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# History of Women Religious

## News and Notes

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### HWR Network News

Programs and registration materials were mailed in April, for the Conference on the History of Women Religious, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 17-20 June, 2001. Please notify the editor (KKennelly33@hotmail.com) or the program chair (emcgahan@nbnet.nb.ca) if you did not receive your copy.

The business meeting agenda will include consideration of several recommendations for the restructuring of the HWR network, and a review of possible sites for the next triennial conference. A paper describing restructuring recommendations will be distributed at the opening session Sunday, June 17, for action at Tuesday afternoon's business meeting. The closing plenary on Wednesday will provide an opportunity to review options for conference sites three years from now, and to volunteer for work on conference preparation.

An advance word on sites: holding the conference at college or university conference centers helps hold down costs; we need accommodations for up to 250 for meeting rooms, meals, and residence. Local arrangements can best be facilitated when an HWR member is located at the host institution. Please come with suggestions based on these criteria.

### Publications

Mary Jeremy Daigler, RSM, has concluded research on her congregation's work in higher education with publication of *Through the Windows: A History of the Work of Higher Education Among the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas* (University of Scranton Press, 2000; distribution by University of Toronto Press, 1-800-565-9523). Readers will find it an informative source regarding the involvement of this community in many

facets of post-secondary education.

Ann Harrington, BVM, and Prudence Moylan, BVM, are looking forward to the June Conference to share their editorial experience with *Mundelein Voices: The Women's College Experience, 1930-1991* (Loyola University Press, 2001), a lively, first-person collaborative account of this remarkable skyscraper college.

Irene Mahoney, OSU, *A Far Country: Ursuline Mission in Thailand 1924-1945* (Udom Suksa Printing & Publishing Bangkok Thailand, 1999), traces the story of her congregation's mission in Thailand (Siam) during the critical decades up to the end of World War II. The mission was begun in 1924 by four European Ursulines (French, Belgian, and Yugoslavian). Despite the usual obstacles and the difficulties of World War II, they established a number of eminently successful schools throughout the country. A companion volume, *Swatow: Ursuline Mission in China*, came out about five years ago. Available through the author at Ursuline Provincialate, 323 East 189th St., Bronx, NY 10458, for \$15 including postage.

*Reflection & Dialogue: What MISSION confronts religious life in the U.S.* (Center for the Study of Religious Life, 2001), is the first publication of the CSRL, established three years ago to conduct interdisciplinary reflection on issues of importance for the future of religious life. Individual copies available from Barbara Kraemer, OSF, Director, 5401 South Cornell Ave., Chicago, IL 60615, for \$5 including postage (in U.S., Canada and Mexico).

Lucy Kaylin, *For the Love of God: The Faith and Future of the American Nun*. (William Morrow Press, 2001), presents a perceptive overview of the complex topic of U.S. women religious, from

the viewpoint of a self-styled "total outsider."

Anne Patrick, SNJM, chair of the department of religious studies at Carleton College, has chapters in two recently published books: "'His Dogs More Than Us,' Virtue in Situations of Conflict between Women Religious and Their Ecclesiastical Employers," in *Practice What You Preach: Virtue, Ethics, and Power in the Lives of Pastoral Ministers and Their Congregations*, eds. James F. Keenan, SJ, and Joseph Kotva, Jr. (Sheed & Ward, 1999), 293-314; and "A Ministry of Justice: The 25-Year Pilgrimage of the National Assembly of Religious Women," in *What's Left? Liberal American Catholicism*, ed. Mary Jo Weaver (Indiana University Press, 1999), 176-189.

Nancy Lusignan Schultz's *Fire & Roses: The Burning of the Charlestown Convent, 1834* (The Free Press, 2000), has been awarded the Lois Rudnick Book Prize by the New England American Studies Association. (See Book Review.)

Dolores Liptak, RSM, is pleased to note publication of *Hartford's Catholic Legacy: Leadership* (privately printed by Abby Press for the Archdiocese of Hartford, 2000). Based on an inclusive definition of church as all God's people, this account of the building of the diocese of Hartford contains many citations regarding women religious.

Susanne Malchau's doctoral thesis, *Love is to Serve. Sister Benedicte Ramsing (1912-1988)—a Biography* (Copenhagen, 1998, in Danish), recounts the remarkable work of a Danish convert to Roman Catholicism who became a Sister of St. Joseph in 1937 and subsequently a leader in nursing education in Denmark.

Elizabeth West, *One Woman's Journey: Mary Potter Founder of the Little Company of Mary* (Spectrum Publications, Richmond, Victoria, 2000) bases this biography of Potter (1847-1913) on archival studies in England and Australia (doctoral dissertation, Charles Sturt University).

