

# CANTICLE OF ST. GERTRUDE

## A JOURNAL OF OUR LIFE



**2015 Theme:**  
Celebrating the  
Year of Consecrated Life

**This issue:**  
Community

## Influencers of Our Faith

### *A Message from Prioress Sister Mary Forman*

The third theme of the issues of the *Canticle* highlighting the Year of Consecrated Life, which Pope Francis proclaimed to begin on the first Sunday of Advent, November 29, 2014, is that of “community.” Although *communitas* is not a word used by Benedict, community is most often associated with Benedictine monasteries. The idea of community harkens back to the accounts of the ideal Christian community that Luke portrays in Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-37 and 5:12-16, and some verses of which Benedict borrows for undergirding his chapters 33-34 of his Rule, on dispossession and common sharing of goods.

As a historian of monastic studies, I think of community in the sense of the communion of saints and the long lineage of monastic women who have inspired a great variety of monastic lifestyles and forms of community throughout the centuries. I would like to introduce you to just a few of those monastic foremothers.

Let's begin with Amma Syncletica, who lived from mid-fourth to mid-fifth century in Alexandria, Egypt. Her “Life” and some twenty-seven of her “sayings” have been preserved from her teachings to the women of her community. A keen observer of the movements of the human heart, based on the teaching



*Amma Syncletica of Alexandria*

of the fourth-century systematician of monasticism Abba Evagrius Ponticus, she distinguished between healthy and unhealthy grief. The former is shown in weeping over one's own faults and the weaknesses of one's neighbor, as a means of drawing close to God; the latter leads to despair, which is cured by prayer and psalmody, the very practices one

is tempted to forego. [AP 27] It is not enough for her to be concerned about her own salvation, but she takes into account the spiritual health of her neighbors, be they her own community members or those living around the monastic home, where the sisters lived together.



Another ancient *amma* (wise woman of the Spirit) was Melania the Elder, a Roman aristocratic widow, who set up a monastery on the Mount of Olives in the fourth century. When Evagrius had run away from Cappadocia (modern Turkey) because of involvement with a Roman official's wife, on coming to Melania's monastery, he fell ill and physicians could not heal him. On revealing to Melania his breach of a promise to God to become a monk, she made him promise to honor his promise; when he immediately became well, she clothed him in a monk's clothing and sent him to the lower desert of Egypt to the monastic settlements in Kellia and Scetis. [Palladius, HL 38] Monastic history has more frequently remembered the child of her prayer and discernment than the godmother whose wisdom detected an illness of heart and its cure.

In the tenth century, the playwright Hrotswitha of Gandersheim, a canoness, wrote plays in the style of the ancient Roman Terence but taking as their subject the stories of the fifth-century harlots-turned-repentants and making of them morality plays for the court of Otto I. Hrotswitha lived in the Benedictine monastery of Gandersheim, but as a canoness, she kept her own funds and would have been free to leave were she to have married, unlike the sisters of the community.

Heloise, wife of the twelfth-century philosopher Abelard and prioress of The Paraclete Monastery, Ferreux-Quincey, France,

*Continued on page 7...*

### OUR MISSION

Eager to welcome God's transforming power in ourselves and our world, we, the Benedictine Sisters of the Monastery of St. Gertrude, seek God together through monastic profession and respond in Healing Hospitality, Grateful Simplicity and Creative Peacemaking.

## Sister Evangela Bossert: In the Heart of Contemplation

Sister Evangela recently asked Father Damian Higgins, who leads iconography retreats at Spirit Center, to review her drawing for an icon of the young St. Benedict. “He called me an iconographer,” she smiles. This affirmation of her craft as an iconographer has been emerging since 1998 and more broadly since childhood, when she became interested in art. “With an icon, you’re painting for the spiritual experience and not to make a piece of art,” she explains.

Sister Evangela’s emphasis on the spiritual experience and contemplative prayer has been expressed as well through her work as a teacher and writer. “Early Christianity rooted the soul in the heart,” she has written. “The heart is the deep center of the self where God abides. God initiates awareness of this self in us and makes possible the conscious entry into God’s presence.”

She is quick to draw connections to her own Benedictine tradition. Although St. Benedict doesn’t speak directly or specifically about contemplative awareness, there are elements in his Rule that show an understanding of it, especially in his many “heart” references, such as: “Attend with the ear of your heart;” “Do not harden your hearts;” “Speak the truth from your heart;” “Fling the evil one from the sight of your heart;” and “Run with expanded hearts in the inexpressible delight of love.”

