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# From Hill 57 t

## Sister Providencia Tolan' Off-Reservatio



Great Falls Tribune

# Capitol Hill: 'Making the Sparks Fly'

## Drive on Behalf of Montana's Indians, 1950–1970

by Joan Bishop



Sister Providencia Tolan and Florence Standing Rock of Rocky Boy's Reservation (upper left) at a 1966 Democratic meeting in Great Falls, Hill 57 homes in 1986 (above)

On a fall day in 1957 a car pulled up at Hill 57, the off-reservation Indian settlement located on a windswept slope several miles northwest of Great Falls, Montana. Before Lois Murray, a new Great Falls *Tribune* staff reporter, could get out of the car, several of the Chippewa-Cree residents met her and firmly closed the car door. Later Murray asked *Tribune* editor William James how she could meet the Indians. Only through Sister Providencia, he told her.<sup>1</sup>

For more than two decades Sister Providencia Tolan, a sociology professor at the College of Great Falls, lobbied on behalf of America's Indians. Initially, in the early 1950s, the plight of off-reservation Chippewa-Cree groups living on Hill 57 and other areas near Great Falls triggered her drive to energize "an impressive cross-section of the Great Falls community," many of whom "had resorted to an ostrich-like attitude when the local Indian problem proved too difficult to solve." During the mid-1950s Sister Providencia worked with members of the Montana Inter-tribal Policy Board, Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, and the National Congress of American Indians. By the late 1960s she had also served as tribal consultant for six of Montana's seven Indian reservations.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequently, Sister Providencia transformed the grass roots movement she had formed into a campaign directed at Michael J. (Mike) Mansfield, Lee Metcalf, and James J. Murray, three of Montana's Democratic politicians in Washington, D.C. Because of seniority, committee appointments, and party stature, these three men had the power to influence federal Indian affairs. Sister Providencia often acted as intermediary between local activists and community leaders in Great Falls and bureaucrats and politicians in Washington, D.C., where leaders recognized her "keen sense of political organization." In 1959 Dr. Catherine Nutterville, Sister Providencia's College of Great Falls mentor, wrote that "Montana in these last few years has become more aware of the plight of the Indians, thanks first of all to the work of Sister Buckskin—Sister Providencia." Rocky Boy tribal leader Edward Eagleman described her as a "fearless, and eloquent sister, and probably one of the best informed persons in the United States on the Indians' economic problem."<sup>3</sup>

**B**y the mid-1960s, during the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, Sister Providencia and her coalition of community and Indian leaders and state politicians in Washington, D.C., influenced federal Indian policy with increased appropriations through the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Office of Economic Opportunity for Indians on or off the reservations.

Ultimately Sister Providencia helped prompt a rethinking of federal Indian policy and contributed to substantive changes in those policies concerned with termination and relocation. She believed that Indian values and pride could only be perpetuated on the reservations. "As a sociologist," she explained in 1958, "I must insist that the tribe, a sub-group, is a strength and a real resource to the wider group."<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes critics viewed her as domineering and paternalistic—the Catholic sister who dictated what was best for the Indian population. "That Nun," some called her. Others considered her activity ill-advised. Yet, in the balance, Sister Providencia, with the help of lawmakers and citizens' groups, elevated an off-reservation community with the unusual name of Hill 57 to a national symbol of urban Indian poverty. The plight and fate of Hill 57 residents became the case in microcosm for all Indians and contributed to major federal reform in Indian policy.<sup>5</sup>

Christened Denise Hortense Tolan, Sister Providencia was born in Anaconda, Montana, February 24, 1909, to former Deer Lodge County attorney John Tolan and Alma Deschamps Tolan. Denise's maternal grandparents, a pioneering merchant and ranching family in Missoula, influenced her as a child. She absorbed her grandfather's tales of Montana's early days, frequently laced with accounts of settlers' depredations to the Indians. Of her grandmother, she wrote "'Church' is a word I associate with Grandmother Deschamps. One day when the lilacs were blooming, mother drove Grandma, my brother Jack, and me to the St. Ignatius Mission in the Flathead valley." For the rest of her life Denise remembered that visit, seeing the impressive interior paintings and especially watching the black-robed Sisters of Charity, who "let her play with their large black rosary beads."<sup>6</sup>



In 1914 Denise moved with her parents to Oakland, California, where she attended Lakeview Elementary School and graduated from Holy Names Academy in 1927. That summer she returned to Montana to be with her cousins at their grandparents' Grass Valley Ranch near Flathead Lake. At one point, alone with grandmother Deschamps, Denise confided that she wanted to become a nun and teach the Indians. "'Never,' my grandmother said calmly, 'You like boys too much.' Good psychology," commented Sister Providencia in 1976. "This was the challenge I needed."<sup>7</sup>

After two years of study at Holy Names College in Oakland, Denise took her professional vows as a Sister of Charity of Providence in Seattle, Washington, in 1930. Over the next decade she taught at Providence elementary schools in Moxee, Seattle, Yakima, and Tacoma, Washington; De Smet, Idaho; and Des Plaines, Illinois. Sister Providencia also spent several summers earning college credits from Washington and Oregon universities toward a bachelor's degree in sociology, which she received from the College of Great Falls in 1944. At the same time, she received a less formal but no less important education in politics by follow-

1. Lois Murray, S.P., conversation with author, October 11, 1990, Great Falls.

2. Victor O. Reinemer (hereafter Vic Reinemer) to Max Gubatayo, January 5, 1959, James E. Murray Collection (hereafter Murray Collection), Toole Archives, Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula (hereafter UM); Lois Murray, S.P., *Good News Sisters of Providence St. Ignatius Province*, 1 (October 1990), insert, n.p.

3. Vic Reinemer, conversation with author, September 18, 1990, Helena; Catherine Nutterville to Robert McCormick, February 2, 1959, Murray Collection; Great Falls *Tribune*, May 7, 1964.

4. Sister Providencia to Frank Morrow, February 21, 1958, Cascade County Community Council Records (hereafter Cascade Council Records), Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena (hereafter MHS).

5. Great Falls *Tribune*, August 5, 1979.

6. Sister Providencia, conversation with author, April 13, 1983, Spokane, Washington; Sister Providencia, "Biographical Information," n.d., and Sister Providencia to her family, "Christmas Greetings," 1976, Sister Providencia Tolan Papers (hereafter S. Providencia Papers), Sisters of Charity of Providence Archives, Mt. St. Joseph, Spokane, Washington.

Sister Providencia, christened Denise Hortense, stood with arms around her siblings when photographed (left) c. 1917 with her father, John Tolan, Sr.; mother, Alma Deschamps Tolan; and grandmother Tolan. Denise posed again in Missoula at age five playing the grand lady (below) and as a young woman in 1928 (right).

