

Past

Forward

PROVIDENCE ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

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



Exhibits for the Sesquicentennial

In their rush to set up a photographic and documentary display and install exhibits of artifacts and memorabilia, the Providence archivists barely had time to change for the 150th anniversary reception held on April 22 at Seattle's Yesler Community Center. Such bustle was the climax of month-long plan-

ning, design and transport of exhibits that highlight the history of the Sisters of Providence in the West. Exhibits and displays bring tangible focus on archival collections of organizations and communities. That is why the interested public loves them. What are normally stored in controlled conditions can be seen up close and in greater detail.

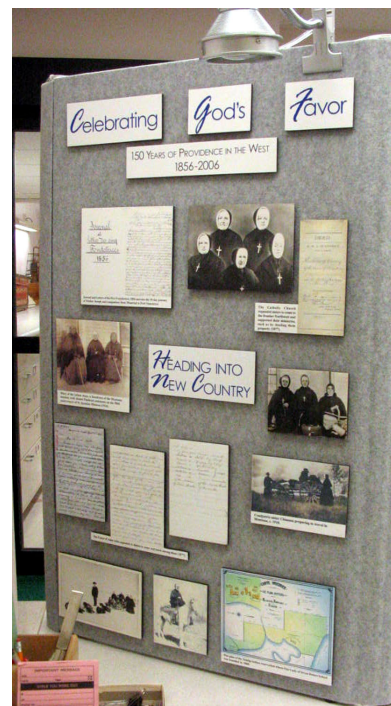
The multi-panel display is titled "Celebrating God's Favor: 150 Years of Providence in the West," also the theme of the sesquicentennial. Selected from a collection of over 50,000 images, photographic prints dominate the display. Reproductions of historical records punctuate the assemblage. Key moments and characteristics of religious life shown are pioneering years, governance structures, vocation and formation, Vatican II reform, and new ministries, as well as apostolic works in education and health care that are the legacy of the Providence sisters.

Complementing the panel display are two five-foot long exhibit cases (loaned by the

Museum of History and Industry) containing arrangements of artifacts. The first presents tools and artwork of Mother Joseph, religious habit *continued on p. 2*



Artifacts have historical, informational, aesthetic and sacred value.



A display with photos, a journal, a property deed, a map, and a letter from Native Americans.

Sister Begins SP History Research

Barbara Schamber, Sister of Providence, was ready to return to ministry after a year-long sabbatical in 2005. Having participated in "Crossing the Mountains," the process resulting in the formation of Mother



Barbara Schamber, S.P.

Joseph Province (MJP), she wanted to write an account of that period.

However the MJP Leadership Team and Sesquicentennial Committee had another project in mind and posed this question to her: why not write the

history of the Sisters of Providence in the West—from the beginning—as part of the 150th anniversary? Sr. Barbara was caught off guard. Her first thought was, "That's going to be overwhelming!" But after prayerful reflection, she took on the challenge of conducting the first stages of historical research and outlining. Her *continued on p. 3*

Inside

St. Praxedes

History Timeline

May Crowning

Praxedes of Providence: Foundress, Missionary, Leader

by Barbara Schamber, S.P.

[Editor's Note: The following article is excerpted and edited from the author's history of the religious community, one of the projects commemorating the sesquicentennial.]

On December 8, 1856, Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart and four sisters arrived at Fort Vancouver, Washington Territory, in response to a petition from Bishop of Nesqually, Augustin Magloire A. Blanchet. The 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Sisters of Providence in the West provides the opportunity to become familiar with the other four foundresses.

After the arduous journey from Montreal to Fort Vancouver, 36-year-old Sister Praxedes of Providence, née Desanges Lamothe, wasted no time in assuming whatever works needed to be accomplished. She was named assistant to Mother Joseph and mistress to novices. In addition, she directed activities in the kitchen. There were only five Sisters of Providence; each

carried enormous responsibilities which would only continue to expand.

After serving eight years in Washington Territory, Praxedes was asked to return to the motherhouse and attend to business concerning the new mission. When she returned to Fort Vancouver in 1866, newly-elected Superior General Mother Philomene accompanied her along with other sisters named for the Western mission. Prior to the trip, sister was appointed Mother Vicar (known today as Provincial Superior) to succeed Mother Joseph. There were now 28 sisters in the West; soon they would celebrate the tenth anniversary of their foundation. Sister Praxedes would serve as Mother Vicar for the next fifteen years.

During her administration she founded four hospitals, three schools for Native Americans, and two boarding schools. Under her watch the vicariate house was reconstructed and St. Joseph Hospital, Vancouver, rebuilt after a fire. All of these

endeavors undertaken by her flowed from a deep prayer life.

Although strong of constitution, her body was ravaged by dyspepsia, a constant illness for this woman of the frontier. More difficult however was never mastering the English language. Being in office where she needed to communicate and correspond with others in matters of business, the mother vicar had to rely on fellow sisters to do so.

