Mary Mackillop

(1842 – 1909)

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Mary Gonzaga Barry

(1834-1915)

Mary Mackillop and Mary Gonzaga Barry were contemporaries and their paths crossed in their pursuit of providing education for girls in Australia and leading their respective orders.

Being of similar age and facing similar challenges the women became friends and corresponded and visited when their busy schedules allowed.

Mother Gonzaga Barry came to Ballarat in 1875 with nine companions to begin a school for girls. In the first year they had founded Loreto Convent Mary's Mount (Loreto College) on the Sturt Street site and a day school in Dawson Street. By the time of her death in 1915, Loreto convents and schools had been founded in Portland, Hamilton, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Perth. Loreto Sisters had also staffed and run parish schools, established kindergartens and teachers' training colleges.

Loreto's connection with Mary Mackillop had begun in Portland. It was between 1862 and 1866 that Mary Mackillop and her family lived in Portland. Mary taught at the Common School and then started a Seminary for Young Ladies. While in Portland the family lived in 'Bayview Cottage', built by Stephen Henty. This cottage was to become in 1884 the founding house for Loreto Convent Portland, now Bayview College. Part of the original house still lies within the fabric of the school buildings.

The Loreto Adelaide foundation was made in 1905 with the encouragement of Mary Mackillop.

As a friend and correspondent, Mary Mackillop said to Mother Gonzaga –

"There is a work for you to do in Adelaide that no one else will do. For some time you will succeed, and your House there will be the most important of all your foundations in Australia."

When recounting this conversation Mother Gonzaga said that –

"I look upon Mother Mary as a saint, and I hope she will be the first Australian-born saint canonized. On the strength of what she told me I made the foundation in Adelaide in 1905."

(M. Francis Tobin, "Mother M. Gonzaga Barry, Her Life and Letters")

Two letters from Mary Mackillop to

M. Gonzaga Barry are extant in Loreto's collection.

J. M. J.

St Joseph's Home
Surrey Hills. Aug 31st

May Jesus & Mary be praised

My dear Mr Mother

I have just heard from Mother General that I can remain until the 7th of Sept, and she wished me to write to you for her and to say how delighted she would be if you would remain with us during your stay in Sydney - She said she was writing to His Eminence to the same effect. And now dear Mr Mother I hope we shall be able to travel together - and that you and any of the dear Nuns who accompany you will also stay with us - It will afford

J.M.J.

us real pleasure and happiness if you do -

We had no sooner reached home than I had to start with another sister on a very rough journey from which we have but just returned - tired and with aching bones - I must wait until we meet to give you the particulars. Meanwhile accept fondest love - and depend upon me to be ready for the 7th. With love also to dear Mother Aloysius, and the members of the Community whom I have the pleasure of meeting - believe me dear Mr [illegible]

Very affectionately yours in J.M.J.

Mary of the Cross

Archdeacon Slattery was most kind too - so were the good Sisters of Mercy - who - like yourselves - had their cab at the station to meet us - The Archdeacon subscribed for a lot £13 - and sent his housekeeper with us to three of his good parishioners - who each took a lot -

Letter 1 Transcript

J. M/J

St. Joseph's House

Surry Hills, Aug 31st [1891]

May Jesus & Mary be praised
My dear Rev Mother

I have just heard from Mother General that I can remain until the 7th of Sept, and she wished me to write to you for her and to say how delighted she would be if you would remain with us during your stay in Sydney – She said she was writing to His Eminence to the same effect.

And now dear Rev Mother I hope we shall be able to travel together and that you and any of the dear Nuns who accompany you will also stay with us. It will afford us real pleasure and happiness if you do –

We had no sooner reached home than I had to start with another Sister on a very rough journey from which we have just returned – tired and with aching bones – I must wait until we meet to give you the particulars. Meanwhile accept fondest love – and depend upon me to be ready for the 7th.

With love to dear Mother Aloysius and members of the Community whom I had the pleasure of meeting - believe me dear Rev Mother.

Very affectionately your in J.M/J

Mary of the Cross

Archdeacon Slattery was most kind too. So were the good sisters of Mercy – who – like yourselves – had their cab at the Station to meet us – The Archdeacon subscribed for a lot £13 – and sent his housekeeper with us to three of his good parishioners – who each took a lot.

J. M. J.

St Joseph's Novitiate
Mount St. North Sydney
Sunday Night

May Jesus & Mary be praised

Dearest Rev Mother

The enclosed was sent here this afternoon from the Convent of Mercy - I am so sorry that it should have been delayed - and now post it so that you may receive it early in the morning -

Do you think that you can come over here to-morrow? I am so anxious to know - Maggie Cameron said that you told her you intended coming - I was very ill for some days, and then had to attend a sudden call to Crowdy Convent - all which made it impossible for me to go to you as I should otherwise have done - Rt. Reverend has not yet returned, but is expected to-morrow I cannot get away quite as soon as was expected, but if you do not come over to-morrow must go there you on Tuesday -

With love to dear Mothers M. Bernard - and St Sales - and your own dear self - I am

Affectionately & gratefully yours in J. M. J.
Mary of the Cross -

Letter 2 Transcript

J. M/J

St. Joseph's Novitiate

Mount St. North Sydney

Sunday Night [c.Jan. 1892]

May Jesus & Mary be praised

Dear Rev Mother

The enclosed was sent here this afternoon from the Convent of Mercy – I am so sorry that it should have been delayed – and now post it so that you may receive it early in the morning –

Do you think that you can come over with us tomorrow? I am so anxious to know – Maggie Cameron said that you told her you intended coming. I was very ill for some days, and then had to attend a sudden call to [?] Convent – all which made it impossible for me to go to you as I should otherwise have done – M. General has not yet returned, but is expected tomorrow. I cannot get away quite as soon as was expected, but if you do not come over tomorrow must go to you on Tuesday –

With love to dear Mother M. Bernard – and De Sales – and you own dear self – I am

Affectionately & gratefully yours in J. M-J

Mary of the Cross.

The first letter from Surrey Hills was written in 1891 when Mary Mackillop was in Melbourne to manage and finance her new Melbourne foundation. The Surrey Hills letter may refer to the train trip that Mary Mackillop took around the country areas begging for funds in July 1891, when there was such serious flooding in Melbourne that begging there was not possible. The letter refers to the support of Archdeacon Slattery, who was in Geelong, and relates to fundraising for Josephite Melbourne foundations.

The second letter from Sydney was probably written in January 1892. Mother Gonzaga had been in Sydney to make arrangements for the new Loreto Sydney foundation.

Whatever the subject of the letters, the close friendship and affection is obvious.

Sadly, we do not have M. Gonzaga's letters of reply.

As M. Gonzaga stayed with the Sisters of St. Joseph in Sydney so Mary Mackillop stayed at the Loreto Convent in Ballarat.

We have a rare diary entry from the Mary's Mount Community diary of 19th August 1891 recording one such visit.

Josephite foundations were made in Victoria in Numurkah in late 1889 and a few months later with a school in Bacchus Marsh. This close location to Ballarat would have made visits to Mary's Mount practical.

August 8th Month 1891

17 Monday

Mr Darby Builder & Contractor assaulted Mr Breslin Clerk of Works at the Redemptorists New Monastery Knocked out teeth blackened eye etc

18 Tuesday

19 Wednesday

Mother Mary Mc Killop paid her return visit with Sr Sister only remained one day & Night

20 Thursday

1891 31 Days August

21 Friday

22 Saturday

23 Sunday—13th after Trinity

Mem.