

**St. Anselm Institute for Catholic Thought at UVA, Holy Women of the Americas Lunch Series  
September 27, 2019  
Saint Marianne Cope (1838 – 1918)**

**1. A Short Biography of St. Marianne**

Marianne Cope was born in Germany but grew up in Utica, NY before becoming a professed member of the Sisters of St. Francis. As a leader in her community, Mother Marianne was instrumental in opening two of the first Catholic Hospitals in Central New York: St. Elizabeth Medical Center in Utica and St. Joseph's Hospital in Syracuse. Recognizing the need for basic health care in a city of immigrants, she and a small group of women defied convention by purchasing a saloon in Syracuse, New York and transforming it into a hospital to serve the needs of a diverse community. Here they welcomed everyone and provided the same quality of care—regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, disease or economic means. They pioneered rules of patient's rights and cleanliness practices not seen before in the United States. And this was just the beginning. Throughout upstate New York, Mother Marianne and her growing community educated and provided healthcare to children.

In 1883, Mother Marianne and a group of six other Sisters of St. Francis bravely journeyed across the United States by train and took a ship to the Sandwich Islands (now Hawaii) to care for individuals believed to have leprosy (now known as Hansen's disease). They initially served at the Branch hospital at Kaka'ako on the island of Oahu to provide care for those exiled from their families. The king and queen then asked that the sisters open a home to care for the healthy children of patients and Marianne named it the Kapiolani Home in honor of the queen. Mother Marianne traveled to Maui in 1884 where she was asked to manage Malulani Hospital, the island's first general hospital, as well as St. Anthony School.

A charter confirming the sisters' ability to fulfil their mission in Hawaii was long awaited and jeopardized by a chaotic political climate. The Hawaiian royal family was very concerned to have the sisters' help with the individuals and communities suffering from Hansen's disease, who were largely native. Meanwhile anti-monarchists sought to strip the Hawaiian monarchy of much of its authority, initiating a transfer of power to Americans and Europeans. In 1887 the 'Bayonet Constitution' forced one of the sisters' greatest advocates, Walter Gibson, out of Hawaii. In 1891 the monarchy was overturned. The policies proposed by the new governors espoused a more radical segregation for all sick with Hansen's Disease to the remote corner of Molokai, Kalaupapa. This policy was inspired not only by health concerns but, in part, by business and tourism interests on the main islands.

In 1888, Mother Marianne and the sisters moved to Kalaupapa to care for those with Hansen's disease who had been exiled to the remote peninsula on the island of Molokai. There she cared for Father Damien in his last months and attended temporarily to the boys' home that he had established there until the Sacred Heart Fathers sent a permanent replacement. Mother Marianne not only provided healthcare to the girls in her care at Bishop Home in Kalaupapa, she offered healing for mind, body and spirit by creating a community that supported individual creativity, dignity and respect. A community of family was established enhanced by gardens, music, art, games and laughter. The gravesites of thousands of people who died from Hansen's disease cover the peninsula on Molokai. It is heartening to know that the sisters provided them with some measure of peace and comfort during their time there. Mother Marianne's faith and strong foundation of values - compassion, self-sacrifice, devotion, courage and service as a Sister of St. Francis - supported her

extraordinary actions that led her to canonization by the Vatican in 2012 (at the same time as Kateri Tekakwitha).

**2. Hawaiian views of the newly arrived sisters.** Excerpt from Sister Leopoldina Burn's Little History of the lepers of Bishop Home, Kalaupapa, Molokai 1896-1901, pp. 32-33

(The sea captain of the Alameda carrying S. Leopoldina Burns and S. Charles to Honolulu from San Francisco. Walter Murray Gibson is man with white beard.)

"You must have noticed," [the captain] said, "how strange we looked at you Sisters when you came on board. We were expecting to fetch the Sisters back to the States, and imagine our surprise when we are to take more Sisters there. We could hardly believe it. I was in the Cabinet meeting and I heard every one of the members of the Cabinet say they did not want the Sisters and would send them back to the States. Only one old man with white hair and a long white beard. His speech was grand. He pleaded so for the poor lepers and how they need the tender care of the Sisters. All he said seemed to silent all the other members of the Cabinet but I am surprised that he gained his point as just one against so many."