This desire to more clearly align the spiritual with the heart led her to translate from Latin some of St. Gertrude’s writings from the book, *The Herald of God’s Loving-Kindness* — Gertrude’s heartfelt revelations of God’s love. “I had never heard of Gertrude before coming here. I went to the library and found a few books but they seemed so academic.”

After spending the first part of her career teaching middle and high school English and History, she returned to Idaho State University for a master’s degree in English and then a Ph.D. in English — interested in transformational writing, her dissertation was “Primitive Consciousness in the Poetry of Gary Snyder.” She became director of the monastery’s InnSpire sabbatical and spirituality program. She also taught Centering Prayer and began working with the monastery’s growing number of oblates, or lay members. “Oblates kept asking me, ‘Who is Gertrude?’”

Since she had studied Latin throughout her education, Sister Evangela felt led to translate the medieval mystic’s writings in a way in which contemporary seekers could relate. “I selected

passages that reflected growth and conversion of spirituality,” Sister Evangela explains. She also wrote commentary, reflections, poems, and prayers. The result is *Gertrude of Helfta: Companion for the Millennium* and it is dedicated to the oblates of the monastery.

“It took me some time to understand the connection between this community and Gertrude,” says Sister Evangela. “She was Benedictine in the full sense of the word. She loved to read and study. She was also among the earliest to have a devotion to the sacred heart. This was about learning to think of Jesus not so much in terms of godliness but more as human and the capacity we have for friendship with Christ. In her prayer, Gertrude is relaxed in the presence of Christ. It’s conversation. This is also very important to me: she provided a model for friendship with Christ.”

Sister Evangela became interested in becoming a Benedictine during a college course in church history at Kansas City University. She felt torn as to whether she should study English or History and took a break to decide, also taking advantage of an opportunity to train as an x-ray technologist and earn money to pay for her education. In addition, she took night classes in art. She passed the exam to be an x-ray technologist and then began night school at the university to finish her degree — in English.

While training to be an English teacher, she worked as an x-ray instructor. “I discovered I love to teach,” she says. During a retreat, she confided to her retreat director, a Jesuit from Seattle University, that she wanted to become a Benedictine but did not want to stay in the Midwest, where all the Benedictine communities were quite large. He suggested St. Gertrude’s. She came out on a train by herself and in 1963, at the age of 33, made her First Profession. “I am excited at our openness to all kinds of possibilities for ministry,” she says. “We have stayed with the original nursing and teaching wherever that’s possible but we are open to the possibilities.” ✠

*Gertrude of Helfta: Companion for the Millennium can be found in the Gift Shop at the Welcome Center and online at [www.StGertrudes.org](http://www.StGertrudes.org).*





# MEMBERSHIP

## Being Benedictine in the World

On September 12, friends and supporters of the monastery gathered for the first “Puget Sound Area Circle,” an event to extend the Monastery’s presence to Western Washington. The Area Circle took place at St. Jude’s parish in Redmond, where Sister Betty Schumacher is a pastoral associate.

The morning session included a presentation on Benedictine spirituality in which Sister Teresa Jackson challenged people to think of the term *monastic* beyond the images of a vowed religious. “A monastic can be anyone who wants to live a life focused on God,” she explained. She then described ways for people to create structures in their lives to live out their values and commitments to prayer.

This was the second of many satellite events (the first was in Lewiston) that the Monastery will be holding throughout the region to give more people opportunities to encounter St. Gertrude’s community and Benedictine spirituality. Sister Teresa is overseeing a “Benedictines in the World” collection of programs that includes many ways — both through distance learning and on-site at the Monastery — for people to grow as monastics. ✕

*To learn more, visit [www.StGertrudes.org](http://www.StGertrudes.org)*



*Above: Sister Betty Schumacher welcomes attendees to St. Jude’s parish in Redmond, Washington. Below: Sister Teresa talks about the ways to be monastic in the world.*

## Community of Care



The Monastery is finding innovative ways to care for elders (Sun Porch Sisters). One way includes a Monastic Immersion Experience option for caregivers in which participants live in the monastery and experience monastic life with us.

