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leur mission en matière de soins de santé ainsi que la fondation et l'exploitation des hôpitaux catholiques.

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**Love Spans the Centuries**  
**Origin and Development of the**  
**Institute of the Sisters of Charity of**  
**Montreal, Grey Nuns**  
**Volume 4: 1877-1910**

by  
**Estelle Mitchell, S.G.M.**

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# LOVE SPANS THE CENTURIES

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Volume IV  
*1877-1910*



Méridien



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**Volume IV**

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*Marie-Marguerite d'Youville*  
(Painting by Flore Barrette, s.g.m., 1959)



## PREFACE

This fourth volume of the history of the Grey Nuns covers the years 1877 - 1910. In the course of these thirty-three years, three Superiors General succeeded one another, of whom two died in office: Mother J. Deschamps, 1877 - 87, deceased June 29; Mother P. Filiatrault, 1887 - 1892; 1897 - 1902; 1907 - 1910; deceased June 11 and Mother M. Hamel 1902 - 1907.

At the outset of this period of history, the personnel consisted of 258 Sisters; at its close, there were 745 Grey Nuns. In thirty-three years, forty-two new works had been founded in Canada and the United States: hospitals, schools, hospices, orphanages, establishments with multiple works, nursing schools, dispensaries, refuges, etc. The 'heroic women' continued their difficult work in the far Canadian North. The west was developing rapidly and the metropolis whose population was increasing required constant adaptations. The common saying: "Go to the Grey Nuns, they never refuse anything" had not become out-dated. Committed to follow Marguerite d'Youville who

had handed down to them the example of a woman heedful of needs, eager to relieve any distress and to promote the knowledge of God, the Grey Nuns at the end of the nineteenth century experienced a true apostolic leap forward stirred up by their *raison d'être* and by the invincible hope, the ambition to obtain the canonization of their foundress, Mother Marguerite d'Youville.

The diocesan proceedings began in 1884 and ended in 1890 with the cause being introduced in Rome. Two world wars brought about delays in the progress of the proceedings. The Sisters of this period 1877 - 1910 were not to see their hopes realized here below. This would be the privilege of the Grey Nuns of the 20th Century. On May 3, 1955 the heroic decree of her virtues was proclaimed; on May 3, 1959 His Holiness Pope John XXIII proclaimed 'Blessed' the Mother of Universal Charity; on December 9, 1990 His Holiness Pope John Paul II canonized this first Canadian-born saint presenting her to the admiration of the Christian world as a model to imitate by women in every state of life today.

This modest young lady from Varennes, born 290 years ago founded a religious congregation consisting of six branches whose members disseminated across various countries of the world continue her ministry of mercy and of love.

Te Deum Laudamus!

Estelle Mitchell, s.g.m.  
May 1991



## IN RETROSPECT

The three first volumes of the Grey Nuns' history — *Love Spans the Centuries* — dealt with the birth and development of the Congregation during the years 1737-1877.

The present volume describes a new period of history, 1877 to 1910, a period of thirty-three years during which the congregation was governed by three successive Superiors General whose terms of office varied from five to fifteen years.

Two hundred and fifty Sisters constituted the community's personnel and this after one hundred and forty years of existence. This reality is explained by the restriction contained in Article nine of the Letters Patent of 1753 limiting to twelve the number of Administrators. Deploring this ruling the foundress, Mother d'Youville, had attempted to limit its effects by taking into partnership women willing to serve as lay Sisters.

The change of allegiance had not improved the situation. The Letters Patent had become obsolete but now, the very survival of religious communities was in doubt. We recall the question often raised by Mother d'Youville in her correspondence "Will they tolerate us?"

Matters stabilized towards the 1820's and we note that one or two names were then added annually to the register of professions. At this rate, recruiting hardly sufficed to fill in the voids being created and to meet the demands of service to the poor for, according to the instructions of the Foundress, the hospice situated at Pointe-à-Callières was filled to capacity.

Mother Dorothée Trottier Beaubien, Superior General from 1833 to 1843 even told Bishop Bourget in a report dated 1840, that it was sometimes necessary to dispense the Sisters from some of the religious exercises in order to assure the care of the sick. In this same year, 1840, a first branch was separated from the main trunk when four Grey Nuns were invited to St. Hyacinthe where they established a new Congregation. Similarly, three other small groups of Grey Nuns would leave in the following decade.

Each departure was almost like a threat to the life of the community. Despite new admissions, the number remained low, varying between thirty-five and thirty-seven Sisters.

In fact, there were thirty-six when the real missionary expansion began. From the fire which had long smoldered beneath the ashes burst forth the apostolic flame: the establishment of a far distant mission beyond the borders of the homeland. Manitoba, not yet a province in 1844, was part of this territory which did not yet belong to Canada.

Mother Elisabeth McMullen, sixth Superior General of the Grey Nuns, who had a profound missionary spirit, yielded to Bishop Norbert Provencher's request to establish



a Grey Nun house on the banks of Red River in the Northwest country.

Mother McMullen herself would accompany her Sisters as far as Dorval from where they would board birch bark canoes for a perilous voyage of fifty-nine days, strewn with all sorts of incidents until on June 21, at one o'clock in the morning, they finally landed at Saint-Boniface.

Those who disapproved the audacity of the undertaking viewed it as a foolish venture, a rash enterprise. Nevertheless, for the Grey Nuns, the new mission was indeed a reality, channelling all their energies and stirring up their courage. It behooved Mother McMullen who was the mainspring of the foundation, to demonstrate the true aspirations of the Grey Nuns. To those living in exile at the Red River, she wrote on December 4, 1844, some eight months after their departure:

We were visited, in Montreal, by a French priest who was forced to leave Santo Domingo because of a State revolution. This good priest would like to see our Congregation in this region. He added that if he could return safely he would ask for us. If this happens, I shall be filled with joy! I fervently ask God to spread us out into the most abandoned places. There are enough communities appearing in large towns, but few who will sacrifice themselves for the Indians, the blacks, etc. Let us beg the God of Mercy to send us to the rescue of these poor infidels and forsaken Catholics. Let us ask God, who is so good, to add to our works these mission fields covered with thorns and brambles. May he give to this work the means of eradicating evil so that good grain may be produced... How happy I would be if I could live to see a black girl in our religious garb! However small and miserable my poor heart, it is still large enough to contain black, yellow, brown and red people, etc. Glory to God, these colors become to my eyes and heart, one and the same color, all tinted with the precious Blood of my dear and loving spouse, Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord of all these people. When the happy day

dawns and my eyes see what my heart desires, I will cry out with rapture: Blessed be God forever. And I will call my yellow, black and white Sisters to help me sing NUNC DIMITTIS SERVUM TUUM DOMINE.

These were not idle words for the sixth Superior General, but a real desire to be directly involved in spreading the kingdom. To the same Sisters she wrote on the day after their departure, April 26:

Had I been able to stay, I certainly would not have left you. I would have accompanied you all the way in order to alleviate and share your hardships. But God who has always given me great desires, also willed to withhold from me the means to satisfy them. He also gave me a strong attraction for the Indian missions of the Red River and I was led to approach my bishop two years ago. In fact, I had been thinking about it for two years.

Mother McMullen was not the only Grey Nun who was strongly drawn towards the distant missions. She had evidence of this when she had asked for volunteers for the Red River and seventeen Sisters freely offered themselves. The whole young generation came forth.

In 1845, four other Grey Nuns left Montreal to found a new community in Bytown (Ottawa) and without a doubt, under the leadership of Mother McMullen there would have been other departures had it not been for the tragedy of 1847. Death claimed seven Sisters among the nursing volunteers, serving the victims of typhus among the Irish immigrants. The tragedy could have brought about the extinction of the community. This fear had even been expressed, but fortunately, the Ottawa Community sent two of its members, Sisters Phelan and Curran to help.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ctés - Srs Ottawa, doc. 129



The sight of the Grey Nuns dying as they fought the epidemic provoked favorable publicity and new recruits were admitted.

When Mother Rose Coutlée replaced Mother McMullen in October 1848, she lost no time in counting her personnel: thirty-four professed Sisters and three novices who would take their vows in November of that year. And yet, the seventh Superior General did not hesitate to accept the full direction of St. Patrick's Orphanage which had been established two years earlier and which had moved several times since then.<sup>2</sup>

Several months later, Mother Coutlée sent to Quebec as her predecessors had done to St. Hyacinthe and to Ottawa, five Sisters and one novice — choice subjects — in order to found the Sisters of Charity of Quebec at Cap Diamant. Only one foundation was made in 1850, that of the school at Prairie-du-Cheval-Blanc or St. Francois-Xavier in Manitoba, established at the instigation of Father Jean-François Laflèche, the future bishop of Three Rivers. The place was modest it is true, but it marks the beginning of the expansion of the Grey Nuns throughout the Canadian West.

While at the Mother House, the Sisters were concerned with the formation of the new candidates, an event took place which gave the community a greater impetus towards the creation of new works. This was the publication in 1852 of the biography of their Foundress. Until then, the Sisters had only the two manuscripts of

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<sup>2</sup> Girls and Irish orphans had first occupied the McGrath house; later, they had moved from Colborne to Wellington, Murray, Bleury, then to Craig Street. It would appear that several houses had been required simultaneously, especially after the typhus, in order to take in as many as fifty immigrant families (*Pièces d'Arch.* 1843-49, pp. 431-573)

Fathers Charles Dufrost and the Life drawn up by Father Antoine Sattin, p.s.s.<sup>3</sup>

Then appeared the detailed biography of Mother d'Youville by the renowned historian, Father Etienne-Michel Faillon, p.s.s. He is the first biographer who, in recounting the life of the Foundress, also revealed the insight of a theologian as he depicted her interior motivation and the state of her soul.

In Marguerite's intimate vision, everything had become simple when she came to understand to what extent God is Father and men are brothers. At prayer she had contemplated him, and in action she had served him. She had proven the authenticity of her love by her works. "It is the glory of my Father that you bear much fruit" (Jn 15:8) said the Master. Marguerite wished to respond to the divinity of God by dedicating her life to the service of humanity. This is why one day in 1737, she resolved to be an instrument of Providence for the humble, the destitute which God himself placed on her path. Without distinction of class, nationality, or creed she had opened her door to them, mindful of the Gospel message: "Whoever welcomes in my name one of these children, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes also the One who sent me" (Mk 9: 37).

In calling to mind the itinerary followed by the Mother of Universal Charity for the edification of the Sisters, the historian Father Faillon led them back to their roots and made them more aware of the direction of their future apostolate. Until then, their works had been confined within the General Hospital in Montreal and in St.

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<sup>3</sup> C. Dufrost, son of Mother d'Youville, was born in Montreal in 1729 and died in Boucherville in 1790. Father Sattin arrived in Canada in 1794. He offered his biography of Mother d'Youville to Mother Lemaire on July 20, 1829.



Boniface; but now, a vast apostolic field opened up before them. Henceforth, they would go where they were most needed and preferably "to the most abandoned regions" as Mother McMullen had indicated in her correspondence.

The workers were ready. Indeed, some of them had already volunteered for the Red River and were awaiting the time set by Providence. Among these was one who had the distant missions at heart. This person, Sister Julie Hainault-Deschamps at age thirty-four, was elected Superior General on October 3, 1853. There was no longer question of leaving her country, but it was she who would extend the distant foundations. She would open seventeen new houses in Montreal and surrounding areas, as well as in Ontario and in the Canadian West.<sup>4</sup>

When Mother Deschamps' second term of office as Superior General came to an end, she was succeeded by Mother Jane Slocombe.

Born in England in 1819, converted to Catholicism during the Oxford Movement, Jane Slocombe arrived in Canada towards 1836 and joined the Grey Nuns four years later. Highly gifted, Sister Slocombe soon mastered the French language and after her profession, shared the responsibilities of Sister Deschamps, then bursar at

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<sup>4</sup> Missions founded from 1853 to 1863 in Montreal and surrounding areas: Hosp. St. Joseph in 1854; St. Brigitte's Shelter 1860; St. Henri's Home 1861; Nazareth Asylum 1861; N.D. des Neiges School 1863; Hospice St. Benoît 1854; Lajemmerais Hospice in Varennes 1859; St. Joseph Hospice, Beauharnois 1861. In Ontario: Sandwich 1857; Amherstburg 1858; Windsor 1859. In Manitoba: St. Norbert School 1858, St. Vital School 1860. In Alberta: Lac Ste. Anne Mission 1859 moved to St. Albert 1863, Lac-La-Biche Mission 1862. In Saskatchewan: Ile-a-la-Crosse cont'd. 1860. The mission in Ontario closed in 1861 and that of St. Henri in 1870. The Grey Nuns were replaced at St. Henri by the Sisters of Ste Anne.



Châteauguay. The Chapter of 1853 elected her Director of Formation where she gave evidence of extraordinary wisdom in dealing with people. In 1863, she was elected Superior General; in her humility, she was alarmed at first, believing herself incapable of presiding over the destiny of the Grey Nuns. Courageously she took up the task while sacrificing her own desire for the missions. This desire would always remain with her as one of her last letters attested. "I envy your lot," she wrote to Sr. Collette recently assigned to St. Boniface, "and I would like to share it with you despite all the trials and difficulties to be encountered."<sup>5</sup>

One can surmise that with such a disposition Mother Slocombe would not diminish the thrust given by her predecessor. Nine new houses would be added to those already in existence.<sup>6</sup>

Despite her small stature and apparent frailty, this petite woman proved to be a courageous leader and under her guidance, four Grey Nuns were sent to found the Mission of Divine Providence in the Northwest Territories. These "heroic women" whom she delegated to go "to the end of the earth" reached their destination only after an extremely difficult journey. Once settled there, they had great hardships to endure from the cold, the isolation, often from hunger and always from the difficulties of adaptation. Nevertheless, Mother Slocombe sincerely envied her daughters.

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<sup>5</sup> Letter of April 27, 1871

<sup>6</sup> In Montreal: 1868 Convent of Bethlehem. In the Montreal area: 1868 Hospice St. Jean; 1869 Hospice St. Joseph in Chambly. In Manitoba: 1869 St. Mary's Boarding School in Winnipeg; the Provencher Academy in St. Boniface; 1871 St. Boniface Hospital. In the United States: 1866 Salem Orphanage; 1868 Orphanage in Lawrence, Mass.

I cannot help seeing you as fortunate and privileged, and gladly would I join you on the journey and then remain with you if such were God's will for me.<sup>7</sup>

God had other plans for this brave woman; it was she who would execute a plan which had been under consideration for some twenty years. As early as 1843, the Grey Nuns had thought about leaving Pointe-à-Callières because of the frequent flooding. Mother McMullen had initiated proceedings in this regard but because of certain opposition<sup>8</sup> to the plan, the project was suspended. Then in 1861, the Seminary agreed to sell to the Grey Nuns the land known as the "Red Cross" on the corner of Guy and Dorchester Streets.<sup>9</sup> The Guy Street wing having been completed, the Sisters occupied it on October 6, 1871. To the Sisters who were grieving at the thought of leaving the place made holy by Mother d'Youville, Mother Slocombe wrote this comforting message: In the new locale, you will always find Mother d'Youville's house and family. Do pray that we may never have the misfortune of losing the spirit which our beloved Mother Foundress left us as a legacy. It would indeed be an irreparable loss if, upon leaving the old house, we were to leave this treasure behind.<sup>10</sup>

The ninth Superior General of the Congregation had indeed been impregnated with the spirit of Mother d'Youville. She gave adequate proof of it upon being elected to this office. For many years, there had been a group of "filles données", fine women who wished to serve God and neighbor without however, committing themselves irrevocably. These women proved to be

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<sup>7</sup> Letter to the missionaries, May 10, 1867.

<sup>8</sup> Pièces d'Arch. 1858-63, p. 151.

<sup>9</sup> Sr. Collette, *Vie de Mère Deschamps*, p. 117

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Sister Charlebois, August 7, 1871. Sister Charlebois was delegated to make the official visitation of the houses in the Canadian West.



exceptionally dedicated and faithful, fulfilling humble tasks, accompanying the Sisters to distant mission posts, serving without any other remuneration but their daily bread and the assurance that they would be cared for in their old age. The situation of these "Marys" touched the Superior General. Therefore, to encourage them, she recommended that they be enrolled in the Third Order of St. Francis. In order to highlight the event she arranged to have Bishop Ignace Bourget at the first reception ceremony on December 23, 1863.<sup>11</sup> The Compassionate Mother wrote "Their life is filled with hardship, and we must alleviate their burden as much as possible."<sup>12</sup>

The Franciscans did not disappoint her expectations. Everywhere, they were heroically faithful helpers who could be counted on in most difficult circumstances.

In the course of her mandate, Mother Slocombe opened eight other convents apart from the mission in the distant Northwest Territories. Two were in the United States, three in Manitoba and three in Quebec.<sup>13</sup> Her remarkable apostolic career came to an end when she died on June 22, 1872 at the age of fifty-two. The General Chapter was promptly convened and elected the tenth Superior General on August 26.

Sr. Elizabeth Dupuis, "formerly Director of Formation", had nursed the sick early in her religious life until 1861 when she was asked to open the school at St-Henri. Seven

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<sup>11</sup> These volunteer women would be called successively "Marys, the Franciscan Sisters and the Sisters of St. Martha. In 1889, the association of the Little Auxiliary Sisters was created. Two years later, in 1891, the latter name was adopted. In 1905, the Association was canonically established. The Auxiliary Sisters merged with the regular members on December 23, 1946

<sup>12</sup> Letter to the Sisters at Ile-a-la-Crosse, April 23, 1864.

<sup>13</sup> See note 6 above.



years later, she was appointed Director of Formation. Mother Dupuis was equipped with a background of experience in various fields. To help her in her duties, she was given three assistants, namely Sisters Ursule Charlebois, Elisabeth McMullen and Honorine Pinsonneault.<sup>14</sup>

In the course of her five-year term, 1872-1877, Mother Dupuis presided at the inauguration of six new foundations. In Montreal, the Nazareth Dispensary; in the distant territories of the Northwest, the Convent of the Holy Angels at Fort Chipewyan. In the U.S.A.: in Fort Totten, North Dakota, the Mission of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows; in Toledo, Ohio, St. Vincent's Hospital built in response to the needs of a growing population, St. Anthony's orphanage built in 1855 having become too small to house both the orphans and the patients. In Longueuil, the Grey Nuns accepted the management of St. Antoine Hospital which was in reality, a home for the elderly. Finally, in old Montreal, Hospice St. Charles was opened. This was a shelter for itinerants, the homeless, the destitute who were admitted on a temporary or permanent basis. It was a precarious work whose existence resembled the daily life of the very people it sheltered.<sup>15</sup>

The opening of new missions required an increase of workers. Mother Dupuis tried to respond to this need by opening a pre-novitiate for candidates aspiring to life as a Grey Nun.<sup>16</sup> At the Mother House where the community

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<sup>14</sup> Sister Pinsonneault was elected on September 16 as a result of a Chapter decision. Until then, there had been only two Assistants provided by the Constitutions.

<sup>15</sup> After many fluctuations this work would stabilize and become *Accueil Bonneau*.

<sup>16</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1909-11 p. 112. The preparatory novitiate created in 1874 was abandoned in 1879. The school to prepare candidates, a similar initiative, had known the same fate some 20 years earlier.

had moved on October 6, 1871, space was already scarce as only the Guy Street wing was completed. The wing parallel to Dorchester Street ended where the chapel would be. As early as 1874, the beams supporting the community room and the dining room had created a hazard when they began to buckle. This weakness was corrected by means of supportive pillars.<sup>17</sup> The work was completed on March 15 and three weeks later, on April 8, Mother Dupuis and her council decided to proceed with the construction of the church and the second part of the main wing as far as St. Mathieu Street. Only the foundation and the ground floor were included in the plans for that year.<sup>18</sup>

Mother Dupuis was also the first Superior General to visit the Manitoba mission since the foundation in 1844.<sup>19</sup> She set out on May 31, 1876 with Sisters Janson and Carroll, two new missionaries, and with a few volunteers or "filles données". They reached St. Boniface on June 8. Thanks to improved means of travel, the journey had lasted eight days as compared to the fifty-nine days required thirty years earlier.

The Superior General lavished praise on the magnificent work accomplished by the Sisters in this distant land. She was unable to visit the Alberta missions but managed to visit Fort Totten, the most recent post, where the Sisters were struggling to learn the Sioux language in order to ensure the success of their apostolate.

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<sup>17</sup> Anc. Journal 1867-77, p. 343.

<sup>18</sup> Circ. mens. 1877-80, p. 250. The building we see today would gradually be completed.

<sup>19</sup> Mother McMullen visited St. Boniface in 1859 but she was then Assistant General. Sister Charlebois also the Assistant, had been delegated to the West in 1870 by Mother Slocombe, but the death of the latter in 1872 had interrupted the visit.



Having returned to Montreal on August 24 after her long trip, Mother Dupuis whose health inspired some concern, set about to prepare the Chapter which was to elect her successor.

Some twenty novices and postulants were preparing to take up the torch from failing hands, and there were thirty-two Institutions for the care of the sick and the elderly and for the teaching and care of the children.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> St. Mary's Boarding School in Winnipeg was turned over in 1874 to the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary.





## CHAPTER I 1877-1880

On October 1, 1877, the twelve Grey Nun administrators and the delegates from the various missions held the General Chapter and elected Sister Julie Hainault-Deschamps as Superior General.

Bishop Edouard-Charles Fabre of Montreal presided at the assembly accompanied by Father Moreau, the Vicar-General and Father Mathurin Bonnissant, p.s.s. He approved the decisions taken by signing the minutes where appeared the names of the three assistants elected namely: Sisters Hedwidge Robin, Elizabeth Dupuis, formerly the Superior General, Sister Ursule-Cécile Charlebois, as well as Sister Victorine Stubinger as Director of Formation.<sup>1</sup>

The re-election of Sister Deschamps was no surprise, especially to Mother Dupuis since she had begged the

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the details concerning Mother Deschamps are taken from her Life by Sr. M. Collette, the unpublished text of which is preserved at the A.S.G.M.



capitulars “not to think of her” considering her failing health.<sup>2</sup> Along with her companions and those respectfully called “the senior sisters”, she considered Mother Deschamps to be a woman of prayer and of action, a leader capable of safeguarding the primitive spirit of the Congregation, while adapting it to the changing needs of society in an expanding town, a growing country.

Mother Deschamps had won the respect and trust of the community, not only in the decade from 1853-1863 when she had presided over the destiny of the Institute, but ever since her profession on September 10, 1836. In fact, her association with the Grey Nuns dated back even further into the past. Admitted to the old General Hospital in 1827, she remained there two years in order to prepare for her first Holy Communion. At that time, she had the precious advantage of being taught by Father Antoine Sattin, p.s.s., the second biographer of Mother d’Youville.<sup>3</sup> The veneration she had for the Foundress of the Grey Nuns and the esteem she had for the vocation of the servant of the poor undoubtedly dates back to that time. She had seen in action, remarkable women such as Mother Lemaire, Mother Trottier de Beaubien, as well as her own aunt, Sister Hainault, then Assistant in the Community, and many others whose humble and hidden career contributed no less in maintaining the heroic spirit established by Mother d’Youville in her General Hospital where she sheltered persons in every kind of distress.

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<sup>2</sup> For several years, Mother Dupuis had been suffering from a chest condition which was now increasing in severity. In fact she died from it on March 15, 1883 in her 52nd year (Circ. mens. 1884-1887 pp. 183-187).

<sup>3</sup> Fr. Sattin was able to interview eight Grey Nuns who had been contemporaries of Mother d’Youville, and M. Louise O’Flaherty, the orphan girl who had been taken in by the Foundress about the year 1756, and who had become a Grey Nun five years after Mother d’Youville’s death.

Julie returned to her home in Lachine in 1829. In 1833, when she was fourteen years of age, her mother died. This resulted for her in another exile since along with her brother, Honoré, she was placed in a respectable foster home on St. Laurent Street so that she could pursue her studies at Notre-Dame-des-Victoires School managed by the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame. Her teacher was a novice called Mother St. Bernard, a future Superior General. Some twenty years later the teacher and her student would have many occasions to meet.

Julie and Honoré attended Sunday Mass regularly at Notre Dame church after which they visited their aunt, Sister Hainault at the General Hospital. At that time, nothing indicated that a future religious vocation was awakening in the young girl. Nevertheless, the regular visits of the two young people aroused curiosity among the Sisters.

On February 3, 1834, Mr. Deschamps married the widow of Nicolas Lenoir dit Rolland after which the children returned to their family home. Julie and her step-mother soon became close friends. Together they went to social gatherings mingling with the elite of society where Julie became so popular that it was believed a certain suitor would win her favor. However, one evening while attending another of these worldly gatherings in a home close to the General Hospital, she heard the convent bell calling the Sisters to prayer. This sound stirred her to the very depth of her soul and she became aware of the vanity of these fleeting earthly pleasures as compared with those experienced in the past when she was with the servants of the poor. Much later, she would admit that, "it was in the course of the twenty months spent close to my aunt (Sister Hainault) that God put into my heart an esteem for, and an attraction to the religious life."



Julie lost no time. So great was her dread of separation that she went to the Grey Nuns a week later to request admission, without informing her family. On Friday, September 9, 1836, Mother Dorothée Trottier de Beaubien, the fourth Superior General, welcomed her to the Formation Centre. The candidate was then eighteen years of age.

From the very beginning of her religious life, Sister Deschamps displayed traits of character, qualities of mind and heart which led to believe that some day she would be considered as one of the most solid pillars of the Institute. Fervent in prayer, diligent and resourceful at work, her attention and concern were mostly directed to the needy. Like Mother d'Youville, she recognized in them "the suffering members of Jesus Christ". Lively and frolicsome, the novice radiated joy wherever she went. Everyone admired her readiness to serve, her mirthful spirit, her deep faith and the many talents with which the Lord had endowed her. Yet, when time came for her perpetual vows, Sister Deschamps was hesitant. She deplored the fact that the Grey Nuns had no foreign missions. Mother Thuot, her Director of Formation reassured her by saying: "You shall have missions some day". She could have added: "and you shall found them yourself".

Sister Deschamps was first assigned to the care of the orphan girls, then she became the assistant to Sister Valade who was the manager at St. Bernard Island of Châteauguay. When, in the fall of 1843, an appeal was finally launched in favor of a mission at the Red River, everyone was surprised that the young Sister's name did not appear on the list of volunteers. She was often teased about this but withstood the teasing without a frown and especially without explaining that her name had been



withdrawn by 'a competent authority'.<sup>4</sup> Sister Deschamps was retained in "Canada" despite her great desire to go abroad on a mission of evangelization.<sup>5</sup>

Sister Deschamps replaced Sister Valade at Châteauguay, residing there almost permanently, with a companion who did the bookkeeping. In addition to her duties as farm manager and "Landlady," she assumed the teaching of catechism to the children of the land-holders as Mother d'Youville had done in the past.

When the typhus epidemic broke out in 1847, Sister Deschamps volunteered to nurse the sick and she contracted the disease but did not succumb to it as seven of her companions had done. As soon as she had recovered, she set about organizing the convalescent home at Châteauguay, and she herself could not rest until her companions, having recovered sufficient strength, returned either to the lazaretto or to their regular duties. The hostess-nurse was remarkable by her warm and gracious hospitality, the concern she manifested towards the more severely stricken, and the efforts she made to provide everyone with a more substantial diet.

Sister Deschamps in no way suspected that, by her behavior during the typhus epidemic, the competence and the maturity she had displayed in the administration of the manor had won her the esteem and the trust of her superiors and of her companions. These were manifested at the election of 1853 when she was elected to the

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<sup>4</sup> In 1880 when Bishop Taché revealed that Mother Deschamps had volunteered for St. Boniface, he received a gentle reproach for revealing a secret which had until then been carefully kept. (Circ. mens. 1877-1880 pp. 573 f.f.)

<sup>5</sup> This was before Confederation when the western provinces were not yet established and did not belong to the Dominion. Consequently, going westward was considered going into exile.

highest office in the Institute. The Superior General was only thirty-four years of age but she would soon justify the choice made by the capitulars. She perceived that the time had come to repeat the heroic deeds of 1844 and to send Grey Nuns to even more distant places where their presence would be needed.

Mother Deschamps became renowned in the course of the decade 1853-1863, but her companions admired her self-effacement when she "re-entered the ranks" at the end of her mandate and served under another Superior as if she had never herself governed. She quietly resumed her duties as farm manager till her health necessitated a change of climate. She was then named Superior at the Home in Toledo from which she returned in 1868 to become Assistant Supervisor of Construction of the Mother House on Guy Street. The condition of her health again forced her to resign and she returned to Toledo where the climate brought relief to her asthmatic condition. This time, she remained until 1873 when she once more became manager. She assumed every detail of the task and on January 7, 1874 the chronicler stated : "Mother Deschamps has been in the basement for the last four days. She has just had 170 hogs slaughtered and quartered".

Some two months later, on March 19, she participated in a 'historic pilgrimage' organized in order to obtain the construction of the chapel. Pilgrims faced great difficulty in coming to the muddy spot where the building would be erected. With a spade Sister Manseau dug up a bit of earth. Sixteen elderly men did likewise. A medal of St. Joseph and a cross were buried in the ground. Mother Deschamps was given the honor of blessing the cross. Recorded in the minutes is the following note:

At this time when manpower is so scarce, we wished to begin this project in the company of paralytics, the handicapped, the blind and the lame in order to show the



great trust we have in the Carpenter of Nazareth to whom we entrust this enterprise.