**3. King Kalakau's death (1891).** Excerpt from Sister Leopoldina Burnes' Journals. *King Kalakau's widow would be ousted from rule two years after her husband died. The Hawaiian royal family showed great concern for the native suffering in the epidemic.*

When the news came from abroad that the good King Kalakau was dangerously ill, it caused great sorrow among the natives for he was dearly loved by them. And when word came that his remains were on their way home,<sup>3</sup> our hearts were sad for our gentle Queen Kapiolani. And from every hut came the sad mournful wailing of the native cry. On every turn we seemed to meet the dark lonely shadow of death. The beautiful mountain tops were hiding under thick damp mist and gray threatening clouds were hanging low and even the wind seemed to sing mournfully as it swept around the corners of the cottages and verandas. The very atmosphere seemed to grieve the loss of the good King. The lovely Queen Kapiolani went from the grand old palace never to return. Liliuokalani was now the Queen. Being King Kalakau's own sister, she was to take his place. Liliuokalani was not like our gentle Kapiolani. The new Queen was a large woman, coarse features and very dark. Her husband being an Englishman, she could speak English nicely. Sometime after she became Queen, the Legislature and many visitors accompanied Her Majesty to the leper Settlement. Mr. Reynolds was then employed by the Board of Health and he felt it his duty to accompany the Queen although he was a very sick man. When they landed, Her Majesty, Mr. Reynolds and many of the visitors came first to the Home.

Our kind Mother could see that Mr. Reynolds was suffering so she told him "to remain with us until the steamer leaves. You are not able to go about the Settlement" she told him. Poor man was indeed so feverish and sick that he was quite willing to sink back in the big chair and close his eyes, remaining quiet until Mother could help him. In her easy graceful manner, Mother welcomed the dusky Queen and seating her in a large chair that the children had decorated with ferns and flowers. Then the girls all neatly dressed in white with black sashes for His Majesty the King, marching slowly and sadly with bowed heads. Many were crying. And after forming a line in front of the veranda, they all bowed very gracefully and expressed with trembling voices their welcome in the pretty native way; and then raising their young bird like voices in heart-felt songs of welcome and sad mournful chants for the friend of the lepers, their beloved King Kalakau.

**4. Issues in Diagnosing “Lepers” to be sent to Kalaupapa.** Excerpt from Sister Leopoldina Burn’s *Little History*, pg. 195 and pg. 215. *Interesting section on how Doctors determined young “Ella” had the disease and she stayed in Kalaupapa for many years not having the disease.*

Still she always said "it was the fault of the teachers that she had been pronounced a leper-so dreadfully treated by the teachers and an exile in the leper Settlement. "I know I deserved punishment but with those awful protestant teachers be justified?" "Poor Ella." How she suffered. I dearly loved her. She was high spirited and quick tempered but easily managed by kindness. The teachers being so awfully afraid of leprosy when they got it in their minds that the little orphan was a leper, they took her to the receiving station and the Doctors pronounced her a leper. After she had remained in the Station for some time, the spots and lumps on her arms and legs all faded away and the Doctors were puzzled. Ella told me the lumps and spots were caused by the heavy ruler the teachers used to punish her with. I asked her "Ella did you tell the Doctors that?" "No I told them nothing. I was afraid I would have to go back to that school and I wanted to stay with the Sisters."

Poor little Ella. Above her elbow she had a little lump that never disappeared and the rest of the same arm was paralyzed. When the Doctors sent her to us, she was then eleven years old; a little delicate creature with a sweet face, soft black curly hair and large mild black eyes. She remained with us eleven years, and all those long lonely years I knew she was not a leper. She was so well and strong; her skin like velvet. Never a blemish and never a leper sore. Poor girl. It was sad to see her spending the bright years of her youth in this valley of death. When strange doctors would ask me "Sister you have been with the lepers so much, do you think there are any of those in your care who are not lepers?" I always pointed to Ella and told them "why I thought she was not a leper." But when they looked at her poor little wrist and found the little lump on her arm, they would shake their head and go their way. Many times the Doctors examined her, but always pronounced her a leper. One day she said "now Sister, it is enough. I shall never be examined again!" And her great dark eyes were flashing with anger. "I know I am a leper, and they know it. Why do they want to fool me like this? You must not call me again. I shall not come if you do." Each time when the poor little orphan came to me in these fits of temper, I told her you must believe me Ella dear, I know you are not a leper! You will return to your sisters, and be free from this awful place." I could soothe her, but she could not believe me. Usually her face would brighten with a peaceful smile she would say "Why Sister, how do you know?"

...

