

REMEMBERING THINGS PAST—FINDING BURIED TREASURE

By Sister Margaret Clarke

Some popular columnist of years ago used to title an occasional essay “things I found on the way to looking other things up.” Much the same thing has happened here—prompted by the Feast Day of St. Scholastica in February, we were rooting around in a difficult-to-open cupboard in the Archives and dug out a box labeled “Kerst family album.” I must admit I had seen this album before, but never what was underneath it in the box. To our amazement, we found under a layer of paper and cloth wrappings two large framed needlework samplers done by Mother Scholastica before she entered religious life. This inspired us to retrieve the other boxes of Kerst artifacts and display some of their contents in the College for the Centennial St. Scholastica Feast day. Here are the items that we uncovered—literally—some homely and everyday, some truly spectacular.

The needlework samplers. Young Catherine Kerst had decided at age 13 and graduation from eighth grade that she was going to become a Sister. Her parish priest told her to wait a couple of years, which she did—exactly—and in the interim she attended St. Joseph Academy in St. Paul run by the Sisters of St. Joseph. It is possible that during this time she completed these two pieces of needlework. The German text reads: “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”

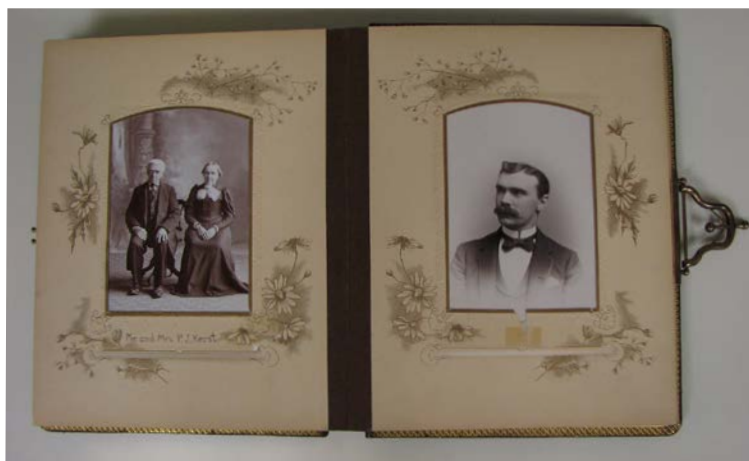


The needlework samplers.



Catherine Kerst at age 13 in 1860 when she started the samplers.

Mother Scholastica’s album. Although this is labeled “Kerst family album” it was obviously assembled by Mother Scholastica. In it are early photos of the founding Sisters of the Duluth Community as well as portraits of her family.



Mother Scholastica’s photograph album, showing her parents Peter and Anna Kerst.



Mother Scholastica's statue of St. Scholastica. This 15-inch tall painted plaster statuette has been on display in the Archives for several years. Even though it is over 100 years old, and was made in a time when sentimentality was rife in religious art, it is restrained in style and still has its bright colors.

Mother Scholastica's rosary and crucifix. In the early days, a large rosary was part of the habit worn by the Sisters. This rosary is visible in an early photo of Mother Scholastica. Together with this in the box was another rosary labeled "Sr. Mechtilde's rosary with cross belonging to Mother Scholastica." The amazing thing about these artifacts is that they were not immediately consigned to some museum display upon the death of Mother Scholastica, but were passed along, in keeping with holy poverty, to others who could use them, and no doubt cherished them for their origins.

Mother Scholastica in the early 1900s, showing her wearing the rosary.



Mother Scholastica's alligator purse.

Mother Scholastica's alligator purse. A note inside the purse states that it was given to her by her brother Conrad (who died in 1891 shortly before the move to Duluth) and then used after her death by Mother Alexia and others doing business for the Community.

This "recycling" of possessions went on in the Community for many years, and still exists to some extent. When I made final profession in 1964, there were many more Sisters coming to the Community than leaving it by death, so new profession rings had to be provided each year. The rings of the Sisters who had died in the previous year were given to the local goldsmith to be melted down so that the amount of new gold needed would be less. The rings of my profession group contain gold from the rings of Sister Agnes Somers and Sister Monica Simon. I have always felt that my ring is not only a symbol of my commitment to Christ, but also a tangible connection to the "great ones" of the Community who went before us. We love and admire those who built the Community, and we continue to carry on this work, sometimes with the aid of objects that they had also used.

--Sister Margaret Clarke is Archivist for St. Scholastica Monastery, and her continuing project is to find a place where these items and others of historical interest can be displayed for all to enjoy. Photos by Andi Therrien.