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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The buildings and grounds of the Providence Academy are located on the periphery of downtown Vancouver, Washington. Begun in 1873, the complex was intended to serve as a boarding school, orphanage and headquarters for the Sisters of Charity of the House of Providence. The main building, commonly referred to as the Academy itself, was designed and constructed by Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart. With its series of narrow, floor-to-ceiling windows that open onto three stories of columned, balustraded galleries, the Academy has a certain French colonial flavor. However, its pedimented central pavilion, its giant pilaster order and the symmetry and axiality of its original plan are Georgian in inspiration. The sevenacre site is shared by five additional structures, four of which are historically linked to the operation of the Academy. Following its sale by the Sisters of Providence in 1969, the main building became available for occupancy by shops and offices. The remainder of the grounds are devoted to a variety of uses.

The Site

In choosing a location for the creation of a permanent community in brick and stone, the Sisters of Providence selected a site which commanded a full view of the town of Vancouver and the Columbia River below. On the east the property adjoined the U. S. Army post, established on the hill above old Fort Vancouver in 1849. For many years, only the old West Reserve Highway divided the two institutions. Today these historic open spaces are more emphatically separated by the physical presence of Interstate 5. Evergreen Boulevard, which borders the Academy grounds on the south, is a busy east-west arterial, one of the few in Vancouver that bridges I-5. To the north and west of the Academy are 12th Street and C Street, both providing direct access to Vancouver's central business district. Opposite the rear of the Academy on 12th Street, the most recent commercial development has occurred. On the site of the old St. Joseph's Hospital (built by the Sisters of Providence c.1909 and established by them in 1858 as the first hospital in Washington Territory) stand a new two-story motel and a steak house. Adjacent to the motel on the same block, opposite the Academy grounds, is a modern apartment complex.

Practically and aesthetically, the Academy grounds were once as important as the main building. Not only were there working gardens, orchards, and functional outbuildings such as a laundry and root cellar, but walkways, parterres, and carefully selected trees and plantings gave the entire institution an attractive, park-like setting. Reporting on the formal ceremonies which marked the start of construction on the site, the Catholic Sentinel of September 26, 1873, remarked that the landscaping on the Academy grounds was such that "beauty as well as utility will combine to make the orphan's home a temple of happiness". A large number of locust, cedar and holly trees, as well as flowering bushes, shrubs and vines remain on the property even today. The most important element of formal landscaping which still survives is a heart-shaped drive leading to the Academy's main entrance on Evergreen Boulevard. A substantial expansion of parking areas in recent years as made a major impact on the character of the Academy grounds. Approximately two-thirds of the site is now occupied by paved or gravelled parking lots. Much of this is leased parking, which is filled to capacity during the working week. The remainder is reserved for Academy customers and patrons of a recently-constructed restaurant on the southwest corner of the grounds.

The Academy's Exterior

The Academy building is a three-story, brick masonry structure with a full basement. With its formal facade facing south toward the river, the building was originally cruciform in

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plan. A major west wing addition of 1891, a one-story kitchen extension off the north wing, and a few minor service wing additions have altered the symmetry of that plan over the years. The basement walls and foundations of the Academy are of cut basalt laid in broken courses. The roof is a gently pitched gable, accented by several cross gables and numerous gabled dormers. Presently the building's roof is clad with a combination of standing seam metal and composition shingles. It is possible that the original roofing material used was cedar shingles. At the crossing of the two major wings is an octagonal bell tower framed in wood. Its arched window openings, dentilled entablature and polygonal dome are echoed by the lantern which surmounts it.

The walls of the Academy were laid up in a running bond with locally manufactured bricks. On its major south facade only, the walls are articulated vertically and horizontally with pilasters and corbelled belt courses. Entablatures and pilaster caps of wood further define the roofline. Of particular interest are the Academy's three stories of wooden galleries which line much of the exterior. Supported at ground level on brick piers, these graceful porches feature slender wooden columns and balustraded railings. In the 1930's galleries on the east, west, and portions of the north elevation were removed because of the high cost of maintenance.

