

Vision

THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF NEW YORK

VOL. 25, ISSUE 1 *Now in Our Third Century of Living Lives of Love* WINTER 2021



LITANY TO SAINT

Elizabeth Ann Seton

Elizabeth, loving daughter:

encourage in all children obedience and love.

Elizabeth, troubled teenager:

speak to today's confused, sometimes abused young people.

Elizabeth, faithful wife:

grant gifts of love and generosity to all spouses.

Elizabeth, caring mother:

share your mother's heart with all parents.

Elizabeth, grieving widow:

look with compassion on all bereaved wives.

Elizabeth, loyal friend:

teach us to share friendship generously.

Elizabeth, heroic searcher of truth:

guide all who, with fear and doubt, seek the way.

Elizabeth, courageous convert:

strengthen the newly baptized as they embrace the faith.

Elizabeth, sorrowing mother:

console those parents suffering the loss of a child.

Elizabeth, steadfast religious:

inspire young women to follow in your path.

Elizabeth, inspired educator:

share your gifts with all teachers.

Elizabeth, a woman for all women:

bestow your charism of love and service on all women today.

— Sr. M. Irene Fugazy, SC



From the President

Dear Friends,

I am sure that many of you have wondered what a deceased relative or friend would be thinking about a particular issue or situation occurring today. A few weeks ago, while sitting alone in the Board Room at Sisters of Charity Center, I looked up at the beautiful painting of Elizabeth Seton facing me on the wall. Her eyes seem to follow one throughout the room. I found myself staring at her and saying out loud, "SO???" I wondered what she thinks about her beloved Congregation at this unusual and challenging time in our history, 200 years after her death.

I asked Elizabeth whether she thought we were doing a good job of staying safe during the pandemic. I also asked what she thought about our ministerial responses throughout the last two centuries and what she thought of our response to new and emerging needs. Unfortunately, she seemed rather noncommunicative that day, so I suggested that she read this latest issue of *Vision*. I told her that she would be most interested in our donation of her artifacts to her shrine in Emmitsburg (I did get a little smile from her on that one). I directed her to the article about our legacy in Guatemala, and the one about our associates who now share in God's glory with her after living the charism of Charity. I told her that she should read the entire issue and be very proud of her sisters, associates, companions, co-workers, benefactors and friends.

I am awaiting her response. In the meantime, I invite you, too, to enjoy reading this issue of *Vision*.



Blessings,

Sr. Donna Dodge, SC

VISION enables the Sisters of Charity of New York to make a cohesive statement about how we reveal God's love in our lives and the many and varied ways in which we respond to the signs of the times.



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Cover: Paintings by Joseph Dawley; *Hazard Yet Forward* sculpture by Margaret Beaudette, SC

How is it that anyone can say, “I am a citizen of the world”? In her correspondence with Rev. Simon Bruté in 1817, Elizabeth Seton shared her heart’s deep sentiments as she prepared to send Sr. Rose to her beloved City of New York. Lest she be considered preferential in choosing ministry sites for the sisters, Elizabeth noted that “although others might not be aware, I am a citizen of the world.”

As a native New Yorker and daughter of the Physician of the Port of New York, Elizabeth was certainly sensitized to the neediness and the hopes of the numerous indigent immigrants arriving in New York from all over the world.

When Elizabeth married William Seton, she joined the family of an overseas shipping company. Hence, Elizabeth continued to broaden her perspective and awareness of different races and cultures.

Elizabeth’s only journey outside the United States took place when she and her daughter Anna accompanied William to Italy in what turned out to be his journey unto death. The cold, damp, inhospitable lazaretto where they were quarantined was the place where William’s soul “took flight.”

During the four months in Italy, while awaiting passage back to New York, the grieving Elizabeth and her daughter were immersed in the rich culture of the Filicchi family. Language, food and faith were invitations to feeling at home as a global citizen in Italy. Global citizenship presupposes strong interconnectedness at the deep level of culture and spirituality.

During the past decade, and before Covid-19, American colleges and universities have enabled students to spend time abroad. Educators recognize that learning to respect and value diversity and work for the betterment of others are invaluable life experiences. Travel offers students the opportunity to foster language facility, cultural awareness and enduring friendships. During her lifetime, Elizabeth wrote to friends outside the United States. Today, students would use social media to stay connected.

Charism is a special grace from God that can change and adapt according to circumstances and endure over time and spatial distance. The Charism of Charity has accompanied us as



Legacy of Elizabeth: *Be Citizens of the World*

By Sheila Brosnan, SC

a Congregation through our relationship with the people of the Bahamas, Vietnam, Peru, Chile and, currently, Guatemala. Sisters were missioned to each of these areas, and they went with the inspiration and the support of charism. These sisters were often wonderfully surprised because they encountered the Charism of Charity in new and different cultural settings. The legacy of Elizabeth Seton helps us understand that the fullness of charity invites us to be Citizens of the World.

Currently, Sisters Rosenda and Rosita are two Guatemalan Sisters of Charity in final profession, and Sisters Manuela and Margarita are Sisters of Charity in temporary profession. Sisters Gloria De Arteaga, Virginia Searing and Nora Cunningham have each served in Guatemala for many years. Although Covid-19 has limited their activities, the House of Formation in Quiché continues to actively assist young women who are discerning their vocation. The Associate Program is flourishing as dedicated men and women seek membership. The Barbara Ford Peacebuilding Center is revamping its work to serve the people in these difficult times.

Over the years, many sisters, associates, companions, and friends from the states have visited Guatemala. Their time spent there can be summed up in the phrase, “The experience was a life changer!” Indeed, it was a unique opportunity to experience

being a citizen of the world.

