

# Nomination Form

The letters of Meri  
Hōhepa Suzanne  
Aubert



**Title of the documentary heritage item or collection**

**Letters to and from Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert**

This should be the complete name of the documentary heritage as it is usually known. Use a second language if the item is known by more than one name, e.g. Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi. Include dates if they are usually part of the name.

**Section 1**

**Nominator Details**

This section is for information about the source of the nomination and the authority under which it is made. A copy of the Aotearoa New Zealand Memory of the World programme's privacy policy is available on its website.

**Name of nominator (person or organisation)**

Nga Whaea Tapu Pūaroha Sisters of Compassion represented by the Mother Aubert Home of Compassion Trust Board.

Full name of the person(s) or organisation(s) making the nomination. If the organisation has a name in more than one language provide them in the preferred order. The nomination may be submitted jointly by more than one person or organisation

**1.1 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage:**

Josephine Gorman, Archivist for the Sisters of Compassion

Explain the nominator's relationship to the documentary heritage. For example, the nominator may be a responsible officer of the library or archive which owns it; or he/she may be a private individual with a research interest in it.

**1.2 Contact person: Sister Josephine Gorman**

Provide the name of the person who is responsible for the nomination process.

**1.3 Contact details**

Provide sufficient details to allow easy communication with the contact person.

Email: [sr.josephine.gorman@compassion.org.nz](mailto:sr.josephine.gorman@compassion.org.nz)

Phone: 04 282 1968

Phone:

Section 2	Identity and Description of the Documentary Heritage
<p><b>2.1 Title of inscription</b></p> <p>If the nomination is successful, what do you want it to be titled (e.g. for certificates)? Please use a maximum of 6 words. In the order of preference add the title in an additional language.</p>	<p>Letters of Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert</p>
<p><b>2.2 Description of the documentary heritage</b></p> <p>This should include a full description of what is included in the documentary heritage, its scope and its size. Include details of the type of documents e.g. letters, film, images etc.</p>	<p>The letters and documents have been sorted into fifty-one large envelopes by Sister Angela Möller. Each envelope contains a series of letters and documents relating to a particular period or event in the life of Suzanne Aubert. The letters have been scanned.</p> <p>The letters touch on historical events happening in the country; from the arrest and trial of Kereopa to World War 1; from France to Aoteāroa, to Rome, and back to Aoteāroa, Her range of correspondence, Māori and Pakeha, rich and poor, governors, politicians, government officials, prelates and the medical profession.</p>
<p><b>2.3 Catalogue, registration or bibliographic details</b></p> <p>This should include any bibliographic, registration, inventory, classification and/or call numbers that uniquely identify the documentary heritage.</p>	<p>The letters are preserved in numbered archival boxes in the Strong Room of the Sisters of Compassion Archives.</p> <p>Catalogue: Bay 1, Shelves 4,5,6 ID 1969.001 &amp; 2006.002.</p>
<p><b>2.4 Visual documentation</b></p> <p>Where available and appropriate, supply photographs or videos of the documentary heritage. Send image files as separate attachments and record captions here.</p> <p>Please provide images that can be used for the purposes of promoting Memory of the World.</p>	<p>Image 1 The first sisters of Compassion: From left Sister Bridget, Anne Carmel, Suzanne Aubert</p> <p>Image 2 Suzanne Aubert taken at Buckle Street c.1905</p> <p>Image 3 Travel document 1872 letter to Donald McLean 1872 letter to Marie Louise Outhwaite</p>

## 2.5 Bibliography

This should be, where possible, a list of 3-6 published sources that have been produced using (i.e. drawing heavily on) the documentary heritage to attest to the item/collection's significance.