We are also collaborating with Community Action Partnership/Area Agency on Aging and LCSC School of Nursing. Recently senior Nursing student Jessica Daugherty-Sterner (shown above with Debbie Lemon of CAP) began her practicum with the Sun Porch sisters. ✕

## Motherhouse Road Trip

A Nun’s Life Ministry visited us on September 3 and hosted a podcast that featured Sister Bernadette Stang and Sister Carlotta Maria Fontes. Sister Teresa Jackson and Sister Janet Barnard answered questions in the chat room. The Motherhouse Road Trip combines social media and in-person events in innovative ways to engage with people about God, faith, and religious life. You can listen to the podcast at [www.stgertrudes.org](http://www.stgertrudes.org). Below is a final picture of the hostesses — Sister Julie Vieira and Sister Maxine Kollasch — and guests with the live audience. ✕



# SPIRIT CENTER RETREATS



## Into the Creative Experience

**“Embracing the Artistic Call: A Cohort Program for Exploring the Mystery of the Creative Experience” Initial Week: February 22-26, 2016**

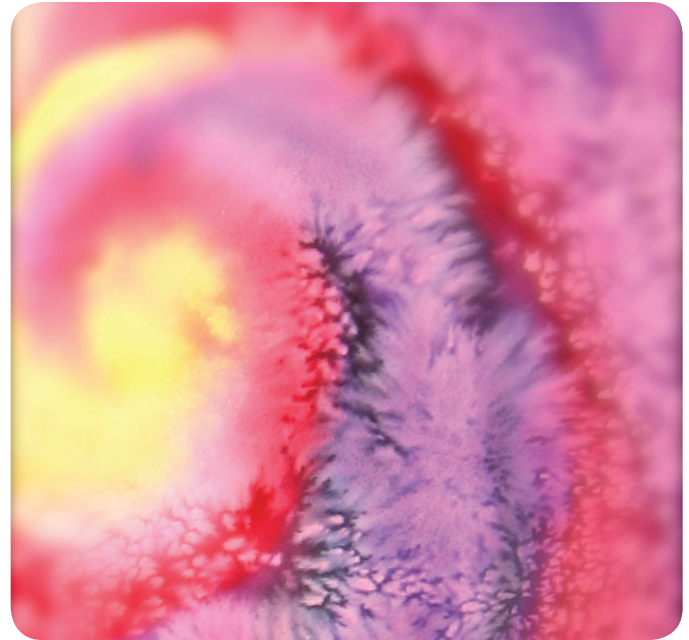
One of the benefits of attending a retreat is the spiritual companionship of learning and growing with a group of people. “Embracing the Artistic Call: A Cohort Program for Exploring the Mystery of the Creative Experience” seeks to extend the retreat community beyond the one-time gathering so that community develops across distances and then reconverges in a final retreat that includes an art show with the sisters.

One of the dictionary definitions of *cohort* is “a group of people banded together” and that is exactly the intention of how people will proceed through the program. It all begins with a week-long retreat February 22-26, 2016, and concludes twelve weeks later with a weekend retreat June 3-5, 2016. In between, participants will have the opportunity of responding to weekly invitations, deepening their creativity, and staying connected to cohort members.

“Embracing the Artistic Call” will bring together individuals at any level of artistic proficiency who have a desire to live a creative life with intention. One cohort inquirer wrote: “I no longer think artists do well in isolation; artists need to spend it all, be open to those who cross their paths and be in that present moment, listening to and engaging others. That act alone nurtures their craft and potentially strengthens it.”



*In “Embracing the Artistic Call,” artists engage in a supportive community of creative development.*



If you have the desire to explore the unknown reaches of your own creative spirit with the support of a creative community, then please join us for this twelve-week cohort program. One participant wrote: “Full of surprises, twists and turns and aha moments. It was nurturing in a way I hadn’t anticipated.”