Yet travel is not the only way to view our world when we may be restricted by the pandemic or physical or economic limitations. Could it be that the media is bringing us the message of Christ calling out for attention in our world? It may well be that the media is inviting us to listen carefully to the cries of the poor and possibly refocus our prayers and lifestyles to meet some of those needs.

Elizabeth Seton had an expansive, compassionate heart along with an openness of mind that qualified her as a citizen of the world. This is our legacy of Charity.

Sculpture: Hazard Yet Forward by Margaret Beaudette, SC, at Seton Hall University, South Orange, N.J.



The Generations Called Her Blessed

By Mary E. Mc Cormick, SC

There is a familiar that is often used when speaking of family resemblances: “she’s the spittin’ image of,” followed by the name of their nearest and dearest. The actual saying is: “she’s the spirit and image of” the named one.

Elizabeth Ann Bayley was the spirit and image of a host of ancestors whose influence on her contributed to the development of her character, temperament, idealism, and even her physical appearance.

Understand these ancestral influences, and we can understand some of the very things that shaped who she was and, against many odds, who she became.

Elizabeth Ann was a child of three cultures, French, English and Irish.

Both her grandmothers were French Huguenots (Protestants) whose families emigrated from their native country to escape fierce religious persecution. Their families settled in New Rochelle, N.Y., home to many of their relatives and compatriots since at least 1687.

Her paternal grandfather, William Bayley, came from a long-established English family in Hertfordshire, England. In 1726, he immigrated to Fairfield, Conn. He married Susanna Le Conte in 1743, and their son Richard, Elizabeth’s father, was born the next year.

Her maternal grandfather, Richard Charlton, came from a distinguished family in County Longford, Ireland. As an ordained Episcopal minister, he spent much of his life as rector of the Church of St. Andrew on Staten Island. He and his wife, Mary Bayeau, were the parents of Catherine, Elizabeth’s mother.

Richard Bayley and Catherine Charlton were married on January 9, 1767, in St. John’s Episcopal Church, Elizabethtown, N.J.

Their second child, Elizabeth Ann, was born in New York on August 28, 1774.

What did her family of origin bequeath to Elizabeth that contributed to the making of this extraordinary woman?

Although deeply religious and celebrated for their industry and frugality, the Huguenots were also “much given to laughter and song, possessing a fine culture.” (*Laverty*, p. 47) From them, Elizabeth inherited her *joie de vivre*, her love of music—she was an accomplished pianist—and dancing. Her smile, which started in her luminous brown eyes, lighted up any room she was in, her way of making all whom she met feel welcome and at their ease. She spoke excellent French and translated many spiritual works from that language for her community, including passages from the life of Louise de Marillac.

Not as much is known about the English Bayleys, although the impact on Elizabeth of her physician father, whose call to a life of service—especially to the poor and plague-stricken—kindled in her the same aspiration.

And from her Irish grandfather, Richard Charlton, came her love for the poor, especially African Americans in his parish, and her desire to teach them.

Her spirituality, nurtured by both her Huguenot and Episcopalian families, was brought to a deeper and more profound level in the Catholic faith she embraced as a young widow.

It is interesting to note that as she lay dying, a sister from her newly-established community—knowing Elizabeth’s love of French—recited over and over again portions of the *Gloria in Excelsis* and passages from the *Magnificat*.

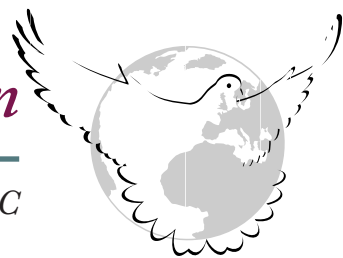
So Elizabeth Bayley Seton went home to God with the language of her Huguenot forebears lingering in her ears: *Je vous salue, Marie... priez pour nous, maintenant, et à l’heure de notre morte. Ainsi soit-il.**

Material taken from *Loom of Many Threads* by Sister Rose Maria Laverty, SC; *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, Annabelle M. Melville.

*Hail Mary, pray for us now and at the hour of our death. Amen
Painting of young Elizabeth Seton by Joseph Dawley.

Prophets and Healers for a Time of Division

By Regina Bechtle, SC



On January 4, 2021 the Sisters of Charity mark the 200th anniversary of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton's entrance into eternal life at a tumultuous time in our nation. We have lived through a historic and contentious election. We are weary from coping with the continuing Covid-19 pandemic and mourning the deaths of more than 300,000 people. We are grieved by continued violence against people of color, by unjust systems that privilege some while oppressing others, and by our often unwitting part in it all.



Courtesy of the Black Ministry Office, Archdiocese of New York

Our mission of Charity calls us in part to “reconcile and bring into unity persons and groups who are alienated and divided.” [SC Constitution, “Our Mission in the Church,” #1.4] These times of alienation and division in our neighborhoods, our nation and our world challenge us to ask “Who do I mean when I say us? Who is included, who is left out?” In a spirit of willingness to learn from others’ experience, we might call upon the wisdom of two heroic persons of color, Venerable Pierre Toussaint (1766–1853) and Servant of God Sister Thea Bowman (1937–1990).

Though Elizabeth Ann Seton called herself “a citizen of the world,” the term probably fit Pierre Toussaint better. He was born into slavery in 1766 on a sugar plantation owned by the wealthy Bérard family in Saint Domingue (today’s Haiti). When a revolution broke out in 1787, the family escaped to New York, where Pierre was apprenticed to a hairdresser. He soon became a *coiffeur* much sought after by New York society women. Though he could have bought his freedom with his wages, as he did for his wife, sister and other relatives, Pierre chose to stay with (and help support) the Bérard family even after their business had failed. On her deathbed, Madame Bérard finally released him from slavery.

After a fire damaged St. Peter’s Church, where Pierre regularly attended Mass, he helped restore it. (Elizabeth Seton was also a parishioner of St. Peter’s from 1805 to 1808, though we have no record that they ever met or spoke.)

