



# PRESENTATION ROOTS

## A PRESENTATION JOURNEY INTO GOLD RUSH SAN FRANCISCO



*"It was about four-thirty o'clock that, onward through the strait after which she was named, the Golden Gate sailed sturdily into San Francisco Bay, carrying on board the five pioneer Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was a cold and chilly morning with clouds betokening rain, when at five o'clock the stately steamer rounded Clark's Point and dropped anchor at the Vallejo Street wharf. At last they were in San Francisco!"*

*Left: Presentation Convent, San Francisco, 1855.*

**F**ive Presentation Sisters volunteered to establish the first Presentation foundation in America. They were: M. M. Joseph Cronin, M.M. Xavier Daly, M.M.

Augustine Keane, Sr. Mary Clare Duggan and Sr. Mary Ignatius Lanigan who later became ill and could not make the journey. Taking her place was Sr. Mary Teresa Comerford from Presentation Convent in Kilkenny. They left Ireland on September 3rd, 1854. After making a brief stop in New York, they crossed the Isthmus in Panama on mules, and finally arrived in San Francisco almost two months later on November 13, 1854. Since that day, the Presentation Sisters led many pioneering efforts throughout the course of their 160 years.



*The delightful drawing shown above is from a 14-foot long scroll depicting the journey made by the Presentation Sisters from Ireland to San Francisco. See more scroll images on Pages 2-3.*

This scroll is believed to have been drawn by Mother Teresa Comerford while she stayed at the Sacred Heart Novitiate she founded in 1879 in Kilkock, Ireland. The long format of the scroll might have been wrapped around cardboard tubes at opposite ends and each “scene” was unfurled as the story progressed. One can imagine Mother Comerford using this drawing to recount the stories of the pioneering Sisters’ incredible journey to the young novices in training as they prepared themselves to one day serve far away in that “foreign mission” called California. The scroll resides in the Union Presentation Sisters’ archives in Ireland. It was digitized and put on display in the nationally travelling exhibit, *Women & Spirit*. Accompanying these images are excerpts from recorded annals and recounted in *With Hearts of Oak*, a history of the San Francisco Presentation Sisters written by Sister Rose Forest, PBVM, and available for purchase [online](#).

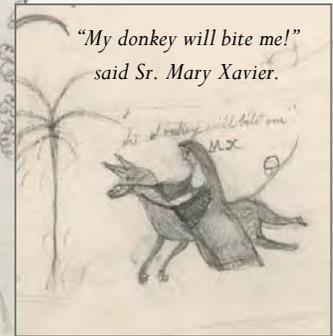
## Journey from the Emerald Isle to the Golden Gate



“They found a sort of inn named after the proprietor “Old Joe’s House,” a most inhospitable mansion with furniture no beds, a few hammocks suspended from the ceiling was their only place of rest, and this was the sum of accommodation afforded them; as much as a basin of water could not be procured to wash off the mud which literally covered them. The next morning they obtained with some difficulty a scanty repast of biscuits and water after which they were turned out of doors by “Old Joe” himself...”

