

## PROFILE OF MOTHER MATHILDE

St. Mathilde Raclot

Born: 1814 (France)

Died: 1911 (Japan)

*Born in 1814 to a middle class family in France, Justine Raclot was a shy and intensely devout girl who, as a schoolchild, had dreams of bringing her faith to distant lands, and in particular to Japan. When she was 18 she entered the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Infant Jesus and took the name of St Mathilde.*

*In September 1852, the Congregation sent four sisters to Penang with Mother St Mathilde in charge, to guide and support the little group of sisters who had arrived earlier in Penang in April 1852 to set up a Convent school for girls. A year and a half later, Rev Mother St Mathilde Raclot and three other sisters sailed from Penang to Singapore to establish a Convent and school. Their mission was to provide an education for girls regardless of their social class.*

*Just 10 days after arriving in Singapore and moving into Caldwell House in Victoria Street, the nuns began to take in students. Soon they also started a Convent Orphanage and a Home for Abandoned Babies as they found day-old babies were being left at their doorstep.*

*The nuns conducted two classes – one for fee-paying students and the other for orphans and the poor. To raise funds for their work, St Mathilde taught needlework to her fellow nuns and their students, and they sold their products to the wives of the local Chinese merchants.*

*The school grew rapidly and by the turn of the century there were some 300 students. Today the 11 Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (CHIJ) schools in Singapore stand as a testament to Mother St Mathilde's work.*

*Of the 79 years that Mother St Mathilde was a nun, 59 were spent in Asia. In 1872, 20 years after arriving in Penang, she led the first group of French nuns to Japan where they worked with disadvantaged women and children. Justine Raclot's vision as a schoolgirl had come true.*