

Past *Forward*

PROVIDENCE ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

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

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History of Providence Archives

Emily Hughes Dominick

Each October we celebrate Archives Month. This is a time to raise awareness of our profession and the daily work that we do. It is also a great time to reflect on the history of our repository.

Last year marked the 40th anniversary of the founding of what is now Providence Archives, Seattle, but our record-keeping legacy started long before. Prior to the establishment of the archives as a separate department within the Provincial Administration, the Provincial Secretary and Treasurer were responsible for caring for the records of the province. The original mandate to keep archives came with the publication of the first customary rules of the Sisters of Providence community in 1858. Chapter 52 of the rules lists 18

articles detailing procedures for protecting and making records available.

On August 1, 1971, Sister Mary David Price began her appointment as St. Ignatius Province archivist. The following May, Sister Rita Bergamini was appointed as the first archivist of Sacred Heart Province. In retrospect, this was the perfect time to establish a more systematic archives department for both provinces. This was a time of transition in the Sisters of Providence community. Between the two provinces, 27 Providence sponsored schools and hospitals closed and over 170 sisters left the religious community in the decade spanning 1965 and 1975. During this time of upheaval, many records needed homes.

At the start of their positions in the archives, neither Sister Mary David nor Sister Rita were specially trained for the work that keeping archives required. Sister Mary David's first career was in the field of education where she taught at all levels from grade school through college. Sister Rita worked as a nurse and nursing administrator. Later, she served as Provincial Secretary for Sacred Heart Province. Both sought archival education through professional



Sr. Mary David Price was the first archivist for St. Ignatius Province.

associations that they applied to the archives they were instrumental in building.

Provincial Council minutes, chronicles, annual reports, and other documents show that from the beginning, both archivists understood the importance of the documents and artifacts in their care. They advocated for tools and resources to best protect and collect these materials. For example, one major need in both province archives was storage space. In St. Ignatius Province, Sister Mary David presented this problem to the Provincial Administration in 1974; out of this grew a Task Force to recommend resources required for the archives. Similarly, the archives in Sacred Heart Province quickly outgrew the original space allocated in a few rooms in St. Joseph Residence. Over time, Sister Rita requested and acquired additional space.



Sr. Rita Bergamini shortly after her appointment as Archivist for Sacred Heart Province at the provincial offices, Providence Heights, Issaquah, May 1972. The archives at that time were housed in three small storage rooms. In November of that year, the material was transferred to three other small rooms at St. Joseph Residence, Seattle.

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Sr. Rita Bergamini, Archivist (left), with volunteer Sr. Mary Mildred in 1973 looking over the first letter by Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart to the sisters in Montreal after her voyage west, written December 21, 1856. Volunteers, both religious and lay, have played a crucial role in helping to translate documents, organize material, perform data entry, and create typescripts of handwritten material over the years. Sister volunteers often bring immediate knowledge of events to the identification and description of archives.



Sr. Rita Bergamini and Assistant Archivist Loretta Greene with the department's first computer, affectionately dubbed "Noel" in honor of its Christmastime arrival in 1986. The IBM, complete with two five-inch floppy disk drives, came with a monochrome screen and a dot matrix printer. Today, archives staff use PCs equipped with 8 GB of RAM, as well as dual monitors, inkjet printers, a state-of-the-art oversize flatbed scanner, and a variety of software programs to facilitate web publishing, database creation, and optical character recognition. Few people in the archives and library fields in 1986 could have imagined the tools available on our desktops today.

1972

Sacred Heart Province Archives created. Sister Rita Bergamini named first archivist.

1977

Sr. Rita assists in the implementation of a Records Management Program at the Providence Corporate office.

1980

Mother Joseph statue dedicated in National Statuary Hall following years of research.

1984

Loretta Zwolak Greene is hired as the first full-time assistant archivist in Sacred Heart Province archives.

1992

Loretta Greene assumes the position of archivist when Sr. Rita Bergamini steps down but continues as a part-time assistant.

1993

First issue of the archive's newsletter, Past Forward, is printed and distributed.

SACRED HEART PROVINCE ARCHIVES

ST. IGNATIUS PROVINCE ARCHIVES

1971

St. Ignatius Province Archives created. Sr. Mary David Price named first archivist.

1974

Formation of Archives Task Force to propose guidelines for acquisition and disposition of records.

1976

Sr. Anselma Mary takes the helm of the archives after her sister, Mary David, passes away. She serves in this capacity until 1989.

