Keepers of the Flame

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Mary Aloysia Hardey with Frances Gimber, RSCJ

Mother Aloysia Hardey
Assistant General, Society of the Sacred Heart
1809-1886

As you know I have been invited to spend some time talking about the person who can be called, after Philippine Duchesne, the second American founder of the Society of the Sacred Heart. She was born on the 8th of December, 1809. Mother Mary Ann Aloysia Hardey, is not well known, even among us RSCJ, but she is so important to the history of the development of the Society's work in the U.S., and she was an American. She is overshadowed by our two saints, Madeleine Sophie and Philippine, with good reason perhaps, and in a sense by Janet Erskine Stuart in the area of education, because Mother Stuart talked and wrote a great deal about education. Mother Hardey wrote practically nothing except letters; words of hers that we have come from these letters and from notes her community members made of her talks, but she was a great educator. There are three full length biographies: the official one in French produced by the motherhouse, a few years after her death, a fuller English one written by Mother Mary Garvey in 1910 and a delightful, almost fictionalized one called *Second Sowing* by Mother Margaret Williams, 1942, biographer also of Madeleine Sophie Barat. In all of these, in spite of quaint language and, it must be admitted some quaint ideas, Mary Ann Aloysia Hardey emerges as a real person, someone who looks you straight in the eye, as she does in her portrait.

She came from Maryland, the little village of Piscataway just across the Potomac from Mount Vernon. She was the second daughter of Frederick William Hardey and Sarah Spalding. Frederick Hardey's ancestors had come to America, to Maryland, in the *Ark* and the *Dove* with the colonists led by Lord Baltimore, staunch Catholics all, to establish a colony where religious toleration would prevail. Their name had been spelled Hardy, but another person of the same name had given up the faith and had established a Protestant colony in Maryland. To distance himself from the apostate, Nicholas Hardy, the 17th century ancestor added the "e" to the name.

When the children were still very young, Frederick decided to follow his brother to a remote western location where there was land a-plenty practically for the taking and the possibility of building a fortune, so when Mary Ann was seven years old she found herself in Opelousas, Louisiana. It so happened that a few years later a certain Mrs. Smith gave her house at Grand Coteau to Bishop DuBourg, who immediately asked the religious of the Sacred Heart to open a school there. Mother Duchesne sent Eugénie Audé and Sister Mary Layton, our first American

recruit, to be the founders. Mary Ann Hardey was among the first pupils in that second school of the Society in North America. As you know, it still exists, and it is the oldest house in the Society in continuous existence.

She loved school; she was loved and she excelled, and before long the idea came to her that she should cast her lot with this little group of nuns. She was particularly fond of the superior and mistress general, Eugénie Audé, whose poor English embarrassed the child. Mary Ann set herself to learning French so that Mother Audé would not have to talk to her in English. She went home for short time after finishing her studies and announced to her parents her intention to enter the Society. Her father replied laconically that he would be glad to drive her back to Grand Coteau because he knew she would be home again soon. When she sent him a message asking for a forgotten mirror, he felt he was right, but he wasn't. She was determined to stay, even though she found the life difficult, especially obedience. And when we see how active and energetic she was to prove throughout her life, how much initiative she showed, we won't wonder that obedience was hard. Her family and all on the plantation missed her. One day when she was still a postulant, her old nursemaid Sophy arrived at the convent to bring Miss Mary home because the master was ill and asking for his daughter. She refused to go, but later changed her mind and set out on foot. Part way down the road, she changed her mind again and ran back to confess to Mother Audé what she had done. It turned out that Mr. Hardey was not ill; it was Sophy's trick to get Mary Ann to come home. She entered in September and received the habit, thus becoming a novice, in October at the age of sixteen. She was given the name of Aloysia for two reasons: Mother Duchesne had devotion to Jesuit saints and so gave her first recruits names of some of these saints, but Philippine's own niece, Aloysia Jouve, RSCJ in France, had recently died very young with a reputation for great holiness. The hope was that Mary Ann Hardey would emulate the holiness of life of the first Aloysia.

