

# Echoing the pioneer past

*USD foundress emulated St. Duchesne's devotion to education.*

When Philippine Duchesne kissed the soil as she stepped ashore in New Orleans in 1818 to begin the arduous task of establishing Religious of the Sacred Heart-run schools in the New World, she symbolically opened a bold new chapter in the order's history — the first strides in an expansion effort that later led to the society's presence throughout North America, New Zealand and Australia.

Mother Duchesne's efforts also provided inspiration for those of her order who followed. Despite frontier condi-

tions, a lack of funds and supplies, and strong feelings of her own inadequacy, she persevered in her devotion to the cause of education. With help from Sacred Heart headquarters in France and the generosity of individuals in this country, the tall French nun established the first free school west of the Mississippi in St. Charles, Missouri. She later opened schools in Florissant, St. Louis, Louisiana and Kansas.

More than a century later, in the post-World War II period, another farsighted Religious of the Sacred Heart had just moved to San Diego and was about to emulate Mother Duchesne's example.

That nun, Mother Rosalie Clifton Hill, a descendant of two old American families that counted Declaration of Independence signer Charles Carroll and George Washington's friend Daniel Carroll on its family tree, completed the initial planning and designed the first buildings for the major university USD has evolved into during the past four decades.

Born on March 13, 1879 in Washington, D.C., Hill was introduced to building design by her maternal grandmother, who taught young Rosalie how to plan houses and rooms using quadrille grid paper, cut and placed in the desired



*The American Parlor in Founders Hall reflects Mother Hill's desire to create not only efficient but beautiful decor. Here she visits with Anne McGowan '61 and Rosalie Parkham in 1957.*





Mother Hill (second from right) and Bishop Charles Buddy (center front) were among the contingent gathered December 16, 1949 for the College for Women's groundbreaking.

positions. Mother Hill used this art and perfected it later when she undertook the design of the San Diego College for Women.

In 1907, 28-year-old Rosalie Hill made her final profession as a Religious of the Sacred Heart. She served as principal of the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Boston in 1916, counting Rose Fitzgerald — soon to become Mrs. Joseph Kennedy — among her students. After serving in other administrative posts in the East, she moved west to Chicago in 1929 when she was appointed vicar of the order's western region.

That position presented Mother Hill with her first opportunity to build a college. For she soon involved herself in the plans to build the San Francisco College for Women, later to evolve into the University of San Francisco.

In the 1930s Mother Hill decided to move the seat of the vicariate from

Chicago to San Francisco, enabling her to involve herself more extensively in the college's formation. It was while she was in the midst of that project that the newly consecrated Bishop of San Diego, Charles Buddy, first approached her about coming to San Diego.

"Someday," the bishop said during his visit, "I will ask the Religious of the Sacred Heart to come to San Diego to help me with the work of education." That remark turned into a formal request in July, 1942, when Bishop Buddy invited Mother Hill in a letter to inaugurate a college for women in San Diego.

While Mother Hill expressed immediate interest in the bishop's proposal, it wasn't until August, 1945, that the bishop, Mother Hill and a few of her colleagues found a site suitable for a college. Mother Hill described the site:

*"It is called the Pueblo Lands . . .*

*Here in Linda Vista Heights . . . the bishop has purchased a long mountain ridge, the plateau of which is more than 100 acres. Here the bishop plans to erect his diocesan seminary (and) to build a college and a school for boys."*

The bishop offered, and Mother Hill accepted on behalf of her society, "15 acres of land, on any portion of the hill" for "a college and an academy for girls." The offer later was increased to 22 acres and confirmed on November 29, 1945.

In 1946 Mother Hill and six members of her society took up residence at St. Madeleine Sophie's Convent in Old Town to plan for the new college. Mother Hill soon decided the design should be an adaption of Spanish Renaissance architecture, which allowed for freedom of expression and many possible variations within a true unity of design.

During the next five years she con-

centrated on drawing plans for the college buildings. Assisted by Mother de Leon, Mother Hill worked for hours at a large table in her office with a stack of quadrille paper, cut to various sizes, which she used to locate buildings, rooms and hallways as she envisioned them. Then she drew blueprints to scale.

