



Mother Joseph

Given by Washington to the National Statuary Hall Collection

ON APRIL 16, 1823, ESTHER PARISEAU was born in St. Elzear near Montreal, Canada. At the age of 20, when she entered the Sisters of Charity of Providence in Montreal, her carriage-maker father remarked, "I bring you my daughter, Esther, who wishes to dedicate herself to the religious life. She can read, write, figure accurately, sew, cook, spin and do all manner of housework. She can even do carpentering, handling a hammer and saw as well as her father. She can also plan for others and she succeeds in anything she undertakes. I assure you, Madam, she will make a good superior some day."

In 1856 Mother Joseph was chosen to lead a group of five missionaries to the Pacific Northwest Territories of the United States. There she was responsible for the completion of eleven hospitals, seven academies, five Indian schools, and two orphanages throughout an area that today encompasses Washington, northern Oregon, Idaho, and Montana. An architect and artist, she was actually responsible for designing the buildings, supervising their construction, and fund raising. Each of her "begging tours" into mining camps lasted several months and raised between \$2,000 and \$5,000 toward the realization of her goal. A stickler for detail, Mother Joseph often inspected rafters and bounced on planks to insure their support.

Mother Joseph died of a brain tumor in 1902, leaving a legacy of humanitarian service. In 1953 the American Institute of Architects declared Mother Joseph "The First Architect of the Pacific Northwest."



Bronze by Felix W. de Weldon

Given in 1980; located in CVC Emancipation Hall.

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