

PROVIDENCE ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

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

A lasting legacy: Sr. Rita Bergamini celebrates 100 years

Archives staff

Sister Rita Bergamini, SP celebrated her 100th birthday on July 16. In honor of this milestone, Providence Archives staff wrote an article celebrating her accomplishments, which was published in the July/August "Archival Outlook," newsletter of the Society of American Archivists. We present here an edited version of the article.

More than twenty years since her retirement from the archives, Sister Rita Bergamini's legacy lives on—both in the archives and in the broader archival profession. An advocate for religious community records, Sr. Rita spent her career making Providence history accessible and making lasting contributions to her community. She cofounded Seattle Area Archivists in 1985, and was a member of the committee that formed the Archivists of Congregations of Women Religious in 1990.



Sr. Rita working in the archives in her signature smock, 1980. Image #SHP.O4.004.

Step by step the artifact collection keeps on growing!

Jessica Long



Loretta Greene retrieving historic ladder from Swedish Cherry Hill campus, former Providence Seattle Medical Center

While on a safety walk around Swedish Medical Center's Cherry Hill Campus (formerly Providence Seattle Medical Center), Travis Adams, security supervisor, found an old wooden ladder in the elevator penthouse. The ladder's worn wood and square hardware suggested it was from the mid-20th century and since it was obviously not OSHA compliant, was initially going to be thrown out. However, after noticing the word "CHAPEL" painted in black along the bottom of the proper right leg and a small sticker designating the ladder as "Property of Providence Hospital," Travis contacted Providence Archives instead. The ladder is believed to have been used in the chapel of the original 1910 hospital. The center section of the 1910 building that included the chapel, which was located on the fifth floor, was damaged during the 2001 Nisqually earthquake and demolished in 2002.

Lasting legacy

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Born in 1921 in Martinez, California, the youngest of nine children of Italian immigrants, Sr. Rita entered the Sisters of Providence novitiate in Seattle in 1943. She spent most of her religious life in nursing administration and education, including earning a doctorate from the University of California, Berkeley. After serving as provincial secretary of Sacred Heart Province, she took to heart the Vatican II directives for religious communities to re-found their charism, which led many orders to establish archives.

In 1972, Sr. Rita enthusiastically launched her second career as an archivist, seeing her role as an organizer and caretaker of history. Experience with religious community records in her previous role as provincial secretary prepared her well for this step. She began by establishing a formal archives for Sacred Heart Province, which encompassed western Washington, Oregon, California, and Alaska. Soon after, she joined SAA and attended her first annual meeting in Columbus, Ohio, where she found kindred spirits in the Archivists of Religious Collections Section (known then as the Church Archives Committee). She faithfully traveled to the conference every year until

after her retirement in 1999.

Sr. Rita acquired training through the Modern Archives Institute at the National Archives and Records Administration, and the Archival Management Institute at the University of Washington. She continued learning through participation in professional conferences and workshops—in 1989, at the age of 68, she became a member of the first class of the Academy of Certified Archivists. Active in several archival, historical, and records management organizations, she often visited other repositories to glean best practices.

For more than twenty years, Sr. Rita developed the Sacred Heart Province archival collections, creating a repository that documents the religious community and the growth of its ministries in health care, education, and social services since 1856. The historical records and artifacts that she accessioned from dozens of Providence-



Society of American Archivists executive director Donn C. Neal tours the archives with Sr. Rita (center) and then-assistant archivist Loretta Greene, 1987. Image #SHP.O5.011.



Sr. Rita (center) talks with sculptor Felix de Weldon and Sr. Peter Claver Thomas during the celebration of the induction of Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart into Statuary Hall in Washington, DC, 1980. Image #HC.F15.013.

sponsored institutions form the nucleus of the current archives.

Sr. Rita understood the importance of the documents and artifacts in her care. “I’m just the resource person, not an historian,” she said. “An archivist provides for historians who come later.” She was ever eager to share her knowledge of the Sisters of Providence and their ministries in the Northwest and of their foundress Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart, as well as to help researchers of all ages and backgrounds. Sr. Rita considers one of her most important projects to have been providing documentation about Mother Joseph in support of her nomination as Washington State’s second representative in Statuary

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Hall at the US Capitol in Washington, DC. The statue of Mother Joseph was dedicated in 1980.