Sisters of Charity honor Toussaint as a major benefactor of the Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum (RCOA) in St. Patrick’s parish, which our Sisters staffed from 1817 on. Not only did he collect money for the orphanage (on behalf of Madame LaRue of the RCOA Ladies Association*) as he trimmed the tresses of wealthy clients, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, Pierre also kept meticulous records of donations received and receipts signed by the asylum’s superior or the Association’s secretary. [*The names and contributions of Livingston, Schuyler and Hamilton women are noted in the Ladies Association’s records of the 1830s.]

The genial Pierre with his niece Euphemia became a frequent and welcome visitor to the orphans and a devoted friend to Sr. Elizabeth Boyle, the Superior, and the sisters who ministered there. Without this man who viewed every person with God’s eyes, there is no doubt that our works of charity in New York would not have survived.

Through a severe yellow fever epidemic Pierre stayed in the city and helped to nurse the sick and dying. He also donated funds to help start the Oblate Sisters of Providence in Baltimore, a community of Black women that began on Paca Street. Because of his many charitable activities, many consider him the father of Catholic Charities in New York. [archny.org/ministries-and-offices/cultural-diversity-apostolate/black-ministry/venerable-pierre-toussaint]

Continued, see page 10

Associates We Have Loved ...

By Maureen Reiser, Director of Associates

Those curious about our Associate Program often pose these two questions: what exactly is an associate, and what does an associate do? There are as many ways to answer this question as there are associates! “Referred to us by sisters or other associates, associates respond to their baptismal call to live the Gospel as they live their lives as single, married, divorced or widowed individuals as they work and live within their communities,” is a typical response. For some, this is enough; for others who seek more, we offer more concrete examples of how associates bring their commitment to living the Charism rooted in St. Vincent de Paul, St. Louise de Marillac, and our founder, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton.



Peggy Cekoric became the first lay Director of Associates in 2010.

Three great examples of how associates live out their calling are found in the lives of our most recently deceased associates: Peggy Cekoric, John Keanna and Eilene Bertsch. The Sisters of Charity influenced Peggy Cekoric both in elementary and high school. Her desire to serve was evident in her role as a registered nurse and educator while raising five children. An active participant in meetings and committees, Peggy expressed her deep conviction in areas of social justice. Peggy’s deep spirituality, love of family and commitment to community were visible when Peggy wrote and spoke these words at her initial commitment ceremony in 1991, “I find myself responding to the Gospel much in the way Elizabeth Seton did as wife, mother, and Christian. I especially feel closeness with her in drawing strength from the Eucharist.” Peggy made her lifetime associate commitment in 1998. In 2010 she became the first lay Director of Associates and lived her commitment fully until her death on September 17, 2020.

John Keanna was introduced to the Congregation when he began teaching at the College of Mount Saint Vincent and was deeply moved by their mission. John became an associate in September 2019 and, though he was an associate for too short a time, left an indelible impression upon all. His generosity with his resources spoke to his passion for serving those less fortunate. At his commitment ceremony John stated, “Recognizing that every Christian has a vocation and calling to ministry (we are all put on this earth to serve) I am



John Keanna made his associate commitment in 2019.

very much looking forward to becoming an integral part of the various educational and health-related ministries that incarnate the mission of the Sisters of Charity.” While John never had the opportunity to accomplish all he dreamed of as an associate, he lived his commitment fully until his death on September 27, 2020.



Eilene Bertsch became an associate in 2008.

As is the case with so many of us, Eilene was educated by the Sisters of Charity of New York in elementary school at St. Raymond in the Bronx. The impression the sisters made on Eilene was evident in the work she accomplished throughout her career as a teacher and university administrator in Fairfield, Conn. Eilene first became an associate in 2008. As an associate, she was actively involved in Merton House, a center for those who find themselves homeless; continued to support the Mercy Learning Center, an educational center for immigrant women; and remained actively engaged in mentoring young students at Sacred Heart University.

In her initial commitment statement, Eilene wrote and spoke these words, “I feel very closely associated with the mission of the Sisters of Charity. I will, therefore, make a very conscious connection between what I do and that mission, and I hope, through association with its members, I will both contribute to and be nourished by their passion for its mission.” Eilene Bertsch made her lifetime associate commitment in 2015. She lived that commitment fully until her death on October 19, 2020.

Sister Constance Brennan, Author

By Maryellen Blumlein, SC

When someone thoroughly enjoys spending time with children—teaching them, telling and reading stories, and encouraging their creativity—the best place for them to be is in the classroom. Sr. Constance Brennan spent most of the first fifty years of her religious life in the ministry of education as a teacher, a librarian, an audio-visual coordinator and a catechist.

With a flair for the dramatic and as an excellent storyteller, Sr. Connie had a way of making subjects interesting and enjoyable for her students. In addition to teaching, she was also a writer, an actress and an orator. She worked on scripts and slideshows for the Congregation. As technology advanced, she continued to write and narrate scripts for PowerPoint presentations and other media.

In 2007, Sr. Connie was asked to become the Archivist for the Congregation, a ministry in which she thrived, using all her skills and most significantly, her gift of storytelling. When students visited the Archives, they were delighted by her accounts of the Seton family, the Sisters of Charity, and the accomplishments depicted in the artifacts on display. *Continued, see page 12*



Sr. Connie shared the history of the Sisters of Charity with students from Visitation School in the Bronx in 2012.

Sister Constance Brennan—Teacher, Museum Docent and Archivist

First in a series highlighting the contributions of sister archivists

By Mindy Gordon, Archivist

A Sister of Charity for over 64 years, Sr. Constance Brennan was a librarian for 21 years, an archivist and docent for eight years, and a teacher for her lifetime.

