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# HISTORY OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS

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Volume 7, Number 1 February 1994

NEWS AND NOTES

## MEMBERSHIP NEWS

M. Jane Coogan, BVM, died December 23 in Dubuque, Iowa, at age 95. A long-time educator and avid historian, Sister Jane was the author of *THE PRICE OF OUR HERITAGE*, a two-volume history of the Sisters of Charity, BVM, and MARY FRANCES CLARKE, FOUNDESS. Although unable to attend the triennial HWR conferences, she took a keen interest in them and was an active participant in the gatherings at the University of Notre Dame which paved the way for HWR. The religious sisterhoods, the history profession, and particularly her many friends and sisters in her own congregation will miss her.

Proposal submission: as explained in the October *News and Notes*, we are addressing concerns regarding ways to enhance success in presenting papers at professional meetings. For now, we are concentrating on the Berkshire 1995 conference. If you have had prior experience with submitting proposals to the Berkshire program committee which were either accepted or rejected, please write me as newsletter editor. Responses will be summarized in the June issue and an effort made to identify helpful proposal tips.

## PUBLICATIONS & TALKS

M. Georgia Costin, CSC, has completed an account of the early history of the Sisters of the Holy Cross. Her book, *PRICELESS SPIRIT*, is due from the University of Notre Dame Press this spring. The account spans the years from 1841 to 1893 and offers a corrective, according to Costin, to prevalent views of Father Edward Sorin's role in the congregation's history.

Connie Fahey, FSM, has completed a doctoral dissertation titled *RELIGIOUS LIFE: COMING OR GOING*. An ethnographic study, the work describes transformational change affecting the communal, ministerial, and spiritual life of the Sisters of St. Mary of the Third Order of St. Francis of St. Louis, Missouri and the Sisters of St. Francis of Maryville, Missouri as a consequence of merger (reunification). Fahey can be reached at 1100 Bellevue Ave., St. Louis 63117 for further information.

The Ursulines of New Orleans have sponsored publication of Sister Jane Francis Heaney's 1949 dissertation, *A CENTURY OF PIONEERING, A HISTORY OF THE URSULINE NUNS IN NEW ORLEANS 1727-1827* (hardback, 431 pp.). This scholarly, pioneer study, freshly edited by Mary Ethel Siefken, provides a detailed portrait of the early New Orleans Ursuline community, its members and works, as well as insights into the city's religious, social, educational, economic, and political life. Both the library purchase rate of \$20 and individual of \$25 include shipping and handling. Request from Archives, 2635 State Street, New Orleans, LA 70118.

*AMERICAN WOMEN IN THE 1960s: CHANGING THE FUTURE* (Twayne, 1993), by Blanche Linden-Ward and Carol Hurd Green, includes a discussion of the role of women religious in social change movements in the 1960s.

Linda Grathwol's recently completed paper, "The North Dakota Anti-Garb Law: Constitutional Conflict and Religious Strife," appears in *THE GREAT PLAINS QUARTERLY*, 13 (Summer 1993) 187-202. Grathwol, a School Sister of Notre Dame, is a staff attorney for Southern Minnesota Legal Services and brings her legal expertise to this illuminating controversy which

involved the SSNDs as well as several other teaching congregations from the 1930s to the early 1960s.

Grace Donovan, SUSC, has an article, "*Women Collaborators in Catholic Education: Nineteenth Century America*," in *RECORDS OF THE AMERICAN CATHOLIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA*, 103:2 (1992; published summer 1993).

A panel entitled "Beyond Biography in the History of Women Religious" will be chaired by Donovan at the spring meeting of the American Catholic Historical Association. The panel at this April 8-9 meeting, to convene at the College of Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts, will feature papers by Patricia Byrne, CSJ, on "*A Tradition of Educating Women--The Society of the Sacred Heart and Higher Education in the United States*;" by Patricia Lynch, SBS, on an aspect of the ministry of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament; and by Loretta Petit, OP, on "*Beyond Biography to the Integrated History of Dominican Frontier Women*." It is noteworthy that all four panelists and chair participated in the HWR triennial conferences of 1989 and 1992.

Regina Siegfried, ASC, gave a paper, "*The Influence of German Culture on Immigrant Nuns, or: The Americanization of Clementine*," at the October, 1993 Communal Societies Association conference in New Harmony, Indiana. Siegfried reports that this was the first year the conference featured a session on Roman Catholic communities.

