

CENTENNIAL GAZETTE

St. James Cathedral, Seattle

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MOTHER JOSEPH TO THE RESCUE

Bishop Blanchet had a Cathedral; but he had practically nothing else. To carry out the work of the gospel, he would need help. In 1852, he traveled all the way to Montreal, where he urged some Sisters of Providence to join him in the new Diocese of Nesqually. They agreed, and five sisters accompanied him on the homeward journey. When they arrived at Oregon City on December 1, 1852, however, they found the formerly thriving settlement deserted. Everyone had gone in search of California's gold. In spite of Bishop Blanchet's entreaties, the Sisters would not remain in this desolate place. On February 1, they departed for Chile.

"Their presence in Oregon had been like two month's of summer sunshine," writes historian Wilfred Schoenberg, SJ; "their departure like the emptiness of the lonely gray skies of winter." Bishop Blanchet was bitterly disappointed, but within a few years he was ready to undertake the same journey again. This time he took with him Father Luigi Rossi, a smooth-talking Italian. Once again five Sisters of Providence were assigned, and once again they set out with the Bishop on the westward journey.

When they arrived in Vancouver on December 8, 1856, Father Brouillet, the Vicar General, set the bell of St. James Cathedral ringing, and walked down to the docks to greet them. But history seemed likely to repeat itself. There was quite a scene when the party arrived at the bishop's house, and Bishop Blanchet was told that no lodgings had been prepared for the sisters. The bishop and the vicar general exchanged some pretty sharp words while the Sisters stood outside with their luggage. In the end, makeshift lodgings were provided for them in one half of the unfinished attic of the bishop's house (Father Rossi occupied the other half).

But this time, in spite of everything, the sisters did not leave. Their superior was Mother Joseph, a truly extraordinary woman. "Behind her plain features, her small dark eyes, like two raisins in a pudding, her large nose and wide mouth, she cherished her own dreams" (Schoenberg). This wild country would call forth all her considerable talents, among them carpentry, architecture, and interior design! By the end of February, 1857, the Sisters not only had their own residence, but their own chapel. In their annals, one of the sisters recorded the circumstance with evident awe: "With a few boards, Sister Joseph built a suitable altar; from a candle box she made a gem-like little tabernacle,



Foundresses of the Sisters of Providence in the West; Mother Joseph is front and center.

painted and decorated with gold ornament with the best material she could afford for a tabernacle veil. Our kind bishop said the first Mass and for our comfort reserved the Most Blessed Sacrament there." Schools, hospitals, orphanages, and missions would follow. Things were finally looking up for Nesqually!

— Corinna Laughlin

In our next issue:
**Father F. X. Prefontaine
and the Lost Cause.**

MY CATHEDRAL

1970—There's music in the air—its source—the organs at St. James Cathedral.

Paul Carmona, the Cathedral's Choir Director/Organist graciously gives me a "tour" of the Casavant organ behind the main altar and grants my request to practice occasionally. Thus begins 36 years of worship and music making at St. James. Over the years my roles have ranged from chorister to interim organist, to member of the Women of St. James Schola. But my greatest joy has been watching music and worship develop an iron-clad bond over the years.

The 1970 fledgling 15-voice choir is now a robust 70+ ensemble. There were no youth choirs. Today, there are 5. There was no Schola. Now every Sunday evening at 5:30, 28 women lead the worship with an elegance I am sure astounds even the angels. We are blessed with two world-class organists and an outstanding corps of adult and youth cantors. Today, worshipers receive orders of celebration so they too can sing to the Lord a new song.

2007—St. James Centennial year—There's still music in the air—its source—the organs, choirs, bell-ringers, and congregation of St. James Cathedral.

—Carolyn Graves

You're part of Cathedral history, too! Do you have a favorite Cathedral story to share? Submit it online at www.stjames-cathedral.org/centennial or e-mail mLaughlin@stjames-cathedral.org. You may find your story in a forthcoming issue of the Gazette!