



PRESENTATION ROOTS

Celebrating 'Pres Style': 1854-2014

A Message from the Archivist:

Dear Reader, welcome to our special edition of Presentation Archives' occasional newsletter. For each of the four weeks in November, we will send out newsletters that feature highlights from the Presentation Sisters' 160-year history. Each newsletter will reflect the Sisters' remarkable history as women who responded to the needs of the times through service to the people of God. Thank you for reading.

*Chris Doan, Archivist
and Rachel Foote, former
archives intern*



Marking a 160th anniversary is a momentous occasion and perfect opportunity to reflect back upon celebratory moments shared between the Sisters and their extended PBVM family. Above, alumnae and benefactors join the Presentation Sisters at Presentation Convent in honor of the Sisters' Golden Jubilee in 1904. "Shamrock Girls" pose before their appearance in the play produced for the Sisters' 50th anniversary performed at the Tivoli Opera House. [Cont. on pg. 4]



PBVM, SF Timeline: the First 50 Years

The past 160 years have been filled with a myriad of incredible milestones punctuated by innumerable triumphs, tribulations, and experiences that have touched the lives of all PBVM Sisters, members of the extended PBVM family, and the city of San Francisco and its surrounding areas. Each newsletter will feature a timeline highlighting the milestones of these past 160 years. We begin with the Sisters first 50 years from the fevered final days of the Gold Rush in 1854 through the dawning of the 20th century.

1855 “ There was hardly enough space for the five Sisters to live, to say anything of conducting a school. As the children crowded into their classes they had to be taught in the lobby, on the stairs, in the kitchen, and even outdoors in the small backyard about twenty feet square . . . ” ~With Hearts of Oak, p.45



The “Shanty” on Green Street, the first home and school of the Presentation Sisters in San Francisco.

“I see the Foundation as a small candle lit on the 13th of November 1854 .. That little candle sputtered and struggled to keep alight through all the ups and downs of the early days of the Foundation, but praise God, the little flicker happily survived and expanded beyond all expectations!”

~ A Presentation Sister



“Mother Mary Xavier, like an unwearied shepherdess gathered the few remaining ones of the flock

together to shelter them from the blighting winds that swept down from the barren hills of discouragement. She it was that stuffed the crumpled old papers into the holes of the shattered shingles to keep out the pelting rain at night from their shivering heads.” ~ Account by Sister Mechtilde McCarthy, PBVM



PBVM, SF Timeline: *the First 50 Years*



“Every Monday morning Sister had a new inspirational saying on the blackboard...The saying that had the greatest impact on me was: ‘The mighty oak was once a little acorn.’ It seemed amazing all the truth that existed in that saying.” ~ Alumna, St. Joseph’s High School, Class of 1961

1878 Saint Joseph Convent and High School founded in Berkeley.

1869 Sacred Heart Presentation Convent and School at Taylor & Ellis Streets founded.

1882 Saint Joseph Convent and School is established in Sonoma.

1888 The Sisters of the Presentation, San Francisco congregation is founded through an amalgamation of the four previously separate Presentation foundations in California.



1890 Presentation Sisters from Fitchburg, Massachusetts and San Francisco arrived in Gilroy, California to administer Saint Mary School.



1904 Sisters celebrate the Golden Jubilee of their arrival in California.



1854 - 1954

Nov. 13, 1854 . . . Fashionable shops, and gambling houses, stood side by side on the noisy, crowded thoroughfare of the West's fabulous boom-town, San Francisco.

Five women, dressed in unfamiliar black costumes stood in the midst of the rough crowd. Just arrived after a trying journey from Ireland, these Presentation Sisters had come to bring Catholic education to the children of the notorious city by the Bay.

This unfamiliarity, however, did not faze the dauntless women. No, they stayed and prayed, and the answer to their prayers is the love of thousands of San Franciscans whom they have guided on the road to maturity.

Today, Presentation Sisters who walk along Market Street are not met by a rough crowd and unsmiling faces. Instead, they are greeted with the happy faces and joyous voices of pupils taught last year, or 20 years ago.

Yes, this is the Presentation legend in San Francisco—from obscurity to fame in a short hundred years.