“Embracing the Artistic Call” is limited to 20 participants who will be accepted through an application process. A donation of \$765 will cover the retreats, food, lodging and program costs after acceptance into the cohort program. To inquire about participating, call 208-962-2004 or visit [www.Spirit-Center.org](http://www.Spirit-Center.org) ✕

### Upcoming Retreats at Spirit Center

**October 13-16 ~ Sharing the Wisdom of Experience: A Spiritual Director’s Retreat**

**December 1-17 ~ Silence the Christmas Noise: An Advent Retreat** Private retreat options.

**January 8-10 ~ Wise Women: Honoring the Feminine Journey**

**January 22-29 ~ Come to the Quiet**

**February 22-26 ~ Embracing the Artistic Call, Initial Retreat**

208-962-2000  
[www.Spirit-Center.org](http://www.Spirit-Center.org)



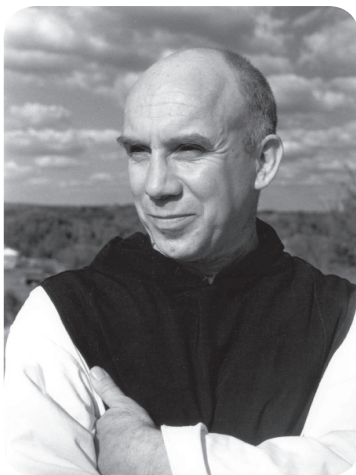


## Meet a Mystic

The rooms in Spirit Center are named for famous mystics and monastics. Each issue of the *Canticle* features one of them.

**Thomas Merton** (1915-1968) was a Trappist monk, writer, mystic, and interfaith leader. He was also a poet and social activist devoted to non-violence — a value that for him was an expression of his faith. His life inspires many in how to live with creativity and unity in a world filled with violence and division.

For one who knew Thomas in his college days, it might have been hard to imagine that he had a vocation. He proudly proclaimed he believed “in nothing,” lived a partying lifestyle, and was careless with his resources. The first religious community he tried to join rejected him for his illicit past. Yet the call to a deeper beauty in God persisted. His biggest challenge was understanding that he was indeed fit to serve Christ. He began to feel drawn to visit churches and to tend to loved ones with prayer. Good books, wise teachers, and an increasing ability to listen through a greater commitment



to prayer led him to finally take religious vows at the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani in Kentucky. Here, he continued to develop as a writer, publishing many books of poetry and non-fiction, including *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1948), his autobiography.

### Prayer from his book, *Thoughts in Solitude*:


“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that

the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.” ✕

Be  
still  
and know...

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**Cynthia Schultz, RN, BCST, APP**  
Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapist  
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## Laudato Si' – Praise Be To Thee

In his Rule of Life, St. Benedict reminds his followers that everything is to be treated with respect and care. This principle flows from an understanding that anything used by a monastic in the course of daily activities belongs not to that individual. It is intended for the good of the total community. So regardless of which “tool of the monastery” is being used – a broom, a computer, a car, water – we need to take into consideration the next person who will need it. Benedict emphasizes this by requiring reparation be made anytime an item is damaged or lost.

In his encyclical *Care For Our Common Home*, Pope Francis bases his observations on that same principle, expanding it to include the entire community of life. He reminds us in no uncertain terms that as we use the common resources provided by our planet Earth we must be mindful of others who also depend upon those resources, both those living now as well as future generations. He challenges each of us to take a hard look at our personal lifestyle in the light of its impact on the wellbeing of our planet and its inhabitants.

In the first half of the encyclical letter, Pope Francis describes in blunt language the ecological crisis we face in our world today. He does not paint an encouraging picture but neither does he conclude that it is hopeless. Yes, he says, there are major national, political and economic reforms that must be undertaken. But he is convinced that will only happen when a moral conversion takes place in the hearts of individuals and small groups. He challenges us to turn from our excessive need to consume and strive to live in harmony with creation. Only in this way will we find true fulfillment and joy.

In his rule Benedict tells us: “When beginning any good work, beg of God with most earnest prayer to perfect it.”



Pope Francis opens his letter with the words “Laudato Si’, mi’ Signore” – “Praise be to you, my Lord.” Here are two wise leaders who are convinced that if we open our hearts to God in honest prayer we will be led in the way of righteousness. This will demand making changes in the way we live: how we shop, how we prepare meals, how we use water and energy, how we show our love for all our brothers and sisters.

In the words of Pope Francis: “Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer. Inner peace is reflected in a balanced lifestyle together with a capacity for wonder which takes us to a deeper understanding of life.” St. Benedict expressed the same idea in his chapter on the observance of lent when he states: “...let each one deny himself some food, drink, sleep, needless talking and idle jesting and look forward to holy Easter with joy and spiritual longing.”

