



A Prayer of Dedication to St. Rose Philippine Duchesne



When we are asked to be bold and
courageous,
You are our inspiration

When our imaginations dream and see
beyond the limits of our sight,

You are our hope

When we fail to meet a challenge and need to
accept our limitations,

You are our model

When we pray with the desire for deep union
with God,

You are our Saint

And with your blessing, to the greater glory
of God, we seek to be loving people who live
and serve others with your same purpose,
vision, and quiet humility.

Amen.

Kimberly M. King, rscj

Philippine dreamed big and listened wide for the voice, the call, of God. Whether working with those in need closer to home in Grenoble, or giving herself to a pull that would take her away from that which was physically familiar and ever deeper into the diverse terrain of the Heart where she made her true home, Philippine responded with *disponibilit *, creativity, and a broad, inclusive desire to make God's love known. With fervor, she talked and wrote openly of her desires, her thoughts, her discernment with God. My contemporary imagination easily hears her saying year after year "and, oh, by the way ... if you need someone to cross an ocean and start something new ... I'm still open because that is where I believe God is calling me to go."

It is one thing to have the dream. It is another still to voice it. But it is something else altogether to drop everything and go forward once approval comes ... to go when the cost is dear and the unknowns looming; to go prayerfully and with courage; to say *Yes* and walk on knowing that doubt, fear, and challenge will be probable companions and might sometimes even gain the upper hand temporarily; to say *Yes* above all else to sharing the Love to which I too have given my life.

Some words as we depart from St. Louis

While many believed Philippine too old to join the missionary band to the Potawatomi, Bishop Rosati championed her cause by sending her this note:

The example you have given in leaving Europe to make the first foundation of the Sacred Heart in America is still very powerful in influencing others to follow you. God be praised for this! But I am really surprised to learn that you are now pleading to leave Missouri in order to go among the Indians. However, when one loves God, one never says “Enough.” If I did not know you well, I might say it is too much for you. But knowing you as I do, I say: “Go! Follow your attraction, or rather the voice of God. He will be with you.” I beg him to bless you.

The 3 sisters who were scheduled to go with Philippine assumed, as the time to leave drew near, that she was too ill to go. But Father Verhaegen insisted:

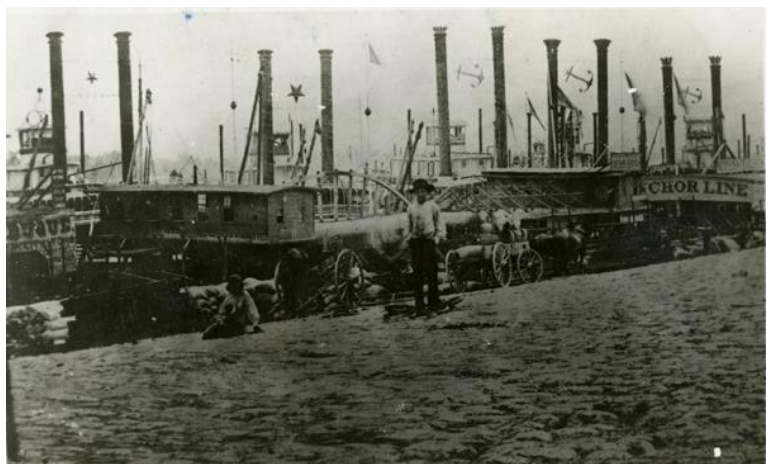
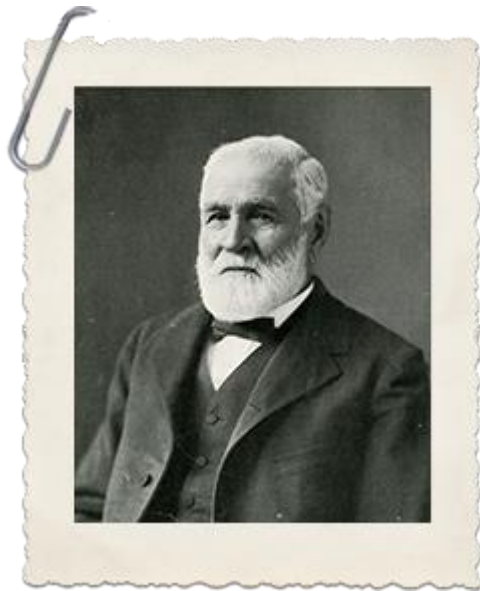
Three? Father Verhaegen had expected four. He turned to where Mother Duchesne sat praying silently, tears falling unheeded on the darkened, toil-worn hands that held her rosary. “But she must come, too,” he said to Mother Gray, and his strong face lighted up with reverent affection. *She* was the person he wanted most of all at Sugar Creek. “Even if she can use only one leg, she will come. Why, if we have to carry her all the way on our shoulders, she is coming with us. She may not be able to do much work,” he added and his kind eyes narrowed to thin slits in a characteristic smile, “but she will assure success to the mission by praying for us. Her very presence will draw down all manner of heavenly favors on the work.”



