



Sister's 1934 distinction being recognized now

Julia Bourg, then a doctoral candidate in biophysics at the University of Michigan, arrived at the IHM Archives in April 2016, on a mission. She had been doing a personal research project to identify and then acknowledge the first 25 women to receive doctorates in physics at the Ann Arbor campus.



Her study led her to IHM Sister Ambrosia Fitzgerald.

Born Elizabeth Catherine on July 9, 1906, in Jackson, MI, Sister entered the IHM community on July 1, 1924. The congregation sent her as a postulant to the University of Michigan where she earned a bachelor of science degree in 1928. Two months later she was received by the congregation and given

the name M. Ambrosia. But the studying did not end there. Sister Ambrosia returned to UM for a master's degree in 1931 and she earned a Ph.D in physics in 1934.

Eighty years later, Julia Bourg became intrigued by the women pioneers in her field at UM. She researched master's degrees and doctorates in physics from 1894 to 1940. Of 544 granted in all, only 25 went to women and Sister Ambrosia earned two of those! Dr. Bourg said Sister was only the fourth woman overall to get a Ph.D in physics at UM and was the first religious Sister to do so.

Fast-forward two years and Dr. Bourg has graduated and now is working in Washington state. But her project was taken up by the Society for Women in Physics at the University of Michigan. A recent



e-mail from Enrique Gamez picks up the story: "We are now trying to commission posters to be hung in UM's Physics Department recognizing the trailblazing woman physicists who studied here in the early 20th century," he wrote, adding, "We hope they'll be inspirational to new generations of students at the University."

Sister Ambrosia's photo will be among those remembered for getting there first and leaving a path for others to follow.

Final note: Sister Letitia O'Connell, a longtime friend,

told Dr. Bourg that during the war years, while teaching at Marygrove and St. Mary's Academy, Sister Ambrosia traveled back and forth to the University of Chicago on weekends where she and other "human computers" worked out intensive math and physics equations. They discovered years later that they had been working on calculations for the Manhattan Project. Sister spent her career in education and when she was given the Distinguished Service Award by the Metropolitan Detroit Science Teachers Association in 1970 they gave her the title "The Indomitable One." She died May 20, 1971.

*From the Archives:**Saint Mary Postulate**Sisters I. H. M., Monroe, Michigan*

WARDROBE LIST

- 2 regulation uniforms - \$30.00
- 3 black ties
- ✓ 3 black silk or rayon slips ✓
- ✓ 4 cotton knit sleeveless shirts ✓
- ✓ 4 pair cotton panties ✓
- ✓ 3 nightgowns, long sleeves
- ✓ 3 aprons containing 2 widths of gingham, made 1 inch from the floor, and having a 1 inch hem.
- ✓ 4 towels and 4 washcloths (large size)
- Necessary toilet articles
- 1 dozen large handkerchiefs
- ✓ 2 pair oxfords (military or cuban heel) ✓
- ✓ 1 pair rubbers ✓
- ✓ 3 girdles ✓
- ✓ 4 brassieres ✓
- ✓ 4 pair black lisle stockings
- 1 bathrobe
- ✓ 1 pair bedroom slippers ✓
- 1 laundry bag
- ✓ 2 lozen sanitary napkins (not Kotex)
- ✓ 1 slack umbrella
- 1 black suitcase (medium size)
- ✓ Furnishings for sewing box
- ✓ 1 woolen blanket

Washproof Name Tapes may be procured from Acme Name Tapes, 791 - 6th Avenue, New York 1, N. Y. The price is 60 cents for 100 names.

Garments marked on button side; towels and handkerchiefs on corner.

Place hanger on corner of towels and washcloths.

- Kindly bring: ✓ 1. Daily Missal
 ✓ 2. Baptismal Certificate
 ✓ 3. Confirmation Certificate
 ✓ 4. Letter of recommendation from Confessor or Pastor.

Conferences focus on the future

By Jennifer Meacham, IHM Archivist

This summer I had the opportunity to attend my first two conferences as a professional archivist. The first at Boston College was an assembly of archivists, historians, and congregational leaders who came together to discuss the varied needs of Catholic religious archives, both now and in the future. It was an eye-opening introduction to the growing number of congregations whose declining numbers and diminishing resources have led to difficult but important decisions about the fates of their archival collections, including mergers and large-scale transfers of ownership.