(All photos, Archives, Sisters of Charity of Providence, Spokane)



ing the career of her father, John Tolan, who, beginning in 1934, was elected to six terms in the United States House of Representatives from California's Seventh Congressional District centered in Alameda. Tolan chaired the House Committee Investigating Dust Bowl Migration during the 1930s and in 1941 testified as amicus curae before the United States Supreme Court in opposition to a California ruling that sought to halt immigration. Neither Tolan's dedication to politics nor his efforts on behalf of disadvantaged migrants was lost on Sister Providencia, and decades later, after she had lobbied effectively on behalf of off-reservation Indians, journalists pointed to her father's influence on her. Yet Sister Providencia also seems to have inherited some of her drive from her mother, who managed her

7. Arthur Deschamps, Jr., telephone conversation with author, August 8, 1988; Great Falls *Tribune*, August 5, 1979.

8. *Catholic Review*, February 7, 1941.

9. Great Falls *Tribune*, August 5, 1979.

10. Sister Providencia to Lee Metcalf, January 26, 1973, Lee Metcalf Papers, MHS (hereafter Metcalf Papers).

11. D'Arcy McNickle, "Hill 57," *Indians at Work*, February 1, 1937, 2.

12. Joseph Kinsey Howard, *Strange Empire, A Narrative of the Northwest* (New York: William Morrow, 1952), 588.



husband's six successful political campaigns and chaired several government war bond drives during World War II in addition to her duties as wife and mother.

The weaving of varied threads from such a background with Sister Providencia's special affinity for Native Americans was perhaps best illustrated by a newspaper article and photograph appearing in early 1941. During summer months in the 1930s, the sister organized several women's cooperative craft guilds on Idaho's Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation, and in 1939 arranged an exhibit of their work at the San Francisco World's Fair. In a *Catholic Review* article appearing February 7, 1941, Sister Providencia is shown displaying crafts from nine Northwest tribes at the House Indian Affairs Committee Room in the United States Capitol. Standing beside her is her father, Representative John Tolan, and on her other side is a smiling first lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, looking down at the beaded moccasins and gloves. The newspaper caption reads: "First Lady of Land Lauds Work of Nun."<sup>8</sup>

Sister Providencia joined the faculty of the College of Great Falls, a Catholic coeducational liberal arts college, in 1948, as a lecturer in sociology.

13. Verne Dusenberry, "Montana's Displaced Persons: The Rocky Boy Indians," *Montana Magazine of History*, 4 (Winter 1954), 12, 13; Verne Dusenberry, "Waiting for a Day That Never Comes," *Montana Magazine of History*, 8 (Spring 1958), 37-38; Denton R. Bedford (as told by Mary Rego), "First Thunder of the Rocky Boys," *The Indian Historian*, 10 (Winter 1977) 37; Jeanne Marie Oyawin Eder, "Chief Little Shell's Tribe of Landless Chippewa Indians of Montana: A Question of Recognition" (master's thesis, Montana State University, Bozeman, 1983), 53; Sister Providencia, "People Without Place," n.d., S. Providencia Papers. See also Cascade County Community Council, "Inter-Group Committee Report on Landless Indians of Montana," 1952, Cascade Council Records.

She came to Great Falls, an agricultural center of approximately 39,000 residents, disappointed. "The whole idea behind my vocation as a sister," she said, was to work with the Indians at St. Ignatius Province. Nevertheless, with thoughts of the Flathead position behind her, Sister Providencia took on two jobs that fall, teaching and social work. Soon she became a familiar figure in downtown Great Falls. Jack Albanese, Jr., a well-known Great Falls resident who assumed the nickname "Father Jack," described her constant movement "from the hospital to the city jail, to the county jail, to the bars, to the lower south side, and to the west side in search of and on behalf of human beings in need." Frequently she befriended Indians who lived in the city or in fringe settlements on Wire Mill Road, Black Eagle, Mt. Royal, or Hill 57.<sup>9</sup>

Sister Providencia left Great Falls in 1951 for a study break in "the most exciting place in the world, Washington, D.C." By June 1952 she had earned a master's degree in sociology from the Catholic University of America.<sup>10</sup>

When she returned to her teaching duties at the College of Great Falls in September, she resumed her daily rounds in Great Falls and renewed her friendships with Indians, including those subsisting on nearby Hill 57. Art Hinck, a pickle salesman, named it in the late 1930s for his Heinz 57 product line, advertising it by writing the name in eight-foot-high numbers with white-washed boulders. The Indians had settled there in the late 1920s, after city officials ordered their tent camps along the Missouri River burned because they were camped near the westside sewer discharge. In 1937 D'Arcy McNickle, the novelist/administrator from Montana's Flathead Reservation, visited the Hill and described his first impressions. McNickle, then administrative assistant in the United States Office of Indian Affairs, wrote:

We left town, crossed the river and went up the slope toward the bluffs which mark the river's ancient bank. There, scattered in the snow, were the flapping tents and patchwork shacks of some of Montana's homeless Indians. The situation is wholly exposed. It is windy, always windy, and treeless and grassless. Barren as a rock.<sup>11</sup>

Some Hill 57 residents belonged to one or another of Montana's Indian reservations but had

14. Joseph Cottrell, "Interview with James Parker Shield," sound cassette, 1984, Critical Writing Project, C. M. Russell High School, Great Falls. Daniel Jarvey, conversation with author, November 11, 1988, Great Falls; Mary Louise Jarvey, conversation with author, October 31, 1988, Great Falls; Edna McGillis, conversation with author, October 31, 1988, Great Falls. See also Milton Colvin, "Hill 57: The Problems of Off Reservation Indians," *Montana Opinion*, 1 (June 1957), 15-18; Great Falls *Tribune*, February 21, 1954; Sister Providencia, "The Indian Villages on Hill 57 at Great Falls, Montana, A Report for the Second Annual Northwest Regional Indian Youth Conference of Montana State University, May 1-3, 1964," Metcalf Papers.



Sister Providencia and Eleanor Roosevelt admire Indian beadwork in Washington, D.C., in 1941.

come to Great Falls to look for work because their home areas could not support them. Others, referred to as landless Indians, were of Cree and/or Chippewa descent. In the mid-1880s these bands had sometimes intermingled with the Canadian Métis (of Euro-Canadian and Indian ancestry) to hunt on the northern plains. Their Montana landless designation grew out of several migrations into the territory in the 1880s. Cree followers of Little Bear had first fled southward from Canada with some Métis in 1885, after the Riel Rebellion. Sister Providencia translated portions of their history from Latin and French texts in the mid-1940s for Great Falls writer Joseph Kinsey Howard, who was documenting their history for his book, *Strange Empire*. Also moving into Montana in the late nineteenth century were a Chippewa band led by Chief Rocky Boy (Sun Child) and Chief Little Shell's Chippewa group, disenfranchised from their North Dakota Turtle Mountain Reservation.<sup>12</sup>

From the 1880s to 1916 these Indians traveled over the state feeling "inferior and unwanted" by many Montanans, including other Indian tribes such as the Blackfeet with whom they had shared allotments temporarily. For these Chippewa and Cree tribes United States government officials

15. William D. James, conversation with author, January 12, 1990, Great Falls; Lois Murray S.P., conversation with author, October 11, 1990, Great Falls.