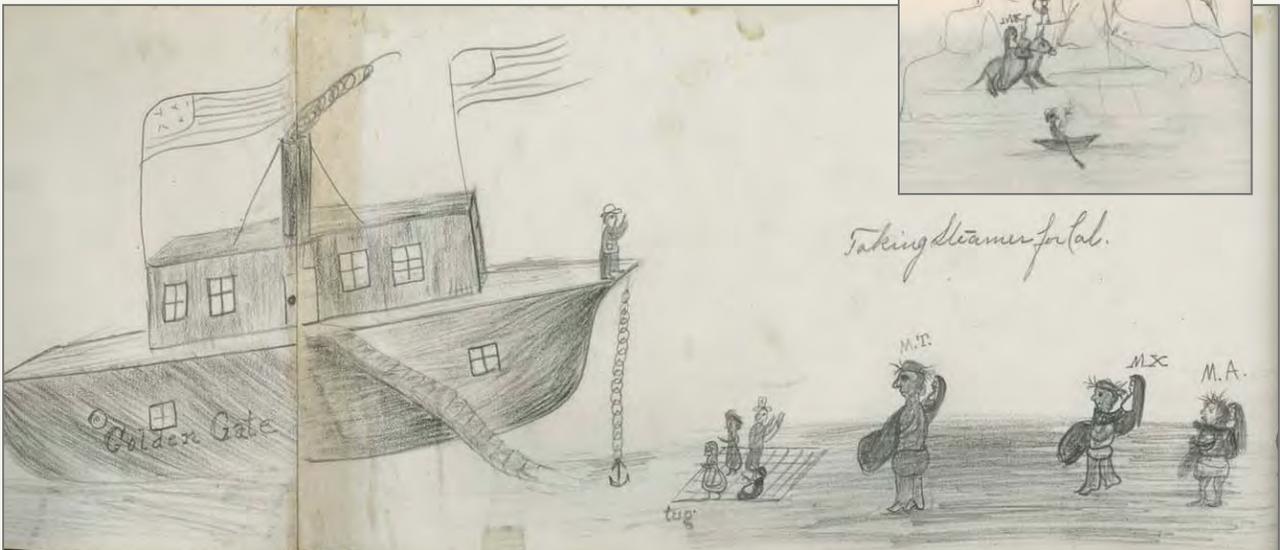
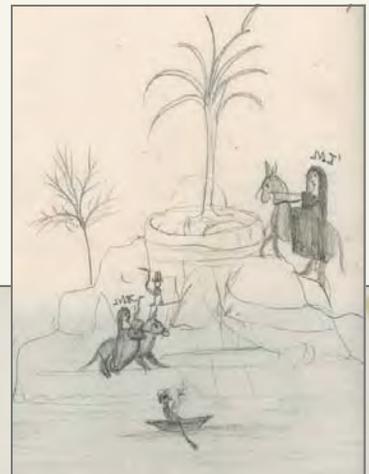


“Catching the donkeys” and a view of the “Forest”



"As might be expected the Sisters proved inexperienced riders, and their guide with whom they wanted to dispense altogether, (as they had reason to believe him to be a dangerous person), to prove to them that they could not get on without him, purposely drove Sister Mary Teresa's mule into a deep slough. She was thrown off and sank to the shoulders in mud, unable to extricate herself. Fortunately one of the government officials who had seen the accident from his verandah came to the spot and drew her out all besmeared with mud. He directed an Indian who was coming near with a pail of water to throw the contents on her head, which he did."

"The two Sisters paused on the verge of this stream, and as they looked round for some road or track to guide them they perceived among the trees opposite an unclad warrior of the forest; he was looking over at them, and yelling either from surprise or anger. The Sisters saw their danger and were greatly terrified, especially as they were alone and without human aid."



"No wharfs had been constructed, and the shallow, shelving beach did not permit these small crafts to approach nearer than about twenty-five yards from the water's edge. To reach them, the passengers had either to wade through the breakers or allow themselves to be carried out by the Indian porters. Trusting themselves to the arms of the porters, the Sisters were conveyed over the breaking waves to the small boats. Soon they were rowed out to the ship, and the huge paddle wheel and high masts of the Golden Gate towered above them."

# P B V M, S F T i m e l i n e : 1 9 0 6 ~ 1 9 4 5

**T**he timeline in this issue begins with the devastating events of the 1906 earthquake and fire and continues through 1945. Despite the tumultuous events that plagued this era including the omnipresent tragedies of two World Wars and the Great Depression, it was a time of unprecedented growth for the Sisters. Not only did they rebuild what was lost, resuming classes almost immediately after the fires were extinguished, but they expanded throughout California opening several new convents and schools. It was also during this time that the Sisters, under the direction of Mother Mary Stanislaus Guiney and Mother Mary Reginald Leahy, began developing curriculum standards and ensuring Sisters received more formalized training and education as teachers so their schools could become accredited, thus further securing their legacy of providing excellent education to all who attended.

**1906** Presentation Sisters work and teach in the refugee camps throughout San Francisco and Oakland. Saint Mary and Saint Agnes Academies are also established in San Francisco during this period.

*"I feel very proud and happy when I describe my beautiful school .. It is situated on Masonic Avenue and Turk Street. This is not only a pretty, country-like place but it is also very healthful. On the north the Convent faces Calvary Cemetery. On the south, Masonic Cemetery."*  
~ "Our High School", written by a student, 1915.



**1912** Convent of the Presentation school opens in the "bucolic" western part of the city. Presentation Sisters also staff the newly opened Saint Teresa School in San Francisco.

**1913** Saint Francis School is established in San Francisco.



**1920** Saint Anne School is established in San Francisco. Above, a photo of the school in its opening year. The school was built in an area of the city that at that time was mostly covered in sand dunes as seen in the photo here.



A general favorite. Nothing better made. Always 50c a pound at the Orange Blossom, 47 Kearny Street.

