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## Catherine Josephine Seton and the New York Mercy Experience<sup>1</sup>

BY

ANN MIRIAM GALLAGHER, R.S.M.

It has been with much interest that I have devoted considerable time during recent years in researching the life of Catherine Josephine Seton. Who was Catherine Josephine Seton? She was the daughter of Elizabeth Ann Seton. Elizabeth founded the Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg, Maryland, in 1809 and, in 1975, became the first native born citizen of the United States to be canonized a saint of the Church. Catherine was also the first New York Sister of Mercy, who at the age of forty-six years entered the Mercy Community several months after the 1846 foundation had been made in New York City from Dublin, Ireland; and, she continued as Sister Catherine or Mother Catherine in the Mercy Community until her death in 1891.

What has my research revealed thus far? It has shown that Catherine Seton's life of almost forty-five years as a Sister of Mercy was one of significance to the history of nineteenth-century American women religious. It has also indicated that her life of forty-six years before becoming a Sister of Mercy was a fascinating one which could only have enhanced her life as a religious. I am pleased to share with you selected highlights of the first forty-six years of Catherine's life, after which I will present an overview of her forty-five years of Mercy Life, pointing out some of the ways she became an important part of what I call "The New York Mercy Experience."

### **The First Forty-Six Years (1800-1846): Secular Life**

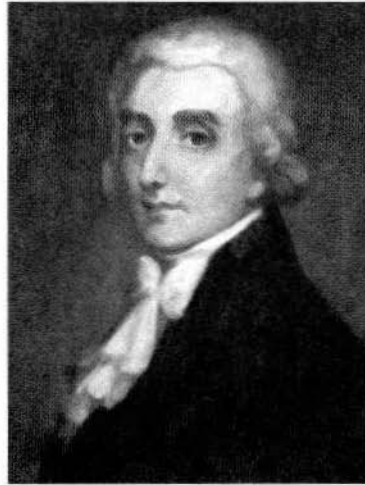
*Early Years, 1800-1821*<sup>2</sup>

Catherine Josephine Seton was born on Staten Island, New York, on 28 June 1800, to Elizabeth Bayley Seton, prominent New York socialite, and William Magee Seton, eminent New York import merchant. This second youngest of the Seton's five children was

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted courtesy of the author. Originally published in *The Mast* 8:1 (Fall 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Her life as a secular, mainly from 1800, the year of her birth, to 1821, the year of her mother's death, was treated in detail by this author in "The Early Years (1800-1821) of Catherine Josephine Seton (1800-1891): Daughter of a Saint, First New York Sister of Mercy" in the Annual Catholic Daughters of America Lecture, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., 5 April 1992.

about three-and-a-half years old when her father died in 1803. When her mother converted from Episcopalianism to Roman Catholicism in 1805, so also did she along with her sisters, Anna Maria (Annina) and Rebecca, and her brothers, William and Richard. In 1808 she left New York to live in Baltimore where her mother opened a school for girls. In 1809 the nine-year-old Catherine traveled to a new home in Emmitsburg, Maryland, some sixty miles northwest of Baltimore, where her mother founded the Sisters of Charity and St. Joseph's School for girls.

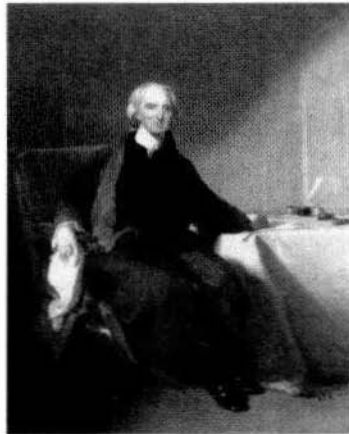


Elizabeth Bayley & William Magee Seton.  
*Image Collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*

Her home from the early summer of 1809 to late February or early March of 1821 was in Emmitsburg. There she attended classes in her mother's school where she eventually became a successful teacher, especially of piano and voice. She settled as secretary to her mother, mainly when it came to correspondence relating to family matters. She accompanied members of her mother's sisterhood on their travels into town on errands of mercy and to purchase supplies for the community and school. She formed deep and lasting friendships, with the sisters and students of St. Joseph's. She did the same, with members of the nearby Mount Saint Mary's College and Seminary community, particularly, with Father John DuBois, the institution's founder, and future third bishop of New York, who became a father-figure for her.