16. House Concurrent Resolution 108, *Congressional Record* (hereafter *Cong. Rec.*), 83d Cong., 1st sess., 1953, 99, pt. 8:10815. See also Christine Bolt, *American Indian Policy and American Reform Case Studies of the Campaign to Assimilate the American Indians* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 132-33 and Donald L. Fixico, *Termination and Relocation, Federal Indian Policy, 1945-1960* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 33, 60, 98-101.

finally, in 1916, carved “a sterile reservation” of 56,035 acres called Rocky Boy’s out of the old Fort Assinniboine Military Reservation in central Montana, one hundred miles northeast of Great Falls. With limited enrollment, however, not all applicants were accepted. Ultimately Rocky Boy’s Chippewa and Chief Little Bear’s Cree bands, allies in previous years, predominated, and the Little Shell group was again left off tribal enrollment records. This group represented some of the off-reservation “people without place,” as Sister Providencia called them, who numbered several thousand in Montana in the late 1940s. Their plight would remain one of the sister’s major concerns into the 1960s.<sup>13</sup>

In 1952 Sister Providencia met about two hundred residents who were crowded together in makeshift shelters. They grouped themselves according to earlier tribal affiliations, mainly Turtle Mountain Chippewa with some Great Lakes Chippewa, Rocky Boy’s Chippewa and Cree. Many family groups lived a seminomadic life. Each spring they left Hill 57 hoping to get haying contracts near Fort Benton or Augusta or pick hops in Washington state. Everyone worked. James Parker Shield recalled driving a tractor when he was eight years old. Each fall they returned to the hill where as many as fourteen or fifteen people sometimes crowded into a room. As a child, Shield sold rags and metal scrap that he scavenged from a nearby dump. Residents shared one water pump. Without telephone or bus connections they were virtually isolated, even from the nearby community of Great Falls.<sup>14</sup>

With dispatch Sister Providencia planned ways to alleviate Hill 57’s poverty, soliciting donations from friends, and urging volunteer groups, such as the Mother Gamelin Club of Columbus Hospital, to repair and donate clothing. William D. James, retired Great Falls *Tribune* editor, recalls providing firewood and receiving a follow-up call from Sister. The truck needed a new battery. Would he provide that also? James noted what others have corroborated: it was impossible to refuse Sister Providencia. One who tried was the Columbus Hospital cook, who took the common view that the

poor could find work and were only lazy. Over the cook’s protest, however, Sister Providencia commandeered leftovers, filled coffee cans, and set up tables outside the hospital’s back door for the needy. She continued her campaign to increase donations of food, clothing, and fuel, yet at best in the 1950s she knew that even major community volunteer efforts were merely palliative. Bureaucratic impediments exacerbated the economic void surrounding off-reservation groups. County officials denied aid ordinarily because they considered all Indians the responsibility of the federal government, while the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs refused assistance because the Indians lived off the reservations.<sup>15</sup>

**M**eanwhile two federal Indian policies of the early 1950s—termination and relocation—impelled Sister Providencia into the political arena. Through their implementation she envisioned even more disastrous consequences for Montana’s Indian population.

The federal termination policy originated with House Concurrent Resolution 108, passed by Congress on August 1, 1953. Related to earlier drives for Indian self-determination in New Deal legislation of the 1930s, Resolution 108 or the “Termination Resolution” sought federal withdrawal from Indian affairs. The resolution directed the secretary of the Interior to present to Congress by January 1, 1954, a list of tribes that could “as rapidly as possible end their status as wards of the United States.” Congress would then pass individual tribal termination bills. Initially some tribal groups backed the measure. Yet when Interior officials and a nucleus of congressional leaders actually moved “as rapidly as possible,” using outdated 1947 statistics, and pressured hesitant Indian leaders to comply, more tribes rallied together against termination legislation.<sup>16</sup>

In Montana Sister Providencia communicated with leaders of the Flathead, Blackfeet, and Rocky

17. Table 4.1 Tribal lists, Policy Statement, March 25, 1947, in Office File of Assistant Commissioner John H. Provinse, reprinted in Bolt, *American Indian Policy*, 133; Sister Providencia to Lee Metcalf, July 11, 1954, Metcalf Papers; Russell Gardipee testimony, “Joint Hearings Before Subcommittees of the Committees on Interior and Insular Affairs,” 83d Cong., 2d sess., on S. 2750 and H.R. 7319, Part 7, Flathead Indians, Montana, February 25, 26, and 26, 1954, p. 947 (hereafter Flathead Hearings). Comments by tribal council chairman Walter McDonald are in Don Matt, “Tribal Government, How We Got To Where We are,” (Flathead Reservation) *Char-Koosta* (Confederated Salish Pend d’Orielles, and Kootenai Tribes newspaper), December 1, 1976; Earl Old Person, “Indians As Human Beings,” *Integrated Education*, (April-May 1967), 18.

18. Kenneth R. Philip, “Stride toward Freedom: The Relocation of Indians to Cities, 1952-1960,” *Western Historical Quarterly*, 16 (April 1985), 189; “Indian Project—Business and Professional Women’s Club, 1956-1957,” unpublished report, Cascade Council Records; Peter Red Horn in “Notes From Fifth Annual Institute of Indian Affairs-Montana State University,” April 9-11, 1958, Murray Collection.

19. Dorothy Bohn, conversation with author, October 25, 1984, Great Falls; Great Falls *Tribune*, December 10, 1953, February 21, 1954. See also Dorothy Bohn, “‘Liberating’ the Indian, Euphemism for a Land Grab,” *The Nation*, February 20, 1954, 150-51. Citizens Research Committee members were James J. Flaherty, Sister Providencia, Robert S. McCleery, LaVerne Kelly, Stanley Deck, Cleveland Hall, Catherine Nutterville, John Gedeon, Dorothy Bohn, named in Citizens Research Committee to James A. Haley, September 7, 1955, Metcalf Papers.



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In 1954 College of Great Falls student Agnes Connors instructed children of Hill 57 at weekly religion classes conducted by the college's Confraternity of Christian Doctrine unit.