There were many lepers in the Settlement who were not sick; young and strong with a few leper spots or a stiff hand with these slight marks which in many cases proved not to be leprosy. Yet hundreds of those young people were sent to Molokai to spend the rest of their lives in exile. So it is no wonder they were brimming. Full of mischief and having no police in the Settlement only two old men without any idea of the duty of a police officer and if called, they would come with a lot of dogs and lanterns.

**5. Parents Visiting their daughters in the Bishop Home in Kalaupapa, Molokai.** *Excerpt from Sister Leopoldina Burnes’ Journals.*

It was a lovely cool morning August 7th 1900. Soft cool wind was so refreshing after the many days of steady warm rain. The whole Settlement and the majestic mountains were covered with beautiful soft green like velvet when the big steamer Mikahala came sailing gracefully in just as the golden sun came peeping over the mountain. She has a very sweet musical whistle that came with a

glad welcome, and ended in a long deep echo through the valleys. In less than an half hour the whole legislature, Board of Health, Doctors, many visitors, relatives of the lepers were landed on the rocky coast and were making their way slowly to the Settlement. When they came in the Home, such awful crying you never heard. Little Hana's father came. She is the little girl who plays the organ in church. The dear tot came to us with her mother who was a very nice ladylike woman. She was covered with sores which never healed and after suffering four years, she died a happy death. God rest her soul. Little Hana never had sores and hardly any sign of leprosy. It was sad to see the poor child when her father came. She had not seen him for over ten years. When she met him she closed her eyes and raising her hands up in the air and then clasping them around his neck, her heart rendering cries were most pitiful. We had another girl who came with us in 1888. Poor Margaret had not the happiness of seeing her parents during all these years and her poor old father was allowed to come. Oh, that poor child. I thought she would faint. She did not seem able to speak for some time. Her father is a little old man with white hair.

#### **6. "Freedom" on Kalaupapa.** Excerpt from Sister Leopoldina Burnes' Journals.

Mother only had charge of the Home in the leper Settlement a short time when the number of inmates run up to over a hundred and still only two Sisters<sup>1</sup> with our Mother in charge.

After the lepers had been so long (As I may say in the prison of the Receiving Station in Honolulu) they were happy to be in the Settlement where they could feel it their own country and they made good use of their freedom going in little parties to the lovely valleys there in the cool shade of the grand old trees. With the refreshing perfume of the soft green ferns and banks of lace madenhair ferns, and the cool sweet water that comes rushing out of the side of the mountain falling over the high steep rocks in to the dark deep basin in the valley and from there running in a clear stream over the moss covered logs and smooth white stones down through the valley with a calabash of poi and a little dry fish, they can enjoy the day in perfect freedom. We went often with our girls to this first valley which is not more than two miles from the Home. The first time we went for a picnic we started early in the morning and just as the blazing sun was coming up in her glowing splendor, we were joyfully entering in to the cool shady valley and shortly after the dump cart came with food and dishes and even the big dinner bell. What a delightful time they had. In a few minutes they all disappeared scattering through the lovely soft green shrubs and great old shade trees up the mountain on both sides of the valley.

#### **7. Community on Kalaupapa.** Excerpt from Sister Leopoldina Burnes' Journals. Boys' visit during the night and the healing power of laughter.

It was near ten o'clock when we left the chapel. Our poor tired Mother went to her writing. Some nights she writes until one and two o'clock in the morning for she has so many things to attend to during the day. It is hard for her to do her writing. And at night when everything is still and we are all sleeping, it is her time for writing. It was one of those lovely summer nights so still and cool. The sky was cloudless and the moon so large and bright that there were ghostly shadows in the deep silence everywhere.

I was so sleepy and tired my mind was easy as I had been to every cottage and attended to every one's wants. I went to my room thinking "I will be in bed tonight at ten o'clock" but Sister met me at my room door. "Did you see those men?" she said, "lurking around the yard?" I turned quickly and looking from the front door I saw two men walking slowly through the yard past the girls' houses. I knew the girls were sleeping and should they be woke suddenly by the ruffians as they sometimes were, their

screamings could be heard far and near, and I was sorry to ask poor Mother to leave her writing. So I told her as quietly as I could "Mother there are two men walking around over there. Shall we see what they want?" "If you are not afraid" Mother said gently without looking up from her writing. "I was dreadfully afraid but did not wish to say so, and besides I knew Sister Elizabeth had the nerve of a man." After kneeling at our Divine Lord's feet before the Blessed Sacrament, we started off. When we turned and came from behind one of the cottages there, they were with their faces close to the window looking in the window talking in a low voice. Their backs being towards us, they did not see us coming. Every thing so still and ghostly a dreadful fear came over me. But we moved on silently till we were very near. I had gained my courage and was just about to ask "what do you boys want here?" when one turned his head and it was fun to see them run. They knocked against each other. One had long legs and his heels struck his back. The other slipped and nearly fell (for it had been raining that day). And as they ran sideways, how funny [they] did look in the beautiful moonlight and everything so still that not one of the girls knew about it.

