

This is an excerpt from the *Souvenir of Golden Jubilee 1886-1936*,
by Sister Mary Eugenia Eberhard, SSMO, Beaverton, 1936,
80 pages plus wrappers, printed by the Catholic Sentinel Printery.

It is reprinted here for its association with the history of Sublimity, Oregon, the subject of this web site. Following it is an excerpt from *These Valiant Women, History of the Sisters of St. Mary of Oregon*, 1886-1986, by Wilfred P. Schoenberg SJ. This excerpt describes the celebrations of the Jubilee Year in 1936, in particular the *Queen of the Valley Historical Festival and Pageant*, and the dedication of the new chapel

Foundation of the Sisters of St. Mary at Sublimity, Oregon

[from the]
Souvenir of Golden Jubilee
1886-1936

Fifty golden years have passed since the tiny mustard seed of a religious Congregation was planted at Sublimity, Oregon. Tradition has recorded memories of the humble foundation of the Sisters of St. Mary at this insignificant town, scarcely a dot on the map of Oregon.

The name may have been the inspiration of some early pioneer as, standing on a gentle slope, he beheld patches of fertile fields, lofty pine trees and grassy meadows. On the distant horizon, hazy mountains and snow crested peaks presented a beautiful and pleasing panorama such as only the hand of the Divine Artist could create.

Sublimity in the early eighties resembled those typical small villages met with by travelers in out-of-the-way places. It comprised an old church, on the verge of collapse, two stores dealing in general merchandise, a post office and hotel.

Some twenty homes dotted the valley, their owners being for the most part Protestants of different denominations. A few Catholic families were scattered here and there. The spiritual needs of the latter were administered to, once a month, by the Reverend Benedictine Fathers, who under the leadership of the zealous Very Reverend Adelhelm Odermatt, had four years previously established a foundation at Mt. Angel, Oregon.

His Excellency, Archbishop C. J. Seghers, had given them charge of a large territory - Gervais, Sublimity, Stayton and Jordan. At the latter place quite a colony of Catholics from Minnesota had purchased land and built homes.

Through some unfortunate misunderstanding between the pastor of the parish to which they had belonged, and his superior, they had drifted away from the authority of the Church.

However they were honest and upright Christians, led exemplary lives and practiced virtue to such a degree that a number of the young girls had banded together to follow the evangelical counsels under

the guidance of an old Sister, who, at one time, had been a member of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood in Ohio.

God's ways are wonderful! Very Reverend Father Adelhelm, burning with zeal for souls, reported conditions to His Excellency, the Most Reverend William H. Gross, who had been promoted to the See of Oregon City, February 1, 1885. His Excellency was deeply interested, visited the colony in person and in gentle persuasive terms advised them of their religious obligations.

Undoubtedly enlightened by the grace of God and keen foresight of the wonderful dispositions of Divine Providence, making use of weak instruments to perfect His designs, His Excellency saw in this small band of virgins the solution of a problem dear to his heart, to provide teachers for the parochial schools of the Archdiocese.

He proposed to the young ladies the foundation of a religious Sisterhood in another location, under the government of lawful superiors. Seven of the number gladly responded, k\happy to consecrate their lives to the service of God and the salvation of souls.

Thus was laid the foundation of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Mary. The Most Reverend Archbishop gave them his blessing and sanctioned the appointment of Reverend Father Wernher, O. S. B., as their Spiritual Director.



Cradle of the Community

One of the old land marks at Sublimity, a spacious two-story frame building which had served as a public school, together with the tract of land upon which it was built, had been donated to the Archdiocese for educational purposes. It was in a dilapidated condition, a mere empty shell; however under the supervision of Reverend Wernher, O. S. B., necessary repairs and crude articles of furniture were made. (Some of these home-made chairs are still giving service). A large room on the first floor contained the improvised chapel, poor as the stable of Bethlehem, yet the “House of God.”

August 12, 1886, the young ladies took possession of this humble dwelling and rejoiced in their first

convent home. The names of these souls who so generously accepted the Divine Call are: Sister M. Clare, Sister M. Wilhelmina, Sister M. Cecelia, Sister M. Gertrude, Sister M. Josephine, Sister M. Aloysia and Sister M. Rose. Sisters M. Clare and Josephine have long since represented the Congregation in the Better Home beyond, but the other five are still active.