Celebrating
in
1954
and
2004

LIGHT • SISTERS OF THE PRESENTATION FALL 2004

Interpreting 150 Years of History

By Sister Stephen Hill, PBVM

According to Sweden, "The unexamined life is not worth living." While Sweden was referring to individuals, this saying can certainly be applied to groups, organizations, and institutions as well.

Reflection on the past in the writing of history is always problematic as the historian can only see an event from a particular perspective, a particular set of facts, a particular set of research, and often a purpose in presenting that information.

An extremely well written article about our Presentation history that had some beautiful and interesting photos. I have feedback for friends and colleagues without the written and oral history resources available. I promise my interpretation from my perspective. We invite you to send us your own observations on members of Presentation history to us, let us know in our history. You will find a form on page 11 of this publication for you to send to your account.

Ministry of Education
The century with which Presentation Sisters may be most closely associated is education. Since the first schools founded by Marie Neagle, education has been central to the Presentation experience. Today, Sisters continue to teach at all levels of education, from kindergarten to graduate programs. Most Presentation Sisters have training in education and thus tend to be found in both settings. Consider us as that history to their assistance through a variety of programs, in literacy programs for girls, in new on-line history, in presentations and at the public house, and in many other formal and informal ways.

The Presentation Sisters, the ministry of education in education with a purpose. Academic excellence was always the curriculum's standard, but what might be considered extra-curricular today was equally important. Embedded within the academic were two important treasures—our faith and our justice.

Located historically in the region of the Roman Catholic religion by the English in Ireland and by the French Catholics within the United States' culture of the late 19th Century and early 20th Century, the Sisters were already committed to teaching the liturgical values, and practices of the faith. These Churches were, in part, the Church's mission of the conversion and teaching of those years. To be Catholic for really a hundred years means to have a long and rich history.

St. Patrick's School, Miami, San Jose

Presentation Fathers' Club



Friends of Presentation

It is fitting here to express sincere gratitude to all the good parents, to members of the alumni and alumnae and other organizations, and to the many other friends both before the earthquake and since, who have given loyal and generous cooperation and support to the Sisters and the schools. May the good God, Who cannot be outdone in generosity, bless and reward them all.

Miami Lunch Savings Building Fund Drive at Fairmont Lombard

Our Lady of Good Counsel Auxiliary

Savings Building Fund Steering Committee

Festival Cribbers

San Jose Spouses of Savings Building Fund

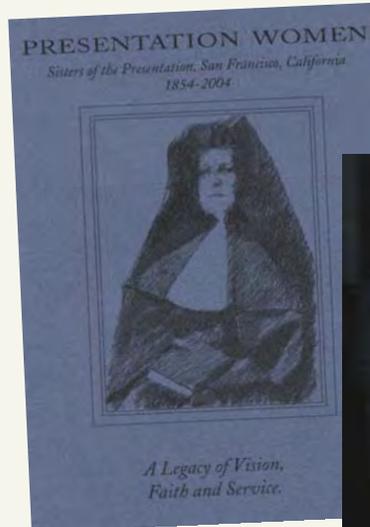
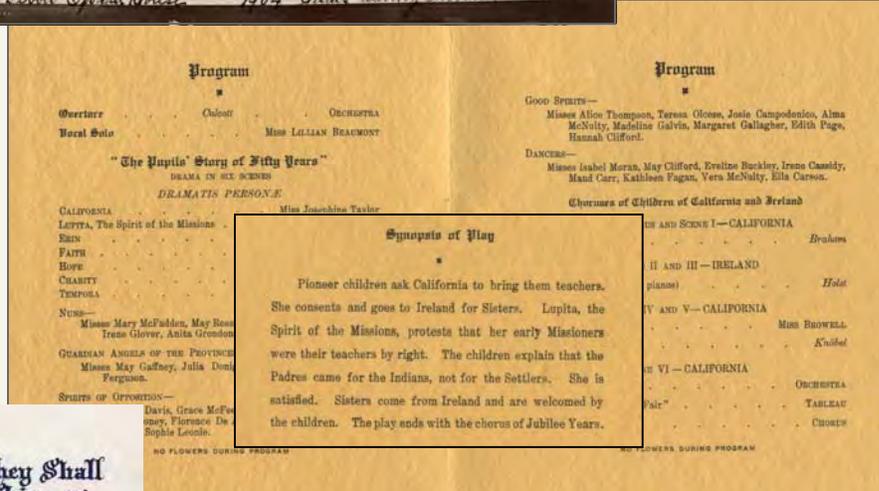
Left: Descendants of Mother Teresa Comerford, Pierce Comerford and his wife, Breda in procession with a chalice and ciborium from the Sisters' first convent chapels at the celebratory Mass for the Sisters' 150th anniversary.