Boy's reservations. She noted apprehension, divisiveness, and a lack of leadership among tribal groups. "They are wobbly about standing on their own feet, financially unsupported," she wrote to Montana's congressman Lee Metcalf. One cause of the tribal leaders' anxiety, she explained, was their concern that if they spoke out against termination, the Bureau of Indian Affairs would retaliate. Flathead tribal leaders, for instance, who had experienced bureau funding cuts for financial and law-and-order services on the reservation since 1952, were apprehensive about sustaining further reductions. Sister Providencia also noted that Montana Indian groups feared abrupt termination. Blackfeet leader Earl Old Person later wrote "It is important to note that in our Indian language the only translation for termination is to 'wipe out' or 'kill off'. We have no Indian word for termination. Why scare us to death every year by going to Congress for money and justifying the request on the grounds that money is necessary to 'terminate the trust relationship of the United States to the American Indian?'"<sup>17</sup>

Besides the termination resolution, Sister Providencia also targeted the Bureau of Indian

Affairs relocation program. Since 1952 the agency had offered reservation Indians stipends to relocate and work in large urban centers. The bureau frequently failed, however, to give workers and their families prior job training or preparation for the harsh realities of urban life, so that between 1950 and 1960 the approximate national average return rate to the reservations among relocated Indians was 40 percent. Sister Providencia had met with families who left the Rocky Boy's Reservation, moved to Los Angeles, and then returned to Montana destitute and discouraged. Speaking at the Fifth Annual Institute of Indian Affairs held April 9–11, 1958, at Montana State University in Missoula, Blackfeet leader Peter Red Horn summed up the situation for some Montana Indian groups: "While we are being relocated, rehabilitated, and educated, we have to live. Presently there is a recession throughout this country. Employment is next to impossible for Indians. These programs are all right to talk about, but don't forget—we have to live in the meantime."<sup>18</sup>

In fall 1953 Flathead tribal leaders fighting termination contacted Sister Providencia and Dorothy Bohn, Cascade County Community Council

20. Gertrude Lindgren, conversation with author, October 11, 1985, Great Falls; Great Falls Tribune, February 9, 21, 1954.

21. Stephen DeMers, Flathead Hearings, 974-75; David Higgins, Flathead Hearings, 998; Larry W. Burt, *Tribalism in Crisis: Federal Indian Policy, 1953-1961* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 38; Sister Providencia to Lee Metcalf, July 11, 1954, Metcalf Papers.

22. Vic Reinemer, conversation with author, October 1990, Helena; Sister Providencia to James E. Murray, October 11, 1955, Murray Papers; Sister Providencia to Lee Metcalf, July 11, November 5, 1954, and *Washington Notebook* newsletters, both in Metcalf Papers. See also Charles Eugene Hood, Jr., "'China Mike' Mansfield: The Making of a Congressional Authority on the Far East" (doctoral diss., Washington State University, Pullman, 1980).

Indian Affairs chairman, who had already joined seven others as the Citizens' Research Committee on Indian issues. They promptly scheduled the first of two open forums in a Great Falls district court chamber on December 14, 1953. Although Paul Fickinger, Bureau of Indian Affairs director in Billings, presented the advantages of ending federal trusteeship, the majority of speakers, including K. W. Bergan, Montana Coordinator of Indian Affairs, and representatives of the Montana Inter-tribal Policy Board supported the Flathead tribal leaders' opposition to termination.<sup>19</sup>

A second forum held on February 8, 1954, dealt with off-reservation Indian poverty, characterized as "one of the city's most pressing problems." Sister Providencia and Bohn organized the forum around participation by key Indian residents and city and county officials. More than a year earlier, Sister Providencia, with the assistance of her Great Falls Chippewa friends, had started religious classes on Hill 57 among the Turtle Mountain Chippewa, many of whom were already Roman Catholics. This religious bond and her relief efforts had created a rapport that enabled the Sister to convince Indian spokespersons to address health and education issues publicly. Acting as moderator, Bohn concluded the meeting by pinpointing "the real stumbling block of Great Falls' citizens indifference to the problems of the landless Indians." The forums and William James's special February 21 *Tribune* feature describing living conditions on Hill 57 chipped away at what Bohn identified as community "indifference." The forums also focused attention on the prospect of increasing Indian destitution among Montana tribes if termination bills passed and forced other Indian groups to seek livelihoods in cities and towns throughout Montana.<sup>20</sup>

In Washington, D.C., meanwhile, Flathead leaders confronted their termination bill, which the Bureau of Indian Affairs had hurriedly drafted. On February 27, 1954, Flathead spokesperson Stephen DeMers testified before a joint congressional hearing that the tribe would "need a minimum period of ten years in which to fully prepare its people to take over full management responsibility, including a complete analysis and survey of all assets." Blackfeet leader David Higgins, reiterated Bohn's concern that "communities in Montana could not bear the burden." That spring the

combined opposition of Mansfield and Metcalf, the Montana Inter-tribal Policy Board, and other vocal non-Indian citizens forced committee leaders to drop the proposed legislation.<sup>21</sup>

Sister Providencia's drive to sidetrack termination assumed a partisan political character. She became an enthusiastic Democratic party supporter who corresponded frequently with Montana's Democratic legislators in the national capital. In several instances she was renewing acquaintances, for she had met Senator James E. Murray through her father in 1941. Montana's junior senator, Mike Mansfield, had grown up in Great Falls and had served in the House for ten years. Sister Providencia's mother, Alma Tolan, knew Mansfield's wife, Maureen. Lee Metcalf, the third correspondent, was elected to Congress in 1953. In the 1950s these three leaders worked together closely, writing their *Washington Notebook* newsletter jointly for western constituents.<sup>22</sup>

**T**o gain their support, Sister Providencia sometimes exaggerated the magnitude of Great Falls's "ground swell" of citizen support. Yet through her example as a crusader against Indian poverty (including directing the 1950 airlift to the snowbound Blackfeet Reservation) and her planning of the recent open forums in Great Falls, she had generated a grass roots movement. Sister Providencia focused on Washington's politicians because, as she wrote Metcalf, "only at the federal level can the moral obligation to protect Indian ownership and Indian rights be sustained." She envisioned Hill 57 as a national symbol of off-reservation poverty, writing to Metcalf in November 1954 that the "strongest argument lies in what is happening to the Indians who are terminated." In her mind that included Montana's landless Indians as well as other terminated reservations such as those of Oregon's Klamath and Wisconsin's Menominee tribes.<sup>23</sup>

Sister Providencia's college students, several of whom were from the Blackfeet and Fort Peck reservations, learned sociology by studying conditions on Hill 57 and played important roles in her lobbying efforts. In summer 1954 Sister Providencia initiated a comparative study of reservation and city Indians and included other northern Great Plains settlements similar to Hill 57. She and her students collected and analyzed statistics on a variety of topics, including education, housing, and voter participation. Findings of the study

23. Andre Deligdisch, conversation with author, c. 1986, Great Falls; Sister Providencia to Lee Metcalf, July 11, 1954, August 6, 1955, Metcalf Papers.

24. George Engstrom and Sister Providencia, "City and Reservation Indians," *Social Order*, 5 (February 1955), 59-65. See also Lee Metcalf, "Threat to Americans, Termination in the 83rd Congress," and James J. Flaherty, "The Obligation of Federal Trust," both in *Social Order*, 5 (February 1955), 57-58, 66-68.



MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

Congressman Lee Metcalf, Senator James E. Murray, and Senator Mike Mansfield (left to right), Montana's three "M's," in Washington, D.C., in 1956

confirmed their views on the value of reservations: Although Indian families who moved away experienced "a slight rise in economic opportunities, there was a loss in group status and individual attainment." The study was published in her friend Father Joseph Corley's Jesuit journal, *Social Order*, under the heading, "Threat to American Indians" with two campaign pieces written by Lee Metcalf and Great Falls Paper Company entrepreneur James J. Flaherty. Pleased with the results of the study, and especially by compliments from Murray and Joseph M. Gilmore, Bishop of Helena, Sister Providencia mailed copies of the magazine to Montana tribal leaders and distributed others in Great Falls.<sup>24</sup>

Sister Providencia's *Social Order* paper was only one of several Indian studies she compiled in the mid-1950s and provided to Montana lawmakers in Washington, D.C., as "ammunition" against termination. Earlier, in July 1954, she had sent a four-page paper on Utah termination to Metcalf and to Murray, then chairman of the Senate Interior and Indian Affairs Committee that ruled on Indian appropriations. The following April, after she attended the University of Minnesota's Conference on Indian Tribes and Treaties, she disseminated information on the controversies sur-

rounding the Menominee tribe's termination, duplicated her letters and reports, and mailed copies to congressmen, tribal leaders, and friends who were officers of both the Association of American Indian Affairs and the National Congress of American Indians.<sup>25</sup>

In summer 1955, Great Falls residents who had rallied around Sister Providencia and Bohn, hoped for the passage of emergency aid bills for the Hill 57 landless Indians, which Metcalf and Mansfield introduced into Congress in July. The proposed legislation directed the secretary of the Interior to provide immediate relief and welfare services to people living on the hill. In August, however, the legislation failed, in part because Interior spokesmen testified against the measure in the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee. Afterwards the Montana delegation sent a joint press release to the Great Falls *Tribune* expressing their frustration over the Interior's role. "The Department says it cannot help the Hill 57 Indians," the press release said, "because Congress has not given it specific authority, yet when Congress acts to give it specific authority, the Department vigorously protests." Sister Providencia's reaction to what some called the "Hill 57 Heartbreak" differed from most. "I do not mind too much that the bills did not pass," she wrote, because "attention is now on the long-term answer" and hinged on national publicity about off-reservation settlements such as Hill 57.<sup>26</sup>

An opportunity to educate Washington's lawmakers came that September when Sister Providencia welcomed Metcalf, Montana Congressman Orvin B. Fjare, and other members of the House Subcommittee on Indian Affairs to Great Falls. She had persuaded Hill 57 resident Peter Gopher to invite them to his home where he showed them a prized possession, a hand-sewn American flag that had belonged to his tribal family for five generations. The next day Sister Providencia chaired hearings in the mayor's council chamber. Later she conveyed her satisfaction with the congressional visit and the issues discussed. "I thank God that the 3 Ms from Montana have already thought in the direction of services to all Indians," she wrote Murray in October.<sup>27</sup>

Encouraged by the congressional tour, Sister

25. Sister Providencia to Lee Metcalf, January 19, 1955, Metcalf Papers.

26. In 1955 Representative Metcalf introduced H.R. 7433 and Senators Mansfield and Murray introduced a companion measure, S. 2556, *Cong. Rec.*, 84th Cong., 1st sess., 1955, 101, pt. 9:12166, 12168; press release, August 4, 1955, Metcalf Papers; Sister Providencia to Lee Metcalf and Mike Mansfield, August 6, 1955, Metcalf Papers.

27. Great Falls *Tribune*, September 8, 1955; Sister Providencia to James E. Murray, October 11, 1955, Murray Collection.

28. Sister Providencia to Mike Mansfield, October 29, 1955, Metcalf Papers; Sister Providencia to Mike Mansfield July 22, 1955, Michael J. Mansfield Collection (hereafter Mansfield Collection), UM; Sister Providencia, "Wardship of Hill 57 Indians," n.d., Metcalf Papers. Sister Providencia, "Population of Hill 57—Tribal Affiliation," October 6, 1955, and Andre Deligdisch and Ethel La Rock, "The Student Committee at the College of Great Falls," summary—Hill 57 Census from July 1, 1954-June 30, 1955," Cascade Council Records.

29. Sister Providencia to Mike Mansfield, October 1955, and Sister Providencia to James E. Murray, November 16, 1955, Metcalf Papers.

Providencia and her students began collecting in-depth enrollment statistics to refute Bureau of Indian Affairs arguments and pinpoint local problems. It was “not speedily done,” she wrote to Mansfield. “I have to go out there [Hill 57] myself because those poor people are so suspicious of any whites, even my students.” First, by ascertaining that most off-reservation Indians were not Canadians and thus ineligible for federal aid as the bureau contended, but were federal Rocky Boy’s and Turtle Mountain enrollees, Sister Providencia gave Montana’s lawmakers information they could use to force the bureau to reconsider its policy. Documentation was difficult, however, because Cascade County welfare officials often would not support enrolled Indians. “Forty-nine persons with federal wardship status were denied general relief or hospitalization” she reported to Mansfield. The impact of Indians on the county welfare situation was overwhelming: although Hill 57 residents represented only 1 percent of Cascade County’s population, they comprised 10 percent of the county welfare load and 25 percent of the medical load. The sister outlined her predicament to Mansfield confidentially in July: “The county people are not aware of the enrollment and you may be sure that I shall not be the one to divulge it to them, if there is danger of the poor people being deprived of the special privileges granted by the County at this time to ‘non-wards.’”<sup>28</sup>

**I**n October Sister Providencia wrote Mansfield again with a follow-up about the increasing number of Indians in Great Falls: “They are not educated for city life. If the Federal government had done a job there would be no problem. There would be no Hill 57.” Then, with donations from friends in Great Falls, Sister Providencia circulated one thousand copies of her Mansfield letter to signers as a petition. Her work triggered local changes. A month later she reported heartening news to the Montana delegation through Murray: “Best of all the Cascade

County Welfare Department has relented on restrictions against relief for wards. We are happy if our efforts and yours accomplish nothing else.”<sup>29</sup>

That December, in honor of her work, the all-Indian National Congress of American Indians (organized in 1944) gave Sister Providencia their annual merit award “for her inspiring leadership of Indians and whole communities.” They also recognized her activities through the years as she kept tribes informed, bridging “the gap” she and they perceived “in Indian organization from the Rocky Mountains to the Mississippi.”<sup>30</sup>

On Capitol Hill, early the next year Mansfield, by then Democratic party whip, used Sister Providencia’s college reports on Hill 57 in a Senate address calling for a federal policy for Indians “on or off the reservations.” Then in February the Montana delegation wrote to Illinois Senator Paul Douglas asking him to make reservations and Indian communities eligible in his Depressed Areas Bill, a suggestion he subsequently adopted. This legislation which finally passed as the Area Redevelopment Measure in January 1961, provided for federal loans for work projects.<sup>31</sup>

Active also at the state level, Sister Providencia presented a report on Hill 57 at the third annual Institute of Indian Affairs meeting at Montana State University in Missoula in spring 1956. Her efforts had long impressed other Montanans such as leaders of the Montana Farmer’s Union and faculty of Montana State University. One was Gretchen Billings, a newspaper editor of Helena’s *People’s Voice* and participant in the university-based Montana Human Relations Committee that investigated reservation Indian issues in 1954. In August 1956 Billings wrote a feature article describing Sister Providencia’s “total approach” in confronting the “enormity of the problem” for off-reservation Indians.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless as the year progressed, Sister Providencia grew discouraged with what she believed was too much publicity for herself. At a December awards dinner in Great Falls, where she received the Great Falls Business and Professional Women’s 1956 “Woman of the Year” award, she vented her frustration over Indian issues by comparing herself to Don Quixote, “fighting windmills all year.” She reported “only failure,” evident in a “new independence of despair on a mass scale across Montana with Indian people dead on their

30. National Congress of American Indians, Certificate of Award, December 1955; Sister Providencia, “Dear Friends of the Minnesota Conference,” May 14, 1955, S. Providencia Papers.

