

Holy Things, Holy People

Exploring Catholic history in the Northwest through treasures from the past

PART 9: SOUVENIR PAMPHLET FOR BISHOP BLANCHET'S GOLDEN JUBILEE

18 MAY 2014

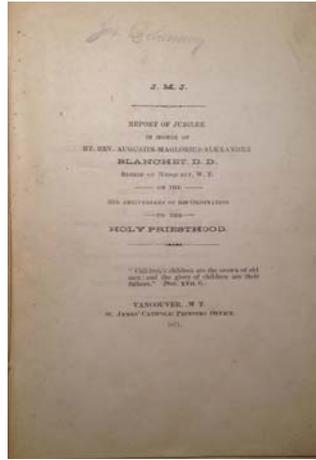
The Archdiocese of Seattle has seen a number of Golden Jubilee celebrations—most recently, Archbishop Alexander Brunett celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood in 2008—but none quite like the celebration prepared for our first bishop, A. M. A. Blanchet, in 1871. The Archives of the Archdiocese of Seattle contain probably the only existing copy of *Report of Jubilee in Honor of Rt. Rev. Augustin-Maglorius-Alexander Blanchet, D. D., Bishop of Nesqually, W. T., on the 50th Anniversary of his Ordination to the Holy Priesthood*, a 52-page commemorative booklet that appeared ten days after this extraordinary event. This glowing account of gives us a glimpse of a local Church that spoke both French and English, and that crossed denominational boundaries even as it fiercely defended its prerogatives.

The festivities (planned in extraordinary detail by the Sisters of Providence) began on the evening of June 2. The children of Providence Academy and Holy Angels College led Bishop Blanchet in procession from his residence to the school auditorium. The route was marked by fir trees, specially planted for the occasion, and by arches adorned with flowers, highlighting the year of Bishop Blanchet's birth, 1797—the year of his ordination, 1821—the year of his consecration as a bishop, 1846—and finally the current year, 1871, with the inscription, "our Pontiff-Priest with golden Jubilee we greet."

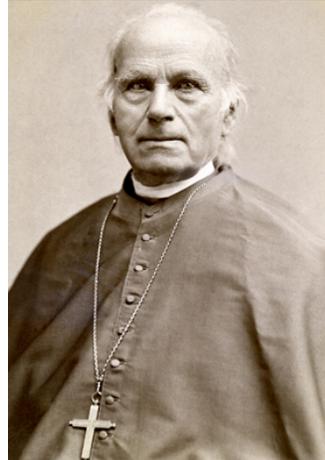
The children presented a pageant, beginning with a duet sung by two orphan girls: "it was easy to see that the kneeling figures of the two little ones produced an impression, the effect of which, could only be found in the hearts of those present, or seen in the unwonted moisture of their eyes." The boys, meanwhile, enacted a "rollicking farce" entitled "The Limerick Boy" which produced gales of laughter from the audience, which included the priests and sisters of the diocese, "several prominent citizens of Vancouver, Catholic and Protestant," as well as officers and men from Fort Vancouver.

When the entertainment was over and the Bishop walked home, the 23rd Infantry Band struck up the *Marseillaise*, honoring the Bishop's French Canadian heritage, and then they assembled on his front porch and regaled him with another hour of music, including airs from *Il Trovatore*.

The celebration continued the next morning, with a Pontifical High Mass in the Cathedral of Sts. James and Augustine (as it was known in those days). The young ladies of the Academy provided the music for the Mass, and Father Fierens of Portland preached on the dignity of the priesthood.



Our first Bishop, A. M. A. Blanchet, celebrated the 50th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood on June 2 and 3, 1871. Courtesy of the Archives of the Archdiocese of Seattle.



After Mass, Bishop Blanchet intoned the *Te Deum*, and then the procession led him back home together with his brother, Archbishop Blanchet of Portland. "Just picture to yourself," says the enthusiastic writer of the pamphlet, "TWO CATHOLIC BISHOPS, dressed in purple cassock, cape, and rochet, with golden stoles hanging down their shoulders... surrounded by twelve priests... supported on each side by dense lines of our most distinguished ladies and gentlemen; while in front, the circle was closed in by the members of our Catholic Societies

and the musicians, in their brilliant regimentals."

More speeches followed. First came Major Dallas of Fort Vancouver, a convert to Catholicism, who recalled the transformation of the region which Bishop Blanchet had both witnessed and helped to bring about: "You have lived to see where once was the pathless forest, now large and flourishing towns, and from many of them, each recurring Sunday hears the anthem of praise ascending from Catholic Altars. The rivers, only traversed in frail canoes, guided by the Indian convert, now echo along their densely wooded shores, or send back from their rocky fastnesses, the reverberating sound of escaping steam from heavily freighted boats.... Pardon, beloved Bishop, my prolixity. The theme widens before me, and my rushing thoughts crowd for utterance, over a half century of retrospect. But I am done."

After Major Dallas, another address was given, this time in French by Julius Suiste of Vancouver: "As the mouthpiece of all my brethren of French origin permit me to thank you for all you have done for us in this Diocese.... In the midst of revolutionary tempest and proud folly which today is carrying the world far away from the path of truth, happy are we to inhabit this almost ignored quarter of the globe, where a Catholic population, fervent and pious, has congregated to celebrate the golden jubilee of its first pastor."

When the speeches finally concluded, there was a luncheon for the bishops and priests, at which the dessert took the form of a tiered cake, topped with an edible miter, and inscribed with the words: "To Our Revered Prelate, With golden years of Holy Priesthood blest, This token of gratitude, From his devoted children, the Ladies of Vancouver."

Bishop Blanchet's response to all these accolades is not recorded. He would continue to serve the diocese for another eight years, retiring in 1879 at the age of 82.

—Corinna Laughlin, Pastoral Assistant for Liturgy