Shortly after she received the habit she accompanied Mother Audé and five others to the foundation of a new house, St. Michael's, east of Grand Coteau, on the Mississippi. She was put to work with the pupils immediately, for there was no one else. This was her initiation into teaching, and though previously she had had no attraction for it, she found that she was suited to it and grew to love it.
She had been a novice only for fifteen months when she was admitted to her first vows in March 1827. Her profession of final vows took place six years later on July 19, 1833. That same year Mother Barat recalled Eugénie Audé to France to serve as assistant general for America. The superior named to replace her at St. Michael's made some serious mistakes, especially borrowing money she couldn't repay. Something had to be done, so upon the advice of Mother Audé, the mother general appointed this newly professed religious of twenty-three superior of the convent. From then on she was Mother Hardey; she was to hold the office, usually in combination with other posts for the next fifty-three years. It may surprise us that someone so young was named to that post, but we have to remember that they were all young and inexperienced. The Society was

new; Madeleine Sophie herself wasn't yet fifty. Philippine was older, but she was the exception. Young Aloysia rose to the occasion, and though she had problems with the bishop over her building project, she proved herself capable, enterprising and judicious.

Here I would like to interject a few details about the Society in Europe to understand what happened while she was still superior at St. Michael's. By this time the Society was thirty-five years old; it was established in Italy, including Rome, and Savoy as well as in France and America; its Constitutions had been approved by the Pope, and it had grown in membership. Madeleine Sophie Barat was superior general for life; she resided in Paris. There was a movement among some members in Rome to make the Society more Roman and more like the Jesuits and to move the center of the Society to Rome instead of Paris. The leading spirit of this movement was Elisabeth Galitzine, a Russian convert to Catholicism who had entered the Society guided by her adviser, Father Rozaven, a member of the Jesuit general council. A general council of the Society of the Sacred Heart held in 1839, influenced by Mother Galitzine and Rozaven, enacted certain measures that would have brought the Society more in line with Jesuit practice. These measures were to be given a three-year trial. In an effort to have them understood by the religious in far off America, Madeleine Sophie commissioned Elisabeth Galitzine to visit America in an official capacity to explain the new decrees and to conduct an assessment of the Society's mission there so far. Mother Galitzine was an impetuous and energetic person; she was a princess by birth and imperious at best. The young American superior of St. Michael's was somewhat dismayed at the prospect of meeting a princess, "with my rustic manners," she said of herself. But she found Galitzine simple and approachable and easily gave her her confidence. Galitzine rapidly made many changes in the organization of the Society's works in the United States. She moved the novitiate from Florissant, where Mother Duchesne had established it, to a remote place in Pennsylvania called McSherrystown, and she decided on a foundation in New York, which had been asked for by Bishop Hughes and which Mother Barat very much wanted. Mother Hardey was to be the foundation stone of that first house on the East Coast.

It would be a good idea here to stop to describe briefly the organization and government of the Society throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th. Madeleine Sophie held strongly to central government with a superior general and assistants – the number came to be four – who formed her council, with regional superiors called provincials or vicars, who traveled to make what were called "regular visits," inspection tours of the houses. The convent or house was the center of the apostolate as well as the residence of the nuns. In some houses the religious conducted just one school, but in several places, especially in the larger houses in cities there were at least two schools, a boarding school and a school for poor children; in a few places there was also a day school and an sometimes an orphanage. In addition, as the Society grew there were also sodalities or associations for working women, for professional women, night classes etc. All this took place in the House, as the nuns did not go out on account of cloister. Travel

from one house to another and exchange of personnel were allowed; otherwise only provincial or vicariate superiors traveled to make these regular visits of the houses under them.

When Aloysia Hardey was named superior of the first house in New York, she began a career of travel to open houses, to oversee their development, to decide on building and moving, or to close establishments that were not flourishing. New York provided her base for all this activity. Beginnings were not always easy: during those first years when Mother Galitzine was still on the scene, it happened that a religious in France had allowed a business man to send some merchandise to the U.S. via the Sacred Heart in New York without warning the nuns to expect the shipment. When it arrived, everyone thought it was gifts from our European sisters: it contained among other things twenty altar vestments. Mother Hardey suggested waiting to see if any information would be forthcoming, but the impetuous Mother Galitzine urged immediate action, and the contents were distributed. You will guess what happened: the merchant arrived demanding his property or payment of 10,000 francs, in that day about $2000, an enormous sum. This earned Aloysia a strong reprimand from Mother Barat for her want of prudence: "You are certainly a novice in business affairs!… It's hard to understand such a lack of judgment," and so forth. Later Aloysia would redeem herself in Madeleine Sophie's eyes and develop a reputation as an acute business woman.

