

PROVIDENCE ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

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

Editor's note: In honor of the 175th anniversary of the foundation of the Sisters of Providence (1843-2018), the Archives staff took a look back at how the Sisters celebrated anniversaries in the past. In this issue of *Past Forward* we examine celebrations of the 75th (1918) and 100th (1943) anniversaries of the religious community. Subsequent issues of the newsletter will discuss celebrations at 125 (1993), and finally, 175 years. We hope you enjoy these essays along with images from Providence Archives collections. Small historical exhibits on the anniversaries are on display at Providence Archives, Seattle; Providence St. Joseph Health office, Renton; and Mount St. Joseph, Spokane. —PS

The Diamond Jubilee: 1918

Elizabeth Russell

As the Sisters of Providence entered their 75th anniversary year in 1918, World War I dragged on, affecting young Canadian and American men, the women who nursed on the war front and the home front, and their worried and grieving families. Thoughts of the war were ever-present. During Archbishop of Montreal Paul Bruchési's **High Mass in honor of the Diamond Anniversary**, he said, "Our children, your brothers mustered into service, are leaving for the military encampments, and from there for the battlefields of Europe; going to their death perhaps. We know not whether they will return." On the other side of the continent, at St. Vincent Hospital in Portland, Ore., the chronicles note that "All the nurses of the training school, including the non-Catholics, are anxious to be present and beseech Our Sacramental King that the reign of peace may descend on the world."

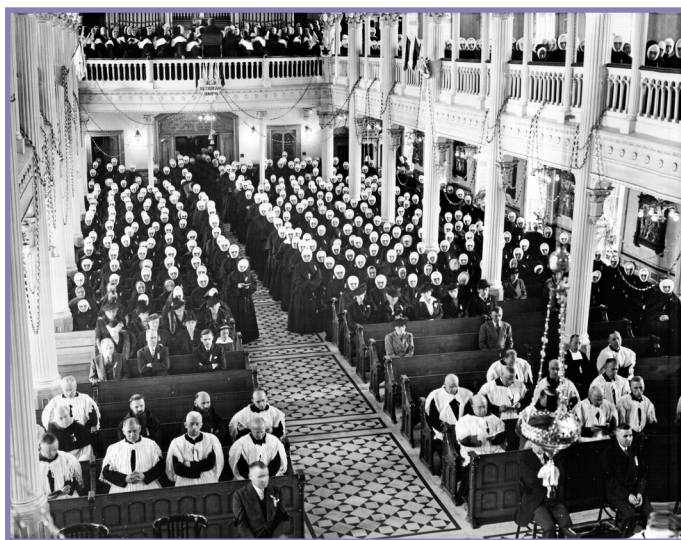
In keeping with the mood of a year in which tragedy knocked at many doors, the Sisters of Providence marked their 75th anniversary mainly through solemn religious observances and good works. Sisters held their *triduum* (three-day) celebration June 6-8 because of a conflict with Holy Monday occurring on their traditional day of celebration on March 25th. These days of celebration in June had special significance since Friday, June 7th coincided with the feast day of the Sacred Heart, a special devotion for the Sisters of Providence. The next day, June 8th, was the anniversary of the death of Bishop Bourget, founder of the religious community. For sisters in the Pacific Northwest, June 8th, 1918 was also memorable due to a total solar eclipse. The state of Oregon lay directly in the path of the eclipse, while the outer edge of the eclipse's path touched Washington. The chronicles of St. Joseph Academy in Yakima described the eclipse: "An occurrence which will render the [anniversary] still more memorable was the eclipse of the sun which took place in the afternoon and appeared almost total at Yakima. Shortly before three o'clock, with the aid of smoked glasses the dark form of the moon could be seen creeping in front of the sun. In about an hour's time the sun had thinned to a slender crescent, shedding over the earth a wonderful silvery glow. It was an awe-inspiring sight – one not soon to be forgotten."

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A Magnificent Tree: the 100th Anniversary of Providence in 1943

Peter Schmid

By the time of the centenary in 1943, the religious community had grown to 3,474 professed Sisters of Providence staffing 120 institutions (or ministries). The success of the sisters' works across the North American continent bore witness to their founders' unrelenting desire to serve the poor. Though the last of the original seven sisters had died by 1894, Bishop Bourget and the foundresses would have been very pleased with the progress the community had made. Fr. Allaire, chaplain at the Mother House, remarked that the institute, "So tiny in its origins...has become a magnificent tree."



Day for the Clergy and the Laity at the Mother House in Montreal, September 23, 1943 – also Mother Gamelin's feast day

Among the publications created for the 100th anniversary are the richly-illustrated history *With Charity For Ensign*, which includes illustrations of early community history, as well as contemporaneous photographs of the sisters' ministries in 1943. The statistics

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Diamond Jubilee

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The *triduum* was celebrated in Montreal and in all the ministries of Providence. The general program at the Mother House in Montreal:

Thursday, June 6th

The Community held a memorial day for deceased sisters and the souls of those connected to SP ministries since 1843.