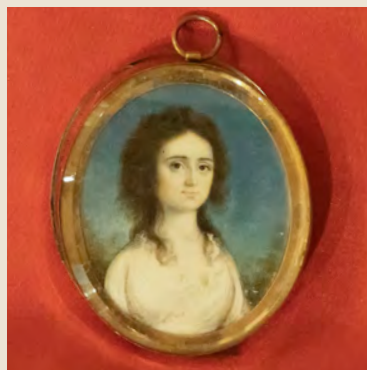
Sr. Constance began her religious ministry in elementary education as a teacher and librarian, an experience which lasted for 33 years at Our Lady of Angels and Visitation in the Bronx, St. Joseph Academy in Manhattan and St. Joseph in Yonkers. At the high school level, she expanded her tutelage as a director of audiovisual media at the Academy of Mount Saint Vincent, Tuxedo Park and St. Gabriel, New Rochelle. Sr. Connie taught library science and media skills at the College of Mount Saint Vincent. She returned to teach the sixth-grade at Visitation School in the Bronx until 2007 when her second career as archivist and museum docent began.

After attending an introductory workshop sponsored by the Catholic Library Association in October 2007, Sr. Connie began her work at the Archives, which continued until her retirement in 2015. When asked to work at the Archives, Sr. Connie embraced the opportunity to delve into the Congregation's history. She composed a memoir of those first days, a time when she regarded herself as a student once again, under the tutelage of Congregation Archivist Sr. Rita King.

"In March 2007 I was a busy elementary school teacher involved with my students. Now, March 2008 finds me a busy archivist involved with my Congregation and in love with archival work. I interned for two summers under a master archivist, Sr. Rita King, who organized a professional growth experience which included time for tours, tasks and reading.

Continued, see page 12

Elizabeth Seton, as performed by Sr. Connie Brennan, and Yankee the Cat made an appearance at the Elizabeth Seton Children's Center in 2012.



Elizabeth Ann

Left: Elizabeth and William's porcelain wedding miniatures

Right: Elizabeth made this christening gown for her daughter Catherine



Above: Elizabeth wore the Seton family brooch on her wedding day.



Left: Elizabeth's portable writing desk

Above: Desk key



Congregation Donates Artifacts of Seton, Bayley and Jevons Families to the National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton

By Mindy Gordon, Archivist

The Sisters of Charity of New York celebrated the opening of the Archives and Museum in 1982 in Elizabeth Boyle Hall, the landmark 19th Century carriage house on the Riverdale campus. The Elizabeth Seton Museum, located on the second floor of the building, has featured exhibits of two distinct in-house collections representing the ministries of the Sisters of Charity of New York and the Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton and Family collection.

The current exhibit, featured since the 2017 Bicentennial of the Congregation, includes items that belonged to Elizabeth Seton before her conversion to Catholicism and during her leadership of the Emmitsburg, Maryland, community of sisters. Many of the items were donated in 1972 by Ferdinand Jevons, the last living descendant of Elizabeth Ann Seton. They include:

- » the hand-painted wedding porcelain miniatures of Elizabeth Ann Seton and husband, William Magee Seton;
- » a gold filigree Seton family brooch worn by Elizabeth on her wedding day;
- » Elizabeth's portable writing desk;
- » the christening gown sewn by Elizabeth for her daughter Catherine;
- » Mother Seton's rosary and crucifix;

» and a tea chest with inlaid decoration that belonged to Elizabeth's father, Dr. Richard Bayley.

Other treasured artifacts are Mother Seton's cap, shawl and belt—the few articles of her clothing that still exist. These were brought to the community upon her death by her close friend, Mother Elizabeth Boyle, the first mother superior of the New York Community.

Sr. Donna Dodge, President, and the Leadership Team: Sisters Margaret O'Brien, Margaret Egan, Sheila Brosnan, Claire E. Regan, Dorothy Metz and Dominica Rocchio, have generously offered to donate these artifacts from the Congregation's Museum to the National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton in Emmitsburg. This decision was made with the greatest consideration and understanding for the significant regard that the New York Community holds for these precious items. Upon accepting this donation, Rob Judge, Executive Director of the Seton Shrine, said he is "honored and overwhelmed by the generosity of the Sisters of Charity of New York."

How to preserve and display these historical items in an environment in which they will be viewed and appreciated was an overriding consideration. Other concerns that helped the Congregation arrive at their decision included:

Seton



Below: Elizabeth's shawl

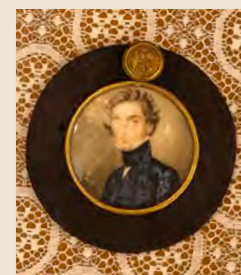


Above: Mother Seton's rosary and (left) crucifix

Right: Dr. Bayley's Tea Chest



Above: Elizabeth's husband, William



Above: Elizabeth's sons Richard (left) and William; note the Navy medal on the frame



Above: Elizabeth's black cap and (left) belt



Sr. Donna Dodge opened the prayer service with a welcome and brief explanation. The service was held prior to the departure of the artifacts from the Mount Saint Vincent campus and is available online at the SCNY website. The transfer of artifacts will occur early in 2021.

In Spring 2021, the Seton Shrine will feature the new exhibit to commemorate the 200th Anniversary of the death of Elizabeth Ann Seton. The Sisters of Charity hope many more visitors will be inspired by the opportunity to view these artifacts as part of the history in Emmitsburg where Elizabeth Ann Seton lived and founded a new community of women religious who continue to serve with dedication and conviction throughout the United States, Canada, and beyond.

- » the age and delicacy of the artifacts require costly conservation measures;
- » a marked diminishment in the number of visitors due to fewer requests from schools and parish groups;
- » and the Museum's second floor location which renders it inaccessible to many.

