

**Robert Was First Student at North American College**

**The Grandsons of Mother Seton**

Mother Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton, who is scheduled on Sept. 14 to be the first native born American saint to be canonized was not only the foundress and mother superior of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul and the mother of the parochial school system in the United States, but also a wife, mother and grandmother.

Born an Episcopalian on Aug. 28, 1774, Elizabeth Bayley had a comfortable childhood, her father being the first professor of anatomy at Columbia College and a health officer in the Port of New York. The young socialite married William Magee Seton, the owner of a financially unstable business, at age 20. Within nine years of marriage, Elizabeth became the mother of five children, Annina, William, Catherine, Rebecca, and Richard. In addition to her own children, she became responsible for the care of her husband's brothers and sisters at the death of her father-in-law.

In 1803, Mr. Seton became ill and required a sea voyage to Italy to sustain his health. Elizabeth

and her eldest, Annina, accompanied him, while the other children stayed with Rebecca Seton, Elizabeth's sister-in-law. Seton died soon after his arrival in Italy and the two women remained with the Filicchi Brothers, business friends of the Seton firm.

Here, Elizabeth acquainted herself with the Catholic faith and upon her return to America, she corresponded with Archbishop Carroll of Baltimore. Through his help, she was baptized into the Roman Catholic faith in 1805 at St. Peter's Church in New York City.

As a result of her conversion, Elizabeth and her children were disowned by the wealthy Seton family and were left penniless since her husband's fortunes had diminished. Father Dubourg, SS, from St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore suggested she open a school for wealthy girls in Baltimore. With the school in close proximity to St. Mary's, she had the opportunity to explore her new religion further.

She soon moved to Emmitsburg, Md. and established a

school for poor children. It was there in 1809, that she founded the Daughters of Charity. Elizabeth and Annina took their temporary vows before Archbishop Carroll and Mother Seton was elected superior of the order.

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Prior to the administration of the final vows to Mother Seton and 18 novices, Annina became seriously ill. Archbishop Carroll gave the girl special permission to take her vows on her death bed. At her death in 1813, Annina was the first professed Sister of Charity at age 16.

Mother Seton's other daughters both were committed to the religious life. Rebecca was a novice within her mother's order at the time of her death. She suffered a spinal injury as a result of a fall during ice skating and after a long illness, she died at age 14. Catherine, on the other hand, lived to reach 90. She entered a religious order and became mother superior of the Sisters of Mercy in New York.

On Jan. 4, 1821, Mother Seton died of a pulmonary infection. Her son, Richard, who was placed with the Filicchi firm in Italy, died a few years after his mother.

William, the second eldest, joined the navy. He married Emily Prime, the daughter and heiress of Nathaniel Prime, one of New York's wealthiest businessmen. The couple took residence in Cragdon, Westchester County, and had two sons, William and Robert.

William inherited his grandmother's natural ability to write. He published several novels including: Romance of the Charter Oak (1870); Pride of Lexington (1871); The Shamrock Cone West; and Moira (1884); along with poetry.

He was a graduate of St. John's College, Fordham, Mt. St. Mary's in Emmitsburg and the University of Bonn. After receiving admission to the New York State bar, he joined the law firm of T.J. Glover. At the onset of the Civil War, he enlisted in the Union Army and fought as captain of the 41st New York Volunteers, French's Division, Sumner's Corps.

After being wounded in the Battle of Antietam, he returned home and married Sarah Redwood Parish, a convert from the Society of Friends.

Prior to his death in 1905, he completed another novel, The Building of a Mountain. His only child, William, died in infancy.

His brother, Robert, chose the religious life. He enrolled in the Urban College of the Propaganda and subsequently became the first student to enter the North American College in Rome, the "House on Humility Street". Following the suggestion of Pope Pius IX, Robert entered the Accademia Ecclesiastica dei Nobili, a seminary for the nobility. He continued his studies at the Roman College and the Sapienza and was ordained on April 16, 1865. Remaining in Rome, he was the Pope's private chamberlain, dean of all the monsignori in the U.S. and the first American priest to be named protonotary apostolic.

