew enough about it to want it for themselves.



They would watch the sisters process to church on Sunday mornings. If they smiled a bit to see them all in ankle-length dresses and long black capes even in the heat of Moxee summers, they did not fear one day donning those same habits.

These girls had mingled freely with the sisters at Holy Rosary. They had prayed, worked, studied, celebrated and recreated with them. With one or other or all of the sisters they had discussed their joys, sorrows, difficulties and deep yearnings. They knew that they were valued as important people. They knew that God wanted them.

Most of the Moxee students in the school felt a closeness to the sisters and they to them. Classes went on in an atmosphere of joy, freedom, trust and responsible learning. Religion lessons penetrated beyond the Baltimore Catechism questions. God's love and Providence gave meaning to their lives.

In the decades before the 50's and 60's the pupils of Holy Rosary school lived pretty much in a world of their own. When they occasionally shared activities with Yakima or Walla Walla youth, they broadened their friendships. Their teachers at Holy Rosary kept bringing them fresh ideas as they shared with them the new knowledge and methods acquired in summer schools or workshops.

The small school offered ideal opportunities to experiment with the Morrison unit study method, the Schorsch insights into religious education, and a drama class that built the props, equipped the stage and billed plays all year long. Sister Eugenia Foley's art appreciation courses brought the masterpieces of painting into the homes of Moxee. The music department stimulated a desire for high quality record players in the homes when it introduced opera and symphony to its pupils.

Things kept happening all year long. When the excitement of a contest, a raffle or an intramural tournament had scarcely died down, the play was the thing, or a luncheon or an evening get-together on the roof to discover the stars and planets. Away from city lights in the clear Moxee skies, Orion, the Big Dipper, Jupiter, Venus and the Milky Way seemed almost within reach. Because the beautiful and the new attracted Moxee pupils, their teachers found delight in broadening their experiences.

## PROGRESS BRINGS CHANGES

Progress brought about changes in the parish. In 1920 the parish provided a school bus that gradually eliminated the need for the boarding department. It closed in 1933. The Oblate Fathers, who had evangelized the Indians in the Moxee valley in 1848, returned to the valley in 1932 to direct Holy Rosary parish, working closely with the sisters in the school for the next thirty-five years.

In 1930 when the people proposed building a public high school in the midst of the Catholic population, an opposition group formed. They feared for the continued existence of Holy Rosary high school. However, the vote favored the location and the new high school opened in 1936.

The response of the superior, Sister Isidora Mondor, to the expected competition was to initiate proceedings to improve Holy Rosary high school and apply for its accreditation. Father Edward B. Connolly, O.M.I., the pastor, fully cooperated with her ideas; and the parish trustees approved.

During Sister Benedict Joseph's time as superior until 1933, the high school had moved to two improvised class rooms on the third floor. The old high school room became a library and study hall. Sister Isidora and Sister Eugenia, the principal, equipped a science laboratory across from the library. For some time now two teachers had been staffing the high school.

On May 12, 1936, Mr. Dimmit, State High School Inspector, and Mr. Van Horn,



County Superintendent of Schools, visited Holy Rosary and gave their verbal approval of the school. The official notice of the certification of all four years of high school came on December 14, 1936.

By that time Sister Agnes Mary had replaced Sister Isidora as superior. With Sister Eugenia, the strong innovative principal, and a supportive staff of two or three dedicated sisters, Holy Rosary high school continued to thrive, losing few if any students to the new public high school. In fact, the competition benefited both schools, and good relations existed between them.

Though sheltered in some ways in their homes and school, Moxee youth were very much youth of their age. The changing world that came with the two world wars had repercussions in their lives.

Prohibition brought a rash of illegal stills, the sale of moonshine and bribing of law officers. Some Moxee men, along with half their countrymen, considered the Eighteenth Amendment an invasion of their rights. They intended to continue having their wine and whiskey. The danger of being caught, the secrecy, the ingenious methods used had a thrill about them that appealed to teenagers working with their parents in evading the law.

