

Past *Forward*

PROVIDENCE ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

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

Finding the pieces of the puzzle: the life of “The Bell and the River,” Part II

Emily Hughes Dominick and Loretta Z. Greene

Editor's note: This is the second in a two-part series about the history of “The Bell and the River.” The first article can be found in the Winter 2013-2014 issue (Vol. 20 No. 3) of Past Forward.

The first part of this history of “The Bell and the River” gave an overview of the main players and process to research, write and edit this biography of Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart. On the eve of 1956, the year of the centennial of the Sisters of Providence arrival in the West, it was hoped that the biography would be published in time for the centennial celebrations, but that was not to be.

In early 1956, Sister Cecilia Mary, who had been named to coordinate the centennial activi-

ties as well as handle the details relating to the publication of the biography, was busy tracking down an appropriate publisher. She found one in Mr. Stanley Croonquist of Pacific Books (Palo Alto, Calif.). In August 1956 she wrote to Mother Mary Philothea, provincial superior, with final publication details about authorship, introduction, title and illustrations. By the end of the month, Mother Mary Philothea signed the agreement with Pacific Books for printing the volume.

The first publication detail about authorship came up late in 1955. Sister Mary of the Blessed Sacrament was the original author but upon her unexpected death Sister Maria Theresa wrote the final chapters. Through the process,



Sister Mary Leopoldine did some of the writing and editing. The question was who should be named primary author? In September 1955, Mother Mary Philothea wrote to Mother Mary Berenice, general superior: “Sister Maria Theresa would prefer that Sister Mary of the Blessed Sacrament be given the title as author and that she would receive acknowledgement in the proper place in the book. However, Sister Judith tells us that she knows of no publishing house which would consider a dead author unless she had previously published one or two books.” In the end, it was decided to list Sister Mary of the Blessed Sacrament as author with acknowledgement *continued on next page*

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Attendees of the MACC meeting held at the Providence International Centre in Montreal June 9-11, 2014, with the mandala created by the participants.

Archives staff were among the nearly thirty participants of the first ever MACC meeting hosted at the Providence International Centre in Montreal this past June. The MACC acronym stands for the “Museum, Archives, Causes and Communications” departments of the Sisters of Providence (SP) international congregation.

This joint meeting had two main objectives: 1) Promot-

ing the SP mission, values and charism through our work of managing, preserving, utilizing and developing the SP heritage; and 2) Fostering collaboration and effective and efficient communications among and between entities. The entities represented at the meeting included the General Administration and Émilie-Gamelin, Bernarda Morin, Holy Angels and Mother Joseph provinces. The archives departments of the General Administration and the Western provinces had previously met on two occa-

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of collaboration by Sister Mary Leopoldine and Sister Maria Theresa.

The book still needed an introduction. In October 1955, Sister Mary Leopoldine announced to the provincial council that she had been in contact with a well-known writer of the Northwest, James Stevens. This was one of the last meetings involving Sister Mary Leopoldine before she was asked to step back from the decisions involved with the publication but her suggestion was taken up; in August 1956 Sister Cecilia Mary wrote that Stevens was working on the introduction and she expected to have it soon.

The question as to the title of the book surfaced several times. The manuscript copy of the book that may have made rounds to readers prior to publication was titled "Like a Tree Growing," borrowed from the final quote of the biography: "Like a tree growing by the rivers of water...his leaf shall not wither and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." Sister Cecilia Mary noted: "A Bell and the River" is an acceptable title. 'Like a Tree Growing' is unsatisfactory—too trite and closely allied to 'A Tree Grows in Brooklyn.'" The origin of this title isn't entirely clear, though years later, Sister Cecilia Mary wrote that it was based on a quatrain by T.S. Eliot, which may refer to the poem "The Dry Salvages" that references both "the bell" and "the river."

As for illustrations, a pencil sketch made by Mr. E.B. MacNaughton of the front yard and main entrance of Providence Academy (Vancouver, Wash.) had already been completed by 1953. The question, and disagreement, was whether or not to also include a portrait of Mother Joseph or the other foundresses. Sister Cecilia Mary

thought using a photograph along with the sketch was not acceptable, while Sister Mary Leopoldine thought a true photograph should be used to add authenticity to the book. The apparent compromise on this point was a pencil sketch based



Pencil sketch by E.B. MacNaughton, prominent Portland businessman and trained architect and engineer. Reproduced opposite of page 110 in "The Bell and the River." Image #22.K1.4

on Mother Joseph's portrait.