To mark this event, a virtual prayer service of blessing and sending was prepared by Sr. Regina Bechtle, Sr. Mary McCormick, and SC Associate Christine Gallagher.

Pierre Toussaint was heroic in his ability to see the needs of others, regardless of their color, and to invite others to see them as well. He said, "I have never felt I am a slave to any man or woman but I am a servant of the Almighty God who made us all. When one of his children is in need, I am glad to be His slave." Some today might fault this great-souled, large-hearted man for not confronting the racist society of his time more overtly. But that would be asking of him more than we ask of his white companions, even of Elizabeth Seton.

Closer to our own time, Sr. Thea Bowman (1937–1990), the granddaughter of slaves, was educated by the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Canton, Mississippi. The witness of Catholics who cared for others, especially those in need, inspired her to become a Catholic and eventually to join the congregation which had taught her. She was their only African-American member. Throughout her 52 years of life and in her ministry as an educator, scholar, evangelizer and advocate for justice, she experienced the personal and social effects of racial prejudice. Yet she dedicated herself to sharing the richness of her African-American culture and spirituality.

Sr. Thea became a forthright, joyous force to be reckoned with, an "evangelizer, teacher, writer, and singer sharing the joy of the Gospel and her rich cultural heritage throughout the nation." [www.sistertheabowman.com/biography] After years in education at all levels, she was appointed to direct the Office of Intercultural Affairs for the Diocese of Jackson, Mississippi, where she worked to fight racial prejudice and foster cultural awareness and sensitivity. The Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in New Orleans claims her as a founding faculty member.

In June 1989, already weak from cancer, she addressed a meeting of the U.S. Bishops. From her wheelchair she passionately described what it meant to be African-American and Catholic, how she claimed the Church as her home and kept trying to find her way home. She urged the bishops

to promote inclusivity, to bring African-Americans into Church leadership and to support Catholic schools in African-American communities. Then, in her inimitable way, she invited the bishops to stand together and join their crossed arms while she led them in singing *We Shall Overcome*. Many had tears in their eyes.

One biography described her as "Educator, Missionary Disciple, Advocate for Cultural Awareness and Racial Harmony."

Another stated, "She transcended racism to leave a lasting mark on U.S. Catholic life in the late 20th century." [www.fspa.org/content/about/sister-thea-bowman] "We all need to be reminded," wrote a recent commentator, "of Sr. Thea Bowman's witness and her work—those of us who bear the wounds of racism and those who inflict them." [www.commonwealmagazine.org/i-bring-myself-my-black-self]

Like Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, in difficult times we can rely on our faith in a God of love who desires only what is for our good, and in Christ's promise to remain with us always. Like her, too, we can look to the courage of those who met the challenges of their day and so inspire us to do likewise. As one small step on the road toward racial justice and healing, let us turn to Venerable Pierre Toussaint and Servant of God Sr. Thea Bowman and pray for a share in their prophetic, compassionate, generous and forgiving spirits.



Courtesy of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Canton, Miss.



Sr. Irene Fugazy, "the P.R. girl for a saint"

The Litany to Saint Elizabeth Seton by Sr. Irene Fugazy, SC

In 1991, after decades of ministry in education on all levels, public relations, development and communications, Sister of Charity of New York Sr. Irene Fugazy began a new ministry that was dear to her heart, that of making St. Elizabeth Ann Seton better known and more accessible to the public. Sr. Irene's family called her "the P.R. girl for a saint."

She was passionate about finding ways to present Elizabeth as a saint for all people, especially for women. She encouraged one of our sculptors, Sr. Margaret

Beaudette, to create a statue of Elizabeth Seton as wife and mother. She said, "It doesn't matter whether they're Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim — it doesn't matter. I just wanted people to meet this woman who has so much to give everyone."

Around 1992, Sr. Irene composed the *Litany Prayer* which lifts up every facet of Elizabeth Seton's life, and so connects with the experience of people young and old (*front cover*). The prayer has been translated into Spanish, French, Italian and Korean, and probably several other languages.

Regina Bechtle, SC

Then & Now

SISTERS OF CHARITY ARCHIVES

Elizabeth Seton's New York— 8 State Street

By Mindy Gordon, Archivist

In May 1801, William Magee Seton rented a stately brick house at 8 State Street, formerly occupied by a friend of Dr. Richard Bayley, Elizabeth's father. This move was fortunate but not preferential. Difficult financial circumstances had recently forced the sale of Elizabeth and William's home on Stone Street. Yet the Setons remained within the bounds of recognized gentility in this wealthy neighborhood. The recently constructed houses were on filled-in land facing the Battery. At the time, Elizabeth wrote to her friend Julia Scott, "We move in May to the Battery next door to Carey Ludlow's house [9 State Street] which is now a lodging house...." (1) Their other neighbor, at 7 State Street, was James Watson, a wealthy merchant. He occupied a Federal-style row house built in 1793 and extended in 1806. At this location, merchants William Seton and James Watson chose to live within the New York harbor view in proximity to their shipping interests.

On August 19, 1802, Rebecca, the Setons' last child, was born in the State Street house. One year later, because of bankruptcy, the Setons left their New York home and sailed for Italy on October 2, 1803. The voyage further devastated William's declining health; he died in Pisa on December 27, 1803.

After returning to New York as a widow, Elizabeth lived in New York City until she could no longer support her children. On June 9, 1808, Elizabeth and her three daughters sailed to Baltimore from Battery Park through New York Bay. She reflected upon this melancholy departure in a letter written on January 30, 1809. "I saw once more the windows of State Street...can a heart swell so high and not burst?" (2)

In the early 1960s, the building at 8 State Street was torn down, replaced in

Continued, see page 15



Above: By 1860, a five-story building stood where the Seton's brick home had been.