Eight days later, Mother Deschamps was appointed Director of Formation.<sup>6</sup> Though surprised, she readily accepted the assignment in a spirit of obedience. Most of the sixty some novices and postulants were ignorant of the fact that the new Director had once been Superior General. Some experienced a certain uneasiness towards her for when Mother Deschamps was described, there was "only one shadow on the picture": an austere and even severe appearance only gave a false impression, but one soon discovered her keen intelligence and kindness of heart hidden beneath her apparent aloofness.

For three and one half years, the Director of Formation diligently prepared the new generation of Grey Nuns, teaching more by example than by words, by her fidelity to every observance, and by her ever present predilection for the service of the poor. Her duties in this office were interrupted when the choice of the capitulars fell on her in the elections of October 1, 1877. Mother Deschamps once more accepted the heavy responsibility of leading the Grey Nun family in the ways of regularity, of obedience and of mortification, and especially in a spirit of perfect union according to the ultimate recommendation of the Foundress.

— 1878 —

Although the duties of Superior General were no longer unfamiliar to Mother Deschamps, the responsibilities nevertheless, had intensified as a result of the accrued number of Sisters and of missions.

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<sup>6</sup> Sr. Suzanne Versailles had had to resign for health reasons.

Mother Deschamps, despite her fifty-eight years, assumed her duties with courage and determination. During her term of office, she would impart to her community, a renewed zeal for the Grey Nun ideal. She was the very soul of the Institute. Every important decision was ratified by her, so that this period of history bears the imprint of her strong personality. For this reason, it is necessary to understand the moral character of this illustrious Grey Nun before undertaking to summarize her work.

The General Chapter begun on October 1, was interrupted the following day to allow the Superior General to pay homage to the elderly Bishop of Sault-au-Récollet. The saintly Bishop Bourget received the members of the General Council with great kindness and gladly gave them his blessing.<sup>7</sup>

On the morning of this day, the Grey Nuns had received a visit from the Apostolic Delegate, Bishop Conroy, who had promised to come and meet the new Council. He was accompanied by his secretary, Father Reddy, who apparently found a cousin among the Grey Nuns, Sister Sweeney.<sup>8</sup> Bishop Conroy was delighted to meet missionaries who had served in the far West and invited them to express themselves in Indian dialects.

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<sup>7</sup> Circ. mens. 1877-80, pp. 10-11.

<sup>8</sup> This Grey Nun's history is most interesting. Born in Birr, Diocese of Killaloe, Ireland, Ellen had not been able to follow her sister, Sister Carroll to the novitiate because she had to care for her sick father who passed away at age 86. Ellen entered the novitiate in Montreal on May 17, 1876. Sister Carroll had been assigned to Lac-La-Biche and was to leave on May 31. For a short while, the two sisters could be together. Sister Sweeney caught a "bad cold" towards the end of the year. The Superior offered to send her back to Ireland in the hope that her native climate would allow her to escape the dreaded and often fatal "consumption". The novice instead requested the favor of remaining with the Grey



Sisters Hamel, Clapin and Agnès complied gracefully and the distinguished guest congratulated them for their achievement. His Excellency expressed his amusement when the orphans were presenting their homage and a small boy refused to give up the beautiful bouquet destined for the distinguished visitor. He clutched it to himself and returned triumphantly to his place.

On the following day, October 3, Mother Deschamps, faithful to tradition, went on a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame-de-Bonsecours. She then made brief visits to the Sister Communities of St. Hyacinthe, Ottawa and Quebec. The Chapter ended on October 10. The Superior General then reported the highlights to a gathering of 120 Sisters. In the course of the years ahead, steps would be taken to have our Constitutions approved;<sup>9</sup> the circular letters, till then written by hand, would henceforth be printed and would give all the Sisters an account of the activities of the various houses, especially the more distant ones. According to the conviction of the Superior, these were proving to be a source of blessings for the whole Institute. The Superior General concluded with a recommendation entirely typical of her:

I recommend to you our dear needy persons; be mothers to them, do not count your sacrifices. You owe them the relief and the comfort which they have a right to expect from you.

Aware that she owed herself to her far-away Sisters as well as to those about her, on November 7, Mother

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<sup>8</sup> ...Nuns until her death — which occurred on May 4, 1878. Sr Ellen Sweeney was 26 years old. It was the custom at the Grey Nuns that when two girls from the same family joined the community, the first would retain the father's name and the second would adopt the mother's name.

<sup>9</sup> The Institute was approved by Rome in 1865.

Deschamps left for Salem and Lawrence in the United States and returned for the "recollection" which ended on November 21, feast of the Presentation. There again, she showed her reverence for the past:

Let us often call to mind the original commitment,<sup>10</sup> she urged the Sisters, the inspiring chapters so worthy of respect which were bequeathed to us by our founding Mothers. They contain the dispositions which should influence our conduct. They summarize beautifully the holiness of our way of life. Tomorrow, we will renew the same commitment which we took on the day of our profession. I urge you also to practise faithfully the virtues of unity, charity, prudence and discretion in your conversations in order to be truly worthy daughters of the same Mother.

Mother Deschamps' solicitude always extended to her Sisters stationed in distant missions. On November 23, she left for Toledo, a place so dear to her heart since she had been one of the foundresses in 1855. At the time the Sisters there were facing grave difficulties. The Bishop of Cleveland wanted the hospital to become a diocesan institution. The Sisters alone had been responsible for heavy loans made from Canada for this foundation so they opposed the Bishop's views.<sup>11</sup>

All the houses in the vicinity of Montreal were visited in turn by the Superior. In January 1878, she was at St. Benoît where she attended the official opening of the Youville Hospice which had been moved "into town", near the parish church.

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<sup>10</sup> The commitment formulated by Mother d'Youville on February 2, 1745 and which has since been signed by every Grey Nun on the day of her profession.

<sup>11</sup> The debate would last till 1888 when Cardinal Gibbons, representing the Holy See, ruled in favor of the Grey Nuns on Oct. 6. (Archives S. Vincent Hosp., Toledo, 1888).



In the intervals between her visits, Mother Deschamps closely supervised the building of the chapel by Victor Bourgeau, the architect, and the Perreault masons on the "muddy" grounds of the Mother House. The health of the Superior General was greatly compromised by the excessive activity and in February she became gravely ill from what was diagnosed as a tumor of the throat. An operation prescribed by Doctors Schmidt and Fenwick was not successful. When a second operation was proposed, Mother Deschamps requested a postponement. On March 19, the tumor was removed but the tracheotomy performed left the patient in a state of alarming weakness. The courageous Superior was not disconcerted by this trial but rather showed greater solicitude for the good management of the community. She prepared to resign her position but the Sisters insisted that she first consult her physicians. The latter, in turn sought a consultation with a young colleague, Doctor Alphonse Deschamps.<sup>12</sup> The half-brother was not in favor of her resignation alleging that inactivity would result in a weakening which would be detrimental to the recovery that could be expected and that with the help of her assistants, the Superior remained capable of fulfilling the obligations of her mandate. Everyone agreed with his opinion. Soon, Mother Deschamps recovered her strength and to everyone's satisfaction, she remained the general animator of the Congregation and coordinator of all its works.

On December 23, 1878, she attended the blessing of the chapel dedicated to the Holy Cross. The feast of Christmas was solemnly celebrated there two days later. A lamp placed before the altar of St. Joseph was to burn

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<sup>12</sup> Alphonse and Alexandre, the Superior's step brothers, having become orphans had been taken in by the Grey Nuns. The first chose the medical profession while the second joined the Company of the Sulpicians.

during an entire year to express the gratitude of the Sisters for the success of this enterprise.

Mother d'Youville's shrine was placed in a room close to the chapel. It was a room made private to avoid anticipating the Church's decision. The Community Room which had served as a place of worship till now, was returned to its original destination, and the altar of the Eternal Father, built at the request of Mother d'Youville herself during the dark period of 1760,<sup>13</sup> was installed there in a place of honor.

Eager to comfort in their exile, the heroic women of the Mackenzie district who had not been visited since the foundation of the mission in 1867, she delegated her assistant, Sister Charlebois who set out on the long circuit on August 25, 1879.

Two months later, on October 22, the basement and the first floor of the central wing of the Mother House having been completed up to St. Mathieu Street, the elderly men were able to move into their new quarters. This great event was celebrated by a fine meal served by the Superior General herself.

— 1880 —

Although she had been elected Superior General only two years previously, Mother Deschamps had successfully supervised the establishment of the chapel and the central wing of the Mother House. She had also presided over the transfer of two houses namely that of Hospice St. Charles to Montreal and that of Hospice Youville to St. Benoît.

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<sup>13</sup> This altar had been given to a shelter managed by Miss Bissonnet, but it had been recovered in 1849 (Circ. mens. 1877-80 pp. 302-303).



As for Hospice Lajemmerais in Varennes, founded in 1859, it was transferred in 1871 from the "Hôtel des Salines" to the Girard dwelling near the parish church, and more important, close to the birthplace of Christophe Dufrost de La Jemmerais' eldest daughter. As the new house was too small, some of the furniture and linen had been stored in a nearby shed; but unfortunately, on March 4, 1879, the shed was destroyed by fire.

Monsignor Désautels, the pastor, an eminent benefactor of Hospice Lajemmerais as well as Mr. Bourbonnais and Mr. Lorion, refused to allow it to be closed. He was supported in his efforts by Mother Deschamps who wished to continue the work and to honor in a worthy manner the memory of the Mother of the poor. Everyone recalled how the Foundress of that Institution had intervened, when early in 1880, Father Birs, former pastor of St. Sulpice parish, had retired at the hospice as a patient and benefactor. This was a providential help which removed all obstacles, and the Superior General did not hesitate, during her January visit, to pledge the funds required for the construction of a larger facility which would fulfill the needs of the population of Varennes and the surrounding area.<sup>14</sup>

Mother Deschamps, who was both Superior General of the Institute and local Superior at the Mother House, experienced ever-increasing responsibilities but she did not shun any of them. She visited faithfully all the missions in Quebec and in the United States in turn, recording their progress or applying corrections as the case may be. Each Sister in the mission was accorded an interview as prescribed by the Constitutions.

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<sup>14</sup> Hospices in those days sheltered elderly persons, orphans and often parish schools.

The two houses in Toledo were visited during February and March. At the shelter as well as at the hospital, she was able to appreciate the work of her Sisters despite a situation which was becoming ever more complicated.<sup>15</sup>

On her return from Ohio, the Superior General presided at the annual retreats occurring in April and attended to the final details concerning the participation of the Grey Nuns in the founding of Notre Dame Hospital.<sup>16</sup>

She was subjected to a great personal trial in the death of her half-brother Alphonse, the physician, who died of pleuro-pneumonia, at age thirty-nine. He was anointed by his brother, the Sulpician, in the presence of their elder sister who now had the task of comforting Alphonse's two orphaned children.<sup>17</sup>

On May 24, Mother Deschamps directed her travels toward the Canadian West. These houses had been visited officially by Sister McMullen, Assistant General in 1859. Sister Charlebois, also assistant, had been delegated there in 1871, but the death of Mother Slocombe, occurring on June 22, 1872, had required her prompt return. Mother Dupuis, the first Superior General to travel to Canada's

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<sup>15</sup> See note 11 above. During this visit, Sister Roy, secretary to the Superior General, was filled with admiration at the invention of the century: the telephone installed at the hospital. By means of this invention, she states, our Sisters are able to call the doctors who live far from the hospital (*Circ. mens.* 1877-80 p. 506). This was in 1880. It would be eight more years before it became possible to call the Mother House from Toledo.

<sup>16</sup> The history of this foundation will be summarized later.

<sup>17</sup> We recall that in 1855, Mother Deschamps had taken in her two step-brothers at the General Hospital. Dr. Alphonse had advised rejection of the Superior General's resignation in 1878 and in 1879 had also saved the life of his Sulpician brother stricken by a life-threatening illness. (Letter of Sr. Charlebois to Mother Deschamps, Sept. 12, 1880).



then known limits, made only a brief sojourn there in 1877.

Mother Deschamps was accompanied by two future missionaries: Sister Elodie Arseneault and Sister Anne-Marie Giquello. The latter, a native of Brittany, had come from France in 1875 with Bishop Henri Faraud who had been recruiting generous persons willing to devote themselves to the missions in the Canadian North.<sup>18</sup>

The means of transportation had improved considerably so that travelling now did not entail the difficulties experienced in 1844. Nevertheless, it was necessary to make a long detour in order to take advantage of the railway system. The Superior's itinerary provided for a first stop at the mission of Our Lady of Sorrows in Fort Totten which was under the jurisdiction of the St. Boniface vicariate. The circuit was made by train to Fort Huron, then to Chicago and from there to St. Paul, Minnesota, and finally to Jamestown, Dakota where the railway line ended. Major McLaughlin met the Sisters there in person and they continued the journey in his wagon drawn by a team of horses. They proceeded with a caravan consisting of forty carts drawn by oxen. The two young missionaries mentioned earlier bemoaned the fact that they had to remain behind because there was no place in the carts.

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<sup>18</sup> Several books have been written about the Northern missions, one of them being "Femmes Héroïques" (Heroic Women) by Father Duchaussois. Another, "Le Soleil Brille a Minuit" (The Sun Shines at Midnight) deals more especially with the heroic lives of the Grey Nuns in the Northwest Territories. Sr. Giquello would not attain the far Northern missions. After ten years in Fort Totten she would become the director for the little Auxiliary Sisters. As for Sr. Arseneault, she likewise devoted herself in Fort Totten for thirty-eight years, and died there on May 16, 1918. (A.S.G.M. doss, des Srs.)

Nothing disturbed the silence of the vast prairies, not even the song of the birds. As far as the eye could see, neither dwellings nor trees were in sight but only the blue sky and the grassy plains, noted Sister Giquello.<sup>19</sup>

Finally after two days of travelling, a white house appeared in the distance. "It is the convent," explained the Major. Mother Deschamps was unable to withhold her tears. "Is it possible that our Sisters are so far away, so isolated? The poor dears!" she exclaimed.

Alerted by the children of the Sioux tribe who had recognized the caravan approaching, the bell convened all the students and the adults of the neighborhood. The five missionaries were visibly moved at the sight of Mother Deschamps who was herself overwhelmed as she followed them to the chapel for the singing of the Magnificat.<sup>20</sup> The Superior General placed on the altar the statue of Our Lady of Providence, which she had brought with her and which had witnessed the consecration of the first Grey Nuns. The fact that they recorded it in their chronicles is evidence that this gesture was very meaningful to them. The Superior General admired the beautiful voices of the Sioux children. She also observed that they chewed gum continually but this was not the end of her surprises. In the course of the afternoon, she would attend a wedding. A short time previously, a young Sioux had confided to the Major that he wanted to marry one of the girls living with the Sisters. The latter had set a firm condition: that the suitor first build himself a house. The Sisters thought that

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<sup>19</sup> Letter of June 1, 1880.

<sup>20</sup> In 1878, two wings of 40ft x 26ft were added to the mission; one for the hospital, with the chapel on the upper floor, the other for the kitchen and the laundry. (Circ. mens. 1877-80 p. 204.) Father Bonin, a priest from Montreal, had ministered at the school and hospital while also having charge of the Pembina Mission. In 1878, he had been replaced by the Benedictine priests of Meinard, Indiana.



this would spell the end of his aspirations considering the proverbial apathy of the Natives. This time they were mistaken, for the young man came forth to claim his due on the very day of Mother General's arrival. "My house is built, I want to marry today at four o'clock." Sister Allard, taken aback, wondered about the wedding apparel which was as yet non-existent. In great haste she set to work, and as if by miracle, the bride appeared bedecked with a calico dress, a veil, a wreath and gloves. The Major and his wife served as witnesses while Father Claude blessed their marriage.

During her two week stay, the Superior General renewed her acquaintance with the Sisters and familiarized herself with the ways and customs of the country. The Sisters were salaried by the American Government according to the duties they performed. The Major of Fort Totten represented the local authority and, to date, the Sisters were gratified by the good relationships that reigned between them and those in charge. But it would not always be thus. The day would come when local authorities would prohibit the wearing of the religious garb and would order the removal of the crucifix from the classrooms. The Sisters faced these storms courageously just as they had experienced other trials in the past. The four foundresses who were still present at the time of Mother Deschamps' visit had sown the good seed "amid tears and fears". At the beginning, they had had to sleep on the floor, build for themselves some rustic furniture, cultivate the soil to avert a famine, and especially, they had gradually to win the confidence of the Sioux children and their parents. The students were literally kings and masters at home, and therefore did not submit easily to discipline at school. They sometimes resorted to lies and calumnies against their educators. They would even hold the Sisters responsible for the epidemics which erupted from time to time.

One day Sister Drapeau's life was threatened. She had been sent to pacify an angry chief, but the timing of her intervention was not well chosen. He had just counted his eagle feathers tinted with the blood of the whites he had killed. Pointing a gun at the messenger he threatened to kill her but an invincible force prevented him from pulling the trigger. He began chanting a war song followed by jugglery during which Sister Drapeau escaped. The chief began to pursue her but fortunately, white men were able to restrain him and forced him to go home.<sup>21</sup> This adventure did not attenuate Sister Drapeau's zeal. One day she was travelling a distance of eighteen miles to assist a wounded man when her "untamed horse" sank into deep snow. The valiant nurse did not hesitate to harness herself and pull until she had freed the horse from this predicament, losing one of her shoes in the struggle. She reached her destination in a somewhat dishevelled state; the neophyte was impressed. "See how she loves us," he said to his wife. Then addressing himself to the Sister, he said: "I am soon going up there, and when I see God, I will ask him to have you by my side in heaven".<sup>22</sup>

As the missionaries related their adventures, Mother Deschamps listened with evident pride. She wrote to the Sisters at the Mother House

I marvel at what is happening in the Dakota forests since we have been working at evangelization there and I am extremely happy with the contribution our Sisters have made. In the six years they have been working here, they have received close to three hundred children. All the

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<sup>21</sup> An account by Sr. Renaud, Sr. Drapeau's companion. 1844-1944, Sr. M. Guichon, pp. 47-48.

<sup>22</sup> Sister Drapeau's biography A.S.G.M.



patients cared for at the hospital have been baptized and about six hundred Sioux now practise the Catholic faith.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, the Superior General could not foresee that fire would destroy the building on Friday, February 16, 1883. The hardships of the early days would again be experienced all over again by the missionaries. They would have to find refuge in sheds and store-houses until the new school was built and ready for occupancy about 1887. As for the hospital, it would be reopened on the site where the old school had stood but would have to close on August 30, 1890 for lack of funds. The boys' school was moved to the Fort and became a Protestant Institution and the Sisters no longer received the students' grants which had constituted the only source of revenue for the hospital. They did however, continue to be in charge of the girls' education.

The dark days were dispelled and the missionaries enjoyed fully the presence of their Superior General. However, on June 15 she bade them farewell. Four missionaries and four "good Canadian girls" (the legendary "Marys" mentioned earlier) accompanied her as far as the Cheyenne River. As the weather was superb, the noon meal was taken on the prairie grass. Then, it was time to part. It was a silent separation, as emotion gripped the hearts of everyone. Sister Lajemmerais whose health was failing, travelled to St. Boniface with the Superior General. They arrived there three days later on June 18. Since the railway station was precisely on the property of the Archbishop's residence<sup>24</sup> — close to the provincial house, they did not have far to go. "The weather was magnificent," Sister Curran stated. "The moon rose in all its beauty before our house, its light enhancing our joy".<sup>25</sup> Archbishop Taché

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<sup>23</sup> Letter of Mother Deschamps 1880.

<sup>24</sup> Letter of Mother Deschamps, undated.

<sup>25</sup> Letter of July 7, 1880

was the first to greet the Mother General, then the Sisters embraced her.

The official visitation began the very next day, but nevertheless she found time to write a few words to the Mother House:

St. Boniface greatly resembles the Island of St. Bernard at Châteauguay, especially the property where the house is situated. The Archbishop's residence is well constructed and is about three hundred feet from the road which is bordered by a magnificent avenue of trees. The cathedral is a short distance away. The vicarial house, dating from 1846, is of white-washed wood. Nearby, are the hospital and the boarding school on property obtained by Bishop Provencher, at the place where the Red River and the Assiniboine merge. Fourteen boats and steamers sail constantly on the waters of these two rivers.

As she was writing these words, Mother Deschamps undoubtedly recalled the four foundresses whom she had known personally and who had arrived on the banks of the Red River on June 21, 1844. Sister Valade, who had founded the St. Boniface houses, had been the young Sister Deschamps' supervisor at the domain of Châteauguay, whence the comparison with the Island of St. Bernard. Whatever the case may be, Mother had little time for reminiscing for the program prepared by the Sisters was indeed heavy. By June 19, she was welcomed with joyful songs by the thirty-six pupils at the boarding school. The unexpected arrival of Archbishop Taché accompanied by the legendary Father Lacombe, o.m.i., caused the reception to be shortened.

On June 21, the thirty-sixth anniversary of the arrival of the first Grey Nuns in Manitoba was observed by a formal school holiday. The next day, a telegram arrived which aroused apprehension for a moment. Eight years earlier



such a message had announced the death of Mother Slocombe. But this time, it was a message of joy. After twenty years of waiting, the Constitutions of the Grey Nuns were finally approved by the Holy See. To mark this memorable event, a great celebration was organized for June 25. Archbishop Taché celebrated the Eucharist which was followed by the chanting of a fervent TE DEUM and once again the house was lighted up as darkness fell. Magic lanterns decked the belfry and trees along the stately entrance to the convent.

On June 30, the year-end distribution of prizes to the students was presided by the Archbishop. It was then that he revealed the secret that had till now been so carefully guarded by the Superior General.

My dear children, he said, I experience a special joy in congratulating you for success in your studies. This exceptional joy is due to the presence here of Reverend Mother Deschamps, Superior General.

Thirty-six years ago, travellers did not come to St. Boniface by train as they do today, nor by steamboat, nor even by carts across the prairies. The only mode of transportation was the birch bark canoe with its accompanying fatigue, its worries and its dangers. Generous persons did not hesitate in the face of obstacles. Four Sisters of Charity willingly accepted the sacrifices which God inspired them to make and landed at St. Boniface on June 21, 1844. Only four of them came, but the number who had volunteered for this mission was much greater. Among these was, I believe, the Reverend Sister Deschamps who has always shown a keen interest in these missions.

The Superior General complained in a whisper that a secret of her life had been revealed. The Archbishop went on aloud:

Reverend Mother is complaining that I am revealing her secrets but instead of repenting, I am going to reveal another which is so personal to me that I can disclose it without indiscretion. On June 24, 1845, another birch bark canoe left Lachine. Among the passengers there were two Grey Nun novices, an Oblate priest and a brother from the same Congregation, by the name of Taché. Sister Deschamps accompanied them as far as Lachine. There, someone offered her a piece of pemican. Sister Deschamps took a taste of it and I must admit that she made a face, but this was only a twisting of the lips and not of the heart, nor of the will, for she said to me: "Brother, you are so fortunate. I wish I were in your place."

Thirty-five years have passed since then, and in the rapid flow of time, a wealth of good deeds and merits has accumulated. It is therefore our duty first of all to thank God and then to thank the Sisters chosen by Him to multiply these advantages in our midst. As first pastor of this diocese, in my name, in the name of the Church, in the name of Bishop Provencher who founded the establishment of the Grey Nuns in St. Boniface, in the name of my clergy, of the children, of the poor, the orphans, the sick, I thank you, Reverend Mother, and I thank the noble Institute which you direct with such wisdom for all the good which the Grey Nuns have been doing in St. Boniface in the course of these thirty-six years.<sup>26</sup>

The Superior General's heart was filled with joy on hearing such praise from the Pastor. In the days to follow she would see for herself the works established by her Sisters in the West.

On July 1, she visited the St. François-Xavier Convent in White Horse Plain, founded in 1850 by two of the pioneers, Sisters Lagrave and Lafrance. Mother Deschamps arrived there by boat for the distribution of prizes— but

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<sup>26</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1877-80 pp. 572-573.



there were no prizes so the Sisters had to improvise. The students received 'medals from the Queen' that is, fifty, twenty-five or ten cent coins mounted on a ribbon and which constituted medals of honor.<sup>27</sup>

On July 5, the Superior General directed her steps towards St. Boniface Hospital which had been established in 1871. Four years previously the Henry Clark house had been purchased increasing the bed capacity from four to ten beds. With legitimate pride, the hospital report indicated that eighty-eight patients had been admitted, many of whom were laborers employed at the construction of the railway.<sup>28</sup>

The following day, July 6, St. Norbert Convent founded in 1858, welcomed Mother Deschamps with the honors worthy of a head of state. Triumphal arches were raised, flags and banners decked the pathway. The pastor, Father J.N. Ritchot, accompanied by Fathers Forget and Doucet from St. Boniface College, participated in the event. The examination of the students lasted for five hours and this time, magnificent prizes had arrived in time to reward those who were successful. Father Ritchot congratulated the Grey Nuns and Father Adolphe Forget, director of the College, added a word of personal appreciation. Mother Deschamps who had always shown a keen interest in the active career of this young Sulpician, congratulated him on

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<sup>27</sup> Letter of July 13, 1880, Sr. Curran to the Mother House.

<sup>28</sup> A.S.G.M. Hist. Hôp. St. Boniface

his success and encouraged him to pursue his good work.<sup>29</sup>

On the evening of July 7, Mother Deschamps arrived at St. Vital School. On the following day a heavy rain reduced the number of students to about fifteen. They succeeded however, in conveying hearty thanks to the Superior General for the education they were receiving in this modest school over the past twenty years.

The Superior General returned to St. Boniface July 14, while preparations were being made to celebrate the feast of Ste. Julie, her namesake. The modest provincial house which, for many years had sheltered a multitude of good works, still harbored the orphanage and the hospice. It was the little orphan girls who offered Mother Deschamps a bouquet of flowers for the occasion. One of the elderly residents took the initiative of offering his respects to "everybody's mother". He was followed by two notable visitors: Archbishop Taché and Bishop Laflèche, Bishop of three Rivers and a former missionary whose arrival on July 6 coincided with that of General Sherman from the United States.

After having presided at the annual retreat, Mother Deschamps left for Montreal via Toledo on July 27; Sister Curran writing the same day stated that there was now "a great void" in the house.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Adolphe Forget was born at Terrebonne on Nov. 30, 1835, and on Jan. 6, 1875 was ordained to the priesthood after long years of waiting. His priestly career was brief as he died on June 9, 1881. For further details concerning Father Forget see the book entitled "Mother Jane Slocombe," by Sister Estelle Mitchell.

<sup>30</sup> The void would be somewhat compensated by the reopening of the novitiate closed five years previously and which would soon admit three new recruits.



The Superior General had brought joy to St. Boniface and in Toledo, she had tried to put an end to the serious difficulties. No one suspected however, that she had come to a grave decision concerning the Northern missions.

Alarming reports had come from her delegate, Sister Charlebois. The Sisters had been overworked and undernourished and their health was threatened; so the kindly Superior General requested Bishop Faraud, the apostolic vicar of these far off regions, to organize the return of the Sisters to coincide with that of the visiting delegate.

Mother Deschamps realized how sad the missionaries themselves would be, for they had so 'carefully' concealed their privations and suffering; but she also knew that Providence had its designs. Providence would in fact, intervene in a unique fashion. The letter reached the Bishop only after the Assistant General had left and the rigorous winter had rendered travel impossible. The 'rescue' of the northern missions had been effected thanks to one of the inconveniences most often deplored in the land of the 'great white silence' - the delay in mail service. The northern missions would be placed under the jurisdiction of the St. Albert vicariate and the Grey Nuns would continue their fruitful apostolate.<sup>31</sup>

Mother Deschamps had arrived at Montreal at approximately ten o'clock in the evening of Aug. 3. Hence, only the next day did she notice the fence that had been built on either side of the alley leading to the chapel, an alley which was two hundred feet long by eighty-two wide. An iron grating resting on a cement base formed the entrance. Four pillars supported the main gate and the two

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<sup>31</sup> For further details concerning this matter, refer to *Le Soleil Brille à Minuit*, pp. 99-101.

side gates. The lot itself was surrounded by a wooden fence surmounted by lattice work and painted grey.<sup>32</sup>

The enclosure was finished — but not the building. The Sisters longed for the completion of the construction. Space was already scarce in this convent which now housed some eight hundred residents.<sup>33</sup> The problems relative to material concerns eventually reached the Superior General's desk and she attended to them promptly. However, she always respected priorities. Hardly had she returned from her long voyage, when she left for Lawrence, Massachusetts, in the United States, where her presence was required.

### **The French Language School in Lawrence, 1880.**

Father Boucher, pastor of Lawrence, wished to give the francophone children of his parish the opportunity of receiving elementary instruction in their own language. Sisters McKenna, Chassé and Bourgeault were assigned to this mission. Sister Ste-Marguerite would join them a few weeks later.<sup>34</sup> As of the first day, two hundred students were enrolled.

When the Superior General visited the Institution, she was favorably impressed with the success of the school which had been in operation for only two years. The material conditions however, were less than satisfactory, since private schools were not subsidized. Parents and teachers attempted to remedy this situation by holding bazaars and other fund-raising events. The school would undoubtedly have survived, but for the fact that public charities had to be channelled to the Augustinian Order

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<sup>32</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1887-90, p. 609.

