

Mary Elizabeth Gieniec: Sister Mary Alexandrine, C.D.P.

1917 – 2008

By Janet Dawson Ebrom

Mary Elizabeth Gieniec was born at home on November 18, 1917, to **Jacob Gieniec** and **Mary Victoria Morawietz** who lived at 414 North Street in San Antonio, Texas.ⁱ Their daughter was baptized on the day of her birth at St. Michael Catholic Church by **Rev. Thomas Moczygemba**. The godparents were **Alex Jurasek**, a cousin, and **Mrs. Ann Robinson**.ⁱⁱ The Gieniec family resided in the Polish Quarter which revolved around the thriving parish of St. Michael's where **Mary Elizabeth** attended elementary school.

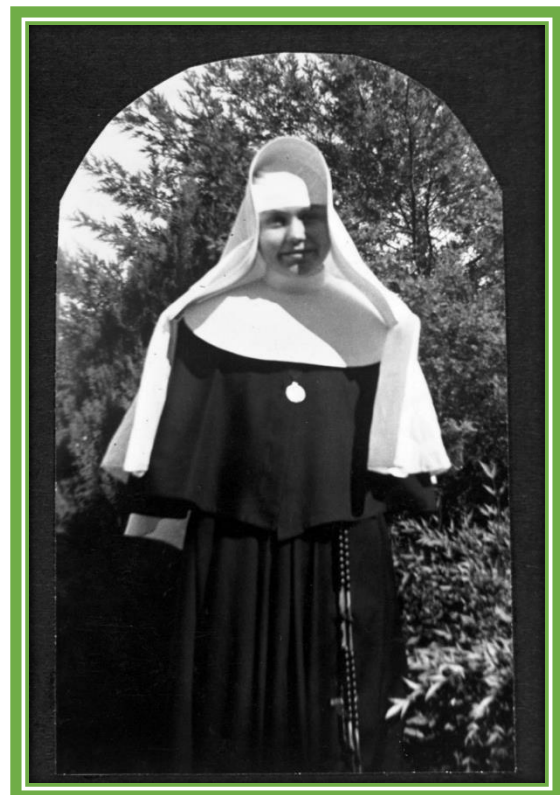
Mary Elizabeth's father, **Jacob Philip Gieniec**, had entered the United States on March 24, 1906, in Baltimore, Maryland, after leaving Bremen, Germany, on the ship *SS Castle*. In his Naturalization Petition, **Jacob** gave his birthdate as April 30, 1887, in Nowy Sącz, Galicia, Austria,ⁱⁱⁱ which is now part of modern Poland.

On her maternal side of the family, **Mary Elizabeth** had deep ancestral ties in Texas. She was the great-great granddaughter of **Ludwig Morawietz**, an original immigrant born in Kamień Śląski, Upper Silesia, in present-day Poland.^{iv} **Ludwig** eventually settled in Bandera, Texas, where he is buried in the St. Stanislaus Catholic Cemetery.

Mary Elizabeth continued to reside in downtown San Antonio where she attended one year at St. Mary's High School. When she was 15, she entered the Sisters of Divine Providence Convent on June 13, 1933. She professed her first vows on June 22, 1935, and made her perpetual vows on June 22, 1941, when she was 23 years old.^v The religious name bestowed on her was **Sister Mary Alexandrine**.

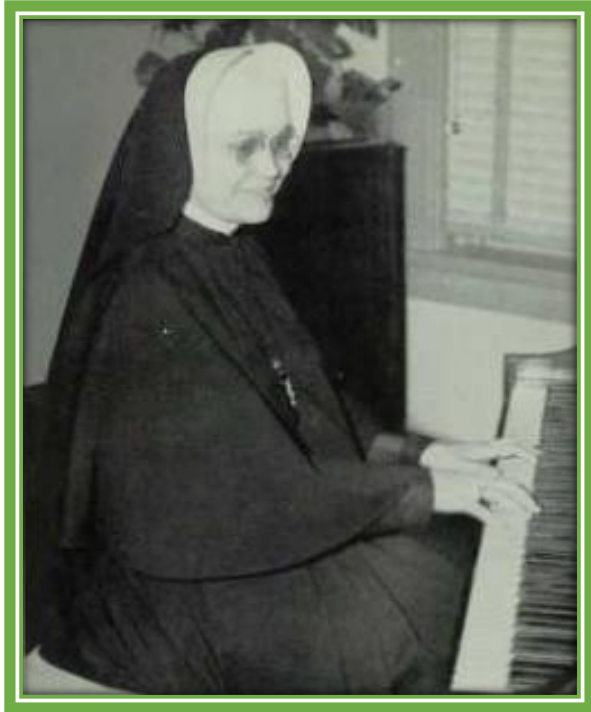
Sister Mary Alexandrine Gieniec, C.D.P.

