

# Past *Forward*

## PROVIDENCE ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

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

### At long last...a Legacy Room

Jessica Long

The dream of a museum in which to showcase objects from Providence Archives is decades old. The absence of one has been mentioned repeatedly by those who visit the Archives, and although there have been plenty of ideas tossed around over the years, nothing formal has ever materialized.

The Mother Joseph Foundation, which was established in 1978 to raise funds for Mother Joseph's statue in National Statuary Hall in Washington D.C., had a goal to create a museum. It was to be dedicated to Mother Joseph's life, but unfortunately that objective was never realized. The Sacred Heart Province (SHP) Archives included establishing a museum as part of a departmental strategic plan in the early 1990's and yet those plans fell apart too. There used to be a small unofficial museum tucked away, along with boxes of records and St. Ignatius Province Archives staff offices, in the lower level of Mount St. Joseph, Spokane. It consisted of a wall of tall cabinets with glass doors and wooden shelves, plus an open area in the center for larger objects. While not intentionally curated, it did allow for the display of a variety of sister- and ministry-related artifacts. Over time however, the space was overwhelmed by collection storage needs and became too crowded to provide tours.

In the absence of a formal museum, Archives has found other ways to share Providence history through small exhibits. We have three cases (located in the main



The former St. Ignatius Province museum at Mount St. Joseph in Spokane

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### Meet our Visual Resources Archivist

We were pleased to welcome Grant Mandarin to Providence Archives back in January. We asked him a few questions in order to introduce him to our readership.



*Tell us about your professional background*

Before I became an archivist I spent many years as an art historian, teaching in several academic institutions, and specialized in wide-ranging, global survey courses of art from prehistory to the modern era. I completed my doctoral studies at the University of Michigan, where I focused on European prints, but my interests extend to painting and the history of photography as well. In addition to teaching, I have experience working in museums and curating art exhibits.

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### Take HEART!

Jessica Long

Last year, I was privileged to be one of 25 participants from across the country to be chosen to participate in Heritage Emergency and Response Training (HEART). This was a program run by the Heritage Emergency Task Force, which is sponsored by the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative and FEMA's Office of Environmental Planning and Historic Preservation. It was created in 2017 for cultural heritage professionals, emergency managers, and first responders to learn how to work together and save cultural heritage during an emergency or disaster.

The program took place in Washington D.C. December 4-8 with enough funding to pay for flights, hotel, and lunches for all participants. Lectures and small exercises were primarily held at the S. Dillon Ripley Center along the Washington Mall, but there was also an excursion to the Anacostia Community Museum for a risk assessment

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## Legacy Room

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Archives in West Seattle, the Providence St. Joseph Health offices in Renton, and Provincial Administration offices in Spokane) in which we curate themed displays that rotate throughout the year. The Archives has also helped create exhibits and displays at several Providence institutions, as well as loan objects externally to local history museums. Our largest exhibit project to date comprised five window displays placed in the SHP Provincial Administration and health system office at 520 Pike Street, Seattle in the 1990's. Former archivists Sister Rita Bergamini and Loretta Greene collaborated with Artech Fine Art Services, an art handling and collection management company in Seattle, to design the exhibits. Each window focused on a different piece of Providence history: Emilie Gamelin and the origins of the Sisters of Providence; the Journey to the West and religious life; healthcare and schools of nursing; education ministry; and Mother Joseph.



**Sacred Heart locket**

Out of the dozens of objects chosen for the System Office project, one now stands out as a surprising piece of Archives history. It's a brass Sacred Heart locket from Providence St. Vincent Medical Center in Portland, Oregon. The locket was originally placed around the neck of a Sacred Heart statue in the chapel during the hospital's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in June 1925. At that time, the names of sisters, doctors, nurses, and others present at the Golden Jubilee were tucked inside the locket along with a petition to Mother Mary. The exhibit used the locket to help represent the sisters' devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, but the designers were so taken with the project and the history of the sisters that they decided to add a prayer of their own: "Please intercede on the behalf of Sacred Heart Province Archives for the establishment of a provincial museum. Thank you."

Providence Archives is happy to announce that years later, that dream has now become a reality!

The Legacy Room officially opened as part of the remodeled Mother Joseph Province Provincial Administration offices at a blessing ceremony on July 31, 2023. This was a culmination of over two years of planning and preparations by Archives staff. It all began with inspirational brainstorming sessions recalling past exhibits and reflecting on engaging and innovative museums we've visited. Follow-up discussions narrowed down our ideas about potential themes, content, audience, and expectations, as well as any needs, concerns, and potential pitfalls. The design process also required collaborating with the architectural and construction teams regarding floorplans and placement of electrical outlets, lighting and environmental controls, and security measures that all align with professional exhibit standards. The whole process included multiple starts, stops, and reworkings as the larger office renovation project evolved around the footprint of the museum.



**The Legacy Room at the offices of Mother Joseph Province in Renton**

The finished space is a modest 126 square foot rectangular room located across from the reception area in the renovated offices. Glass doors framing the front and a glass wall on the opposite end gives the little museum an open feel. The brass handles installed on the doors are from the entrance of Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center in Spokane and provide a nice historic touch. Around the walls of the Legacy Room is a rail system that allows for artwork, photographs, or signage to be hung using wires and hooks as a flexible alternative to nails. The two exhibit cases were acquired in a perfect moment of providential timing when the Seattle Art Museum offered used cases for free while we were in the early planning stages for the museum.

