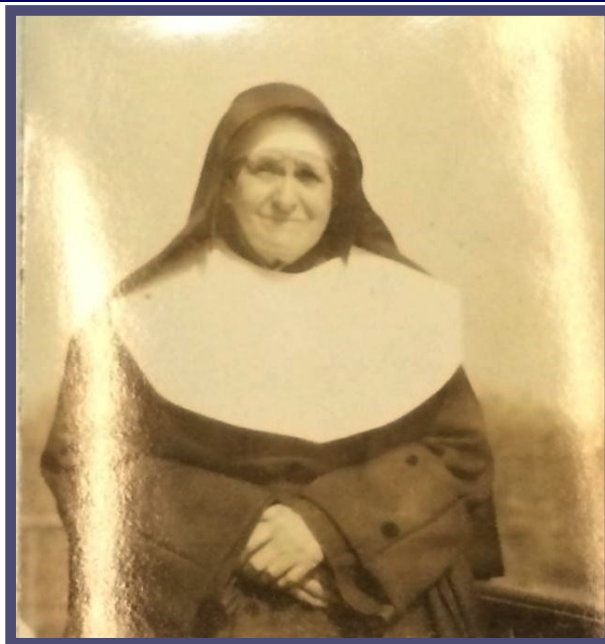


Annals from the Archives

Sister Raphael of the Sacred Heart



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Sister Raphael of the Sacred Heart Pike
Passport photo
Trinity Washington University Archives

—While it is known that Sister Raphael of the Sacred Heart's ministry centered around Trinity College in Washington DC from its very foundation, not all are aware that she also had close ties to Ipswich and the North Shore of Boston.

Sister Raphael of the Sacred Heart was born on February 9, 1858 as Lucy Johnson Pike in Brooklyn, New York, the daughter of James and Lucy (Johnson) Pike. Three days after her birth, Lucy's mother died. And because this was long before baby formula was created, her father hired a widow who'd recently lost her baby to be Lucy's nurse. Lucy's aunt also came to help the family, which included Lucy's brother, James, who was five. During those early years, the Pikes spent most summers with Lucy's grandparents who lived in Newburyport, MA.

One of Sister Raphael's earliest memories was of hearing about Abraham Lincoln's assassination and standing on the roof of a building in New York City to watch the funeral procession pass by. She also joined her family at City Hall to "gaze on the face of the dead President." Around this time, her father accepted a consular position in Mauritius. Because it was too far to take his children, they went to live with their grandparents in Newburyport. Lucy attended school for several years in Newburyport which had "little discipline . . . yet as I look back on those days I think I learned a great deal."

By 1870, the family settled in Lynn, MA and Lucy entered Lynn High School, graduating in 1874. During those years, she studied Latin, Greek and French. After exploring various opportunities for her further education, she chose to attend the Ipswich Female Seminary where she studied German, French, Chemistry, and Geography, among other subjects. While Lucy and her family were Universalists, she attended services at the Episcopal Church in Ipswich during her years at the Seminary. Her lessons in history brought about a growing interest in the Catholic Church and she visited Archbishop Williams in Boston to learn more. He recommended she begin instructions with the Sisters of Notre Dame at the Academy on Berkeley Street in Boston. But when she completed her instructions and was told she needed to be baptized, Lucy grew indignant as she had already been baptized when she was born.

The Ipswich Female Seminary closed in 1876, which left Lucy uncertain what she wished to do next. During that summer, her brother introduced her to a man who soon asked her to marry him. Surprised by his offer, she told him she wished to

complete her education before making a decision. They remained friends. That following winter, Lucy took classes in French and German at St. Margaret's School in Boston. After her classes, her male friend took her to hear concerts or see plays in the city. Not long after, he had to go out west for his business and they agreed to wait until they met again before deciding if they would marry.

Her classes at St. Margaret's School brought about an interest in religious life and she explored the possibility of entering St. Margaret's Convent in Boston as an Anglican sister. But looking back on those years, she wrote in her autobiography that, "*Gradually I became indifferent to any religion. Perhaps this was due to the influence of the School of Philosophy in Concord that I attended.*"

The School of Philosophy was opened in Concord, MA in 1879 by William Torrey Harris, Franklin Sanborn, and Bronson Alcott. Sessions were held during nine consecutive summers between 1879 to 1887. Drawn to its Transcendental philosophy, Lucy attended the school in 1881, hearing lectures by the most famous Transcendentalists of those years. She spoke with Elizabeth Peabody, Julia Ward Howe and became friends with Ellen Emerson, Ralph Waldo Emerson's daughter. She also joined the Philosophical Club in Concord that met every other week to discuss the lectures at the School. It was during this year that she found a new focus, the study of medicine. And since she had two female cousins who were physicians, she did not consider this unusual.

