

The unveiling of the restoration of the unique photographic portrait of Rosalie Cadron-Jetté, Mother of the Nativity (in religion), foundress of the Misericordia Sisters, on the feast of Divine Mercy

Have you ever dreamed of meeting Rosalie to contemplate her eyes filled with tenderness and to see the smile on the corner of her lips? We know this is impossible because Rosalie left us nearly 150 years ago. The last witnesses of those who knew her have been gone for a long time. What is left of Rosalie? Words, testimonies, iconographies, books about her life. To have an idea of what she may have looked like, we have very little to go by.

At the Mother House, there are several portraits of Rosalie: paintings, charcoal pictures, busts, low-reliefs, a stamp, a medal, wax statues, dioramas, a stained-glass window, etc. However, there is only a single portrait that has been proven to be 100% authentic.¹

A first restoration – It consists of a photograph taken, according to oral tradition, shortly before Rosalie's death in 1864. You may have seen this photo on the cover page of the little purple book² by Hélène Grégoire, however, this is not the original snap-shot (see photo 1). This latest photo was produced in the 1990's. When we examine it closely, we notice that the photo has been cropped close to her face and that there have been a few modifications. Therefore, the Rosalie that we see in this photo is not quite authentic.

1 The second most authentic portrait of Rosalie Cadron-Jetté (1794-1864), Mother of the Nativity (in religion), is the one painted by Marie Perras, Sister Marie-de-la-Miséricorde (in religion) (see photo 3). It is likely that it was produced based on the photographic model and the personal knowledge she had of her. It was probably produced after Rosalie's death. All the other portraits of Rosalie are posthumous. What the portraits of Rosalie in religious life have in common is that she is younger than in reality. In a few of these portraits, she is even wearing the second costume, a costume she never wore.

2 Hélène Grégoire, *Rosalie Cadron-Jetté, A History of Audacity and Compassion*, Montréal, Ed. Centre Rosalie-Cadron-Jetté, 2007, 94 p. The restoration is centred on Rosalie's face. The rest of the photo has been removed. Interest in the restoration of 2012 was to restore the whole photo.



The original photograph – However, an original snapshot does exist, but it is not as well known (see photo 2).³ It resembles a picture painted by Marie Perras, in religion Marie-de-la-Miséricorde (see photo 3). However, the lines are blurred and her facial features lack precision.

Announcement of the restoration – What would you say if you were in front of the real image of Rosalie? Technology has evolved since recent attempts to restore her photographic portrait in the 1990's. Therefore,



³ In fact, it consists of a previous restoration, but unlike the foregoing photo, this photo is complete. Around 1977-1978, an expert photographer in the restoration of old photos, whose studio was situated in the neighbourhood of St-Henri, received the mandate to restore Rosalie's photo. He attempted to remove the black paint behind the plate.

it is now possible to see Rosalie's features more clearly. This was a considerable challenge because her small photo was on a glass plate; it was fragile and worn (see photo 4).⁴ In any case, the discovery of Rosalie's true face is a not-to-be missed opportunity. In recent memory, the last unveiling of this type was a portrait of Marguerite Bourgeoys. For the Sisters and the members of the Misericordia Family, the restoration of this photo is no doubt a way to get closer to Rosalie physically so that we can communicate with her spiritually.



I now invite Sister Monique Lallier, General Superior of the Misericordia Sisters to unveil the restored picture of Rosalie Cadron-Jetté (see photo 5).⁵

⁴ The glass plate measures: 10.6 cm high; LA: 8 cm; Thick: 0.2 cm. The state in which it was: many black spots, scratches on Rosalie's forehead, above the chair and at the extreme right side of plastron. Furthermore, we noted that it was missing in the picture (see photo 4).

⁵ The digital restoration was carried out in 2012 by Ms. Micheline Leclerc, technician in museology, expert in digital restoration (michelineleclerc.com). It took her 36 hours; half of which were dedicated to rediscovering details of Rosalie's face and hands.

An extraordinary opportunity to have this portrait

There is no doubt that we are extremely lucky to have this photographic portrait of Rosalie and that it is important to showcase it.