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*How did you get interested in Archives?*

I spent a lot of time in archives while working on my dissertation, both here in the US and abroad, and have always been fascinated by how collections of historical documents, whether text-based or visual, are arranged and preserved. The way archives are set up and maintained impacts how researchers convey our collective histories, what stories they tell, and how they tell them. We do not often think about the “stuff” behind the historical record, and as I dug deeper into the archives I visited, I realized just how powerful they could be. So, when my art history career was waylaid by the COVID pandemic, I decided to shift to archives.

*What is your favorite aspect of archival work?*

It is strange, given my background in the humanities, but two of my favorite aspects of archival work are analyzing how collections are structured, and working with data to ensure consistency across collections. Sometimes a simple decision like labeling different materials can turn into a major conundrum requiring extensive research and consideration. Taking a broad perspective of collections and working out such details is something I find really satisfying. On the other hand, I enjoy the more minute aspects of archival work as well, such as identifying the figures in a single photograph to provide the best description possible.

*Tell us about your job as Visual Resources Archivist*

As the archivist for Visual Resources, I am charged with overseeing all aspects of our photographic and audio-visual collections, as well as the digital images hosted on our website. In addition to digitizing new photographs that come into the Archives, I make sure that our existing materials are accessible to current users and preserved for future researchers. Whether it is rehousing images in new archival-grade folders, arranging a set of photographs into a logical order so as to aid their retrieval, or fulfilling a request for a photograph of the original Providence Hospital in Seattle in 1910, you'll find me engaged with our physical collections on any given day in the archives.

*In your time at Providence so far, what projects have you worked on?*

So far, most of my work has gone toward getting a better sense of the collections, and I am currently engaged in a major survey of our visual resources to aid our migration to a new content management system. This includes a lot of counting individual folders and reviewing past finding aids which will help us to get a clearer sense of what we have and how we can best represent these materials in a

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## Take HEART

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Jessica, at left, acting as Team Lead under the Incident Command System structure, during the collections evaluation role-playing exercise

walk-through, and a tour of the recovery room at the Library of Congress. Topics covered during the intense week of learning included risk and damage assessments, emergency documentation, packing and storage basics, evacuation principles, salvage and emergency kits, media and crisis communication training, and funding opportunities.

One of my favorite parts of the program was the collections evacuation roll-playing exercise. This took place inside the Smithsonian's Industry & Arts building where participants were told that collections from the fictitious “State Museum of Smithsonian” were under threat due to an equally fictitious “impending wildfire.” With a limited amount of time, supplies, and information, HEART participants had to first organize ourselves using the Incident Command System (ICS), which is a standardized approach for coordinating and controlling a response to an emergency or planned event. ICS is designed to be applicable to all kinds of situations and to facilitate multiple agencies working together. Once we had our ICS leadership structure established, we had to apply what we had learned in HEART to carefully pack up the collections and move them to a designated location safe from the “wildfire.” My



Jessica, right, helping to roll a wet textile sample onto a tube during the water salvage exercise

job during this exercise was the Team Lead for storage of the “evacuated” objects. I had to direct other Storage Team members, create an organized storage system from scratch, direct the flow of incoming packed objects, and record locations of each item for future retrieval. It was

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## Visual Resources Archivist

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unified database. In February I completed a project aimed at updating our digitization process and have begun to generate new images of historically significant works for our digital collections, most notably the hand-drawn maps of institutions owned by the Sisters of Providence that Sr. Anatolie of Montreal made in the 1910s-1920s.♥

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## Take HEART

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quite a whirlwind afternoon!

My other highlight of the week was the water salvage exercise, during which examples of typical museum collection items were thrown into kiddie pools! We learned how to correctly handle and remove photographs, artwork, books, and various small objects, like figurines and baskets, from the water and then how to start the drying process without further damaging anything. Large textiles were particularly challenging!

At the end of the week, I was sent home with several books and resources, along with my very own high-visibility safety vest, gloves, and hard hat! I also came away with a lot of ideas on how to improve the Archives' disaster plans and spread HEART knowledge to fellow cultural heritage professionals in the Spokane community.♥

## Legacy Room

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As befits the first exhibit in the Legacy Room, visitors can now explore Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart's life, accomplishments, and legacy as the foundress of the Sisters of Providence in the West. An accompanying exhibit booklet gives context to the room's contents, such as blueprint showing the layout of St. James Mission in Vancouver, Washington and a 1919 cadastral map of Providence Academy, Vancouver made by Sister Anatolie (Mary Elizabeth Desroches, 1861-1940). Other must-see treasures are several souvenirs from Mother Joseph's Golden (50th) Jubilee in 1895, her red Chinese camphor wood raveling trunk, her family photograph album (which contains one of the only three images we have of Mother Joseph), and artifacts associated with her many craftsman skills, including wax disks, a mold, gold thread, leather stamping tools, and a typesetter.

The potential of the Legacy Room is as boundless as Mother Joseph's (and the Archive's!) creativity. Future displays will utilize the diverse records preserved in the Archives collections, including larger objects that have never been exhibited before, to tell the countless stories of the Sisters of Providence and Providence Health & Services. Please stop by for a visit! ♥

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