In 1882, she entered the Boston University School of Medicine. During her first year, she lived with her family in Lynn, but the commute became too much for her. The following year, she and a classmate rented a "flat" in Boston which they shared until they graduated in 1885. One student whom she became very close to, and whom she admired, was Dr. Anna Shaw. Dr. Shaw was born in England in 1847. She felt called to the ministry and became the second woman to graduate from the Boston University School of Theology. Though she was refused ordination by the New England Methodist Church, she was finally ordained in 1880 by the New York Conference of the Methodist Church. While serving as a minister at the Wesleyan Methodist Church in East Dennis, MA, she earned her medical degree at the BU School of Medicine. Lucy and Dr. Shaw maintained their friendship until Dr. Shaw's death in 1919.

Interestingly enough, during Lucy's second year in medical school, she was offered a teaching position at Vassar College. She refused because she wrote, "*I had no attraction for teaching and found medicine much to my liking.*" After graduating from medical school, she considered work at an Insane Asylum where she had been an intern, but because her father objected, she did not take the position. It was probably just as well, as she became quite ill after graduation. Her physician advised her to go to Waukesha, Wisconsin, with the hope that its healing waters would help her recover. She was so ill, however, that she couldn't travel any further than her aunt's house in Detroit. There she recovered enough to accept a position with Dr. Philip Carter, a local gynecologist. The doctor was also the editor of an international medical journal. And so, in addition to offering him assistance in his office a few hours a day, she wrote book reviews for the journal and also translated the journal into French and German.

While in Detroit, she became engaged to the man she'd met many years before, planning to marry him in June of 1886. But Lucy grew ill again, this time with spinal meningitis and needed to return to her family in Boston to recover. The following September, she was well enough to return to her aunt's home in Detroit.

During that Christmas, a friend of her aunt came to visit. She was a well known author and a devout Catholic. Lucy talked to her about her exploration of the Catholic faith many years before. This was passed along to a friend of the author who was a priest. Lucy agreed to meet with him, where she told him she had escaped the seduction of Rome. He replied that "*runaways are often captured in flight.*" She met with him several more times and he cleared up many of her doubts. She wrote, "*I found myself getting interested.*" However, she knew her family would object and as for her fiancée, she understood that he "*was much opposed to the Catholic Church.*" She felt it would be impossible to make that kind of sacrifice.

And so, she prayed and "*that night I went through a torture of [the] soul.*" When the sun came up the next morning, her decision was made. She would convert to Catholicism. She wrote to her fiancée to tell him and was soon baptized as a Catholic. Undeterred, her fiancée wrote back, asking her to wait six months before breaking off their engagement. Finally, though, he accepted her decision and returned to his work in Kansas. They never met again.

And while her family was not happy, she wrote that her visit with them after her conversion "*was a little constrained but on the whole more agreeable than I anticipated.*" Not long after she received her First Communion and was Confirmed.

She soon after set up her medical practice at 15 Breed Street in Lynn, MA. During those years she read many Catholic biographies and books of Catholic history. She practiced medicine in Lynn until 1890, when she joined the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, entering through the Waltham Novitiate. She took her first vows in 1892. Between that year and 1900, she served as a teacher and as the convent's infirmarian at the Academy on Berkeley Street in Boston.

In 1900, she was sent to Trinity College to organize the Greek Department, which she supervised until 1912, when she then organized the Biology Department. As the college's physician, she also dealt with the onslaught of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic. More than eighty of the students became ill and though hundreds were dying in the city, Sister Raphael did not lose one patient. In 1920, Sister Raphael was elected President of Trinity College. While President, she strengthened the college's curriculum, expanded many programs and built the Trinity College Chapel. After her term as College President, she was named the Superior of the Novitiate in Waltham, MA. Six years later, she returned to Trinity. She then organized the college's archives and wrote a short history of the congregation.

And while she had not felt drawn to teaching decades before, the tributes to her from her former students stated that she was a “*searching scholar. . .sympathetic teacher, progressive leader. . .a charming lady. . .a friend of the girls . . . [with a] merry twinkle in her eye, her placid activity and her gentle philosophy are already part of Trinity’s lore. To successive generations she has been sister, mother, aunt and is now gracefully approaching a sweet grandmotherhood.*”

Sister Raphael of the Sacred Heart died at Trinity College in Washington DC on March 21, 1940 and is buried at the Notre Dame cemetery in Ilchester, Maryland.

Ipswich Female Seminary

Image from

HistoricIpswich.net

The Seminary was located at the present day site of the Christian Science Church, across the street from the Choate Bridge Pub



House at 15 Breed Street, Lynn, MA

Where Dr. Lucy Johnson Pike
practiced medicine

Image from Google Maps

Sources consulted for this article

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- ◆ *The Concord School of Philosophy and the Legacy of Transcendentalism*, by Bruce Ronda. New England Quarter, December 2009.