Catherine rejoiced with her mother in witnessing the growth of St. Joseph's and the extension of the Sisters of Charity to Philadelphia in 1814 and to New York in 1817. And, she had a fair share of sorrow in Emmitsburg. During her almost twelve years there, she experienced the loss of many members of the religious sisterhood and her own family. These included her sisters, Anna Maria and Rebecca; her aunts, Cecilia and Harriet Seton; and, ultimately her own mother.

Although her home was in Emmitsburg for almost twelve years, there was a life for her elsewhere at periods during that time. After seven full years in Emmitsburg, she set out in 1816 at sixteen years of age on a series of at least five lengthy excursions (ranging from several weeks to more than three months at a time), arranged by her mother for health and social-cultural purposes. The trips took her to Baltimore, Annapolis, Philadelphia, New York City, and Carrollton Manor in present-day Frederick County, Maryland.



Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence.

*Public Domain*

In Baltimore she studied art and music with private instructors and became acquainted with Mrs. Catherine Harper, daughter of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the last and only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence and one of the wealthiest men of the nation.

In Annapolis, she was the guest of the same Charles Carroll in his elegant mansion on the Severn River where she delighted in parties, including those he hosted for French officers on leave from

their vessels in the bay, and with whom she was able to converse adequately in French.

In Philadelphia, she was introduced to the social life of Julia Scott, her mother's wealthy Protestant widow-friend and benefactress, who, after Elizabeth Seton's death, became her "second mother."

In New York City, she visited with relatives on both the maternal and paternal sides of her family, almost all of whom she had not seen for many years. She also toured parts of the city, being especially charmed by observing women in the newest fashions promenading on Broadway.

At Carrollton Manor, the summer home of Charles Carroll, located on his vast estate about forty miles south of Emmitsburg, she socialized with celebrities such as the widow of Stephen Decatur, hero of the Tripolitian War and one of the most distinguished members of the U.S. Navy, while also serving as tutor to Carroll's grand-daughters, Emily and Elizabeth Harper, on vacation from her mother's school.

Her last excursion, the one to Carrollton Manor, ended sometime in August 1820 when she returned to Emmitsburg. By the end of that month, her mother's health had deteriorated so rapidly that death seemed imminent. Preparing for death, Elizabeth Seton renewed her religious vows on 24 September 1820, in the presence of Catherine, some of the Sisters, and Father Simon Bruté (future first Bishop of Vincennes), Elizabeth's spiritual director from Mount Saint Mary's. While her mother lingered, Catherine sent accounts of her physical condition to Julia Scott in Philadelphia. On 26 December she relayed news that her mother was becoming weaker and was reduced "almost to a skeleton in appearance." "As you suppose," she wrote, "I am chief nurse and too happy to be so — this employment is dearer to my heart than can ever be imagined or expected."<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Seton died about a week later, 4 January 1821. Catherine was the only of her children present when death came. Anna Maria and Rebecca had died some years earlier, and William and Richard were now making their own way in a world far beyond Emmitsburg.

#### *Adventures and Restlessness, 1821-1846*

An extremely sad and broken-hearted Catherine Seton left

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<sup>3</sup> Archives of Saint Joseph's Provincial House, Emmitsburg, Maryland (hereinafter cited as ASJPH), 1-3-3, XI B58, Catherine Seton to Julia Scott, Philadelphia, Pa., 26 Dec. 1820.

Emmitsburg in late February or early March of 1821, just a few months short of her twenty-first birthday. She departed, knowing that she was the sole heir of her mother's \$2500 funded family estate. Further, she took with her some of her mother's personal property, including furniture, correspondence, and her wedding ring.<sup>4</sup>

For the next quarter of a century her home was in Baltimore with her friends, the Harpers, and in New York City, with her Aunt Mary Post and with her brother, William, after his marriage to the wealthy Emily Prime of Westchester County. She enjoyed a wide circle of acquaintances, and in the words of an admirer, became known for her "beauty, wit, and social accomplishments."<sup>5</sup> She received marriage proposals. They included one made by the British Ambassador to the United States, Mr. Stratford Canning (later the famous Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe British Ambassador at Constantinople), to whom she was first introduced by Charles Carroll of Carrollton.