Read along the Way!

The little mission band boarded the Missouri River packet, *Emilie*, on June 29, 1841. Its captain was almost surely Joseph LaBarge.

The river trip was pleasant; accommodations on the steamboat were good, though not so luxurious as those on the smart packets now plying the Mississippi. Mother Duchesne gathered fresh strength as the boat ascended the muddy stream and was able to walk the deck with a remarkably firm step. She was interested in all she saw and heard and was a center of interest among the passengers. By a spontaneous gesture these people took up a collection amounting to fifty dollars for the nuns, while traders on board contributed provisions to the value of forty dollars. These were confided to the care of Edmund, a young Negro from the convent in St. Louis, who had been brought along to help with the heavy work of installation.



The *Emilie LaBarge*

Joseph LaBarge – steamboat captain

<http://shs.umsystem.edu/historicmissourians/name/l/labarge/#section2>

Read as you cross into Kansas

After 4 days aboard the steamboat *Emilie*, the mission band finally arrived in the vicinity of Sugar Creek. The Indians had been alerted to the arrival, so the entire village assembled and waited a day.

Mother Mathevon describes it:

We had stopped about 18 miles away on the banks of the Osage River at the home of a French settler, where we were most kindly received. The Indians, impatient of our arrival, sent ahead two of their number to find us. These came and knelt before the Father Superior to receive his blessing. We gave them supper; then they started back to announce to their tribesmen that we would be met with them the following day. As we advanced the next morning, we met, every two miles along the way, Indians mounted on fine horses. They had come to greet us and show us the safest and best road.



(GO TO PAGE 14 AS WE HEAD TO ST. MARY'S MISSION, KANSAS)

(Read as we depart in the morning for Sugar Creek)

Louise Callan describes the scene as the band approaches the mission at Sugar Creek:

About a mile from the mission house a band of five hundred braves appeared in gala dress – bright blankets, plumes and feathers, and moccasins embroidered with porcupine quills. Their faces were painted black, with red circles around the eyes that gave them a frighteningly grotesque appearance. As the mission wagon advanced, the Indians performed a series of equestrian evolutions, now in semi-circles, now in circles, and always with such precision that there was never a horse out of position.



On Arrival at the Mission



As we enter this sacred place, let us see if we can catch some remnant in the wind of the voices that were once here but have now left....Mother Mathevon describes this place:

Here we live in perfect silence and recollection, and so do the Potawatomies among whom we dwell. They are by nature a quiet people; they all speak in a low tone of voice, and the children are never noisy at their games or in the classrooms. The little boys stand in silence watching a game, or draw their bow-strings in silence at the birds. On Sundays, however, the women allow themselves the relaxation of singing nearly all day long at the doors of their huts or in the church. Our ignorance of the doings of the world is complete; news scarcely ever reaches us. We can, like the hermits of old, ask what men are doing now. Do they build homes, do they carry on business, etc.?

Our children are learning to read, to write, to know their religion. They also knit, crochet and sew marvelously well. Many of them can now make all kinds of clothing, for both men and women. They work in the garden, learn to wash and iron, care for the cows, bake bread, churn and make candles. In fact, we train them in all that can be useful to them as wives, mothers, house-keepers. The docility of their character makes them very easy to handle and teach, and the parents uphold us in all we do.

Remembering the Potawatomi



The Potawatomi were a peaceful tribe living in the upper region of Lake Huron and on the islands of Green Bay and the adjacent shores of Lake Michigan. By slow stages they drifted southward into Illinois and Indiana. They were a warrior race who loved to hunt and had to learn to appreciate farming.

