

# Past *Forward*

## PROVIDENCE ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

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

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## Major New Photo Acquisition From Portland Institutions

*Peter Schmid*



*Nurses with ambulance in front of St. Vincent Hospital, Portland, ca. 1914*

“There’s a note in one of the boxes from a sister with an Italian last name.” Jeff Krause, photographer/videographer for Creative Services for Providence in Portland, Oregon, heaved a carton into the U-Haul van I had driven down from Seattle in September of last year. I was there to retrieve a collection of official photography from Portland institutions. Jockeying the box into position in that van, I smiled with recognition and told Jeff that I had no doubt about the identity of the author of the note. Several weeks later, I discovered the half-sheet of paper:

“To Whom It May Concern:  
Please contact Archivist, Sisters of Providence, before disposing of any negatives in this file.”

The note, dated October 12, 1972, was tucked into a box of medium-format photographic negatives in Kraft envelopes. Sure enough, it was signed by Sister Rita Bergamini, then-archivist for the former Sacred Heart Province. Sr. Rita had just been appointed to the new position in May of that year, having completed a term as provincial secretary (for more on the history of Providence Archives, see the Fall 2012 issue of *Past Forward* on our website). The note appears on the letterhead of Providence Heights (Issaquah, Washington), where the provincialate was then located. The negatives in question form just one part of three large accessions of photographic material acquired, which provide visual documentation of the three oldest and largest Providence institutions in Portland, Oregon:

## Artifact Spotlight

*Jessica Long*



Warmer weather and beautiful spring flowers often inspire people to lace up their shoes or dust off their bikes and head outside to exercise the winter blues away. Spring is the time when races kick into high gear and the annual Providence/Mail Tribune Invitational Race in Medford, Oregon is no exception. The humble beginnings of the race can be traced back to the new Health Promotion Program at Providence Hospital, now Providence Medford Medical Center, in 1981. The small race took place on the last day of National Health Week with the goal to improve the physical



and mental health of citizens in Jackson County. A year later, the hospital co-sponsored the event with a local newspaper, the *Medford Mail Tribune*, and expanded the purpose of the Race to encourage family participation.

Described as the “second largest athletic event in Southern Oregon” in the 1984

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## The St. Joseph Medal Tradition

Rene Campagna

Bill Bouten was a young laborer when he watched his father and Sister Peter Claver Thomas, administrator, walking together on the construction site of the new East Wing of Sacred Heart Medical Center (SHMC) in Spokane, Washington. Later that evening he asked his dad about this occurrence and learned that there was a special ceremony of dropping religious medals into the concrete of the building foundation on projects that were under the oversight of Sr. Peter Claver.

Sr. Peter Claver adapted a Catholic tradition that dates



*Sr. Rosalie dropping a medal into a concrete pour*

back to St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) who prayed to St. Joseph and encouraged her nuns to bury St. Joseph medals in the ground when they needed more land for their convents. This custom was also practiced by St. Andre Bessett (1845-1937) of Montreal, who secretly buried a St. Joseph medal on Mount Royal where a shrine was later built. Sister Rosalie Locati, director of mission and values at SHMC, points to Sr. Peter Claver as initiating the tradition of dropping medals in the concrete of Providence ministries. According to Sr. Rosalie, "It was probably from her own spirituality that she came up with this idea."

Bill Bouten is now the president of Bouten Construction and he, along with various Sisters of Providence, have continued the medal placement tradition that was started several decades ago. The ritual occurs early in the construction process, usually when the concrete of the foundation is being poured. The workers gather together with invited guests and a Sister of Providence. The concrete pumps are halted for a moment while the medals are dropped into place. Workers take off their hats and bow their heads as the sister prays for their safety and the successful completion of construction.

Bill describes these ceremonies as "very memorable and leaving an imprint" on all who attend. He also recalls with humor one of the ceremonies conducted by Sister Lillian Deslauriers, chaplain. Usually the ritual needs to be very brief because the concrete pumps are halted; however, Sr. Lillian added extra parts that included sprinkling of holy water and singing. Bill was more drenched than sprinkled and when the "Hymn to Divine Providence" began, he was concerned about the concrete pump plugging up because of the delay. Everything turned out fine, although it probably is the one ritual that he won't ever forget.

Sr. Peter Claver's nephew, Tim Thomas, also works for Bouten Construction and has been part of many medal rituals as well. One of the most meaningful parts of the ritual for him is the prayer that is directed toward the safety of the workers: "This shows genuine care for those who are building."

After Sr. Peter Claver's death, other Sisters of Provi-

dence carried on the tradition and currently Sr. Rosalie continues this partnership with Bouten Construction. She has lead several of the rituals, including for Sacred Heart Children's Hospital, Mt. Carmel Hospital, and most recently for Providence Medical Park



*Sr. Rosalie Locati with medals*

in Spokane Valley. She collects many of the St. Joseph medals from the sisters when they pass away, and supplements others from religious supply stores. In addition to St. Joseph, there are a variety of other medals that are used, including: Our Lady of Sorrows, Sacred Heart of Jesus, Blessed Emilie Gamelin, the Miraculous Medal of Mary, and the Guardian Angels.