Under the spiritual direction of the Reverend Father Wernher the little band completed a year of novitiate, according to the Rules of their Order and on March 25, 1887, His Excellency presided at the first ceremony of Profession of the Congregation.

On the same occasion Sister M. Wilhelmina was lawfully elected Superior. The Sisters, at that period, lived in direst poverty; and it was decided that Sister Superior with a companion should travel through the East, in order to collect funds for sustenance and building purposes.

With but little knowledge of the English language and poorly clad they were received with the greatest of kindness. Many gifts of beautiful vestments, material for clothing and substantial donations were sent "home," to the great joy of the Sisters.

It was on this tour that Sister M. Wilhelmina and Sister M. Cecelia sought hospitality with the Sisters of St. Francis, Layton Boulevard, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Reverend Mother Alexia, the General Superior, received them graciously and offered to assist them in every way possible. Sister M. Wilhelmina petitioned the Reverend Mother for a teacher to send to Oregon temporarily. The kind-hearted Mother granted the request and Sister M. de Sales at once set out for the West.

Meanwhile a small one-room frame school had been erected and September, 1888, the first parochial school was opened with an attendance of some twenty scholars. Sister M. de Sales was an excellent teacher. To maintain the high standard of education evidenced this first year has been the ideal to which the Sisters of St. Mary devote their talent and energy.

Death of Father Wernher, O. S. B.

The New Year of 1889 had scarcely dawned when the convent bell tolled mournfully, announcing the death of Reverend Wernher Ruttiman, O. S. B., devoted chaplain of the Sisters. Valiantly he had fought the dread disease of tuberculosis but finally succumbed. His death was a hard blow to the struggling Community, but still they had the consolation of having the Reverend Benedictine Fathers to attend to the mission. When, however, at the end of the year these devoted. Fathers ceased their ministrations the cup of sorrow was full to overflowing.

Reverend Joseph Fessler

Early in 1890 Reverend Joseph Fessler, a German priest from the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Wisconsin came to Portland, seeking in a milder climate, restoration of his failing health. His Excellency, the Most Reverend Archbishop Gross, D. D., appointed him pastor of Sublimity and chaplain of the Sisters.

Having established successfully a convent of the Third Order of St. Francis at Silver Lake, Wisconsin, he was very well qualified to direct the destinies of the little Congregation at Sublimity.

Being possessed of temporal means, he at once purchased a farm adjoining the church property to provide for the necessary sustenance of the Sisters. Imbued with a spirit of solid piety, he realized that bread alone did not constitute the One Thing necessary. Hence, through the influence of the Right Reverend Vicar General Muehlseipen of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, Missouri, he obtained two Sisters from a very fervent Congregation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood at O'Fallon, Missouri, to instruct the Sisters and Novices in the principles of the religious life.

Sister M. Ludmilla and Sister M. Melanie were exemplary religious and devoted a whole year to the task of fostering in the hearts of all a deep love of Christ and the salvation of souls.

Instruction, study, manual labor, humiliations, and trials of poverty, all contributed their share in moulding these youthful souls into solid foundation stones upon which was to rest the spiritual edifice of the future Congregation. May it be said to their credit that with God's grace all persevered and became worthy Spouses of the Crucified.

Reverend Joseph Fessler recognizing the possibilities of Sublimity as a Catholic center advertised extensively in Eastern papers its ideal location, climate, fertile soil, and other attractions. As a result many Catholic families from the Middle West settled there and in the surrounding country. Protestants were willing to sell their land at a moderate price and thus Sublimity became and remains a citadel of Catholicism. A fine new church was erected and dedicated to St. Boniface, October 26, 1890.

First Mission

One morning in January, 1891, found the members of the novitiate in sorrow and tears. A "hack" drove up to the convent and three of their number, Sister M. Anthony, Sister M. Margaret and Postulant Anna Ritzinger accompanied by Sister M. Melanie of O'Fallon were taken to Turner station, and from thence proceeded to Verboort. Reverend Father de Latte was the resident pastor of that parish. An interesting account of this early foundation is reserved for another page.