<sup>33</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1881-83, p. 8

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 1877-80 p. 636



which was under the threatening cloud of utter financial ruin. After three years of existence, the program was obliged to discontinue in 1883 <sup>35</sup> at the end of the school year.

### **Notre Dame Hospital, Montreal, 1880.**

A very important event occurring in 1880 would undoubtedly be a landmark in the history of the Grey Nuns, namely their collaboration in the founding of Notre Dame Hospital. It is irrelevant here to elaborate on the controversy which was in full effervescence at that time. Moreover, the designated chronicler, who was a faithful interpreter of her Superior General's directives, declared pointedly:

We have always remained neutral in the difficulties between the Laval establishment and the Medical School.<sup>36</sup>

In fact, this neutrality of the Grey Nuns concerning certain controversial matters dated back to some twenty years. Mother Slocombe had recommended that the Sisters observe discreet silence relative to opposing views, for example over the division of the Island of Montreal into various parishes. These instructions had been faithfully observed so that when Mother Deschamps accepted the administration of the new hospital in the name of the Community, she could truthfully state:

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<sup>35</sup> Under Mother Slocombe's administration in 1868, the Grey Nuns had accepted a foundation in Lawrence - the Protectory of Mary Immaculate. The closure of the parochial school did not compromise the existence of the Protectory.

<sup>36</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1881-83, p. 397.

We are motivated entirely by the desire to dedicate ourselves to suffering humanity and thus to comply with the desire of our chief Pastor.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, Mother Deschamps figured as an innovator since never before had it been the custom for the Sisters to serve in an institution which did not belong to the community. On the other hand, people could not imagine that a hospital could function without Sisters. In supporting the initiative of Dr. E.P. Lachapelle and his colleagues and of Father N. Rousselot, p.s.s., Mother Deschamps was able to demonstrate how lay people, clergy and religious could unite their efforts to assure the success of an institution for the relief of suffering. The collaboration of the Grey Nuns approved by Mother Deschamps won her the title of Co-foundress of Notre Dame Hospital.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, the cosmopolitan character of the new institution stirred up the zeal of the Grey Nuns. Had Mother d'Youville not served a motley population for thirty-four years in the General Hospital founded by the Charon Brothers but which was under government authority? Furthermore, Father Rousselot's own financial contribution and the keen interest he showed towards this Institution based in his parish must certainly have influenced the decision of the Grey Nuns. In the span of the previous 150 years, the Sulpicians had created many works of Charity in Montreal and entrusted them to the daughters of Mother d'Youville.

For their part, the medical staff consisting of fourteen doctors, contributed generously to the project. They relinquished their fees for four or five years in order to

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 397.

<sup>38</sup> *Hist. Hôp. N. Dame*, Dr. E.P. Benoît, p. 15.



assure the existence of this hospital with its fifty beds<sup>39</sup> for the poor plus twenty more for patients able to pay the cost of hospitalization.<sup>40</sup>

Since erecting a new building was out of the question, the founders chose to use one already in existence, the Donegana Hotel, which had lost its original splendor and whose owners wished to sell. The founders purchased it from the Furness estate for \$20,000.00 and also the neighboring property belonging to Mr. R.J. Devins for \$10,000.00. Father Rousselot supplied the necessary warranty and in addition, personally assumed the cost of food, heating and lighting for the whole establishment.<sup>41</sup>

The new hospital, consisting of four separate buildings, occupied most of the land between Notre Dame Street and Champs-de-Mars Street.<sup>42</sup> It was close to Hospice St. Charles which, since 1877, was being administered by the Grey Nuns.

Mother Deschamps exercised sound psychology in her choice of the first Sisters to be assigned to Notre Dame Hospital. Sisters Perrin, Olier, Hickey, Hainault, Panet and Ste-Angèle would be recorded in the community's history.

Physically, Sister Eulalie Perrin was petite<sup>43</sup> but she stood tall by the quality of her intelligence, by her great

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<sup>39</sup> M.T. Harel au Card. Simeoni, 15 avril 1880.

<sup>40</sup> Union médicale, août 1880, pp. 369-374.

<sup>41</sup> Union médicale août 1880 pp. 369-374. This Sulpician used \$41,000.00 of his personal funds for this project. (Hist. Hôp. N. Dame, Sr. Morin, p. 1)

<sup>42</sup> Circ. mens 1881-83, p. 398-399.

<sup>43</sup> Sr. Perrin was often teased about her small size. Sr. Labrèche, the chronicler would say: "Sr. Perrin is the size of my arm." On the other hand, it is known that Sr. Labrèche's arm could not have been very large since she used to say of herself: "I am so thin that I could be eaten on Friday without the law of abstinence being violated!" (Corr. gen. 1871)

esteem for religious life and by the steadfast determination with which she accomplished the tasks entrusted to her. These were both numerous and important since she had been involved in the foundation of the Sisters of Charity of Quebec in 1849 and in that of Sandwich in 1857. Having returned to Montreal four years later, she assumed the responsibility of the dispensary after having headed the Pharmacy Department at the Mother House. She developed a pancreatic emulsion called Pancreatin, which was patented both in Canada and in the United States. As well, she displayed outstanding talent for the care of the sick,<sup>44</sup> and remarkable insights in the discernment of the aptitudes of her companions.

Sister Perrin gave of herself unsparingly and her example both stimulated and encouraged others. She had the gift of arousing enthusiasm and directing efforts towards a single goal, inspired by a single ideal.

Sister Olier for her part, had vast experience concerning the keeping of records. She had organized the secretariate at the Mother House and for several years had written the chronicles of the community. She was gifted with an exceptional memory, and history credits her with the account of facts not recorded by anyone else. To the new hospital she would contribute her talent for writing and for judicious counselling and would assist the Superior in her multiple tasks.

Sister Hickey gained distinction by the universal charity she had displayed at St. Vincent Hospital in Toledo where she had been one of the foundresses in 1855. Assigned to the care of the sick, she was also "on call" for out-patients.

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<sup>44</sup> Mother Slocombe had, so to say, entrusted to her the care of Mother Deschamps, her Assistant, who in 1869 had had to resign her position. Sr. Perrin accompanied her to Toledo where the climate proved beneficial for the patient.



Nothing disheartened this courageous worker, but it was for the ingenuity and the tireless quality of her charity that she was remembered wherever she had served. At Notre Dame, she was quite at home.

As for Sister Hainault, professed since the summer of 1862, she was noted for her joyful nature, her intensity at work, and especially for her kind and sensitive heart. Assigned to the men's ward, it was said that she gave to all, especially to the most unfortunate the care of an attentive mother. Her devotedness was short-lived however, for she contracted typhoid fever from her patients and died on February 28, 1881 at the age of forty-four.

Sister Panet, née Juliana Casgrain, had only three years of religious profession when she was assigned to the dispensary and to the pharmacy. Consequently, she was initiated to the care of the sick probably under the direction of Sister Perrin herself. She excelled and would later become Superior at the hospital - orphanage in Morristown (N.J.), United States, then at the Patronage Youville and at Varennes, Quebec. But for her, the care of abandoned children would be a priority. Thanks to her initiative and to her persistent requests, the Provincial Government would pass its first adoption law in 1909. Born of a high-ranking and influential family, Sister Panet was noted for her reserve, her pleasant and courteous manner, and for her total availability which revealed the depth of her charity.

As for Sister Marguerite Papineau, known as Sister Ste-Angèle, she was the youngest child and only daughter in a family of five. Because she had been long desired, she had been pampered. At age eighteen, she was already an accomplished young lady, well educated and gracious in manner. Her parents fondly hoped she would marry, hence they were surprised and saddened upon learning her decision to join the Grey Nuns. However, this Christian family did not oppose God's choice. Sister Marguerite

therefore entered the novitiate on December 7, 1877 and gave herself irrevocably to the Lord on May 10, 1880. Her assignment to Notre Dame overwhelmed her. "It will be most difficult to sense the aroma of my mother's good soup," she explained, for her family lived close to the hospital. But Sister Ste-Angèle was prepared for heroism. Two years later, she would be missioned to the difficult mission of Chipewyan in the Northwest Territories. She would spend thirty years there performing various duties including that of cook. She deplored the fact that it was impossible for her to vary the menu and sometimes could offer the children only 'green soup' made from boiled herbs. How she would have liked to serve good pea soup!<sup>45</sup> Sister Ste-Angèle wistfully remembered the savory taste of "home-made soup."

The five Sisters knew what their roles and responsibilities would be. At the hospital, they would be responsible for the internal management, with the authority to hire as many employees as were necessary. The doctors of course, would be responsible for the medical aspects, while the board of Directors would provide the necessary financial resources for proper functioning. The task was not easy for Messrs. C.P. Hebert, J.R. Thibodeau, E.A. Génèreux, E.J. Barbeau and B. Tansey but they dedicated themselves joyfully.<sup>46</sup>

As for the interns, on leaving the conference room, they would readily go to the wards for their clinical training. Moreover, they would take on the duties normally performed by nurses such as applying dressings, administering medications, giving treatments.<sup>47</sup> Doctor H.E. Desrosiers was the first doctor connected with the

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<sup>45</sup> The details concerning these Sisters are contained in their respective files. A.S.G.M.

<sup>46</sup> Hist. Hôp. Notre - Dame, Dr. E.P. Benoît p. 18.

<sup>47</sup> Ec. d'inf. Hôp. N. Dame, A.F. - Angers, pp. 23-24.



hospital in this way, and his presence assured immediate help in emergency cases.<sup>48</sup>

Before this organization plan could be put into effect, it was important first to clear away the debris, left by masons, plumbers, painters and other tradesmen who had been working in the building for almost a year. The old Donegana Hotel, which had been the ultra-fashionable meeting place for the elite of society, could no longer be recognized. Prince Jerome Napoleon and Maurice Dudevant-Sand, son of the famous author, Georges Sand, had stayed there in 1861.<sup>49</sup> After the departure of the English garrison, the popularity and the prosperity of the hotel had suffered a radical decline. It had become "a veritable hall of miracles at the hands of small industrialists" but the repairs amounted to over \$4,000.00, a fabulous sum for the time.<sup>50</sup>

Sisters Perrin and Hickey crossed the threshold of the future hospital on May 24, 1880. They set to work with great courage. Amusingly dubbed "the Sisters of the Laval University" they worked relentlessly. Re-enforcement was welcome, but two long months of intense labor were required before the hospital would be ready to function.

On July 25, His Excellency Bishop E.C. Fabre blessed the hospital in the presence of three hundred persons. Two days later, the institution began admitting patients. Many wounded persons were admitted due to the hospital's proximity to the Port of Montreal, to the railways, and to the business sector.

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<sup>48</sup> Union Méd. Can. août 1880, pp. 369-374.

<sup>49</sup> Hist. Hôp. N. Dame, Sr. Morin, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Union Méd. Can. 1880, pp. 369-374.

The competence of the doctors and the skill of the nurses inspired trust and patients flocked to this hospital soon to be renowned because of its somewhat revolutionary procedures. There were no curtains around the beds and fresh air and sunlight were allowed to penetrate through the large bay windows!

In the evening, Sisters and novices from the Mother House came to relieve the day staff. For one of them, Sister O'Brien, known as Sister St. Augustin, her devotedness would cost her her life. Like Sister Hainault, she contracted typhus from one of her patients and died on January 9, 1881.<sup>51</sup>

On June 30 of the same year, 1881, the hospital received its Charter of Incorporation and recorded the birth of the Association of the Ladies' Auxiliary which Sister Perrin encouraged by her enthusiasm and collaboration.<sup>52</sup> The ladies committed themselves to the upkeep of the linen and bedding.<sup>53</sup> In addition, Sister Perrin suggested "The Project of Loaves" which consisted in requesting that 240 families supply one loaf per month, thus saving the hospital six hundred dollars a year.<sup>54</sup>

The contribution of the Ladies Auxiliary was not only precious but indispensable. By means of bazaars, field days, horse shows, Christmas celebrations, musical and literary events, these volunteers would ward off a budgetary deficit. The quality of their invited artists:

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<sup>51</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1881-83, p. 17.

<sup>52</sup> When Mrs. Fitzpatrick, secretary of the Association learned of Sr. Perrin's death in 1907, she wrote these words of praise: "It was she who taught us to love and assist the destitute patients." (*Doss. Sr. Perrin, A.S.G.M.*)

<sup>53</sup> *Ec. d'Inf. Hôp. N. Dame, A.F. Angers*, pp. 22-23

<sup>54</sup> *Bull. Fêtes de Centenaire, No. 5, 1978*, p. 5. The Project of Loaves lasted from 1883-1927.



Madam Albani, a renowned singer, authors Nérée Beauchemin, William Chapman, Benjamin Sulte, L.O. David,<sup>55</sup> to name but a few, would attract the élite of the Montreal society into the ranks of the Association.

Notre Dame Hospital did not only maintain its operation but developed and expanded its services. In 1885, an ambulance service was established and in the same year the Masson property was purchased. The following year, the Béliveau boarding house was added to the original building and the wing facing the Champs-de-Mars Street was consolidated in order to install a laundry, a dryer, a mortuary, a room for autopsies, a laboratory as well as an amphitheatre with a capacity of 130 seats. A few years later, the Berthelot property would be acquired.<sup>56</sup>

This progress was interwoven with difficulties of all sorts, notably the ever-sensitive question of the University. The Grey Nuns shared both the success and the trials and especially the work which required many long hours. They received board and lodging and in case of illness, were cared for by the hospital. In addition, each Sister received an annual salary of \$32.00.<sup>57</sup> Occasions for devotedness and selflessness would abound at Notre Dame and the ambition of the Grey Nuns would be fulfilled; they were not deceived in their expectations.

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<sup>55</sup> Mrs. Albani sang on May 8, 9 and 10, 1890. On the last day she offered her services gratuitously. (Circ. mens. 1887-1892, p. 415). The writers named were invited to the Fair of 1895 (bull. Fêtes du Centenaire de N. Dame, No. 5, 1978, p. 6).

<sup>56</sup> Hist. Hôp. N. Dame, Dr. E.P. Benoît, pp. 53-54.

<sup>57</sup> Concordat du 25 sept. 1882.





## CHAPTER II 1881-1883

Mother Deschamps had opened seventeen new houses in the course of her first term as Superior General, from 1853 to 1863. Therefore, since she had resumed this function of high importance in 1877, everyone was astonished that now, with a personnel of 277 professed Sisters and 75 candidates<sup>1</sup> in the novitiate, she did not comply with the many requests addressed to her. In fact, in the course of the last three years, the only foundations had been the school at Lawrence, in the United States and participation in the establishment of the Notre Dame Hospital in Montreal.

The slower pace could certainly not be attributed to a diminished apostolic zeal on the part of this woman, but rather to her concern for the houses already in operation. She wished to ensure the possibility of their serving the purpose for which they were established. These works were now expanding. As noted earlier, the Hospice

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<sup>1</sup> *Circ. mens. 1881-1883*, p. 8. In December 1877, two months after Mother Deschamps' re-election, the Congregation numbered 252 Sisters.

Youville in St. Benoît and the Hospice Lajemmerais in Varennes had been moved close to the church in their respective parishes. Threatened by the mighty St. Lawrence River whose banks were being eroded where the military barracks had stood, Hospice St. Charles in Montreal had found refuge in the Denis-Benjamin Viger house in September 1879. These two houses, as well as the others established in distant regions, urgently required action on the part of the Superior General whose declining health was however compensated for by unbounded energy. The chronicles of the Congregation contain a daily recording of notable events and give an idea of her daily program.

Because of her illness, Mother Deschamps was unable to attend the blessing of the chapel in Varennes on December 23, 1880. Mother d'Youville's grand-nephew, Archbishop Taché, had insisted on presiding at this ceremony. On January 11, 1881, it was Bishop E.C. Fabre of Montreal who blessed the new house. This time, Mother Deschamps was able to be present. She insisted on greeting personally the elderly and the orphans under the care of Sisters Gadbois, Casgrain, Vandandaigue and Bérubé. The hospice in Varennes took on a character of special importance for the Superior General. Since the early years of her religious life she had endeavored to imbue herself with the spirit of Mother d'Youville, with her unflinching trust in the Providence of the Father of Mercies. Her goal in accepting this foundation in 1859, had been to help the elderly and the orphaned, but also, she had wished to perpetuate in Mother d'Youville's home town the memory of this great 'Lover of the Poor'. It would appear that Mother Deschamps had a presentiment that one day this Mother of the Poor would be honored by the Church.

The establishment in Varennes appeared firm. The Sisters could count on the support of surrounding



parishes where workmen had generously volunteered their services for the reconstruction. Especially, they could count on the untiring devotion of their pastor, Mgr. J. Désautels. But alas, death struck this shepherd while he was resting at the Convent of the Grey Nuns in Salem, Mass. U.S.A. On August 6, his body was returned to Varennes where two days later, an impressive funeral service was held.

In his last will Monsignor Desautels had not forgotten his hospice. He had bequeathed \$6,000.00 with the stipulation that Father Bourbonnais, his friend and protégé,<sup>2</sup> be granted refuge there.

Thanks to the generosity of Monsignor Desautels, the institution in Varennes was able to survive the difficulties of the transfer and to pursue its dual vocation of sheltering both the senior citizens and the orphans of the region.

Mother Deschamps took advantage of the summer season "to visit the houses in the country and a few in the city" wrote the chronicler.<sup>3</sup> These visits to the houses in the country were no easy task in view of the means of transportation prevalent at that time.

The Mother House and the Sisters in distant houses communicated by correspondence and, in the case of emergency, by telegram. It was thus that on September 2, Mother Deschamps learned that on the previous day fire had destroyed the outbuildings of the orphanage and of St. Vincent's Hospital in Toledo. Because of the difficulties these houses were experiencing, the misfortune could easily take on catastrophic proportions.<sup>4</sup> In such circumstances, the Superior

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<sup>2</sup> Sr. Collette. *Vie de Mère Deschamps* pp. 259-261. Father S. Théberge would be appointed pastor at Varennes.

<sup>3</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1881-1884, p. 116.

<sup>4</sup> The bishop of Cleveland had considered the orphanage a diocesan institution. See above concerning these difficulties.

General and her Sisters had to walk in the dark while firmly believing in the light.

From far away St. Boniface, the news was more encouraging. The 'old' house of 1846 was undergoing renovations. The massive antique chimneys were being replaced by smaller ones made of brick. The proposed boarding school would be an entirely separate building<sup>5</sup> rather than a new wing added to the existing complex.

Manitoba, however, was not the only place where construction was in progress. For several years already, the Sisters had bemoaned the lack of space at the manor on St. Bernard Island at Châteauguay. Of course, this was not the original wooden building measuring 50 ft. x 20 ft. where the Lemoyne family, then the Robutel de Lanoue family had lived. The heirs of the latter, Joachim and Marie-Anne, had sold the property to Madame d'Youville on June 8, 1765.<sup>6</sup>

In 1774 Mother Despins, Mother d'Youville's successor, had built on the island, another manor house measuring 58 ft. x 45 ft.

Some sixty years later, all was demolished in order to erect a new building on the same foundation. Mother Deschamps, for her part, had spent the first decade of her religious life at this manor where in 1847, she had welcomed the Sisters who had survived the scourge of the typhus epidemic. A mansard roof was built over this house in order to provide for double the number of

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<sup>5</sup> Archbishop Taché to Mother Deschamps, Sept. 28, 1881. These houses would soon be provided with running water. (Circ. mens. 1881-1884, p. 306).

<sup>6</sup> Joachim de Lanoue had returned to France after the war and his sister, Marie-Anne, had been a boarder at Mother d'Youville's General Hospital since August 1748. In 1764, negotiations for the purchase of the property had been undertaken by Mother d'Youville.



resident or convalescent Sisters who could be accommodated. A relatively large chapel designed by Mr. Bourgeau, architect, was built, as well as a 24 ft. annex to serve as a laundry and a store room.<sup>7</sup>

Mother Deschamps recalled many memories of the past when she had visited the construction site. She had seen the buildings which dated back to Mother d'Youville's time, and especially, she had prayed at the foot of the cross erected on the mound in 1832 in order to ward off the cholera epidemic. In 1854, a violent wind had toppled this beloved souvenir which had to be replaced.<sup>8</sup> It was in making an eighteen foot excavation in which to plant the white cross, that a pile of human bones was discovered, evidence that the mound had been man-built, probably by the tribe of Mound Builders.<sup>9</sup>

On the slope of the mound, apple trees blossomed in the spring, diffusing their fragrance. One of them had been planted by Mother d'Youville herself.<sup>10</sup> Nearby stood the old mill which, since June 8, 1865, had become a charnel house for holding bodies. At that time it was named Bethlehem, which means house of bread, for it is there that wheat had been ground for the landholders in former times. Fond memories are attached to

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<sup>7</sup> A.S.G.M. doss. Châteauguay. A house for employees would be erected in 1882.

<sup>8</sup> This crucifix, work of Antoine Labrosse, had originally been placed above the altar in Notre Dame Church in 1738. It was before this crucifix that Mother d'Youville came that same year to seek the healing of her knee from which she had been suffering since shortly after undertaking her work. (A.S.G.M.)

<sup>9</sup> The cross on the mound had to be raised up again many times, after the wind or an electrical storm had toppled it.

<sup>10</sup> This apple tree was cut down in 1914. With the wood, unaffected by age, a checker-board was made as well as many small chalice-like cups to be used as containers for salt on the dining room tables till about the mid 1950's

everything on this Island of St. Bernard; even the carriage gateway at the main entrance was covered with vines transplanted from Pointe-à-Callières when the Sisters left this historical site in the fall of 1871.

On October 26, a bright autumn day, the renovated manor house as well as the chapel and other additions were blessed. Bishop E.C. Fabre who presided at the event, was accompanied by a few Sulpicians, other members of the clergy and many Grey Nuns among whom was Mother Deschamps. In the course of the ceremony, the assembly learned that the chapel had been built thanks to the generosity of Mr. C.S. Rodier,<sup>11</sup> while his wife had donated the huge painting of Blessed Marguerite-Marie Alacocque which covered the entire wall behind the main altar. In addition, Mr. and Mrs. Rodier had donated the very beautiful carpet covering the steps to the altar. These generous benefactors had wished to immortalize in this way the memory of their daughter, Eulalie, who had died on the 15th of the preceding April at age 24, after only three and a half months of religious life. Her first assignment had been that of assistant treasurer at Châteauguay.<sup>12</sup>

Other benefactors had donated the altar, and the statues of Our Lady of Lourdes and of St. Joseph. These were Mrs. A. Tiffin and her brother, Richard Devins whose names, as we shall see, would often recur in the annals of the Grey Nuns.

As for the priests who were natives of Châteauguay, namely Father Primeau, pastor at Boucherville, Fathers Reid and Faubert, as well as Father Allard, an Oblate of Mary Immaculate, they had offered to contribute toward

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<sup>11</sup> This was the nephew of Mr. C.S. Rodier, the former mayor of Montreal.

<sup>12</sup> On her death-bed, Sr. Eulalie had asked her mother to donate this painting which had graced her bedroom at home.



the furnishings. There were as yet, no pews so they supplied the funds necessary to cover the cost of these. The sanctuary lamp and the sacred vessels were donated by the St. Joseph Hospice of Montreal. All the Grey Nuns were so delighted that a chapel had finally been established on the Island, that each of the missions in the surrounding area gladly considered it a duty to contribute towards it.<sup>13</sup>

Mother Deschamps was preoccupied with another chapel, - that of the Mother House on Guy Street where visitors were already coming in large numbers. It was noted that in September, 2,159 Americans had visited it. The Americans had made it a practice to visit Pointe-à-Callières when the Grey Nuns still lived there. They had been deeply impressed at seeing the long line of Sisters as they filed out of the dining room after the noon meal and processed towards the chapel alternating the verses of the Miserere. Soon the people of Montreal would imitate the Americans, for on May 14, 1882, it was recorded that the parishioners of Ste. Cunégonde, and later those of St. Henri, would choose the chapel of the Grey Nuns as a place of pilgrimage.

This chapel was evidently large and welcoming. Of Roman style, it was the pride of Victor Bourgeau who had drawn up the plan, but it did not have all the necessary furniture. The sanctuary floor, in mosaïque, a donation of Mr. Rodier, was completed for the patronal feast on September 14.<sup>14</sup> It appeared however, that it would take many years to complete the decorating of this temple which was meant to be so beautiful. Then Providence came into play, for it was in this perspective

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<sup>13</sup> Until this time, the Sisters had had to attend Mass at the Parish Church, except during the year of the typhus epidemic when one of the rooms had served as a temporary chapel.

<sup>14</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1881-1884, p. 161. The feast of the Triumph of the Cross is one of the patronal feasts of the Grey Nuns.

that Mrs. Anne Marie Tiffin's generosity again came as a blessing. The sister of Sister Marguerite Devins, having become widowed on October 21, 1881, decided to offer her jewels to adorn the monstrance donated to the chapel in 1830. The benefactor also contributed fine laces to deck the altars.<sup>15</sup> In Mrs. Tiffin's view, nothing was too beautiful for this temple where she loved to come and pray. The Grey Nuns' chroniclers would record the continuing prodigality of this humble lady who had hoped to remain anonymous. The Sisters had tried to respect her wish, but because Mrs. Tiffin's charity was known even outside the monastery, people soon came to know the source. The fact remained that for the Grey Nuns, the benefactress was considered to be an instrument which Divine Providence used to embellish the monument they had endeavored to erect to the glory of God.

The Superior General's program for the year 1881 had been fairly heavy and yet two other works must be mentioned; not necessarily new projects, but some that were expanding. These were the St. Jérôme-Emilien Orphanage and the Nazareth Dispensary.

### ST. JEROME-EMILIEN ORPHANAGE 1881

This initiative actually goes back to 1874-1875 when it was modestly inaugurated by Sister Victoire Godard who had been responsible for home-visiting of the poor in the western section of town. The difficulties Sister Godard experienced were not her first. Having entered the Grey Nun novitiate in 1844, she had been obliged to return home to her family after a year of trial due to ill-health.<sup>16</sup> An interval of six years would pass before Sister

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<sup>15</sup> Life of Mrs. Tiffin, Sr. Collette, pp. 21-23. The monstrance would be exposed for the first time on December 23, 1881.

<sup>16</sup> The notes which follow are drawn from the biography of Sr. Godard.



Godard was again admitted. She made her religious vows on September 12, 1853.

Successively assigned to care for the orphans at the St. Joseph Hospice, and to teaching at the elementary school of St. Henri, she returned to her first post in 1868, and finally in 1874 was assigned to the apostolate for which she appeared to be particularly gifted: home visits to the poor.

Sister Godard was an obese person and at the time, this was considered to be a sign of flourishing health. Each day, she left the Nazareth institution and worked in the district which had been assigned to her. People were amazed to see this heavily-built Sister circulating so sprightly and she was the object of much ridicule; but she paid no attention to this for when she entered the home of a poor family, joy and trust entered with her. Sister Godard confirmed the saying, "It's good to carry weight". Soon the mockery ceased and as she went the orphans followed her, attracted by the "goodies" which she so generously dispensed. The fate of these poor children haunted her however, and soon Sister Godard rented a house for them, a house which she entrusted to a dedicated person.<sup>17</sup> She increased her canvassing for funds and provided for the upkeep of fifteen of them. Sister Godard was not content with providing them with food and shelter. In the first week of January, she had gifts for them: items of clothing she had made herself and which disappeared quickly.

Four years would go by in this way for the servant of the poor and then, in July 1878, struck with a sudden illness, she was forced to interrupt her work for a brief sojourn in the infirmary. Having resumed her customary work, she was stopped again on August 17, and died the following day after admitting that she had only one fear:

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<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, the name of this person is unknown.

that of not fearing death. At her funeral on the 20th, people were moved at seeing the twenty orphans weeping around the tomb of their foster mother.

The work had never ceased since the passing of the foundress, but in the year 1881, thanks to Father Rousselot, the orphanage was moved "to the stone house on the other side of Plateau Street, a building bought from the widowed Mrs. Nolan and destined partly to Sister Godard's project".

Sister Brassard, who specialized in the art of restoring abandoned houses, had made her first experience at the barracks along the waterfront where St. Charles Hospice had been re-located. She welcomed Sister Godard's orphans there at the beginning of November. She was assisted by Sisters Aresse and St. Ignace and soon there were twenty-four orphans sheltered in the new facility which was largely supported financially by the Sulpician priests and where Father Giband had been appointed as chaplain.

Fifty-eight orphans were cared for in this refuge until 1883 when the Côté estate declared it could no longer support the City's Catholic Orphanage and would surrender its rights to the Seminary. Eleven orphans were then placed at the Grey Nun Convent in St. Benoît, and the others were placed elsewhere in the city.<sup>18</sup>

The foundation established by Sister Godard, had functioned for two years at the house on Plateau Street. It would come to life again in the history of the Grey Nuns six years later, as we shall see in this account.

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<sup>18</sup> Vie de Mère Deschamps, Sr. Collette, pp. 264-276.



## THE NAZARETH DISPENSARY, 1881

Founded twelve years earlier under the patronage of the untiring Father Rousselot, this work had been inaugurated in 1873 under Mother Dupuis' administration and was housed in the institution bearing this name.