In her "History of the San Diego College for Women," the late Sr. Aimee Rossi describes the concepts Mother Hill kept in mind while designing the first buildings:

*"Her basic idea was that although usefulness and efficiency must always prevail they should not overcloud the aspect of beauty. She held that it was no more expensive to build something beautiful than something ugly. It was, she said, a matter of having an overall plan, choosing the right details and their relationships, and harmonizing them. Moreover, she reiterated, the Church had always sought goodness, truth and beauty, and that was her objective."*

In late 1946 Bishop Buddy and Mother Hill chose Frank Hope Sr. as the architect for the first building, the San Diego College for Women — better known today as Founders Hall and Camino Hall. Ground-breaking ceremonies took place May 1, 1948 as a group of local civic and religious leaders looked on.

When completed in early 1952, the college consisted of two quadrangular two-story buildings, a chapel, a 1,000-seat theater and a rear building containing the kitchen and dining room facilities. The first floor of the west quadrangle contained classrooms, a radio studio, language laboratory, and the library, with an extension to the rear for art and music studios. A lower floor was planned to house the science laboratories and theater storage area.

The second rectangular facility included administrative offices, parlors and some residential facilities.

The cost? About \$3 million.

Registration for the first students was scheduled for February 9, 1952, with classes to begin on February 11. Although construction was not completely finished, 50 women enrolled, pleasing Mother Hill and her colleagues.

The faculty, although small in numbers, brought with them a Sacred Heart trademark — excellent academic cre-

dentials. Some of the first professors included Mothers Catherine Parks, Ph.D., U.C. Berkeley; Mariella Bremner, Ph.D., Loyola University, Chicago; Mother Rossi, Ph.D., Stanford University; Agnes Murphy, Ph.D., Catholic University; Alicia Sarre, Ph.D., Stanford University; Frances Danz, Ph.D., Stanford; Irene Lawrence, Ph.D., Stanford and Bernice Farrens, Ph.D., Stanford.

They were joined in the fall by Mothers Agnes Schmidt, Ph.D., Stanford, Margaret Guest, Ph.D., U.C. Berkeley; Sally Furay, Ph.D., Stanford; and Lucille Kraemer, M.A., Stanford.

So the college that existed only on quadrille paper less than five years earlier was well on its way to success.

Mother Hill's influence continued to shape the College for Women's growth, and even after her retirement as superior vicar of the San Diego Sacred Heart community in 1961, the well loved and respected nun continued to reside at

Alcalá Park until her death on December 12, 1964.

Perhaps longtime San Diego newspaper editor Eileen Jackson summed up Mother Hill's legacy best when she wrote about the brand-new college in the June 7, 1952 *San Diego Union*:

*"(The structure) is as modern as tomorrow with its science halls, 300 blue tile powder rooms, its TV, radio and art studios, its tiled soda fountains, and yet as mellowed as a 400-year-old Spanish building."*

In the years ahead, the Sacred Heart influence was to continue to play an integral role in shaping USD's identity. □

*(Coming in the next issue: the Sacred Heart influence at USD today. Special thanks to Dr. Iris Engstrand, professor of history, and Clare White '80, for sharing research from their upcoming history of USD.)*

## St. Duchesne to be honored Nov. 19

Just who was Philippine Duchesne, elevated to sainthood in July by Pope John Paul II?

She was born in 1769 in Grenoble, France, thrust into a society in the midst of a turmoil that boiled over some 20 years later into the radical changes wrought by the decade-long French Revolution.

Growing up surrounded by social upheaval undoubtedly influenced St. Duchesne's life. But few of her contemporaries likely would have guessed at the brave pioneer she was to become during adulthood.

For in a period during which women generally were raised to become wives and mothers, St. Duchesne not only spent 11 years ministering to the poor, the sick and prisoners of the Revolution, she also joined a four-year-old religious order — the Religious of the Sacred Heart. She volunteered to go to America early in the 19th century, hoping to do mission work among the Indians.

And although she was not to work among the Indians until late in her life, St. Duchesne devoted much of her 34 years in the United States to education, establishing the first free school west of



St. Philippine Duchesne

the Mississippi, opening schools in Florissant, St. Charles, Grand Coteau, St. Louis and New Orleans. It was a foundation from which her order extended itself throughout Northern America, New Zealand and Australia.

Sacred Heart alumni from throughout the western United States will gather at USD on November 19 to honor St. Duchesne. A full day of activities is planned, including a lecture on the saint's life, a liturgy and a reception. More information is available from Sr. Annette Schmeling, (619) 260-4590.