- Kirk, Marcienne D, *Remembering Your Mercy*, The Sisters of Mercy Auckland and Marcienne D Kirk. 1998.
- Manson, Cecil & Celia, *Doctor Agnes Bennett*, Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd, 1960.
- Munro, Jessie, *The Story of Suzanne Aubert*, Auckland University Press & Bridget Williams Books, Auckland, 1996; second edition 2009.
- Munro, Jessie, [ed] with the assistance of Sister Bernadette Wrack: *The Correspondence of Suzanne Aubert Letters On The Go*: Bridget Williams Books Limited. Wellington, 2009.
- Rafter, Pat, *Never Let Go!* A.H. & A.W. Reed LTD 1972.
- Wells, Peter, *Journey to a Hanging the Events that set New Zealand Race Relations Back By A Century*, Random House New Zealand, 2014.

## Section 3

## Assessment Against the Criteria

### 3.1 History/provenance

Provide a summary of the provenance of the documentary heritage. For example, how and when was the material acquired and integrated into the holdings of the institution?

About 825 letters written by and to Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert have been gathered by the Sisters of Compassion and preserved in the Sisters of Compassion archives. Suzanne Aubert, fortunately, copied most of her letters in case of loss. Much of her writing was in French, especially in the earlier period. Since Her death, people to whom she wrote letters in her old age have generously donated original documents or copies.

### 3.2. Uniqueness of the documentary heritage

Give a brief explanation of why the documentary heritage is unique and irreplaceable.

Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert's correspondence from 1913-1919 relating to her time in Rome highlights a process unique in Aotearoa New Zealand, the gaining of Vatican approval for the establishment of a new religious congregation. Also unique of the time was her complete and lasting cure of a person suffering from Leprosy she had nursed and treated in the 1870s. A letter she wrote in 1924 to Doctor T H Valintine, the Director-General of Health, concerning her treatment of leprosy in the 1870s illustrates her courage, resourcefulness, and ability to work proactively with health officials.

### 3.3 Assessment against the significance criteria

Provide an explanation of what criteria the documentary heritage meets and why it meets those criteria. The documentary heritage must meet at least one of the criteria in this section. An explanation of each criteria is given on the front page of this form.

**Time:** Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert lived in Auckland in the 1860s. She lived through the turmoil's of the Māori war, the disengagement of Māori from Christian missions, the return of Bishop Pompallier to France in 1868, and the misunderstanding of his successor causing her to abandon her school for Māori and leave for Hawke's Bay. Letters she wrote during this period portray her strength of character and her determination to remain a missionary in spite of homesickness and uncertainties.

Over a quarter of Suzanne Aubert's correspondence date from 1913-1919 while she was in Rome to obtain the Decree of Praise which would protect all her works, widen her scope for health care, and recognize the distinctive charisma of her Order. While there her letters describe her volunteering as a nurse to help the earthquake victims of Abruzzi. She thanked God that she was able to work and in a letter to her friend, Isa Outhwaite, she wrote that hard work had kept her 'out of the mad house'.

While in Rome in response to a request from Sister Chanel the Novice Mistress for the Sisters of Compassion Suzanne wrote one of her greatest letters *A letter to the Novices*, She expressed the spirituality which had developed from her years of life experience in New Zealand and which she wished her followers to share.

**Place:** The geographical scope of the letters. From France to Auckland in 1860, her move to Hawkes Bay, Hiruhārama, Wellington to World War I; to Rome, and back to Aotearoa, and her close involvement living in these places. She was not just an observer; she was a participant.

**People:** The range of her correspondents, did not discriminate on the basis of ethnic or racial origin, sex or religious belief. This was unusual at the time. She worked alongside people of differing backgrounds and on their behalf, she set up support systems wherever she could. Her ability to get on well with all sectors of society is shown in the letters she wrote to Governor

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Generals, Government officials, the medical profession, business people, and her many friends and volunteers. Her letters touching on her relationships with Church hierarchy, notably Bishops Pompallier, Redwood, Cleary, and O'Shea offer a rare glimpse of the workings of Church politics. The letters of January 1872 to Isa Outhwaite and Donald Maclean concerning the death of Keropa recognise Suzanne's belief in Keropa, the injustice of his sentence, and her determination to support him in his last hours. Her rapport with early New Zealand pioneering nursing professionals Grace Neill, Agnes Bennett, Jessie Bicknell, and Hester Maclean, who all labored proactively in maintaining professional nursing standards and goals while finding ways to resolve issues.