Philippine describes them to Sophie in her first letter from the mission:

The tribe, which like many others was driven out of Michigan by the Americans, is now half Catholic. These people have built their village at a distance from the pagans, who are being converted gradually. Once baptized, they never revert to drunkenness or stealing. Whatever is found is placed at the door of the church to be claimed by the owner. Not a single house has locks on the doors, yet nothing is ever missing. The Indians gather in groups (men and women separate) for morning prayers, Mass, and catechism. In the evening they assemble again for prayers. They eat seven times a day...

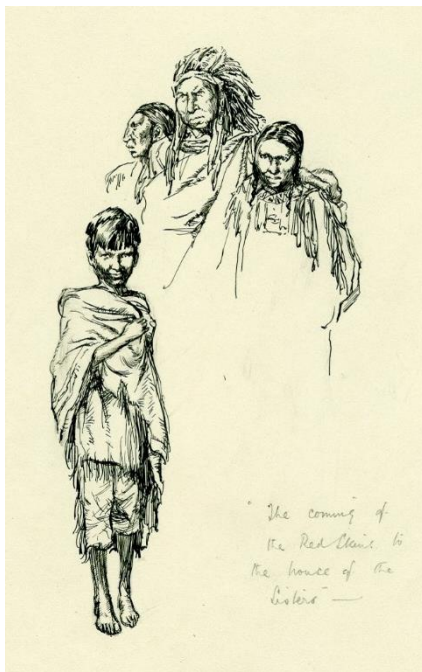
Philippine writes of the cemetery in a letter to Sophie:

They tell us that there are many saints buried in the little cemetery. When I walk out of doors, I always go there, and I kneel and beg of God the favor of being buried beside them. I feel, however, the same longing for the *Rocki Mountain* missions and any others like them, that I experienced in France when I first begged to come to America, the same longing I felt for the Indian missions, once I reached this country. They say that in the *Rocki* people live to be a hundred years old. As my health has improved and I am only seventy-three, I think I shall have at least ten more years to work.

Philippine's Cabin



The religious took possession of their new log cabin on October 9. It was primitive and poorly built, but it was clean. There was not much privacy in it, for the Indians came and went as they pleased during the daytime, but the nuns had grown accustomed to this. A wood stove and some shelves occupied one side of the room. This was designated as the dining room and kitchen; but when winter came on and icy wind swept in from the western prairies, the nuns and the Indian pupils huddled near the fire, even while meals were being prepared. Sensitive as she had become to cold, because of the fever that seldom left her now, Mother Duchesne suffered more than the others. Yet she made her way through the snow to the unheated mission church for Mass each morning.