Have you taken time yet to study and pray over the encyclical letter *Care for Our Common Home*? Prepare to be inspired and challenged. Copies are available in our Welcome Center book store. It is quite readable but if you find the prospect of reading all 120 pages daunting, you might begin with a summary. A good one with insightful commentary can be found at [www.markwmcginnis.wordpress.com](http://www.markwmcginnis.wordpress.com). ✕

## The Bishop's Visit and Introducing Our Prioress



On August 25 we held a reception in Spirit Center, inviting friends of the Monastery to meet our new prioress, Sister Mary Forman, O.S.B., Ph.D., and the new bishop of the Diocese of Boise, Most Reverend Peter F. Christensen, M.A., D.D. Sister Mary shared the story of the growth of the monastic community through a PowerPoint presentation and Bishop Peter talked about ministry hopes and challenges. “Sometimes my heart gets heavy,” he said, “but what refreshes and gives a sense of balance, anchor, hope, and trust in the enduring power of God is the knowledge that there are communities like this who give so much of their time in prayer.” ✕



# MESSAGE FROM THE prioress

## ...continued from page 1

wrote the first critique of the Rule of Benedict, stating that because it was written for male monks, it did not address the unique situation of women Benedictines living together in community. So, for example, she did not see her Sisters being able to do the hard manual labor that the monks of Benedict's rule were required to do.



*Hildegard of Bingen.*

In the same century, although Heloise and Hildegard did not know each other, Hildegard of Bingen, *magistra* of the Monastery of Rupertsberg and contemporary of Bernard of Clairvaux, a famous Cistercian abbot, wrote an *Explanation of the Rule of Benedict* for

some Augustinian canons of *Hunniensis*. She is most famous for a trilogy of works of theology beginning with *Scivias*, musical compositions of *Symphonia*, medical texts, and over three hundred letters to Popes, kings, monastic leaders, hermits and many others, most often chastising them for not living their stations in life as authentically as they might.

Gertrud of Helfta, a thirteenth-century mystic claimed by both Cistercian nuns and Benedictine sisters, lived with two other mystics in her monastery: Mechtild of Hackeborn, her choir mistress and friend, and Mechtild of Magdeburg, a Beguine mystic who in her elder years lived with the sisters of Helfta and is credited with encouraging Gertrud and the other Mechtild to write down their visions of Christ. Gertrud's visions of the heart of Christ would be the forerunner to the later devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Gertrud's writings show her early struggle to overcome her lukewarmness toward Christ and her

eventual bringing to Christ petitions on behalf of sisters she found troublesome in order to gain wisdom about how to see them differently.

In the fourteenth century, Julian of Norwich, an anchoress living in an anchorhold attached to the Church of St. Julian, would write her initial twenty-five chapters of "*Showings*" or visions, known as the "Short Text," upon recuperating from a deadly plague and then, after twenty years of reflection on those revelations, she would extend the theological teaching of those visions into the "Longer Text." She made famous the title of Christ, "Jesus as mother," indicative of Christ's maternal, merciful care of "even-Christians," that is, Julian's fellow Christians with whom she conducted spiritual direction.

Skipping over a few centuries to the nineteenth, Mother Johanna Zumstein and two other sisters in 1882 left San Andreas Kloster in Sarnen, Switzerland, to come to America. They established a convent and academy in Colton, WA and later Mother Hildegard Vogler established St. Gertrude's Convent in Cottonwood, ID, in 1907.