Constance A. H. Berman, *The Cistercian Evolution: The Invention of a Religious Order in Twelfth-Century Europe The Middle Ages* (University of Philadelphia Press, 2000), challenges a

good many past assumptions regarding the early growth of the order, documenting a major role for women in the success of Cistercians.

## Research In Progress

Catherine O'Carrigan, RSC, is near the completion of her history of the Sisters of Charity in Australia. Tentatively titled *Colonial Catalyst: Sisters of Charity, 1838-1858*, the work will treat of such topics as colonial education and health as well as of numerous institutions that played an important part in the early social history of the colony.

Independent scholar Tom Campbell is researching the cultural impact of nuns in North Western and New England New South Wales from 1890 to 1949. Ursuline, Dominican, Josephite, and Mercy congregations are included in his study.

Patricia Jean Manion, SL, has moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, to finish research and writing for her book on Mother Magdalen Hayden and The Santa Fe Trail. The Sisters of Loretto will celebrate the 150th anniversary of their arrival in Santa Fe on Sept. 26, 2002.

Patricia Wittberg, SC, is researching the impact, on sponsoring religious communities, of withdrawal from sponsored institutions. She has completed 36 focus groups with the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, two regional communities of the Sisters of Mercy, and some United Methodist Deaconesses; and is now doing a content analysis of these transcripts. Archival analysis of the groups' newsletters and other publications is the next step in this sociological study.

Correction: an incorrect email address was given for Rosemary Halter (research about Mother Theodore Guerin, SP) in our February newsletter. The correct address is <rosmarinus@nrcengineering.com>

## Book Review

*Fire and Roses: The Burning of the Charlestown Convent, 1834*, by Nancy Lusignan Schultz (The Free Press, 2000). Pp. ix+317.

Nancy Schultz's monograph is a riveting tale of

the shocking crime perpetrated against Ursuline nuns who conducted a monastery and academy just outside Boston at Bunker Hill, in the very heart of Yankee New England. Amassing a veritable cornucopia of facts about the lives and experiences of these victims of gross prejudice, she describes the series of intimidating actions by laborers that climaxed on the evening of August 11, 1834, when Ursuline property was desecrated and leveled by fire, the nuns and students scattered, and the impressive imprint of their lives forever erased from Massachusetts soil.

Schultz begins by presenting the story of Mary Ann Moffatt, the superior of the Canadian-based sisters, who headed the Mt. St. Benedict monastery. She ends with graphic details concerning the raucous aftermath that followed the exoneration of all but one of those accused of the crime. Many other fascinating materials strengthen her argument that New England's anti-Catholicism was particularly virulent. But others are less pertinent, albeit fascinating. Thus, the author reaches back centuries, reviewing the lives of St. Benedict and St. Ursula. Her aim is to provide substantiation regarding the enlightened philosophy that guided the nuns and the religious tone of the academy. Yet some of her efforts seem shallow. For example, Schultz accepts the workers' assertions that the nuns' lives were "exotic" and "foreign" without sufficiently weighing the import of the traditional value given to prayers of petition or acts of penance.

Schultz divides the many actors in this tale into basically two opposing camps: nuns intent upon their ministry to train women to be virtuous role models and mothers, and local workers who seemed threatened by the influence of this elite Charlestown academy. On the periphery are schoolgirls who did not always act with the decorum they were taught, their parents, and a cadre of townsmen who were ambivalent about Irish-Catholic growth and willing to use the workers as dupes in achieving their own ends. Added to this mix is Bishop Benedict J. Fenwick who established the academy and convent but who had also chosen to purchase nearby land to be used as a site for a local cemetery. Schultz suggests that his decision to further his holdings at a site hallowed by Yankee blood during the American Revolution

proved the last straw that occasioned the riot of 1834.

For all that, the reader is still shocked by the animosity that erupted in Charlestown. Using the excuse that a sister had "escaped," a band of angry men carried out a heinous set of deeds. Can one agree that it was the "foreign" aspects of Ursulines that precipitated these actions? Can the officious manner of the Mother superior have been reason enough to burn and destroy, and then to hang this woman in effigy on succeeding anniversaries of the deed? Can class and ethnic distinctions have aroused such emotion? Was the bishop more at fault than has previously been suggested?