With all of these decisions finalized and the publishing agreement signed by Mother Mary Philothea, the book was ready for printing. The last question was how many to print. An invoice dated March 1957 shows a bulk order of 2000 books were charged to Sister Cecilia Mary. Later invoices show that an additional 4299 books were sold in the first four years following publication.

When the book was published in 1957, Sister Mary Leopoldine had mostly gotten past the hard feelings that led up to the book's printing: she was thrilled and had an apparent renewed energy to promote sales of the book. Sister Mary Leopoldine personally auto-

graphed dozens of copies when she was honored at a party held at DeSales Catholic Book Shop in Spokane.

Reviews of the book were favorable. Sister Mary Leopoldine wrote an article for the "Little Journal of Providence"

(Jan. 1958) summarizing the book's success and the background of its creation. She included quotes from sisters and others about their reactions to the book and included a full reprint of a magazine article that she declared had "climaxed the reviews thus far." The review called Mother Joseph "one of the most remarkable and successful religious in the United States." Interestingly, it ends with sharp criticisms that still frustrate readers today including that "there is no index, no chapter headings, no bibliography and no maps of territory unfamiliar to most Americans."

For decades after its publication, "The Bell and the River" continued to have interest to the religious community, employees

of Providence Health System and the general public. The dedication of the Mother Joseph statue in Statuary Hall, Washington, D.C., in 1980 renewed interest in this pioneer woman and her biography. As a result, the supply of extra copies began to dwindle so it was reprinted by the provincial administration in 1986. This softbound edition was an exact reprint of the original book with an additional preface by Sister Barbara Schamber, provincial superior.

In 2006, the religious community celebrated the 150th anniversary of its arrival in the Northwest. The year-long recognition included public celebrations of Mass and receptions in Seattle, Spokane and Vancouver, Wash.; a major exhibit; and publication of a pictorial calendar and historic timeline. This event sparked another renewal of interest in the pioneer history and an increased demand for "The Bell and the River." The anniversary was seen as an appropriate time to reprint the book again. Spearheaded by Sister Susanne Hartung, Chief Mission Integration Officer of the Washington/Montana Region of Providence Health & Services, this project included correcting errors in names, misspellings and other inaccuracies. This major effort resulted in 10,000 copies being printed and distributed to employees.

In recent years the text has been reformatted to meet the changes in communication and technology. In 2009, an effort was launched by Sister Susanne to produce an audio version of the book. The original issues of research, authorship and production took on a modern dimension as it was necessary to find the right voice to read the text, select a production studio, identify the correct pronunciation of names and places, correct errors and determine the

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Wheelchair finds new home

on stage

Pam Hedquist

Though Providence Archives primarily collects archival materials



The wheelchair in the spotlight with actresses from "Little Women."

including papers, manuscripts and photographs, we also have collected thousands of artifacts, or three-dimensional physical objects, over the years. Since everything cannot be retained, the Archives staff must decide what artifacts to keep and what to do with things that don't fit the collections scope.

When you think of the sheer number of objects that have been created and/or used by the Sisters of Providence and their resulting ministries, it is enough to make your head spin. The basic process is as follows: a donated artifact is assessed for historical value, provenance, uniqueness and physical condition. If the item meets these

requirements then it is accessioned, cataloged and stored properly.

But what happens to the physical objects that do not meet the criteria? Archives staff make efforts to ensure that each item finds an appropriate home. This home might be a museum, historical society, or another archive. Liturgical items might be offered to a parish or a mission. Some items might be returned to the donor. And still others might be offered to a charity for resale or used as a fund raiser.

Recently, we found a home for a 1940s metal and wood wheelchair from Providence Regional Medical Center Everett, Wash. Due to storage space limits and having another wheelchair in much better condition, we decided to de-accession the

item from the inventory. Since the chair was stored in Spokane, Loretta Greene thought of offering it to the theater department at Gonzaga University; she made the call and they were ecstatic to accept it.

The department head was aware of a local performance of "Little Women" in need of a period wheelchair. How perfect! At that point, I became the contact for arranging the pick-up of the chair. I was lucky to be able to attend the opening performance to witness our wheelchair on stage. It was a wonderful feeling knowing that it once belonged to one of our Providence ministries and gratifying to see that even artifacts that leave the archives have continued use and value! ✍

What's new in the archives?