*Sr. Magdalena Suter*  
1849–1913

*Foundress*  
*Mother M. Johanna Zumstein*  
1850–1926

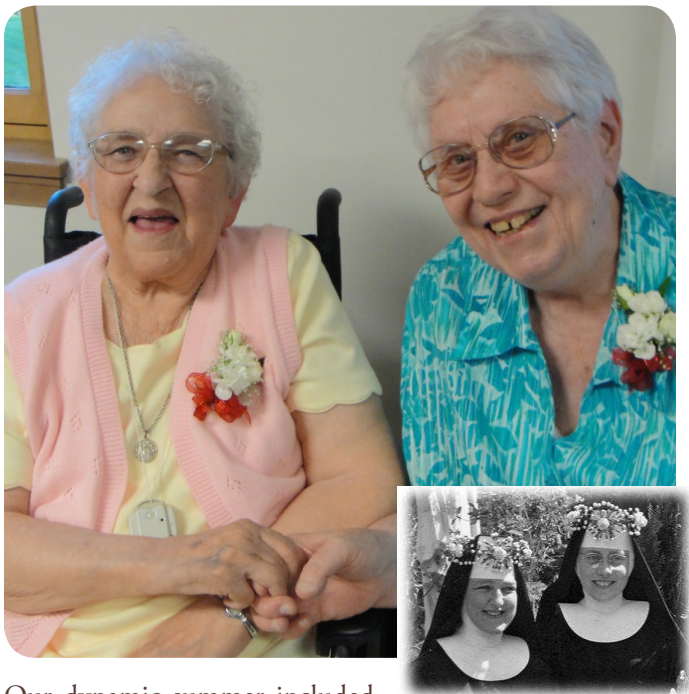
*Sr. Rosalia Ruebli*  
1860–1901

All of these consecrated women, living monastic life in keeping with their environment and time period, are the forerunners of the wide variety of religious life among women religious that is seen today. Each experienced a unique call of God to be that reflection of God's love and example of how to be dedicated to God and to the people of God that was her own. My heart is grateful for the immediate foremothers of my own community and the many named and unnamed sisters through the centuries, who have made possible this way of life. I invite you to reflect on the men and women in your own life, who have deepened your faith and challenged you to become all you could be as God designs and desires. ✕



*Julian of Norwich by Stephen Reid, 1912.*

## 60-Year Jubilarians!



Our dynamic summer included celebrating the 60th Jubilees of Sister Angela Uhlorn and Sister Mary Marge Goeckner. They made their First Professions together on June 13, 1955. Since then they have grown in monastic life, serving in diverse ministries and encouraging each other along the way.

“When we were postulants, the professed sisters were not allowed to talk to new members,” remembers Sister Mary Marge. “This was very difficult, especially for Sister Angela’s outgoing personality. She would be in trouble one day and would pack her bags to leave. I would talk her out of it, and then, the next day, I would have my bags packed ready to leave. She would listen to my tears and talk me out of leaving.

“Thank God for the gift of music! Sister Angela and I were able to sing and that saved us more than once. While we didn’t yet know Latin, we were able to sing the chant and mumble the words. This got us back into the sisters’ good graces.” For each of these women, finding their way to St. Gertrude’s and answering calls to be teachers was the result of observing sisters teaching and sharing their gifts of joy and service to others.

“I remember feeling like I wanted to embrace the whole world,” recalls Sister Angela, “and somehow I sensed that monastic life would give focus and direction to this expansive yearning. It seemed to me that the sisters influenced many people in positive ways, and I wanted to participate in that.” ✕

## art·i·FACT: Stories from the Collection



**Polly Bemis, “Angel of the Salmon River,”** originally known as Lalu Nathoy, was born in 1853 in the north of China near the Mongolian border where brigands for centuries had been sweeping down to raid the countryside. To keep the rest of the family from starvation Lalu’s father traded her to the brigands in exchange for enough seed to plant another crop. Destiny brought her to the saloon of Charles Bemis in the mining town of Warren, Idaho. In time, Bemis not only admired Polly, but loved her. Perhaps Polly also became a beneficiary from the beginning to Charlie Bemis to reappraise and redirect his life, for it was not long before her status was changed to a more respectable position of Mrs. Bemis. They were married August 13, 1894. Polly was now officially free from slavery. ✕

*Excerpted from Idaho County’s Most Romantic Character: Polly Bemis written by museum founder Sister Alfreda Elsensohn. The book will be re-released this fall. Many artifacts from Polly’s life including her wedding dress, jewelry, and handiwork are on view at the Historical Museum.*

## 15th Annual Fall Lecture Series

7:00 p.m. at Spirit Center, FREE

These events, held on Thursdays during the month of October, provide insights into the history of our region. Q&A sessions with the presenters follow the lectures. Light refreshments are provided.

**October 8, 2015 ~ 7:00 P.M.**

Richard Holm, Jr.: “Bound for the Back Country, Vol. 2”

**October 15, 2015 ~ 7:00 P.M.**

John Bradbury: “Frontier History Along Idaho’s Clearwater River”



**October 29, 2015 ~ 7:00 P.M.**

Steven Branting: “The Pox, the Flux, and Other Maladies”



These programs are made possible by funding from the Idaho Humanities Council, the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Get in-depth information about each lecture event at [www.HistoricalMuseumAtStGertrude.org](http://www.HistoricalMuseumAtStGertrude.org)