The 1994 American Catholic Historical Association meeting held in San Francisco in January featured two sessions on Roman Catholic Religious. The first, entitled "Female Religious and Girls' Education in Nineteenth-Century France," included papers by Rebecca Rogers, University of Iowa ("*Nuns or Lay Women? Competing Images of Women Teachers in Mid-Nineteenth-Century France*"); Sarah A. Curtis, Santa Clara University ("*La Bonne Soeur: The Teaching Nun in the Community, 1850-1904*"); and Frances Kelleher, Grand Valley State University ("*Roman Catholic Sisters and the Laicization of Public*

*Primary Schools in Champagne, 1880-1914*").

The second, entitled "Preachers on the Frontier: Dominican Women and Men in the United States, 1830-1870," included papers by Dominicans M. Patricia Dougherty, Dominican College of San Rafael ("*Adventure and Authority in Gold Rush California: Mary Goemaere and the Foundation of the Dominican Sisters of San Rafael*"); Loretta Petit, University of Dayton ("*A Fenwick Unremembered, His Indian Pastorate Unexplored*"); and Mary Nona McGreal, Director of Research, Project OPUS ("*The Progress of Project OPUS: Building a National Dominican Research Network*").

Dolores Liptak, RSM is featured in the video "*My Soul Proclaims: History of Catholic Women, USA*" (a US Catholic Conference production available through the Office of Catholic Communication Campaign, call 1-800-235-8722). A one hour documentary, the video describes the historical and contemporary contributions of Catholic women in church and society.

The recently published Carmelite *THE WOMAN'S PRAYER COMPANION*, goes beyond the inclusive language standards set by previous psalters to include feminist-oriented prayer themes and biographical vignettes, along with sets of suggested psalms to use with themes or personal memorials. To order contact Teresa Boersig, OCD, Carmelite Monastery, 2500 Cold Spring Road, Indianapolis, IN 46222-2393.

Member Theresette Hunting, CSJP, commends to our readers a recently published book, *NUNS IN NINETEENTH CENTURY IRELAND* by Caitriona Clear (Gill and MacMillan, Dublin, 1987 and The Catholic University of America Press, 1988).

A cluster of recent Canadian publications of interest are Eileen Gahagan, CSJ, *A CENTENARY HISTORY OF THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH OF PETERBOROUGH, ONTARIO*; Mark G. McGowan and Brian P. Clarke, eds., *CATHOLICS AT THE 'GATHERING PLACE': HISTORICAL ESSAYS ON THE ARCHDIOCESE OF TORONTO, 1841-1991* (Dundurn Press,

1993); and *WALKING THE LESS TRAVELLED ROAD: A HISTORY OF THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF TORONTO, 1841-1991* (Archdiocese of Toronto, 1993).

## BOOK REVIEW

*WOMEN OUT OF THEIR SPHERE*, by Anne McLay (Western Australia Vanguard Press, 1992) 483 pp.

Through an interdisciplinary approach using history, sociology, psychology, and theology, Western Australia Mercy sister Anne McLay gives her readers a meticulously detailed account of the settlement, growth, and amalgamation of Mercy Sisters in Western Australia. She touches on racism and classism within the Mercy congregation and concentrates more specifically on sexism in Australian society and church. She writes:

"The early West Australian Mercies accomplished much. They were. . . successful women. And, in many ways, they asserted their independent status. But seen from another viewpoint, they were also prisoners of their womanhood and of their roles as nuns."

McLay works out her thesis of the founding myth in the interplay and tension between the Mercy women exerting their independence as women and the role of the "the worthy helper" that society, the church, and even the Mercies themselves expected. She asks a series of questions that help to focus her approach:

Did they in fact stand in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed in colonial Western Australia? Were they more devoted to playing the role of the nun, to preserving their privileged status within the church, to protecting their sacred space than they were to performing the works of Mercy to which they had pledged themselves? Did the setup of their religious living, coupled with the role they were forced to assume, mean that, in fact, they really lived in two worlds?