Compared to other communities – Did you know that many communities founded before the XXth century cannot boast of having a portrait of their founder or foundress, and what is more a photographic portrait? A few communities only have photographs which were produced posthumously or before the foundress joined the community. Thanks to this photograph, we have a true objective representation of Rosalie, contrary to other means such as paintings, drawings and sculptures. In these latter representations, the subject is seen through the eyes of the artists.⁶

In the community – What is even more remarkable is that the Misericordia Sisters were able to afford this luxury because when Rosalie's portrait was taken⁷, around 1864, photography was not widespread nor was it accessible to all.⁸ First of all, it had to be done by a professional photographer because the procedure was complex. It remained so for 20 years.⁹ The devices used were cumbersome and complicated to manipulate. Picture taking was a long procedure and images used to be transposed on glass which was a heavy and fragile medium.

At the time, it was very costly “to be photographed”, approximately \$5.00. Those who could afford this new art form were the bourgeois, businesses and religious communities. At that time, the Misericordia Sisters were extremely

⁶ « The portrait » « *Le portrait* », *Encyclopédie Wikipédia*. URL : <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portrait#Photographique>
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⁷ Ancient expression.

⁸ Photography was invented in 1839 and its use increased in 1854. The 1st official studio in Montreal was the Notman photography studio (1856). A few years later, a other studios appeared. To know more: “*L’histoire de la photographie*” (The History of photography), William Notman” on the Internet site of the McCord Museum, virtual exhibit.

URL : <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/fr/clefs/expositionsvirtuelles/studionotman/> Consultation : 2013-03-21

⁹ Two important inventions had to be made to democratize photography. The first was the invention of celluloid film in 1884 by George Eastman. This new procedure made it possible to take several snapshots on the same glass medium. This led to the replacement of the glass medium. Then, in 1888, the 1st camera was invented, the Kodak. Photography was no longer limited to professional photographers. To know more: “The history of photography” *Encyclopédie Wikipédia*. URL : http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Histoire_de_la_photographie Consultation : 2013-03-21

poor. Who would have paid the cost? An indication that the cost was very expensive is the fact that older portraits seem to be those of Rosalie's first companions, but these portraits were taken after Rosalie's death¹⁰. There must have been a sense of urgency to take this photograph.

In Montréal, Bishop Bourget was not keen on this type of art form.¹¹ The first religious photographs were those of buildings rather than individuals. However, Bishop Bourget saw the importance of having a portrait of Rosalie for the community. It was his way of stating to the community that the foundress was Sister of the Nativity and not Sister Ste-Jeanne-de-Chantal.¹² The formal portrait of Rosalie became the first in the family album of the family of the Misericordia Sisters.¹³ Considering all that was said above, the taking of this photograph must have been an event in itself in the community.

10 Rosalie's first companions, the pioneers, were dressed in the second costume (worn from August 1866 to April 1958).

11 Nicolas-Hugo Chebin, Julie Fontaine, Chantal Déry and Jean-François Larose, « 38. Snapshots of yesterday and today » *Historical Bulletin Montreal Clic*, published on the website of the *Centre d'histoire de Montréal*.

URL : http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=2497%2C3090405&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL Consultation : 2013-03-21

12 Rosalie was a humble and discreet woman who did not worry about the fact that Sr. Ste-Jeanne-de-Chantal, first general superior (1848-1863), had allowed confusion to reign with regard to the title of foundress. To settle this misunderstanding, Bishop Bourget intervened during one of his visits to announce to the whole community that Sister of the Nativity was the foundress and that she was to be called 'Mother' from now on.

13 Martha Langford, PhD, "La petite histoire de l'album photographique: 1860 - 1960", Website of the McCord Museum, virtual exhibition "The photographic Studio of William Notman".

URL : <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/fr/clefs/expositionsvirtuelles/studionotman/themes/albums/> Consultation : 2013-03-21

What does the photograph of Rosalie tell us?