1989

Sr. Margaret Bischoff serves as acting archivist from January to October. In November Sr. Anne Marcelle Lemay takes over as acting archivist.

1993

Sr. Margaret LaPorte named archivist.

1995

Sr. Helen Mason named archivist in addition to her role as Provincial Secretary.

Picturing Providence

Peter F. Schmid

A column highlighting archival materials that provide visual documentation of the Sisters of Providence.



Archivist Loretta Greene all "wrapped up" in her work during a major remodel of the department. In dire need of more space and other improvements, the archives closed to researchers for about three months in 1995 to have high-density compact shelving installed, along with other improvements including waterproofing an outside wall, removing asbestos, and adding a fire suppression system. The work required a temporary relocation of the entire collection. All of the document cases and books were stacked onto 49 pallets, and wrapped in plastic to ensure stability before moving offsite to temporary storage. The new shelving increased storage space by 67%. Projects such as this can be extremely stressful for archives staff; a sense of humor was crucial to surviving the ordeal!

Society of American Archivists (SAA) executive director Donn C. Neal examining materials with Archivist Sr. Rita Bergamini and Assistant Archivist Loretta Greene, in 1987. Neal was on a tour of northwest region archives. Beginning with Sr. Rita's participation in the Modern Archives Administration course at the National Archives (Washington, D.C.) in 1972, through helping to establish Seattle Area Archivists in 1985 and the Archivists of Congregations of Women Religious roundtable of SAA in 1990, Providence Archives staff remain engaged in regional and national professional associations.

1995

Renovation of the archives space and installation of high density compact shelving.

1999

Sr. Rita retires from the archives.

2002

InMagic electronic photograph database is acquired; 451 records are added by the end of the year.

2004

Archives space in Seattle is renovated along with the rest of St. Joseph Residence.

2006

Archival resources are heavily used for the sesquicentennial celebration of the Sisters of Providence in the Northwest.

2008

New full-time position, Archives Assistant-Technial, is filled by Pamela Hedquist whose primary task is data input for the sister personnel biographical database.

MOTHER JOSEPH PROVINCE ARCHIVES (PROVIDENCE ARCHIVES, SEATTLE)

1998

Joint Archivists meeting of St. Ignatius Province and Sacred Heart Province, to discuss future plans for the archives, held in Spokane.

2000

St. Ignatius Province and Sacred Heart Province merge to create Mother Joseph Province. The two archival repositories are joined.

2001

Visual Resources Archivist position is created. Peter Schmid is hired to fill this role.

2003

Historical records and photograph collections moved from Spokane to Seattle.

2005

Artifacts from Seattle are moved to Spokane.

2007

Completion of Washington Film Preservation Project in which all 16mm film in the archives is cleaned, repaired and re-housed.

2010

Web-based image database, CONTENTdm, goes live after many years of preparation and hours of work to migrate information from previous in-house database.

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The legacy of both St. Ignatius Province Archives and Sacred Heart Archives is rich thanks to the many projects,

large and small, completed over the years. In Sacred Heart Province, former archivist Sister Rita Bergamini considers the assistance she provided for the



Associate Archivist Norman Dizon (left) and Visual Resources Archivist Peter Schmid with a truckload of former St. Ignatius Province archives ready to go to Seattle, March 2003. After the merger of the former Sacred Heart and St. Ignatius Provinces to form Mother Joseph Province in 2000, the paper and photograph records were transferred from the SIP archives at Mount St. Joseph to the archives in Seattle.

Washington State legislature process of selecting a second person to represent Washington State in Statuary Hall in Washington, D.C. as one of her most important projects. The archives provided the sources of information to those promoting Mother Joseph as this

representative. Sister Helen Mason, last archivist for St. Ignatius Province, is most proud of the many requests the St. Ignatius Province archives staff was able to fulfill to provide photos, memorabilia and information to institutions celebrating an anniversary or other event.

In this issue we celebrate the history of our archives by looking back at the important people and events that made the archives what they are today. You'll find a timeline of pivotal dates and a *Picturing Providence* that is scattered throughout the pages with a collection of



Current Providence Archives staff (from left): Loretta Greene, Archivist; Pam Hedquist, Assistant Archivist-Technical; Emily Hughes Dominick, Associate Archivist (since 2007); Peter Schmid, Visual Resources Archivist.

archives related photographs and their historical context. Unfortunately, we have very few photographs of the St. Ignatius Province Archives staff and space, so most of the photographs shown relate to Sacred Heart Province Archives. We hope you enjoy this retrospective journey through our department's history.

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