McLay tells the story of the Mercies in Western Australia through accounts of the significant pioneers and their successors. Pioneering women Ursula Frayne, Catherine Gogarty, Anne Xavier Dillon, Ignatia de la Hoyde, Aloysius Kelly, and Baptist O'Donnell left Ireland in 1846 as part of the Baggot Street Mercies in Dublin to begin the extensive Mercy mission of schools in Western Australia. Their stories and involvement with the church and society are replaced by a succession of Mercies from 1846 to contemporary Mercies who have expanded ministries from schools to include new paradigms of Mercy works and membership.

Many of the narratives and conditions of the early foundations in Western Australia have striking parallels with pioneers sisters in the United States: no money, difficulties with bishops, poor living conditions, and the courage to continue in the face of almost insurmountable obstacles. McLay makes excellent use of both secular and religious primary sources to frame her story.

Chapter 7, Episcopal Politics and Mercy Survival Tactics, merits special mention in that it is a clear and insightful presentation of McLay's feminist perspective. She discusses it in terms of "foundation years: struggle for control over their own lives" to the "amalgamation saga" to the "retention of individuality" for both the Perth and West Perth groups. Even though McLay claims to write from a feminist perspective, both the preceding and following chapters are not as clear about that viewpoint as is chapter 7. She thereby weakens her own thesis.

The book is more than amply illustrated with photographs of people, places, buildings, and artifacts. The notes and index are evidence of careful research. For the geographically challenged, a map of Australia and a close-up of Western Australia would have helped immensely.

McLay ends her account with the caution common for many groups of women religious today: "There seems every possibility that the Sisters of Mercy in the West have reached the end of their era, it is also obvious that they will not die out with a whimper. There is confirmation of too

much energy still..."

Readers interested in the history of women religious written from a feminist perspective will find this book worth the effort of reading details of unfamiliar places. Its thesis, although inconsistently worked out, offers challenges for religious women of any community.

Regina Siegfried, ASC  
Aquinas Institute, St. Louis

### **RESEARCH IN PROGRESS**

Frances Kelleher at Grand Valley State University, 231 Au Sable, Allendale, MI 49401 is currently completing a book on primary school teachers in late nineteenth century France. She expects to begin a project on the congregations of women religious whom the French government displaced from public schools in the early Third Republic.

Barbara Misner, SCSC, now back at 1500 O'Day Street, Merrill, Wisconsin, 54452-3497 after archival research in Europe, is working on the history of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross, founded in Switzerland in 1852. She is interested in contacts with others who are historians of international communities, founded for any charitable purpose and with a Germanic background.

Mary Roger Madden, SP, is engaged in an oral history project covering the years 1926-1960, as remote preparation for volume IV of the history of the Sisters of Providence of Terre Haute, Indiana.

Peg Brennan, SSJ, is beginning research on the early days of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester. She can be contacted at 10 Almay Road, Rochester, NY 14616.

### **OPPORTUNITIES**

Regional women's history associations with forthcoming conferences: the Western Association of Women Historians will convene for its 25th annual meeting at the Huntington Library, San Marino, California May 20-22.

The proposal deadline of January 7 is now past, but this notice serves as an alert for attendance and submission for next year. Contact Kathie Sheldon, 925-14th Street, #24, Santa Monica, CA 90403. The Southern Association for Women Historians will hold its third conference June 2-5 at Rice University, Houston. Contact Joan Cashiiis, Dept. of History, Ohio State University, 106 Dulles, 230 W. 17th Ave., Columbus, OH 43210.

The National Association for Women in Catholic Higher Education will meet June 24-25 at Loyola University Chicago. Contact Melissa Kesler Gilbert, Dept. of Sociology, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA. 02167.

Competition for Fulbright scholar awards for faculty and professionals opens March 1, 1994, with a deadline of August 1, 1994. This program is open to professionals, independent scholars, and artists outside academe including individuals in the private sector and government, journalists, lawyers, and many others. Research and lecturing grants are available in nearly 140 countries, for from two months to a full academic year. Contact Steven A. Blodgett, Director of Recruitment and Liaison, Council for the International Exchange of Scholars, 3007 Tilden Street, N.W., Suite 5M, Washington, D.C. 20008-3009.

### **NEWSLETTER DEADLINE**

Please have copy for the June issue to the editor by May 1, 1994.

### **THE HWR NEWSLETTER**

Published by the Conference on History of Women Religious  
12001 Chalon Road  
Los Angeles, CA 90049-1599

ISSN: 1054-545X  
Annual Subscription: \$5.00

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