They distilled rye, barley, wheat and prunes. The prunes made the best brandy, worth twenty dollars a jug, with a good market at the banks for those willing to run the risk. Stool pigeons of the government knew where to lie in wait; but Moxee salesmen usually could detect them by the "look in their eye". Just in case they missed, they now and then slipped a fifty dollar bill to the judge. The unwary, at times, did get caught, went to court and paid a fine. Judges, knowing full well how prevalent bootlegging was, seldom issued a jail sentence.

Holy Rosary high school students were fully aware of traffic in illegal alcohol in Moxee. Their home parties, too, had become more sophisticated than those of the pioneer day taffy pulls when the syrup flowed from the Bergevin sorghum mill. The gaiety was still wholesome fun as they danced for the fiddler into the night, quenching their thirst from a big canteen of hot soup with crackers and — a secret supply of moonshine.

High school teams shared the fun of wedding day customs throwing rice, driving the hayrack they had forced the bride and groom to mount, out-pranking the veteran pranksters. Little crime existed among Moxee's teenagers — but plenty of tantalizing mischief. Such were the students that the sisters taught at Holy Rosary.

The depression of the 1930's and prohibition hurt the sale of hops. The price dropped to an all-time low of five cents a pound. Kilns bulged with unsold hops; contracts were broken; but Moxee farmers faced reality and kept faith. Their old spirit of getting needed things accomplished showed itself when the parish hall burned to the ground in 1937. By 1938 a new and better one stood in its place.

## NEW MILE STONES AHEAD

The population of Moxee kept growing-up to a point. The first settlers kept adding acreage to their farms so that, when the young men began to marry, have families and want farms of their own, little land was available for them in Moxee. Many of them bought farms in the Lower Valley and brought much of the spirit of Moxee to Wapato, Toppenish, White Swan and Prosser.

In Moxee the first hastily built homes began to be replaced by some beautiful modern homes that bespoke prosperity. The Julian Sauve stone house on the hill, built in 1909, now had rivals. In the place of the dirt roads with chuck holes, mud and foot-deep dust, there were paved highways for high-powered cars and trucks.

The Moxee City fathers, determined to let Yakima motorists recognize a city when they passed through it, put a thirty-mile-an-hour speed limit on the three block long main street. When the city needed funds, it had an easy source of revenue.

Mechanization of harvesting methods began in 1941 when Wilfred Rivard installed a stationary hop-picking machine. Fifty men now could do the work of three hundred people. Then came the portable machines operated by only nine men. Moxee residents still had employment during spring training and fall harvest seasons; but the need to hire outside laborers lessened just as labor problems began to multiply.

As early as the 1930's Moxee had become prominent in the international Hop Growers Association and a good number of the men, like the Rivards, Brulottes, Gamaches, Beaulauriers and others became specially generous to their church and school.

In Moxee, as in the whole world, the decades of the 50's and 60's ushered in a new era for the Church. The pioneers of the immigrant train from Minnesota, one by one, were journeying to God. At Mrs. Pamela Champoux's death in 1956, her sons and daughters realized that now it was their generation that was to hand on the faith in ever increasing depths of wisdom and love. So it was with other families.

Providence had designs for changes in Holy Rosary School, too. In March, 1957, the state inspector visiting the high school was satisfied with the quality of education given the thirty-five students by the four sisters on the faculty with Sister Dolorosa Dufault as principal. However, state law required a minimum of thirty-six students for long-term accreditation; so the inspector renewed the accreditation for one year only.

The sisters consulted with their headquarters in Seattle, with the bishop of Yakima and with the pastor and trustees of Moxee's church. Central Catholic High School was to open in Yakima the fall of 1957 to serve the greater Yakima valley. With Moxee students having the option of going there or to St. Joseph Academy or Marquette High School, the time seemed feasible to broaden the opportunities of Moxee's teenagers and close Holy Rosary high school.