Reflecting on the importance of the medal dropping rituals, Sr. Rosalie concludes: "When we bless the space as sacred, we also remind each other that our work is sacred." Bill Bouten also reflects on the meaning of this ritual: "When we pause and everyone's head is bowed down, there's nothing like this which occurs on construction projects except those undertaken by Providence. The entire construction team realizes that we are not just building any project, rather we are building something that will carry on the legacy of the Sisters of Providence."

*Rene Campagna is director of mission integration at Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center, Spokane*

## Photo Accessions

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Providence St. Vincent Medical Center (founded 1875), Providence Portland Medical Center (founded 1941), and Providence Child Center (founded 1944).

Thus, this extraordinary collection had been on the Archives' radar for decades by the time I traveled to Portland to retrieve the photographs. Jeff had contacted me in December 2015, saying that it was time to transfer the massive collection to the Archives. And massive it was: 83 cartons of material, or about 125 cubic feet. Sisters of Providence at Saint Joseph Residence, where the Archives are located, were treated to a familiar sight of boxes lining the hallway outside our offices; far too many to put away quickly, they awaited appraisal and sorting, before material deemed worthy of permanent retention found a home on the shelves in our storage area.

The collection would not have survived without the stewardship of the photography staff at the institutions who recognized the value of their work over the decades.

The collection includes over 100 binders full of strip negatives and transparencies which record life at Providence St. Vincent Medical Center (PSVMC) from the 1970s through 2000, including alphabetized portraits and work-for-hire by outside photographers; print files which date from the 1890s to about 2000; negative files from Providence Portland Medical Center (PPMC), 1955-1990s; and hundreds of videotapes from both medical centers and the Providence Child Center. The negative and print files also include Child

Center photographs. The nursing schools at both medical centers are documented, along with nursing services, nearly every department from admitting to surgery to housekeeping, the first open-heart surgery and development of the Heart Institute under the leadership of Dr. Albert Starr, regional clinics, and special events such

she could not have known when the negatives might come to the Archives, her note demonstrates Sr. Rita's role not just as a passive collector of Providence history, but as an active custodian of records who had an interest in making sure that the photographs would in fact end up at our repository. The note also implies the promise that the



*Nursing staff bid farewell to the first open-heart surgery patient at Providence Hospital, Portland, 1961. The young patient holds a "Rocky & His Friends Cartoon Kit"*

as groundbreakings and staff picnics. Campus developments are recorded with aerial views, prints and slides, and the list goes on – the preliminary inventory is 100 pages long. Many of the photographs were used in the institutional newsletters, such as PSVMC's *Crescent*, and are precisely dated.

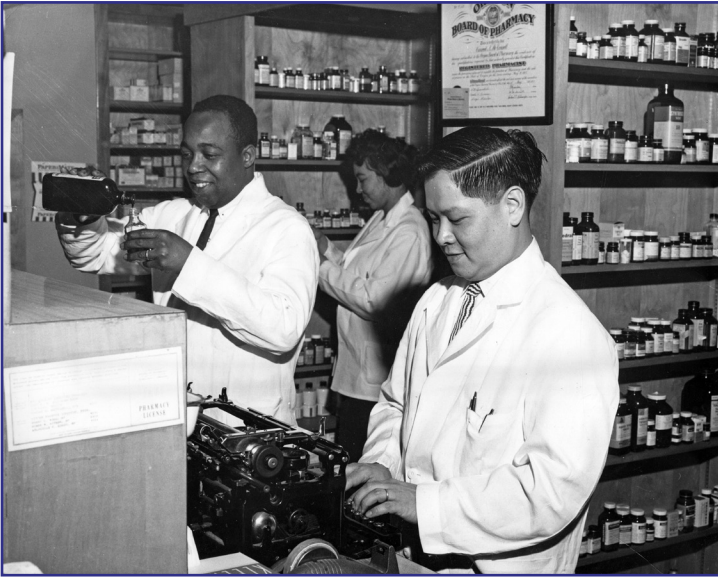
Even after my initial culling of duplicates and items not deemed worthy of permanent retention, the numbers are truly staggering: negatives, prints and slides all add up to an estimated total of over 790,000 photographs. The accessions form the largest cohesive body of photographic material in the Archives.

Sr. Rita's note, besides being a fun touchstone for the current staff of the Archives, also captures some values of our profession. Though of course

Archives would provide a home for the negatives and be treated as historic documentation worthy of preservation. It is worth noting again that as a formal department, Providence Archives was brand new in 1972, and that information was not shared instantaneously as it is today; Sr. Rita could not keep in touch with records-keepers by email – she used personal visits, "snail mail" and telephone to spread the word about the Archives and ensure that historic materials from a vast health system were not lost; she did not have the luxury of simply pointing to a website and saying, "Here's who we are and here's what we do." Though technology has forever changed how we communicate, and the way archivists do their work, this simple note on a half-sheet of paper delivered on its promise.

