

Mary Providence, SSA (1836–1904)

Mary Ellen Tucker, in religion Sister Mary Providence, was born in County Sligo, Ireland, on October 2, 1836. She enjoyed a privileged upbringing and was educated by the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary. The death of her mother and a family financial disaster resulted in the family immigrating to Montreal, Quebec.

Blessed Mother Marie-Anne Blondin, Foundress of the Sisters of St. Anne, personally recruited her to the Congregation. She entered the Novitiate at Vaudreuil in 1851 and pronounced her vows in 1853. She was twenty three years old when she arrived in Victoria, British Columbia, in 1859.

Her desire to use her talents for the welfare of others enabled her to guide the young Institute during the formative years of this mission. For 45 years, she devoted herself to the advancement of education, health care and charity in the Pacific Northwest. Her exceptional finesse and governance style kept her in key leadership roles as Province Leader or Vicar for 23 years. During this time, a number of charitable establishments came into existence: schools, boarding schools, orphanages and a hospital. She was recognized for her love of the poor and especially the orphans who always claimed her special attention. She was present and attentive to each sister but particularly those who were sick or dying and those serving in remote missions. As a leader, she was appreciated as a woman filled with joy and compassion.

Her vision of education was based on the formation of a strong character and would often remark: “A woman’s influence is not limited; life will be mostly what women truly wish it to be.”ⁱ Despite leading a virtually semi-cloistered life, Sister Mary Providence was a shrewd businesswoman, whose advice was sought by leading citizens of Victoria. She accomplished so much both within and outside her religious community that it was said: “the consensus of the public is that this nun, who seldom left the convent grounds, exerted a far-reaching and beneficent influence which distinguished her as the greatest woman of the time in British Columbia.”ⁱⁱ She died on May 29, 1904.



ⁱ Down, Edith E. “A Century of Service” P. 46

ⁱⁱ *Lugrin*, Nancy Bertrand. See Note #47, p 269 of “*Caring and Compassion*” by Darlene Southwell