St. Mary's Home

Again in March of the same year the call for a second band of missionaries came to the motherhouse. St. Mary's Home near Beaverton had been erected under the auspices of the Reverend A. M. Grussi, C. P. P. S. Although much of the interior, especially the basement was incomplete, yet His Excellency, the Most Reverend Archbishop Gross, was most anxious that the Sisters take charge of the institution. Accordingly Sister M. Cecelia, Sister M. Aloysia and Sister M. Seraphim arrived at St. Mary's on March 18, 1891, to care for the orphans awaiting admission. Within a month after St. Mary's Home opened its doors to shelter the little waifs of Oregon, it numbered sixty inmates.

The Most Reverend Archbishop realized the necessity of more help for the care of the orphans and decided to transfer the motherhouse and novitiate from Sublimity to St. Mary's. The transfer was effected on the 27th day of June, 1891. His Excellency at the same time appointed Reverend Joseph Fessler as resident chaplain. Faithful unto the end, he labored for the welfare of the Congregation and the orphans until June 20, 1896, when he peacefully yielded his soul into the hands of its Creator.

But, to return to the subject of our sketch. After the transfer of Reverend Joseph Fessler to St. Mary's, Reverend Peter Beutgen and Reverend Joseph Bucholzer were for short periods in charge of the Sublimity parish.

Reverend Anton Lainck

Reverend Anton Lainck, ordained in 1891 for the Archdiocese of Oregon City, at Innsbruck, Tyrol, arrived in Portland in the spring of 1892. His first appointment was at Gervais, then New Era and Brooks, and in 1894 as pastor of St. Boniface Church, Sublimity.

Under his efficient leadership the parish assumed greater proportions. An extensive addition was made to the church as it could no longer accommodate the number of the faithful. New altars were designed and we of today admire the beautiful "Calvary Group" on the main altar and the many statues, inspirations to piety and devotion.

Apace with the growth of the parish was the development of the school. Father Lainck loved children with a truly Christ-like affection and no sacrifice was too great when their welfare was concerned. Nothing was left undone to ground them deeply in the principles of our holy Faith, to instruct them in all the necessary fields of secular knowledge, in a word, to mould their character, in order to make of them true, loyal members of the Catholic Church and worthy citizens of our country.

A modern two-story school with a basement, stands a monument to his zeal for the salvation of Christ's little ones. Under his administration St. Mary's Church at Stayton was built and, for some years was attended from Sublimity as a mission.

The Sisters of St. Mary found in Reverend Father Lainck a revered father, a sincere friend and advisor. Opinions differed at times but he ever upheld the authority of the teachers and had a kind word for the Community.

He sedulously fostered the call to the priesthood and encouraged religious vocations. His words fell on good ground as Sublimity has the enviable record of claiming as its own six of God's anointed; three of these, Reverend Paul Benedict, Reverend Mark Schmid and Reverend Clement Frank have joined the ranks of the Benedictine Fathers, the other three - Reverend Francis Prange, Reverend John Prange, Reverend Anthony Spenner are members of the Jesuit Order. Several others are in the seminary preparing for the priesthood and one, Joseph Nuttman, is a brother at Techny, Illinois.

Thirty-seven young ladies responded to the Divine invitation: "Follow me!" Thirty-three entered the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Mary, one the Benedictine Order at Mt. Angel, one became a member of the Sisters of Holy Names, one is a member of the Sisters of Providence, and one, the Sisters Adorers of the Precious Blood.

For a period of over twenty-five years Father Lainck labored incessantly in this vineyard of the Lord, "going about doing good." In 1926 he paid a visit to his native land and spent some months abroad. It proved to be his last farewell for upon his return to Oregon his health began to fail. Everything possible was done for him at St. Vincent's Hospital, but on June 11, 1927, he was called to his eternal reward. His remains lie buried in the center of the parish cemetery where rest so many of his devoted people.

Reverend Francis Scherbring

Reverend Francis Scherbring, a young priest distinguished for virtue and piety, succeeded Father Lainck as pastor of Sublimity. Having been reared on a farm in Iowa, he was “at home” from the first and soon loved the flock committed to his care.

His career was marked by unbounded charity to the sick and poor. He needed only to be informed when members of the parish were ill and forthwith he would visit them, bring them Holy Communion frequently and endeavor by kind words of encouragement to alleviate their sufferings.

