

INSTITUTE HISTORY SESSION 11

Mère Marie-Thérèse (1842-1843) & Mère Constantine (1843-1875)

Mère Marie-Thérèse



Places:

Ghent: where **Marie-Thérèse Vandeputte** was born

Thuin: only place she served besides Namur

Marche-enFemme: foundation in 1842

People & Relationships between them:

Describes herself, Mother St. Joseph & Ignace: “one in aim, one in spirit, one in heart – that is our motto.”

Dates & Events:

1793- July 5th: birth

1812-August 15: received habit

1813-September 12: vows

1813-17: class mistress at Namur

1817: sent to Thuin to be headmistress

1820: superior at Thuin

1823: called to Namur to replace Sr. Anastasie after her death (superior of Mother House, Assistant to Mother St. Joseph)

1833: gets very sick

1835: replaced by then Sister Ignace – helps with accounts & writing

1842: March – elected 4th Mother General

1843: February – resigns due to ill-health; became treasurer of house & in charge of temporal affairs

1858: dies of heart attack while at house in Brussels

Impact of War/Political Unrest:

William of Orange: his troubles break her health

Relationship with Hierarchy & Clergy:

Not much to say

Primitive Spirit:

Unity & equality among Sisters

Joy: writes she could laugh enough to make up for the time when laughter was impossible

Spirituality underpinning everything:

Deep love of Notre Dame

Simplicity and very healthy humility

What touched your heart?

She knows herself well: knows she's a better 2nd person than 1st person

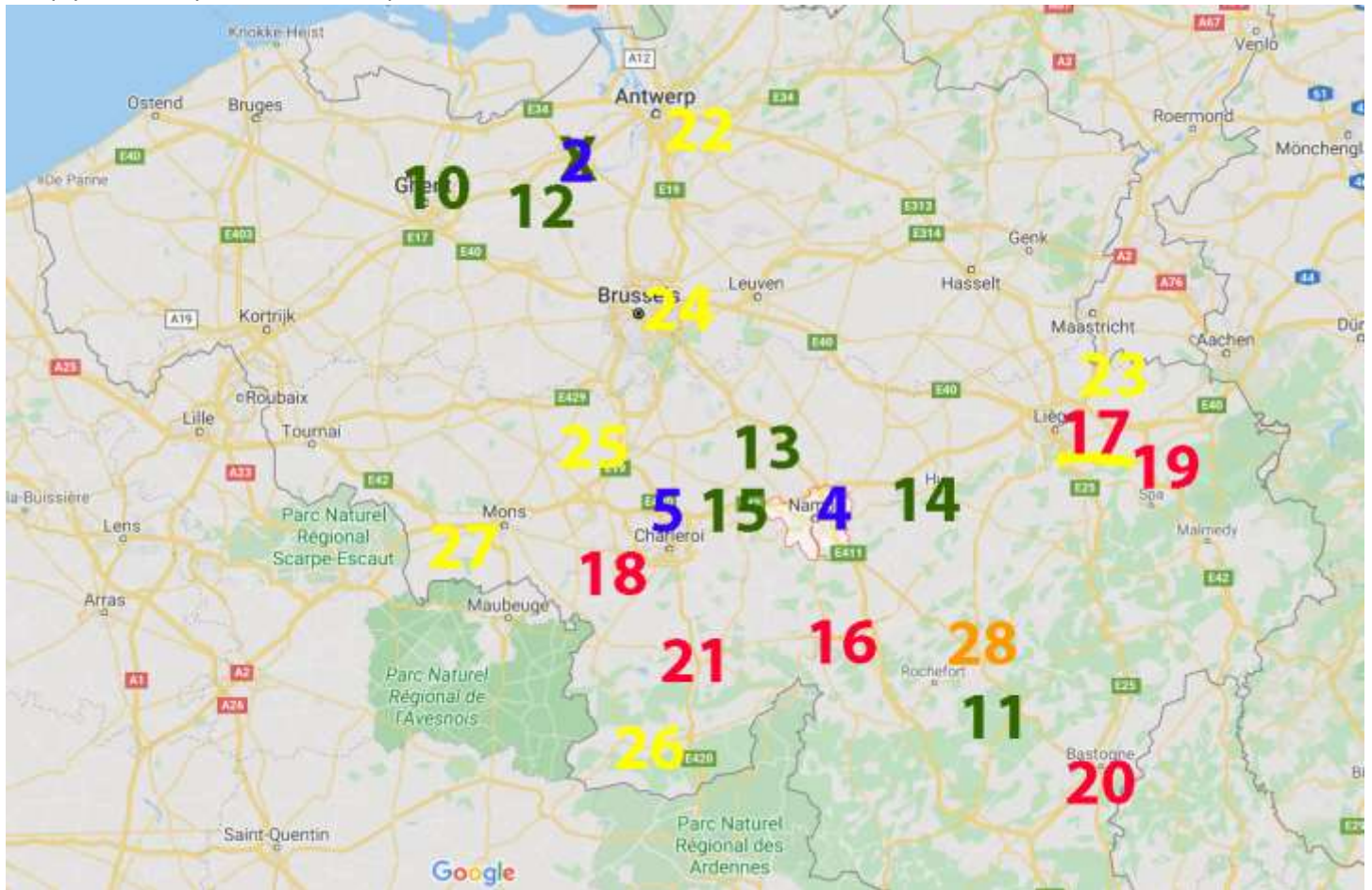
New insights?