When Mother Praxedes turned over the administration of the vicariate to Mother John of the Cross in July 1881, she was greatly relieved. Only 61 years old, she looked much older than her years. She gladly accepted being in charge of sisters' linens with quiet humility.

Her illnesses continued to progress and sisters could see the pain she suffered. The great foundress, Mother Praxedes of Providence, died on September 24, 1889. She is buried at St. James Acres cemetery, Vancouver, Washington.



Praxedes of Providence, 1870s

Exhibits

continued from p. 1

accessories, and liturgical objects. The second holds a nurse's uniform, medical instruments, school memorabilia and attire, and teaching implements. These and other artifacts reveal the religious community's way of life and the culture of the times.

The exhibits will make another appearance at the Spokane celebration on Aug. 5 at the Davenport Hotel following Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Lourdes.—N.D.

A TIMELINE tracing the history of Providence in the West, has been printed as a commemorative brochure for the sesquicentennial. Filled with photographs and historical facts, as well as a list of major institutions, the four-fold brochure was produced by the Archives and the anniversary committee. The timeline can be used in vocation outreach, mission integration, employee orientation, public relations, and



teaching. For a copies check with your mission and communication offices. Also available from the System Office at 206-464-3374 (for Providence staffs) and 206-923-4021 or 509-474-2300 (for sisters and public).—N.D.

PICTURING PROVIDENCE

by Peter F. Schmid, C.A., Visual Resources Archivist

A column highlighting archival photographs and other resources that provide visual documentation of the Sisters of Providence. Peter selects notable materials from the collection of over 50,000 photographs. He can be reached at 206-923-4012 or peter.schmid@providence.org.

May the Month for Mary and Mothers



Senior boarders at Providence Academy in Vancouver, Washington, crown the Blessed Virgin, circa 1954. May crownings were held outdoors and in the academy's music hall during inclement weather. A Mother's

Day Tea was hosted after this crowning.

The Catholic Church has long honored the Blessed Virgin in May, culminating in the crowning of Her statue with a crown of flowers. The crown is a reference to Mary as

Queen of Heaven. Though usually celebrated on May 1st, some crownings are held on May 31st, feast of the Queenship of Mary. (The feast day was proclaimed by Pope Pius XII in 1954, also declared a Marian Year). There were separate events for grade school and high school. The Sodality prefect usually had the honor of placing the crown.

Crownings were popular in the 1950s, as was forming "living rosaries" in May and in October, the month of the rosary. Sister Alexis Melancon, last principal of the Vancouver academy, remembers joining living rosaries in the 1930s while a student at St. Vincent de Paul Academy, Walla Walla. Students wore uniforms of pink, yellow, blue and green to distinguish the decades.

Sr. Barbara Schamber *continued from p. 1*

knowledge of institutional history, sense of community, and experience in provincial leadership were the biggest factors in selecting her as historian for the sesquicentennial, according to committee chair, Sr. Joan Gallagher.

A Chicago-native taught by women religious, young Barbara and her family moved to Sun Valley, California. Eventually she enrolled at Providence High School in Burbank. She entered novitiate in 1961 and the rest is history!

Teaching and school administration became her primary ministries. From 1985 to 1991 she was provincial

superior for Sacred Heart Province and board chair for its corporations. She was called again to the first Leadership Team of MJP, serving as provincial from 2000 to 2004.

Last January Sr. Barbara began researching in the Archives. She is no stranger to the department and its work. Back in 1969 she assisted Sr. Rita Bergamini in organizing the province's historical records that later lead to the birth of a full-fledged archives program. Throughout her terms in provincial administration, she has come to rely on the archivists' expertise. She has now discovered the distinctions

between doing archival and library research, the latter with which she has been familiar as educator. "They're actually very different," she says, referring to the manner materials are organized and handled.

The themes of her research revolve around mission callings, to places and to apostolates. The thread she sees in the Providence story is one of "crossing many mountains"—personal, geographic, ministerial and spiritual.

The book is slated for publication in late 2007. (See excerpt from first chapter on page 2.)—N.D.

The Spring Winds

The spring winds rise up restless, journey
Through rude grasses, testing energy,
Mood; consider mischief, spin and swirl
Unsettled; whistle warning twist, twirl,
Gather power. With sudden fury

Scythe purple fields ruthlessly
Felled irises lie in agony
Dying, stem cocoons lost. Petals furl.
The spring winds rise up

Again. blow quietly; oversee
Bittersweet harvests with apathy
Change venue, confused, all in a whirl
Shamble through shadows, hurl
Dust, directing all who wish to see
The spring winds rise up.

—Margarita Acosta, *S.P.*, 1989

Sr. Margarita (1942-1995) was hospital administrator, teacher and writer. A collection of her poetry is kept in the Archives.



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