# P B V M , S F Timeline: 1906 ~ 1945



**1919** Our Lady of Lourdes Grammar School is established in Los Angeles.

**1921** Our Lady of Loretto Grammar School opens in Los Angeles.

**1925** Saint Columba School is established in Oakland and Saint Patrick School is established in San Jose.

**1930** Presentation Sisters staff the Salesian Brothers' school, Saints Peter and Paul in San Francisco.



**1930** Academy of the Presentation School graduates its first class. *The background photograph shows the school still under construction. The sign atop the hill announces the soon-to-be-built "San Francisco College for Women".*

**1936** Presentation Sisters staff Saint Rita School in Sierra Madre.

**1938** The Presentation Sisters open Epiphany School, San Francisco.

**1923** Presentation Sisters staff Bishop Conaty Memorial High School.

**1924** Presentation Sisters open Cathedral School in San Francisco.



*"Mother M. Ignatius and Sister Marie Therese left for Montebello in the old Packard automobile this afternoon . . . This is the first time any of our Sisters had ever attempted to drive to Los Angeles . . . The automobile was laden with sets of vestibules, Mass charts, linens for the altar, and candlesticks, to help equip the new sanctuary for our dear Lord at St. Benedict's Convent . . . St. Benedict's beautiful new school was ready for its opening Monday, September 22."*  
~ Excerpt from the Motherhouse annals, 1941

## Superior Spotlight: Mother Josephine Hagarty



**M**other Mary Josephine Hagarty was born Frances Hagarty in Dublin, Ireland in 1849. The exact date of birth for this woman who would play a key role in the development of the Presentation Sisters of San Francisco is unknown. Her younger sister, Josephine, also entered the Sisters of the Presentation and became Sister Mary Calasancius.

Mother Josephine and Mother Mary Calasancius came from Ireland with Mother Mary Angela Berchmans Shea in 1870. Mother Josephine entered Sacred Heart Convent at Taylor and Ellis Street as a postulant, received the habit on April 11, 1871, and was professed on August 6, 1872.

In the Sacred Heart Convent School, according to Sister Rose Forest, “she labored with untiring zeal and marked success in the schools until 1878, when Mother Mary Teresa Comerford took her to Berkeley to found Saint Joseph

Presentation Convent. When Mother Mary Teresa went to Ireland in 1879, Mother Josephine was appointed superior of Saint Joseph.”

Before her death, Mother Teresa Comerford suggested that the self-governing convents of the Presentation Sisters be amalgamated. In 1888, with the help of the Most Reverend Archbishop Patrick William Riordan, the Holy See consolidated the Presentation convents. Mother Josephine Hagarty was appointed the first Superior General of the congregation, an office to which she was by Papal dispensation re-elected and which she held for twenty-three years until her death on November 7, 1912.

“Our two beautiful convents and all they contained were destroyed in the April disaster. ... We saved nothing but our clothes and the Sacred vessels. Since then we have gone through many vicissitudes. Teaching in refugee camps and tents, taking care of relief Stations and children shelters. Everyday we miss more and more what we have lost. Libraries, musical instruments, apparatus of every description and our homes...” ~ *Excerpted from a letter Mother Josephine wrote to Mother Berchmans in Ireland.*



Mother Josephine guided the Presentation Sisters through two remarkable periods in their history. She united the different convents and Sisters after the amalgamation into one unit and oversaw the recovery of the congregation after

the loss of property during the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire.

Mother Josephine would oversee the rebuilding of the convents and schools, including opening new ones and building a new Motherhouse at 281 Masonic Avenue in the years following the earthquake and fire.

In the unidentified newspaper article at the time of her death, the lead of the article summed up her life, “Within the past week, death has taken from this community one of the most prominent educators of the State, Reverend Mother M. Josephine Hagarty, Superior of the Order of the Presentation in the Archdiocese of San Francisco.”

At her Requiem Mass, Archbishop Riordan and over fifty priests participated. The newspaper noted, “The love, reverence and esteem of the pupils of her schools was evidenced in the thousands who thronged to convent chapel, corridors, and reception rooms... many were the sobs that came from the lonely hearts that felt that death had robbed them of a wise counselor and a sympathetic friend.”

To read more about Mother Josephine Hagarty and over 300 additional biographies of the Presentation Sisters, check out *Presentation Women*, available for purchase [online](#).

For comments or questions about the newsletter, contact Presentation Archives at [presarchives@pbvmsf.org](mailto:presarchives@pbvmsf.org).