Formation during Napoleonic wars, knew Julie

How long she lived after her resignation

1st General Treasurer

Deeply trusted by Mother St. Joseph & the Sisters





Mère Constantine (1843-1875) – photos from 1843 (L) and 1873 or 4

Places:

- 1804-1843: 28 foundations – not all survived
- 1843-1875: 66 foundations (Belgium 24, England 17, America 25)
- Foundations during Mère Constantine's generalate (Belgium, England, United States, Guatemala)

Hornu: foundation in 1843

Tirlemont: foundation in 1843

Arlon: foundation in 1844

Anderlecht: foundation in 1847

Ecaussinnes: foundation in 1851

Flobecq: foundation in 1851

Quaregnon: foundation in 1852

Charleroi: foundation in 1854

La Calamine: foundation in 1857

Dison: foundation in 1858

Molenbeek: foundation in 1861

Saint-Gilles-Waes: foundation in 1866

Penryn, Cornwall: foundation in 1845- moves to Clapham, London in 1848

Blackburn: foundation in 1850

Liverpool, Mt. Pleasant: foundation in 1851

Liverpool, Orphanage: foundation in 1851

Manchester: foundation in 1851

Northampton: foundation in 1852

Wigan: foundation in 1854

London, St. George's: foundation in 1855

Sheffield: foundation in 1855

St. Helens: foundation in 1857

Plymouth: foundation in 1860

Norwich: foundation in 1861

Birkdale: foundation in 1868

Liverpool, Everton Valley: foundation in 1869

London, Battersea: foundation in 1870

Guatemala: 3 foundations between 1859 –1875

Willamette, Oregon: foundation in 1844

Oregon City, Oregon: foundation in 1848

Dayton, Ohio: foundation in 1849

Boston, MA: foundation in 1849 (Stillman Street (1st 2 residences, Lancaster Street, Berkeley Street, the Fenway-Emmanuel College)

San Jose, CA: foundation in 1851

Lowell, MA: foundation in 1852

Roxbury, MA: foundation in 1854

Columbus, Ohio: foundation in 1855

Philadelphia, PA: foundation in 1856

Marysville, CA: foundation in 1856

Lawrence, MA – St. Mary's: foundation in 1859

East Boston, MA: Foundation in 1860

South Boston, MA – Broadway: foundation in 1860

Reading, Ohio: foundation in 1860

Santa Clara, CA: foundation in 1864

San Francisco, CA: foundation in 1866

Chicopee, MA: foundation in 1867

Hamilton, Ohio: foundation in 1869

Washington, D.C. – North Capitol & K: foundation in 1873

People & Relationships between them:

