

**Venerable Rose Hawthorne (Mother Mary Alphonsa, OP)
(United States of America) 1851-1926**

Married, Separated, Widow

Initially provided outpatient nursing care to poor with cancer and then established home hospitals in New York City and Hawthorne, New York

*Foundress of The Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of
Saint Rose of Lima (The Hawthorne Dominicans)*

Daughter of the Famous American Writer, Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Rose Hawthorne (Mother Mary Alphonsa, O.P.) was born on May 20, 1851 to Sophia Amelia Peabody (1809-1871) and Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) in Lenox, Berkshire County, Massachusetts. She was the last of three children. Her father was the famous American author of *The Scarlet Letters* (1850), *The House of Seven Gables* (1851), *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) and many short stories to include: *Young Goodman Brown* and *The Birthmark*. Soon after her birth, the family moved to Concord, Massachusetts where Rose grew up at Wayside, the house that is now the literary shrine for Americans.



From 1853-1860, ages 2-9 years old, Rose lived in Liverpool, England where her father served as the American Consul at the request of his close friend President Franklin Pierce. Notable was a trip to Italy in which Rose physically bumped into His Holiness Pope Pius IX as she was dashing about the Vatican Gardens. Pope Pius IX only smiled and "He put his thin white hand on the tumble red curls and gave her a blessing"(1-p5).

When Rose was 13 years old, her father died on May 19, 1864, at the age of 59, during a visit to New Hampshire's White Mountain. He was found by his friend and the 14th president (1853-1857) of the United States, Franklin Pierce. Nathaniel Hawthorne was buried at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord, Middlesex County, Massachusetts.

At the age of 14, Rose enrolled in formal school for the first time at a seminary for young ladies. Rose's parents instilled in her a closeness to God and she was aware that God was in her daily life. A good school friend, Mary Betts, and she often talked of God, of their love for Him, and of His love for mankind.¹

Following a period of mourning, in October 1868, Sophia Hawthorne moved to Dresden, Germany with her three children, Una, Julian and Rose. Their home became a meeting place for traveling Americans. One of the visitors was an aspiring young writer, George Lathrop, the son of a New York physician. Rose was enamored. They fell in love and Sophia supported their desire to marry when both matured. The Lathrops moved to England and the Hawthornes soon followed. There, in London, Sophia Hawthorne died of pneumonia on February 26, 1871 at the age of 61. She was initially buried in Kensal Green Cemetery in London, England. Her body was reinterred in 2006 near her husband at the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord, Middlesex County, Massachusetts.

George Parsons Lathrop and Rose Hawthorne were married later that year on September 11, 1871 at St. Luke's Anglican Church in Chelsea, England. George and Rose returned to the United States. They moved to Cambridge, Middlesex County, Massachusetts where George

obtained a position as a staff critic on the Atlantic Monthly. On November 10, 1876, the couple was blessed with the birth of their son, Francis Hawthorne. They moved back to Wayside in Concord, Middlesex County, Massachusetts. There at the age of 4, Francis contracted diphtheria and died on February 6, 1881. He was buried at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord, Middlesex County, Massachusetts. George turned to alcohol and both he and Rose absorbed themselves in their literary careers and social engagements.

After Francis' death Rose and George moved to New York. There George was sporadically employed. At one point they moved to New London, Connecticut. There both studied Catholicism and were received into the Catholic Church on March 19, 1891, the Feast of St. Joseph, at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church in New York. Rose attended the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass daily and frequented the sacraments. When conflicts arose between her domestic duties and religious practices, a priest counseled her to "cheerfully forgo even devotional exercises at times in favor of her husband's well-being"¹ which she did.

George and Rose made frequent trips to New York. She engaged in works of mercy as opposed to her prior social life. She became concerned for the poor of the city as she pondered on the death of her dear friend Emma Lazarus, a daughter of a wealthy Jewish family who had died from cancer. Emma was from a well-to-do family and was well cared for in her illness. However, the poor with cancer had no one to care for them.

After multiple temporary separations, home life had become unbearable and dangerous for Rose. She applied to the diocesan authorities for permission to leave George. The Lathrops permanently separated as husband and wife and Rose left New London. Rose's heart was set on the question of who would care for the poor victims of cancer whom upon their diagnosis of this incurable disease were discharged from the hospitals in New York City and penniless could only go to Blackwell, Island.

With a strong desire to care for others, she took a 3-month nursing course at the New York Cancer Hospital. At the age of 44, she began caring for the poor diagnosed with incurable cancer in a few tiny rooms on the lower east side of New York City. Her first outpatient was a 7-year-old Jewish boy, Louis Stellar. In 1896 her diary records that "she fed and clothed a starving mother and child; changed the dressings twice that day of a cancer patient; visited an elderly woman suffering from consumption; successfully prevented an eviction; and brought food to a child dying of meningitis".¹

Though the proud daughter of Nathaniel Hawthorne, she humbled herself and begged seeking alms for the poor. "Rose developed two basic premises: "the first, as soon as she had her own home for the cancerous poor, the nursing would be done by unpaid workers; the second, if she were to help the poor effectively, she must become as one of them and live as they lived" (1-p15). Rose continued to provide nursing care in peoples' homes. She brought a poor person with cancer to her flat. In 1897 she rented four rooms at 668 Water Street and moved her patients there. She continued to provide nursing care to patients in their homes while managing the "home hospital." Rose developed pneumonia and was cared for by a Mrs. Watson.