Doctor L.E. Desjardins, who had returned from Europe highly qualified to treat eye conditions, assumed the duties of medical consultant. He was assisted by his brother Guillaume-Henri. From April 19, 1873 to May 1 of the following year, 798 cases had been treated there.<sup>19</sup>

The reputation of this famous doctor drew other doctors who also wished to specialize, as well as attracting an increasing number of patients. The dispensary was moved to the first floor of the Nolan house which was large enough to accommodate both the dispensary and the St. Jérôme-Emilien Orphanage, likewise directed by the Grey Nuns.<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, as a result of difficulties between the Laval University in Montreal and the School of Medicine, the Sisters were ordered not to accept any more students for the school.<sup>21</sup>

Dr. Louis-Edouard Desjardins went to plead his cause in Rome and returned in the fall of 1883. For two consecutive years, the dispensary had served persons with eye conditions. It too would one day be restored

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<sup>19</sup> The Canadian Journal of Surgery, April 1969.

<sup>20</sup> Circ. mens. 1881-1883, p. 204. Remember that Sr. Godard's orphanage occupied the second storey of this house.

<sup>21</sup> Histoire de la P.Q. Rumilly, T. 4, p. 63.

and again be under the internal administration of the Grey Nuns.<sup>22</sup>

### 1882-1883

For the Grey Nuns, the year 1882 was marked by the General Chapter held on the first Monday of October. All the members of the Council were maintained in office except Mother Dupuis whose health necessitated a prolonged rest.<sup>23</sup>

She was replaced by Sister Praxède Filiatrault who had made profession on September 14, 1864. Assigned successively to the functions of purveyor and that of bursar, she was promoted to the rank of administrator on May 1, 1875.<sup>24</sup> Four years later, she was appointed Superior at the Nazareth institution, and in 1881, assumed the responsibility of two neighboring missions - the Dispensary and the St. Jérôme-Emilien Orphanage.

Sister Filiatrault had given evidence of her ability. She was recognized as an authentic Grey Nun, respectful of traditions certainly, but open to innovations. In view of ensuring a better knowledge of the institution for the blind, she supported Father Tanguay's initiative and allowed young musicians "to go and make music for the members of the House in Ottawa", as recorded by the chronicler in April 1882.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> In 1885, Father Rousselot bequeathed the Nolan property to the Grey Nuns who rented it to a company of artists. They established a cyclorama representing the great mystery of the passion. This house closed in 1888. (Circ. mens. 1887-1892, p. 222)

<sup>23</sup> Mother Dupuis died on March 15, 1883.

<sup>24</sup> The Council of the Grey Nuns consisted of twelve administrators of whom five were on the General Council.

<sup>25</sup> Circ. mens. 1881-1883, pp. 324-325.



Mother Deschamps had observed the aptitudes of her assistant. Shortly after the Chapter, she had directed her towards the Toledo missions which were grappling with the difficulties described earlier.<sup>26</sup>

Sister Charlebois for her part, returned from her visits to the missions in the West and in the Great Canadian North on October 29, 1881. She had been absent a little over two years.<sup>27</sup>

As a result, those distant missions could count on the support of a member of the General Council who was aware of their special needs and their particularities. The convents of Providence and Chipewyan which had narrowly escaped closure were incorporated through the intervention of Sister Charlebois and on her advice, were attached to the mission at St. Albert, Alberta. Sister Margaret Devins whose alms received from the family estate, had often helped these poor missions, was assigned as their purveyor.

As for Sister Robin, she was in charge of the houses in town and in the country. On January 1, 1883, there were 317 Sisters of which ninety-six were in active service at Hospice St. Joseph, at Châteauguay and at the Mother House. The latter sheltered 820 persons, though it was a house being completed only as the resources became available or as benefactors made it possible. Among the latter, Mrs. Marie-Anne Tiffin was most remarkable. In the course of a long trip to Europe, she visited the important shrines. In Beauvais, she had admired a magnificent Way of the Cross and conceived the idea of donating an exact

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<sup>26</sup> Sr. Filiatrault left Montreal on November 6, 1882 and would return on December 14, 1883. During this stay, she was able to acquire a knowledge of English.

<sup>27</sup> Sr. Charlebois' first visit to the distant missions had been interrupted by the death of Mother Slocombe in 1872. She left the second time on August 25, 1879 and this time reached the houses of the Far North.

replica to the Grey Nuns. She told her sister, Margaret (Sister Devins), of the project, who in turn advised Father M.C. Bonnissant, p.s.s. who had manifested a special interest "in this beautiful church which is the heart of the huge establishment on Guy Street."<sup>28</sup>

This Sulpician priest suggested an alternative. According to him, it was more important to erect altars. Mrs. Tiffin agreed to the proposition without however putting aside her first idea. She then requested her brother, Mr. Richard Devins, to make available to Father Bonnissant the necessary funds specifying that the most beautiful marble was to be selected for this monument. The services of the architects, Bourgeau and Leprohon were retained to draw up the plan. The initial draft was submitted by Father Bonnissant to his colleague, Father Toupin and to a devoted friend, Alfred Larocque.<sup>29</sup> Not only did they approve it, but both decided to also make a monetary contribution for the altar of the Sacred Heart. Father Bonnissant himself donated \$700.00 for the altar dedicated to the Eternal Father, while Mr. Richard Devins completed the total amount. He applied to this project, the profit from the sale of five thousand brochures he had authored entitled: "Reminiscences of My Visit to the Grey Nuns".<sup>30</sup>

By July 1, 1882 the contract had been concluded between the Grey Nuns and Mr. O'Brien. In December of the same year this marble sculptor delivered his work

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<sup>28</sup> Fr. Icard, *Sup. Gen. of the Sulpicians*, Dec. 9, 1886.

<sup>29</sup> Mr. Larocque was the son-in-law of Mr. Olivier Berthelet, founder of St. Joseph's Hospice in Montreal in 1854.

<sup>30</sup> *Vie de Mère Deschamps, Sr. Collette*, pp. 274- 275. On May 10, 1883 Mrs. Tiffin, sister of Mr. Richard Devins, established residence at the Grey Nuns.



made from white marble obtained from Rutland, Vermont.<sup>31</sup> He began to haul the marble on April 16 believing he could finish the task by June 5, but in spite of his diligence, he was unable to meet his deadline. The delay favored the execution of certain other projects, notably the improvement of yards and flower-beds, and the renovation of the 'red cross' at the corner of Guy and Dorchester Streets. Even the chapel tower underwent repairs during which a disaster was narrowly averted. A container filled with live coals had unfortunately been left unattended. The evening breeze stirred up the embers and neighbors saw the sparks. Moreover, the doorbell was not functioning. The firemen had to climb over the high grey fence in order to reach the belfry and extinguish the flames while it was still in its early stage.

All this commotion did not escape Sister Manseau, the humble worker, now an invalid, who on March 19, 1874 had organized the historic pilgrimage. It had been made up of sixteen poor, handicapped, elderly persons, some blind or crippled. In the course of this pilgrimage, each person had lifted a shovelful of earth in the traditional way. After they had buried in the earth a medal of St. Joseph to whom they entrusted the building of a chapel, they had planted a cross blessed by Sister Deschamps who was then the business manager.<sup>32</sup>

This enterprise was about to take a great step forward with the consecration of the altars; and Sister Manseau would have loved to see this glorious day. Unfortunately, "on June 25, she had been moved to the large room facing the painting of The Agony." On July 1, she passed away. It was on July 3, that Archbishop E.C. Fabre,

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<sup>31</sup> Concerning the quality of this marble, Princess Louise, wife of Governor General Marquis de Lorne, said during a visit to the convent in Nov. 1883, that she found it every bit as beautiful as that from Italy. (Circ. mens. 1881-1883, p. 653.)

<sup>32</sup> Circ. mens. 1877-1880, pp. 248-249.

attended by Bishops Louis de Goesbriand of Burlington, Edgar Wadhams of Ogdensburg, New York and Duhamel of Ottawa proceeded with the consecration of the altars.

Many of those present, including the Superior General herself, undoubtedly remembered Sister Manseau who had died prematurely. To this companion could be applied the words of St. Paul: One sows, another reaps. 1 Cor. 3:7

The Grey Nuns were not deterred by this state of affairs; they themselves were reaping what others had sown for they ensured the continuity of works established more than a century ago.

Fortunately for the new enterprises, dictated by new needs, the numerous new recruits offered an assurance of stability. The novitiate now numbered eighty-one novices and postulants. Mother Deschamps did not rely only on this assurance. She remembered that at her death, Mother d'Youville entrusted to only seventeen Sisters the responsibility of perpetuating her work. Neither did she ignore the fact that 1780 would be only the first among other years in which there would be no new recruits. And yet, thanks to the Providence of God the Father, the little community had survived. The Superior General was absolutely certain that it would be thus in the future, providing that like the first Grey Nuns, they would persevere in doing whatever "little good" they could.

In Mother Deschamps' opinion, this "little good" would be carried out in two urgent works: one at Châteauguay, the other at Ste. Anne-des-Chênes, Manitoba.



## THE SCHOOL AT CHATEAUGUAY, 1883

In 1844, the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame had opened a boarding school for young girls at Châteauguay. Bishop Bourget had first proposed this undertaking to the Grey Nuns. Mother McMullen, then Superior General, had declined

because plans were already too far advanced with the daughters of Marguerite Bourgeoys. We are disposed to go anywhere, even in the most distant places for the greater glory of God, but we do not wish to get in the way of another community nor to expose ourselves to comments which could trouble our peace and unity,

she explained.<sup>33</sup> Until now, the Grey Nuns had adhered to the tradition established by Mother d'Youville, of teaching catechism to the children when the Rivière-du-Loup could be crossed.

Mother Deschamps, who was spending a few days at the manor after the blessing of the chapel at the Mother House, visited the homes in the little fort and realized that thirty-nine children were of school age. This amply justified the creation of an elementary school. Without delay, she appointed Sister McBean as the teacher. Having no school house, she settled in the building which had been completed on August 20 of the previous year for the hired men.<sup>34</sup>

Several weeks of study and especially of adapting the students to discipline convinced Father Vinet, the pastor that the project would be worthwhile. A site for the school was selected: the property of the Grey Nuns within the parish limits. Soon the construction was begun in view of having it completed by late fall.

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<sup>33</sup> A.S.G.M. doss. Châteauguay.

<sup>34</sup> Circ. mens. 1881-1883, p. 415.

On November 20, classes opened for forty-five pupils who had to resist the temptation to fish in the nearby river in order to learn reading, writing and arithmetic.

Father Vinet gave the building over to the Grey Nuns in 1889 but until his death in 1892 he would continue to visit the children whose amazing progress was a consolation to him.

Sister McBean was succeeded by Sisters Ouimet, St. Antoine and many others. The school was to last three quarters of a century and would always be a source of comfort to the pastors and of pride to the parents.

The Grey Nun teachers at times had unexpected joys worthy of mention. For example, Sister Gaudry, a missionary at Salem was visiting a studio in Boston. There she met a mulatto girl by the name of Margaret Osborn, formerly a pupil at Hospice St. Joseph in Montreal. From memory, the young lady had painted the portraits of Mother d'Youville and of Father Normant, p.s.s. The artist gladly offered her paintings to Sister Gaudry who in turn gave them to Sister Mongeau, then Superior at the convent in Salem and formerly a missionary at Hospice St. Joseph. The latter remembered the little Margaret of former days. "She is black, but in my eyes, she is white and her soul is even more so," she wrote to Mother Deschamps.<sup>35</sup>

The chronicles of the school at Châteauguay have no record of any other meetings as sensational, but they do make note of the constant progress of the pupils and on occasion, make special mention of those who were outstanding and a credit to their 'Alma Mater'. The St. Joseph school was closed in June 1957 but the Sisters continued to be involved in teaching. Marguerite

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<sup>35</sup> Letter dated May 28, 1883.



d'Youville Convent was opened in 1956 to serve as a residence for Grey Nuns who taught in three of the four schools of the area.

### THE CONVENT AT STE-ANNE-DES-CHÊNES, MANITOBA, 1883

At the end of the summer of 1882, a fearless and heroic woman returned from the Great Canadian North. Through fifteen years Sister Adeline Audet dit Lapointe had withstood the rigors, privations and isolation peculiar to the land of icy silence. She had proved to be an inspiration in these far away hovels where frost covers not only the windows but also the interior walls, where the frigid climate freezes even the ink and makes correspondence impossible. She rose at day break and was the first at work, stirring up the embers and activating the fire in order to heat the house before the student boarders and her companions got up. When the latter protested, she merely stated that she required less sleep than they. Foundress of the house in Chipewyan in 1874, she remained there an entire year suffering untold hardships and then returned to Providence where she again had to endure fasting, cold and great anxiety for, as we have seen, the order had been given by authorities in Montreal to close these houses. However, the delay in mail service had blocked the impending withdrawal. Since then, the missionaries had been careful to avoid reporting their difficulties to authorities at the Mother House for fear of having to leave these places where God's work was being carried out.

The rigidity of the daily program however finally forced Sister Lapointe to surrender. Sister Charlebois had observed this at the time of her visit in 1881. It was for this reason that she had appointed Sister Ward to replace her as Superior at Providence. On July 2 of the following year, Sister Lapointe returned to Eastern Canada, "in

order to interest potential benefactors in the missionary works of the North."<sup>36</sup> She left behind widespread regrets and Bishop Faraud even stated "that her departure would be prejudicial to this institution where she had done so much good."<sup>37</sup> Her journey ended at St. Boniface where for the past year there had been question of founding a convent at Pointe-aux-Chênes, a humble village established since 1856 and which since 1870 had become the parish of Ste-Anne-des-Chênes.<sup>38</sup>

Everyone knew that the generosity of Sister Lapointe could be counted on; and so, Mother Deschamps suggested to Sister Lamy that this courageous Sister be chosen as foundress.<sup>39</sup>

Sister Lapointe was no stranger to St. Boniface. She had lived there from September 1866 to June 1867 on her way to the Northern missions. She had even made a brief stop there again in 1872 while making an urgent journey to request help from the Mother House. Ten years had gone by since then and there had been so many changes! One of the valiant foundresses of the Red River, Sister Hedwidge Lafrance, passed away on March 20, 1882.<sup>40</sup> Had it occurred one month later, the flood would have disrupted the funeral as it had done that of Sister Valade in 1861.<sup>41</sup>

A bridge now spanned the Red River. It had no sooner been opened for traffic than the flood carried

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<sup>36</sup> Notes concerning Sr. Lapointe were extracted from her biography preserved at A.S.G.M.

<sup>37</sup> *Le Soleil Brille à Minuit*, Sr. Mitchell, pp. 106-107.

<sup>38</sup> *Vie de Mgr. Taché, Dom Benoît*, V.2, p. 124.

<sup>39</sup> At the Chapter of 1882, Sr. Lamy had replaced Sr. Hamel as vicarial superior. Sr. Hamel had become her assistant.

<sup>40</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1881-1883, p. 313.

<sup>41</sup> Sr. Valade was the founding superior. Sr. Lagrave, her assistant, had passed away on August 4, 1859.



away two of its trusses on April 19. The water rose so rapidly that it became necessary to evacuate the little hospital. Five chronically ill Protestant patients were taken by canoe, and to their great surprise, discovered that the volunteers who had carried them to the Provincial House were none other than Archbishop Taché and Father Dufresne. Two days later Sister Cleary and Sister Ste. Anne in turn left the threatened hospital. The rushing torrent overturned a fragile canoe guided by three men. A short distance away another canoe capsized and despite the protests of the oarsmen, the nursing Sisters insisted on helping the two shipwrecked persons. As they did this, the Archbishop and the Grey Nuns on the bank looked on in anguish. The non-Catholic journals highlighted this rescue in a laudatory manner while the Sisters maintained they had only done their duty.<sup>42</sup>

The bridge had been replaced, the anticipated famine did not occur, the boarding school had been completed and was blessed on August 18, 1883 and given the name of Taché Academy by the second bishop of St. Boniface. Sixty boarders and 250 day students soon occupied it, while the old yellow building became the Orphans' Home and would in time be named the Provencher Academy<sup>43</sup> to honor the memory of the legendary apostle and the first bishop in the west.

Sister Lapointe attended the official opening of the boarding school. She undoubtedly thought how much longer it would take for such institutions to be erected in the far northern territories. The responsibility for their humble beginnings rested with her, a role which she

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<sup>42</sup> Sr. Curran to the Mother House April 25, 1882.

<sup>43</sup> Until then, the orphanage was in a part of the provincial house. In 1886, it was transferred to the John wing of the St. Boniface College and it was handed over to the Marist Brothers in 1899.

accepted as a matter of fact. On August 27, she left St. Boniface with Sister O'Brien and Sister Lagarde to establish a convent at Ste-Anne-Des-Chênes. Sister Reid, the bursar, representing Mother Deschamps, and Sister Lamy, the Vicarial Superior, accompanied the foundresses who for the past two years<sup>44</sup> had been eagerly awaited by the pastor, Father Raymond Giroux, and by the young population. Until now, the teaching duties had been held successively by Miss J.B. Gauthier and Mr. Théophile Paré.<sup>45</sup>

The building which had been erected by the federal government, first on Côteau Pelé, then on a lot belonging to Mr. J. Champagne to lodge immigrants working at the construction of the railway, was no longer needed since the closing of the Dawson route. The Government gave it to the Grey Nuns without however first advising them accordingly. It then became a shelter for itinerant visitors and served until 1881 when it was demolished in order to rebuild near the church on Mr. Richer's land. It was completed by the fall of 1882 but Mr. Arthur Lacerte who had been hired as a teacher, occupied the large house with his family until the arrival of the Sisters.

A cavalcade was organized to meet the missionaries and the little bell proclaimed their arrival with all the vigor the sexton could muster. The reception took place at the Church. The pastor welcomed the three pioneers who moved into their convent only on August 26. The situation was no surprise for Sister Lapointe. In the far North the Sisters had always arrived before the house was ready for them.

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<sup>44</sup> Sr. Charlebois had visited the mission when she had passed through St. Boniface. The chronicler erred when she placed the incident in 1873 for at this time Sr. Charlebois was in Montreal.

<sup>45</sup> Benoît. Vie de Mgr. Taché, V. 2, p. 124.



Eighty pupils registered early. A few weeks later there were 130 which prompted the vicarial superior to assign Sister Brouillet as additional staff.

The task eventually proved to be too heavy for Sister Lapointe who was obliged to retire in 1884. She was replaced by Sister O'Brien, then by Sister Lagarde and finally by Sister Dudemaine who all would have extensions built to the convent.

In 1908, statistics were produced. Thirteen hundred students had attended the institution which had now become a high school. Two students had entered the priesthood, thirty-four had chosen religious life. Of the latter, twenty-three had become Grey Nuns.<sup>46</sup> One of these students, Sister St. Theophile who had been professed since April 29, 1903, attended her father's ordination on July 26, 1906. Mr. Theophile Paré had formerly been a Member of the Legislative Assembly from the county of La Vérendrye. In 1894 and prior to his ordination, he had become critically ill and the doctors had given up hope. He then requested a cure from Mother d'Youville, foundress of the Grey Nuns. Shortly after this, the pastor, Father Giroux, wrote to Mother Hamel: "Dear Mr. Paré is now convalescing. His return to health is really miraculous. He attributes it to Mother d'Youville to whom we had entrusted him."<sup>47</sup>

The Grey Nuns and especially Sister St. Theophile had, we are sure, urgently implored their foundress in order to obtain the cure of this benefactor of their work and of this father who had guided his only daughter towards the total gift of herself in religious life.

Because of a fire which had levelled the house at Fort Totten and compelled the Sisters to accept the house of

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<sup>46</sup> Circ. mens. 1906-1908, pp. 736-739.

<sup>47</sup> Circ. mens. 1892-1895, p. 398

the Benedictine priests who returned to their old hovel,<sup>48</sup> it was understandable that Mother Deschamps' attention should turn to that mission for which she always had a predilection. More than ever, she deplored the limited number of workers while the requests for the Grey Nuns' services abounded. An urgent appeal came from San Francisco in April, followed by a visit from Father L. Fouesnel who pleaded in vain. Vain also were the requests from Duluth, Cambridgeport, Southbridge and Sanding Rock in the United States.<sup>49</sup>

The Grey Nun missionaries as well as their Franciscan helpers were falling beneath the burden of work and extreme poverty. Like the missionaries who were laboring in the land of the great white silence, they fasted the year round, as well as did those at Lac-La-Biche and at Ile-à-la-Crosse. As for the Sisters in St. Albert, they were not able to enjoy the taste of good white bread until the fall of 1882.<sup>50</sup> In the following autumn, when a generous person offered them a few apples, they deferred the enjoyment of these until November 21, which was a feast day for the Sisters. One of the Sisters eyeing the fruit remarked: "It is ten years since we have had any apples to eat."<sup>51</sup>

Among the three foundresses of the Alberta mission, Sister Alphonse had already succumbed to the hardships.<sup>52</sup> Sister Emery, the first Superior of this region, was nearing the end of her career. Health reports concerning her were alarming. As for Sister Lamy, she had been asked to come from Alberta to serve in St. Boniface where the difficulties of the early beginnings

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<sup>48</sup> Sr. Lajemmerais to Mother Deschamps, Mar. 20, 1883.

<sup>49</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1881-1883, pp. 607-608.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 497.

<sup>51</sup> Sr. Paquette to Mother Deschamps, Nov. 23, 1883.

<sup>52</sup> She died on October 7, 1879.



had given way to progress. The farms were already selling at fabulous prices. Such was not yet the case for the neighboring territories which would eventually become Saskatchewan and Alberta. It was undoubtedly for this reason that Father Lacombe, like Bishops Taché and Grandin, had recruited people from Quebec in order to colonize the West with French-Canadian families. Alberta had not yet discovered its black gold so the recruits were not numerous. People preferred to settle in the United States.

The Native Indian population as well as the Metis and the whites would require schools in ever greater numbers. Mother Deschamps heartily applauded Bishop Grandin's initiative in obtaining additional help for his diocese. Founded in 1820 at Amiens by Madame Bonnault d'Huet, the Faithful Companions of Jesus accepted to come to Canada to work as evangelizers. They established two boarding schools; one at Prince Albert, the other at St. Laurent. Having landed in Montreal on May 23, 1883, they were welcomed at the Mother House of the Grey Nuns. Mother Deschamps was their chaperone during their stay in the metropolis and it was she who accompanied them to the station at their departure. On June 4, the Sisters reached St. Boniface where they were welcomed as guests at the Provincial House till the 11th when they left for their final destination.<sup>53</sup>

According to the custom decreed by Mother McMullen, the Grey Nuns willingly transferred from convents in well-populated areas and went rather to work for the glory of God in more remote places.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The Faithful Companions of Jesus would perform a great work in the West. They would soon open several boarding schools among which was one in the small town of Calgary in 1885.

<sup>54</sup> See: In Retrospect, p.11

Two projects were presented to Mother Deschamps in the fall of 1883. Archbishop Taché requested the establishment of an industrial school for Natives at Qu'Appelle while Bishop Grandin requested a similar favor for Fort Calgary, at the mouth of the Highwood River or Dunbow.<sup>55</sup> The bishops hoped by means of these schools to exercise a deeper influence on the young natives and especially to prepare them for their obligations and privileges as full-fledged citizens.

By now Indian schools no longer held any secrets for the Grey Nuns. They knew what dedication, psychology, care, patience and work were required. They had seen at work apostles who did not hesitate before any obstacle, who had opened the way through years of caring, of insecurity and of inconceivable privations. Among the Oblates of Mary Immaculate whose names were immortalized in this glorious chapter of the Church's history in Canada, there is one which the Grey Nuns venerate more particularly. Without any hesitation, they referred to Bishop Grandin, as the holy man who seemed to have had a special vocation. Some said that in all the missions where he had served, adversity had preceded or accompanied him, while he and his companions saw, in these frustrating situations, the cross which renders apostolic works fruitful.

In September 1883, people in St. Albert were celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the episcopate of this intrepid missionary who in 1857 had been appointed Bishop of Satala, co-adjutor of St. Boniface, but had become Bishop of St. Albert in 1868.<sup>56</sup> This great but humble man did not appreciate being in the limelight but submitted and accepted the genuine

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<sup>55</sup> Fr. Lacombe, McGregor, pp. 269-270. This school would be called either St. Joseph School, High River School, or Dunbow School.

<sup>56</sup> Sr. Labrèche to the Sisters in Toledo, May 23, 1869.



praises of those who had seen him at the task. Forty Oblate Priests and Brothers, ten Grey Nuns representing their companions from Lac-La-Biche, Ile-à-la-Crosse and the Mackenzie attended the celebration as well as his dear niece, Sister Grandin from Notre Dame Hospital in Montreal. In the presence of Father Soullier, Assistant General of the Oblates and their official visitor, the Bishop of St. Albert heard a speaker recall the incident in which he had almost perished. Returning to the mission with an orphaned child, he had been obliged to bury himself in the snow for a whole night to protect himself from the bitter cold. He recalled also the fire which occurred on March 1, 1867 at the mission of Ile-à-la-Crosse, on which occasion the Bishop stated "he had not even a handkerchief with which to wipe away his tears."<sup>57</sup>

The Sisters, by means of their crafts had succeeded in raising a hundred dollars to offer the Bishop on the occasion of his anniversary. At the school, the pupils presented artificial flowers along with songs and dialogues. The girls wore for the first time black dresses with white collars edged in blue and in place of moccasins, they wore high buttoned shoes.<sup>58</sup>

The celebration unfolded in the humble house of earlier times since the construction of the convent was not yet finished. The carpenter Brothers had all been employed in the fields and at the mill. All were resigned to occupying the new convent only the following year.<sup>59</sup> The completion had been extended by two more years and finally the move had been to the bishop's old residence as the new building had become the episcopal

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<sup>57</sup> Vie de Mgr. Taché, Dom Benoît, p. 548.

<sup>58</sup> Sr. Paquette to Mother Deschamps November 23, 1883.

<sup>59</sup> Sister Guenette to Mother Deschamps, Aug. 2, 1883.

see. The Sisters felt compensated for their wait by the beauty of the site. Located on the crest of the enchanting hill, they could view the immediate surroundings where they could have outbuildings and gardens.<sup>60</sup> Also, things were moving faster in St. Albert. Soon it would take only three weeks to receive a letter from Montreal. Until then, the wait had been six weeks.

This was a welcome improvement for the mail was soon to bring extraordinary news,— the realization of a fervent desire which all Grey Nuns had secretly harbored in their hearts. Providence, in its own divine way was preparing to intervene and to make this legitimate ambition come about.

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<sup>60</sup> Circ. mens. 1884-1887, pp. 307-309.



## CHAPTER III 1884-1886

Dom Henri Smeulders, the Apostolic Commissary delegated by His Holiness Leo XIII to settle the ever-acute problem of the Laval University in Montreal and other business, arrived in Quebec on October 22, 1883.<sup>1</sup>

Mother Deschamps went to Quebec to offer him the homage of the Community.<sup>2</sup> The mitred Abbot of the Cistercian Order, having arrived in Montreal on December 12, exposed his plan to visit the various religious congregations. At the invitation of the Superior General, he came to the Mother House on December 23, the hundred and twelfth anniversary of Mother d'Youville's death.<sup>3</sup>

This anniversary had always been observed since 1771 but in 1883, the presence of the distinguished guest conferred a greater solemnity on the event. His Excellency was accompanied by his secretaries while Father Colin,

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<sup>1</sup> Hist. de la P. Qué., Rumilly. V. 4 pp. 108 -110.

<sup>2</sup> Circ. mens. 1881-1883., p. 677.

<sup>3</sup> Vie de Mère Deschamps, Sr. Collette, p. 285.

Superior of the Sulpicians, and a few members of the clergy greeted him at the chapel entrance.<sup>4</sup>

After Mass and breakfast the pontifical commissary entered the community room. There a surprise awaited him, and which visibly impressed him. He saw, assembled in this room, evidence of just about every human distress: the abandoned child, the orphaned, the blind, the crippled and the elderly on the brink of death. He listened attentively to the cantata as well as to the address delivered by an orphan girl. It was, he said, the most beautiful of any he had heard since his arrival in Canada. Having been invited to tour the establishment, he visited the sick and "old man Jacob" had the pleasure of being addressed in German, his mother-tongue. When the guest was led into the Sisters' dining room he expressed surprise at their use of pewter dishes. As he visited the many workshops, he understood that the diversity of works was made possible by the dedication of their respective supervisors. He was finally led to the shrine of Mother d'Youville,<sup>5</sup> and the Superior General took advantage of this opportune moment in order to offer him a biography of the Foundress. He, the Abbot, who had observed visually, the works inaugurated by this woman and who had been informed about the missions in the West and in the remote Northern regions, had already formed an opinion concerning the spirit which had guided the

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<sup>4</sup> Details of this visit were extracted from *Circ.mens* 1881-1883.

<sup>5</sup> Exhumed on Dec. 6, 1849, under the care of Fr. Faillon, p.s.s., the remains of the Foundress were kept in the community room until 1871 when the Grey Nuns moved to their new Mother House on Guy Street. Deposited first in a room adjacent to the novitiate, they were then placed in a room close to the chapel adjacent to the room where the deceased Sisters were laid out. In this room there were long white curtains in the windows and a few items of furniture and objects having belonged to this great woman as well as the memorial inscription. This room remained under lock and key.