31. Mike Mansfield, “Federal Indian Policy,” address to the U.S. Senate, May 22, 1956, reprinted in *Cong. Rec.*, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 1956, 102, pt. 7:8650; James E. Murray, Mike Mansfield, Lee Metcalf to Senator Paul H. Douglas, February 9, 1956, reprinted in *Cong. Rec.*, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 1956, 102, pt. 3:2986; Area Redevelopment Act, Public Law 87-27 (hereafter PL), *United States Statutes at Large* (hereafter *U.S. Stat.*), v. 75, 87th Cong., 1st sess., 1961, p. 47.

32. Gretchen Billings, (Helena) *People’s Voice Newspaper*, August 17, 1956.

33. Sister Providencia, “Acceptance of Award” speech, December 4, 1956, Great Falls, S. Providencia Papers; Great Falls *Tribune*, December 5, 1956.

34. Sister Agnes Kathleen to Mother Brendan, Provincial Superior, August 12, 1956, S. Providencia Papers.

feet from hunger because no agency of the federal government would admit jurisdiction" over the off-reservation Indians. Acknowledging criticisms from some citizens, Sister Providencia added: "They call me the Sob Sister of Great Falls, coddling the people, making them dependent, wasting my time on a hopeless problem."<sup>33</sup>

The "they" in the sister's speech included some college administrators and members of her order. "Why does Sister Providencia devote so much time to the Indians?" wrote Sister Agnes Kathleen to Mother Brendan, the Provincial Superior on August 12, 1956. Sister Agnes complained that Sister Providencia's classes and health had suffered and that "the Indians are here all day long to see Sister." She added:

We have children running around using the toilet room, etc., causing comments. If the community wants her to do this work with the Indians, then what arrangements can it make to give her time and space? What are we to do? A mere admonition will not solve the problem. Sister Providencia has had admonitions without number. You may wonder in the light of the foregoing why I did not object to Sister's attending the meeting of the National Congress of American Indians in Spokane next week? Well, really, it is a relief to have her away for awhile and let us get the house cleaned.<sup>34</sup>

Sister Providencia's drive to confront barriers, "break wide open the whole question of termination," and "bring the scorners face to face" ran counter to some views of a sister's work. Great Falls Bishop William J. Condon had refused to allow her to chair the February 1954 Indian forum because it was too controversial. Ursuline Sister Genevieve McBride, who taught in Great Falls and at nearby St. Peter's Mission during these years, expressed a norm perhaps when in 1984 she commented to an interviewer: "I was more interested in the human side instead of politics." It may well have been politics and Sister Providencia's approach, as much as criticism of her college Indian activities, that also annoyed some of her contemporaries. In Great Falls on daily rounds she ruffled many feathers. In the

1950s, for instance, it was an accepted practice for sisters to travel together. Yet it was common to see Sister Providencia make frequent trips to Hill 57 with a college student at the wheel of the car.<sup>35</sup>

Over the years Sister Providencia's superiors supported her nonetheless. "Be assured of my sincere remembrance and appreciation for all the work you do besides being a teacher," wrote her Superior General Mother Philippe de Cesaree from Montreal in 1967. A year later her provincial superior, Sister Xavier, responded to Sister Providencia's request to solicit contributions from her order for the Indians: "You need not request permission at this level. Before we'd ever consider asking you to stop your work, we would have to have very good reasons that you aren't really helping those who need the kind of attention you give them."<sup>36</sup>

In the mid-1950s, however, against a backdrop of perceived failures and criticisms, Sister Providencia devised new approaches. She wrote a one-page paper titled "5 Planks to Nail Down 57 Problems." The five planks included: "Save the family; Guarantee education (50% on Hill 57 not attending); Work on employment; Save the tribe (a resource for the state); Equalize special services." Sister Providencia suggested that an appointed committee investigate these precepts at local, state, and national levels. She circulated copies of her "5 Planks" and incorporated its recommendations into talks that she and her students presented to local service clubs and on radio broadcasts over Great Falls KMON. In 1957 Sister Providencia included several of her "Planks" in Montana House Joint Memorial No. 6. on off-reservation issues that legislators addressed to the Congress of the United States. Murray intended to use this Hill 57 memorial to influence more politicians in Washington. He reasoned that although this resolution came from a state with a small population and without great impact on the whole body of Congress, it nevertheless emphasized the Indian's distress and the necessity for increased federal response to problems of Indian subsistence, health, education, and welfare.<sup>37</sup>

35. Sister Providencia to Mike Mansfield, August 6, 1955, Mansfield Collection; Sister Providencia to Lee Metcalf, March 13, 1957, Metcalf Papers; Dorothy Bohn, conversation with author, October 25, 1984, Great Falls; Marsha Daniels, "Interview with Sister Genevieve McBride," sound cassette, 1984, Critical Writing Project Great Falls High School, Great Falls; Lois Murray S.P., conversation with author, October 11, 1990, Great Falls.

36. Mother Philippe De Cesaree, Superior General, to Sister Providencia, October 9, 1967, and Sister Xavier, Provincial Superior to Sister Providencia, December 12, 1968, S. Providencia Papers.

37. Sister Providencia, "5 Planks to Nail Down 57 Problems," S. Providencia Papers; *Laws, Resolutions and Memorials of the State of Montana passed by the 35th Legislative Assembly in Regular Session* (Helena: State Publishing Co., 1957), 764; "Extension of remarks of

Hon. James E. Murray of Montana in the Senate of the United States," March 26, 1957, *Cong. Rec.*, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 103, Appendix 2426.

38. U.S. Congress, Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, "Federal Indian Policy," Hearings on S. 809, S. Con. Res. 3, and S. 331, 85th Cong., 1st sess., May 13, 1957; "Statistics About Hill 57, April, 1957, collected by Mrs. Dave LaMere, B. P. W. delegate and compiled by Mr. Richard Charles of Great Falls," and "Statement of Mrs. Dave LaMere," Hill 57, May 1957, Great Falls, Montana, both in Cascade Council Records. Also in 1957 Sister Providencia and her college students wrote and disseminated: "A Preliminary Report from the Worship in Understanding," "Economic and Social Picture for Hill 57 Families," "These Children of Hill 57 Families Were Not in School Opening Day, September 3, 1957," all in Cascade Council Records.