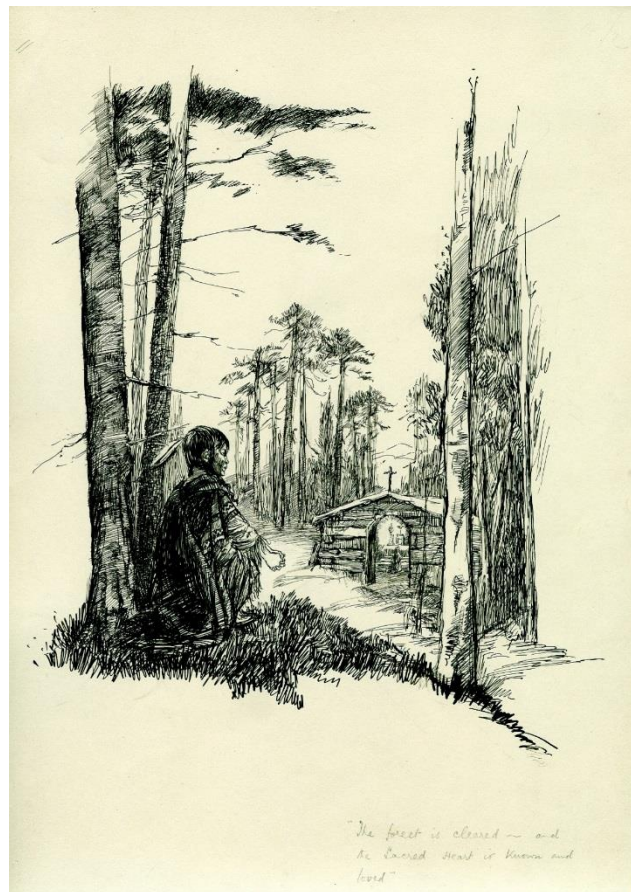


Privacy was at first unknown in the convent at Sugar Creek. The religious were often embarrassed in the beginning by the continual visits of the Indians, who filed into the cabin as if they were at home, seated themselves on the ground without uttering a word, remained as long as they liked, regardless of the occupations of the nuns, gazed impassively at all that was being done, without evincing the slightest interest or emotion, then silently withdrew. The nuns quickly learned to show neither astonishment nor the least desire to be alone, and so won the friendship of their uninvited guests, who took the greatest delight in the little bell that called the community to prayer and the clock that rested on a high stump in a corner of the cabin.

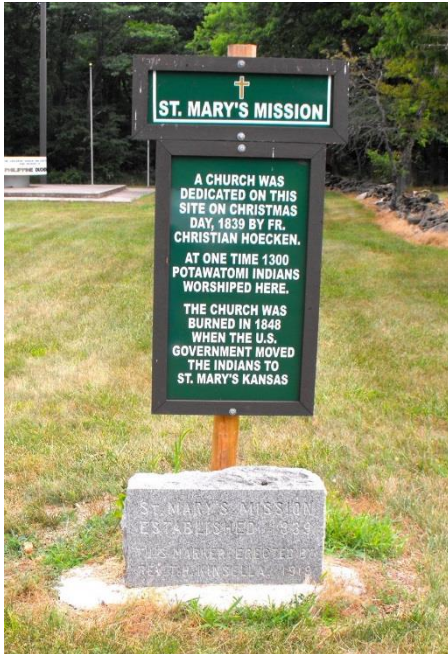
The Many Uses of Philippine's Cabin

A single room of modest proportions served as a parlor, refectory, and dormitory. Sometimes there were more visitors than just Indians:

Another type of intruder was less welcome. It sometimes happened that, while the religious were at Mass, prairie dogs forced their way into the hut through chinks in the walls or burrowed through the floor and carried off the breakfast prepared for the community. Sister Amyot used to relate her astonishment and chagrin at having a side of bacon stolen from the top of a wooden box on which she laid it, while she turned to take down the frying pan from a peg in the wall. A dog had crept in and watched his chance. Not even the fleet-footed Indians could recover that precious meat, a month's provision.



The Church at Sugar Creek



The log church at Sugar Creek was a neat and spacious structure, situated on a bluff about a hundred feet above the level of the bottom land and blessed on Christmas Day, 1840, under the title of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. As the entire mission was dedicated to our Lady, Philippine found herself once more at *Saint Marie*, but similarity to the Alpine monastery ended with the name. The convent erected at Sugar Creek stood close to the church on an eminence commanding a fine view of the surrounding country, but the little stream, bordered by sugar maples and called Sugar Creek, bore no resemblance to the swift Isère of Dauphiny, nor could the Indian encampment evoke the memory of Grenoble and the lovely Vale of Grésivaudan



The Church at Sugar Creek, cont.

The Indians however, seemed to appreciate her from the moment she set foot in the Sugar Creek encampment. Even though she could not teach their children as Mother O'Connor was doing by mid-July, or cook for them as Sister Amyot did, or read their language as Mother Mathevon could after three or four weeks amongst them, they loved her and respected her and brought her all manner of things – fresh corn, newly-laid eggs, chickens, wild plums, sweet, clean straw for her pallet. “Whatever they have, they bring to the *good old lady*, as they call Mother Duchesne.” wrote Mother Mathevon in August.

Sometimes their presents were of a more



formidable nature. The Potawatomi had, under the influence of the Jesuits, adopted ways of peace. At times, however, they had to defend themselves against marauding tribes. On such occasions they rejoiced to present their trophies-scalps of their enemies – to the religious, to whom they considered this honor due. So it sometimes happened that on opening the door in the morning, the nuns were greeted by a bloody spectacle, a line of scalps hung on their doorposts. To have shown horror or even repugnance for such spoils, would have been a mortal offense to the Indians.



She stayed all morning in the church, so Sister Amyot would take her a cup of coffee each day, and she drank it at the door of the church. After dinner she went again for three or four hours of prayer. The Indians had the greatest admiration for her, recommended themselves to her prayers and called her *Woman-who-prays-always*. Everyone admitted that a great number of baptisms resulted from her prayers. Almost every Sunday afternoon three or four men or women and their families were baptized. Mother Duchesne inscribed all their names in the register.

