THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF
SAINT MOTHER THEODORE GUERIN

A THESIS PAPER
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis project was to develop a visual story of Saint Mother Theodore Guerin, the eighth saint to be recognized in the United States. Six photomontage panels tell her story and the legacy she passed to us from her birth in 1798 to her death in 1856, as well as the congregation’s ongoing efforts to the present day. In the future, these pieces may be considered for inclusion in the new Saint Mother Theodore Guérin shrine or its environs at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana. While Sisters of Providence and staff of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods are generally familiar with this narrative, the panels would serve as “talking pieces” while escorting visitors and/or interactive stations where independent visitors can learn more about the Saint, her times and the legacy of Providence she passed on to her community.

Many visitors have only a day or a few hours to come for information, prayer or time to reflect. To aid pilgrims in this endeavor, an illustrated booklet has been developed to accompany the panels. The booklet will also serve as a memento/reminder of the visit to provide continuing study.

Use of the panels at other sites during lectures, displays and/or fund raising events is also anticipated.
INFORMATION GATHERING

The primary sources of information and image collection were the Archives of the Sisters of Providence, St. Mary-of-the-Woods, and Ruille-sur-Loire, France. The Vigo County Historical Society, Vigo County Public Library, Indiana American History Museum and Indiana State Museum (Indianapolis) were other important resources, as were the Notre Dame and Vincennes (Old Cathedral) Archives. Websites explored included: Wabash Valley Visions and Voices, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, and various transportation, canal, and train historical sites. On some sites I frequently found text descriptions of living conditions and transportation difficulties, and also, at times, illustrations. They proved to be a valuable asset in themselves and for the additional links to other reference sites.

Scanning original fragile documents, photographing current sites and artifacts, and printing on a laser printer and large inkjet plotter printer were processes used to complete the project. In addition, images never digitized in the Archives at St. Mary-of-the-Woods were scanned and copies provided to the archivist. These images were later posted to the Sisters of Providence website.

Every image that related to the subject appeared valuable at first sight. Even duplicate images discovered in different digital resources appeared important since the quality, resolution, and size needed were unknown. This led to development of a log that recorded every image source, image
name, year, and original source (photographer, painter, drawer, engraver) for ongoing reference of over three hundred images.

THE PROJECT
Media and Style

Each panel represents a period in the life of Mother Theodore and the ongoing development of the life of the congregation. Not every significant event is represented.

Photography, available in 1839, was neither affordable nor readily available in America—and specifically Terre Haute until the 1850s. Father Corbe is known to have photographed fossils and other Indiana mineral formations in the 1850s and later, but none of his images could be found in the cited repositories. Mother Theodore was urged to have a photograph made and reluctantly made the journey for the sitting in Terre Haute 1856, shortly before she died. At that sitting three Daguereotypes were made and are preserved in the archives at St. Mary’s. Mother Theodore’s formal portrait was painted from one of the three Daguereotypes, and today hangs in Providence Hall Parlor.

The images included in the project are drawings and later, black and white, and color photography. I believe black and white images provide a more consistent look throughout, particularly when moving through transient times of drawing and intermingled photography. Ultimately, I decided to render
all panel photographs and drawings as black and white images to maintain visual continuity. Photomontage was selected as the style for the panels since the images are from diverse sources and it allowed subtle changes to meld the whole story without distortion of individual original images. All images were digitized and adjusted for maximum clarity.

Original handwritten letters in French from Father Dujarié, the French founder of the Sisters of Providence, and Mother Theodore; a Mother Theodore handwritten page in English from a ledger, dated 1856, containing insight into her sixteen years in Indiana; a Circular Letter in 1854, by Mother Theodore in English, summoning the Sisters to St. Mary’s for the summer retreat; an 1840s canal map of Indiana; and the printed Decree of Beatification and Canonization have been used as backgrounds for the panels to provide a “visual tie” from panel to panel. They also provide a chronological progression as each panel is viewed from 1840 through 1998.

Description of the Panels

The six panels are intended to represent cross sections of the stories of Saint Mother Theodore Guerin and the congregation. All the panels could be used, or selected panels could be used to narrate more specific accounts. The panels are: Early Life and Community; Voyage to America; Arrival and Early Days in America; Years of Sorrow; Death of Mother Theodore Guérin and Growth of the Community; and Recognizing a Saint.
The panels are lightweight for easy transport, and constructed of GatorBoard, an asset for mobile presentations. They are laminated to eliminate color shifts and protect the images from scratches, and are bound by vinyl to preserve the edges.

