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Sacred White Buffalo, Mother Mary Catherine [Josephine Crowfeather, Ptesanwanyakapi, Ptesanwasyagapiwin]

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—Kathleen McNerney Donovan

**SACRED WHITE BUFFALO, MOTHER MARY CATHERINE** [Josephine Crowfeather, Ptesanwanyakapi, Ptesan-Wanyagapiwin] (1867–1893), daughter of Joseph Crowfeather, a Hunkpapa Lakota chief, was born near Standing Rock Agency, Dakota Territory (now North Dakota). From infancy, she was regarded as a sacred virgin because, just after her birth, her father had carried her into battle for protection, and they both returned unharmed. Hence her Indian name, Ptesanwanyakapi (They See a White Buffalo Woman), compared her to the sacred virgin in a Lakota story. As a youth, she expressed a desire to become a Catholic nun, and for four years she entered the Benedictine Sisters’ School at Fort Yates, North Dakota.

From 1888 to 1890 Crowfeather trained to become a sister under the guidance of Father Francis M. Craft, a priest of Iroquois ancestry. She shared his vision of fulfilling the dream of the seventeenth-century Mohawk convert Kateri Tekakwitha, who had wanted to establish an Indian Christian sisterhood. With five other Lakota women, she attended a Benedictine academy in Avoca, Minnesota, and then entered the Benedictine novitiate in Zell, Minnesota, where she professed her vows in 1890. She then served as assistant cook at a Stephan, South Dakota, mission school until internal strife at the novitiate prompted the premature transfer of the fledgling community to its new convent at Elbowoods, North Dakota, on the Fort Berthold Reservation.
The next year, Crowfeather was elected the founding prioress-general of the new Congregation of American Sisters, and she assumed the title “Mother.” Although independent, her community followed Benedictine discipline through convent devotions and missionary work among the Arikara, Gros Ventre, and Mandan. The congregation taught English, cared for the sick, and directed Christian sodalities.

In 1893 Mother Catherine succumbed to tuberculosis. Her young community survived for seven years more and reached a membership of twelve. Despite chronic poverty, illness, and racism during its brief history, the order served to inspire future Native religious workers.

References


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SAILA, PITALOOSIE [Pitalouisa, Pitaloosee] (b. 1942), was born in Arctic Canada on August 11. A well-known Inuit printmaker, she lives at Cape Dorset. Pitaloosie is married to the noted sculptor Pauta Saila and is the niece of Oshoochiak Pudiat and the famed Cape Dorset sculptor and printmaker Pudlo.

In the late 1950s the Canadian artist and author James A. Houston, working as a civil administrator for the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, introduced drawing and printmaking to the Inuit people of Cape Dorset. Since then the production of art has been a creative outlet and a means of earning a livelihood for many Inuit people. Pitaloosie belongs to the second generation of Cape Dorset artists. She began drawing in the late 1960s, and her first piece was published in the 1968 Cape Dorset collection. Since that time her prints have appeared regularly in the illustrated catalogs of the annual collections of Inuit art, and her work has been exhibited internationally.

Pitaloosie often draws scenes of seasonal activities, such as hunting and fishing. *Fisherman’s Dream,* a 1971 print, was reproduced on a twelve-cent stamp issued in November 1977 by the Canadian government. Pitaloosie is best known, though, for her depictions of mothers and children. In 1983 her print *Arctic Madonna* was selected to be reproduced on a UNICEF Christmas card. Much of her work conveys the Inuit sense of transformation and possibility.

References
