

GARVIN, Sister Mary Cleophas. December 11, 1899–January 16, 1990.

FORDHAM UNIVERSITY (BS 1927), SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY (MS 1931, PhD 1934).

Sister Mary Cleophas Garvin was born Linetta Anna Garvin in Vickery, Ohio, the daughter of Odelia Margaret (Wilhelm) (1873–1962) and Austin Edward Garvin (1868–1926), natives of Ohio. Her mother was a housewife; her father was a meat dealer in 1900, a salesman in a meat market in 1910, and a foreman in an auto factory, Willys-Overland Company, in Toledo, Ohio, in 1920. She had one older sister, Lucille (1898–1923), and four younger brothers: Paul J. (1901–1986), Austin E. (1902–1986), Norbert J. (1904–1979), and Cleophus (1910–1914).

Garvin attended grade school at St. Ann's and high school at Notre Dame Academy, both in Toledo. She graduated from high school in May 1917 and entered the Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame in Cleveland, Ohio, on July 2, 1917. Her investment was on January 2, 1918, her first vows on January 2, 1920, and her final vows on January 1, 1923, in Cleveland. Her religious name, Mary Cleophas, was chosen in memory of her brother who died at age four when she was eleven.

Garvin was an instructor in mathematics and physics, as well as religion, history, and Latin, at Notre Dame High School in Cleveland from 1919 to 1929. While teaching full time, she spent eight years in part-time study completing her undergraduate work in science, mathematics, and education. She had extension courses at Notre Dame College and John Carroll University in Cleveland and summer courses at St. Xavier College (now Xavier University) in Cincinnati, Catholic Sisters College of the Catholic University of America, University of Notre Dame, and Fordham University.

After receiving her bachelor's degree from Fordham in 1927, Sister Mary Cleophas taught for two more years at Notre Dame High School. She had courses in French and education at Fordham in the summer of 1928 and courses in education at Columbia University in the summer of 1929. In autumn 1929 she entered Saint Louis University for full-time graduate study. She spent the next five years there and earned a master's degree in 1931 and a PhD in 1934 with studies in mathematics, physics, and astronomy. Her doctoral dissertation in analysis was written under the direction of Francis Regan, who had earned his PhD from Michigan in 1932. She was Regan's first doctoral student and the second to receive a PhD in mathematics from Saint Louis University. The published version of her dissertation appeared in the *American Journal of Mathematics*, and her results were extended in 1938 and 1944 by Regan's next two students, Rev. William C. Doyle and Ella C. Marth, whose dissertations appeared in the *Annals of Mathematics* and the *Duke Mathematical Journal*, respectively.

Immediately after receiving her doctorate, Sister Mary Cleophas returned to the Cleveland area to serve as professor of mathematics and physics and head of the science department at Notre Dame College. This college, affiliated with the Sisters of Notre Dame and then primarily for women, awarded its first bachelor's degree in 1926. Garvin remained as department head until her retirement in about 1976. She taught until 1975, was chairman of the computer center 1975–76, and was associated with the computer center until 1977. She also served as superior at the college 1947–53 and 1958–60.

Sister Mary Cleophas continued to take or audit courses. These included courses in religion and physics at John Carroll University and courses in mathematics at

Oklahoma State University (NSF institute, summer 1959); the University of Kansas (summer 1960); and Bowdoin College (summers 1961, 1962). She audited other courses at the University of Oklahoma and at Seton Hall University.

Among her contributions at the college, besides what was described as her “unusual talent for teaching,” were special classes for parents to learn the “new math” with their children (“Sister Mary Cleophas: An Educator,” 1). She provided elementary and secondary teachers with information about curricular changes, and introduced computer science to teachers and college students. In connection with her interest in computer science, in the late 1960s and early 1970s Sister Mary Cleophas applied for and received several grants for desktop computers and for computer-related workshops and institutes, especially for teachers. She also gave talks at meetings of NCTM. During her last few years at Notre Dame College her activities were focused mainly on the computer center. The Garvin Computing Center at Notre Dame College is named after her.