Mother of Universal Charity. The chronicler wrote that even before reading the biography,

he encouraged us to present to the Roman Court, the Cause for the beatification of our Foundress, giving us the presentiment that some day we would have the joy of seeing her honored by the Church.<sup>6</sup>

Never was any directive given to the Grey Nuns carried out with greater eagerness. Mother Deschamps who had had the great advantage of hearing Father Faillon, the theologian, and of reading his work, from that moment entertained the desire of extolling the virtues and the merits of this woman whom she so greatly admired. Assembling the Administrators on the afternoon of this memorable day the decision was taken to undertake the necessary measures in view of introducing the Cause before the Roman court.<sup>7</sup> The news was communicated to all the missionaries on December 31 in an official letter from the Superior General and the means of assuring the success of this proceeding was indicated. "Let each Sister try to penetrate herself with the spirit of the Foundress and especially to reproduce her universal charity<sup>8</sup> by means of our various works." Father M.C. Bonnissant was appointed vice-postulator for the Cause.<sup>9</sup> The Sister-Communities expressed their enthusiasm as well as their desire to contribute towards the cost involved and proceedings were undertaken without delay.

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<sup>6</sup> Circ. mens. 1881-1884, p. 689.

<sup>7</sup> Bishop Bourget had often expressed the desire for Mother d'Youville to be canonized. But the Sisters hesitated to undertake the necessary steps before introduction of the cause of Fr. Olier, the founder of the Sulpicians. Bishop Smeulders' visit and the encouragement of Bishop Fabre ended their hesitation.

<sup>8</sup> Circ. mens. 1884-1887, pp. 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> Vie de Mère Deschamps. Sr. Collette p. 289.

Immediate measures were necessary in order to comply with the requirements of Rome. Mother d'Youville's remains were to be walled in to ensure their protection and also to comply with regulations relative to the investigation re: 'non-cult.' A vault was prepared in the crypt beneath the chapel and on January 16, 1884 the shrine in which Mother d'Youville's remains had rested for thirty-five years was opened. The Grey uniform covering the remains was replaced by a new one. Her cross was replaced by one of the twelve original crosses given by Father Louis Normant and then the precious remains of the Foundress were laid out in the funeral chapel where they remained until the definitive transferal. Here the elderly, the crippled, the orphans and the Sisters all visited the Servant of the Poor which henceforth, they would no longer see. A few hours before the ceremony, the remains were placed in a coffin and Mr. Desmarais, a photographer took her picture.

On the following day, January 17, Father Pierre Deguire, p.s.s., the ecclesiastical Superior and Father T. Harel, the Chancellor, accompanied by Fathers Bonnissant and Guihot applied the seals on the coffin. To Mother Deschamps and Sisters Charlebois, Robin, Filiatrault and Stubinger befell the honor of carrying the precious remains while being accompanied by 112 Sisters.

Forthwith, workers built the brick wall concealing from the Sisters' view the remains of their Mother. There were tear-filled eyes said the chronicler.

Feelings were indescribable; dear Sisters, the mysterious emotions experienced during this simple but beautiful and touching ceremony need not be described in order for one to understand. This privation, so vividly felt is considerably heightened by the hope that some day our Beloved Mother will re-appear with the halo of sainthood. What a beautiful



day that will be! How far into the future that is, is God's secret

commented the narrator recording these notable events in the history of the Grey Nuns.<sup>10</sup>

The chronicler had no idea that the wait would span three quarters of a century before Mother d'Youville would be recognized as Blessed. During this time, the crypt was a place of recollection where the Sisters came to steep themselves in the spirit of their vocation and renew their determination to reproduce in their lives the virtues which their Foundress had practiced: faith which recognized trials as being "the instrument by which God brings about in chosen souls, conformity with the sole object of his delight"; hope, renouncing passing joys in favor of the joy "which no one could take away from them" and finally, charity towards everyone. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, Mother d'Youville had in fact savored the dogma of the Fatherhood of God and had discovered the bond of brotherhood which united her to everyone. This was what motivated her to express her filial love in works of charity.

In times of great decision, of departure for distant missions, the Sisters would turn to their Foundress to draw strength and courage. Everything favored serious reflection in this crypt where rested also those who had followed in the footsteps of the Mother of the Poor and who had continued the work initiated by her. In early February, the remains of the seventeen Sisters buried at Hospice St. Joseph from 1869 to 1875<sup>11</sup> were transferred here. Among them were those of Mother Jane Slocombe and Mother Elisabeth McMullen, two former Superiors-General whose

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<sup>10</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1884-1887, pp. 5-6.

<sup>11</sup> While the construction on the Mother House was in progress, the Sisters had to be buried in this crypt.

memory remains alive in everyone's mind.<sup>12</sup> The place was impressive: each of the tombs was surrounded by a black wooden frame. An altar with candlesticks dating back to the time of the Charon Brothers was placed at the right hand corner and a Mass was celebrated there on February 7, for the repose of the souls of the valiant workers. A statue of Our Lady of Sorrows completed the austere decor while fourteen simple wooden crosses affixed to the wall allowed the Sisters to make the Stations of the Cross there.<sup>13</sup>

The cross was once more presented to the Grey Nuns on January 10, 1884, when fire destroyed the orphanage at Toledo. The Sisters were grateful that no lives were lost but because of the difficulties with which this house was grappling, reconstruction would be difficult. However, it would take more than that to disconcert Mother Deschamps. She delegated Sister Reid, the bursar, to Toledo with the title of Superior pro-tempore and the institution was rebuilt. Furthermore, the year 1884 would witness the birth of two other institutions. To this effect, a contingent of eleven Grey Nuns was sent to the Canadian West. The departure took place on the evening of May 21. After the farewells in the community room, the group went to Hospice St. Joseph where from the pulpit, Father Alexandre Deschamps, p.s.s. offered them congratulations and best wishes. They then went to the boarding terminal where all present witnessed a scene in which both heroism and emotion were apparent. Those who were leaving chatted joyfully, while relatives and friends wept abundant tears. The Superior General who had been able to suppress her own grief, later read in the columns of Protestant

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<sup>12</sup> Circ. mens. 1884-1887.

<sup>13</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, these details and those which follow were extracted from Circ. mens. 1884-1887.



newspapers, the praises of her Sisters who had accepted to leave without any hope of return.

### **ST. JOSEPH SCHOOL IN DUNBOW, N.W.T., 1884**

In 1882, Father Albert Lacombe became the Superior at the post in Calgary. In 1875, the Federal Government had established a military fort on the Bow River with Captain Brisebois as Commander, hence the name Fort Brisebois, which replaced that of Fort Lajonquière established in 1751. The following year, 1876, Colonel McLeod finally named the place Calgary, which means clear water.<sup>14</sup>

The little village, realm of the Blackfoot Indians, did not at that time, foreshadow its future greatness. The dwellings were very primitive: simple huts of aspen or of poplar or even of upright poles covered with make-shift roofs. However, many nations were represented there: Métis, French Canadian, American and even Spanish, Italian and Chinese.<sup>15</sup>

At the mouth of High River, St. Joseph's Industrial School or the Dunbow School was erected in 1883-1884. In 1887 Father Emile Legal was succeeded as principal by Father Edmond Claude.

Sisters Delphine Guénette, Ste-Geneviève and Thiffault and two Franciscan tertiaries were selected as foundresses of the Industrial School. Sister Guénette having been part of the original team of missionaries in Lac-La-Biche had a precious background of experience. She arrived in Calgary with Sister Ste-Geneviève on August 24. Sister Thiffault joined them a few weeks later. As could be expected, the house was not yet completed. To dispel their boredom, Archbishop Taché offered them a trip to the Rocky

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<sup>14</sup> Morice, *Egl. cath. Ouest Can.* V. 2, p. 396.

<sup>15</sup> Breton, *Mgr. Grandin*, p. 527.

Mountains at his expense. They travelled with the Bishop and reported that all the beauty they had admired was beyond description.

On their return to the field of action, where the site was equally superb, they lent a hand to the final preparations, so that on October 17 the school was actually opened. The pupils were slow in coming however, as the Blackfoot showed some reticence towards the White population. Furthermore, the Riel uprising of 1885 was not a favorable time to open classes.<sup>16</sup> Life was not easy for the Sisters however, since Sister Guénette was soon obliged to give up her duties while at the beginning of winter 1885, Josephine Dubé, one of the Franciscan Tertiaries, died of "galloping tuberculosis".

New missionaries replaced those who had fallen. Sister Cleary replaced Sister Guénette as Superior. Sisters Tobin, Drapeau, Mongrain and Schetté arrived in the course of the fateful year of 1885 as did Miss Druais, a substitute for Josephine Dubé, the Franciscan Tertiary.

Recruitment was carried out thanks to Father Lacombe who visited the Reserves scattered about the country and who, because he mastered three Indian languages, was able to convince the parents of the benefits of schooling. The undertaking was difficult and the Grey Nun missionaries were moved to pity by the hardships of the Apostle of the Blackfoot.

Soon thirty-one noisy little pupils claimed the devotedness and the activity of the Sisters who not only had to teach these children but also to feed and clothe them. Success crowned their efforts and Lieutenant

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<sup>16</sup> This uprising will be dealt with in the second part of this chapter.



Governor Dewdney who visited the school in 1886 expressed satisfaction with the performance of the pupils.

Periodically, the Dunbow School was visited by the major Superiors both of the Oblates and of the Grey Nuns who expressed their delight with the progress the pupils were making but deplored their low enrollment. In 1892, Mother Ward was astonished at finding in Dunbow, Cree and Blackfoot children speaking English correctly and playing in a band, "which could compare with those of our cities."<sup>17</sup>

Sister Cleary assumed the role of a doctor. When Domitilde, the Franciscan tertiary, sustained a fracture to her arm, Sister set it so well that her patient was soon able to resume her occupations. The accident, however, inspired Father Lacombe to request that the Government supply the services of a doctor. Dr. Rouleau, a staunch Catholic, was appointed a short time later.<sup>18</sup>

In 1894 the school narrowly escaped a prairie fire. In the course of the decade several shops had been added which had changed the little "borough" into a small enchanting village beyond the limits of the town of Calgary.

The territorial exhibition which took place in Regina had invited the pupils from Dunbow and in competition with work presented by White pupils,<sup>19</sup> one of the Blackfoot was awarded the first prize for footwear.

In 1897 the chronicler wrote that

Father Legal, the director, had the joy of baptizing the Chief of the Blood Tribe along with his wife who were

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<sup>17</sup> *Circ. mens.*, 1892-1895, p. 470.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 359.

<sup>19</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1895-1898, pp. 28-29.

considered as the king and queen of this domain. At this time, there were eight Sisters at the school. The farm, maintained by the boys being trained as farmers, was prosperous.

They excelled also in sports and Sister Boulanger was able to write to Mother Filiatrault on June 20, 1898:

Our youngsters from the school are becoming famous. Recently, they won at a football game in Calgary. Ten or twelve of them were declared champions of the North West and of British Columbia.

On December 13, 1913 there was a reunion of twenty-six former pupils under the presidency of Bishop McNally of Calgary and his secretary. The celebration was reaching its climax when Father Lacombe appeared.<sup>20</sup> The white-haired apostle with rounded shoulders received a homage worthy of his role as founder.

Nevertheless, the number of pupils would decrease because schools were appearing on the various Reserves. Furthermore, it appeared that the influenza epidemic in 1918 during which all the pupils were confined to bed, gave the institution the death stroke. After thirty-eight years of existence the school, now in need of major repairs, was closed indefinitely on December 16, 1922. Six Grey Nuns left this area with regret, and were directed toward other missions where they were needed.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ann. 1913-1914, p. 323-324.

<sup>21</sup> These details are extracted from the file of the Dunbow School.



## THE SCHOOL AT QU'APPELLE OR LEBRET, N.W.T., 1884

Qu'Appelle, a station located at 1,736 miles from Montreal, displays its beauty between Lake-of-the-Woods and the Rocky Mountains. It was first visited by Bishop Provencher, then by Archbishop Taché in 1864. Returning from Fort of the Prairies, today known as Edmonton, the Bishop had lost his way and arrived fortuitously on the hills surrounding the Qu'Appelle valley. He stopped to admire and contemplate the beauty of the site.

At some distance, he noticed an encampment of Cree Indians. The latter helped him find his position and Archbishop Taché realized that on this river which flowed through the valley, a Fort had at one time been built by La Vérendrye's sons, who were his grand uncles. Then and there, he decided to found a mission in this location. Through the two following winters, he sent Father Ritchot there. The latter raised the first missionary base. In 1868 he was replaced by Father Decorby who was replaced a short time later by Father Hugonard, pastor of the St. Florian Parish, later named that of the Sacred Heart.<sup>22</sup> At the moment when industrial schools were being established, Father Hugonard presented to Bishop Grandin and Father Lacombe, Vicar-General, a request that such a school be established in his parish which included Cree, Sauteux and Sioux tribes. Bishop Grandin consulted Archbishop Taché, his superior who went to Ottawa and obtained financial assistance from the Federal Government for the construction and operation of the Qu'Appelle School which was then built on property donated by the Archbishop.<sup>23</sup> The work almost failed following federal elections, but finally all was resolved and work on the

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<sup>22</sup> Benoît, *Vie de Mgr. Taché*, vol. 2, pp. 528- 529.

<sup>23</sup> Sr. M. Guichon, 1844-1944, pp. 49-50.

school progressed through the summer of 1884, when Father Lebret, another Oblate priest, arrived at the mission.<sup>24</sup>

On June 4, 1884 Sisters Brassard and St. Charles, both on their way to their respective missions of Ile-a-la-Crosse and of Chipewyan in the Athabaska region, stopped at Qu'Appelle and "saw the location of the industrial school which was only twenty-three miles from the landing place,"<sup>25</sup> a location which did not seem very far compared to the great distance which separated them from the Mother House.

On October 20, the foundresses, Sisters Lalumière, Bergeron and St. Arnaud left St. Boniface. They reached their destination three days later and were greeted by Father Hugonard, the principal and by Mr. Preston, the son of an English Lord. The Sisters were no longer astonished at having to occupy a house that would be completed only in December.<sup>26</sup> In the meantime, work was plentiful. While the Sisters were preparing for the arrival of pupils in the spring of 1885, Father Hugonard and his colleagues were recruiting through a district which was greater than the whole of France<sup>27</sup> when the Métis uprising broke. In Montreal, everyone was worried about the safety of the far away missionaries. Mother Deschamps even wrote to Bishop Grandin asking him to return to St. Boniface the Sisters residing at Dunbow and Qu'Appelle.<sup>28</sup> The Bishop, in a letter dated April 8, 1885 explained concerning the Oblates and the Grey Nuns:

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<sup>24</sup> Fr. Lebret added the function of post-master to his regular duties. Senator Girard would change the name of Qu'Appelle to that of this missionary.

<sup>25</sup> Sr. St. Charles to Mother Deschamps, June 4, 1884.

<sup>26</sup> Morice, O.C., V. 3, p. 54.

<sup>27</sup> Letter of Jan. 25, 1888.

<sup>28</sup> Circ. mens. 1884-1887, p. 224.



I do not fear for our lives, but I fear for our properties (...) The Industrial School in Calgary (Dunbow) could well disappear (...) They say the Protestant school in Battleford has already been destroyed

Bishop Grandin added broken-heartedly.

As the Blackfoot were maintained in peace at Dunbow due to the influence of Father Lacombe, so at Lebret, Father Hugonard kept the Indians at Lime Mountain and Crooked Lake neutral. Star Blanket, the chief of this region was even ambushed with his men to the North of Lebret.<sup>29</sup> The Oblate begged the Superior General to desist. She could hardly resist this missionary whose influence had won the total confidence of the Indians at whose services he would dedicate thirty-three years of his life.

Contrary to what happened in Dunbow, the recruiting of children proved to be easy and by the spring of 1885, there were thirty boys. It was soon time to think of admitting girls.<sup>30</sup> Gentlemen of 'high rank' visited the school and spoke of it in glowing terms. Even Lieutenant Governor Dewdney, who originally had strongly opposed the creation of these schools,<sup>31</sup> had to admit their value and acknowledge the founding principle that gave rise to them as he had done at Dunbow.

At Lebret as in the other missions, good was accomplished at great cost. Sister Lalumière who was becoming blind, was recalled to the Mother House in 1886. Sister Marie replaced her as Superior. Sister St. Arnaud, stricken with galloping tuberculosis, caused great alarm. The doctor recommended her immediate departure. She left for St. Boniface but, contrary to the

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<sup>29</sup> Morice, O.C., V. 3, p. 80.

<sup>30</sup> In his correspondence with Ottawa, Bishop Taché had insisted on the creation of Industrial Schools, especially for girls.

<sup>31</sup> Morice, O.C., V. 3, pp. 43-44.

medical prognosis, she recovered and returned to her post where she had been replaced by Sister Lamothe. Only in 1905 did she actually return to the Mother House.<sup>32</sup> The Sioux were astounded at the continuing availability of these missionaries of the Gospel. One of them asked Father Campeau: "Where do these men and women of prayer grow? Some who come to us are elderly, some are young, but all are kind and charitable."<sup>33</sup>

On April 7, 1887, the school admitted eighty-nine pupils of whom thirty-four were girls "who shared the attic where they slept soundly on beds of straw." The influence of the school was felt even in the homes since during the winter of 1887 there were a great number of conversions. Others still undecided, attended the midnight Mass and the festive meal on Christmas day. Sister Goulet, who spoke the Cree and Sauteux languages fluently, circulated around the tables befriending the guests who exclaimed: "Ah, the Sister speaks and we can understand her."<sup>34</sup>

There is an advantage to being understood and especially to understanding. Father Hugonard realized it on this particular Christmas day when he was about to bless a union already three years in existence. "Will you take 'X' for your spouse?" he asked. "Not just yet," the young man replied firmly. Surprised, Father Hugonard delayed the celebration then discovered the reason: the young man wished first to be baptized and to have his children baptized.

In 1888, there were six Sisters at the school. Finally, in December of that year, fifty-six girls moved into the new house which had been built for them. Another marriage took place on February 26, 1889. It was Cecile, the first

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<sup>32</sup> Circ. mens. 1904-1906, pp. 352-353.

<sup>33</sup> Letter of Jan. 2, 1890.

<sup>34</sup> A.S.G.M., doss. Sr. Goulet.



pupil received at the school who had decided to marry. All the relatives and friends wearing their finest costumes and with faces painted in every color and wearing feathers in their hair, came to the school in large numbers where they attended the wedding and remained till the following day. The Sisters were kept busy attending to everyone. Sister Goulet explained: "Perhaps soon all will respond to the Father's invitation to come to His banquet."

Before long, a tradition was set at this school. Everyone wished to celebrate their wedding there. The girls who worked out preferred to remain at the school rather than in their huts. Finally, an alumni association was created.

The musical talent of the Amerindians was displayed in their singing and in the success of their band performance. Archbishop Taché to whom the mission owed its foundation returned there in 1890. He attended Vespers and his soul was deeply moved when he heard the choir of Cree, Sauteux and Sioux children singing the verse of the psalm: *Laetatus sum in his quae dicta sunt mihi.* (I rejoiced when I heard them say...) The Archbishop dared not blend his voice with those of these 'Children of the Forest', for he remembered being told by a neophyte: "You sing badly," but he appreciated the beauty of other voices and blessed the Lord for having once been lost in the region of the Qu'Appelle River where fields were ripening for Christ.

The place was indeed blessed for on October 23, 1891, the sudden cure of Sister St. Thomas was recorded, a favor attributed to Mother d'Youville.<sup>35</sup> It was blessed also because it had been visited by the cross. "Hail has caused great damage at the Industrial School," say the chronicles of 1892. "Seven hundred large panes of glass were broken. Father Hugonard's garden was completely destroyed in a quarter of an hour."

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<sup>35</sup> Violent pulmonary hemorrhages had endangered the life of Sr. St. Thomas.

The pupils continued to increase in number and to progress in knowledge. They took part in the Chicago Exhibition and in that of Regina. At the latter place, they brought back almost all of the first prizes. Does this mean that the children of the red skins had become docile as lambs? Some maintain they had. Father Langevin would say concerning the 180 pupils whom he addressed in the summer of 1893, "They listened to me attentively. There were, here and there, a few little wolves but on the whole they were very good."<sup>36</sup>

Among the women now of age, vocations appeared and two young ladies went to St. Boniface in the hope of being admitted to the novitiate of the little Auxiliary Sisters.<sup>37</sup> They would see for themselves "where grow the women of prayer." Toward the end of November 1897, fire destroyed the shoe factory. Modern machines had just been installed there. Father Hugonard decided to rebuild.<sup>38</sup>

Everyone was surprised to see that these trials far from dissuading the pupils who were waiting, stimulated the hesitant and pupils abounded at the school.<sup>39</sup> It must also be pointed out that the success of former students now living on the reserves contributed greatly toward making the institution popular. Sister Goulet pointed out <sup>40</sup> that "Our former pupils give us great comfort. They make us forget all the trouble and the fatigue."

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<sup>36</sup> Morice, Mgr. A. Langevin. p. 104.

<sup>37</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1895-1898. pp. 270-272. The two were Misses Rose Fagnan and Madeleine Racette.

<sup>38</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1895-1898, p. 533.

<sup>39</sup> A law which came into effect in 1898 stipulated that a girl admitted must be fourteen and remain at the school for four years.

<sup>40</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1898-1901, p. 328.



When, at the end of 1899, the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion came to Lebret to establish a boarding school for white children, the eight Grey Nuns welcomed them cordially. "Our great desire is that their work may be blessed by God," wrote Sister Goulet, but one could sense that she would not have traded her lot for that of the new arrivals.

The alumni of 1901 assembled the former pupils at their Alma Mater and the celebration lasted four days.

Everyone conducted themselves in a manner that was a credit to the institution. The young mothers were becomingly dressed; the small children were remarkably clean and the young husbands were dressed as gentlemen,

declared the Superior with pride.<sup>41</sup>

The nine Grey Nuns who served the Lord at the Lebret school had many opportunities to manifest the diversity of their talents. The teachers became nurses when there was an epidemic. Thus, in March 1902, measles broke out among the pupils. A dormitory became an infirmary and Sister Bergeron became the nurse to twenty-seven sick children. As well as earning the praises of the non-Catholic doctor,<sup>42</sup> she won an increase in the love of the children and of their parents.

In short, all was well in Lebret. On January 5, 1904, an anonymous writer stated:

Such were matters there that life was peaceful when suddenly, tragedy struck. In no time fire destroyed the

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<sup>41</sup> Letter of Sr. Goulet to Mother Filiatrault, July 13, 1901. The Sisters of Our Lady of Sion were replaced by the Sisters of St. Joseph from St. Hyacinthe.

<sup>42</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1902-1903, p. 83.

school and some of its adjacent buildings, - the school which had been enlarged three times in its twenty year existence!

"If the fire had broken out during the night, we would all have perished in the flames," wrote Sister Goulet.<sup>43</sup>

In less than half an hour, the smoke was so dense that we could not save any furniture. From the girls' house some succeeded in throwing blankets, pillows and even a few beds through the window.

Sisters McMillan and Weekes who were on second and third floors respectively, could escape only through a window, as did the young Oblate priest recently arrived in Lebret and who had the honor of saving the Blessed Sacrament. This rescuer had knocked at Sister Weekes' door in order to find his way and this enabled her to escape from the flames. In less time than it takes to write about it, the Sisters were completely stripped of everything but the clothes they were wearing. For shelter, they received temporary lodging from the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion whose boarding school was vacant during the Christmas holidays.

"We had everything," writes Sister Goulet, "and now we have nothing." Then undoubtedly recalling the incident of January 31, 1745 when Mother d'Youville and her first companions underwent the same experience, she added: "God wishes us to practice poverty and patience." ... and heroism, we could add. Father Hugonard, admirable for his resignation did not however consider giving up the work. He was supported in this by the Sisters who were ready for any sacrifice. They lived in the parish church; the boys in the adjacent buildings. A few weeks later, after having slept on the hard pews in the choir-loft, the Sisters had beds. When summer arrived, Sister Bergeron slept in the bell-tower. Every scrap of material

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<sup>43</sup> The details concerning the fire were taken from the letter



was collected to make garments for the children. All was done during the week for on weekends, all traces of household activity had to disappear in order to give way to worship services.

The Sisters received new clothing from their Sisters in Montreal who at the invitation of Mother Hamel, the Superior General, gave the best they had.<sup>44</sup> Food supplies had been stored in a secure place which was not spared by the flames. What remained lasted hardly three weeks. But they succeeded in living from day to day carrying their few precious belongings while construction was in progress on three separate buildings 60 ft. apart. Soon, the old cobbler shop could be occupied. The paint shop was used both as a kitchen and a classroom. The Sisters took their meals in a narrow hallway where the sounds of the boiler were continually heard. As there was room for only six at table, the Sisters took turns.

By September 1905 the corner-stone for the chapel could at last be blessed. The winter of 1907 was particularly rigorous. The cold came in everywhere and fuel was in short supply. They had to resort to whatever could serve as fuel. Toward the end of this year however, everything was back to normal and Sister Goulet could write to Mother General: "Today, thanks to the mercy of God, we occupy a good and large house where we have all the necessary comfort." The writer did not add that during the four year period of trial the ordinary program had been maintained. Classes were regular, the sick were cared for, social services were kept up and even marriages were celebrated. Once there were four on the same day.<sup>45</sup>

On October 22, 1909 the school's twenty-fifth anniversary was celebrated in a new building far more

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<sup>44</sup> Circ. mens. 1902-1905, p. 855.

<sup>45</sup> Circ. mens. 1906-1908, p. 557.

impressive than structures of earlier times. The program consisted of a Mass of thanksgiving and a great banquet which featured a cake representing the old school. The cake was a masterpiece of Sister Champagne. In the evening, the pupils enacted the history of Lebret. The distinguished guests would say:

the richness of the soil and the abundance of the crops have been admired but a thousand times more praiseworthy is the transformation wrought in the minds and hearts of these dear children!<sup>46</sup>

Lebret had spanned the first quarter century of its history. Some 2,000 Indian children had received some knowledge of God as well as principles of faith and morals and also skills which would enable them to earn their living in an honorable way. Undoubtedly, as they reviewed the past, a time so short but so rich in blessings, the Sisters gave thanks to God for having been able to accomplish so much good in this enchanted site where it seemed easier to see things in the light of eternity.

### - 1885 -

For the Grey Nuns, the year 1885 opened with a good forecast. The professions of December 30 had increased the religious personnel by ten. The celebration was impressive and Reverend Father Pichon, s.j., delivered an eloquent sermon.<sup>47</sup> The number of Grey Nuns was now 354 which was an incentive for Mother Deschamps to view the future with confidence. She could send more Sisters to the Northwest. In a letter from Sister Ward dated September 17, 1884 it was learned that the caravan which

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<sup>46</sup> Circ. mens. 1909-1911, pp. 362-363.

<sup>47</sup> In all likelihood, this is the same Father Pichon whom St. Theresa of the Child Jesus mentions in her Story of a Soul.



had left the preceding year had finally reached the distant mission of Providence. She added that crops had failed especially at Chipewyan but that fishing had been good. Sisters Columbine and Boursier and the three girls from Brittany, Mathurine, Marie-Anne and Josephine were adapting well to the life of poverty and hardships of these remote areas.

In February, the initial procedure relative to the cause of Mother d'Youville was sent to Rome as well as the petition signed by all the Grey Nuns on December 23. At the end of March fifty-eight other petitions reached Rome signed by Archbishops, Bishops and religious authorities from places where the Grey Nuns were stationed.

At the Mother House, Mrs. Tiffin's generosity was again exercised at the beginning of March. Two magnificent paintings were installed in the sanctuary, above the altar of the Holy Cross. They were by Urbain Bourgeois, a famous artist in Paris, and represented the Finding of the Holy Cross and the miracle revealing its authenticity. The Grey Nuns, who had inherited from their founders the prayer "O Crux Ave," experienced a revitalization of Mother d'Youville's favorite devotion. They were as yet unaware that a heavy cross would befall them within a month.

Since January 24, 1885, the telegraph had linked the Pacific coast to the Atlantic<sup>48</sup> and in the latter half of March, like a thunderbolt, news arrived of the Métis uprising under Louis Riel who had returned from Montana in the preceding June.

Louis Riel had been a protégé of Archbishop Taché, of Dame Masson de Terrebonne<sup>49</sup> and of the Grey Nuns whose elementary school he had attended in St. Boniface

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<sup>48</sup> Morice, *Hist. abrégée*, p. 116.

<sup>49</sup> Deceased in November 1883.

before the Archbishop had sent him to Montreal to study for the priesthood. The college program had altered his health so in 1861,<sup>50</sup> Mother Deschamps, after consulting his doctor, obtained permission for him to continue his studies as a day-student while staying at the old Mother House. The student disappointed his protectors. In 1870 he took up the charge of the Métis Movement in St. Boniface. Following the uprising, he fled to Montana where he became an American citizen. During his exile, Gabriel Dumont joined him in order to convince him to lead the Metis in Saskatchewan and Alberta who were grappling with the same problems as had those of Manitoba fifteen years earlier. The unfortunate Riel allowed himself to be persuaded and he engaged in an adventure which would prove to be his downfall.<sup>51</sup>

Mother Deschamps and the Sisters refused to believe that their former protégé would harm his benefactors among whose ranks was his own Sister Sara, a valiant missionary at Ile-à-la-Crosse and who died there on December 27, 1883. But on hearing that Riel, despairing and demented, had accepted the coalition of the various Indian tribes, they became justly alarmed. It was then that she wrote to Bishop Grandin to bring back to St. Boniface the Grey Nuns established at Dunbow and Qu'Appelle. On April 8, the Bishop replied that "there is no need to fear for our lives, but for our property." Alas, Bishop Grandin did not know that Fathers Marchand and Fafard had already fallen, as well as seven other white men who were victims of Big Bear, Riel's ally at Frog Lake.