**Subject and Theme:** Suzanne's reputation as a nurse and her dedication to the welfare of disadvantaged children had spread widely in colonial New Zealand. Medical doctors were keen for her to send Sisters to Wellington in order to undertake similar work there. Bishop Lenihan of Auckland had issued a similar invitation for his own diocese. Eventually early in 1899, she left for Wellington. Her letters from Wellington describe her home for the disabled, the Soup Kitchen for the unemployed, the crèche for working mothers, and her ambitious project a Home at Island Bay initially for the care of babies and children. With the work increasing there was a need for trained staff. Suzanne and her sisters completed a course with the newly formed St John's Ambulance Association. She later established a hospital to provide nursing training for her sisters to enable them to offer the best possible care for New Zealand's poor and needy. Meri Hōhepa became the well-known Mother Aubert. Almost inevitably while living in Wellington her work took her away from constant direct contact with the Māori people. Nevertheless, at no point did she contemplate closing down the work of the sisters at Hiruhārama, her letters and records bear witness to the constant journeying between Wellington

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and Hiruhārama. Working alongside Māori was essential to her vision.

**Form and style:** Many of Meri Hōhepa's Suzanne Aubert's writings in the earlier period were in French. In her *New and Complete Manual of Māori Conversation and Vocabulary*, she places value on the section on writing letters. Her letters establish a tradition of compassion, love, and service to the poor the sick, and the abandoned of every race, creed, and none. Most of her letters were written by hand apart from the ones written for her by her secretary, she had a dislike for typewriters.

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### 3.4 Testimony of at least two independent experts

The committee requires testimony from at least two independent people or organisations who can give an informed opinion about the significance and provenance of the documentary heritage.

The informed opinion should focus on the criteria for inscription provided above and on the front page of this form. Please provide up to one page from each expert in support of your submission.

*Note: the fields in italics will not be included on the version uploaded to our website.*

**Expert One**

Name Jessie Munro

Qualification(s) MA Hons I in French, University of Auckland; Commonwealth Scholar in French

Contact Number 021 264 4142

Email [jessie.munro@xtra.co.nz](mailto:jessie.munro@xtra.co.nz)

I have detailed knowledge of the correspondence of Suzanne Aubert (Meri Hōhepa). As author of the biography *The Story of Suzanne Aubert*, published in 1996, and (in association with Sister Bernadette Mary Wrack, the late archivist of the Sisters of Compassion) editor of *Letters on the Go: The Correspondence of Suzanne Aubert* (2009), I have been privileged to study manuscript copies of all the extant letters from and to her, from the 1860s to her death in 1926. As a French scholar I have been able to analyse her French language correspondence in its original form, and have translated it (or edited other translations). For my research, including on addressees and their historical context, I consulted a great many archives and libraries in New Zealand, France and Rome: national, regional and local; religious and secular; general and specialised.

I know the provenance of the letters and can vouch for their significance to the documentary heritage of Aotearoa New Zealand. They are unique and irreplaceable in that they encapsulate the life of an intelligent, educated, observant and warm-hearted woman who arrived here at the age of 25 and died here at 91. They convey her total commitment to and full engagement in the communities where she lived, both Māori and Pākehā: in war-affected 1860s Auckland; in 1870s Hawke's Bay with Ngāti Kahungunu as well as Vogel-era immigrants; in remote Whanganui River kainga during the 1880s and 1890s; in early twentieth-century Wellington dealing with social welfare pressures. They are evocative of a great span of New Zealand history.

She was an active woman, travelling often on foot, and her assessment of and response to people's situations came from a real understanding of their conditions of life. Her clear, well-written correspondence ranged from friendly personal letters, to vivid missionary narratives back to France, to confidential outpourings of feelings, to motherly guidance, to letters of advocacy addressed to people of influence. Within this wide range of correspondents and across these many decades, the personality and dedication of Suzanne Aubert come through with a remarkable constancy.