The many windows and doors of the Academy building have segmental-arched openings almost exclusively. The lancet windows of the second floor chapel are a notable exception. The windows of the central, pedimented entrance bay on the south facade are topped with corbelled brick hood moulds and ornamented with keystones and acanthus scrolls. As a rule, wooden window sash with four over four lights remain intact all over the building. Many of the Academy's doors, including that of the formal south entryway, have been replaced or altered over the years to meet changing standards.

The Academy's Interior

The first floor of the Academy is now wholly occupied by shops and offices. A small restaurant is in operation, and the music hall or auditorium, located in the 1891 west wing, is available for group rental. The narrow hallways of the first floor are partially lined with built-in student lockers - continuous rows of panelled wooden doors. Originally these surfaces (as well as the doors, wainscotting, enframements and other elements of woodwork throughout the building) were grained in an interesting variety of patterns. Here, and elsewhere on the second floor, much of this woodwork has been recently painted over. Other alterations on the first floor to accommodate shops and offices have been minimal. To a large extent, spaces have been retained as originally partitioned; however, within each office or shop space individual decorative schemes have been carried out. In some cases this has involved removal of the original plaster to expose brick wall surfaces.

Connecting the first through third stories is an unsupported, winding wooden staircase located in the central crossing. The second floor of the Academy contains a wide hallway and additional classrooms. Renovation on this floor is essentially complete and offices are being leased. The work was limited chiefly to the refinishing and polishing of

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hardwood floors, and the painting of walls and woodwork. Also located on the second floor is the Academy's most ornamental and most interesting space - the Chapel. The room extends a full two and one-half stories in height and was executed lavishly in the Gothic tradition. The wooden alterpieces and statues which once adorned the apse and flanking niches were said to have been carved by Mother Joseph in her basement workshop. These and many other elements of Gothic ornament were removed from the chapel by the Sisters when the Academy closed in 1966. There is evidence that the color scheme in the room has changed several times, but that the paint colors originally applied were rich and varied. Presently the chapel stands empty and deteriorating.

On the third floor of the Academy were dormitories for the boarding students, as well as additional classroom space. The boys' quarters were situated behind the chapel in the north wing, considerably separated from the girls' dorm in the west wing. No renovation as yet has taken place on the third floor.

The Sisters quarters were located on the fourth floor, essentially an attic space. Storage areas were also situated at this level. In the stone basement of the Academy building were workshops, Mother Joseph's in particular, and fuel storage rooms.

Outbuildings on the Academy Grounds

Documents precisely identifying the location and function of outbuildings which existed at various times on the Academy grounds have not yet come to light. A French site plan (somewhat illegible) of uncertain date shows a total of fourteen dependencies. Those that remain standing today are located generally northeast of the Academy building and include:

1. Laundry - 1870's (?)

CONTINUATION SHEET

The laundry is a two-story brick masonry structure designed in close keeping with the architecture of the Academy itself. Once outfitted with a steam engine, laundry and ironing facilities, the building also housed the hired male help on the second floor.

2. Boiler House - c.1910

The boiler house is appended to the east side of the laundry. The small one-story structu with its polygonal smokestack is as much an Academy landmark as the bell tower. The building's brickwork is one of its most interesting features, and includes elaborate corbelling and herringbone patterns. The original equipment remains intact on the interio the boiler dated 1910.

3. Well House - 1870's (?)

The well house is an octagonal frame structure located just north of the laundry building. The water tower (and possibly a windmill) have been removed. The well provided the Academy water supply into the 1960's.

4. Gymnasium - 1930's This one story and basement structure, just east of the main building has served as both a kindergarten and a gymnasium. It is presently leased to the Skinner Montessori School,

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and is enclosed along with a surrounding play area by a cyclone fence.

5. Century House Restaurant - 1976

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This recently-constructed commercial building is located directly in front of the Academy's eastwing on Evergreen Boulevard. The restaurant faces west toward C Street and is fronted by a paved parking lot. An effort was made to create a building that is architecturally compatible, by using Hidden brick and fenestration identical to that of the Academy.



