



Born to family with wealth and political connections; her father, Pierre Francois Duchesne, was a lawyer, businessman, and prominent civic leader in Grenoble, France, and her mother, Rose Perier, was a member of a leading family from the Dauphine region of France. From age eight Rose had a desire to evangelize in the Americas, sparked by hearing a Jesuit missionary speak of his work there. She received a basic education at home from tutors, and religious education from her mother. Educated from age 12 at the convent of the Visitation nuns in Grenoble, she joined them in 1788 at age 19 without the permission or knowledge of her family who were violently opposed to her choice, but finally gave in.

Religious communities were outlawed during the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution, and Rose's convent was closed in 1792. She spent the next ten years living as a lay woman again, but still managed to act like a good member of her Order. She established a school for poor children, provided care for the sick, and hid priests from Revolutionaries. When the Terror ended, she reclaimed her convent and tried to re-establish it with a group of sisters she had maintained in Grenoble. However, most of the sisters were long gone, and in 1804 the remainder was incorporated into the Society of the Sacred Heart under Saint Madeline Sophie Barat. They then re-opened the convent of Sainte-Marie-d'en-Haut as the second house of Sacred Heart nuns. Rose became a postulant in December 1804, and made her final vows in 1805.

In 1815 Mother Duschene was assigned to found a Sacred Heart convent in Paris, France. On 14 March 1818 at age 49 she and four sisters were sent as missionaries to the Louisiana Territory to establish the Society's presence in America. Diseases contracted during the trip to America nearly killed her, and after she recovered in New Orleans, the trip up the Mississippi nearly killed her again. She established her first mission at Saint Charles, Missouri, a log cabin that was the first free school west of the Mississippi River. She eventually six other houses in America which included schools and orphanages. She ran into some opposition as her teaching methods were based on French models, and her English was terrible; her students, however, received a good education, and her intentions were obviously for their best.

She was ever concerned about the plight of Native Americans, and much of her work was devoted to educating them, caring for their sick, and working against alcohol abuse. Finally able to retire from her administrative duties at age 71,

Mother Duchesne evangelized the Pottowatomies, and taught young girls of the tribe. This work, however, lasted but a year as she was unable to master the Pottowatomi language. She was known to the tribe as “Woman-Who-Prays-Always”.

She spent her last ten years in retirement in a tiny shack at the convent in Saint Charles where she lived austerely and in constant prayer.