

Emmitsburg to celebrate St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Two hundred years after St. Elizabeth Ann Seton arrived in Emmitsburg to found a ministry of education, hundreds of Catholics will commemorate her entry into town as they witness a live Aug. 2 reenactment complete with a horse-drawn Conestoga Wagon. The special event is one of the highlights of a weekend of bicentennial celebrations July 31-Aug. 2 that will also include a Mass with Chicago Cardinal Francis E. George, the showing of an archival exhibit and tours of historic sites.

Born in New York to a prominent Anglican family, St. Elizabeth Ann converted to Catholicism in 1805 after the death of her husband two years earlier. The widowed mother of five arrived in Baltimore in 1808 at the invitation of the Sulpicians to work as an educator.

She journeyed to Emmitsburg with four companions in 1809 to develop the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph, a women's religious community modeled on Paris' Daughters of Charity. Samuel Sutherland Cooper, a wealthy seminarian at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, purchased 269 acres of land in Frederick County for the future saint to found a school.

St. Elizabeth Ann established St. Joseph's Free School in 1810, an all-girls institution that came without tuition. Its foundation is regarded as the start of the Catholic parochial school system in the United States.

Many women were attracted to St. Elizabeth Ann's religious community. Between 1809-20, 86 women joined the Sisters of Charity.

From St. Elizabeth Ann's original religious community grew four independent communities in North America: the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of New York, the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul of Halifax, the Sisters of Charity of St. Elizabeth, Convent Station, New Jersey and the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill, Greensburg, Pennsylvania (1870).

The Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph joined the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de

Paul of Paris in 1850.

Pope Paul VI canonized St. Elizabeth Ann in 1975 as the first U.S.-born saint.

The Sisters and Daughters of Charity today minister in education, healthcare, social justice and other outreach efforts throughout the country and around the world.

Celebration Weekend

July 31 – The Seton Shrine historic sites in Emmitsburg will be open from 10 a.m.-7 p.m. with the exception of the Stone House and White House, which will close at 5 p.m. The opening celebration in the Basilica of the National Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton begins at 7 p.m. A premiere showing of “The Seton Legacy” DVD will be featured.

Aug. 1 – Cardinal George, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, will celebrate a 9 a.m. Mass at the Seton Shrine. Throughout the day, visitors may tour Seton Shrine sites, view a Civil War encampment, watch “The Seton Legacy” DVD and participate in morning and afternoon information sessions. Session topics include:

“Charity Matters,” an exhibit of archival treasures including 19th-century embroidery, tapestry, paintings and a display by Daughter of Charity Sister Betty Ann McNeil.

Emmitsburg Catholic Heritage Tour, a guided bus tour to historic Emmitsburg sites including the restored St. Joseph College Chapel, the National Shrine Grotto of Lourdes and St. Joseph Church.

Walking Tour of Seton Shrine Historic Sites, highlighting the history of Mother Seton’s religious community in St. Joseph’s Valley.

Aug. 2 – Two Masses will be held at 8 a.m. at the Seton Shrine and at the Glass Chapel at the Lourdes Grotto. A procession from the grotto to the Seton Shrine will begin at 9 a.m., with a blessing of the Seton Legacy Garden to follow. Auxiliary Bishop Denis J. Madden will celebrate the noon bicentennial Mass (tickets required). Throughout the day from 7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., parking and shuttle services to the

Seton Shrine will be available at the Lourdes Shrine Grotto.

For more information, visit www.setonlegacy.org.