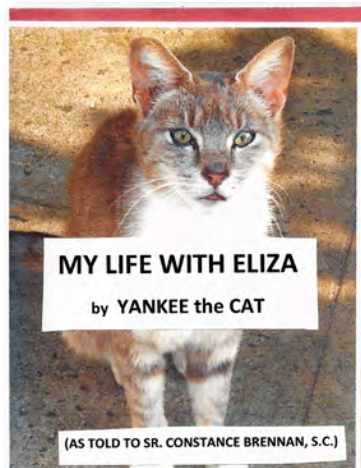
Below: The Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton at 8 State Street, New York City.



Sr. Constance Brennan, Author *Cont'd from page 7*

Since her childhood days, Sr. Connie also loved cats, and it was apparent that they loved her in return. Whether at home or work, Sr. Connie cared for any cat that came to her. One such cat often visited the house next to the Archives and the sisters named him “Yankee.” They fed Yankee and made a small shelter to protect him from the weather. After meals, Yankee always made sure that he could catch a glimpse of Sr. Connie; he would then wander over and sit or stand by her as she engaged in conversation with him.

These visits with Yankee inspired an excellent idea. Sr. Connie envisioned telling Elizabeth Seton’s story to children through the voice of Yankee the Cat, so she decided to write it. Once she finished, Sr. Connie considered having the story published and



made available to school children and other interested readers. Though the project didn’t materialize in her lifetime, Yankee’s tale will soon be told. Here is a brief recap:

As Elizabeth Seton sailed to Italy with her husband William, then in ill health, their eight-year-old daughter Anna found a cat on the ship. She begged her mother to let her keep him, and Elizabeth finally said yes. Yankee stayed with them in Italy, traveled home to New York, and remained with the Seton family throughout their time in the city. When Elizabeth and her children moved to Baltimore, Yankee went with them. And when everyone moved from the house on Paca Street to Emmitsburg, Yankee walked along beside Anna Maria.

The remainder of his tale will soon be available when *My Life with Eliza by Yankee the Cat* will be published on the Congregation website at a later date.

***Sister Constance Brennan—
Teacher, Museum Docent &
Archivist*** *Cont'd from page 7*

“My days were filled with genealogy searches, orphan queries, requests from researchers, quests for long-lost favorite teachers, and questions about great-great aunts who could have been Sisters of Charity. In each request, my mentor, Sr. Rita, was there not to do, but to advise... Is it any wonder that my respect for the archivists that preceded me has grown? ...As our ministries evolved, our sponsored institutions adapt with and for the people they serve, our membership increases or diminishes, it is imperative that our past be preserved, and our present be recorded before it is forgotten in the rush so common in this electronic age.”

In addition to the myriad tasks that comprise the daily activities in the Archives, Sr. Connie became involved in arranging museum displays and conducting tours. Her ability to relate to students of all ages was evident as she directed museum tours for primary and secondary students and the general public. Her enthusiastic presentations inspired many College of Mount Saint

Vincent newcomers, who visited the Archives and Museum in Boyle Hall during campus orientation. Her passion for conveying the story of Elizabeth Ann Seton—as well as her love of cats—inspired Sr. Connie to write a children’s story. *My Life with Eliza by Yankee the Cat* was composed as a guide to instruct

*In March 2007 I was a
busy elementary school teacher
involved with my students.
Now, March 2008 finds me a
busy archivist involved with
my Congregation and in love
with archival work.*

Sr. Connie Brennan

youngsters about the fortitude and religious devotion of Elizabeth Ann Seton.

During her eight-year tenure, Sr. Connie focused upon answering the many reference inquiries for historical information and photographs to assist staff needs and external researchers.

After the release of *Doubt* in 2008, a feature film focused on the dilemma of Sisters of Charity as teachers and caregivers, requests for information about the sisters grew. Community productions of *Doubt* in the metropolitan area led to dozens of appeals for the loan of the traditional Sisters of Charity habit. Sr. Constance responded diligently to these requests, documenting the loan and receipt of textiles, which continued for several years.

While attending Archivists for Congregations of Women Religious (ACWR) meetings, Sr. Connie served on the 2012 conference Scholarship Committee, significant in that the event became the framework for subsequent conferences. Sr. Connie is remembered for her great interest in maintaining the Community’s history by the ACWR archivists, who expressed condolences upon her passing on September 26, 2020.

The numerous projects that Sr. Constance assumed during her involvement as archivist and docent proved the culmination of her extensive experience as a teacher and librarian. Her knowledge and enthusiasm were evident as she embraced this second career with the same dedication that characterized her devotion as a Sister of Charity.



A Family of Faith—The Sisters of Charity & the Donachie Family

By Margaret Donegan, SC

One summer morning in July 1953, the day following the fiftieth wedding anniversary of Jean and Thomas Donachie, passengers crowding onto the local bus, were delighted to discover that the *Daily News* featured the beloved Donachie clan.

St. Barnabas parishioners were excited and proud. Little did they suspect that Sisters of Charity were strongly discouraged from making headlines in the *Daily News* and that Sr. Dolorita Maria, the oldest of the clan, would have a lot of explaining to do at Mount Saint Vincent.

On September 7, 1930, soon after graduating from St. Barnabas High School, Sr. Dolorita Maria entered the Congregation. Over the next 70 years, she ministered as a dedicated educator, group mother, regional superior and librarian. No matter where she served, her gentle presence created a spirit of calm and love.

Sr. Dolorita's presence was never more evident than in the small, busy library at St. Raymond Academy. There, everyone found a welcoming smile. Students who felt ill, particularly on quiz day, liked to recuperate in the library where, much to the chagrin of their teachers, Sr. Dolorita served the ailing students "a nice cup of hot tea." Even delinquents found solace in the library, for as they awaited their fate, Sr. Dolorita offered them words of consolation and comfort despite the stern glare of the principal.