Catherine traveled extensively in Europe. Her lengthy, detailed, and exciting travel journals, along with correspondence related to her foreign travel, will constitute the basis of a separate study sometime in the future. For now, a sampling. All told, she made three European trips between 1829 and 1840, totaling almost six years of residency abroad. The first was made with her brother, William, while he was on an extended leave from the U.S. Navy in 1829 and 1830. With old and new friends, she visited many parts of Italy and France, sight-seeing and socializing, and keeping abreast of political events of the day. Spending much time in Florence, Italy (then the Grand Duchy of the Austrian Dukes of Lorraine), she became acquainted with Florentine nobility, political exiles and their families, American and European socialites, diplomats, and business people residing in the city.

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<sup>4</sup> For information on Elizabeth Seton's will see Annabelle M. Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton, 1774-1821* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), 373, n. 66. It is unclear exactly what furniture was taken by Catherine. The correspondence very probably included letters of Reverend Bruté to her mother. (See ASJPH, Early Correspondence, #108, Sister Catherine Seton to Mother Euphemia Blenkinsop, Emmitsburg, MD, 22 Feb. 1884.) Catherine wore her mother's wedding ring when she left Emmitsburg and continued wearing it until her death, shortly after which the New York Mercys returned it to the St. Joseph's Provincialate in Emmitsburg, where it now graces the museum honoring her mother. (See ASJPH, Early Correspondence, #41, Sister Bonaventure, R.S.M., to Mother Mariana Flynn, Emmitsburg, MD, 20 April 1891.)

<sup>5</sup> Monsignor [Robert] Seton, *An Old Family or the Setons of Scotland and America* (New York: Brentanos, 1899), 325.

In Rome, she lived for several months at the renowned Convent of the Sacré Coeur Sisters, where she had the leisure to study Italian, French, and the guitar, participate in religious exercises, entertain visitors, and make friends with other women who, like herself, took advantage of the privileges afforded them by the institution. While in Rome, she also toured parts of the city with her dear friend, Bishop John DuBois, then on a begging trip in Europe for his New York diocese.

In France, after staying for a while at the country home of the venerable statesman, Lafayette, she took up residence in Paris. There she was caught up in the Revolution of 1830 and joined Lafayette, Talleyrand, and others as they hosted victory celebrations marking the overthrow of the Bourbon Monarchy.

The second trip took place in 1835 and 1836. In the company of Mrs. Harper and her daughter, Emily (who would be a life-long friend of Catherine and a great philanthropist of the Sisters of Mercy), she journeyed through parts of England, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Belgium, and Holland. Her countless adventures included climbing the Swiss Alps at least twice. Among her many new acquaintances were Cornelia Peacock Connelly, future foundress of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, and her husband, Pierce, for whose formal abjuration of the Episcopal faith and acceptance of Roman Catholicism in Rome she was present.

The third European trip occurred from 1838 to 1840 when she traveled with her brother, William, his wife, and their children. For a time, they constituted part of the elite "American Circle" in Nice, France (then ruled by the House of Savoy), after which they settled down in Florence.

In Florence, she renewed old friendships and formed new ones. She frequented balls, banquets, concerts, ballets, operas, designer dress shops, museums, and churches. It was especially during the "Florence phase" of this last European trip that she experienced a severe case of restlessness. In a letter to Julia Scott, she confessed that "the novelty of Europe" was over for her, that her destiny seemed to be that of a wanderer who was "always on the go," and that she was simply "weary to death of it [all]."<sup>6</sup> Leaving William and his family in

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<sup>6</sup> Archives of the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN, "The Robert Seton Collection" (hereinafter cited as AUND, RSC), II-I-a, Catherine Seton to Julia Scott, Philadelphia, PA, 28 Nov. 1838.



Bishop John DuBois.

*Image Collection of the Vincentian Studies Institute*

Florence, she returned to New York City alone in April 1840. She was almost forty years of age at the time.