At the time of the above incident Aloysia Hardey had not met Madeleine Sophie, but the calling of a Society-wide council in 1842 gave her that opportunity. She went to France for the council, which never took place after all because of disagreements with the bishop, but she made a retreat that influenced her spiritually for the rest of her life, and she met her superior general. The story is told that Mother Barat, upon meeting Mother Hardey, exclaimed, "How young she is!" Ever quick, Mother Galitzine, who was standing by, retorted, "That is a fault she is correcting every day, Reverend Mother." There was mutual understanding and mutual affection from that meeting, and though Madeleine Sophie was frank as always in her criticisms of Aloysia, it is obvious that she trusted her. Later it would be rumored that Bishop Hughes of New York wanted the Sacred Heart in America to separate from France and be established as an American branch with Mother Hardey at the head. She was deeply distressed by this rumor and wrote straight to Mother Barat to protest her loyalty. Madeleine Sophie responded, "I believe that by now I know you through and through, and what I am convinced of above all is your sincere attachment to the Society."

Mother Hardey was in charge in New York for thirty years, and there she established what proved to be her most famous foundation: Manhattanville. The first location in lower Manhattan did not allow for expansion or for the grounds necessary for a boarding school. There was a brief sojourn in Astoria, in the country then, and in 1847, Bishop Hughes told Mother Hardey about a property in Harlem Heights in the village of Manhattanville. It had belonged to Jacob Lorillard, who had died ten years earlier. High on a hill with a view of the rivers to the east and the west, it

seemed made for the boarding school. The heirs had put it up for sale, but at the last minute the widow decided she did not want to sell it to "the Church." Mother Hardey ordered all the nuns and pupils to make a novena: they were to make the Way of the Cross for nine days, and at its end the old lady died, thus removing the obstacle to the sale. This development caused Bishop Hughes to comment, "Beware of opposing Mother Hardey because she will kill you with her novenas." All was not clear sailing yet, however: the asking price, $70,000, was 20,000 more than the Society was prepared to pay. Again, there was recourse to prayer: this time 20,000 prayers to Mary; some accounts say it was the *Memorare*, some the Hail Mary; whichever it was, the price was reduced to 50,000 and twelve additional acres were added to the original fifty, and thus Manhattanville came into being.

The growth of the city northward meant that at several different times parts of the property were taken for city streets. On one such occasion the plan provided for cutting a street right through the front door of the building. A delegation of city planners was named to call on the superior to inform her of the decision. One of these is reported to have said to the others, "Gentlemen, do not permit yourselves to be magnetized by Mother Hardey. Be determined not to yield…she has a wonderful power of bringing everyone into line with her views." She listened while they showed her their maps and explained the necessity of destroying her building; she made no response until they had finished, and then when asked for her reaction, she said, "Surely, Gentlemen, you cannot intend to carry out the extreme and ill-advised measures you have proposed?" and then proceeded to point out obstacles they had overlooked and to propose an alternative that saved the property. She had prepared a formal statement to that effect that each of the delegation signed. As they were leaving one of the men was heard saying, "Gentlemen, did I not warn you?" Whether this story is apocryphal or not, the fact is that the core of the property where the main buildings were located remained intact until the college move to Westchester County in 1952.

Mother Hardey soon opened a second house in New York. After 100 years in two city locations, that house moved to Greenwich. For a while she was superior of this house too, traveling back and forth by day. There is a funny story connected with this: in the Manhattanville community there was a young Italian nun named Stanislas Tommasini. She has left us a delightful memoir in which she recounts the following. She was the chosen companion for these day trips downtown; they used public transportation and wore secular clothes over their habits. It seems that one day Tommasini decided she wanted to be fashionable, so she wore a crinoline. But once in the bus, she discovered she did not know how to sit down in a crinoline, so she had to remain standing the whole way down. The bus was not crowded, so there were empty seats, and other passengers wondered why she did not sit down. Then the bus gave a mighty lurch; she was thrown back into a seat; her crinoline flew up revealing her habit underneath. She tells us: "Reverend Mother never made an allusion to this affair and I thought she had not forgiven me, when once at the motherhouse, before all the superiors after the retreat of 1877, she told the story in detail, adding,

‘You never knew how you amused me.’ ” On another occasion, Mother Hardey remarked to Tommasini, who was rather oddly dressed, “Tommasini, you did well to enter religion.” And still another: it seems that once when her superior was going away for a long time, Mother Tommasini was crying rather too copiously for Mother Hardey’s taste; she said, “Stop crying, Tommasini; I don’t want to get my feet wet.”