- Marie Jeanne Joseph Collin - taught by SNDdeN at Liege & Namur
- Jean Jacques Collin & Marie Duchesne are parents of Mère Constantine; 1 sister, 3 brothers
- Bishop Pisani of Namur – Constantine is confirmed in chapel of his episcopal residence
- As a student at Liège & Namur she knew Julie, knows Mother St. Joseph, Ignace, Marie-Thérèse
- 7 Colonies of Sisters sent to Oregon/California by Mère Constantine
- 3 Colonies of Sisters sent to Guatemala by Mère Constantine
- 13 Colonies of Sisters sent to Cincinnati/Boston by Mère Constantine
- Sister Augustine: Ignace's good friend from childhood; superior at Ghent, votes are split between her & Constantine for mother general; named 1st assistant (superior of motherhouse)
- Sister Aloysie-becomes 1st assistant (superior of motherhouse) in 1864

Dates & Events:

- 1802-February 12 – Mère Constantine born
- 1812- confirmed by Bishop Pisani in his episcopal chapel
- 1822-January 6: enters novitiate, receives name Sister Constantine
- 1824-vows September 14
- 1825-sent to Jumet
- 1831-mistress of boarders at Jumet when Ignace named superior
- 1835-named Superior at Jumet in Fall
- 1842-called to Namur to be superior
- 1843-elected in February, 10 days after Marie-Thérèse resigns
- 1843-Sisters depart for Oregon December 12 – 30 days stuck in river, reach Willamette October 1844
- 1843-Sisters begin staffing schools connected to mines in Belgium
- 1844-approbation of rule received
- 1845-Sister arrive at Penryn, Cornwall
- 1848-Penryn Community transfers to London
- 1849-opens college to train lay teachers for Catholic Schools at Bastogne
- 1853- opens Refuge for orphaned girls
- 1859-Sisters depart for Guatemala
- 1866-begins bringing English and Belgian superiors together for meetings (visits from Sisters serving in Americas happening on individual basis)
- 1869-Social work in Belgium scaled back because so many teachers are needed
- 1874-Golden Jubilee celebration
- 1875-October 25: dies – longest serving Mother General

Impact of War/Political Unrest:

- Liberal/Catholic tensions in Belgium – 1869: real fear Catholic schools will be closed & religious expelled from Belgium; similar tensions in England w/1870 Education Code (Life of Sr. Julia p. 90-91; this threat is constant during Constantine's generalate – see insights below.)
- 1848-1850 Famine: 1/3 of population in Flanders is in need of help to keep from starving
- Industrialization: populations in cities explode, massive social outreach needed

Relationship with Hierarchy & Clergy:

- Constantine: positive and collaborative
- Catholics work together against the Liberal Party (also Catholics)
- With Vatican I there is a rise in centralization & clericalism (the following points are based on <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/post-traumatic-church> and <https://www.britannica.com/event/First-Vatican-Council> from *America* magazine & Encyclopedia Britannica)
 - Reaction to what happened in Revolutionary France (near-death of the Church) and elsewhere created a movement toward greater centralization of power that transformed the church from top to bottom: from a decentralized, diverse grouping of local churches in loose communion with the pope to a highly centralized, uniform, much more monolithic organization than it had ever been. In this sense, the church mirrored and imitated the great empires and nation states of the 19th century, which used new means of communication and transportation to consolidate power, enforce unity and build bureaucracies.
 - Done out of a great sense of urgency & conviction that its very survival was at stake
 - convoked to deal rising influence of rationalism, liberalism, and materialism
 - 51 pre-prepared decrees – only 6 were dealt with
 - Only 700 of around 1050 eligible participants were present
 - Promulgated a doctrinal constitution dealing with relationship between faith & reason and one of papal infallibility
 - Council took a break after 10 months and could not re-convene because of war in Italy

Primitive Spirit:

- Continuity: as a young girl at school in Namur Constantine knew Julie; she knew Mother St. Joseph for over 20 years; Sister Anastasie was superior at Namur her 1st 3+ years of life as an SNDdeN; she worked with Ignace for 10 years at Jumet; Marie-Thérèse was a class mistress at Namur while Constantine was in school there and Constantine serves as superior of Namur & Marie-Thérèse's assistant
- P. 173 of life of Sister Mary of St. Francis: simplicity was Mère Constantine's characteristic virtue
- Vision of 1806: we become multinational during her term
- Equality: Headmistresses need charges too
- Community: challenged excuses not to be present, emphasized charity, vows/Rule were not to be seen as a burden
- Constantine's caution not to send out young Sisters too quickly/fear of rapid expansion
- Constantine really tried to listen to and work with Sisters
- "Preparing Sisters" for mission, generosity of Belgian houses in supplying things & personnel
- Focus on unity & apostolic mobility: from letter writing & visits to Sisters' willingness to teach anywhere - and they WERE moved from one place to another. This enabled them to bring common ideas to children who were linguistically/culturally separated
- Commitment to the poor