When one compares the record of Catholic academies that were contemporaneous with the Ursuline academy, one is hard pressed to find anything to match the Charlestown situation. In 1828, for example, just as Mt. St. Benedict was beginning to attract notice, President John Quincy Adams was signing the Act of Incorporation for two congregations in the greater Washington area, the Visitation Order in Georgetown and the Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg. By that time, both had been conducting schools and academies for more than a decade. Yet there was never such a showdown. Instead, there was a growing accord with the sisters on the part of political and business elites. Both the Visitation and Charity sisters still enjoy honor in these places. Such thoughts lead to the impression that what happened at Charlestown was a unique affair, involving many converging elements of distrust and fear. That it escalated so badly must have had to do with the perceptions that fit the Boston circumstance to the letter. It appears obvious, to be sure, that neither Catholic nor Protestant leaders properly recognized the depth of prejudice that could disrupt the Yankee psyche. Subsequently, New England's Catholic leaders proved far more cautious in their interaction with Protestants.

Still, one is left to wonder: what was the final catalyst? Had it to do with resentment that the bishop invested women with such authority? Can we ignore the influence of Lyman Beecher who preached just before the fire that Catholic schools

were part of a Roman plot to take over the nation?

Schultz has provided the reader with rich details to help form our judgment on this matter. She invites us to retrace the same ground. Doing so should make us less complacent about the present state of Roman Catholicism in American society. For this and many other reasons, I strongly recommend reading *Fire and Roses*.

Dolores Liptak, RSM. Historian/Archivist, Connecticut Region, Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

## Announcements

Betty McGrath, SL, assistant archivist for the Sisters of Loretto Archives in Nerinx, Kentucky, died unexpectedly January 22, 2001. We extend our sympathies to the Loretto community.

Ursula Schwalen, CSJ, died March 5, 2001, after a prolonged illness. General superior of the diocesan congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Superior, Wisconsin at the time of its amalgamation with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, St. Paul Province, she left a special legacy to all her sisters in the form of the history she published in 1996: *Called and Re-Called to Serve: History of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Superior, Wisconsin 1907-1987*.

The Benedictine sisters in St. Joseph, Minnesota, inaugurated their new Art and Heritage Place earlier this year. Composed of renovated Artisan Studios, the newly constructed Haehn Museum, and the Whitby Gift Shop and Gallery, the complex is a fitting tribute to a Benedictine tradition of creating, nurturing, preserving, and sharing the visual arts, architecture, and music. For more information try the Sisters of the Order of St. Benedict web page <[www.sbm.osb.org](http://www.sbm.osb.org)> or write 104 Chapel Lane, St. Joseph, MN 56374.

The 28th annual conference of the Communal Studies Association will be held in New Harmony, Indiana, on Sept. 27-29, 2001. The conference theme is "International Communities: An Overview." The program features sessions on the methods, theories, evolution and direction of the study of intentional communities. For registration

information, contact Gina Walker, University of Southern Indiana Archives, 8600 University Blvd., Evansville, IN 47712. Tel. 812-464-1896. Email <[awalker@usi.edu](mailto:awalker@usi.edu)>

The Episcopal Women's History Project will again offer travel/research grants for 2002. Grants of \$500 each are available to aid projects that focus on the activities of women within the Episcopal church in the United States or its overseas activities. Projects dealing with women whose work was closely associated with church membership are also eligible. Application forms are available from Dr. Jane Harris, 4220 Raleigh Drive, Conway, AR 72022, or email <[harris@mercury.hendrix.edu](mailto:harris@mercury.hendrix.edu)> Deadline is 1 December 2001.

## Archives

HWR conference official records, including Conference papers, are deposited with the Avila College Women Religious Special Collection archive. Begun in the fall of 1997 as a repository for books and materials focused on the experience of religious sisters, the collection is intended to preserve out-of-print and current books on American sisters, making them available for researchers and others interested in the activities and experiences of nuns.

In the first two years the collection was augmented by major book and materials donations by George C. Stewart, Jr. and Hermenia Muldrey, RSM. The collection has subsequently grown in size and scope: besides a growing book collection that now numbers over 1300, the manuscript collection (research papers, pamphlets, and governance and formation literature pertaining to religious congregations of women) has grown to well over 1000 documents.

Collection directors, Martha Smith, CSJ, and Carol Coburn, will be at the forthcoming HWR Conference in Milwaukee, and will welcome inquiries at that time regarding the WRSC. Conference presenters are encouraged to deposit their papers with the archive by means of forwarding a copy of the paper with a completed usage permission form to the newsletter editor Karen M. Kennelly. Please contact Elizabeth McGahan at <[emcgahan@nbnet.nb.ca](mailto:emcgahan@nbnet.nb.ca)> if you did not receive the permission form.

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2401 Karen M. Kennelly, CSJ, Editor

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**Newsletter Deadline**

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