The second conference was the triennial meeting of the Archivists for Congregations of Women Religious (ACWR) recently convened in Louisville, Kentucky. Here the emphasis was on what more we can do to share our archival collections with a larger, even global, audience – and why that is so vital. We do not save the records of the past merely to recall what was, but rather for the sake of what is to come. The IHM Congregation's influence on the past is, I believe, well documented. My role, perhaps even my mission, is to gather and organize both the past and the *ongoing* story of the IHM Sisters through preservation, access, and promotion of our collection so that the impact of that legacy may be felt well into the future.

My experiences at these two gatherings were positive and humbling. I was welcomed into a society that values its contributions and embraces the challenges ahead. I know my connection to their community will only benefit my work for yours.



Summer for IHM sisters was always a much-anticipated chance to come home to the Motherhouse and catch up with one another. The green benches scattered around the beautiful grounds were one of the favorite gathering spots. In this photo from August 1973, this bench was claimed by classmates (from left to right) Sisters Mary McDevitt; Marion Shea; Carolyn Campbell; Madeleine Sophie Weber, and Laura Hardage.

First 'Mystery Photo' solved with IDs, background



The Class of 1960 history majors are seen here during a visit with Mayor Jerome Cavanagh in Detroit. The trip was arranged by Police Sgt. Paul Sheridan, father of Colleen Sheridan, IHM. The visit occurred before the 1967 unrest that convulsed Detroit for years after. This is a photo that was displayed at the August Campus Update when the Archives asked Sisters if they could identify the people and explain the context. Thanks to all who contributed names and information! Here are the names:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1) Barbara (Monica Marie) Gazella | 8) Mystery gentleman |
| 2) Colleen Sheridan | 9) Mary Jo Maher |
| 3) Carol (Maurilla) McPharlin | 10) Mary (Mary Stephen) King |
| 4) Karen Valleau | 11) Marie Ursula Posjena |
| 5) Rebecca Vonderhaar | 12) Barbara (Marie Felice) Parpart |
| 6) Karen Marie DeBusscher | 13) Judith (Norma Jean) Kaiser |
| 7) Patricia (Patrick Ann) Slosar | 14) Margaret (Thomas Louise) Child |



A recent request had us pulling out our collection of memorabilia and photos from Immaculata High School, Detroit, such as the blue and white banner (left). Here are some IHM IHS facts:

- Opened in 1941; closed in 1983
- 226 IHM Sisters served there
- Positions included teachers, administrators, counselor, attendance, bookstore, food service, business office, receptionist
- Longest tenure: Sister Mary Ignace Koehler, 1959-77, religion/chemistry
- Famous peanut butter cookies? Sister Verda Sauer made those!

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Since 2000, all IHM sisters have been encouraged to submit individual chronicles to the IHM Archives. These records about your own life and ministry over the course of a year or more add breadth and depth to the documented history of the IHM Sisters. Your contribution will enrich the future record of the IHM, so please be sure your life's story is included in the community's story.

Facebook favorites: Most popular recent Archives post



In July, 92 years ago, Mother Domitilla Donohue and Sister Miriam Raymo were looking to expand the congregation's farmland to meet the needs of expansion. The number of Sisters

was increasing and the opening of Marygrove College was on the horizon.

Four days later, on July 30, 1926, they purchased 157 acres and a

"good dwelling House" from Jacob Newcomer.

The next day they purchased Fred Humphrey's farm of 276 acres, "a fine House and a \$1000 tile Silo not yet erected." Along with the farm, the Sisters took in 22 cows, 56 sheep, 30 hogs, 1,500 bushels of oats, and 60 acres of corn still on the stalks.

The Sisters eventually held more than 900 acres and provided meat, poultry, dairy products, fruits and vegetables for about 3,000 people a day, including the Sisters, their students and people in need. They operated these farms on N. Custer Rd. for more than 50 years.

In this photo, Sister Cyrilla (Marion) Farrell (center) joins her Sisters in trying to keep a herd of sheep moving. (Detroit Times photo)