Let us now take a closer look at Rosalie's portrait (see photo 6). Hum! Perhaps you are saying under your breath, "Rosalie is not very pretty!"¹⁴ You cannot say otherwise. After all, Rosalie had had 11 children when she entered the convent at the age of 51. She had led a hard life and she died at the age of 70. Her past had left its mark on her physical body. However, the beauty of all this is that we can see it and feel it.

State of her health – Let us take a closer look. The photograph tells us more about the state of her health. We will recall that the last years of the life of Rosalie were painful as she was suffering from dropsy¹⁵. In our days we would call it generalized oedema caused by a fatal and gradual



decrease of kidney function. This illness caused her to have violent fits of coughing and loss of mobility caused by swelling and sores on her legs. No doubt this is the reason why she was sitting rather than standing when the picture was taken.

¹⁴ With regard to Rosalie's physical appearance, it has been reported that single mothers used to say, "This good old Mother is not pretty, but there is something different about her that attracts us."

¹⁵ It is believed that Rosalie's kidney problems started around the age of 36. Among the remedies prescribed at the time was "*l'herbe aux perles*" a herb that had diuretic properties.

The backdrop – The backdrop of the photo¹⁶ indicates that the photographer was not in his studio for the occasion. No doubt Rosalie was not well enough to go to the studio. In fact, there is no scenic display. Maybe the picture was taken in Rosalie's room.¹⁷

Picture-taking – It must have been difficult for Rosalie to sit still for the portrait. Some believe that Rosalie coughed because her pectoral cross is crooked and the plastron on the original photo is superimposed.¹⁸ The pillow behind Rosalie indicates that she found it difficult to sit upright. In those days, picture-taking lasted several minutes.

Fatigue – There are signs of fatigue in her face. Her eyes are deep-set. Rosalie must not have slept well at night because she was transferred from the sisters' dormitory to a private room around 1861 because her coughing kept others awake.¹⁹ Wrinkles on her face indicate that Rosalie is now an old woman who had a hard life. However, she still has strength as she is firmly holding a book in her hands, perhaps the Constitutions of the community. Despite the weight of years, her eyes seem to be smiling at us?²⁰

At the time, people did not smile on photographs because picture-taking took too much time.²¹

16 Vincent Lavoie, « *Mémoires instantanées* », Musée McCord, 2003. Appeared on the website of the Musée McCord Museum. URL : http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/scripts/printtour.php?tourID=VQ_P3_2_FR&Lang=2 Consultation : 2013-03-21

17 In addition to Rosalie's chair on the original snapshot, there appears to be a lamp with a glass bulb and a table. These elements have been erased on the reproduction displayed on Rosalie's tomb.

18 On the original photo, one notes the superimposition of two plastrons and of hands.

19 Around 1863, Rosalie was transferred to a second private room, situated in the new wing adjacent to the chapel which had been enlarged. It is said that Rosalie could hear the prayers; the small door of her bedroom had a removable panel. Rosalie lived in this room during the last days of her life.

20 Jean-Marie Gillis reminds us that our great grand-parents did not smile on photographs. The reason was because they were carrying the tradition of serious portraits, but it was also because picture-taking took so much time that it was impossible to keep on smiling. The smiling faces appeared later when time-exposure was reduced to a few hundredths of a second. *Petite histoire du sourire dans l'art* by Jean-Marie Gillis, no 54, on the website of the Association of Doctors Alumni of the Catholic University of Louvain. URL : <http://www.md.ucl.ac.be/ama-ucl/sourire54.html> Consultation : 2013-03-2.

21 In Rosalie's days, we do not know how much time it took to take a picture, but we know that it varied depending on the subject. To capture the image of a building could take several hours, while that of an individual, several minutes. André Gunthert, « Photographie and temporalité. « *Histoire culturelle du temps de pose* », *Images Re-vues* [En ligne], hors-série 1 | 2008. URL : <http://imagesrevues.revues.org/743> Consultation: 2013-05-13.

Now that I have shown you how to look at this photograph and to see how fortunate we are to have this portrait of Rosalie, I hope that you will appreciate it as much as I do. Every time you look at it, a living emotion will pierce your soul saying: at this moment, I am looking at the true Rosalie, the one who is tenderness and compassion.

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