In Great Falls Sister Providencia's campaign gained momentum when a group of her college students organized to lobby as the Friends of Hill 57. With Sister Providencia they worked enthusiastically on a new project, the selection and preparation of a Hill 57 spokesperson to testify at special hearings in Washington, D.C. Sister Providencia already had secured donations for the trip from Gertrude Lindgren, chairperson of the Business and Professional Womans' Club, and local Indian women. In May Eunice La Mere, Hill 57 resident and Rocky Boy's enrollee, joined other Montana Indian leaders from the Crow, Blackfeet, and Flathead reservations. She told congressmen that 62 percent of Hill 57 residents lived on relief and the population was growing. Sister Providencia applauded La Mere's and other firsthand Indian testimonies that fueled the growing national criticism of relocation and termination policies.<sup>38</sup>

**M**ore often in the mid-1950s Montana's lawmakers took their cues on Indian issues from their tribal constituents and the leaders of the National Congress of American Indians, characterized by sociologist Robert C. Day as "the principal Indian power group to grapple with the shifting goals and tactics of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of the Interior." Significantly several of Montana's Indian leaders, Walter Wetzel (Blackfeet), Walter McDonald (Flathead: Salish and Kootenai tribes), and Freda Beazley (Fort Peck: Assiniboine tribe), officers in the Montana Inter-tribal Policy Board, also became officers of the National Congress. Besides opposition to termination, they criticized the government's relocation policy and declared instead that "the government should concentrate on relocating industry to the reservation and not the Indian to the industry."<sup>39</sup>

39. Robert C. Day, "The Emergence of Activism as a Social Movement," in Howard M. Bahr, Bruce A. Chadwick, and Robert C. Day, eds., *Native Americans Today: Sociological Perspectives* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) 807; (Flathead Reservation) *Char-Koosta*, September 1958; (Browning) *Glacier Reporter*, January 29, 1959; Freda Augusta Beasley Papers, MHS; Walter Wetzel, telephone conversation with author, March 25, 1992.

40. James E. Murray, S. Con. Res. 85, (Improvement of Standard of Living of American Indians), *Cong. Rec.*, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 1956, 102, pt. 9:11926; and Murray, S. Con. Res. 3, (Standard of Living of the American Indian) *Cong. Rec.*, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957, 103, pt. 1:278; Lee Metcalf, "A Story of Two Congresses," speech, National Congress of American Indians, September 25, 1956, Salt Lake City, Utah; Lee

By 1958 James Murray and Lee Metcalf had grown more outspoken on Indian concerns. In July 1956 and again in January 1957, Murray, Senate chairman of the Interior and Indian Affairs Committee since 1955, introduced concurrent resolutions "to improve the standard of the American Indian without exacting termination of federal protection of Indian property or of any other rights as its price." Metcalf, a member of the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, spoke frequently against termination policies. He addressed the National Congress of American Indians conventions in 1956 and again in 1958. At the latter, held in Missoula, Montana, Metcalf, wearing a "bright feathered bonnet," gave the keynote address to 200 delegates, representing 270,000 persons belonging to thirty tribes in twenty states. Earlier that year he had spoken twice to meetings of the Indian Rights Association. Sister Providencia monitored such public statements with pleasure. They contributed to what historian Francis Paul Prucha called "an outcry too loud to ignore." Popular opinion thus forced Interior Secretary Fred A. Seaton to give a radio broadcast from the Navajo Reservation in Window Rock, Arizona, on September 14, 1958, repudiating House Concurrent Resolution 108 and criticizing past interpretations of the termination bill. He declared instead that the only qualifications for ending the Indians' relationship to the government should be tribal readiness and "acceptance of the plan prior to action by Congress."<sup>40</sup>

Sister Providencia continued to lobby, but less the lone Don Quixote or Sob Sister of Great Falls and more with the assurance her Blackfeet name implied: "She-Who-Captures-Two-Horses-in-Battle." Actively she sought more publicity for Hill 57. During the summer of 1958 she renewed her former Washington-based friendship with author/broadcaster Robert McCormick and provided him with an Indian bibliography for his prospective national telecast. Later that year she watched National Broadcasting Company cameras film Hill 57. Then on Sunday afternoon, November 13, 1958, McCormick narrated the "Kaleidoscope"

Metcalf, "The Bureau of Indian Affairs," speech, National Congress of American Indians, September 17, 1958, Missoula, Montana; Lee Metcalf, "The Need for Revision of Federal Indian Policy," speech, Indian Rights Association, January 3, 1958, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and February 4, 1958, Mt. Kisko, New York, all in the Metcalf Papers; *Daily Missoulian*, September 17, 1958; Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indian* (2 vols., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 2:1056; Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton, reprint of September 13, 1958, radio broadcast, Cascade Council Records.

41. Sister Providencia to Lee Metcalf, January 1, 1959, Sister Providencia, "To all neglected relatives . . ." January 29, 1959, Metcalf Papers; Sister Providencia, "Bibliographic data which document facts in 'The American Stranger'," n.d., S. Providencia Papers.

program's "The American Stranger," which depicted the "chronic distress" among the Menominee Indians in Wisconsin and Montana's Flathead, Blackfeet, and off-reservation Indians represented by Hill 57. Sister Providencia expressed joy to Metcalf in "being caught in a whirlpool of reaction. As a result of the program the true native feels less a stranger and others now view themselves as strange Americans who should know so little about their neighbors and their survival problems."<sup>41</sup>

Sister Providencia encouraged other commentary as well. In December 1959 she took visiting journalist Robert Fenwick to Hill 57. Later in the year she and others greeted Democratic vice-presidential candidate Lyndon Johnson in Great Falls. At an October 8 reception in his honor at the Great Falls civic center, Johnson declared that "the case of the landless Indians on Hill 57 is primarily a federal responsibility."<sup>42</sup>

**A**s pleased as she was with national publicity surrounding the hill, from a tactical point of view, Sister Providencia considered a spring 1961 visit from a congressional task force particularly significant because the Department of the Interior had directed it to investigate specifically the problems of eligibility for aid to Indians living in the cities. The task force's report subsequently recommended federal aid for Indian communities and spurred passage of the 1961 and 1963 augmentations to the 1956 Adult Education Act and the enactment in 1962 of the Manpower Training and Development Act that aided Indians wherever they lived.<sup>43</sup>