Hanging the Panels

I believe the best presentation of the panels takes the viewer easily from one piece to the next, not only without distraction, but in such a way that the viewer and the panel are one in interaction. My preference was to suspend each panel from the ceiling. Because large pieces, when hung, pitch the lower edge back and the top edge forward, devices were sought to keep alignment straight. After interviewing the best professional framers a type of aluminum anchor hook was selected. Four upward tilted, triangular wedges and a single anchor shaped device were embedded containing a slight fold-out hook. The panels weigh less than five pounds each and the framer consulted remarked that he had seen greater weight sustained by the same device for a longer time period than I would require.

The panels were suspended from the ceiling back-to-back. As an additional aid to correct a slight bottom pitch, a small piece of industrial strength Velcro was attached to the bottom right interior corners of each set of panels. This secured each set of panels and insured they hung as one.
Booklet

Selected key images from the panels have been included in the booklet to accompany the text on the facing page. The booklet text augments the panels for those unfamiliar with the story.

The finished dimensions of the booklet are 5 1/2” x 8” in the same vertical orientation as the panels. A spiral binding has been used to allow the booklet to lie flat for ease of use by the visitor. Booklet covers include images from the panels, and are protected by transparent vinyl. In future use, the booklet may be reprinted in a “take-home” version, so visitors would be able to recall the story and their introduction to Mother Theodore and the community.

INFLUENCES

Dadaists developed photomontage to awaken the everyday man from a lethargy caused by lack of engagement by preeminent classic trends. Their work included cut or torn images collected from popular publications, randomly arranged in spatial configurations including body parts, objects and even machinery, shocked viewers accustomed to an ordered, refined genre. Following political events of the day, the work contained stinging, concealed propaganda. (Dillon 67)

A founder, and most well known member of the Dadaists in Berlin, John Heartfield (1894-1961), targeted the Nazi Party by constructing biting political propaganda posters
using torn images from current publications. His intent was to arouse public awareness and foment social reform. (Meggs 283)

Example: (A) *Adolf the Superman Swallows Gold and Spouts Junk* (1932)

Kurt Schwitters, (1887-1948) named his brand of Dadaism, "Merz", a derivation of the German word for commerce. Using layers, he produced images of "color against color, texture against texture," (Meggs 282) that were complex sense/nonsense artistic pieces. Schwitters' work was composed of found pieces, large and small, in whole or part, sometimes found as cast offs in garbage bins and alleyways from the popular culture. Even today, pieces composed of recycled fragments, are said to have been influenced by the Dadaists, though they may or may not be of any political significance (Dillon 3).
In the 1960s Jerry Uelsmann (1934- ) disregarded the common photographic standard of every photographic outcome being pre-visualized before snapping the shutter, by layering multiple photographic negatives in the master image to create a new dream-like form of photomontage. He was not so interested in "taking photographs" as "making pictures" (Uelsmann 7). In his paper, "Post-Visualization", a parody designed to enlighten, broaden, and open up the scope of creating photographic images, he played on words that indicated his symbolic use of objects and figures. Crisp, might not be clear (in meaning). His intention, using absolutely concrete, easily recognized objects, was to push the viewer into examination of possibility rather than merely portray reality.
As an art form, photomontage waxed and waned into obscurity, only to experience several revivals. Advertising, with the advent of digital imaging and manipulation within software programs, eventually would become its evolutionary master. (Meggs 280)

A modern photomontage photo-illustrator, Diane Fenster, describes herself as an alchemist, using a combination of photography and scanned imagery. She uses multiple layers both literally in Photoshop and figuratively in the images she chooses. On her website (www.dianefenster.com) a catalogue of work is available for commercial clients. She identifies her profession as that of photo illustrator, (Fenster 1) but reaches far beyond cold, glib advertisement.