Deploring the fact that owing to the distance from Sublimity many of the children of Stayton were deprived of a Catholic education, he built a fine brick school at Stayton. Upon its completion Sister M. Alicia and Sister M. Rosalita of the Sisters of St. Mary were sent to take charge. Temporarily they lodged with the Community at Sublimity and traveled back and forth daily. The attendance at St. Mary's School, Stayton, was very gratifying to Father Scherbring and recompensed him for the sacrifices made.

His next great ambition was to replace St. Boniface Church with a beautiful Gothic edifice. But God in His inscrutable judgments had decreed otherwise. In the latter part of August, 1935, whilst at Seattle he became seriously ill, and was hurried to St. Vincent's, Portland. He recovered sufficiently to return to his parish. However his work was done; for on September 11, 1935, he peacefully rendered his soul to its Maker. At the foot of the Crucifixion Group and by the side of his predecessor, Father Lainck, rest his mortal remains awaiting the final resurrection.

Reverend Joseph Scherbring was appointed by His Excellency, the Most Reverend Archbishop Howard to fill the vacancy caused by the death of his brother. Father Joseph will carry out the cherished plan of the deceased to build a fine Gothic church. Excavations for the foundation are under way and it will not be long until a new and more beautiful “St. Boniface” will point its spires heavenward.

Reverend George Sniderhon succeeded Father Joseph at Stayton. Devoting his first efforts to the welfare of the children, he added a third class room to St. Mary's school. Three Sisters of St. Mary are there employed and, with the blessing of God, the work of education is carried on successfully.

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The Year of Jubilee

excerpt from *These Valiant Women* by Wilfred Schoenberg SJ, 1986

The jubilee year began with the chapel dedication instead of ending with it, from 1936 to 1937. It was called rather arbitrarily “The Golden Jubilee of Profession of the First Ten [sic] Sisters.” This provided additional time for preparation which, because of cost, was kept to a bare minimum.

What jars one's sense of history about it, however, is that only five sisters had pronounced their religious vows in 1887.⁹ On March 25 of that year, these five had pioneered using a Benedictine vow formula, since they lacked one of their own. The remaining four sisters who acquired the enviable title of foundress only after many years had sweetened the memories of all, made their religious profession on July 4, 1888.¹⁰

There were two public demonstrations to commemorate both events. The former, a pageant called "Queen of the Valley," was followed by the publication of a booklet containing brief histories and the text of the pageant.¹¹

Queen of the Valley

According to the official program, the full title of this extravaganza was "Queen of the Valley Historical Festival and Pageant prepared by Sister M. Eugenia of the Sisters of Saint Mary of Oregon."

Sister Eugenia was home-grown, a product of Portland, named Mary Alice Eberhard. Born in 1886, "she had seen the city develop from a busy river port of ten thousand to a city of three hundred thousand." Both of her parents were pioneers of the 1850's, an accidental circumstance of birth which bestowed upon her a certain *placet* of the establishment and a tenacious loyalty to the City of Roses. Her father was present when Archbishop Gross entered the city in triumph, beneath an arch of flowers. He taught in St. Michael's College on Fifth and Mill in the 1870's, when young Eddie O'Dea (later Bishop O'Dea) was a student there. Mary Alice attended the old Portland High School but she learned more with the help of her father than from her school teachers. From him she gained her knowledge of history and the classics, both of which she used in writing her pageant. In October of 1910, she entered the Beaverton novitiate in her twenty-seventh year.

The text of the pageant, which runs for twenty-eight large printed pages, is composed in poetic form, some of which reveals a perceptive woman who has had experience in the world without being captivated by it. Her inspiration for this doubtlessly came from an epic poem "in dignified blank verse" published by her father under the title *Champoeeg*.