Back in New York she engaged in numerous works of charity, guided by Bishop John DuBois. She kept up an extensive correspondence with her first-cousin, James Roosevelt Bayley, future first bishop of Newark and eighth archbishop of Baltimore, particularly during his studies and travels in Paris and Rome: she encouraged him in his conversion from Episcopalianism to Roman Catholicism; she sought his advice on what should be read by new and potential converts to the Faith whom she was instructing; she kept him informed of issues dealing with the Church of the United States, including the crucial Catholic school question in New York; and she shared with him something of her personal life, noting at one point that she was likely to remain in her “status quo” — the single state — even though gentlemen admirers continued to show an interest in her.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore (hereinafter cited as AAB), several lengthy letters of Catherine Seton to James Roosevelt Bayley, Paris and Rome, 1842-1843. For the one with information on her single state in life, see 43A-N5, 1 October 1842.



Catherine spent time at St. Joseph's in Emmitsburg in the spring of 1842, having first written to the Superior, Mother Xavier Clarke (who, like herself, had been with Elizabeth Seton when she died), the reason for the contemplated visit: "I long to visit my early home once more, to see again several friends."<sup>8</sup> The Emmitsburg trip was followed by visiting old acquaintances in Baltimore, by assisting with music for the Requiem Mass at the Baltimore cathedral for the recently deceased Bishop John England of Charleston, and by making a lengthy spiritual retreat at the cathedral.

After returning to New York, she reflected on the graces received from the Emmitsburg visit and the Baltimore retreat. Writing to Mother Xavier of those experiences, she said: ". . . I trust to live for God now, though I may truly exclaim with St. Augustine, 'Eternal Beauty how late have I known thee, how late I have loved thee.'"<sup>9</sup>

In 1842, Catherine lost two people who had been very significant in her life: Julia Scott, her "second mother" since Elizabeth Seton's death in 1821, and John DuBois who had been a father figure for her since they first met in Emmitsburg in 1809. She was with Bishop DuBois when he passed away. What he meant to her over the years is perhaps best summed up in what she wrote to James Roosevelt Bayley following his death: "I knelt by his dying bed as his spirit departed, and mourned him as my oldest best friend."<sup>10</sup>

With the loss of Bishop DuBois, Catherine depended a great deal on the support and counsel of Bishop (later Archbishop) John Hughes, DuBois' successor to the see of New York. Many years earlier, her mother had helped persuade DuBois to admit Hughes to his seminary at Mt. St. Mary's where he was employed as the institution's gardener and over-seer of slaves. Now the same Hughes was to play a key role in her daughter's future. Catherine was fully aware of the work of the two communities of women religious in New York City at the time — the Religious of the Sacred Heart and her mother's community, the Sisters of Charity. When she expressed interest in pursuing some form of religious life, Bishop Hughes encouraged her to hold off on a final decision until after the arrival of the Sisters of

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<sup>8</sup> ASJPH, 1-3-3, XI B63, Catherine Seton to Mother Xavier Clarke, Emmitsburg, MD, 23 Feb. 1842.

<sup>9</sup> ASJPH, 1-3-3, XI B64, Catherine Seton to Mother Xavier Clarke, Emmitsburg, MD, 29 April 1842.

<sup>10</sup> AUND, RSC, II-2-n, Catherine Seton to James Roosevelt Bayley, Paris, France, 20 March 1843.

Mercy he was bringing over from Dublin. He introduced her to them soon after they made their New York foundation on 14 May 1846, while living as guests of the Sisters of Charity at Saint Joseph's Select School in East Broadway.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Last Forty-Five Years (1846-1891): Religious Life**

#### *Entrance to Silver Jubilee of Profession, 1846-1874*

Several months after that introduction, on 11 October 1846, at the age of forty-six years, Catherine Seton entered the Mercy Community at the Convent of Mercy, in Manhattan's No. 18 Washington Place West as the first New York Mercy choir postulant, bringing to the community \$1000 in funds and an open-ended family pledge of a \$500 annual stipend.<sup>12</sup> A few days later, the thirty-one year old superior, Mother Agnes O'Connor, in a letter to the Mercys in Dublin, recorded the event in these words:

I consider the entrance of our new Sister Catherine (Miss Seton) a singular favor from Providence, she being a person very influential amongst Catholics and Protestants of the first distinction. She sings delightfully; her voice is of the highest note and cultivation.<sup>13</sup>

Mother Agnes' hopes for Catherine Seton expressed in that letter, as one who might play a vital role in helping mold the Mercy Community in New York, were echoed a few years later by Bishop John Hughes. In a letter written 16 April 1849, to Archbishop Samuel Eccleston of Baltimore, Hughes declared:

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<sup>11</sup> The "founding sisters" were: Mother Mary Agnes O'Connor (Superior); Sisters Mary Angela Maher, Mary Austin Horan, Mary Monica O'Doherty, Mary Camillus Byrne, Mary Teresa Breen (Professed Sisters); Sister Mary Vincent Haire (Novice); and, Marianne Byrne (Postulant).