In June, 1957, it graduated nine young ladies, the last of over a hundred alumnae members. Theirs was the largest class ever. Most of these girls had spent all twelve years at Holy Rosary. Most bore names of the pioneer families: Desmarais, Brulotte, Gamache, Beaudry, Belaire, Sauve. In the Moxee tradition, God chose one of them, Pauline Lemaire, to become a Sister of Providence.

The chronicle writer for 1957 ends her account of the year with words of faith, "We exalt, O Lord, Thy Providence and we submit ourselves to its decrees."

The grade school went on for ten more years. Sister Mary Berchmans, as the province supervisor of primary grades, had special concern to help Moxee's teachers. After a late August workshop, she would spend two weeks with the young sisters at the opening of school and return periodically to give follow-up help. The upper grade teachers continued to give Moxee youth a basic education with opportunities for development of each one's potential.

With the high school gone, the number of sisters dropped to five and then to four; as the number of piano pupils no longer warranted a music teacher. With a growing number of Catholics now in the public school, Holy Rosary, in 1958, began offering religious education classes after school, and vacation school in June.

In the spirit of Vatican II, with its old Moxee enthusiasm, Holy Rosary School celebrated its golden jubilee in 1965. Father Daniel Regimbal, O.S.B., one of Moxee's five priest vocations, sang the jubilee Mass in the vernacular, a first in Moxee.

Sister Brendan and Sister Mary Loyola, foundresses, shared the joys of the day with former pupils, now fathers and mothers of another generation. Sister Bernadette Desmarais, one of the first 1915 pupils, was now the superior of her Alma Mater; and Sister Bernard Maria Perrault, a 1935 graduate, was teaching there. There was reason for great rejoicing.

But rumors of the end of an era soon began. The Providence Sister Formation program, scarcely ten years old in 1967, could not supply the number of sister teachers it had anticipated. Vatican II had opened windows, and new winds were blowing. The whole world was changing with unprecedented speed. The sisters could spare just three, maybe only two sisters for Moxee for 1967-1968. With two sisters and two lay teachers, the school continued that year, its last school term.

When the Most Reverend Joseph Dougherty, Bishop of the Yakima diocese, announced the close of Holy Rosary School to the congregation, he told them, "This is one of the saddest moments of my life." He was saying Mass at an altar facing the people, a symbol of new things to come.

The Moxee church had arrived at a new milestone. Something new needed to be accomplished. With Moxee initiative, the people met their latest challenge with a solution prompted by faith. They went to their pastor, Father John Shaw, who shared their wish to have some Providence Sisters continue to live in their valley.

Mr. and Mrs. Albert Gamache offered a house for the sisters across the street from the church. Father Shaw then asked the Providence Sisters if they would send two semi-retired sisters, who knew the Moxee people, to come to live in their parish. His request was granted; and Sister Agnes Mary and Sister Anna Clare Duggar moved into the remodeled house in the fall of 1968.

Sister Anna Clare worked with the parishioners to organize a full-scale C.C.D. program. By October, grades one through six had enrolled two hundred fifty pupils with eleven parishioners trained by Sister Anna Clare to conduct the classes. Mrs. Leonard Riel, with eight more teachers, enrolled seventy-five pupils of grades seven through twelve.

The constantly renewed spirit of faith would go on burning brightly in Moxee. That's the way it ever would be, please God. C'est toujours la vie à Moxee.