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Sister Alexandrine received a Bachelor of Music Degree from Our Lady of the Lake College. She also did graduate work there and at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois.^{vi}

She was a classically trained pianist with a reputation for excellent teaching methods. For decades, she joyfully taught piano, voice, choir and classroom music to high school and college students.^{vii}



Photograph from: *Philothean* - Providence High School, San Antonio, Texas, Yearbook, Volume XI, 1962, page 22

Her love of music transcended each of her academic assignments including Providence Academy in Alexandria, Louisiana; St. Mary's School in Lawton, Oklahoma; and Our Lady of the Lake College and Providence High School in San Antonio, Texas.^{viii} While head of the music department at Providence High School in 1966, she was awarded the Honor Shield of Modern Music Masters.^{ix}

As a gifted musician, **Sister Alexandrine** volunteered her talent to glorify God. She coordinated music at festivals and special events, co-founded an honor society for music students, and taught students in a music studio on the north-side of San Antonio. According to those who knew her, "...she was a quiet and humble person. But beneath her simple exterior was a brilliant musician and teacher who mentored many people."^x

Since her father's **Gieniec** family was from the Galicia region in the partitioned Poland, and her mother's **Morawietz** and **Juraschek** families came from the European region of Upper Silesia, **Sister Alexandrine** was proud of her rich heritage. In 1988, the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio held an exhibition of her family heirlooms that she had contributed. The exhibit featured more than 100 keepsakes along with personal stories about her family.^{xi}

Her own life as a devoted Divine Providence Sister personified her forebears' strong Catholic faith which had been handed down through the generations.

Sister Alexandrine entered eternal rest on February 22, 2008, in San Antonio, Texas, at the age of 90. Her memorial Mass was offered on February 26th at 10 AM in Annunciation Chapel at Our Lady of the Lake Convent Center. She was buried in the Sisters of Divine Providence Cemetery, 515 SW 24th Street, in San Antonio.^{xii}



Photograph from: *St. Michael's Catholic Church 1866 – 1966 Centennial*, 51st page

ⁱ Texas State Board of Health. Certificate of Birth, stamped #50015.

ⁱⁱ St. Michael Catholic Church, San Antonio, Texas. Baptism Records, page 11, entry #5.

ⁱⁱⁱ US District Court of Western District of Texas, San Antonio, Texas. USA Petition for Naturalization, 6 August 1940, No. 7132.

^{iv} Św. Jacka (St. Hyacinth), Kamień Śląski, Upper Silesia. Baptism Record, 25 August 1802, page 163, entry #51.

^v *St. Michael's Catholic Church 1866 – 1966 Centennial*, 51st page.

^{vi} *St. Michael's Catholic Church 1866 – 1966 Centennial*, 51st page.

^{vii} *San Antonio Express-News* [San Antonio, Texas], 26 February 2008, page 4B.

^{viii} *St. Michael's Catholic Church 1866 – 1966 Centennial*, 51st page.

^{ix} *San Antonio Express* [San Antonio, Texas], 4 November 1966, page 12-F.

^x *San Antonio Express-News* [San Antonio, Texas], 26 February 2008, page 4B.

^{xi} *San Antonio Express-News* [San Antonio, Texas], 26 February 2008, page 4B.

^{xii} *San Antonio Express-News* [San Antonio, Texas], 24 February 2008, page 7B.