When we were sure the men were gone, we went home and had a good laugh telling Mother about it. It was then about eleven o'clock when a quick rap came on the door. "Oh come" a voice said. "A woman is dying." So off we started again. Everything was still as death except the groaning of the ten half sick women in the room. When I knelt by the sufferer's bed, she could not speak to me and pitiful groans were coming from every side. Suddenly Sister burst out laughing and I could not keep the laugh back when thinking of that funny picture a few minutes before. And fearing the poor sufferers would think us unkind, I told them as well as I could in native all about it and how funny the men looked. It was surprising to see the effect it had [on] those poor sick women. They jumped up in their bed. Not another groan but all excited, one talking louder than the other. And the one we thought to be dying opened her eyes and in a clear voice said "were you not afraid?" "Oh no we were not afraid! They ran for their life. But we are very tired and sleepy." "Oh poor Sisters!" they said. "Go home and go to bed. We will be all right." When we got home we had another good laugh telling Mother how quickly the sick women got better. Excitement is good sometimes.

**8. Experience at Kalaupapa (before the arrival of the sisters).** Ambrose T. Hutchison, resident in the settlement from 1879-1932

On the night of the 4th day of January 1879 about seven p.m. I with 11 other fellow sufferers were lined up in two by two file by our jailer (each of us carrying our own baggage) guarded on each side by a squad of policemen were taken from the leper detention station...and put aboard the SS Mokolii lying alongside the pier at the foot of Fort Street. After a half-hour wait for two Government Officials, Sam G. Wilder President of the Board of Health and Dr. N.B. Emerson newly appointed first resident physician of the Leper Settlement of Kalawao. When they arrived and came aboard the steamer the line was cast off, the steamer moved out into the harbor and steamed out to sea bound for Molokai and arrived off Kalaupapa the next morning 7 a.m. when the steamer anchored we entered a row boat with the two officials and rowed to the Kalaupapa landing and put ashore and [were] received by the local officials of the Leper Settlement. After our names, ages and places we hailed from were taken down, left on the rocky shore without food and shelter. No houses provided by the then Government for the like of us outcasts.

Mother Marianne's Copy of Letter to Premier Walter M. Gibson, President of Board of Health, Hawaiian Islands, written at Branch Hospital for Lepers, Kakaako, Oahu.

Date: January 7, 1884.

Archive at St. Anthony Convent and Motherhouse, Syracuse, New York

[Sister Marianne  
Franciscan Sisters  
Jany 7. 1884]<sup>(1)</sup>

Honolulu, H. I. Jan. 7. 1884

His Excellency W. M. Gibson, President  
of the Board of Health.

Dear Sir:

.....But before we assume the heavy responsibility of caring for the unfortunate "Lepers" we beg, for our security and protection, a written and duly signed agreement in which we wish to have plainly stated what the government may expect of us, not only at the present time, but also in future.... We would wish to know exactly the extent of our authority in the Institutions of which we are to take charge, in what relation we shall stand to the Doctors and Stewards. (In regard to the Stewards, I beg to say that, we cannot be subject to them; however, we have no objection to work with them provided they respect our rights and will not interfere with us). Officers or Attendants should be forbidden to use profane or indecent language in our presence... As far as practicable each party should have their duties assigned to them, so there may be no unpleasant misunderstanding.

We are as yet strangers here, and unacquainted with the regulations of the Institution, but at one glance we can see much that must be changed, hence we expect to have the Authority to establish such regulations as we shall think proper or rather deem necessary, to carry out the object for which we were called here... The main cause of the terrible affliction resting upon the poor people, is well known to every intelligent man, there is every reason to believe that the great immorality is calling from heaven God's punishment, therefore our first step towards improving their sad condition, should be, to remove as much as possible, the cause of sin and immorality. To us it is shocking, to see how poorly the helpless females are protected, and how much they are exposed to danger..... Their pitiable condition appeals strongly to our sympathy. And we, most earnestly, beg your Excellency and the Board of Health to make arrangements, without delay to seperate the sexes.

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