*Leon and Esther Dufault drove to H.R.S. in a wicker pony cart. Esther is now Sister Esther, S.P.*



*Sister Mary Dolorita introduced Moxee's Canadian-French first graders to reading English.*

*Sister Mary Loyola knew the art of being a strict and beloved teacher in Moxee.*



*Six of these 27 girls who made up the 1932-1933 H. R. S. high school became Providence Sisters. Sister Theresa Lang taught them part of that year.*



*Wilfred and Melina (Gamache) Sauve met on the immigrant train to Moxee in 1897 and were married in Yakima before Moxee had a church.*



*Hop picking time was a jolly time in Moxee.*





*In 1919 Louina Belaire, Olive Patnode and Ruby Beaudry became the first graduates of H. R. S.*



*Jeffry and Vivian (Brulotte) Gamache, both educated at H. R. S. sent their eighteen children to their alma mater until it closed in 1968.*



## HELPFUL DATES AND FACTS BETWEEN THE YEARS 1843 and 1920

- 1843 —Founding of the Sisters of Providence in Montreal, Canada
- 1851 —Death of Mother Emilie Gamelin, Foundress
- 1852— First attempt at a foundation in the West failed
- 1856 —Successful foundation in Vancouver, Territory of Washington
- 1864 —Erection of vicariates, among them Providence of Vancouver Vicariate
- 1891 —Erection of provinces, among them Province of the Sacred Heart, Vancouver
- 1912 —Regrouping of provinces establishing Holy Angels Province in Western Canada and suppressing St. Vincent de Paul Province in Oregon
- 1925 —A new regrouping of provinces

Original name of the Institute — Daughters of Charity Servants of the Poor  
F.C.S.P.

Present name of the Institute — Sisters of Providence, S.P.

Name often used — Sisters of Charity of Providence

### Superiors General 1856 - 1920

- 1851-1858 Mother Caron
- 1858-1872 Mother Philomene
- 1872-1878 Mother Caron
- 1878-1886 Mother Amable
- 1886-1898 Mother Mary Godfrey
- 1898-1910 Mother Mary Antoinette
- 1910-1922 Mother Mary Julian

### SUPERIORS OF PROVIDENCE OF VANCOUVER VICARIATE

- 1864-1866 Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart
- 1866-1881 Mother Praxedes of Providence Lamothe
- 1881-1890 Mother John of the Cross
- 1890-1891 Mother Peter of Alcantara

### PROVINCIAL SUPERIORS OF PROVIDENCE OF THE SACRED HEART

- 1891-1894 Mother Peter of Alcantara
- 1894-1900 Mother John of Jesus
- 1900-1903 Mother Benedict Joseph
- 1903-1909 Mother Mary Eugene
- 1909-1913 Mother James Kisai
- 1913-1919 Mother Vincent Ferrier
- 1919-1925 Mother Praxedes of Providence Gerin-Lajoie

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PHOTOS: Most of them, courtesy of Sisters of Providence Archives,  
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This is a story of seven early Providence schools, all but one of them existing in Washington before it was a state. It tells of sisters who brought Christianity and education to early population centers in Vancouver, Steilacoom and Cowlitz; to Yakima before irrigation had turned a desert into a fruit bowl; to Olympia, the city of high fashion; and to Moxee, a unique French settlement. It shows the sisters in Tulalip educating the Indians of the Puget Sound in the first government contract school for Indians in the country.

This is a story of dedicated, self-educated religious women who not only taught school subjects well but instilled a love of learning in youth. These Providence Sisters played a part in the history of education as it advanced to new standards of certification, accreditation, expansion and excellence. They played a part in the lives of hundreds of their students in whom they planted seeds of faith, love and wisdom — seeds that have reaped abundant fruit.

This book has relevance today when society has reached a new turning point. Educators in this emerging era who seek fidelity to their roots while meeting the needs of changed times will find these pages refreshing. As they follow the early educators constantly breaking ground, achieving results only after resourceful devotedness, they will have reason for courage and hope. The book has a message of trust in Divine Providence for all who dream dreams.

The author, Sister Dorothy Lentz, has had firsthand experience in educating hundreds of high school boys and girls in Providence and archdiocesan schools in the Northwest. She is presently one of a team of Providence Sisters writing the history of their religious community in Canada and the United States.