Friday, June 7th

The sisters reflected, prayed and did good works in reparation for the sins of the world. This was a time of contemplation on the ways the religious community could better serve its mission.

Saturday, June 8th

On the final day of the *triduum*, the sisters gave thanks for the many blessings granted to the religious community since its foundation. The celebratory Mass was kept simple, with only two guests from outside the community: the doctor who had cared for the sisters for 39 years and his wife.



Pressed flowers and calligraphy honor the 75th anniversary: *Fleurs qui ont répandu leur parfum près de l'Ostensoir au 75ème Anniversaire de l'Institut* ("Flowers that have spread their fragrance toward the monsternance on the 75th anniversary of the institute")

The *triduum* was also celebrated at the ministries of Sacred Heart and St. Ignatius Provinces. In keeping with the instructions of the superior general to all the ministries, the sisters celebrated the anniversary within their own ranks and did not issue invitations to the clergy or the general public. The superior general also requested that each institution contribute \$5 toward a combined offering to be presented to the pope as alms for the needs of poor children.

While there was consistency in celebration of the *triduum* across the religious community, there were unique observances at some ministries: At Providence Academy, Vancouver, Wash., novices presented a dramatic tableau representing the blessing of the seven original sisters by Bishop Bourget; at St. Joseph Academy, Yakima, "the ladies of the parish gave the Sisters a pantry shower, in honor of the Diamond Jubilee. Many ladies called during the afternoon to

offer their congratulations. Ice cream was served in the boarders' dining room."

Gifts and Commemorations

- Pope Benedict XV sent a signed letter containing his apostolic blessing of the religious community.
- Sister Mary David unveiled her oil painting of Bishop Bourget in honor of the anniversary.
- The religious community published *Biographical Sketches of Mother Gamelin and of Her Six Foundress Companions*.

After the June celebrations, the sisters continued on as usual. They would go on to face additional challenges in their schools and hospitals when in the fall and winter of 1918, the viral pandemic known as the Spanish Flu reached Providence ministries. In Montreal, in December 1918, a temporary orphanage opened to care for children whose parents had died in the outbreak. In the western provinces, the flu afflicted many people, including sisters, some of whom died from the virus. The epidemic recurred in some locations during the next few years.

World War I finally ended on November 11th, 1918 when the armistice between Germany and the Allies was signed. Relief was felt by all, including the Sisters of Providence. Who could know, as they went about their work, that the 100th anniversary of their community would also be celebrated in the midst of a world war?

Magnificent Tree

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within the book's pages bear witness to the success of the sisters' ministries in that year alone: nearly 165,932 patients admitted to hospital; 1,070 nurses graduated; 68,803 meals given to the poor outside of the institutions; 1,196 resident pupils attending school. And the lists go on.

Of course, the Sisters did not celebrate in a vacuum; World War II loomed over any festivities and by 1943, both Canada and the United States rationed foodstuffs such as sugar, coffee, and butter, and products such as gasoline, tires, and just about anything made of metal. The sisters postponed travel: the general superior had planned her official visitation of former Sacred Heart Province in 1942, but wrote in the *Circular* that "difficulties of all kinds caused by the war render impossible the realization of this plan."

However, the Sisters of Providence have always found ways to make do and adjust to difficult circumstances, and one hundred years called for celebration. Mother Praxedes of Providence, superior general, declared that the centenary would be celebrated as "a simple family festival" in light of the war. References to the community as a family appear throughout the centenary celebration descriptions in the chronicles of the western provinces: at St. Vincent Academy in Walla Walla, Wash., March 25 was a "family

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Magnificent Tree

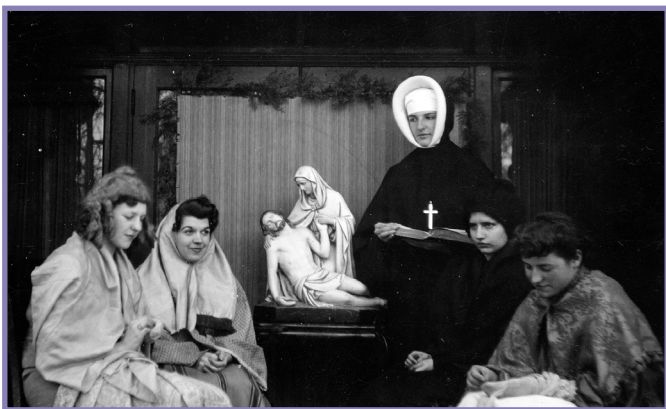
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celebration;” at St. Patrick Hospital, Missoula, Mont., “A pleasant family intimacy ran through the course of the day;” at St. Elizabeth Hospital in Yakima, Wash., “This feast of today was purely a family feast, spent quietly in the sanctuary of our own homes;” and Mount St. Vincent in Seattle, Wash. celebrated a “three day family festivity” where “the family hymn ‘O Douce Providence’ [was] rendered in its original French.”