Sr. Rita also brought Providence Archives into the computer age in 1986, when she championed development of a biographical database for ease of access to information on sisters who served in the Northwest. That effort became the basis for the current database, now containing a wealth of biographical, religious formation, and ministry information for more than 1,800 Sisters of Providence in the west.

In addition, Sr. Rita cultivated an active relationship with administrative and public relations departments at the corporate and institutional levels in what is known today as Providence Health and Services, ensuring the visibility of the archives and increasing appreciation for the value of these records across the organization. She worked with corporate records managers to establish policies

When Sister Rita Bergamini turned 100 years old on July 16, she joined a prestigious group of centenarian Sisters of Providence. In Mother Joseph Province, Sister Cecilia Paganessi and Sister Irene Charron celebrated their 101st birthdays on July 9 and October 4th, respectively. In fact, the number of living and deceased centenarians in the whole religious community is a stunning 122 sisters! Eleven sisters, ranging from 100 to 105 years, are living while 111 sisters, ranging from 100 to 110 years, are deceased. The oldest sister, Laura Drouin, who died in 2015, celebrated 110 years and 27 days. Congratulations to all centenarian Sisters of Providence!

SPs celebrating 100 and over in 2021	Number
105 years old	2
102 years old	2
101 years old	2
100 years old	5
TOTAL	11

regarding records management programs in the institutions and the transfer of inactive records to the archives. In offering archives tours and other outreach initiatives, Sr. Rita shared religious community and corporate history long before mission effectiveness became common in the health system.

Those who know Sr. Rita remember a dedicated archivist who recognized the value of a religious community archives within the larger context of women's

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Artifact collection

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Another exciting addition to the artifact collection this year is a 1950's Isolette Infant Incubator by Air-Shields, Inc. donated by Sarah Marrinan, staff pharmacist at Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center, Spokane, Wash. on behalf of her father, Dr. Michael Marrinan. The incubator is from Providence St. Joseph Medical Center in Polson, Mont., which was established in 1916 by three Religious Hospitallers of Ontario, Canada. The hospital was later transferred to the Presentation Health System in 1984 and purchased by Providence Health System in 1990.

The incubator sits on a large silver metal-wheeled cabinet and has a clear acrylic hinged hood with four arm ports for accessing an infant inside. Stored in the cabinet are several additional items, including filters, arm sleeves, an infant scale, an infant resuscitation mask, an oxygen hose, and baby boy and girl name cards. As the first medical artifacts directly related to neonatal intensive care units, the incubator and other objects are wonderful additions to our small pediatric collection!

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history and a vibrant and expanding corporate history. Providence Archives has become an important source for Catholic Northwest history, and Sr. Rita has been a valuable champion for archives as a consultant for archivists in other provinces as well as for sisters from other Northwest religious communities. She even encouraged the keeping of historical records within her family.

In her centennial year, Sr. Rita remains actively engaged in the religious community, the archives, and anything to do with Catholic Northwest history. She has watched with pride as Providence Archives has grown from a staff of one to its current number of five; expanded its storage and office spaces and reference room; increased outreach through a website, a triannual newsletter, archives tours, and rotating exhibits; and established an online database for photographs, artifacts, and scanned documents. Her creativity, dedication, and tireless advocacy for archives have created a long-lasting legacy.

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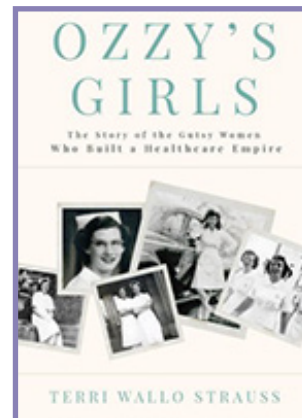
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Book corner

A new book by Terri Wallo Strauss uses Providence Archives images and sources to tell the story of women who attended the school of nursing at St. Vincent Hospital in Portland under the tutelage of Harriett Osborn, first nurse to earn a bachelor's degree in Oregon. The hospital, now known as Providence St. Vincent Medical Center, had one of 16 nursing schools founded by the Sisters of Providence, and ran from 1892 until 1975. Strauss is the daughter of Dee Rennie Wallo, long-time nurse at St. Vincent's and a graduate of the class of 1946. For a copy of the book, visit Ozzysgirls.com.



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