<sup>12</sup> This was the first of the New York Mercy Motherhouses. Catherine Seton lived there from 1846 until 1848. She lived at a new Motherhouse, Saint Catherine's Convent of Mercy, located at the corner of Madison Avenue and 81<sup>st</sup> Street from 1885 until her death in 1891. (See Archives of the Sisters of Mercy of New York [hereinafter cited as ASMNY], "History of Saint Catherine's . . . Madison Avenue," H 100-15-1-2-2.)

<sup>13</sup> Archives of the Sisters of Mercy, Dublin, Ireland, Mother Agnes O'Connor to Mother Cecilia Marmion, Dublin, Ireland. 15 October 1846.

Miss [Catherine] Seton [now known as Sister Mary Catherine] is to make her solemn Profession of religion tomorrow; and judging by the fervor and unbounded self-denial of her novitiate, if ever [a] daughter rivaled the sanctity of such a mother as hers, she is the one.<sup>14</sup>

About forty years later, Mercy chronicler Mother Austin Carroll, in her multi-volume work, *Annals from the Leaves of the Sisters of Mercy*, presented vivid accounts of how the New York Sisters of Mercy, in helping to meet the overwhelming needs of New York's mushrooming population, engaged in a range of almost unlimited ministries permitted by the rule of their foundress. She wrote of the House of Mercy which they established mainly to shelter immigrant women (especially of Ireland), to educate and prepare them for future employment, and to serve as a placement agency from which they might find respectable work and earn a decent living. She wrote of their circulating libraries, schools, orphanages, sodalities, visitations of the poor, sick, and oppressed in homes, in hospitals, and in prisons. In commenting on their prison ministry, Mother Austin Carroll gave special recognition to Catherine Seton. Her words follow:

The experience of the Sisters [of Mercy] in the [New York] city prison, or Tombs, would fill volumes. Malefactors of every country and degree have there claimed their ministrations. Numbers have been converted of whom some died true penitents, and others have become useful members of society. In reclaiming these, Mother Catherine Seton spent the greater part of her active life as a Sister of Mercy. She even took the trouble, at her somewhat mature age to keep up by study, her knowledge of modern languages that she might be able to instruct or console the prisoners of all nations whom she encountered in this awful abode, which she did to the great comfort of many a poor foreigner . . . This good woman is

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<sup>14</sup> AAB, 25 E 15, Bishop John Hughes to Archbishop Samuel Eccleston, Baltimore, Maryland, 16 April 1849. (Catherine Seton received the Mercy habit on 16 April 1847, and was given the name, Sister Mary Catherine.)

loved and venerated by thousands, in the prisons and outside of them . . . She is truly the prisoners' friend.<sup>15</sup>

Catherine Seton's involvement in prison work dates back to the very early history of the New York Sisters of Mercy. Within a year of their arrival in New York, the Sisters were approached by the City's Commissioners of Charity who offered them free access to the city's prisons as well as to its hospitals and other institutions. Catherine, possibly while still a novice, began to organize prison ministry for the young community. As it developed, the ministry included visits of a few Sisters several times a week not only to the Tombs, the city prison, but also to the more distant state prison of Sing Sing at Ossining, and to the penitentiary on Blackwell Island (now Roosevelt Island) in the East River. "The Annals of the New York Sisters of Mercy," in describing Catherine's initial enthusiasm for this work, state:

As soon as she began the visitation of the Tombs, she set herself the task of learning German and Spanish [being already fluent in Italian and French], in order that her usefulness among the unhappy inmates might find no limit.<sup>16</sup>