**Expert Two**

Name Elizabeth Charlton

Qualification(s) Province Archivist, Society of Mary-Marist Archives Wellington

Contact Number 04 471 0600

Email [enquires@maristarchives.org.nz](mailto:enquires@maristarchives.org.nz)



Name Elizabeth Charlton

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Qualification(s) Province Archivist, Society of Mary – Marist Archives Wellington

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Contact Number 04 471 0600

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Email [enquiries@maristarchives.org.nz](mailto:enquiries@maristarchives.org.nz)

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I have no hesitation in recommending the inscription of Suzanne Aubert's letters in the Register. Suzanne Aubert had a long relationship with the Society of Mary, starting in France and continuing in New Zealand.

The provenance of the letters has been thoroughly documented by Jessie Munro and the Sisters during their research. A number of them are held in the Society's General Archives in Rome.

This is a unique set of correspondence, which crosses from the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and represents the criteria in the following ways:

**TIME** – Suzanne Aubert's relationship with Māori particularly after the New Zealand Wars, when the prevailing view was that the Māori were a dying race.

**PEOPLE** - the role and relationships of Suzanne Aubert, who left France for New Zealand without the approval of her family in 1860, a rather uncommon occurrence. The determination and courage she had to buck the trends of the time provide a snapshot into aspects of human behaviour and this can be seen through her letters.

**SUBJECT and THEME** - her concern for better rights, education and health outcomes for Māori and the downtrodden, women and children in particular. Her dealings with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church to firstly establish the Congregation of the Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion in New Zealand and to then have it recognised as a congregation of pontifical right.

**FORM and STYLE** – her personality shines through the letters. The letters demonstrate her command of register in English, French and Māori.

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The above experts have given their written permission to provide this information to the Memory of the World Committee and they have agreed that the provided information can be published without email and contact details and that they can be contacted by the Register Subcommittee if required. Yes

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**Section 4**

**Legal Information**

**4.1 Owner (name and contact details)**

**The Mother Aubert Home of Compassion  
Trust Board,  
Rhine St, Island Bay  
Wellington 6023  
Phone 04 282 1965  
Email: sr.ma@compassion.org.nz**

Provide the name and full contact details of the owner or owners, whether an institution or an individual.

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**4.2 Custodian (name and contact details if different from the owner)**

Provide the name and full contact details of the custodian, whether an institution or an individual. Sometimes the custodian of the documentary heritage may not be the same as the owner. It is essential to establish both before a nomination can be added to the Register.

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**4.3 Legal status The Correspondence of Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert is owned by the Mother Aubert Home of Compassion Trust Board**

State whether the documentary heritage is owned privately, or by a public institution, or by a commercial corporation. Details of legal and administrative powers for the preservation of the documentary heritage should be the name of the Act, or other instrument of administrative power, that gives the owner and/or the custodian the legal power to preserve the documentary heritage.

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**4.4 Accessibility** They are held at the Sisters of Compassion Archives at 2 Rhine St, Island Bay, Wellington.

**Supervised Public access in physical and digital form.**

Provide a brief description of how the documentary heritage may be accessed. All access procedures and restrictions should be clearly stated.

There are three levels of access:

- access to verify the significance, integrity and security of the material. This is the minimum condition for inscription
- access for reproduction, which is strongly encouraged
- public access in physical, digital, or other form

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**4.5 Copyright Status**

For documentary heritage items that are subject to copyright, details should be provided on the relevant copyright legislation and copyright owner(s). Any other factors affecting the legal status of the documentary heritage should be noted. For example, is any institution required by law to preserve the documentary heritage in this nomination?

**Permission must be sought from the Mother Aubert Home of Compassion Trust Board for the letters to be used for any purpose.**

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**Section 5**

**Stakeholders**

The nominating institution is accountable for consultation with all relevant stakeholders before submitting the nomination.