In later years, Sr. Dolorita volunteered her services with the Little Sisters of the Assumption in Harlem. She prepared

Above: (seated) Mr. Thomas Donachie; Mrs. Jean Donachie. Standing, front row: Sr. Dolorita Maria; Sr. Miriam Vincetta; Sr. Jean Miriam; Sr. Mary Bernard; Sr. Marie Thomas, back row: Rev. Bernard; John; Rev. Peter, OFM; Joseph; Emma Donachie Keating

adults for the General Equivalency Diploma, helped them develop skills that eventually led to their employment and visited families who suffered many hardships, listening to their stories and bringing them hope. Upon her death on May 8, 2004, the sisters offered thanks for her prayerfulness and wisdom that enriched the Congregation.

Compassion, humility, wit and love for the poor—qualities inherited from their parents—characterized the five Donachies. Yet, each of the sisters brought her unique spirit to the Sisters of Charity so clearly expressed in the ministry of Sr. Jean Miriam who, on September 7, 1931, at age 16, followed Sr. Dolorita into the Congregation.

In her 59 years of ministry, Sr. Jean, born on December 8, 1914, "smack in the middle of the Donachie clan," served in parishes throughout the Archdiocese of New York, Brooklyn, Queens and in the Bahamas. At one time, she and Sr. Genevieve Brown dreamed of Africa, but the Holy Spirit led them, instead, to Andros. The Androsians were poor, and Sr. Jean was so comfortable living amid their simple lifestyle. She felt at home in their one-room dwellings, where they told her stories of long ago, shared their ice cream and taught her about yams, wild

Continued, see page 14

ones and “tame ones.” She knew what families needed—clothes and food—but she also loved to delight the children with her jar of candy.

Every hardship, Sr. Jean believed, offered an opportunity for ministry, and every inconvenience could be turned into an amusing anecdote. In their “fairly well-furnished home,” they found three bureau drawers with no bureau, a bureau with one drawer missing and one bed that fell apart. Every evening she courageously fought off the mosquitoes and sand flies that visited at sunset. Still, in the light of the graciousness and hospitality of the Androsians, these “pests” could not dampen her spirit.

Above all, Sr. Jean was a poet. In the wonder of creation, in a simple flower or the song of a sparrow, she experienced the mystery of love, and she found words to express her joy in these gifts of God. On November 8, 1990, Sr. Jean woke to the incredible beauty of eternity.

Sr. Miriam Vincetta was the third Donachie to grace the Congregation. Born on October 15, 1916, into a fun-loving family, she soon emerged as the leader of mischief. That might have been the reason she was the favorite babysitter for her younger brothers and sisters, and even the neighborhood children.

Before entering the Congregation on September 7, 1940, she taught at St.

Augustine’s School in the Bronx. At the end of her first year, a happy, breath-taking one with 60 second-grade boys, Sr. Marie Vincetta Leahy, the principal, declared that Miss Donachie was a born teacher. That experience prepared her for the years ahead.

After her first vows, Sr. Vincetta was missioned to St. Patrick School, Prince Street, where she met Sr. Maria Monica McNerney, who, much like Sr. Marie Vincetta, was another model of charity who influenced her life. In 1950, caught by the missionary spirit, she sailed for Nassau, and like Sr. Jean, she found joy ministering among the Bahamians. Six years later, she was back at St. Augustine, then St. Paul’s in Brooklyn, and later St. Athanasius.

It soon became evident that Sr. Vincetta was ill. She underwent cobalt treatment, but even that could not crush her buoyant spirit. Despite her serious diagnosis, on New Year’s Eve, 1963, while staying with Sr. Dolorita, she prepared the traditional simplicity, a simple play which became the highlight of the evening. It was probably her last opportunity to create fun and make others happy.

On April 23, 1964, her suffering over at last, she died surrounded by her sisters and brothers. The Congregation grieved with her family, and very specially with her parents. Her three priest brothers offered her Mass at St. Mary’s Church in Yonkers, and Sr. Vincetta, having

faithfully fulfilled her mission, was laid to rest in St. Raymond Cemetery.

The Donachies welcomed a new daughter, Jean, into their family on November 8, 1923. Like her siblings, she enjoyed happy childhood memories and caught the family spirit of simplicity, love for the poor and sense of humor.

Jean, Sr. Marie Thomas, entered the Congregation on February 2, 1944, and just a few months later, she arrived at Incarnation School. From her earliest days, she was a dedicated teacher who, as noted in her eulogy, had the exceptional gift of showing sensitivity to the shy students who could easily have been overlooked in her crowded classroom.

Later, as principal and superior at Visitation, she welcomed visitors to her office, earning a reputation as a good listener and wise counselor. Similarly, the junior professed Sisters who had monthly meetings at Visitation found Sr. Thomas to be open and supportive as they considered the impact of Vatican II on religious life.

That same spirit followed her to SS. Peter and Paul School in the Bronx, where she ministered for 33 years. Not only was she remembered as an outstanding educator, but as an advocate for the poor and elderly. She visited the Irish senior citizens, the remnant in the parish, and opened her heart to the homeless who came to the convent door.

Continued, see page 16

Information from the
Development Office

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Sister Constance Brennan, SC (*Sister Mary Josita*)

Entered: 1956+ Date of Death: September 26, 2020 + Age: 84

Sr. Constance's ministry spanned all levels of education for 48 years. Her years on the elementary level as teacher and librarian included Our Lady of Angels and Visitation, Bronx, and St. Joseph, Yonkers. She served as librarian, teacher, and director of audio/visual media at the Academy of Mount Saint Vincent, Tuxedo Park, and St. Gabriel, New Rochelle. In 2007, Congregation leadership appointed Sr. Constance as Archivist. She served in religious education for 35 years, teaching children who attended public school. Sr. Constance did not receive a formal assignment to this ministry; her call came from a deep faith and genuine desire for children to know God's love.