There is an interesting digression here. Mary Alice worked with her father in his researches that led to his conclusion: the name Oregon was an Indian corruption of the name of the Spanish province, Aragon. The sailors on the Spanish "treasure ship" which had been wrecked on Manzanita beach at the foot of Neahkanie Mountain on the Oregon Coast, had sailed from Aragon. This and other bits of history of the northwest are included in her generous list of benefactions that the Sisters of St. Mary owe to the nations of the world. Of Spain she wrote in part:

Spain: To the celebrants of this festival
She has given a St. Ignatius, whose rule
They follow and his
Calendar of Saints, Nay, their very
Patron, St. Francis Xavier, was
One of my most illustrious sons - -

The pageant itself was a lively performance that illustrated the part which the Sisters of St. Mary had taken in the promotion of the Catholic faith in Oregon. Many peoples with a wide diversity of customs and interests had been involved in the 360 years of Catholic influence leading up to the small beginnings made by the sisters in the Maria Zell convent in 1886. These peoples in their colorful costumes, were portrayed by a cast of 250 students from the schools conducted by the congregation. The pageant was opened by a glittering procession of the entire cast through the auditorium. Then in

seven episodes, each country told of the gifts which it had brought to enrich the life and culture of Oregon. "This sequence of facts was presented in a restful variation of rhythmic prose and blank verse and was enhanced by the graceful dances and drills against a background of song and music." In the first Episode, for example, there were more Indians than chiefs and an "Indian Bow and Arrow Dance" by students of St. John's High School. In the third Episode, the Spirit of England, "The Dashing U.S. Marines" made use of the eager little fellows from the Boys' Home, a stroke of genius as far as casting went. The pageant was brought to a grand finale "by a beautiful tableau in which the Queen Mother of the Precious Blood was crowned as Queen of the Valley - the fair Tualatin Valley where St. Mary of the Valley stands as her royal seat."¹²

The orchestra for the pageant, comprising sixty-four students from the many different schools, was directed by Mrs. Mary Dodge, whose task, perhaps, was the most difficult of all. Thirty-one girls and thirty-three boys presented twelve selections, including such demanding classics as Tschaiakowsky's "Andante Cantabile," "Minuet in G" by Beethoven and "Artist's Life" by Johann Strauss. One must admire the audaciousness of the conductor, as well as the sisters, in daring to present such a formidable program with mere children, long before inter-school orchestras became popular.

The Chapel Dedication

The grandiose pageant was produced on Sunday, May 2, 1937, in the Benson Auditorium, Portland. It is quite possible that it was the most elaborate program ever presented in that venerable hall. If not, it was at least the most adventurous, for not until the final curtain was anyone sure that it could come off without a disaster.

On the following Sunday, May 9, Archbishop Howard celebrated a Pontifical Mass in the new chapel. And the sisters, during this sparkling ritual, publicly renewed their religious vows. His Grace, who was known sometime, on occasions like this, to deliver long-winded sermons, gilding the lily as it were, spoke but briefly in a loud, resonating voice, so that even the older sisters who were hard of hearing could understand what he said. First he congratulated the sisters and reminded them "that true greatness of a congregation does not lie in its beautiful convent or the many schools it conducts, but in the spirit that has prompted that work." The sisters, he added, who follow these departed leaders all know the strength and beauty of soul that prompted the foundation of the Sisters of St. Mary of Oregon. The spirit of that humble beginning, fraught with many dangers of time and earth, had safely brought the Congregation with marked courage to its culmination in the Pageant of the Golden Year.¹³

End Notes

9. The five professed sisters on March 25, 1887, were Sister Mary Clara Hauck, Sister Mary Josephine Eifert, Sister Mary Wilhelmina Bleily, Sister Mary Benedict Arnold (who left the convent in 1894) and Sister Mary Cecelia Boedigheimer.

10. The four professed sisters on July 4, 1888, were Sister Mary Rose Eifert, Sister Mary Aloysius Bender, Sister Mary Gertrude Silbernagel, Sister Mary Johanna Silbernagel.

11. [Sister Mary Eugenia Eberhard, SSMO], *Souvenir of Golden Jubilee 1886-1936*, Beaverton, 1936, 80 pages plus wrappers. This was printed by the Catholic Sentinel Printery.

12. SSMOA, manuscript: Sister Mary Pulcheria Sparkman, SSMO, "And So It Happened and Not By Chance," p. 283.

13. Ibid., p. 284.

[A couple of notes from the Archives & Museum editor:

The new church envisioned by the Frs. Scherbring never materialized. Th foundation was filled in and we are left with the original church.

Sister Benedict Arnold, despite her suggestive name, left the order in good grace. But her intention to join a contemplative order did not succeed, lacking a sufficient "dowry." She became a caregiver for an elderly couple in Salem, Oregon, received an inheritance, and is buried in the St. Boniface churchyard in Sublimity, Oregon.]