*See page 4 for more photographs*

*PHOTO ACCESSION: A FEW MORE SAMPLES*



*Pharmacy, St. Vincent Hospital, 1961. Department head Conrad McConnell at left; Mrs. Arlozell Brown; Henry Wong. Conrad "Mac" McConnell was president of the Oregon Society of Hospital Pharmacists and served on the Oregon State Board of Health prior to his untimely death in 1973*



*Patients and staff were delighted when Roy Rogers and his wife, actress Dale Evans Rogers visited St. Vincent Hospital in 1959; they were in town to stage entertainment features for the Oregon Centennial*



*Having fun with fruit, 2000: Providence Child Center brings children with disabilities and Montessori School children together for fun and learning*



*A Sister of Providence and nurses beside a modern ambulance, 1959. The hospital was celebrating the Oregon Centennial; the nurse in center dons a vintage uniform and "muffin top" cap*

## Providence Academy Updates

*Elizabeth Russell*

Since the purchase of Providence Academy in Vancouver, Washington by the Fort Vancouver His-



*Original artwork honors Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart*

toric Trust (FVHT) in January 2015, FVHT staff have been busy raising funds for renovation and interpretive displays at the building, which is more than 143 years old. Providence Academy, Vancouver (PAV) was the first permanent school building in Washington Territory, opening in 1874. In 1978, the U.S. Department of the Interior added the building to the National Register of Historic Places.

During 2016, the front entry hall was extensively renovated to add display panels presenting a timeline of Sisters of Providence activities in the West from 1856 to the present, as well as features on the chapel, the ballroom, and the bell tower. Providence Archives staff provided text and photographs during the production of interpretive panels. In the entry, a new painting honors Mother Joseph, as does an original work of art in the shape of a heart representing her association with the Sacred Heart. Thirty-two branches growing out of the heart symbolize the

foundation of the 32 missions inspired by her work.

Remodeling of the entry hall included the addition of three brick walls to memorialize the contributions of the Hidden family, who produced the bricks for the building. The Hiddens bought the building after the school closed and have played a noteworthy role in the academy's preservation. Outside the building, on the corner of E. Evergreen Blvd. and C Street, a wayside interpretive panel draws the attention of passers-by.

Renovation progresses on the roof of the building and exterior supporting columns and balconies to ensure that the

With further fundraising, FVHT plans to add more interpretive displays and curated spaces to the building, including an exhibit gallery on the ground floor. The Trust's proposal is to repair the spiral staircase in the center of the building, to create a special space to honor Mother Joseph, and to create dioramas to give visitors a sense of the school and religious life. Planners also propose to re-create the Shrine of the Blessed Mother on the academy grounds.

Providence Health and Services maintains its close relationship to Providence Academy with tours for PH&S employees throughout the year;



*The remodeled entryway includes a timeline featuring research and images from Providence Archives, at left*

building meets safety standards; Washington State appropriated one million dollars from a supplemental capital budget toward this effort in 2016. Governor Jay Inslee visited PAV in October 2016 and was impressed by FVHT's sustainability plan for the building, which includes its use as a small business incubator. Currently, PAV has space for about 65 businesses.

PH&S also lent financial support to FVHT during fundraising to purchase the building. FVHT and Providence Archives will continue their productive collaboration to ensure that the legacy of the Sisters of Providence will be represented accurately for generations to come.

Supporters of FVHT can find out how to donate to the Providence Academy effort here: <http://fortvan.org/Support/support-the-trust.html>

## Artifact Spotlight

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Providence Hospital chronicles, the individual and team walking, running, and biking races were usually held in mid-May and typically started on the hospital grounds. The races from 1992 through 1997 are represented in our artifact collection by seven T-shirts and one mug. Each of the brightly colored souvenirs features at least one butterfly around various logo designs and the year the race took place in. Two of the T-shirts sport a cute cartoon butterfly wearing a shirt, running shorts, and tennis shoes beneath the name “the Butterfly Run,” which was a special children’s event initiated on May 18, 1991. The mug is unique among this small collection in that it has the word “WINNER” printed underneath the logo.

Supported by hundreds of volunteers, corporate sponsors, and positive media coverage throughout the years, it is easy to see how the race was beneficial to both the hospital and surrounding community. By the time the Providence/Mail Tribune Invitational Race ended in the late 1990’s, the event had bloomed from a Walk-a-Thon, Jog-a-thon, and Bike-a-thon with a modest 350 participants into a major community event which repeatedly drew over 5,000 people and 3,000 registered participants. For more inspiration to compete in races this spring (or cheer from the sidelines!), visit our website to see all the cataloged Invitational Race artifacts in the Providence Medford Medical Center collection: <http://tinyurl.com/m9p8n8x>



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