The same "Annals," her letters, and other sources provide additional information on the continued zeal she manifested almost exclusively with male prisoners at the Tombs, at Sing Sing, and on Blackwell Island. She kept them supplied with spiritual reading materials, rosaries, medals, stamps, writing paper, clothing, tobacco, and toilet articles. She personally instructed them in the Faith and encouraged them to join the League of the Sacred Heart, a confraternity for prisoners, founded by the Sisters of Mercy and designed to promote the prisoners' spiritual and moral growth. She assured them that she

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<sup>15</sup> Mother M. Teresa Austin Carroll, *Leaves from the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy*, vol. 3, *Newfoundland and the United States* (New York: Catholic Publication Society, 1889), 171-2. (See also Helen Sweeney, *The Golden Milestone, 1846-1896* [New York: Benziger Brothers, 1896] for an overview of the first fifty years of New York Mercy history of which chapter 5 is devoted to Catherine Seton; and Katherine Burton, *His Mercy Endureth Forever* [Tarrytown, New York: Sisters of Mercy, 1946] for an overview of the first one hundred years of New York Mercy history, including various references to Catherine Seton.)

<sup>16</sup> ASMNY, "Annals of the Sisters of Mercy of New York," 125.

would look after their families in time of need. She provided spiritual consolation to them as they awaited their executions. She rejoiced with them when their executions were commuted (and in some cases, partly because of her influence). And she labored ardently to improve their living and working conditions by urging wardens, doctors, and others to seriously pursue over-all prison reform.

Once released from prison, these men often kept her informed about their lives. They visited her, they wrote to her, and they sometimes sent her gifts and remembrances of themselves. On one occasion, she received a "gift" from a former prisoner who was living in Philadelphia shortly before he died. It was a trunk containing a small assortment of clothing for distribution to the poor, and a wide variety of pistols, jimmies (crowbars), and other burglar's tools for whatever use she might have for them. Gifts associated with her prison work also came from her Mercy community. When she celebrated the Silver Jubilee of her profession in 1874 (April 17), she was delighted to receive as presents from the Sisters several suits of men's clothing with twenty-five dollars in silver concealed in a pocket of each suit. It was clothing for prisoners and former prisoners, and money for them and their families.

*Silver Jubilee of Profession to Death, 1874-1891*

At the time of her Silver Jubilee of Profession in 1874, Catherine Seton was almost seventy-five years old. Shortly afterwards, she found it necessary to withdraw from active prison ministry. However, almost until her death many years later, she was entrusted with the general supervision of that work. Community records note that "it was a matter of course for the sisters who had visited the prison[s] to turn into Mother Catherine's room at evening recreation and give her [an] account of the day."<sup>17</sup>

Throughout her entire religious life, she was much immersed in a vast number of other ministries. She helped place many women in jobs after they had been trained in the Community's House of Mercy. She received countless numbers of the poor who came to her for religious instruction, advice, food, clothing, medicine, and money in the same House of Mercy. When she was refused permission because of her age to join other New York Mercys in giving service at the soldiers' hospital in Beaufort, North Carolina during the Civil

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

War, she kept the sisters informed of the "home front" with interesting and humorous letters, while also offering them spiritual comfort in the midst of their difficult work. She visited the sick at homes and in hospitals, including Bellevue and Harlem and Blackwell Island. She threw herself whole-heartedly into fund raising and development projects to help subsidize Mercy ministries. She utilized her musical talents not only in New York, but also in Providence, Rhode Island, where as early as 1851 she helped with music for its first Mercy Reception ceremony. She encouraged one of her nieces to enter and persevere in the Mercy communities of New York and Providence.<sup>18</sup> She helped arrange Mercy vacations in Newport, Rhode Island, at the summer home of her close and wealthy friend, Emily Harper. She cultivated friendships with women religious of other communities, especially with the Sisters of Charity at Mount St. Vincent-on-Hudson where she and other Sisters of Mercy sometimes went for rest and relaxation. She served as a consultant to Charles I. White in his publication of the first major biography of her mother. She actively supported the work of Father Isaac Hecker and his new Paulist Community. She published and circulated works of a religious nature (sometimes after translating them from French). She read extensively and wrote beautiful meditations and poems. She carried on a voluminous correspondence with relatives, members of the American Catholic hierarchy, and others on any number of events and issues ranging from the First Vatican Council, to Bismarck's unification of Germany, to finding a way for transporting a destitute Irish woman from New York City to a better life with her brother near Cincinnati,