Vain were the petitions of Archbishop Taché and Bishop Grandin, of the Anglican Bishop MacLean and of Colonel

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<sup>50</sup> Mother Deschamps was then at the end of her second term as Superior.

<sup>51</sup> The details concerning Riel were taken from his file preserved at A.S.G.M.



Richardson to obtain justice for the Metis.<sup>52</sup> An open revolt was inevitable and would necessitate the sending of troops. A regiment left Montreal on April 2, the very day on which Fathers Marchand, Fafard and their companions were shot. Despite their rapid travel by railway, many things happened before the insurrection could be quelled. The troops were fortunate that the influence of the Oblates, notably Bishop Grandin and Fathers Lacombe, Hugonard, Paquette, Collignon, Végreville, Moulin and Leduc, had succeeded in keeping the Piegan, the Blood, the Sarcis, and the Assiniboines out of the war.

The reports carried by newspapers were sometimes contradictory so that it was mid-May before the Sisters in Montreal could know what was happening in St. Albert. Then, during a visit to the Mother House, Father Antoine informed them that people of the region had been gripped by fear and that the Grey Nun Convent on the enchanting hill had become a refuge for women and children from Edmonton, Lamoureux and Namao. When at the end of May news of the death of Fathers Marchand and Fafard reached them, Mother Deschamps' anxiety reached its peak. She decided to go to her Sisters whom she believed were threatened. The Sisters tried to dissuade her because of her age and poor health but to no avail. It was her duty to go and support her missionaries and even to share their fate if such was God's will.

On May 31, newspapers announced the end of the insurrection and the capture of the principal leaders.<sup>53</sup> They also announced that the Fort and the mission at Lac-la-Biche had been plundered and destroyed. That was all it took to induce the Superior General to proceed with her plan. Furthermore, she would bring along to the West two

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<sup>52</sup> Breton, o.c., p. 295.

<sup>53</sup> Riel gave himself up to Middleton on May 15.

new missionaries and three Franciscan Tertiaries from Brittany to ensure relief. The death of Archbishop Bourget, the saintly old Bishop at Sault-au-Recollet, inclined her however to pay her respects to this worthy Bishop to whom the Grey Nuns owed so much gratitude.<sup>54</sup>

Mother Deschamps left in the evening of June 15 after emotional good-byes to the personnel at the Mother House. Everyone silently wondered if she would return.

The itinerary included a stop at Fort Totten from where the travellers would depart on July 6. Two days later, they arrived in St. Boniface. "Everybody's Mother" was welcomed with great joy. Having learned that Mrs. Delaney and Mrs. Gowanlocks, who had been prisoners of Big Bear and of whom it had been reported that they had been abused and massacred, were in fact in Winnipeg, Mother Deschamps promptly went to offer her respects and assure them of her joy that they were safe and well.

Mother Deschamps had no idea how much the insurrection had disrupted life at the convents of Lac-La-Biche and Ile-à-la-Crosse. The revolt had even alarmed the heroic women of the North.<sup>55</sup> In great fear, Fathers, Brothers, Sisters and pupils had fled from Ile-à-la-Crosse, which was said to be threatened by the Cree. They fled to the Isle of the English fifty miles from the mission where they were sheltered by the Chipewyan Indians till the end of April and where they had to live according to Indian

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<sup>54</sup> Archbishop Bourget died on June 8 and was buried on the twelfth after a solemn funeral which assembled both friends and adversaries. We know that Riel, in one of his religious follies, mentioned his intention of removing His Holiness Pius IX and replacing him with Bishop Bourget. This could be explained by the fact that Riel rightfully considered Bishop Bourget as a benefactor of the Riel family.

<sup>55</sup> The account of these travels reached the Mother House only at the beginning of July.



customs. They returned only on May 3, feast of the Finding of the Cross, after the priests had erected on the Island, a large wooden cross on which was inscribed:

On this Island, Priests, Sisters, Brothers and Officers threatened by their persecutors, the approaching Cree in revolt, came to seek refuge among their faithful Chipewyans. It is in memory of this stay among them that this cross is erected to thank God.<sup>56</sup>

Panic seized the people of the region of Lac-La- Biche, especially after the massacre at Frog Lake only three days distant from the mission. Sister Youville, the Superior, made known her alarm to the six Sisters under her direction. Everyone feared a coalition between the Cree of White Fish Lake and those of Big Bear. Bishop Faraud tried in vain to reassure the Sisters counting on his personal influence to subdue the rebels. Sister Youville was not convinced and insisted on leaving. The flight took place during the night of April 28-29. There also, they took refuge on an island and relied on fish for nourishment. The Sisters and the pupils sought shelter in Indian huts and a tent which protected them more or less against the inclement weather. They lived in this fashion until the early evening of May 12 when aboard a leaky craft they landed on what they called, "our precious shore."

As for the Sisters at Fort Providence, near the Arctic Circle, it appeared that they at least, had been spared and yet, they experienced the repercussions of the turmoil: delays in mail service and damaged merchandise: boxes arrived stained with blood and those who delivered them explained to the missionaries: "There is fighting not far from here and Sisters like you are being killed." A few months later, they received a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes,

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<sup>56</sup> A.S.G.M. doss. Sr. Hearn.

which had been shipped to them from France. The box, on arrival at Green Lake near Ile-à-la-Crosse, had been opened with an axe by the pagan warriors. At the sight of "this woman laying in a coffin" the terrified vandals fled. A Catholic Native returned the statue of the Immaculate Conception and it was given a place of honor in the chapel at the convent of Providence.<sup>57</sup>

Mother Deschamps reached St. Albert on July 27. It was the first time that a Superior General had visited this remote mission and it was there that she learned of the experience of the missionaries of Lac-La-Biche and Ile-à-la-Crosse. It was not possible for her to visit these two places but she requested that the Sisters of Lac-La-Biche, the nearest to St. Albert, come to meet her there. Sisters Youville, Sicard and Carroll arrived two days later. According to Sister Youville, there were no words to express her boundless joy: "the greatest joy of her missionary life."

Another praiseworthy Grey Nun, Sister Emery, foundress of the first mission in Alberta, and who had been working there for the past twenty-six years, could now return to her Maker after such a great consolation. In fact, she died on August 5 with Mother General at her side. On August 7, the valiant missionary was laid to rest beside Sister Alphonse in whose company she had labored from the time of the founding.

During her stay in Sunny Alberta, Mother Deschamps went to Dunbow and Qu'Appelle in order to re-assign the Sisters there, according to the changes mentioned earlier. In Calgary, she met the Faithful Companions of Jesus who had been established at St. Laurent, but who had to flee toward Prince Albert at the time of the revolt. Arrested by

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<sup>57</sup> P. Duchaussois, *Femmes héroïques*, pp. 177-178.



the rebels, they were taken to Riel in Batoche where they were treated with respect.

As for Riel, history has recorded his sad fate despite the fact that he had powerful intercessors in the Bishops and the Oblate Fathers. Eight of his allies were executed together in Battleford. Archbishop Taché, upon learning of the execution of his protégé, entrusted Mr. Dugas with the responsibility of delivering the sad news to his family. On this same evening of November 16, Sister Lamy, the Superior in St. Boniface, went on behalf of the Grey Nuns to express sympathy to Louis' mother and to his wife.

On December 12, 1885, Father Gabriel Cloutier, an emissary of Archbishop Taché went to Regina to claim Louis Riel's body and bring it back to St. Boniface. The funeral convoy travelled by night. Riel's coffin was delivered to the family residing at St. Vital. On the following day, in St. Boniface, Riel's coffin, carried on the shoulders of Métis in their traditional coats, entered the cathedral where Archbishop Taché awaited the body for the funeral service. The Grey Nuns grieved over the unfortunate fate of their protégé. According to their custom, they refrained from judging their former pupil and prayed for his eternal repose. An anonymous writer simply inscribed the following note in the chronicles:

Poor dear Sister Riel, God was indeed merciful in calling her to himself before now and thus to have spared her the sorrow and intense grief she would have experienced over the sad fate of her brother!

It had often been told that Sister Riel, known as Sister Marguerite Marie, had been one of our most valiant missionaries.

## ST. ROCH AND ST. CAMILLE HOSPITALS, 1885

Mother Deschamps, who had gone to the help of her Sisters threatened by the Riel uprising, continued in the West, her mission of bringing comfort. She visited successively St. Albert, the school at Dunbow and that at Qu'Appelle then returned to St. Boniface where she remained for a longer period in order to carry out the Canonical visitation prescribed by the Constitutions. During her absence, an unexpected event took place in Montreal which necessitated the help of the Grey Nuns.

The Superior General, however, seemed to have foreseen the eventuality, for at the time of her departure from Montreal, she had addressed a final recommendation to the Sisters of the Mother House: "Give of yourselves generously. If any epidemic breaks out, go to help the victims like true Sisters of Charity."<sup>58</sup> A few cases of small-pox were recorded at Hôtel-Dieu during April. The Department of Health then decided to open the civic hospital on the 7th of that month. By June 10, twenty-eight victims had been registered. The danger of an epidemic was obvious. Mother Deschamps had wisely recommended that her Sisters follow the tradition established as early as 1755, whereby the Sisters had flocked to the help of the plague-stricken.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Sr. Collette, *Vie de Mère Deschamps*. p. 32.

<sup>59</sup> A religious since 1737, Mother d'Youville donned the grey habit on Aug. 25, 1755. On that very day she went to assist the Indians at Sault St. Louis who were afflicted with small-pox. In 1847, seven Grey Nuns died of typhus contracted from the Irish immigrants. Ever since 1855 when the St. Vincent Hospital in Toledo came into existence, it was understood that during the numerous epidemics which broke out in this town sitting on marshy land, the Grey Nuns would be in charge of the "Pest House".



Sister Charlebois, the Assistant General, therefore did not hesitate to call forth volunteers. The Sisters of Providence for their part, gave themselves totally in the East section of town. Several succumbed to the disease. About August 26, when the plague<sup>60</sup> reached the West side, four Grey Nuns began to make rounds of the homes of the afflicted. As a measure of prudence, these nurses were assigned a separate apartment, known as the soap-house. The visiting Sisters defied the pestilence, entering the quarantined homes to alleviate pitiable conditions. The dead lay alongside the living and it even happened that in a large family there was only one left who was barely conscious enough to be aware that those about him were dead. From September 26 to October 2, Montreal and suburbs recorded 401 deaths. Vaccination became mandatory. This measure brought about some dissension from the population who opposed any change.<sup>61</sup>

Close to Hôtel-Dieu was a refuge where the quality of care was inadequate. The town officials asked the Grey Nuns to take over the administration. Sisters Hickey, Papineau, St. Jean-de-la-Croix and Martin were assigned to the task. Sister Hickey, the Superior, visited the set-up on September 12. She found seventy two patients in a pitiable state, begging her to care for them. On the following Monday, feast of the Triumph of the Cross, the four Grey Nuns entered this house of suffering. Their arrival displeased certain members of the staff who promptly left the temporary hospital making it necessary to obtain reinforcements immediately. Sister Charlebois had plenty to choose from, so eager were the Sisters to exercise that function par excellence: the care of the poor. Thus, the

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<sup>60</sup> Unless indicated to the contrary, the details concerning this epidemic, as well as the founding of St. Roch, St. Camille and St. Vincent were taken from *Circ. mens.* 1884-1887.

<sup>61</sup> Rumily, o.c., V. 5, pp. 83-84.

names of Sisters Forget, Casgrain, Labrèque and the novices Reeves, Mailloux, Cummings, Vallières, Laflamme, Poitevin, Paiement, Ste-Josephine, Weekes, Ste-Monique, and Bourque deserved to be recorded in history as well as those of Sisters Neveu, St. Stanislas, and Duchesneault, visiting nurses.

Thus arose St. Roch Hospital, resulting from an immediate need which from its early days was a prey to opposition and to a slanderous campaign. Mr. I. Flynn, Secretary for the Department of Health, invited Sister Charlebois to refute the accusations. On October 28, she replied:

It suffices for me to know that our Sisters are about their duty and to be aware that the care they are giving the patients is both efficient and charitable. I prefer that we be justified by our works rather than by our writings.

The epidemic wrought such havoc that authorities decided to open a new lazaretto at the Crystal Palace on the Exhibition site of Mile-End. This palace adjacent to the Mount Royal or St. Camille Hospital had been blessed on October 10, by Bishop Fabre while St. Sauveur Hospital, reserved for non-Catholics and serviced by their own Sisters of Saint Margaret had been blessed by Archbishop Bond. The buildings, entirely separate but joined by hallways could accommodate more than 300 patients. It was to this facility that St. Roch Hospital transferred its patients on December 4, 1885 and where patients afflicted with small-pox would be cared for. It is a verifiable fact that forty-eight Grey Nuns enrolled in this praiseworthy team



along with the young Betsy O'Reilly.<sup>62</sup> Seven hundred and seventy patients were treated there of whom 232 would die. From February 1885 to December 1886, the region of Montreal recorded 3,146 deaths.<sup>63</sup>

Mother Deschamps had been informed of these diverse activities and of the numerous changes while she witnessed in St. Boniface the same eagerness to help the victims of plague. In fact, an isolation section was set up in one of the buildings of the St. Boniface Hospital, "the old ice-house", repaired and set up for the care of contagious cases.<sup>64</sup> This initiative of course received her endorsement. She left the Red River on October 19, stopped at Fort Totten on the 23rd, and reached Toledo on the 27th, where she had the delicate task of comforting the Sisters who were being oppressed by diocesan directives.

On November 4, the day following her arrival in Montreal, the Superior General went to the St. Roch and St. Camille Hospitals to support and encourage the nurses. Once again, the Grey Nuns had proven to be equal to their task as Sisters of Charity. They defied the dangers of the contagion and remained disposed to give their life if necessary as their companions had done in 1847 and more recently in 1881.

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<sup>62</sup> Betsy O'Reilly was a young orphan who, unwilling to leave the Grey Nuns, had purposely damaged her eyes with a strong substance. Remaining at the convent as door-keeper, she more or less had been adopted by Mrs. Tiffin, who had her consult the most noted specialists of the time. Betsy's eyesight would never improve but she would prove worthy of the trust of her benefactress and it would be she who would assist her at death.

<sup>63</sup> The administration of St. Camille Hospital was transferred to Notre-Dame Hospital in 1896 and was open to patients with contagious diseases. (Circ. mens. 1895-1898, pp. 115-117.)

<sup>64</sup> Hôp. St. Roch et St. Bon. A.S.G.M., doss. 2.

The Superior General had reason to be proud of her Sisters wherever they were. She saw that the spirit of the Foundress was indeed alive in the Congregation, a spirit "of participation in the Fatherhood of God, that immense source of mercy and charity". From the Fatherhood of God to the brotherhood of man, thus may summarize in a few words the spiritual journey of the Mother of the Poor.

In the course of the proceedings for the introduction of Mother d'Youville's Cause before the Court in Rome, the Grey Nuns were indeed pleased to read the testimony of one of the witnesses:

The light of a faith developed to a degree lofty enough to enable an ordinary woman to discover a devotion almost unknown in her surroundings and even in the Catholic world, such attraction could have been produced only by the Spirit of God.<sup>65</sup>

Mother Deschamps and all her Sisters knew that their Foundress, under the movement of the Spirit, had chosen as a model the beloved Son who had said: "No one can come to the Father except through Me" (Jn 14:6) and it was a great joy for them to see above the side altar to the left, Urbain Bourgeois' beautiful painting representing Jesus urging souls to trust in the Father and to love Him. This painting was installed at the end of September and was a copy of another in the Mother House of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Paris.<sup>66</sup> The benefactor, Mrs. Tiffin, also ordered from the same artist another masterpiece: Christ teaching the Lord's Prayer to his disciples. On December 15 of this memorable year, 1885,<sup>67</sup> it was blessed and installed above the altar dedicated to the Eternal Father.

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<sup>65</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1884-1887, p. 351. The devotion mentioned here is that of the Eternal Father.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>67</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1884-87, p. 350.



Even today, these paintings remind the Sisters of their ideal: total trust in the mercy of God the Father, the imitation of Christ who so loved mankind that he accepted death on a cross.<sup>68</sup> Finally, they are inspired by the middle painting representing St. Joseph at his work bench, assisted by the Child whose skilled workmanship is evident by the Cross above his head.<sup>69</sup>

For the benefit of the Sisters, Mother d'Youville had preferred to convey in pictures rather than in words what God expected of them here below: the imitation of Christ by works on behalf of the poor in the large human family.

Your light must shine before men so that seeing your good works, they will give thanks to the Father who is in heaven (Mt. 5:16).

Quietly, the Sisters had been faithful to her instructions. In the Northwest, they had taken in those who fled the rebels; everywhere, they cared for the sick in hospitals, for the elderly in hospices, for orphans and other children in their schools; foundlings filled their nurseries, itinerants were sheltered at Hospice St. Charles. Furthermore, despite the unexpected events of those not to be forgotten years, they accepted a new type of work in Montreal. Mother

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<sup>68</sup> It will be remembered that two paintings of the Holy Cross had been received in May of the same year. Two other paintings representing the martyrdom of St. Andrew and the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi by the same artist would be received in 1886. At that time, the two paintings donated by Father Faillon in 1853 and 1856 by the artist Leopold Durangel would be placed at the rear of the chapel.

<sup>69</sup> Some time before her death, Mother d'Youville herself, writing to her attorney, had asked him to have made in France a painting according to this description. This painting would be made only in 1830 under the administration of Mother Lemaire who suggested adding "the Blessed Virgin with her spindle." Mother Lemaire wished thus to perpetuate the devotion of the Foundress to the Holy Family.

Deschamps, an outstanding woman of prayer, was filled with joy as she engaged in action.

### ASYLUM OF ST. HENRI DES TANNERIES, 1885

The Village of Tanneries developed in the suburbs of Montreal. In 1874 it became the municipal corporation of St. Henri and Narcisse Trudel was elected mayor the following year. The Town of St- Henri was proud of its beautiful church which as of July 2, 1867 was its parish centre; there the upper middle-class of lawyers, doctors, notaries and merchants attended services along with the common folk.<sup>70</sup>

Tanners engaged in preparing leather (hence the name Tanneries) had long been established there. The machine shops of the Grand Trunk Railway and the slaughter house for the west side explained the increase of the population to 9,000.<sup>71</sup> It was a working population where the women also found employment outside the home. Among the leisure activities provided at St. Henri, the Canadian Club of Racketeers was definitely the favorite.<sup>72</sup>

The charming little town was endowed with a convent, that of the Sisters of St. Anne, established there since 1870, and a College maintained by the Brothers of the Christian Schools built by the parish two years later.

However, Father Rémi Décarie, pastor there since 1882,<sup>73</sup> deplored the absence of a day-care centre, a

<sup>70</sup> Rumilly, o.c., T. 3, p. 58.

<sup>71</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the details concerning St. Henri were taken from the chronicles of the asylum and from the *Circ. mens.* of the years mentioned.

<sup>72</sup> Rumilly, o.c.t. 3, p. 149.

<sup>73</sup> From 1877-1879, he had replaced Fr. I. Gratton, the second pastor. Fr. Décarie had occupied several positions, one of which was at Vancouver Island and another at Oakland, California. His health, fragile at first, became more stable. He was named pastor at Bedford, N.Y. in 1879 and returned to St-Henri in 1882.



nursery school or a kindergarten. He convinced the administrative board of the parish by 1884, to found a shelter for children of both sexes, of pre-school age, and to entrust its direction to the Grey Nuns.<sup>74</sup> He knew what to expect of the dedication and the success of the Sisters whom he had observed in action at similar works in Montreal, the institutions of Nazareth, St. Patrick's and St. Joseph's, and moreover, he had three nieces in that community.<sup>75</sup>

Bishop Fabre approved the pastor's project on October 29, 1884 and the following spring, the construction of a two-storey brick building measuring 100 ft. x 40 ft. with an added kitchen, was begun. The house was built on parish property adjacent to the sacristy and facing College Street.

In the course of the winter, Father Décarie went to the Mother House on Guy Street to intercede with Mother Deschamps. "Why do you want Grey Nuns?" she asked. "To open a shelter for our small children." "Are there many small children in your parish?" "Mother, are there many? Just lift any board of the sidewalk and some will appear!" replied the pastor. The Superior smiled and later she urged the members of her Council to accept this new work which the founder had called an asylum or shelter.

The administrative body was financially restrained and in debt, but the pastor was optimistic and discerning. The debt would ultimately be paid off and gradually also the work would progress. The Sisters would begin by taking in pre-school children, then orphans and a few elderly persons, and a Sister would visit the poor in their homes. This diversity of works would be covered under the name of asylum and Father Décarie who had foresight but

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<sup>74</sup> E. Auclair, *St-Henri des Tanneries*, p. 72.

<sup>75</sup> The Grey Nuns had accepted to manage a school at St-Henri from 1861-1870.

agreed to begin slowly, returned home with the promise that Sisters would soon go and assist him with his charitable works. They would be employed by the administrative body and would receive a small annual salary.

In early summer, Sister St-Louis, the Superior, and one of her companions, probably Sister Aubry, went to supervise the final stages of construction at the request of the founder. They stayed at the rectory and with the charitable women they made the main articles of linen and worked to organize a bazaar, for the asylum had no other resources than the help of Father Décarie from his personal patrimony and from public donations.

The reliance of the founder on the generosity of his parishioners was well founded. Devoted women whose names are preserved in the archives, - Mesdames Lenoir, Létourneau, De Sève and Descary were contributors as well as were certain gentlemen whom the chronicles do not identify, contributed toward construction. Some dedicated their evenings, others entire days in order to speed up its completion. A certain Mr. P. Lefebvre assumed the duty of night watchman until the building was completed.

From the very beginning, the Sisters 'inherited' Gélisque, a nickname for Angélique, a frail little old woman with a nasal voice and whom the Pastor called the foundress, while Father Latulippe, his assistant and future bishop of Hailebury, called her his daughter because it was he who had directed her to the asylum.

On the last Sunday of August, Father Décarie announced the opening of the asylum for September 1. Despite the prevalent smallpox epidemic, the population responded readily to this project since 400 children had registered; 400 very young children who knew nothing of discipline or silence and who ran at top speed up and



down the steps and porch. Sisters St-Louis, Aubry and St-Georges had their hands full taming these little ones, but like experienced psychologists, they would channel this surplus energy. The feast of Father Décarie occurred hardly one month from the entrance date and the Sisters organized a program featuring all these little ones as well as the eleven orphan girls who lived on the upper floor while attending day school.

The bazaar ended toward the end of September with a success that exceeded their fondest hopes: a \$1,500.00 profit. The pastor had spared no effort to encourage visitors. He participated in various activities without suspecting in the least that behind certain closed doors the little ones were being trained to sing and to "recite gracious little recitations" for him.

They were talented and performed perfectly on the evening of October 1, the feast of St. Rémi. The founder was jubilant at the precocious success and the parents were proud of the talent displayed by their youngsters whose progress had been so evident. It was already necessary to increase the number of Sisters on staff so Sisters Tessier and Casgrain were appointed, the latter being assigned to visiting the poor in their homes.

Despite the financial difficulties, the Sisters survived, the school program improved, the asylum even had its own regiment of seventy soldiers, officers and generals. At solemn religious functions, "these fearless and irreproachable little soldiers mounted guard and presented arms before the Blessed Sacrament." The attendance was moved by this spectacular performance even more than by that of the renowned choir of St. Henri.

The population of the region increased to the point where the parish had to be subdivided. The parishes of Ste-

Cunégonde and St. Elisabeth du Portugal were set up.<sup>76</sup> Under Mayor Eugène Guay, seven times re-elected to that post, the town prospered. A shoe factory was opened and a night school as well.<sup>77</sup> For several years, Montreal had cast longing eyes toward St. Henri in view of annexation. Father Décarie whose opinion carried weight, was favorable to the project. The mayor and the aldermen recognized the advantages and on October 30, 1905, the Capital city assumed the debt and St. Henri could elect two members to the Council of the City of Montreal.<sup>78</sup>

In 1909 plans were initiated to rebuild the asylum because of the growing population, but they would be realized only in 1929, when a group of committed lay people took in hand the destiny of the work created in 1885 by Canon Rémi Décarie of illustrious memory and served by the Grey Nuns.<sup>79</sup>

#### - 1886 -

As a consequence of the termination of the small-pox epidemic, and especially of the restoration of calm in the Western provinces, it would appear that Mother Deschamps might diminish her own activities. The recent foundations were going well. The elementary school in St. Boniface which had been moved to the former college had become the Provencher Academy. As for the hospital in St. Boniface, which dated back more than a decade, it was progressing by leaps and bounds. Founded in 1871 with

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<sup>76</sup> Ste-Elisabeth was established at the exact place where the Grey Nuns had lived from 1861 to 1870.

<sup>77</sup> Rumily, o.c. T. 3, pp. 154-155.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 365.

<sup>79</sup> Fr. Décarie's death occurred in August 1920. In his handwritten will he bequeathed \$10,000.00 of his estate to benefit the orphans. The asylum became the Hospice in 1921, a Home in 1953, and finally a Health Centre in 1976.



four beds, ten others had been added through the years, but it was evident that it could no longer meet the needs of the population. A fund-raising campaign was launched in the spring of 1886 and everyone was confident it would be successful.<sup>80</sup>

A group of zealous women in St. Boniface came together for the purpose of helping the poor. Miss Taché, a sister of the Archbishop, was named the president. Weekly, they met at the vicarial house where they did sewing for the needy.

For their part, the Sisters of Charity continued their work discreetly with Mrs. Riel, the mother of poor Louis. Sister Lamy, the vicarial superior visited her regularly and was edified by the courage and resignation of this woman who found comfort in her faith. As for the widow of Louis Riel, the former protégé, she succumbed under the burden of this trial and passed away on May 24, 1886.<sup>81</sup>

As for the difficulties in Toledo, they had reached a state of crisis and Mother Deschamps had to come from Montreal on April 15 to offer the Bishop of Cleveland a solution: to give up the ownership of the asylum on the condition that he cancel the debt. This was not the end of her worries concerning this work. She extended her stay in Toledo for several months and it was there that she learned by telegram on May 31, of the death of Father Campion, p.s.s., the founder of this institution now being so sorely tried.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1884-1887, p. 409. Unless otherwise indicated, the details which follow are from the same source.

<sup>81</sup> Mrs. Riel left two orphans who were taken in by an uncle.

<sup>82</sup> Fr. Campion was then the Vicar-General of the diocese of Cleveland. He left this position in 1856 and entered the Sulpicians of Montreal the same year.

Even while far away from the Mother House, Mother Deschamps was called upon to make decisions concerning the development of the other missions. Consequently, a close correspondence was maintained between Montreal and Toledo. It was at the latter station that news of her large family and her homeland reached her.

With anguish, she learned on April 27, of the state of health of Sister Charlebois, her assistant, who had received the Sacrament of the sick. She had planned to return to Montreal but she was notified by telegram that the patient was now out of danger.

A news bulletin informed her that in Quebec, Montreal and Ottawa the promotion of Archbishop E.A. Taschereau to the rank of Cardinal was being celebrated while Bishops Fabre and Duhamel were elevated to that of Archbishop in their respective dioceses. In Baltimore, Bishop Gibbons also was made a Cardinal. Mother Deschamps and the Grey Nuns did not anticipate at that time, that the new Cardinal would be instrumental in ending the conflict in Toledo.<sup>83</sup>

The Sisters were no longer surprised at seeing Mother Deschamps deal squarely with difficulties. For many long years they had admired her serene attitude nourished by inner strength. She indeed deplored the thorny question of St. Vincent's Asylum, a topic of public notoriety, despite the discretion of the Sisters. As if to comfort her concerning this sad state of affairs, a request reached her from Bishop Marty of North Dakota to establish missions in three areas of his diocese. Though it was impossible to comply with this request for lack of available Sisters, she was happy to know that the services of her religious community were appreciated and desired.

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<sup>83</sup> Bishop W. Elder, Archbishop of Cincinnati, received the mandate of conciliator. After two years of negotiations, he sent his resignation to Rome. (Arch. of Toledo)



Mother Deschamps had no idea that in Montreal, the Sisters were preparing to give her an eloquent testimony of filial admiration. September 9 would mark the 50th anniversary of her entry into their religious family and the Sisters planned to celebrate the event with pomp. When the program was ready, by means of strategy, the Sisters arranged for her to return to the Mother House under the pretext that some administrative problem required her presence. They set the date of her arrival for September 8, but Mother had planned to return on the 6th. Another telegram informed her that the train anticipated had discontinued service. She therefore arrived in Montreal at ten o'clock in the evening of September 7.

Another hitch! She arrived at the Dalhousie station at the same time as the Sisters of Quebec who had been invited to the feast. But this did not disconcert the Sisters. They invited her to spend the night at Notre Dame Hospital.

An nine o'clock the following morning, Sister Charlebois went to fetch the Superior General who was officially welcomed back by the whole community assembled along the Holy Cross corridor of the Mother House. The tight ranks of those present closed access to the community room thus concealing any sign of the demonstration to come.

Precisely at one o'clock, the greeting began. Mother Deschamps with great surprise, then understood yesterday's meeting, for she saw the Sisters of Charity of Quebec, St. Hyacinthe and Ottawa mingling with those of Montreal to offer their best wishes on this solemn occasion.