Right: A medallion memento cast from the bronze fixtures collected during the renovation of the Presentation Motherhouse at 281 Masonic Avenue, San Francisco, built in 1912.





The tradition of scripting performances for foundation anniversaries began in 1904 when Mother Josephine Hagarty wrote "The Pupils Story of Fifty Years." In 1954, a Centennial Pageant was performed. The program shown below shows an image of Nano Nagle floating above San Francisco's iconic Ferry Building. In 2004, Sister Stephanie Still wrote a historical interpretation that was performed in the Little Theater of their former high school, the Academy of Presentation in San Francisco.



Below: Acting the part of "Women of the Lantern" to emulate Nano Nagle.



Superior Spotlight: Mother M. Teresa Comerford



Mother Teresa Comerford arrived in San Francisco with Sister Mary Joseph Cronin, the original Superior, Sister Mary Xavier Daly, Assistant to the Superior, Sister Mary Augustine Keane, Bursur, and Sister Mary Clare Duggan. Within the first year, three Sisters returned to Ireland because of illness and Sister Mary Teresa Comerford became the second Mother Superior of the California group, spearheading the early survival and growth of the Sisters of the Presentation.

An early account of Mother Teresa contained in the book of obituaries of the San Francisco Presentation Sisters recorded the following: "In appearance Mother M. Teresa was a magnificent type of womanhood: tall and stately, with a very handsome and pleasing countenance. She possessed great personal charm and magnetism, which drew many to her. Very pious, very religious, very zealous, her virtues and her charms enabled her to accomplish much in our dear Lord's vineyard... Her vigor and her practical spirit of organization soon led to her being recognized as the leading spirit of the little commu-



Sacred Heart Novitiate, Kilcock, Ireland. Mother Teresa stands in the back row, second from the left. Newly professed postulants wear the black veil and cape, and the novices wear white veils.

nity in all that pertained to the growth and development of the Order."

"I fear much for dear Fr. Geoghegan. The Dr. is apprehensive that if he should get cold, it would be all over with him and then indeed we wd. be destitute. You know this place is not like S. Francisco. No one thinks of handing you a donation - no fairs &c. [...] We have numberless applications, choir and Lay - very suitable, but little means. Pray that God may provide." - Letter from Mother Teresa to Mother Josephine, June 30, 1880

Realizing a need to have more Sisters to teach and work in the California foundation's schools, in September 1879, Mother Teresa went to Ireland to open the Sacred Heart Presentation Novitiate at Kilcock, County Kildare, Ireland. A relative, the Very Reverend Father Geoghegan had built the convent for her use as a novitiate. The novitiate was founded on October 15, 1879, and it became the Sisters' first mission established abroad.

Eventually, business called her to return to California despite her delicate

health at the time. Mother Teresa worked on the amalgamation of the San Francisco Bay Area convents and Kilcock upon her return. This was a move not popular with all the Sisters. She had Irish bishops and the future Cardinal Vaughan meet in Rome for her but the matter was sent back to Alemany who refused permission.

Returning to the Convent on Taylor Street, Mother M. Teresa entered a period of illness from which she did not recover and died on August 2, 1881. She received the Last Sacraments, and when the evening Angelus was ringing on August 2, 1881, she went to her eternal reward.

To read more about Mother Teresa Comerford and over 300 additional biographies of the Presentation Sisters, refer to *Presentation Women*, available for purchase [online](#).



A section of Mother Teresa Comerford's handwritten vows that she personalized with her artwork.