While she was responsible for the two houses in New York, Mother Hardey was superintending foundations in Canada that required visits to both Montreal and Halifax. She oversaw the move from McSherrystown to Philadelphia, then in 1847 to Eden Hall outside of Philadelphia. The next few years saw new houses opened up in Buffalo, Detroit and Albany and in St. Johns, New Brunswick, all under her supervision. In the meantime, Mother Hardey went to France for the Council of 1851. When she returned, she closed Buffalo house and moved the community to Rochester. There was another foundation in French Canada at Sault-au-Récollet followed by a journey to Havana to begin there. While in Havana Mother Hardey contracted yellow fever, and her life was in danger. Madeleine Sophie had been afraid for her health, but Mother Hardey recovered and the first convent and school in Cuba were established. The next year, 1859, she bought the property called Kenwood in Albany, New York, the house that became the novitiate for the whole of North America. That year there was a fire at Manhattanville – not the famous fire that destroyed the building later – and though ill herself, Mother Hardey organized the evacuation. The next day she had a slight stroke, and afterwards she was unable to write. She had had a beautiful, even hand and she was a prolific letter writer. From then on until the end of her life, she depended on a secretary to write her letters.

The Civil War brought new responsibilities; Mother Hardey had both southerners and northerners in her schools, especially at Manhattanville, there were daughters of officers on both sides, and it was a challenge to keep peace. Mother Barat asked her to visit the houses of the West, as they were cut off from their superior vicar who lived at Grand Coteau, so she undertook an extensive journey as far as St. Joseph, Missouri. In the course of that trip she passed through Chicago and visited the religious here. On account of the circumstances, Mother Barat asked Mother Hardey to take charge of these Missouri and Illinois houses until the end of the war, when communication with Louisiana would again be possible. Mother Barat’s death coincided with the end of the war, and once again there was a journey to France to take part in the election of the new mother general. This was Josephine Gœtz. On this occasion she formed a very high opinion of the American vicar, and when a vacancy occurred on the general council, Mother Gœtz would name Aloysia Hardey assistant general, the first American religious of the Sacred Heart to be so named.

Before that nomination Mother Hardey spent four years as superior at Kenwood, during which time she founded a house in Cincinnati and another in Southern Maryland. It was called Rosecroft, the name of the property. It had belonged to her stepmother, who willed it to her

daughter Pauline. When Pauline entered the Society of the Sacred Heart, it became the property of the Society; there was a house there for two years, but it did not prove feasible, so it was closed and another foundation made in Providence, Elmhurst. By that time Mother Hardey was at the center of the Society in Paris.

But before we look at her life there let's talk about what kind of a person she was and what kind of educator. This could be another whole talk, but we can touch on a few points. As superior and vicar she was much loved. The Kenwood house journal says apropos of one Christmas vacation: "Our reverend Mother seems to desire nothing except to make us happy." She was vigilant with regard to the well-being of her communities. The report of one regular visit underlines the importance of "abundant and good food." In another house she insists that all possible means be taken… "to reduce debt, without, however, economizing on the food or depriving the community of any necessaries;" and she orders the change of the cook when there have been complaints about her cooking. Elsewhere she observes: "the Mother charged with the sisters should never reprimand them at recreation." The superior should be very kind to all, watch over health and comfort of all, especially the coadjutrix sisters, never allow them to be treated harshly, which is contrary to spirit of Society.

Undoubtedly there were those whom she rubbed the wrong way – they have not recorded their feelings – but the testimonies to the affection in which she was held are numerous and convincing. Again the Kenwood journal, apropos of the day she left for Paris: "This is the saddest day Kenwood has ever known." She was responsible for a very large number of religious, but she had a personal relationship with each one: before going to Paris, she had private talk with every one of the 120 RSCJ at Manhattanville. The quotations above from Mother Tommasini's memoir reveal a woman with a sense of humor, and more than one house journal refers to Reverend Mother's amusing accounts of the hardships of foundation days, *e.g.* soup served in the refectory in the absence of spoons.

Her letters indicate that she had a realistic view of herself, an objective way of talking about herself when writing to Madeleine Sophie. She refers to her faults in a calm, matter-of-fact way. Her reactions to criticism show pain but are unruffled; she is determined to improve but not anxiously. She is respectful and deferential but never obsequious, even while using the 19th century formulas that strike us as exaggerated. My impression is that she had a good self-image, but no ego. She is not self-important, and she does not take herself too seriously. Except for that one reference above to her retreat in 1842 in Lyon, we haven't mentioned her spiritual life. Her religious daughters pay tribute to her prayerfulness, even saying that they could tell by her serenity when she had spent a long time in prayer. But we have no spiritual notes or journals; letters do not speak of her intimate prayer life. It is understandable because, as we have said, after 1859, she could not write. Her instructions and admonitions to her nuns are very strong in their insistence on the importance of prayer and of faithful commitment to the Sacred Heart of

Jesus, to whom they were dedicated.