In 1877, Robert left for America and served as chaplain at St. Elizabeth's in New Jersey and

became pastor of St. Joseph's in Jersey City. Upon returning to Rome in 1902, Robert was consecrated Titular Archbishop of Heliopolis. With the outbreak of the first World War, the 75-year-old archbishop returned to America and established residence with the Sister at St. Joseph's in Emmitsburg, Mother Seton's original community. He was then made chaplain of the Sister of Charity of St. Elizabeth, Convent Station, N.J. On March 22, 1927, he died in the chaplain's quarters at age 88, the last direct descendant of Mother Seton.

During his long life, Robert wrote a biography of his grandmother, Memoirs, Letters and Journal of Elizabeth Seton; and Roman Essays along with many contributions to the American Catholic Quarterly. He was a leading member of the first American pilgrimage to Palestine. A noted speaker, Robert was also an antiquarian, numismatist, historian, essayist and linguist being well versed in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, German, Italian and Spanish.

Mother Seton's grandsons lived to see the Daughters of Charity, the first native religious

community, grow to more than 10,000 members. The sisters conducted a nation-wide system of charitable and educational institutions. Among them were the country's first Catholic orphanage, the first Catholic hospital and the first maternity hospital.


Members of this order founded St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester which primarily served both Union and Confederate soldiers during the Civil War.

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**Nancy Murphy**

Some forms of perfection simply don't appeal to me. Although it might be fascinating to sit inside London's Big Ben and watch the ages of man go by, I would be quite unwilling to dwell on such mechanical and mathematical precision. I would prefer instead to watch a Pennsylvania Amishman rumble along after his team of heavy-flanked horses plowing the earth in preparation for the season's crop. And though I appreciate the velvet petals of a manicured rose garden and marvel at the breeze-borne scent, I feel a certain inner peace watching the lonely farmer, reduced in size by the distance between us, performing his part in the ordered sequence of an ordered universe.

Porcelain figures too and china teacups have their place in life, but I don't communicate with them as I do with a piece of earthenware thrown on the potter's wheel and guided by his touch to a solid form of his own imagination. And so it was natural to poke around the potter's shop I discovered quite by accident one chill day last month. The young woman told us her shop conducted classes in the use of the potter's wheel, and she pointed out several hand thrown items.

Very handsome.

But one small mug sitting on a shelf above the sinks and surrounded by the artifacts of the trade caught my eye. She lifted it down and casually announced that it had been thrown on the wheel by a youngster, an eleven-year-old girl. And I fell in love with the squat little mug. For there is a flowing honesty, an easy purity, in the creations of a child.

Unaware of the majesty of life some children can re-create the wisdom of the ages with an innocence and a primitive interpretation which reflects the harmony between the universal and individual natures. And the obedience of the earthen clay

But I was totally unprepared to learn that the eleven year old is a victim of Down's Syndrome, and that the small, honest hands of this young potter, would reveal the straight simian crease across the palms.

I returned to the shop that weekend and asked permission to interview my little potter. Readily granted, I watched her while she held the mug and answered my questions, with a hint of shyness at first but an air of confidence. And as Suzie's fingers traced the contours and lines of the mug, I recognized the gentle touch and the very personal communication between the craftsman and the product. I was surprised and pleased. For, like the Amishman with his plow, Suzie's hands are already familiar with their calling.

I have watched the cabinet-maker's hands on wood and the surgeon's hands with the blade. I've watched my Grandmother's hands making Potato Gnocchi. The pianist's hands on the keyboard and the sculptor's heavy hands on the unfinished piece. For human hands are sensitive indicators of unseen gifts.

But no one can detect the gift itself. Defects and handicaps alone are detectable. Although all facets of a person are contained within his molecular configuration at the moment of fertilization, only that defect which will set him apart later in life is discernible. His gifts remain protected from the prying eye of science, revealed only in their eventual fruits.

And Suzie has the gift. It has not been totally submerged by her handicap. Although it is not as obvious as the defect, it is nonetheless a positive aspect of her personality; and an aspect from which she will draw much satisfaction and peace.

I love the honey colored mug. I have asked for two more.

And I wonder what other potentials lie within this and other children who have been allowed and encouraged to create such quiet mugs of inspiration.

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