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<sup>18</sup> Thus Helen Seton, daughter of Catherine's brother, William. Born in New York City in 1844 and educated at the Sacré Coeur convent in Paris, France, she entered the New York Mercy Community on 6 January 1876; she received the habit and the name of Sister Catherine (by now her aunt was known as Mother Catherine, and thus no problem with a name duplication) on 14 November 1876; and she made religious profession on 8 February 1879. In 1885, she transferred to the Providence Mercy Community and received the name of Sister Angela. In 1889, she returned to the New York Mercy Community and resumed the name of Sister Catherine. She died at Saint Catherine's Convent on 81<sup>st</sup> Street in New York City on 14 December 1906. She is buried in the Sisters of Mercy lot at Calvary Cemetery on Long Island. (See ASMNY, A 100-3-3-4, and AUND, RSC, XI-2-j, Robert Seton to James E. Edwards, Notre Dame, IN, 1 January 1907.)

Ohio.<sup>19</sup> She served as Assistant Mother of the community for several years (1864-1871). She supported several separate New York Mercy foundations extending from Worcester, Massachusetts, to Eureka, California, and the establishment of branch houses in Greenbush and Balmsville, New York. In spite of the tremendous dedication she exhibited in all of these activities, her deepest love was that of prison ministry. Her community knew and remembered Catherine mainly as one who "rejoiced in the title of Prison Sister."<sup>20</sup> Catherine Seton died of pneumonia and the grippe at St. Catherine's Convent of Mercy on the corner of Madison Avenue and 81st Street in New York City on 3 April 1891, at the age of almost ninety-one years. Requiem Mass was celebrated for the repose of her soul in the convent chapel on 6 April by her nephew, Monsignor Robert Seton (the future titular archbishop of Heliopolis), after which she was buried in the Sisters of Mercy lot at Calvary Cemetery on Long Island. In eulogies and obituaries, she was lauded as the daughter of a saintly woman whose religious sisterhood had expanded remarkably after its foundation, and as a member of a family of other distinguished persons. She was hailed as one who had been well-acquainted with a long line of eminent clergy and bishops who had been among the leaders of the nineteenth-century American Catholic Church. In considering her life as a laywoman, attention was given to the prominent people she knew and the wide variety of interesting places she lived and visited. In reviewing her years as a Sister of Mercy, acknowledgment was made of her countless contributions to works of the Mercy Community, but the greatest emphasis was placed on her love for and service to the poor, the sick, and most especially to those in prison. Perhaps *The New York Catholic News* (5 April 1891) summed up her prison work best of all in these words:

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<sup>19</sup> Some of Catherine's dealings with the American Catholic Hierarchy, including those related to correspondence, were treated by the author in "Catherine Seton (1800-1891) and the Nineteenth Century American Catholic Hierarchy: Advisor, Advisee, and Friend" in a paper delivered at the History of Women Religious Conference, Cardinal Stritch College, Milwaukee, WI, 19 June 1995.

<sup>20</sup> ASMNY, "Annals," 125. (Her involvement in prison ministry was treated by the author in "Catherine Seton [1800-1891]: 'Mercy Prison Sister'" in a paper delivered at the History of Women Religious Conference, Marymount College, Tarrytown, New York, 29 June 1992.)

No one probably ever acquired such influence and control over the thieves and robber class of New York. Though complete reformation was seldom the reward of her zeal and prayerful labors, she was able to prevent much evil and inspire much good in the minds and hearts of this dangerous and apparently irreclaimable class. They came to her for years to seek advice and guidance, they endeavored to make her trustee for their wives and children, so implicit was their confidence in her. She would be called to the [convent] parlor to meet at the same time some relative moving in the best circles, and perhaps some unfortunate whose steps to the convent door had been followed by a detective.<sup>21</sup>

What a marvelous tribute to Catherine Josephine Seton, daughter of a saint, and the first New York Sister of Mercy! What a marvelous tribute to Catherine Josephine Seton, to a woman who certainly played a very vital role during the first forty-five years of "The New York Mercy Experience!"

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<sup>21</sup> AUND, RSC, [II-2-d], *The New York Catholic News* (5 April 1891).