In April she applauded the implementation of one of her 1957 "Planks" when Great Falls Mayor William H. Swanberg appointed a citizen's committee of seven to investigate the problems of local Indians. A month later Metcalf met with the committee, Sister Providencia, and her classes at the College of Great Falls to explain how new federal programs, such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, Area Redevelopment, low-cost housing, and Ac-

celerated Public Works, might be used locally. In May 1965 a group of concerned citizens formed a private corporation called Opportunities, Inc., to contract with the federal government to administer anti-poverty programs locally and provide "a community house with a trained staff for assistance to the Indians and also unfortunates of other races." On May 15, 1963, Sister Providencia exuberantly wrote, "Dear Mother Provincial, Things are really happening and moving for Hill 57 at last."<sup>44</sup>

When she addressed a Missoula audience giving "An Overview of the War on Poverty," in December 1966 Sister Providencia told how programs engendered by the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act were operating in Great Falls. The population of Hill 57 had decreased because Indian families had moved into town to participate in local Community Action Programs, the Neighborhood youth corps, and the Headstart program. Other families, however, had chosen to stay on the hill, and Sister Providencia would note that in 1971 Hill 57 had become "a religious center for worship services attended by Indians from Wyoming, Canada, and the Rocky Boy's and Blackfeet reservations." She described the "vigorous cultural life of their own that is just as motivated by the ancient social and religious ideals of the buffalo days as it ever was."<sup>45</sup>

Sister Providencia continued to work and lobby on Indian issues through the next decade. Murton McCluskey, a Blackfeet leader and former director of the Great Falls Indian Education Office, commented on Sister Providencia's ability to bring people together on issues when she chaired and organized meetings. She was also a consultant for Community Action Agencies of the Office of Economic Opportunity for four communities and four tribes in Montana. Her papers reveal her pride in being adopted by the Blackfeet, Gros Ventre, Assiniboine, and Crow tribes.<sup>46</sup>

In recent years historians have noted how the emergence of Indian activism and self-determination in the 1960s and 1970s originated in the conflicts of the 1940s and 1950s in part as the threat of terminationist policies strengthened tribal

42. Robert W. Fenwick, "America's Lost People," *Denver Post*, January 1, 1960; *Great Falls Tribune*, October 28, 1960.

43. Adult Education Act, PL 84-959, *U.S. Stat.*, v. 70, 84th Cong., 2d sess., 1956, p. 986, and augmentations to it: PL 87-273, *U.S. Stat.*, v. 75, 87th Cong., 1st sess., 1961, p. 571, and PL 88-230, *U.S. Stat.*, v. 77, 88th Cong., 1st sess., 1963, p. 471; Manpower Training and Development Act, PL 88-415, *U.S. Stat.*, v. 78, 87th Cong., 2d sess., 1962, p. 388.

44. Sister Providencia to Mother Provincial, May 15, 1963, S. Providencia Papers; memorandum, "Hill 57 Committee Discussion with Senator Metcalf—College, May 2, 1963," and Benjamin W. Hilley to Merrill W. Englund, May 10, 1965, Metcalf Papers.

45. Sister Providencia, "An Overview of the War on Poverty," December 28, 1966, Metcalf Papers; PL 88-452, *U.S. Stat.*, v. 78, 88th Cong., 2d sess., 1964, p. 508; Sister Providencia to Elizabeth Ann Cooper, August 4, 1971, S. Providencia Papers; James Parker Shield, "Hill 57 Serves as a Spiritual Retreat," September 14, 1980, and James Parker Shield, "Misconceptions About Indians," November 9, 1980, both in *Great Falls Tribune*.

46. Murton McCluskey, telephone conversation with author, September 18, 1990.

47. Peter Iverson, "Building toward Self-Determination: Plains and Southwestern Indians in the 1940s and 1950s," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 16 (April 1985), 173; Burt, *Tribalism in Crisis*, 126; Walter Wetzel, telephone conversation with author, March 25, 1992.

resolves. Historian Peter Iverson contends that we have not given sufficient credit to the enduring nature of Indians in this country. Sister Providencia played a role in this growth especially when she encouraged and advised Montana Indian leaders and assisted them in communicating with Washington's politicians and bureaucrats. Thereafter she participated in a new decade of active planning. As chairperson of the Montana Inter-tribal Policy Board's Steering Committee in 1960, she held meetings in Great Falls and Browning to help prepare Montana tribes and the National Congress of American Indians for the June 1961 American Indian Chicago Conference, a harbinger of Red Power movements of subsequent years. Blackfeet leader Walter Wetzel appointed her tribal consultant and acknowledged her counsel as he worked through the Montana Inter-tribal Policy Board and as president of the National Congress of American Indians.<sup>47</sup>

By 1966 Sister Providencia had seen changes and issued the challenge in her direct style: "Well folks," she wrote, alluding to past history, "to the People of the Buffalo: The drums are sounding here, muffled it may be, but steady and strong. I hope that they are taken up across the plains and I warn the dinosaurs who still think the Indians are 'things' to get pushed around—to move out of the way."<sup>48</sup>

A letter Sister Providencia sent to Senator Metcalf in 1971 summarized the results of her quest: "What a long step from the War of '54 and the abolishment of Indian group existence. I went

to an Indian education meeting in Billings this past week. All I could do was just sit there and shake my head in wonder. The new definition of an Indian covering landless and terminated Indians, the competent leadership of Indians from different states, the deference of federal offices to them. All I can say is WOW in college vocabulary and

praise the Lord . . . our old battle, you and I since 1955."<sup>49</sup>

For more than two decades Sister Providencia exercised her talents as a leader, teacher, writer, and speaker, mobilizing forces and involving others. She started by building a rapport with Indian friends, then she organized committed students and convinced a nucleus of Great Falls citizens that action and understanding were necessary. To Metcalf she was a "sparkplug and a catalyst" who made Hill 57 a national symbol of off-reservation poverty, thereby helping bring about a change in federal Indian policy. For Murray she "spoke the conscience of those of us who are concerned with Indian welfare."<sup>50</sup>

In the late 1970s Sister Providencia retired and wrote *A Shining from the Mountains*, a history of the Sisters of Providence Mission established in 1864 at St. Ignatius, Montana. Thereafter she lived in the Sisters of Charity home at Mt. St. Joseph in Spokane, Washington, which she described as "that place of blissful quiet." After her death at age eighty on December 23, 1989, Father Robert Fox saluted her during the homily: "Dear and joyful friend who came charging into our lives," who would "make the sparks fly and help us hear the thunder roar in the land of the Shining Mountains."<sup>51</sup>



Sister Providencia in Spokane, c. 1980

48. Sister Providencia, "To the People of the Buffalo," June 15, 1966, Metcalf Papers.

49. Sister Providencia to Lee Metcalf, September 20, 1972, Metcalf Papers.

50. Lee Metcalf to Sister Providencia, August 8, 1966, Metcalf Papers; James E. Murray to Sister Providencia, May 27, 1958, Murray Collection.

51. Sister Providencia Tolan, S.P., *A Shining from the Mountains* (Alberta, Canada: Jasper Printing, 1980); Sister Providencia, memorandum, December 19, 1971, and Rev. Robert Fox, Homily, recording, 1989, both in S. Providencia Papers.

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