This was not the end of Mother General's surprises, for in the community room her brothers Joseph and Alexander,

the beloved Sulpician, awaited her<sup>84</sup> as well as Mrs. Tiffin and Mr. Devins.<sup>85</sup> The career of the Superior General was summarized in a cantata and in an address appropriate for the circumstance. So great was her emotion that she could not express her deep gratitude in her usual easy manner. A small boy of pre-school age, recited a little compliment during which time she recovered her composure; then noticing two Sisters from Toledo who had travelled on the same train as she had but without her knowledge, she exclaimed: "My Sisters are too clever, they will not live long." The comment relaxed the emotionally charged atmosphere and then came the offering of gifts. Mr. Devins offered a Calvary with life-size statues destined for the dining room. Mrs. Tiffin, with her usual prodigality, offered magnificent church vestments. The Sister Communities and other benefactors were also generous toward the Superior General. Among the four paintings of Mother d'Youville offered on this memorable day, Mother Deschamps undoubtedly preferred, though she did not say so, the one which had been made by Maggie Osborn, formerly her little protégé.

The celebration ended only on the following day. At the Mass, a vocal composition with a biblical text was beautifully executed. It had been composed by Alexandre, her brother, who was not present due to the fact that the celebration of the previous day had drained his strength.

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<sup>84</sup> Fr. A. Deschamps left Hospice St. Joseph in 1885 due to ill health. From then on, he was chaplain at the Hospice of Nazareth. The Sulpicians are credited with having revived the devotion to St. Joseph and thus to have paved the way for the later erection of the magnificent St. Joseph's Shrine on Mount Royal.

<sup>85</sup> Mr. Devins' spouse had died on July 5. Because she had been a benefactor, a solemn service was held for her at the Mother House on the 14th.



At the close of this beautiful day, Mother Deschamps summarized her impressions as follows:

With Mother d'Youville, let us thank the ETERNAL FATHER for the growth of our Institute. May the fervor of our early Sisters be ever alive among us and may Charity nourish all the other virtues.

In the service of the Lord for a HALF CENTURY appears as one day - a day of happiness. While all the world may not see it that way, we indeed cherish it. Let us give thanks to God.

In dedicating myself to God, my love has grown so that I can love you all the more.

I examined a treasure... I came into its possession. The poor and the orphans have become all my wealth. Who shall take it from me?

The feast could not last forever, and Mother Deschamps after attending to some urgent problems and visiting the immense house yet unfinished, returned to Toledo with Sister Gadbois as Secretary. She was therefore not present at the General headquarters of the Institute when on October 7, Father Lacombe escorted Crowfoot, chief of the Blackfoot tribe and his brother, Threebulls, when they visited the Mother House. These visitors of note contributed by their presence to the success of the bazaar in favor of the building project at the cathedral.<sup>86</sup>

The apostle of the Blackfoot had insisted on their visiting the Grey Nuns. They were welcomed with all the respect due to their rank. Chief Crowfoot addressed the audience with Father Lacombe as his translator. The Chief was suffering from asthma. He used his fan of crow feathers in order to facilitate his breathing. He was described as being tall, of noble appearance with delicate features,

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<sup>86</sup> This was the St. James Cathedral of Montreal, now called, "Mary Queen of the World."

sparkling black eyes and a stately bearing. The two Indians felt uncomfortable in the city; they did not enjoy it; therefore, along with their mentor, they set out the next day to return to the prairies.

By virtue of the interest Mother Deschamps held for the Indian missions, it is not presumptuous to believe that she savored the details of this visit as reported in the community chronicles.

The year ended on a note of sadness for the Grey Nuns. Father M.C. Bonnissant, the dedicated priest who had spent his final years guiding the completion and embellishment of the chapel, died suddenly on November 15. Mother Deschamps writing to Father Icard, Superior General of the Sulpicians, would say:

If the Seminary of Montreal has lost in him one of its most distinguished members, we Grey Nuns mourn an eminent benefactor (...) His broad experience had won our trust. We did not undertake anything without having first consulted him(...) Our large and beautiful chapel will forever speak to us of his benevolence.

In order to perpetuate the memory of this benefactor, his name was inscribed in a gold heart fastened to the statue of the Blessed Virgin donated by Mrs. Tiffin and placed above the altar of the Eternal Father - a gift of the deceased Sulpician. The feast of the Presentation unfolded with great pomp on November 21. Furthermore, the Grey Nuns would obtain the heart of the Sulpician which would be preserved in the crypt of the Mother House near a tombstone erected in his memory.



## CHAPTER IV

1887-1889

Another Grey Nun Chapter was scheduled for 1887. Mother Deschamps who was nearing the end of her second five-year mandate<sup>1</sup> was no doubt eager to transfer the torch of responsibility to other hands.

During her administration, eleven new works had sprung to life.<sup>2</sup> From 250 Sisters at the end of 1877, the number had increased to 378 over a ten-year period. Mother Deschamps saw the dawn of this year in Toledo which had again necessitated her presence. One could

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<sup>1</sup> She held office from 1853 to 1863 and was re-elected in 1877 and in 1882.

<sup>2</sup> Among these missions, the school in Lawrence, the St. Jérôme-Emilien orphanage, as well as the Nazareth dispensary had to close for reasons explained above. As for St. Roch Hospital, it lasted only through the epidemic of 1885. In September of the year, 1887, at the request of Archbishop Taché, the Grey Nuns assumed the direction of Provencher Academy where they would teach small boys until 1899. This apostolate was inaugurated by Srs. Ste. Placide and Couture and gave rise to the priestly vocation of Fr. Alex. Lambert.

surmise that this woman of action was reluctant to bequeath to her successor, a problem as critical as that of the orphanage.

The preparation of the General Chapter however, was imperative and so the Superior General returned to the Mother House on March 7.<sup>3</sup> Archbishop Taché of St. Boniface hastened to greet her. He was at the time, occupying the apartment of Mrs. Tiffin who had left for Rome on the 22nd of the previous month.<sup>4</sup> Without delay Mother Deschamps went to Notre Dame Hospital where her dear brother Alexandre was seriously ill. The encounter had almost been aborted for the patient's condition had declined since early March.

Mother Deschamps, strong and serene in spite of her heavy schedule, made a short visit to the houses in the city on the day following her arrival. Eager to claim what she called 'the blessing of the poor' she made the rounds of the various wards.

There were 521 of all ages: the elderly, orphan boys and girls, abandoned children affectionately greeted this tender mother. Although she was following the Toledo affair closely, other matters also claimed her attention. Providence acting through a benevolent person, provided finances to complete the main wing of the Mother House from the chapel to St. Mathieu Street.<sup>5</sup> The chronicler noted that Mother Deschamps was grateful, for since her arrival, she had been concerned that the 778 residents were very closely confined. She set the project in motion without delay, knowing well that she would thus alleviate the

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<sup>3</sup> *Circ. mens.*, 1884-87, p. 559.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 569. Mrs. Tiffin would attend the laying of the cornerstone at the Canadian College in Rome.

<sup>5</sup> This central wing begun in 1879, comprised only the ground level and the first floor



burden of her successor. Mr. Victor Bourgeau, architect, assumed the direction of this work.

Another matter had required the return of the Superior General from Toledo. Bishop Minetti, from Rome had given instructions concerning the introduction of Mother d'Youville's Cause before the Roman Court. A vice-postulator would first have to be appointed to replace Father Bonnissant; then, the writings of the prospective candidate would have to be examined. The Roman prelate added: "The Cause is really very beautiful, the case is well presented and the witnesses are well informed."<sup>6</sup> Father Pierre Rousseau, p.s.s., was named vice-postulator. On April 21, Bishop Fabre issued a decree to be read from the pulpit at parish masses and at the Chapter of religious communities for the purpose of collecting the writings of the Servant of God. The first study session of these writings was held on May 12, 1887.<sup>7</sup>

At the end of May, the Superior General experienced another great joy. Sister Josephine Nebraska, of the Sioux tribe, made her religious vows in the chapel of the vicarial house of St. Boniface. She was the first pure-blood Indian to dedicate herself to God as a Grey Nun. Mother Deschamps to whom befell the duty of officially accepting Josephine as a member of the Congregation recognized God's work in this native girl who had a rather difficult past.<sup>8</sup> The seed

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<sup>6</sup> Letter to Chancellor T. Harel, Jan. 21, 1887.

<sup>7</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1884-87, pp. 613-614. The result of this study was sent to Rome on June 12.

<sup>8</sup> The sad fate of the Sioux is known. They were pressed by the American army and repulsed by the Sauteux, their mortal enemy during the tragic years 1860 - 1870. Mother McMullen visiting St. Boniface in 1859-1860, accepted to be the godmother of Adèle, the eldest sister of Josephine Nebraska. Archbishop Taché became her godfather. The two little sisters were raised at the orphanage of the Grey Nuns. Adèle married, but Josephine opted for religious life. Nancy, their mother, lived at the convent. After her daughter's

was sprouting in these distant missions which had required much self-sacrifice and great heroism. The day had come, proving that hope had not been in vain. Besides, these missions now appeared less distant since the railway spanned the country from coast to coast and there was even a steamship plying along the Mackenzie River.<sup>9</sup> The Sisters from there had hoped that thus facilitated, travel would allow the Superior General to visit the Northern posts.

Life was not all merely routine business however, for the Superior of the Grey Nun family. On June 3, she was summoned to the bedside of her Sulpician brother who died the following day at eleven o'clock in the evening at the age of forty-five. He was happy to be assisted in his final hours by his elder sister who had formerly sponsored him as an orphan.

Three months later, on August 7, Sister Charlebois, the Assistant General, also passed away, mourned by the community which she had so faithfully served and by Mother Deschamps who in 1879, had delegated her to the Northern missions to comfort the missionaries there who were suffering from continuous deprivations and from rigorous cold. News of the latter death reached the Northern wilderness only several months later. The "heroic women" praised this worthy Grey Nun who had overcome all the dangers and inconveniences of a long journey in order to comfort them and confirm them in the certitude

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<sup>8</sup>...profession, she proclaimed herself to be a great lady, having Jesus-Christ as a son-in-law. Sr. Nebraska persevered and was termed a model religious. She died on April 3, 1894 at age thirty-five, leaving to her mother the cross received at her religious profession. (The First Sioux Nun, Sr. Hilger).

<sup>9</sup> The transcontinental left Montreal on June 28, 1886 for its first run. As for the steamship, it appeared on the great river of the



that despite the distance, they belonged to a family that loved and appreciated them.

Mother Deschamps had not yet drained the cup of sorrow. The bewildering toll of deaths recorded at the Crèche gave rise to unfavorable publicity surrounding the Grey Nuns. People seemed to overlook the fact that these poor little victims were already moribund when admitted or when found at some church door.<sup>10</sup> Doctors Rottot and Laberge, regular visitors at the institution, testified in favor of the good care given by the Sisters.<sup>11</sup> The Superior General, wishing to improve the lot of these children, went to New York to visit the foundling home directed by the Sisters of Mother Seton. The American technique could not solve the problem. Many long years would elapse before science would develop acceptable substitutes for a mother's care.

On September 28, 1887 the small four-bed hospital at Fort Totten began admitting Sioux Natives. It was a few miles away from the school and under the charge of two Sisters.<sup>12</sup>

According to custom, Mother Deschamps left office at the end of September. She resumed her place in the rank and life and was disposed as previously, to be an example of a religious who, after having been in command, would demonstrate her spirit of obedience.

- 1888 -

On the morning of Monday October 3, 1887 the capitulars assembled in the community room for a session presided by Father L.A. Maréchal, Bishop Fabre's Vicar

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<sup>10</sup> Jacob, the sexton, found one of them frozen to death. A note revealed that he was six days old and that he had been baptized.

<sup>11</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1887-92, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

General, and by Fathers Deguire and Rousseau, both Sulpicians. They elected as members of the new Council: Mother Praxède Filiatrault, Superior General, Sisters Luce Michaud, Eulalie Perrin, Louise Fournier-Painchaud, Assistants and Albine Dumouchel-Peltier, Formation Director.

Though Sister Deschamps endeavored to remain in the background, Mother Filiatrault entrusted to her the position of treasurer.<sup>13</sup> The new Superior knew full well that temporal matters would be carefully handled.

Mother Filiatrault was in her forty-seventh year and having made her vows on September 14, 1864,<sup>14</sup> she was now in the twenty-third of her religious life. She had been placed early in positions of authority, and in 1882 had become Assistant General. It was then that she left for Toledo where, while improving her knowledge of English, she could examine at close range the means of solving the problem of the orphanage. On her return from Ohio after a year's absence, she had been initiated by Mother Deschamps in the art of managing an ever-growing Institute. By her first message to the Sisters, it was evident that the new Superior General's intent was to maintain the original spirit in the community. "The first thrust of the founders bore the seal of God's spirit; we cannot alter it without danger," she wrote.<sup>15</sup>

Besides, like the Foundress, Mother Filiatrault was convinced that genuine charity is expressed in works. By

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<sup>13</sup> Life of Mother Deschamps - Sr. Collette, 362.

<sup>14</sup> When she was preparing for profession, Sr. Filiatrault was called to Mother Slocombe's office. The Superior General informed her of a letter from a former suitor who had become a judge declaring that "he was still waiting for her!" The novice then decreed: "Mother, my choice has been made since the day of my entry."

<sup>15</sup> Not. biog. Mère Filiatrault, A.S.G.M.



this trait, she closely resembled Mother Deschamps, her predecessor. Because of the ill health of the latter, Mother Filiatrault delegated her to Toledo where the climate agreed with her. The former Superior would also contribute toward solving the persistent local problem. The construction of the St. Mathieu wing would not be interrupted by the treasurer's absence since Mr. Bourgeau would visit the building site daily, eager to see the completion of the building he had designed. Then on February 24, while he was leaving the Mother House, the architect was stricken with a heart attack. The doctor declared that he could not be transported to the hospital. He was therefore hospitalized at the Mother House. Despite the care given him, he died on March 1. The Lord had granted "the wish of this good man for he had told several of the Sisters that he would like to die attended by the Grey Nuns."<sup>16</sup>

It was not given to the distinguished architect to see the completion of the building due to be blessed on May 31 of that year (1888). A large number of Grey Nuns attended Mr. Bourgeau's funeral at Notre Dame Church on March 5 in tribute to the generous benefactor.

Seven young Sisters joined the ranks of the Grey Nuns in early January. In April, Mother Filiatrault was then in a position to accede to Bishop Williams' request to establish a house in Boston. In May, she also gave an affirmative reply to "The King of the North", the legendary Father Labelle, who had requested the founding of a hospice at St. Jérôme, as well as to the pastor at Minneapolis in the United States who had requested a school.

On May 23, on board the transcontinental, the Superior, along with Sr. Devins as her secretary, and Sister Bissonnette, a future missionary, travelled toward St.

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<sup>16</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1887-1892, pp. 65-67.

Boniface where Bishop Taché wished to commemorate with dignity an important anniversary.

That year, 1888, the only survivor of the four Grey Nun pioneers in the West was celebrating the golden jubilee of her religious profession which she had made on June 1, 1838. Six years later, Sister St. Joseph (Gertrude Coutlée) had left for the Red River. She was 25 years of age at the time. With extraordinary fortitude, she had left forever her homeland and her family which included one of her sisters, Sister Rose Coutlée, later to become Superior General 1847-1853.<sup>17</sup> Sister St. Joseph had undoubtedly experienced the pain of parting; however, no one could realize how she felt at the thought of never returning to her native Quebec. Serene and humorous, she had been cheerful all along the way. She had even shown an invincible optimism. It was reported that she had been the only one able to sleep on board the canoe despite a storm or during difficult crossings.

Neither Mother Filiatrault nor her companions had ever met Sister St. Joseph. They knew her only by what had been related of her in circular letters addressed to the various houses, but the testimony had sufficed to elicit esteem and admiration for the heroine. The young missionary had manifested perfect availability and self-sacrifice. Employed successively as Formation Director, as a teacher, as sacristan, and as ward mother, she had served courageously and now, although she was approaching the half-century of her oblation, she was still giving of herself as the humblest of novices. One can imagine with what emotion the Superior General embraced the worthy missionary. Sister Devins, the secretary, failed to describe

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<sup>17</sup> Mother (Rose) Coutlée died on April 9, 1877 while performing a charitable duty. As Assistant, she was in charge of preparing the barracks along the river edge for the establishment of the St. Charles Hospice. She succumbed from exhaustion at age 62.



the encounter, undoubtedly because the emotional intensity was beyond words; but as purveyor for the missions, she would describe at length what she saw in "this beautiful country." She mentioned the solid bridge now joining Winnipeg and St. Boniface and the newly rebuilt cathedral dedicated the previous year by Archbishop Fabre of Montreal.<sup>18</sup> She described in detail "the lovely convent surrounded by beautiful flower-beds", as well as the official reception given to the visitors.

All the personnel were there, outside: Sisters, students of the boarding school,<sup>19</sup> the orphans and finally the permanent guests who were seated at the entrance and whose brown complexions betrayed their origin.

A short distance away, one could see the hospital under construction. Its opening was expected for the fall.<sup>20</sup>

The Superior General was escorted first to the chapel where the Magnificat was sung, and then to a reunion in the Community Room. It was the custom in such circumstances for the Superior to share news of recent happenings at the Mother House. Sister St. Joseph occupied a place of honor and it was undoubtedly for her benefit that the Superior described the feast organized in Montreal the previous April 15 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Stanislas Lestang's service at the Mother House; he had worked not only in Montreal, but also at St. Boniface.<sup>21</sup>

The local newspaper headlined the arrival of the Superior General of the Grey Nuns, the first religious order

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<sup>18</sup> Morice, o.c., V. 3, p. 125.

<sup>19</sup> In 1887, these two hundred students received a diploma awarded by the Royal Commission of London for their achievement.

<sup>20</sup> The cornerstone had been laid on May 15, 1887.

<sup>21</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1887-1892, pp. 81-82.

established in the West and especially, described the celebration concerning the venerable Sister St. Joseph, one of the foundresses of the mother mission which gave birth to all others established since then in the Canadian Northwest.<sup>22</sup>

On the morning of May 29, it was the Archbishop of St. Boniface who gave the historical homily at the Cathedral overflowing with invited guests among whom were Bishop Grandin of St. Albert, the Oblates, the Jesuits, diocesan clergy, the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, the American Consul, magistrates, senators, ministers, delegates,<sup>23</sup> former students, members of the Coullée family and obviously, companions of the jubilarian. Archbishop Taché took advantage of the occasion to recall the memory of Pierre de la Vérendrye, his ancestor, who had discovered the West; of the Venerable Mother d'Youville, his relative, who had founded the Community "of which he was justifiably proud," since the initial group had given birth to the three Sister Communities and since both the trunk and the branches were the glory of the Canadian Church. The Archbishop quoted statistics: 406 professed Sisters, 57 novices and 16 postulants; 700 elderly persons in hospices, and some 4,000 children in schools under the direction of the Grey Nuns.

Today, said the eloquent speaker, people travel from Montreal to St. Boniface in sixty-two hours, in parlor and sleeping cars. Imagine the time when the same trip by birch-bark canoes took sixty days.<sup>24</sup> And yet, these Sisters endured all the hardships without the least complaint.

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<sup>22</sup> M. Bernier, *Journal Le Manitoba*.

<sup>23</sup> Mr. J. Royal, brother of Sr. Royal, the deputy from Provencher was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba, two months later.

<sup>24</sup> The Archbishop could speak knowingly of this, having himself left Montreal in 1845 aboard the same means.



When the founding of Industrial Schools was authorized the Prime Minister of Canada told us that we could do nothing better than to obtain the help of the Grey Nuns. Archbishop Taché concluded by listing the works in the West. You never imagined, he said addressing himself to the jubilarian, that you would ever see sixteen establishments of your order in Manitoba and the Northwest where now 114 Sisters are working and where seven novices and two postulants are in formation, while your houses overflow with pupils, orphans, the handicapped and elderly. Receive the expression of my gratitude as Bishop of this diocese for all the good you have done.

With a voice choking with emotion, Sister St. Joseph renewed the vows she had made initially on June 1, 1838 in the humble chapel of the Charon Brothers, the very place where several months later, Sister Deschamps had also made her final vows. The former Superior General had wanted to share in this celebration and among the many natural flowers offered by distinguished guests, Sister St. Joseph discovered a bouquet of everlasting straw flowers from the craft-shops of the Mother House. Mother Deschamps and a few Sisters, who had been companions of Sister St. Joseph in the novitiate, had planned the gift.<sup>25</sup> On the evening of this great day, when calm had been restored after the excitement of the celebration, Sister St. Joseph admitted that leaving Montreal on April 24, 1844,<sup>26</sup> had required so much courage that she had never wanted to return.

In early June, Mother Filiatrault and her secretary left for Fort Totten. Sister Clapin, the foundress of this mission was nearing the end of her career and the Superior General offered her to return to Montreal, a privilege which she gratefully accepted.

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<sup>25</sup> These were Srs. Beaudry, Brault, Guyon and Pinsonnault. The latter two were co-founders of the house in St. Hyacinthe.

<sup>26</sup> Not. biog. Sr. St. Joseph.

The convents of Qu'Appelle and of Calgary received Mother Filiatrault's visit and finally, the house in St. Albert welcomed her... in the Bishop's former residence to which they had moved on October 20 of the previous year, 1887. It was not a luxurious house, but it was more spacious than the one they had previously occupied. The building undertaken several years previously had become the Bishop's new residence and was now being occupied as rooms were completed. Such was also the case for the Sisters who had been compelled to leave their former residence so that materials could be taken from it for the new construction. This simultaneous moving had created "considerable confusion" said Sister Paquette "for we had to transfer everything ourselves by hand."<sup>27</sup>

The orphanage would be built on the site of the house which had been demolished. The Sisters boasted about their new place, their unfinished chapel which they intended to make into "a veritable little jewel." The Superior General however, was edified at the poverty of the place. Though they are in rather cramped quarters, she thought, at least the Sisters here are not suffering from hunger, whereas news from Chipewyan revealed that there was a famine in that area. Hunting and fishing were poor and people had to get flour from the supplies in the warehouses of the Hudson Bay Company.<sup>28</sup> There were deaths in the forests. Mother Filiatrault regretted that she could not go to this mission. The steamship service was still too hazardous to make the return trip in the same year.

Several decades would elapse before the Northern missions could receive a visit from their Superior.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Sr. Paquette to the M. House, Jan. 1, 1888.

<sup>28</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1887-1892, p. 100

<sup>29</sup> Mother Piché would go to the Northern missions for the first time in 1912.



Archbishop Taché had brought into prominence, the apostolic spirit of the Grey Nuns on May 29, saying that they walked in the footsteps of their Foundress. Mother Filiatrault observed that this was indeed the case. She would have another proof of this when on returning to Montreal, on September 13, she learned that Sisters Marie-Xavier and Lassisseraye had gone from St. Boniface to care for forsaken families in the village of Selkirk. These families had been stricken with diphtheria and five of the children had already fallen victims of the disease.<sup>30</sup> As though to indicate to the Sisters, that their apostolic efforts were pleasing to him, the Lord permitted that on October 9, a telegram to the Mother House announced that the difficulties concerning the Toledo mission had finally been resolved thanks to Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore who had been delegated by Rome to settle the matter. The Sisters would keep the ownership of the orphanage and the interdiction concerning the canvassing for funds for its operation was lifted.<sup>31</sup>

### **WORKING GIRLS' OR ST. HELENA'S HOME, BOSTON, U.S.A.- 1888 -**

Despite her many activities, Mother Filiatrault fully intended to follow up on the apostolic thrust given to her Congregation by her predecessor, Mother Deschamps. For some time, Bishop Williams of Boston had been requesting a home for the protection of young girls employed in shops and factories of the city.<sup>32</sup> At first, an office was opened for the purpose of finding employment for the newcomers.

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<sup>30</sup> Sr. Hamel to the M House, Oct. 2, 1888.

<sup>31</sup> Arch. Toledo. Some generous persons had made up for the lack of resources... the Finlays, the Mahers and many others.

<sup>32</sup> The details concerning this foundation and that of St. Joseph's Home were taken from the chronicles of these two houses and the Circ. mens. of these years.

This initiative would not last however, for soon the house was filled to capacity with young workers. The difficulties experienced in Toledo were not to be repeated in Boston. From the very beginning, a Women's Auxiliary was formed to assure financial security. Sisters Quinn, Kavanaugh, Savaria and Ledoux, the foundresses, were to have a relatively comfortable life in this house placed under the patronage of St. Helena. They had taken up residence on May 26, 1888.

The Sisters worked steadily in this new venture situated on Dover Street, but it soon became too small and by 1891 an extension became necessary. That same year, Bishop Williams' Silver Jubilee was celebrated. The institution wished to share in this occasion. The Sisters offered him an armchair and their young charges offered him a bouquet of twenty-five lilies arranged in a silver urn. Everyone wished to celebrate in a worthy fashion, the Bishop who showed a genuine interest in the French Canadians and who was the recognized protector of Calixa Lavallée, the author of Canada's National Anthem.<sup>33</sup>

Construction of the new house measuring 132 ft. by 75 ft. began on July 1, 1891, on Union Park Street. It would be evaluated at \$103,395.00 and would remain the property of the diocese. A Corporation was formed consisting of the Bishop, his Auxiliary, the Vicar General, and the pastors of neighboring parishes. The Sisters for their part, would organize bazaars and concerts to help liquidate the debt. These various efforts were highlighted on October 16, 1892 by a grandiose celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America. The celebration was convened by the Society of Working Girls' Friends, and

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<sup>33</sup> Lavallée left New York on Dec. 15, 1887 to attend the World Congress of Music professors. He was representing musicians of the United States. Bishop Williams willingly granted his choir-master a leave of absence.



a profit of \$2,000.00 was recorded on this occasion. A monument was erected to Christopher Columbus on land adjacent to the Cathedral and donated by Bishop Williams.

On May 27, 1893 the new residence was ready for occupation although the official opening was deferred to November 30. Several weeks earlier, Mother Filiatrault had delegated to Boston, Sisters Bourgeois and Hickey. The latter, a tireless visitor of the poor in their homes, had been prescribed a rest. Now, being less accustomed to marble steps than to those in the homes of the poor, Sister Hickey fell and was so seriously injured that her life was threatened. She would recover however, but was unable to attend the jubilee celebration of Bishop Williams' ordination to the priesthood. Archbishop Fabre of Montreal who attended, was hosted at St. Helena's Home which sheltered 140 boarders.

In 1888 statistics were established for this work now in existence for ten years: 11,278 workers had been admitted while work had been found for 2,181 others; 550 had been treated and ten needy families had been assisted.

### **ST. JOSEPH'S HOME, BOSTON, 1899**

In July 1899, St. Helena's Home narrowly escaped a serious fire. The general sympathy which was manifested convinced Bishop Williams of the worthwhileness of the work. He then purchased another residence on Brookline Street to house black workers and immigrants. Since most of these young girls were destined to do housework in neighboring homes, courses in culinary art were organized for them. Religious teaching was not neglected and in December of that year Sister Lynch presented ten candidates for first communion.

A visitor from France, Mr. F. Monier, praised the initiative in a letter addressed to Mother Filiatrault and dated September 17:

The patronage is one of the very original works the like of which I would like to see established in Paris, where a sojourn in the capital offers similar danger for young ladies who come there to work. In the other house I admired the inexhaustible activity of charity toward the unfortunate, the most forsaken.

In 1938, economic and social conditions required the closure of these houses which no longer met the needs of the times. Over the course of a half-century, the Grey Nuns had offered the working girls of Boston a comfortable place to stay where they could enjoy a family-like atmosphere and be shielded from the loneliness of isolation. Each could, in addition improve her knowledge, develop her talents and prepare her future. It was with regret that the Sisters left St. Helena's Home. Several of them were assigned to the Ste. Brigitte House in Montreal which had been pursuing the same objective since 1860.

**NOTRE-DAME-DE-LOURDES, MINNEAPOLIS,  
MINNESOTA, U.S.A.  
- 1888 -**

In August 1888, the foundresses of Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes School left for Minneapolis. They were Sister Tassé, Superior and Sisters Derome, Bissonnette and St. Thomas. They were accompanied by the Superior General and Sister Devins, her secretary. Father Daignault, the local pastor, had requested the Grey Nuns to direct the school which was attended, for the most part, by students of French Canadian origin. The new Superior was pleasantly surprised at seeing classrooms which were well lighted, well ventilated and surrounded by sycamores, maples, and acacia trees growing freely in a large yard. The three-storey



building was adequately furnished. The reception was cordial. Father Daignault, a native of Trois-Rivières, was awaiting the Sisters at the station along with two French Canadian women who were overjoyed at the arrival of the Grey Nuns. "Everyone, even the Irish, appeared delighted to have French Canadian Sisters," noted Sister Tassé. The kindly pastor took advantage of the favorable circumstances to announce the parochial visit which would be carried out by the newly arrived Sisters before the opening of classes.

On September 19, 220 pupils registered and the number would increase; by January 10, there were 280. In addition, a Sister would be responsible for visiting the sick in their homes so that soon, the mission had six Sisters, all of whom had plenty to do.

There, as elsewhere, the Sisters earned the esteem of the parishioners and the high approval of Bishop Ireland who on October 12, 1890, lauded them from the pulpit. Before long, there were religion classes for adults. There were 128 students, aged from thirteen to twenty-two "who could neither read nor write."