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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Providence Academy in Vancouver, Washington is one of the most significant pieces of historic architecture in the Northwest. Completed in 1874, the Academy is the earliest remaining example of many charitable institutions built throughout the region by Mother Joseph of the Sisters of Providence. The Sisters arrived in the small settlement of Vancouver in 1856. They were one of the first religious orders to permanently establish themselves in the vast territory of Washington. Their contributions in the areas of health care, education and social work have a continuing impact on the welfare of the northwest even today. The Providence Academy is a substantial brick building executed in a pleasing Colonial-based design. Mother Joseph's talents as an architect and builder are readily apparent here, in the Sisters' first permanent headquarters in the northwest.

The Mission Begins

The Sisters of Charity of the House of Providence were called to the new territory by Bishop A. M. A. Blanchet, of the diocese of Nisqually. On November 3, 1856, three professe sisters and two postulants left their Mother House in Montreal for a mission on the far side of the continent. The nuns experienced a month-long voyage from New York to San Francisco, via the Isthmus of Panama. The vessel battled severe storms from San Francisco to Astoria, but on the evening of December 7 made a safe passage across the dangerous bar into the mouth of the Columbia River. The missionaries set foot on the shore at Fort Vancouver the following day, where they were temporarily housed in the attic of an old barracks.

In the mid-1850's, Vancouver was a settlement of some 500 white people. Hudson's Bay Company employees, two companies of soldiers, and a handful of American and French-Canadiar families lived in the area, in addition to a small village of Indians situated on the river bank. Amongst this colorful group of pioneers the Sisters set to work. By February, 1857, Mother Joseph had fashioned a small frame house to serve as a convent and temporary chapel. It was soon converted to a school, and modest cabins were erected to house boarding students, orphans, and the elderly. The activities of the Sisters expanded to include nursing the sick and caring for the mentally disabled.

Approached by the local citizenry in 1858, Mother Joseph opened St. Joseph's Hospital in one of the sisterhoods' frame structures. (This non-sectarian community hospital remains in operation today with modern facilities). In 1860, when old Fort Vancouver was abandoned Mother Joseph gained permission to salvage the sound lumber from vacant Hudson's Bay Compar structures for use in her building projects. By 1863, the Providence community had grown to include seven frame buildings. But it was not long until these facilities were overcrowded, and Mother Joseph's skills in design and construction were focused on a magnificent new project.

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(continued on attached sheet)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 7 ACTES



VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property is bounded on the north by 12th Street, on the south by Evergreen Boulevard, on the east by Reserve Street, and on the west by C Street.

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Florence K. Lentz, Histor	ric Preservati	on Specialist	
ORGANIZATION			DATE
Office of Archaeology and	<u>d Historic Pre</u>	eservation	January, 1978
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Mother Joseph - Early Northwest Architect

CONTINUATION SHEET

Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart (born Esther Pariseau in the province of Quebec in 1823) was the daughter of a French-Canadian carriage-maker. In her childhood she became familiar with her father's tools and proficient in carpentry and woodworking. Although she was highly competent in a variety of domestic crafts, Mother Joseph's ability to plan and build might be considered her most useful contribution to the work of the sisterhood in the early northwest.

For 46 years she supervised the establishment and construction of hospitals, schools and homes in the states of Washington, Montana, Idaho and Oregon. Mother Joseph is remembered as a perfectionist who, whenever possible, stuck close to the construction site directing, inspecting, and occasionally re-doing the work of a shoddy craftsman. In 1953 the American Institute of Architects acclaimed this remarkable woman as the first architect in the Pacific Northwest. The West Coast Lumbermen's Association honored her as the first non-native northwestern artist to work in the medium of wood. Most recently, the Washington State Legislature signed a bill selecting Mother Joseph for representation at Statuary Hall in Washington, D.C.

At the time of her death in 1902, the superior general Mother Mary Antoinette wrote of Mother Joseph in a letter to the community:

God had endowed her with talents rarely found in a woman. She excelled not only in the feminine arts, from the most ordinary to the finest, but she was also skilled in works considered the domain of men.

She had the characteristics of genius: incessant works, immense sacrifices, great undertakings; and she never counted the cost to self. She exercized an extraordinary influence in the Church of the West.