As an example, Car of the Future (Fenster 2) includes layered images of a mature woman facing the viewer, images of auto blueprints, auto test dummies, diagrams of safety
features bearing the title, “Blueprint for Safety”. The images combine to deliver the message, yet subtly, through the viewer’s discovery. It is NOT the manufacturer’s, “I will tell you what you need,” but rather, “Let’s consider all options to be safe while growing older and driving.” Her work invites us to willingly comply because it appears reasonable.

Examples: (D) *Car of the Future*;

(E) *Internet Security Crisis*

In another work, *Internet Security Crisis*, (Fenster 3) for *Infoworld Magazine*, she deals with a well defined topic of
Internet security and theft, with crisp images and bolder colors. Again, viewers "discover" her meaning by finding/linking relationships drawing on their personal experience. It is as if she pulls the conclusion from the viewer.

After returning to multiple websites and publications to study Ms Fenster's work, it became evident to me that my attraction to her work was her underlying assumption that the viewer is intelligent, has valuable life experience and can come to a desired conclusion, given sufficient visual information. In analyzing over seventy of her photomontage images I decided I wanted to present Mother Theodore Guérin's story in a way that would stir personal memories, that would actively engage viewers, and that would invite them to draw conclusions based on personal life experience.

I wanted to create images anyone could recognize from their own experience, whether first hand or vicariously. Anyone can look at an image of horse and buggy, for example, and tell immediately this means of transportation is far more time-consuming and difficult than their car. They can imagine, by seeing a ship's image with sails, that travel would be substantially different, less comfortable and, more time consuming, would cause more seasickness, experience more loss of life, have fewer people on board, be unaffordable by most, and present more hazards than they would face in the same journey today. They come to the question, "How did she do it?" and that is exactly my intention. I want viewers to see Mother Theodore as a person not so different than themselves.
This is why photomontage works so well for the panels. Disparate images reside in a co-presence to form a gestalt. (Dillon 10-11). It sums up the events using visuals to engage the viewer in a complex, ongoing story and draws from them the answers that lie within.

CHALLENGES OF THE PROJECT
Collection of Images

Image collection at each repository presented challenges. Some of the most frustrating: assistants saw their roles as guards/protectors of the collection rather than assistants in a search; the system of storage did not facilitate or enhance retrieval of desired images; the system for retrieval in place at one location did not match that of sequestered archives in another place in the same building; only those who had seen what had been stored knew where to look, no lists or catalogues were available; other departments held image resources for five years before releasing them to the archivist, creating a five year lag in retrieval; and images found on some websites referred the searcher to contacts not familiar with website content, making information gathering frustrating, if not impossible.

The lesson learned, after months of requesting images, was the more the archivist/librarian knew about what images I desired, how they would be used, the breadth and depth of the project, the more likely I was to receive ancient images sequestered from the general public. It is far different from requesting a book in the Dewey Decimal System.
Decisions: Printing, Layering, and Presentation

Originally it was my hope to print images on several transparent film layers, separating them with spacers, against a single opaque background (probably containing the current background letters). The viewer would literally look *through* the piece to the background, which would change with every light adjustment, creating new reflections and shadows.

This became challenging for multiple reasons. The first was the treatment of image edges with opacity and feathering. While layered images conceal additional image data from one layer to another, printing on transparent film would necessitate absolute clarity beyond a softened edge. We work on the image that will be *seen*. In this type of presentation what *should not be seen* must also be addressed. Each panel contains approximately twenty images, in addition to the background, and depending on the number of film layers, the challenge multiplies.

The second challenge involved multiple layers of transparent film, measuring 36” x 60”, separated by spacers, that must be designed to be hung on some kind of rod that would protrude forward from the back of the piece. Stabilization from front-to-back and side-to-side presented a third serious consideration.

The scope of the work began to be dwarfed by the magnitude of hanging challenges. The intent of multiple
transparent film layers was abandoned in favor of concentration on manageable, transportable pieces.

CONCLUSION

The panels, as they were designed, drew people in to Mother Theodore’s story and provided an entry for them to participate in the scenes. Many who were familiar with the history recognized people from the past, others pointed asking about particular images, saying, “So THAT’S ……!” Those unfamiliar with the story looked to the booklets as a guide and resource as they went from panel to panel. Many commented the pictorial account became much richer and enlivened the history. Small groups even discussed the development of architectural styles or the imagined difficulties of living in that period. The project elicited memories, thoughts and feelings from the viewers—exactly as intended.
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