

TAPE P-106 SIDES A & B
SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW WITH SISTER MARY PAULA
Date: August 24, 1979
Interviewer: Sandy Crain

SIDE A

This interview provides a context for understanding the relationship between Episcopal Sisters and what is now known as the Evergreen [Music] Conference Center founded by Canon Winfred Douglas, husband of Dr. Josepha Williams Douglas of Camp Neosho.

Frances Lorraine Bush, a devoted Methodist involved in the work of that denomination, was teaching in Dallas, Texas during World War Two when she became convinced that she should devote herself to the cause of peace and could best do so through a life of fulltime Christian service. During her second year of teaching she became attracted to the Episcopalian church. After four years as a teacher, she took a two-year course at the New York Training School for Deaconesses and church workers then returned to Dallas to work for Christ Church (Episcopal).

Her family had Roman Catholic neighbors; a Roman Catholic Ursuline Convent was only a half block from her house; but her mother forbade any communication with Roman Catholics. Once she discovered the existence of Episcopalian nuns, Frances Bush avoided them because she thought that she could not commit to the life of a nun.

She mistakenly believed that becoming a lay Associate of the Episcopalian Sisters of St. Mary would suffice but it did not. She then entered the novitiate of the Episcopalian Community of Saint Mary in Kenosha, WI where she completed six months as a postulant and two-and-a half years as a novice. In 1954, she received a new habit and a new name, Sister Mary Paula, and began to live under the rule of the Sisters of St. Mary. Sister Mary Paula took permanent vows in 1954, when she acquired another new habit with cross and cincture. In the interview, she discussed the style of nuns' habits and their decision to wear contemporary clothing. Her clothing comes from gifts and thrift shops.

The convent follows a modified Benedictine rule where prayer, work, e.g. nursing in convent infirmaries in Milwaukee, WI and Peekskill, NY, teaching (now discontinued, except for Sunday School) and community life are central imperatives.

In 1965, the Community of St. Mary celebrated its hundredth anniversary. Its history *Our Ten Decades of Praise* recalled Canon Winfred Douglas of Evergreen. Canon Douglas was ordained an Episcopal priest in 1899 in the mission Chapel of the Transfiguration, Evergreen. In 1903 he began to study Plainsong on the Isle of Wight, UK, with Benedictine monks from Solesmes Abbey, France and he determined to introduce it to Episcopal communities in the USA.

END OF SIDE A

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SIDE B

Father Douglas preferred to teach Plainsong in a religious community with a commitment to daily recitation of the Office. In 1906, Douglas accepted an invitation to teach at Mount Saint Gabriel Convent in Peekskill, NY where he became Choirmaster and immediately began to set the music for *The Community of Ceremonies*, rituals marking the life and death of a nun. In a matter of weeks, the Canon had the nuns singing genuine Plainsong. They studied hard even though they and the Convent schoolgirls found Plainsong lacking both tune and rhythm. Sister Paula explained that her community stopped chanting Plainsong only because they do not have sufficient singers.

From 1910, Douglas, his wife Dr. Josepha Williams Douglas and their son Eric (of Camp Neosho, Evergreen) spent the next twelve years at Mount Saint Gabriel in a house named Saint Dunstan. The Canon participated fully in the life of the Mount. He preached, led retreats, heard confessions, and organized and acted in the school's Christmas pageant. He and Josepha hosted Sunday dinners and musical afternoons for the students.

Episcopal nuns first arrived in Evergreen in the early 1920s at the invitation of Father Douglas, and lodged as guests in the house known as St. Raphael's on the grounds of Evergreen Conference Center. Sister Paula thinks that Eric Douglas later gave them title to the house. The nuns' living room was originally a tavern. The well-known local builder Jock Spence added a third section, as changes in materials and styles (e.g. beveled stair posts), attest. Two Spence tables with stair-step legs are in the living room. Ann (the second Mrs. Winfred Douglas) presented the piano. Navajo rugs came from the Douglas collection. Drapes made from monk's cloth were embroidered by Sister Elizabeth Clement to match the rugs. Sister Elizabeth and the other two nuns with her had arrested tuberculosis. The nuns visited homes, nursed people and taught Sunday School.

In the early 1960s, a two-story farmhouse displaced by highway construction was moved to the nuns' house and attached to it as a new chapel. An altar and pews were stored below the house. The library must have been the farmhouse porch. There is a small bedroom, bath and sacristy. Ann Douglas (who became the second wife of Canon Douglas) slept in a partially finished attic bedroom entered by a trapdoor. The largest room became the Chapel of St. Joseph and St. Mary. The statue of St. Joseph is from Oberammergau. The pews have figures carved either in Evergreen or Denver.

The nuns now travel to Evergreen to hold summer retreats and workshops attended mostly by Episcopalians. Every Wednesday, the nuns observe a "Quiet Day" of reflection. In winter, the nuns rent out part of St. Raphael's as well as a cabin rebuilt in the early 1970's.

END OF SIDE B