The Return to St. Charles



By this time, Bishop Kenrick had taken over for Rosati, and he heard of Philippine's poor health. Kenrick, who ten years later would call her the "holiest person he had ever known," was not content to let her "lay her bones to rest in the Indian cemetery," as she had so often expressed the wish. He counseled a return to St. Louis.

Callan continues:

As soon as Father Verhaegen was informed of the order, he planned a trip to Sugar Creek. He had escorted Mother Duchesne up the Missouri to Indian Territory; he would bring her back safely, though it was a bitter disappointment to him to have to do so. On June 19 they left the mission, after a demonstration of affection on the part of the Indians that must have moved Philippine to tears. They traveled slowly in a rough, jolting wagon through dust and heat and stopped to say good-bye to Napoleon Bourassa and his Potawatomi wife Memetekosikwe, who had so often befriended the nuns during the past year. Four days later they boarded the river packet at Westport and reached St. Louis on June 29, 1942 – exactly a year from the day they had set out for Sugar Creek. No sudden spurt of courage and generosity had carried Mother Duchesne through this hardest ordeal of her cross-strewn career, but the habits of a lifetime, above all the habit of simple acceptance of God's will through love.

The Mission Moves to St. Mary's Kansas

In 1843 at the Sugar Creek Mission, there were 61 pupils in each of the schools. The girls were taught spelling, reading, writing, and ciphering, and home skills including carding, spinning, sewing, knitting, embroidering, and even fancy-work and artificial flower making. They learned to make every article of apparel, to bake good bread, make butter, and do every kind of housework.

In the thriving parish were many confraternities and public devotions. By 1847 there were 1300 Christian Potawatomi coming to the mission. The work of the Jesuits was seriously hampered, however, when unscrupulous white settlers began selling the tribe that demon for the Indians: liquor. A government proposal to transfer the Potawatomi to a new reserve farther west was welcomed by the fathers.

St. Mary's Mission



Mother Philippine Duchesne,
drawn for *Crusade Magazine* by
Becky Melechinsky

The Potawatomi gradually started making new settlements on their latest reserve, a 30-square-mile tract lying on both sides of the Kaw (Kansas) River. Fr. Verreydt, scouting the area seeking a central mission location, asked the Blessed Mother to help him find a good site which he would name after her. Early in June, 1848, he settled on the spot which is the St. Mary's campus today.

On August 16, 1848, the missionaries left Sugar Creek on their rigorous 90-mile move. They reached Wakarusa Creek where Fr. Hoecken was with the Indians, and on September 7, began the last stage of their journey. The party was composed of Father Verreydt and newly-arrived Swiss Father Maurice Gaillard, Brother George Miles and Brother Patrick Ragan. The four sisters were Mother Mathevon and Mother O'Connor, Sister Mary Ann Layton, and Sister Louise Amyot. With them was also the French and Indian guide and interpreter Joseph Bertrand, as well as an Indian boy named

Charlot. High water on the Kaw delayed them a day until they could ford the river on horseback and in wagons. On September 9, they stopped at noon for dinner at Cross Creek (Rossville), and at about four in the afternoon they arrived at the new St. Mary's.

Two half-finished log houses awaited them. The buildings were parallel, about 110 yards apart. The cabin to the west, near a small creek, was assigned to the nuns. It was two stories high, 21 by 61 feet, with five rooms. There were no windows, doors, floors or caulking between the logs, and no furniture excepting the little they had brought. Everyone was happy to see Brother Mazzella when he arrived on September 26, and began work on the buildings, putting up a temporary chapel and a barn. In time the sisters' building was lengthened to 100 feet. It contained an assembly hall and served as school house and residence until 1870.

Far from civilization, the pioneers faced the coming winter, which was extraordinarily severe, even for those days. Fr. Gaillard ran out of Latin adjectives to describe in his diary the intense cold, leaden skies and deep snow-drifts. For eighty days the Kaw was ice bound and could be used as a wagon road.

Food ran low; at one point all they had was a bag of cornmeal. In February, the winter was moderating when a dread epidemic of cholera hit. It was impossible to conduct school. In July the epidemic abated and the boarding schools were re-opened; Indian children came from all over the reserve. In September, 1849, there were 57 boarders and 10 day students.