The Academy is Built

As the scattered frame buildings of "Providence Suburb" in Vancouver became increasingly inadequate, the Sisters began to envision a massive brick structure to house their numerous activities. During the 1860's property was purchased, and plans were laid out for a combined convent-orphanage-school, with a bakery, laundry, stables, boot factory and woolen factory as proposed dependencies. The <u>Vancouver Register</u> of March 9, 1867 stated that the building would be the largest in Washington Territory, and on September 14 asserted that it "will be the largest building on the northern coast, the Court House in Portland or the Willamette University not excepted".

In September of 1873, Mother Joseph's vision at last began to materialize. The cornerstone ceremony took place on the 21st of that month, with the Bishop Blanchet of Nisqually presiding. Seven blocks from the construction site was the brickyard of Lowell M. Hidden

CONTINUATION SHEET

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who was contracted to supply the brick for the Academy. Hidden had arrived in Vancouver in 1864 via California, and according to family record, was urged to enter the brick business by Mother Joseph herself. The Hidden Brick Company remains a prominent Vancouver business even today. Funds for the Academy project were for the most part solicited by the nuns in the mining and lumbering camps of Washington, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and British Columbia. During her long career, Mother Joseph led many a begging expedition into remote corners of the wilderness to finance the continuing works of the sisterhood.

The Academy opened its doors to students in September of 1874. Much remained unfinished, but gradually the nuns acquired funds to complete the building. Initially the Academy was cruciform in plan, with one wing reserved for boarders and day students, one for orphan girls and a third for orphan boys. The building was extolled as a model of health and safety, with modern facilities for baths and laundry, and systems for heat and ventilation. A two and one-half story Gothic style chapel located on the second floor of the Academy is its most impressive interior space. The chapel was not complete until January of 1883. Its decoration was carried out under the direction of an architect by the name of McKay (Vancouver Independent, early 1882), although Mother Joseph is credited with the carving of the five altars, some of the statues and pews, and much of the Gothic ornament. In 1891, a large west wing including the first floor auditorium, was constructed. It is generally believed that Mother Joseph was absent during that time, and that upon her return she was most disapproving of this asymmetrical addition to her clasically symmetrical building.

The Academy grounds were an integral part of the institution in terms of design and function. From the beginning, the seven-acre site was laid off in garden plots, walks and parterres. As their funds permitted, the Sisters erected a variety of brick and frame outbuildings which contributed to the school's self-sufficiency.

A barn, a stone root cellar, and a print shop (the original convent and schoolhouse) were removed over the years along with most of the early outbuildings. The laundry, the power house, and the octagonal wellhouse remain intact. A masonry structure built in the 1930's and used for a kindergarten and gymnasium is also extant.

A History of Changing Uses

When the Academy began operations in 1874, it admitted both male and female orphans, as well as female day and boarding students. Fees for each quarter included: entrance, \$5; board and tuition, \$40; laundry, \$8; bed and bedding, \$2; French, \$3; piano, \$15. Day school charges were: \$4 for the elementary level, \$6 for the intermediate, and \$8 for secondary instruction. The Sisters emphasized not only the "basics", but also offered vocal and instrumental music, drawing and needlework.

Until well into the present century the Academy continued to serve in its full capacity as school, orphanage and headquarters for the sisterhood. Gradually, however, these functions were assumed by other institutions. In 1916-1917, the orphanage was phased out. The novitiate and Provincial Administration were relocated in Seattle in 1924. During World

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War II, the Academy's attendance increased as Vancouver's population expanded with shipyar and factory workers. In the 1950's, both the grade school and boarding school were discontinued as parish schools were constructed in the surrounding area. Providence remained in operation as a girls' academy until 1966 when the last class of 28 students graduated.

For three years the dignified old building sat vacant, trespassed by vandals and pigeons. When demolition appeared imminent, the property was purchased by descendents of Lowell Hidden the brickmaker. Shops and offices now occupy much of the building, and will increase in number as the upper stories are renovated. A restaurant leases the Academy's old kitchen facility, and a Montessori School is housed in the gymnasium building. Present ly, most of the historic grounds have been turned into parking lots, and a modern restaurant has been constructed in front of the Academy's west wing. Although it has lost a certain degree of historic integrity in the process, Providence Academy has been saved from extinction by a new and economically viable reuse.

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