A “continuous novena” was prayed across the whole Providence community throughout the year, with each house beginning its nine-day devotion on the day proscribed for its annual Thursday Holy Hour.

In Montreal, a *triduum* (three-day) celebration began September 21st with a Day for Religious Communities of Women, followed by a Day of Remembrance Mass on the 22nd, and finally a Day for the Clergy and the Laity on the 23rd, Mother Gamelin’s feast day. Provincial and local superiors of the four eastern provinces were invited to attend celebrations at the Mother House, along with the provincial superiors plus a companion from the three western provinces. There is no evidence that Mother Mary Mildred, superior of Sacred Heart Province attended. However, Mother Pascal, superior of St. Ignatius Province, left Spokane for Montreal on Sept. 13, accompanied by her blood sister, Sister Mary Crescence.

In honor of their centennial, Pope Pius XII bestowed upon the Sisters of Providence the Benemerenti Medal, an honor awarded for service to the Catholic Church. On November 10, 1943, Msgr. Ildebrando Antoniutti, Apostolic Delegate to Canada, presented the medal at the Mother House, saying, “This medal, bestowed on the Superior General and, through her, on the entire Institute of Provi-



A tableaux enacted by students at St. Joseph Academy in Yakima, Washington portrayed Emilie Gamelin at various stages in her life. Image #54.D2.5

dence, signifies that the Pope is pleased with you, that the Church appreciates your services, that society admires your works and your devotedness, that the poor and the sick love you and are grateful to you for what you do for them.”

Here in the West, in addition to praying the novena, and celebrating with special Masses, students at the schools and academies presented talks on the history of the Institute, or even enacted theatrical pieces. At Providence Academy, Vancouver, Wash., freshman focused on studying the life and works of Mother Gamelin, sophomores turned their attention to the devotion to Our Mother

Artifact Spotlight

Jessica Long

Proclaimed by the superior general as one of the “Jewels in the Centenary Diadem [crown],” Saint Joseph Hospital in Burbank, Calif. was one of the three new foundations dedicated in the centennial year of 1943. It is fitting then that the blessing of the hospital’s cornerstone would take place on March 25, the foundation date of the religious community. Described in the hospital Chronicles as “resplendent with sunshine and thanksgiving,” the day began with the sisters attending a High Mass at the parish church in the morning, and the cornerstone blessing at 4 o’clock in the afternoon. The ceremony was attended by a few hundred friends, priests, and sisters and also included a blessing and raising of the United States flag; a speech by the Honorable Walter R. Hinton, the mayor of Burbank; and reading of telegrams from Mother Praxedes, superior general, and Mother Mary Mildred, provincial superior. To commemorate this special occasion, the metal blade of the trowel from the ceremony was engraved: “This trowel used in laying the cornerstone of Saint Joseph Hospital Burbank, California on centenary of the institute, March 25, 1943. Officiating His Excellency Most Reverend John J. Cantwell D.D. Archbishop of Los Angeles, California.”



of Sorrows, while juniors and seniors explored the varied ministries of Providence. At St. Joseph Academy in Yakima, senior and sodality president Elizabeth Berghoff won first place in a contest for her essay on Mother Gamelin. Elizabeth would later enter the community as Sr. Rebecca Berghoff and spend the next 70 years teaching. Sr. Rebecca died earlier this year. At both St. Joseph Academy and St. Michael School in Olympia, Wash., students presented tableaux on the life of Mother Gamelin.

Sisters at other institutions enacted historic events as well. At St. Patrick Hospital in Missoula, “One of the sisters took upon herself the role of impersonating the first old guest of Mother Gamelin” to perhaps unintended humorous effect. At Mount St. Vincent, Seattle, novices and postulants presented an historical program, “A Chaplet of Years,” and also dressed in the historic habit of the first sisters: “The novice-Mothers served the tables, and up and down the novitiate row could be seen strange postulants dressed with the white-scarfed neck and headdress and strange novices in grey habits and white fluted bandeaux.”

In spite of the war, rationing, and the many urgent needs of the ministries, the community paused, very much as a family, to survey its history and remember the roots of the tree.



Mother Joseph Seen in a New Light

Loretta Greene

Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart is one of the “saints” of the Pacific Northwest who is honored in a new stained glass window at St. Edward Church, Shelton, Wash. The window was dedicated on August 18, 2018. The parish commissioned four windows, each about 4 x 6', to honor: Princess Angelina, a convert to Christianity, and daughter of Sealth, chief of the Suquamish and Duwamish, Seattle; A.M.A. Blanchet, first bishop of the Diocese of Nesqually, later Seattle; Father Mark Welchman, OSB, 30-year pastor of St. Edward's; and Mother Joseph. Sister Judith Desmarais, provincial superior, and three other Sisters of Providence were present for the celebration.

The work depicts Mother Joseph holding architectural drawings, with Providence Academy in the background. Beneath her feet are a drafting compass and building tools.



*Depictions of Fr. Mark Welchman, OSB,
and Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart*

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