The Fathers educated the boys and trained them in farming. Of the sisters' school for girls Fr. Gaillard wrote in 1852: "[The school] of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart excites the admiration of all; it is of the greatest service to the mission. The girls brought up therein are models of piety; [and excellent in] the management of domestic affairs. Two of the oldest pupils have been so much edified by the sisters'

examples of humility, patience and devotedness that they also have expressed a wish to become Religious...and last spring they went down to St. Louis for their novitiate."

In 1852, the last year of her life, the old Saint Philippine wrote to Saint Madeleine: "Mother Lucille Mathevon wrote me that she has more than sixty pupils in her boarding school. There are four lay teachers (half-blood Indians) who help the nuns and who have religious vocations...Recently there was a scourge of smallpox, which is very terrible when it attacks the Indians. The vast majority of those who had it died like saints."

By now St. Mary's had been since 1850 the temporary seat of the young newly-appointed Bishop John Miège, S.J., and the humble wood chapel built in 1849 beside the Oregon trail had become the first cathedral in the vast territory between the Missouri border and the Rocky Mountains!

The bishop described the piety of the Potawatomi during a Corpus Christi procession, concluding, "The blackrobes cannot help experiencing a lively emotion at reflecting that St. Mary's is the only place in this immense desert where anything is done in reparation of the insults offered to our Divine Master in the Sacrament of His love."



Catholic Church in St. Mary's, 1851

For over three decades the sisters continued their great educational work for Indian girls.

But their self-effacement was so complete that only two of their names occur in the mission annals, where it is recorded that Mother Lucille Mathevon was called by death in 1876. The success of the nuns' school was due to her intelligent sympathy and administrative skill.

Mother Mary Anne O'Connor's death at St. Mary's is recorded as December 9, 1864. Fr. Gaillard wrote that she was conspicuous for virtues of gravity, wisdom, humility, assiduity in labor however menial, and a burning zeal for souls. Women often came to the convent to seek her advice and never left without gain to their souls. Through her zeal entire families were converted to the Catholic faith.

By the end of the 1860's the Indians had gradually disappeared before the flood of white settlers. The Jesuit superiors, realizing St. Mary's must take a new direction, converted it to a boys' college, reasoning that its location on the transcontinental railroad in the center of the country would make it accessible to boarding students. Its rural situation would promote good morals and religious vocations. Fr. Gaillard

noted, "Wherefore, Mary Immaculate, through the college to be built and the patronage of which she has undertaken, will undoubtedly through a long succession of years be the glory of the region and the honor of the Christian people, an issue which is the object of our prayers and hopes in God." Prophetic words!



The Jesuits gave over part of the property to the nuns, and in 1870 the sisters constructed a large four-story brick edifice to house their academy for girls. It bristled with chimneys from its many fireplaces; its high ceilings were of molded metal; and tall windows let in much light. It became known as the "Skyscraper of the Prairie." In this new and commodious home, with the same devotion that had marked their labors for the Indian children, the nuns pursued the work of the higher Christian education of women.

Also in 1870, the Jesuits raised a large brick building for their new College. This edifice was completely destroyed by fire on the morning of February 3, 1879. That very afternoon the sisters vacated a large part of their building, so that the Jesuits could continue classes. Three days later the nuns transferred their academy to a house in town, leaving their convent and school to be occupied by the college faculty and students. Soon, the Jesuits bought the building. By July, 1879, the sisters had completely withdrawn from the campus of St. Mary's College, not to return, and there closed an impressive chapter of pioneer educational history in the West.