Sister Catherine Smith, SC (*Sister Miriam Magdalen*)

Entered: 1937+ Date of Death: October 24, 2020 + Age: 101

Sr. Catherine served in education for 36 years. She taught grade one at St. Paul, Home Economics at Bishop McDonnell High School, both in Brooklyn, and was Principal of Blessed Sacrament High School, Manhattan. She worked with young adults as Director of Grace Institute, Manhattan, and Elizabeth Seton College, Yonkers. She then devoted 13 years to the Congregation's ministry for its retired sisters as Director of Retirement and Assistant Administrator at Convent of Mary the Queen, Yonkers. After 50 years of active full-time ministry, Sr. Catherine volunteered for 21 years at Saint Joseph Medical Center, Yonkers, overseeing the Gift Shop and visiting patients.



Sister Frances Devine, SC (*Sister James Marie*)

Entered: 1939 + Date of Death: October 5, 2020 + Age: 102

Sr. Frances' 65 years of ministry were in education and pastoral ministry. She taught at Cathedral High School in Manhattan for 18 years. She returned to her alma mater, Bishop McDonnell in Brooklyn for one year, and was then assigned to Cardinal Spellman High School in the Bronx for 13 years. She was also Principal of the Academy of the Resurrection in Rye for eight years. After studying theology and spirituality in Berkeley, Ca., she began 25 years of service as a pastoral minister, first at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Shrub Oak, followed by ten years as Outreach Coordinator at Maria Regina Parish, Seaford, Long Island. In 1993, Sr. Frances formed "People of Hope" and "Women of Hope."



Sister, Theresa D. Luciano, SC (*Sister Richard Mary*)

Entered: 1957 + Date of Death: December 1, 2020 + Age: 83

Elementary education was Sr. Theresa's first love and only ministry for 50 years. She taught at St. Agatha Home in Nanuet, where she also served as a group mother for one year, Holy Trinity in Manhattan, St. John the Evangelist in White Plains, her alma mater, St. Mary in Yonkers, and Holy Name, New Rochelle. In 1977, Sr. Theresa began working with the "open classroom" teaching method, a late-seventies and early-eighties teaching innovation. She used this technique when she taught at Blessed Sacrament in the Bronx, and Sacred Heart in Dobbs Ferry. Sr. Theresa taught computer science at Christ the King in Yonkers, St. Matthew in Hastings and then at St. Mary, Yonkers.



Then & Now: 8 State Street

Cont'd from page 11

1964 by the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary. The adjacent former James Watson house, a New York City landmark listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was renovated to become the Rectory of the Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton, named after the first American-born canonized saint. Today, the Shrine is towered over by modern construction.

State Street today approximates the original shoreline prior to landfill expansion. The short street in the Financial District of Manhattan extends from Water Street to Whitehall Street, bordered by Battery Park at its eastern border and terminates at the northeast corner of the park at Bowling Green.

Although a contemporary building, the Shrine church was designed in the Georgian Style to match the adjacent

Watson House, the only extant residence in the area. Both are part of the Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton. The parish shared its mission of hope following the September 11 Tragedy in 2001. Without a resident population, the Shrine is open to commuters, visitors and tourists for prayer.



(1) *Elizabeth Bayley Seton Collected Writings*, ed. Regina Bechtle, SC, and Judith Metz, SC, mss. Ed. Ellin Kelly, 4 vols. (New City Press, 2000–2006), 1:151.

(2) *Ibid.* II:50



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The Donachie Family

Continued from page 14

Even the animals sensed her kindness. She was a friend to the dogs and cats, and the children believed she had a healing touch that could cure their beloved pets. Among her great joys was music, and she willingly shared her talent at any gathering. Her eulogy records that her first novitiate rendition was “Pistol Packing Mama” played to a slow beat, but she soon amended her repertoire, and, in time, she led the hymns at morning Mass.

Sr. Thomas, the last surviving member of the Donachie family, must have missed her brothers and sisters. However, her strong faith sustained her until August 22, 2008, when God called her home to join the Donachie clan.

The youngest member of the Donachies, Sr. Mary Bernard, was born on February 9, 1925. She thrived in her loving family, and, following in the footsteps of her sisters, she graduated from St. Barnabas High School. The next few years found her on Madison Avenue, a stenographer in Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, but on February 2, 1950, she answered the call that tugged at her heart.

As a Sister of Charity, she taught in two elementary schools, and in September 1960, she arrived at Grace Institute. There she was the favorite teacher and ideal Sister of

Charity for the young women in her classes. She was a “sweet-heart,” a student proclaimed, so sensitive, so kind to everyone. You might say she was a true Donachie.

She was missioned to Mount Saint Vincent in 1965. Shortly into that assignment, however, she was diagnosed with a terminal illness. Only two years after the death of Sr. Vincetta, the Donachies and the entire Congregation was shocked by the devastating news. Prayers were offered for her recovery, but after weeks in St. Vincent’s Hospital, it became clear that God had other plans. Soon after the new year, on January 21, 1967, she died, just short of her 42nd birthday. She was buried in St. Raymond Cemetery next to Sr. Vincetta. Many years have passed but memories of Sr. Bernard still linger.

The Donachie family is remembered with great affection by all who knew them. Although each Sister of Charity has her own favorite story, they all agree the Donachies lived humility, simplicity and charity. They blessed the Congregation, and their memory is forever cherished.



The five Donachie Sisters of Charity
(from left to right): Sisters Miriam
Vincetta, Marie Thomas, Dolorita
Maria, Mary Bernard and Jean Miriam