Spirituality underpinning everything:

- Seems to follow the model of discernment set by Ignace for choosing Sisters for missions
- P.172 of life of Sister Mary of St. Francis: prayer before the tabernacle; glow when receiving communion (description of Constantine)

- Constantine constantly felt that our work should be God's work at God's initiative. She cautioned missionary sisters who insisted too much on action or being agents of action (Louis asking to be sent west, Loyola making decisions without waiting for response), encouraged looking to the Belgian pattern for schools/houses as model; fear of American value of freedom
- Interesting that the spirituality is not highlighted as much by the story tellers

What touched your heart?

- How terribly long communication took to Oregon – up to 2 years
- Sisters expelled from Guatemala within a month of Mère Constantine's death - she was a guardian angel for them
- So rooted and yet able to adapt, expand
- Stamina of living on the threshold

New insights?

- Mère Constantine was a 'new generation' with close ties to the 1st generation: Mother St. Joseph was mother general her 1st 16 years as an SNDdeN; she worked closely with Mère Ignace for 10 years before Ignace was called to Namur in 1835; Sr. Anastasie was superior at Namur her 1st 3+ years of life as an SNDdeN.
- Mère Constantine hated debt and loved the poor: tremendous expansion of ministry in Belgium is because of the needs of the poor: schools for mining children, night schools, starts a training school for lay teachers in Bastogne in 1849! It is huge.
- Tremendous organizer: able to see the forest and the individual trees
- Described as cautious and conservative by Sr. Mary Linscott in Quiet Revolution?????
- Belgium 1835-1875: it's an artificial nation - serious divisions of language & culture, no natural basis for unity, famine of 1848-50, typhoid epidemics, political division between Catholics & Protestants focused on schools; tremendous poverty as industrial nation built at expense of their own people
- Incredible vocations in Belgium in spite of poverty & Anti-Catholic (at least Anti-Church) fervor in Belgium (see 1869 example on p. 90-91 in Life of Sister Superior Julia and links to reigns of [Leopold I](#) and [Leopold II](#) on Wikipedia)

From Quiet Revolution:

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New foundations were made in Oregon, New England, California, Guatemala and England, the work rapidly increased in Belgium, social provision was added to school work, lay teacher training was begun, local centres for the formation of Sisters were set up and, on a country by country basis, clusters of new schools were opened wherever the main movements of population followed industrial expansion. Yet, though Mère Constantine supported the new foundations generously and was willing for Sisters in America and England to make whatever adaptations were necessary, she had been too impressed by the experience with Sister Borgia to abandon the caution that was all too evident in Belgium.

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The most striking advances (in education) were made in the overseas foundations and the result of this was an interesting situation in which, after a conservative start, the Sisters in America and England gradually reasserted the original progressive ideas of the foundresses and took advantage of the local circumstances and public support, while the Sisters in Belgium were more hesitant and increasingly preoccupied with social problems, material provision and the dangers from political unrest.

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Mère Constantine showed herself willing to work with public authorities wherever possible and in this she continued the policy of Mère St. Joseph. She collaborated with the Government in founding Beernem, with the commune at Pecq, with the hospice board at Tirlemont, with private philanthropy at Hornu and Verviers. This willingness was particularly important in the overseas development when she found herself at different times in communication with the Hudson Bay Company, the Queens Committee of Council on Education, the Government of Guatemala and sundry local authorities from Sheffield to San Francisco. Local relations played a key part in establishing the work and, by identifying it with local interests, Mère Constantine ensured that its immediate impact, wherever it was, was vital.

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She may not have been a great educator in the sense that the first three Mothers-General were, for she lacked their originality and imagination, but she had a calm and balanced mind and sure judgement which enabled her to provide the conditions in which others could experiment. Though not by her personal initiative, progress was made in understanding educational aims and methods during her generalate and no such advances could have been made either without her or in spite of her.