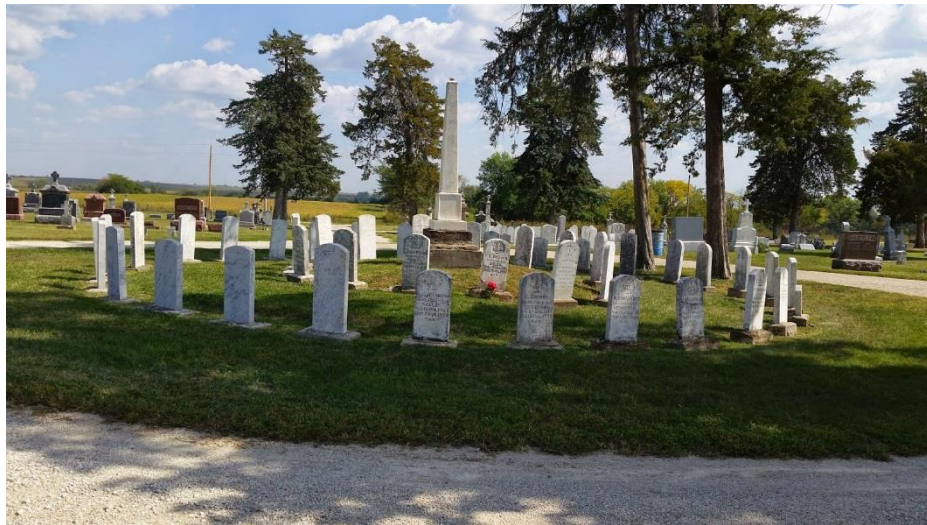


Calvary Cemetery in St. Mary's Kansas

On an open hilltop overlooking the campus and the valley of the Kaw the pioneers of St. Mary's sleep peacefully in the old Jesuit cemetery. In summer, the song of the ever present breeze is joined to the drone of cicadas and the calls of birds.



Plain headstones around a central obelisk mark the resting place of the Jesuits from all over the world who came here to labor for souls.





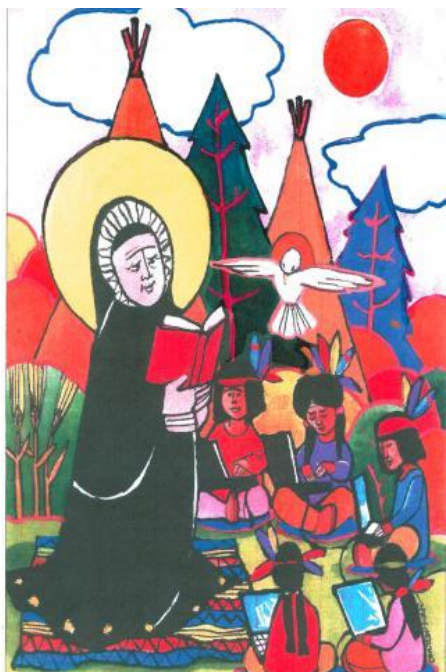
Apart, in the shade of a tall old cedar, a large stone topped with a cross and engraved with the Sacred Heart bears seven names: Mother Lucille Mathevon, died 1876; Mother O'Connor, 1864; Sr. Amiotte, 1857; Madame Regan, 1868; Sr. Layton, 1876; Mother Boyle, 1877; Mother Deagan, 1872. These are the heroic Ladies of the Sacred Heart, who worked with the Fathers bringing faith and civilization to the prairie.

On the stone we read: "Expectamus donec veniat immutatio nostra." These words, "We are awaiting the coming of our immutability," are a commentary on Job: "Who cometh forth like a flower, and is destroyed, and fleeth as a shadow, and never continueth in the same state" (Job 14:2). These flowers, the self-effacing sisters, perfumed the work of St. Mary's, and fled away leaving little record of their lives.



Strengthen in us, O God, the work You have begun in us.

(RETURN TO PAGE 6 AS WE HEAD TOWARD MOUND CITY, KS AND PHILIPPINE DUCHESNE MEMORIAL PARK)



Prayer of the Potawatomi on Hearing of the Death of Philippine

She comes, Great Spirit,
 She comes soon.
 Comfort her spirit and care for her passage.
 Let the grasses of the fields whisper her homecoming.
 Let the lapping of the Mississippi's water
 Chant her back to you.
 Put out your colors this morning in all four season's flowers.
 Let them bloom all at once in her honor.
 Let the mockingbird, known for cleverness,
 Imitate all manner of songs, one for each mood of our hearts.
 For we are sad; she was our sister.
 We are glad, too; she is your child.
 We are sorry; too many miles prevent our putting out this blanket

Once more, over her shoulders.
 (She learned weaving from our hands; we learned to pray from her face).
 Let the sun blaze forth her compassion,
 And the full moon tonight remind us
 Of her hours praising you in this tent.

