



# 2022 History Essay Contest Homeschool 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Winner

## Elizabeth Ann Seton

By Christina Mooney – Adamstown, Maryland

Elizabeth Ann Seton was the first American born saint, foundress of the Sisters of Charity and the first Catholic school in The United States. She went through many things in her life, good and bad, but made the lives of many people better. Elizabeth Ann Seton was a mother, wife, widow, sister, foundress, teacher, role model, saint. A true American hero! She paved the way for future generations of American girls to have good educations.

Elizabeth Ann Bayley was born in New York City on August 28, 1774, to a wealthy Episcopalian family. When she was just three years old, her mother Catherine Charlton Bayley passed away. Elizabeth was almost four years old, when her father Richard Bayley married Charlotte Amelia Barclay. Charlotte had many children to care for and did not have much time for Elizabeth. Her father was usually not home until late at night, because he was a doctor and needed to tend to his patients.

As the years passed Elizabeth turned from a child into a young woman. She met William Magee Seton. They got married when she was nineteen. They had five children together. William was from a wealthy merchant family. However, about ten years after marrying Elizabeth, pirates captured the cargo on the family's ships causing the business to become bankrupt. Later William got very sick and doctors told him that he needed to be taken somewhere else out of the city because he had tuberculosis. So, they set out for Italy straight away.

Their oldest daughter, Anna Maria nicknamed Annina, came with them on the long and tiring journey that weakened William even more. Finally the voyage was over. The Setons were in Italy at last. They made their way off of the boat onto the land, when suddenly a guard stopped them and led them to a quarantine facility called the Lazaretto. The Lazaretto was not very good for William and sadly he died there and was buried in Italy. Elizabeth and Annina continued their journey and went to their friends, the Filiccis' home.

Although Elizabeth and the rest of her family were Episcopalians, the Filiccis were Catholics. They introduced her to the Catholic faith. They offered to go to an Episcopalian church on Sundays, but Elizabeth denied their offer because she wanted to discover more about the Catholic church. She was most interested in the fact that Catholics believed that the Eucharist was truly Jesus' body and blood. After, she and Annina left Italy, though, as time passed Elizabeth became more interested in the Catholic Faith.

When they arrived back in New York City all of Elizabeth's children were overjoyed to see their mother and sister after their voyage, but upset that their father was not there with them. Elizabeth needed to find work because she did not have the money to pay for all the family's expenses, food, and other necessities. She decided to become a teacher. The experiences at Mass in Italy at the Catholic church stayed present in Elizabeth's mind. She felt as if the Catholic faith was calling her. She had pondered over it for a while and finally decided to convert. Word went around that Elizabeth was going to become a Catholic and people shut her out of their lives. Parents of the children that she taught did not want her teaching their children. Even the Setons and the Bayleys did not interact with her anymore. One night William's sister, Cecelia, ran to Elizabeth's home. When she saw Cecelia coming, she rushed out to meet her and asked why she was wandering around alone so late at night. She told Elizabeth of how she mentioned that she wanted to become a Catholic and the Setons kicked her out of their home. Later William's other sister, Harriet, joined them too. Elizabeth, her children, Cecelia, and Harriet all traveled to Baltimore, Maryland.

While Elizabeth was in Baltimore, she started her own order of sisters called The Sisters of Charity. Soon after, a man named Samuel Cooper wanted to help Elizabeth and her order, so he bought a piece of land in Emmitsburg, Maryland for them. They accepted his offer and a school for girls was soon to be built. By that time, Elizabeth had gathered more people to come with her. Suddenly, Cecelia got sick with tuberculosis so she needed to leave earlier because city air was not good for her lungs, so Elizabeth, her children, and Cecelia went to Emmitsburg early. Shortly after, the rest of the group came as well. The year was 1809.

At first they lived in a small farmhouse called The Flemming Farmhouse. They stayed there until a large building could be built which would serve as a school for girls and a home for the sisters. This building would be called Saint Joseph's House. Now, the school had started. Many girls, rich and poor, attended the school to get a good education from Elizabeth and the other sisters. She also took in orphans and gave them an education. The school and order of sisters grew quickly. By 1818, there were over one hundred students and sisters living at St. Joseph House. On January 5th, 1821, Elizabeth passed away from tuberculosis. Although she had died, the school continued to grow and thrive.

Elizabeth Ann Seton is important to the history of America, because she started the first Catholic school in the United States and The Sisters of Charity, which was the first order of sisters native to the United States. Because of these contributions to the world, Pope Paul VI canonized Elizabeth Ann Seton on September 14, 1975 making her the first American born saint. Elizabeth Ann Seton was and continues to be a role model for everyone today!

## SOURCES:

### **THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF SAINT ELIZABETH ANN SETON, LOCATED IN EMMITSBURG, MARYLAND**

I am a Junior History Interpreter at The National Shrine Of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton in Emmitsburg, Maryland. My information has been taught to me by my mentors.