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**5.1 Owner**

The owner(s) of the documentary heritage has been consulted:  
Yes

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**5.2 Custodian**

The custodian(s) of the documentary heritage has been consulted:  
Yes

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**5.3 Significant Stakeholders**

Stakeholders with a significant interest in the content of the documentary heritage e.g., iwi, family members, have been consulted, if relevant:  
Yes

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**Section 6**

**Care and Preservation and Risk Assessment**

Identify any risks to the survival of the nominated documentary heritage. We understand if you have not done a formal risk assessment.

Note: a successful inscription may assist you to obtain funds to preserve and care for the nominated documentary heritage.

If your nomination is successful, we may request additional information on the care and preservation of the inscribed documentary heritage.

The correspondence is kept in a formally managed archive in a secure fireproof vault in a building compliant with earthquake building codes.

### Summary

Provide a brief summary describing the documentary heritage and how it meets the criteria for inscription on the Aotearoa New Zealand Memory of the World Register.

Keep your summary to no more than 300 words as, if successful, it will be used on the website **unescomow.nz** to describe why the documentary heritage has been inscribed on the New Zealand Register and given UNESCO recognition.

### Meri Hōhepa Suzanne Aubert, Correspondence from 1860 to 1926

Born in 1835 in France, Suzanne Aubert came to New Zealand as a missionary in 1860. In her long life as Sister/Mother Mary Joseph (Meri Hōhepa), she was a scholar, health innovator, social welfare pioneer, tireless champion of vulnerable children, advocate for the poor and sick 'of all creeds and none', friend to Māori, and founder of the Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion: a woman of faith and compassion. Her funeral in 1926 was the largest given to a woman in New Zealand.

Suzanne Aubert, intelligent and observant, was a prolific letter writer. Through her letters, she reached out to others, offering encouragement, support and friendship, advocating on their behalf and expressing appreciation and friendship.

Her letters convey much of the social and political context in Aotearoa New Zealand from the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth century, covering war and settler influx with their traumatic consequences for Māori, and a developing country still lacking social welfare provisions.

While moving around the country she observed much poverty and hardship, leading her to set up a children's Home, a soup kitchen, a home for the aged and disabled, a crèche and eventually a hospital, all free of charge. Letters highlight this activity, including correspondence with government officials, petitioning for funding, permissions and assistance in training and support.

Meri Hōhepa challenged the prejudices of the time. Living in close community with Māori, she was knowledgeable in indigenous culture and medicine. A fluent scholar of the language, she published an updated Māori prayerbook and a significant Māori-English phrasebook, as well as preparing an extensive English-Māori dictionary.

Letters from Rome, while she was establishing ongoing security for the Sisters of Compassion, portray her love for her adoptive country and her longing to return to Aotearoa New Zealand.

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**Section 8**

Inscription to a UNESCO Memory of the World register provides an opportunity to promote the importance of documentary heritage. We shall provide you with a branded 'tile' to use on websites / social media and in catalogues.

Give a brief overview of how your institution will use the opportunity of a successful nomination to promote the Memory of the World programme and the importance of documentary heritage. You may wish to consult with communications staff in your organisation to provide an answer to this question.

Having consulted with our communication people in our organisation they would use the opportunity to promote the Memory of the World in –

- All our social media
- Some printed publications
- Some presentations

**Section 9**

**Permission to use visual documentation**

The Aotearoa New Zealand Memory of the World Committee will also work with you and your communications staff to obtain publicity for the programme and for the successful inscriptions.

Do you give permission for the Committee to use the visual documentation you have provided for Aotearoa New Zealand Memory of the World publicity purposes (e.g. for brochures/website)?

Yes

**Section 10**

**Declaration of Authority**

I am authorised to nominate the above documentary heritage to the Aotearoa New Zealand Memory of the World Register.

Name: Sister Josephine Gorman

Date: 13 May 2022

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