

BIOGRAPHY OF COLLEGE'S FOUNDER AND FIRST PRESIDENT IS PUBLISHED

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Former Rivier president, Sr. Lucille Thibodeau, p.m., Ph.D. '66/'72G, publishes biography of College's founder and first president.

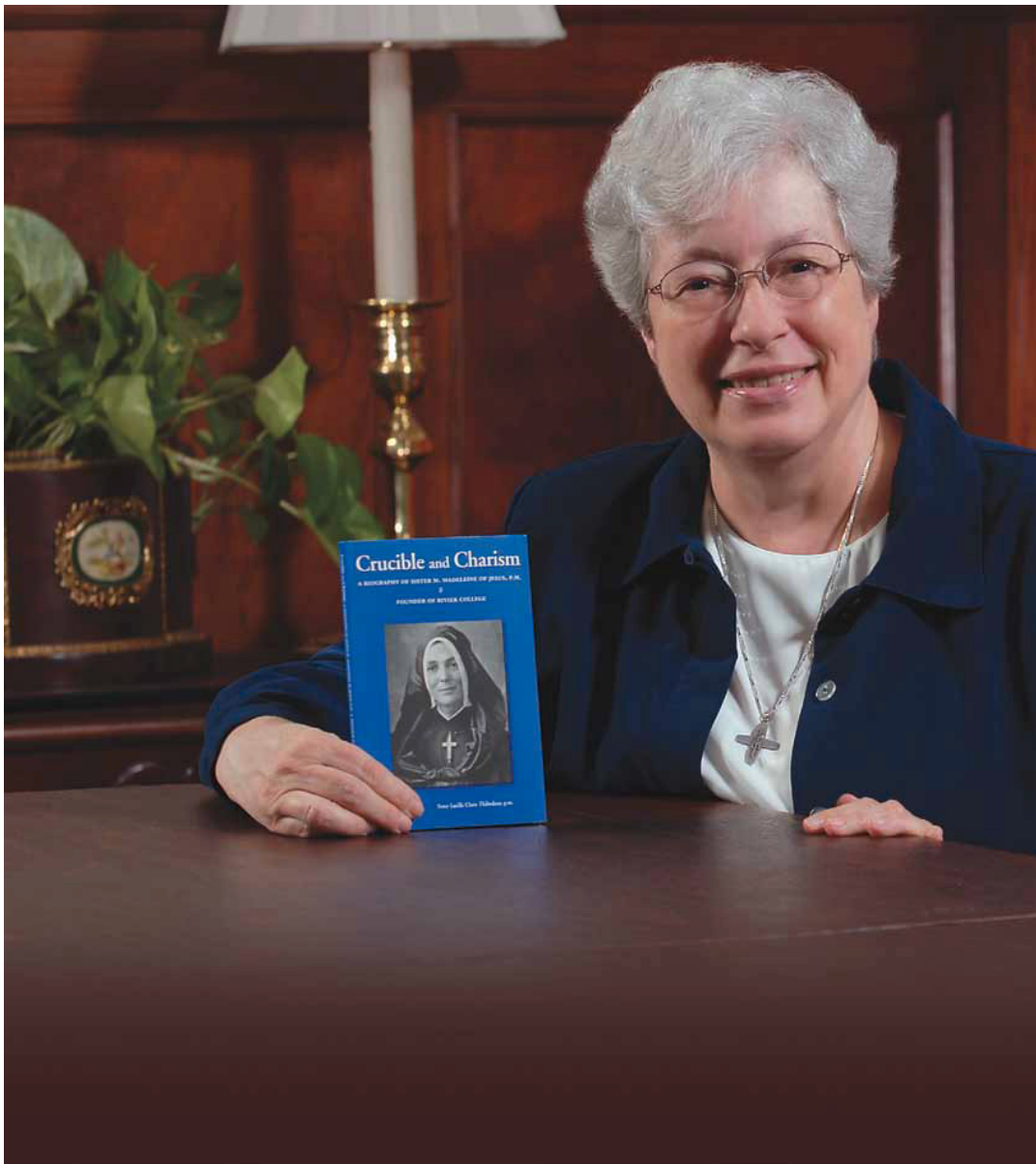


PHOTO BY JODIE ANDRUSKEVICH

"I remember looking at her photo in the *Rivier News* and wondering who she was. Her story was not well-known."— Sr. Lucille Thibodeau, p.m., Ph.D. '66/'72G