In addition to her professional affiliations with national mathematics and physics associations, Garvin was also a member of the Central Association of Science and Mathematics Teachers. In 1975 she was made an emeritus member of the Ohio Council of Teachers of Mathematics; in 1976 she was presented with a life membership.

Garvin’s main intellectual interest outside of mathematics was music. A 1981 article quoted her as saying, “Although mathematics was my first interest, music was a close second. Rarely did I miss an opportunity to attend a good musical program, especially of the Cleveland Orchestra” (“Keeping in Touch – Sister Mary Cleophas”).

Excerpts from the obituary that appeared in the *Notre Dame College of Ohio Today* emphasize yet another aspect of her life.

Sister Mary Cleophas was ever concerned for the needy and the poor. In the early years of the college, she served as financial aid advisor for needy students. . . .

She was a charter promoter of the Servants of the Paraclete, gathering stipends, food, and clothing for needy priests who had left the active ministry On Sundays she visited the lonely in a nursing home

As the time for retirement from the classroom drew near, her outreach to the needy increased as she organized the distribution of bread to the hungry, new and used clothing to the needy, bed linens to the poor, and vitamins to the malnourished. To assure the continuation of this work, she founded the Cleveland Co-Workers of Mother Teresa, a group of 35 men and women who are dedicated to helping the lonely, the unwanted, and the poor. (p. 1)

Sister Mary Cleophas received the Vincent P. Haas Memorial Award for “putting Gospel values in action” and the Mayor’s Award for volunteerism in 1985.

After her retirement, Sister Mary Cleophas remained at the college as archivist before moving to the Provincial House in Chardon, Ohio, in 1985. She died of pneumonia in the Provincial House Health Care Center in 1990, shortly after a celebration of her ninetieth birthday. The Sr. Mary Cleophas Award for Excellence in Mathematics was established at Notre Dame College after her death.

Organizational affiliations: AMS, MAA, NCTM, Amer. Assoc. of Physics Teachers, AAAS.

Thesis and dissertation:

1931 A critical comparison of the Gaussian and Laplacian methods of computing orbits based on the computation of the preliminary elements of the planet Pluto. MS thesis, Saint Louis University.

1934 On the convergence of a generalized series and the relation of its coefficients to those of the corresponding power series. PhD dissertation, Saint Louis University, directed by Francis Regan. Typescript.

Publication:

1936 A generalized Lambert series. *Amer. J. Math.* 58 (1936): 507–13. Published version of PhD dissertation. Presented by title as “On the convergence of a generalized series and the relation of its coefficients to those of the corresponding power series” to the AMS, Berkeley, CA, 20 Jun 1934; abstract: *Bull. Amer. Math. Soc.* 40:388 #204. Reviews: *JFM* 62.0336.01 (K. Knopp); *Zbl* 014.30401 (J. D. Tamarkin).

Presentations not listed above:

The computer spectrum for the small college. Presented to the NCTM, Cleveland, OH, 13 Nov 1969.

With Sr. Teresemarie McCloskey. The use of the computer as a tool in teaching mathematics. Presented to the NCTM, Canton, OH, 21 Mar 1975.

References to:

“Keeping in Touch – Sister Mary Cleophas.” *Notre Dame Today*, March, 1981.

“Sister Mary Cleophas, Teacher at Notre Dame.” (Obituary) *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 17 Jan 1990.

Reinhard, Sister Mary Marthe, S.N.D. with contributions from Sister Teresemarie McCloskey, S.N.D. “Sister Mary Cleophas Garvin: An Educator for More Than 50 Years.” (Obituary) *Notre Dame College of Ohio Today*, Spring 1990: 1, 6.

Other sources: Owens questionnaire 1937; Religious Women in Mathematics Survey 1983; communications with Archives of the Sisters of Notre Dame, Chardon, OH, with Sister Jeanne Garvin, IHM, (niece), and with Paul J. Garvin Jr. (nephew); communications with Saint Louis University Archives and University of Notre Dame Archives; US Census 1900, 1910, 1920 OH.

Last modified: March 6, 2009.