Peter Schmid

Most archives grow by accretion, and Providence Archives is no different: we add to the collections the dribs and drabs that are left at our office doors, mailed to us by sisters or PH&S staff, or donated to us by those with some Providence connection—a nursing or grade school alum, perhaps. Sometimes, however, there is a major transfer of records when a ministry closes or separates from the health system, there is a change in personnel, or staff are simply cleaning old files squirreled away in the building. That's when boxes line the hallway outside the Archives offices at Saint Joseph Residence and we try the patience of sisters and staff—like now!

In March, Deborah Shawver, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer at Providence St. Peter Hospital (Olympia, Wash.), alerted us to old public relations materials that she thought we might be interested in. This call was very

important because we rely on long-time Providence employees like Deborah who have repeatedly used the archival collections, to contact us about historical materials. Otherwise, records can be destroyed before we ever know about them; decades of history can disappear in an afternoon.

Loretta Greene traveled to Olympia to appraise the records in a basement storage area and was happy to find well-organized records including newsletters which filled gaps in our existing holdings and some fantastic photograph files. As often happens, though, there was a snowball effect: Pamela Arledge, Executive Office Manager, showed Loretta voluminous administrative files that were also ready for transfer. And, in the foundation office were records of the hospital auxiliary from its earliest days. The archive's Seattle staff returned to Olympia in early April and prepared about 100 records cartons of material for shipment to Archives. These

cartons now line the archives hallway as the staff slowly processes the records and incorporates them into the original historical collection for the hospital.

These departmental records span 1970-2004 and are a gold mine. They include various administrative board minutes and correspondence; strategic plans; documentation of new hospital services; departmental activities; and early service area records. One example of the historic value of these records are files from the office of Mission Effectiveness which chronicle Mark Koenig's far-reaching work both internationally and with the local community. Correspondence and memoranda show how Mission Effectiveness was organized directly under administration with the administrator's close support of the program.



Boxes currently lining the archives hallway

Auxiliary records include minutes, scrapbooks and photograph albums, 1954-1987, and even a volunteer apron that has been cataloged along with other artifacts received from public relations including medical instruments and a nursing uniform.

As we work to clear the hallway more gems will surface from this large transfer, and all will benefit from a greater understanding of Providence history. ✍

Puzzle

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best method of distribution.

Most recently, the book was made available electronically when it was scanned as part of the Google Books Library Project. The Sisters of Providence, as copyright owners, gave permission for the whole book to be available online. This e-version of "The Bell and the River" benefits the religious community, employees, researchers and the general public, and supports the system core value of stewardship by eliminating the likelihood of reprinting a paper edition.

What would Sister Mary Leopoldine think about "The Bell and the River" now that it is more than 65 years since she was appointed by the General Council to research and compile this biography? She would likely not be surprised to learn of its longevity. Her research

MACC

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sions but this meeting included all of the entities of the community and the addition of the other related departments. It should be noted that the MACC meeting was made possible by a group of professional translators constantly interpreting using the official languages of the community: English, French and Spanish.

Over the course of the three-day meeting, we shared information about our work, outreach and projects through individual and group presentations, panel and plenary sessions and small group discussions. These brought to light differences among the

was meticulous, her zeal for the project was untiring, and her belief in the subject was true. She would be proud that her work has stood the test of

entities in terms of professional backgrounds, staffing levels and reporting structures, use of technology and methods of communication. In spite of these differences there was an atmosphere of unity and excitement in finally meeting the people whom we knew by name only, if at all, engaged in similar work across two continents. A morning prayer led by the Chilean delegation culminated in the creation of a beautiful mandala which symbolized our common purpose and desire to work together. Clearly, there is much to be shared in terms of ideas, projects and expertise.

The general feeling of the meeting was excitement and an urgency to find a concrete way

time and is a valuable historical resource. She would knowingly nod her head at the difficulties encountered with the reprint and reformat editions but just as

to work together. However, it was agreed that communication between entities needs to be improved before we can commit to collaborative projects. All agreed that the first step toward this will be a survey for each entity to more specifically pinpoint its needs and to determine how to better communicate. The Mother Joseph Province Archives staff volunteered to design and distribute the survey and the results.

The survey is in the development stage, but it will hopefully serve to highlight areas where we can collaborate and help one another or at least solidify our shared goals so that we can continue the conversations we started in June. ✍

in 1957 she would probably take great joy in seeing each edition come to fruition and be their champion. ✍

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