Sr. Lucille examines a portrait of Sr. Madeleine of Jesus hanging in the building that bears the founder's name. (PHOTO BY JODIE ANDRUSKEVICH)

Sr. Lucille Thibodeau, p.m., Ph.D. '66/'72G, Professor of English, has published *Crucible and Charism*, a biography of Rivier's founder, Sr. Madeleine of Jesus, p.m. Sr. Lucille says she was honored when Provincial Superior and Rivier College Corporation Chair Sr. Sue Bourret, p.m. asked her to write Sr. Madeleine's biography. "I'm not a historian by training," says Sr. Lucille, "but biography is a literary genre. I felt I could do this."

Sr. Lucille didn't know much about Sr. Madeleine before beginning research for the book. When Sr. Madeleine died in March of 1965, Sr. Lucille was a junior at Rivier. "I remember looking at her photo in

the *Rivier News* and wondering who she was," she says. "Her story was not well-known."

As Sr. Lucille sifted through the six-inch file box that held the College's only records of its founder, the story emerged. Sr. Madeleine had a passion and an aptitude for educating women. As the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary's general supervisor of studies for schools in New England, she helped establish Presentation of Mary Academy in 1926-27.

Sr. Madeleine spent most of the next four years at the Catholic University of America, where she earned a master's degree and her Ph.D. in Classics and Comparative Philology. Her dissertation on the sermons of Saint Augustine was published in CUA's series in Patristic Studies and earned favorable reviews from top scholars—including Alexander Souter, whose work Sr. Lucille cited in her own doctoral research. "I felt a kinship with her on that level," says Sr. Lucille.

Sr. Madeleine returned to New Hampshire and created a College unlike most others of the time. "Most other Catholic colleges had been, or were being, founded primarily to educate congregational members. But Sr. Madeleine believed that a thorough intellectual formation matched with sound moral training would prepare laywomen for leadership in society, and she never abandoned that conviction," Sr. Lucille writes.

The materials documenting Sr. Madeleine's life were written in French as well as English. "Her biographer had to be fully conversant in French to capture the nuances," says Sr. Lucille. "There's also something unique about the way Sisters talk about faith that calls for an understanding of how that sounds and feels, as well as how that language has changed. Sr. Madeleine and her colleagues spoke in a very traditional religious language, but the realities that language points to don't change."

In 1946, Sr. Madeleine became enmeshed in a culture war in which language played a key role. In an effort to better serve Rivier's growing population of students who did not speak French, Sr. Madeleine dismissed the College's French-speaking chaplain and asked the bishop to assign one fluent in both English and French. Those who saw Rivier as a strictly Franco-American school protested. Sr. Madeleine's superiors demanded—and received—her resignation. They announced that she was leaving the College due to illness and sent her to France, where her health truly began to fail.

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After just months in France, Sr. Madeleine asked to return to America; a provincial house in Quebec welcomed her. She spent her remaining 17 years in the infirmary at St. Hyacinth, and received in-hospital shock treatments that seemed to help for a time, but never fully relieved her symptoms.

Sr. Lucille found few of Sr. Madeleine's medical records, but was able to surmise that while her condition could not be treated easily at the time, it might be quite treatable today. The length of time Sr. Madeleine spent in the infirmary surprised Sr. Lucille; she also hadn't realized how much the culture war between some Franco-Americans and Irish influenced what happened to Sr. Madeleine.

"I tried to keep all speculation out of the biography," says Sr. Lucille. "I focused on facts." Sr. Adrienne Beauregard, p.m. '43, who worked closely with Sr. Madeleine from 1942-1946, reviewed the manuscript to verify its accuracy.

Sr. Lucille says, "It's true that Sr. Madeleine's story is sad in many ways. It's about her acceptance of loss, failure, illness, mortality. But it's also about the joy of having created a college, which is not only or even primarily a place but a state of mind for young women to inhabit."

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