

Colorado nun dies six days shy of 106th birthday

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. – A religious sister who entered the convent in the era of World War I and Prohibition died just six days shy of her 106th birthday.

Sister Richardis Durant died Oct. 20 at Mount St. Francis in Colorado Springs, the motherhouse for the Western province of the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration.

Although Sister Durant is one of the oldest women religious living in the United States, at least one is older, according to the National Religious Retirement Office in Washington.

Sister Corazon Garcia, a Religious of Mary Immaculate, was born in Spain Sept. 4, 1904, making her 107 on her last birthday. She started her community's first house in the United States in the 1960s and now lives in Washington.

Sister Durant was born Oct. 26, 1905, in Bellwood, Pa., but moved to the Southwest as a child because her mother suffered from tuberculosis, she told The Colorado Catholic Herald, newspaper of the Colorado Springs Diocese, on the occasion of her 100th birthday. She felt called to religious life at an early age and entered the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration on Oct. 4, 1923, in Lafayette, Ind.

Sister Durant said her vocation to religious life never wavered.

"When I made my first holy Communion, I asked the Lord to give me a vocation to the religious life. ... Being in the convent for 82 years, I wasn't in the world. I thank God for my vocation. I'm happy where I am when I see and know the world," she said in 2005.

She received her bachelor's and master's degrees from Creighton University in Omaha, Neb.

Sister Durant spent most of her professional career in education. She taught at

Catholic schools in Colorado, Indiana, Kansas, Nebraska and New Mexico. She served as the academic dean at the College of St. Joseph in Albuquerque, N.M., from the early 1950s until 1965.

In 1965, Sister Durant became director of religious education at St. Joan of Arc Parish in the Archdiocese of Denver, with responsibility for 1,800 public school children. She said it was her favorite job, and the reason why she learned to drive in her 60s.

When she retired after 15 years, the pastor and parishioners gave her the gift of a cruise to Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Israel and Rome – which she called the highlight of her life.

After her retirement from St. Joan of Arc, Sister Durant served at the Gardens of St. Elizabeth Assisted Living Center in Denver, where she taught classes and put out a weekly newspaper for 11 years.

“It was interesting interviewing the elderly people who had such a rich past in Colorado mining country,” she told the Herald.

In 1992, at age 87, she retired to Mount St. Francis. She remained active there, keeping herself busy with crafts, playing card games such as pinochle and computer games such as FreeCell.

“You can get addicted to it, so I limit myself to three games only per day,” she told the Herald.