Though responsible for so many schools and so many school mistresses, she had not much opportunity to develop teaching experience: she was put in charge too soon. But she always taught a few classes; at Manhattanville, we are told, she would appear in the study hall at handwriting class to observe and correct and encourage. In her talks to young teachers, she stressed that the work of the school is a work of the whole community; all have a part, not only those who teach in the classroom, but the cook in the kitchen as well. Education is not the work of one person; there are to be no stars. She was very strong that teachers should respect the needs of the children and allow for their weaknesses while holding them to a high standard. She felt that some young nuns were too demanding; she would say, "What would it be like if Our Lord were as exacting with you as you are with the children?" Above all she believed and taught that it is the virtue and character of the teacher that influences the students. She used to say that it was Mother Audé's example that formed her.

Immediate contact with the school ceased when she went to Paris in 1872, as did responsibility for houses and people under her. She said frankly that she suffered from inaction at the beginning: she had nothing to do except give advice to the superior general when asked. It is evidence of her deep inner life that she was able to make the change, but we know little of her thoughts and feelings, such that another person would have confided to a journal, because she couldn't write.

There was travel, however, to visit European houses in company with the superior general, acting as her interpreter during visits to England and Ireland. And there were three journeys to America and back to settle business and oversee foundations. For a time Mother Hardey was in charge of the probation, the program that prepared young religious for their final vows; she also acted as superior of a retreat house next door to the motherhouse. It was also a place that lodged parlor boarders, young women who were in Paris to study; that gave her some contact with people beyond the communities. Many of them were foreigners, and her understanding of homesickness stood her in good stead in helping them. The rules were as strict as they were in the boarding schools. Once some Irish girls smuggled in some tea and were about to have a forbidden tea party when the plan was discovered and the tea confiscated. Mother Hardey found out that the girls had been disciplined; she said nothing so as not to appear in conflict with the nun in charge of the girls, but a few days later invited them to have tea with her in her parlor.

The whole Society celebrated with Mother Hardey her golden jubilee of profession on the 19th of July, 1883. From then on her health declined; it is not clear what was the cause; it is possible that she had a serious heart condition. The superior general, Mother Lehon, had the thought that it would help her to go to America to be among her own people, but the doctor said she could never stand the trip. Mother Lehon then sent for the Mother Sarah Jones, the vicar who had

replaced Mother Hardey, and Mother Hoey, who had been her secretary for many years, inviting them to come to Paris to visit their beloved mother. While they were at sea, she died on June 17, 1886, at the age of 76. When the two arrived at the motherhouse four days later, they were informed of Mother Hardey's death. The superior general would have sent her remains back to America with them, but Reverend Mother Jones remembered that Mother Hardey had said that she wanted to remain where she died. So her body was placed in a tomb in the crypt of the chapel at Conflans outside of Paris, where it stayed until 1905. In the early 1900's a series of anti-clerical laws in France resulted in the departure from the country of all the religious of the Sacred Heart and of many other nuns as well. They were forbidden to conduct schools or even to teach unless they became secularized. The motherhouse, the center of government of the Society was moved to Belgium, and it was then that Madeleine Sophie Barat's body was sent to Jette St Pierre, outside of Brussels. The superior general decided then that Mother Hardey's remains should be sent back to America; in the summer of 1905 a grave was prepared at Kenwood and her body crossed the ocean for the last time; it was her twentieth transatlantic crossing.

What is her legacy? It is surely the presence in the educational world of the thriving schools that today form the Network. Most of the older ones owe their foundation directly or indirectly to her initiative or to her care. It was entirely fitting that when the nuns in Chicago opened a school for boys at Sheridan Road, they named it after her, Hardey Preparatory School. All the schools, new and old, can look to her for inspiration; our school heads especially can find in her guidance in forming teachers and students. The young nuns who were formed by her collected her counsels and published them after her death in a little book. The last section on "Zeal and Education of Youth" contains much wisdom about the importance of the action and influence of the teacher and about the true mission of the Sacred Heart educator. She urges teachers: "Study the sciences you are called upon to teach; but, above all, study your pupils in order to mould their characters, to make them love duty, and to lead them to God." She did not speak the language of goals and criteria; she rather spoke of virtue or supernatural motivation, but she would have applauded the efforts towards formation to mission in the schools today.

To her nuns – and by extension to all those who work with them – she said we should have three loves, love of the Heart of Jesus, love of the Society and love of the Rule. Today we would express that as, of course, love of the Heart of Jesus as encountered in the people in our path, especially the poor and oppressed; love of and loyalty to our own sisters around the world, and for us RSCJ loving and active fidelity to our way of life, while for our alumnae/i, associates and colleagues she would surely have encouraged and applauded their generous commitment to the Society's mission of education.