In December 1897, a New York City art student, Alice Huber from Louisville, Kentucky joined Rose in her work. They would dedicate their lives together to the care of the incurable poor with cancer for the next 30 years. Meanwhile, George drank more and more regularly following their separation and as a consequent his health failed and he died on April 10, 1898 at Roosevelt Hospital in Manhattan, New York, New York, at the age of 46. Arriving at his bedside after he died, Rose knelt and prayed for his soul. He was buried in Green-Wood Cemetery, Greenwood Heights, Kings County, New York.

At this point Rose expressed her desire to adopt a religious life and habit. Alice and she took the name Daughters of the Puritans and their habit was fashioned after the dress of pilgrim women. Archbishop Corrigan suggested they wait, but eventually gave public approval of their

charity work. In 1899, they obtained enough money to move to a house at 426 Cherry Street. By May 1, 1899, the last patient was moved to their new home.

They now called themselves Servants of Relief for Incurable Cancer and called their home "St. Rose's Free Home for Incurables. At the suggestion of Fr. Clement Thuente, OP, Rose and Alice became Dominican Tertiaries. On September 14, 1899 Rose Hawthorne Lathrop took the name Sr. Mary Alphonsa, OP and Alice Huber became Sr. Mary Rose. As religious they added daily meditation and prayed the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. They received permission to have a chapel built in their home and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass Celebrated there once a week.

In November 1900, Archbishop Corrigan gave Sr. Mary Alphonsa and Sr. Mary Rose permission to wear the Dominican habit. They professed their first vows on December 8, 1900, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Both patients and women desiring to enter religious life increased. Mother Mary Alphonsa as she was known had three precepts: 1) Sisters were never to show abhorrence or disgust at the sight of repulsive ugliness brought about by cancer; 2) Once a person was declared incurable, the sisters would not permit any patient to be a guinea pig for medical research, 3) No money was to be accepted from the relatives of the patients or even from former employers.

Mother Alphonsa rented a flat for men across the street from the St. Rose's Free Home for Incurables on 426 Cherry Street, New York --- both of which were eventually outgrown. The sisters prayed two novenas to the Sacred Heart. On the final day of the second novena, a French Dominican whose community had decided to return to France offered to sell them a large monastery on 9 acres of land for a reasonable price. They purchased it and Mother Alphonsa with a few postulants moved in, in June 1909. The new home was called Rosary Hill. They continued to operate St. Rose's Home in New York City where Sr. Mary Rose was superior. They cared for many patients in both locations and continued to receive vocations. Rosary Hill lacked electricity and the candles and kerosine lamps always posed a fire hazard. In addition, through the spring a breeze brought fresh air into the monastery. But in the winter, there was a risk of pipes freezing from the frigid winter breeze. The sisters had to stoke the furnace throughout the winter nights to prevent freezing. After a fire damaged Rosary Hill, Mother Alphonsa was determined to build a fireproof building. This was realized after her death.

Mother Alphonsa's heart stopped on July 9, 1926 at the age of 75. She died at Rosary Hill Home, Hawthorne, New York in the Motherhouse of the Congregation.⁴ She was buried at the Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne Cemetery in Hawthorne Westchester County, New York, USA. The Order Mother Alphonsa founded is formally known as The Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of Saint Rose of Lima. In 2026, the Motherhouse is located at 600 Linda Avenue, Hawthorne, NY 10532. vocationdirector@hawthorne-dominicans.org.⁴

Archbishop Edward Cardinal Egan approved the opening of the cause for canonization on February 4, 2003. The diocesan inquiry closed April 9, 2013. The Posito was published in 2021.³ On March 14, 2024, Pope Francis authorized the promulgation of the decree of heroic virtue of Servant of God Rose Hawthorne (in religion: Mary Alphonsa).²

Prayer for the canonization of Rose Hawthorne (Mother Mary Alphonsa, O.P.):

Lord God, in your special love for the sick, the poor and the lonely, you raised up Rose Hawthorne (Mother Mary Alphonsa) to be the servant of those afflicted with incurable cancer with no one to care for them. In serving the outcast and the abandoned, she strove to see in them the face of your Son. In her eyes, those in need were always "Christ's Poor." Grant that her example of selfless charity and her courage in the face of great obstacles will inspire us to be generous in our service of neighbor. We humbly ask that you glorify your servant, Rose Hawthorne, on earth according to the designs of your holy will.

Through her intercession, grant the favor that I now present
(*here make your request*).

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen
Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us!
(*3 times*)

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father.

For further information or to report favors received please write to:

Rose Hawthorne Guild, 600 Linda Avenue, Hawthorne, NY 10532.
www.hawthorne-dominicans.org
youtube.com/@hawthronedeominicans.

"God and the poor await us side by side" Mother Mary Alphonsa

"A fire was lighted in my heart where it still burns. I set my whole being to endeavor to bring consolation to the cancerous poor." Venerable Rose Hawthorne, OP"

References

- 1) Boniface Hanley, O.F.M. The more things change the more they are the same. *The Anthonian*. St. (Patterson, NJ: Anthony's Guild, 1985).
- 2) Hagiography Circle. *Year 1926*. [Newsaints.faithweb.com/year/1926.htm](https://newsaints.faithweb.com/year/1926.htm). Accessed 18 April 2026.
- 3) Hagiography Circle. *News 2024*. [Newsaints.faithweb.com/news_archives_2024.htm](https://newsaints.faithweb.com/news_archives_2024.htm). Accessed 19 April 2026.
- 4) Rose Hawthorne: Brief Biography. Accessed 21 April 2026. <https://www.hawthorne-dominicans.org/brief-biography>