Our village will keep vigil tonight.
 Chief declares a fast in her name until tomorrow.
 We will pray in what was her tent
 For both our peoples, and for all those places
 On the flat map which she left for us.
 Creator, hear our prayer for her, for our children.
 For those prairies, trees and rivers.
 For the faraway mountains and this brook which hold our tears.
 Hear our sighs for these, our children,
 That they remember what she taught them
 And recall her name, for many moons, as your great woman.

Sharon Karam, RSCJ

Philippine

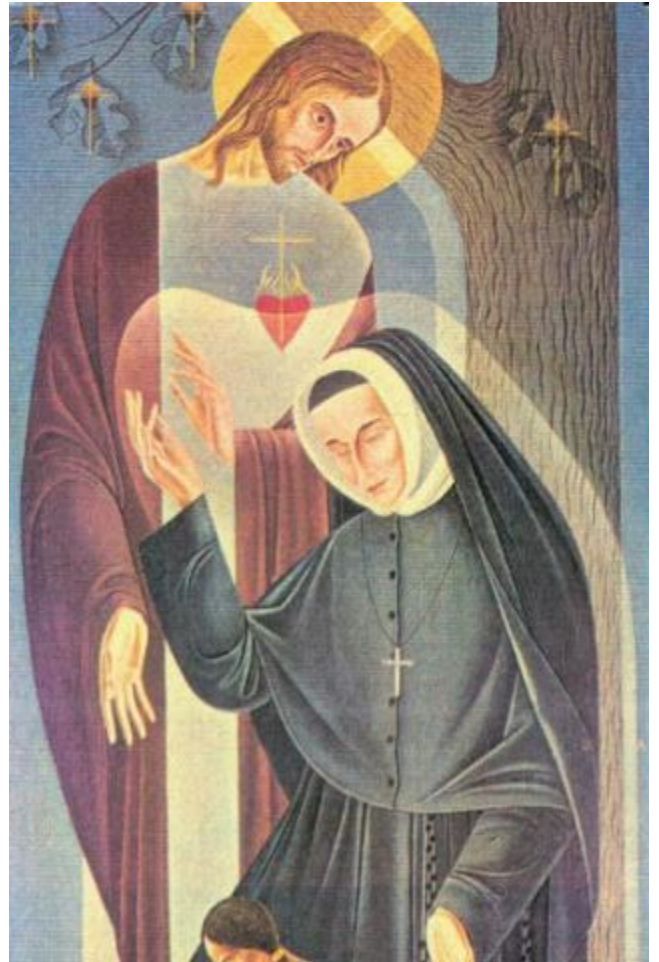
They called her "The Woman Who Always Prays,"
And so she did...
She did not know then, but her life was a prayer.
She did not know then that, like God,
she was great enough to fail.

But she *does* matter, this Woman Who Always
Prays.
Still she treads the wheat fields
Of the America she did not understand;
She understands it now; God understands
even America.

She nurtured the burgeoning harvest,
was the grain of wheat that died.
She, lonely at eighty, walked in solitude.
Toiled at the sparse wheat field when there
was no rain, little seed;
But God was the seed, the rain and the growth
of the wheat in silence.

And this field of the Society, washed by two
oceans, mapped the faith of Philippine;
Believing when there was no rain, little seed,
sparse ground.
Believing that the wheat would spring.
Working for the impossible harvest.

Janet Reberdy, RSCJ
(1923-2008)



St. Rose Philippine Duchesne in painting at
Villa Duchesne/Oak Hill in St. Louis

Heart of Oak

What have we learned from her?

The value of a steadfast purpose;

the success of failure and the

unimportance of our standards of success;

the power of grace released by deep, divine desires and simple duty daily done;

the old, unearthly, stark, unwelcome fact that God is the worker, we the tools, so that God often takes the keen edge of our choice plans and uses it in God's own way, not ours, producing wonderful results entirely beyond our understanding - but only if the handle of the tool is smoothed and rounded to God's hand by sacrifice and prayer.

T. Gavan Duffy, SJ



Iconic image of St. Rose Philippine Duchesne, found in many Sacred Heart schools

Information in this booklet was gathered primarily from Louise Callan rscj – *The Society of the Sacred Heart in the North America and Philippine Duchesne: Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart* and from “Reflections of Philippine” on sofie.org and were arranged in this booklet by Mrs. Jeannie Steenberge, Theology Department Chair, Villa Duchesne / Oakhill School, St. Louis, MO.