The Minneapolis School depended on the Vicarial House of St. Boniface to provide the required religious personnel. In 1892, eight Grey Nuns were on staff so that space had become insufficient and another lodging was necessary. It was only then that the residents admitted that they had suffered from the cold for the past four years. In the night of July 26 to 27 of that year, a hurricane struck the town. Train rails were broken, bridges were carried away and the water rose in an alarming fashion in the convent basement but fortunately, the Sisters were not obliged to move. Then on January 25, 1894 the school narrowly eluded a fire. The chronicler underlined the fact that the flames died out spontaneously in a room where there was a framed picture of Mother d'Youville.

In 1897, thieves visited the school and the convent. Their only loot was a dollar which had been left in the teacher's desk. The Sisters had only a scare, and with leniency, attributed this attempt to the misery which was prevalent that year.

The Sisters' devotedness would bear fruit. At the end of 1898, Father André, the successor to Father Daignault, told Mother Filiatrault that two young ladies planned to request their admission to the novitiate. Sisters Provost and Bélair would be worthy of the path they had chosen.

In 1906, the Sisters were recalled with regret from this place where they had labored for eighteen years. The decision had become necessary due to the growing needs of other Grey Nun works. Bishop Ireland summarized the sentiments of all in his letter of July 24:

It is with deep regret that I learned of your determination to withdraw your Sisters from the parish of Notre-Dame in Minneapolis. Your resolve appeared to me so firm, that I did not think I should beg you to reconsider. The departure of your Sisters deeply saddens everyone in the parish. The pastor and I also regret it. Other Sisters may replace them as teachers but it will be difficult to replace them in the affection of the parishioners. I owe thanks to you and your Sisters for all the good that you have done in Minneapolis.

### **ASILE ST-JEROME, QUEBEC - 1888 -**

Besides his impressive stature, his prestigious reputation, and the influence he enjoyed in Montreal itself, Father Labelle of St. Jérôme held in his hand another 'ace' which encouraged him to request the Grey Nuns for a foundation which he hoped to establish in his Northern region. He was a co-parishioner of Mother Filiatrault, born



at Ste-Rose-de-Laval some six years after him who would become a legend in his own lifetime. Furthermore, this King of the North knew how to plead his cause as he had already proven in various other circumstances. Since 1876,<sup>34</sup> the railway linked St. Jérôme and Montreal. The pastor then had only to stress the needs of the parish in order to win the acquiescence of the Superior General and her Council.

Before leaving the Mother House for the West, Mother Filiatrault went to St. Jérôme where she was cordially welcomed by Father Labelle and his mother, and where she observed the progress of measures already taken in view of the future establishment.

A month later, Father Pierre Pelletier, the Assistant Pastor, accompanied by several distinguished persons of the small town, visited the Nazareth Asylum directed by the Grey Nuns and then went to the Mother House to envision in advance, the blessing that would come to St. Jérôme.

On Monday, October 29, Mother Filiatrault and Sister Peltier, the Formation Director, accompanied the three foundresses, Sisters Montgolfier, Bélanger and Poirier to St. Jérôme. This time, the welcome of the new missionaries was more impressive. Father Pelletier in charge since the Pastor had assumed the duties of deputy minister of Agriculture, awaited the Sisters at the railway station. With him were Mr. Lapointe, Mr. Labelle, the treasurer, and Mr. Scott. The latter, though non-Catholic, was very sympathetic and devoted to the budding project. They boarded four splendid carriages to travel to their destination, a pretty little house which would be their temporary home until the so-called establishment was completed.

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<sup>34</sup> The details concerning the King of the North are taken from the book entitled "Le Curé Labelle," by Father E.J. Auclair.

Some twenty women performed the duties of hostess at the house already completely furnished. Their attention was drawn to the fact that all was in accordance with the customs of simplicity which characterized the Grey Nuns.

This is a happy beginning, the chronicler observed, but one must not forget that this foundation relies only on the charity of the parishioners and on the work of the Sisters.

According to the Pastor's optimism, it could be foreseen, that since St. Jérôme was called to a prosperous future, there was no reason to fear any difficulty.

In the meantime, the Sisters set to work without delay. They visited the sick and soon they took in two orphan girls aged seven and eight years respectively for whom they made dresses from old cassocks.

The bazaar on March 5 brought in the fabulous sum of \$1,740.00. It was hoped that the profit from the drama night and music concert would suffice to purchase a cow. Unexpected help came to the Sisters through the intervention of Father Labelle who obtained an annual grant of \$500.00 for the maintenance of this project. This assistance was providential, since the candidates had been increased by four more orphan girls. Their ages ranged from six years to twenty months and it was the Superior who was responsible for their care.

On December 1, 1889 a few rooms were opened in the new house and the move took place promptly as everyone was cramped for space in the first residence. When on his return from Europe, the Pastor who had become Apostolic Protonotary since June, visited the Asylum, he appeared very pleased.



It is already a tree which promises to be strong and to shelter under its branches, the most beautiful flowers of charity of which you are the excellent gardeners.<sup>35</sup>

Alas, Monsignor Labelle would not see the tree develop. On January 4, all who knew him, in Canada and beyond, were stunned upon learning of the unexpected death of the distinguished Pastor who succumbed a few hours after an emergency operation. It was said that he had died quickly as he had lived, expressing only one regret: that of not being able to bid farewell to his elderly mother. Sister Bélanger was given the task of informing Mrs. Labelle of her son's death. "She showed admirable serenity and resignation," say the chronicles.<sup>36</sup> However, this courageous mother would not outlive her grief, for six months later, she followed her son to the tomb.<sup>37</sup>

The funeral of this outstanding servant of God and country<sup>38</sup> took place on January 8 at St. Jérôme. Mother Filiatrault, Mother Deschamps, the treasurer and Sister Labelle, cousin of the deceased attended, as well as the Sisters from the Asylum who then served a luncheon to members of the clergy and to government representatives. The women and young ladies supplied the food and helped with the service. No one dared to mention it, but everyone wondered about the future of the Asylum which had lost its founder and on many occasions, its purveyor. The trial was not however at its deepest point, for soon the people of St. Jérôme would lament over another tragedy. Some ten days after Pastor Labelle's funeral, the college in St. Jérôme, under the direction of the Brothers of Holy Cross, was destroyed by fire. This college had also been founded by

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<sup>35</sup> Fr. A. Labelle to Mother Filiatrault, Sept. 24, 1890.

<sup>36</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1887-92, p. 513.

<sup>37</sup> Auclair, o.c., p. 10338. Hon. H. Mercier to Mrs. Labelle, Jan. 4, 1891.

<sup>38</sup> Hon. H. Mercier to Mrs. Labelle, Jan. 4, 1891.

the tireless Pastor in the years 1873 and 1874.<sup>39</sup> The parishioners deplored the loss of the college all the more because the dynamic Pastor Labelle was no longer there to rekindle the hope of rebuilding. Furthermore, Father Pelletier was summoned to another field of action. While the rectory was being refurnished for the next pastor, Father Pelletier stayed at the hospital-asylum for a few days before his departure. It was there likewise that the new pastor also would stay. Father L.J. Lafortune arrived on March 6, and lost no time in asking the Sisters to take charge of the school temporarily established at the village for boys from eight to twelve years of age. Hence Mother Filiatrault designated for this new work, two Sisters, one of whom was Sister Charbonneau, who would become renowned in this temporary school, heated by stoves which gave off more smoke than heat. The students were numerous and noisy, but the teacher soon gained control by instilling into them a sense of duty.<sup>40</sup> The availability of the Sisters was deeply appreciated and everyone was so pleased with their teaching that deferral of the rebuilding was being considered. The role of substitute assumed by the Sisters lasted three years and ended with the school year of 1894.

There had been as many as twelve Sisters in St. Jérôme during this period of volunteer service. At the beginning of 1897, nine remained there under the direction of Sister Bélanger, the tireless nurse who had also been the Superior since 1891. Now, this good Sister of Charity died at St. Jérôme on February 16, 1897 at age forty-four. She had become ill, "after having canvassed the countryside and spent many long night vigils with the sick." The doctor

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<sup>39</sup> Circ. mens. 1887-92, p. 515. It was also Fr. Labelle who, according to Auclair (p. 35) had installed the Sisters of St. Ann at the convent in St. Jérôme where Mrs. Labelle retired after the death of her son.

<sup>40</sup> Not. biog. Sr. Charbonneau, Circ. mens. 1909-, p. 101.



declared that there was no hope of recovery from pneumonia, to which the patient replied, "Many years ago I surrendered my life to God. I am happy to die." The population of St. Jérôme recognized the merits of this servant of the poor. She was given a beautiful funeral and distinguished persons of the place accompanied her remains to the Mother House in Montreal.<sup>41</sup>

Sister Deguire replaced her and shortly after her arrival, she took part in the unfolding of an episode which the chronicler described in detail. An elderly couple belonging to the French nobility, had been living in St. Jérôme in extreme poverty. The man was ninety-six and his wife was eighty-four. They lived together in a hovel along with twenty-two dogs, twelve cats and ten chickens. In addition, the old man had two guns and three revolvers. Briefly, the place was not in the least bit attractive. Having been informed that the old man was gravely ill, Sister Cormier took the risk of visiting him. She brought along a basket of 'goodies' for these poor people. To her great surprise, the gift was accepted and she was invited to come in which Sister Cormier hesitated to do because her companion had an uncanny fear of dogs. They promised to return however, and did so. A short time later, the squalid house was no longer recognizable for Sister Cormier and several neighboring women had cleaned it thoroughly. Also, the sick man accepted to part with his dogs. More important, at the first proposal, he consented to see a priest and died a few days later. His widow was invited to retire at the Hospice and arrived there on the day of the funeral. On seeing the white bed which awaited her, she exclaimed: "I've heard of paradise; could this possibly be it!"<sup>42</sup>

Occurrences such as this greatly impressed the visiting nurses as well as the ninety novices and twenty postulants

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<sup>41</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1895-98, pp. 357-361.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 367-371.

who were preparing to become Sisters of Charity either in Montreal or in St. Boniface, as the incident was reported in the chronicles of the community.

Life in St. Jérôme did not ordinarily have such notable cases. Certain events such as the blessing of the cornerstone of the parish church by Archbishop Bruchési, on September 22 of this same year, 1897 occurred to vary the routine.

Four years later, the parishioners were advised that the Sisters' convent was in need of repair.<sup>43</sup> In 1903, when a forest fire threatened the village of St. Jérôme, it was feared that the convent would be destroyed by the flames.

On April 28, wrote Sister St. Mathias, we were in immediate danger because of the fire which was ravaging the property adjacent to our sugar refinery. Since Monday, the atmosphere is oppressive. A few miles from here, there is complete desolation. Six weeks later, on June 8, she added, since Saturday 6, the fire is completely extinguished and there is no more smoke.

The Sisters carried on with their mission of comforting and assisting the needy and they promoted devotion to Mother d'Youville, the great protector in such occurrences.<sup>44</sup>

The fire had aggravated material conditions and poverty had become distressful at the asylum of St. Jérôme. The little village had difficulty recovering from the disaster. Everyone felt that it would take years. In October 1907, Father Pelletier, the former assistant, now pastor at Berthierville, sent \$3,200.00 to the Grey Nuns from the estate of Father Labelle.<sup>45</sup> The manna fell on time and

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<sup>43</sup> Circ. mens. 1898-1901, p. 639

<sup>44</sup> Circ. mens, 1902-03, pp. 593-594.

<sup>45</sup> Ann. 1906-08, p. 393.



restored hope. The Sisters succeeded in surviving the aftermath of the forest fire until on November 24, 1911, another fire completely destroyed the asylum. Only the lives were spared and everyone was grateful that the accident had occurred in the early morning and as the children were already up, the Sisters had only the very young to be concerned about. The celebrant was unable to complete the Eucharistic celebration. The sole refuge available for the elderly women was the rectory's second floor until they could be transferred to a summer cottage which they would have to vacate in the spring.

On November 28, the decision was taken to abandon this work since the local people were quite unable to support the cost of reconstruction, a condition stipulated in the original contract. It was with deep regret that the eleven Grey Nuns left St. Jérôme where they had worked during forty-three years. They brought with them to the Mother House, the elderly persons who had nowhere to go and room was made for them at Hospice St. Mathieu.<sup>46</sup>

- 1889 -

Fortunately, religious vocations were plentiful at the Grey Nuns' novitiate, for requests abounded soliciting the creation of orphanages, asylums, hospices or schools in the United States as well as in Canada, and even in England.<sup>47</sup> The relief force was being prepared in the novitiates both in the West and in Montreal. In 1889, sixty-eight entries were recorded of whom five were in St. Boniface while three

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<sup>46</sup> Ann. 1911-12. pp. 76-77.

<sup>47</sup> Circ. mens. 1887-92, p. 303.

candidates from Toledo arrived in Montreal on May 29.<sup>48</sup> At Toledo, the vexation was continuing relative to the fact that the interdiction pertaining to alms-giving was being maintained although this was about the only means of subsistence for the orphanage. The St. Vincent Society which grouped doctors and other professionals emerged spontaneously. Diverse organizations provided the necessary subsidies to furnish the operating room. It was anticipated that the hospital would soon assume the financial responsibility for the orphanage. The trials undergone by these houses drew public sympathy and young ladies of the locality were now coming to swell the ranks of the Grey Nuns.

At the Mother House, the construction of the central wing having been completed, there was now the possibility of a better allocation of space. The novitiate and the postulate occupied most of the upper floor of the north wing which paralleled Guy Street. Near these departments was the workroom for the poor. As for the orphanage section it had the advantage of more space since the elderly were moved to the central wing. Three orphans were attending the St. François Xavier Home, a trade school under the direction of the Brothers of St. Gabriel. Two among the other protégés were destined to farm work and so were directed to the Grey Nun farm at Châteauguay. As for Vital Boulrice who was fourteen, he went to pursue his classical studies under the Brothers of the Christian Schools with the intention of joining that community.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The health of Sr. Peltier, Dir. of Formation was unable to bear this additional burden and she would be replaced in August by Sr. du Sacré-Coeur.

<sup>49</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1887-92, pp. 217, 244 and 295.



The Superior General thought it wise to resume the project of women boarders,<sup>50</sup> which had been suspended in 1825. Mrs. Tiffin moved to the St. Mathieu end of the central wing and her brother, Mr. Devins, whose health was failing, yielding to Father Rousselot's insistence, became her neighbor as of May 1, 1888.<sup>51</sup>

It was foreseen that the program for 1889 would be particularly heavy. A new mission was opened in January. Then, on July 30, the Superior General attended the blessing of the house erected in St. Jean, Quebec, a four-storey building measuring 108 ft. by 40 ft. This was the new home for the elderly where, Madame Tugault, the foundress, retired while the old residence after being renewed, would serve as a hospital.<sup>52</sup>

The special General Chapter convoked by Mother Filiatrault on March 31, opened on August 19 for the purpose of creating the Association of Little Auxiliary Sisters.<sup>53</sup> These admirable women working in various missions, particularly those in the most remote areas, would henceforth, after a period of formation in the novitiate, be admitted to annual vows for three years, then to perpetual vows if they so wished. Otherwise, the vows would be renewed annually. A mitigated rule united them to the Grey Nuns and allowed them to carry on their specific works. They were to wear the black habit and be called the Sisters of St. Martha. Three years later, this name would be changed to that of Little Auxiliary Sisters until 1905, when the Association was recognized as Auxiliary Sisters. The uniform adopted was similar to that of the regular Sisters except for a few minor details. These volunteers who chose

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<sup>50</sup> Not. biog. Mère Filiatrault, p. 50.

<sup>51</sup> Vie de Mme Tiffin, anonym. pp. 58-59.

<sup>52</sup> Circ. mens. 1887-92. p. 280

<sup>53</sup> See above: Retrospect note 11.

the status of Auxiliary through humility or for health reasons, or even because they had no attraction for positions of command, had proven their worth, especially in the distant places which called for continuous heroism. It was with joy that the Superior General, her Council and the Community welcomed these incomparable helpers as members of the same religious family.

All was not joy during 1889. On July 18, word came of the death of Father Téléphore Harel, the Chancellor, who over the past four years, had been working actively at the Cause of Mother d'Youville.<sup>54</sup> In him, the Community had lost a support and a guide whose competence would be sorely missed.

A month later, another friend of the Congregation passed away. It was Father Victor Rousselot, a Sulpician and a particularly generous benefactor of the Grey Nuns who had unquestionably contributed to the expansion of the community. On his arrival in Canada in 1854, he had been appointed chaplain at the former Mother House near the river. That very year, he had founded St. Joseph's Asylum which was annexed to the hospice bearing the same name. Six years later, in 1860, the Nazareth Institution for blind children appeared, as well as a kindergarten for children of pre-school age. In 1866, he was pastor at Notre Dame without, however, neglecting the works he had created. Notre Dame Hospital which opened in 1880 would recognize him as a co-founder. Three years later, he was appointed to St. Jacques parish and in this same year, 1883, he resolved to found an agricultural school for orphans at Wentworth in Argenteuil County, thus supporting Father Labelle's efforts towards colonization. The Orphanage of Notre Dame de Monfort was under the administration of excellent missionaries belonging to the Compagnie de

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<sup>54</sup> Fr. M. Emard to the community assembled, July 31.



Marie founded at St. Laurent-sur-Sèvre, in Vendée, France.<sup>55</sup>

Father Rousselot returned from France in August 1887 after a rest of about eighteen months. His health however, had continued to deteriorate. His work with the blind remained his favorite activity, and in October 1888, he gave their Institution two Braille Remington typewriters.

On May 9 of that year, Father Rousselot retired at the Mother House of the Grey Nuns close to the men's department. Despite his great weakness, he attended the distribution of prizes at Nazareth on June 21. This proved to be his swan song for five days later, his condition deteriorated and he was taken to the Notre Dame Seminary where he died at 5:35 a.m. on Saturday August 31, amid the regrets of the Sisters and of all the unfortunate to whom he had dedicated thirty-five years of his life.<sup>56</sup>

One of the Sulpician's protégés painted his likeness and the tableau was given to the Grey Nuns in December.<sup>57</sup>

The memory of Father Rousselot would also be immortalized at the convent by the works he had instigated, among which was the St. Louis Orphanage, (known as Orphelinat Catholique) where the Sisters took over the administration in early 1889.

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<sup>55</sup> Circ. mens. 1881-83, pp. 626-629.

<sup>56</sup> Biography of Fr. Rousselot by Fr. L.S. Icard, sup. gen.

<sup>57</sup> Circ. mens. 1888-1892, p. 336. One can definitely recognize this artist as being Margaret Osborn of whom we spoke earlier.

## ORPHELINAT ST-LOUIS OR ORPHELINAT CATHOLIQUE MONTREAL, 1889

Toward 1875, Sister Bonneau had inaugurated a modest project on behalf of the orphans whom she encountered while on her charitable rounds. In 1881, this work had been moved close to the Nazareth asylum, thanks to the generosity of Father Rousselot who, for this purpose, had bought the stone house of the widowed Mrs. Nolan.<sup>58</sup>

Ever since 1864, Father Rousselot had manifested such an interest in the Catholic Orphanage that one could expect that it would eventually become a reality. In existence since 1832, the orphanage had been under the direction of a committee of charitable women assembled in 1827 with the objective of "relieving the extreme misery suffered by a great number of destitute in Montreal." Madam the baroness of Longueuil, Mesdames de Lotbinière and de Beaujeu were respectively the first president and vice-president of the organization.<sup>59</sup>

The cholera epidemic of 1832 was to give a new orientation to the work. Decimated by the fatal disease of the several elderly women who had been taken in, now only four survived while the number of orphans was increasing at an alarming rate. The women on the committee, encouraged by Father P. Phelan, p.s.s., then decided to care for the orphans instead. They entrusted their wards to the Refuge at Fauboug St. Laurent where Madam Gamelin was inaugurating her work destined to become the Congregation of the Sisters of Providence. They opened the doors of the asylum located on Notre

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<sup>58</sup> See above, year 1881.

<sup>59</sup> The details concerning the Catholic Orphanage were taken from footnotes of archival material 1821-1833, pp. 205, 301-312.



Dame Street. It had been the house of Père Louis, built on the former site of the Récollets, and gratuitously placed at the convenience of the Society by the Sulpicians. This explains the name of Orphelinat St. Louis given to the Institution, and the reason why the children were called the 'Recollet orphans'.

It was in 1832 that Mrs. Angélique Blondin, the widow of Gabriel Cotté entered on the scene. She became the main provider and chose Mrs. Chalifoux as the first director. Unfortunately, Mrs. Cotté's career ended in 1838. Her daughter, the widow of Jules Quesnel, assumed the responsibility and the Association of Lady Patronesses experienced years of rewarding efforts. Mrs. Maurice Laframboise, grand-daughter of Mrs. Cotté, joined Mrs. Quesnel, her mother, and for sixteen years held the position of secretary for the Committee.

Mrs. Chalifoux, the first director, was replaced in 1849 by Miss Eulalie Petit, who for twenty years accomplished wonders. Everyone admired the courage of this woman who had a firm hand but whose heart was as affectionate as that of a mother, and who gave all her strength and the resources of her intellect in order to improve the well-being of her charges.

The deteriorating condition of the home however, necessitated a move. In 1863, the residents settled in a house located on the corner of Cheneville and Lagauchetière Streets, behind the new church of Notre-Dame-des-Anges. Shortly after this, Father Rousselot, undoubtedly consulted by the women of the Committee, undertook to establish the work on a more solid basis. Eager to ensure its existence, he considered entrusting the administration to a religious community. To this effect, he suggested both to the Committee of Women and to the Grey Nuns an exchange of property: that on Cheneville Street for another close to the Nazareth Institution

"bordered in front by St. Catherine Street." The contract was signed on January 17, 1865 by Mother Jane Slocombe and her Council, while the women committed themselves to building an orphanage which would later be administered by the Grey Nuns under the direction of the Lady Patronesses.

Miss Petit ended her career in 1869, at which time Miss Elmire Morin was named director of the orphanage. She moved there with her elderly father and her sister, Delphine. In 1881, Sister Godard's orphanage was transferred to the Nolan house and in 1883, "the Cotté heirs, unable to continue their role of purveyors, gave up their rights to the Sulpician Seminary." For six more years, thanks to the dedication of the two Misses Morin, the project remained under lay administration, but when Miss Elmire died in January 1889, the project was really in crisis. The two sisters had served admirably well with praiseworthy zeal, but their strength had failed. Delphine then retired first with the Little Sisters of St. Joseph and later at the Mother House of the Grey Nuns where she lived until August 18, 1906.

By virtue of their promise dating back to 1865, Father Rousselot had no difficulty in replacing them with the Grey Nuns. Sister Emerance Caron-Turgeon, and Sister Lamarche took over the orphanage on January 9, 1889. The new director stated, "At noon Mrs. Prévost introduced me. Here is your Sister. The children looked at me with wonder." At the noon meal, Sister noticed with astonishment the absence of knives and forks, and the orphans ate only puréed foods with the use of a spoon. Water was the only beverage. The children clad in shirts and barefoot, delegated one of the younger ones to request the permission to go and play outside. The Sister explained that soon it would be possible. Encouraged by the response, they sent another delegation this time to solicit the



permission to play with the cap guns - or 'revolvers' - received from Father Pelletier, the chaplain. Sister Turgeon explained, "Let us wait until Miss Morin is gone; then, we will see." They could not contain themselves for joy and one cap in fact did go off. Sister Turgeon stressed that they did however enjoy a noisy gun exercise after Miss Morin had gone.

Other surprises awaited Sister Turgeon. She discovered that "the twenty-four beds had straw mattresses but no bed-springs." The attic was totally cluttered. In the basement, there were rats around the empty coal bin. Only five dollars could be found in the house.

The Superior listed the most urgently-needed repairs, the fuel on hand, the tools, the clothing necessary for the children who went to the school of the Brothers of St. Gabriel and who needed to be warmly dressed especially at this time of year. Sister Lamarche undertook the job of making clothes from the articles donated. The Sisters from the school at Nazareth contributed the work of their students so that the blind knitted for the sighted. Mr. F.X. Froidevaux loaned a large stove and agreed to advance the funds necessary for the repairs. Sister Turgeon promised to reimburse all, counting on St. Joseph, the great provider in whom she placed all her trust. The capacity of the Institution was increased by developing the attic into a dormitory and the Sister was able to pay the accounts as they became due.

The orphanage which had housed 463 children from 1832-1888, registered 780 between 1889-1900. In 1917, the Institution would move to Notre-Dame-de-Graces. The Grey Nuns would continue their work there, while the Sulpicians sponsored the talented students who wished to pursue their education.

## ASILE STE-CUNÉGONDE, MONTREAL 1889

On April 12, hardly three months after the arrival of the Grey Nuns at the Orphelinat Catholique, Mother Filiatrault, along with Sister Perrin, her Assistant, visited the Brewster castle in the parish of St. Cunégonde.

This castle had served as a Protestant academy over the past few years. It would soon become the temporary dwelling of the several Sisters destined for the new work which had been accepted, namely the day-care centre for children, as well as visiting the poor and the sick in their homes. Father A. Séquin, founder of the parish had wished to secure the services of the Grey Nuns as had done Father R. Décarie, the pastor at St. Henri.

On May 13, Sisters Lapointe and St. Louis began the parish visit in the company of Les Dames de Charité who, for their part, were responsible for collecting funds to pursue the project.<sup>60</sup> Sister St. Louis had a good tutor in the person of Sister Lapointe who already had a reputation for her charity. The two did the recruiting for the day-care centre so that on September 16, when Sister Malépart, the Superior and Sisters Deguire, Ste. Praxède and Laboissonnière arrived, 147 pre-school children were there to welcome them. The castle could house only thirty persons, so that they had to perform miracles in order to allocate the children to the various rooms, because a regular classroom had also been opened at this time.

When, after three years under this program, the statistics were produced, it was found that thirty-four boys and three hundred girls had attended the school, while six thousand tots had attended the day-care centre. Moreover, one thousand home visits had been recorded.

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<sup>60</sup> The details concerning Asile Ste. Cunégonde were taken from the gen. arch. and from Circ. mens. of the years mentioned.



It was evident that the Sisters' stay at the Brewster castle would soon end, for the funds were inadequate. Then in May 1893, Father Séguin, the founding pastor, passed away following a long illness. Although he bequeathed the greater portion of his estate in favor of this project, it was insufficient to continue the plan despite little Harry's legacy whose laudable action bears reporting. This child had been visited at home by Sister St. Edouard who had helped him "in his dying moments". Several months later, little Harry's young sister appeared at the castle requesting to see the nurse who by now had been transferred. Then the little girl delivered her message. "My little brother told us to give this to Sister St. Edouard." It was a purse containing forty-nine cents, the child's whole fortune. This delightful deed moved the Sisters to hope that the house whose destiny had been in question for five years would finally be built. In fact, Father Ecrement, the new pastor, strongly encouraged the Grey Nuns to proceed.

Toward the end of March 1895, the land at the corner of Albert and Atwater Streets was cleared and in April construction of a six-storey building began under the direction of Architects Perreault, Venne and Mesnard. It measured 230 ft. by 50 ft. and was to be called the Sacred Heart of Mary Asylum, but it was the name of Ste. Cunégonde which would finally prevail.

The blessing of the cornerstone took place on July 7 in the presence of a large attendance of parishioners and clergy. Father Lepailleur, the pastor of Maisonneuve, stirred the audience by explaining the triple mission of this project: it would be:

A home and school for young children;

A home for the protection of youth;

A home for the comfort of the elderly.

The enthusiasm reached such a pitch, that the sum of \$159.00 was collected, an unhopd-for amount to which everyone, including the poor as well as the rich, the elderly and the children had contributed.

Mother Deschamps, in office since 1892, participated in the celebration and several months later, "knowing what to expect with regard to Sister Lapointe's charism," she requested her to establish in the parish the project of 'St. Anthony's loaves'.<sup>61</sup>

The Superior had been correct; the project flourished and provided genuine relief for the future Institution as it had in the past for the Notre Dame Hospital.

Finally, on September 26, 1896, the Sisters left the temporary home where they had lived for seven years and they took over the new building which had two wings measuring 18 ft. and 45 ft. respectively. One of these was for the elderly and the other for student boarders. The main portion of the building was for the orphans and the elderly of both sexes.

Archbishop Bruchési, at the time of his visit in 1901, was delighted to see the good work being done in this institution of charity. Three years later, he would grieve with the entire population when the parish church was burned to the ground. The shelter provided space immediately to serve as a temporary church without however interrupting the regular work. The children were moved to the lower floors for classes and for meals. This was a relatively noisy group since four hundred children were received daily. This program would last three years until the new church was opened on April 11, 1907.

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<sup>61</sup> Sr. Lapointe was no longer on the staff of Sisters at the Asylum at this time, but she continued to devote herself to that cause.



The hospice was to prove both useful and popular. In 1918, a school for home economics was opened and four years later, there were classrooms under the administration of the School Board. These additions did not mean the deletion of the earlier works, so the Institution was operating at full capacity until the fateful day of June 15, 1951 when fire destroyed Hospice Ste. Cunégonde, resulting in the death of thirty-five victims including twenty-eight elderly women, five employees and two Sisters, namely Sisters Antoinette Chauvin and Rita Gervais, the Superior. Mother Courville, the Superior General at the time would write:

Confronted by this unutterable tragedy, we have better understood what moral courage was required of Mother d'Youville in order to be able to recite the TE DEUM after fire had destroyed her hospital on May 18, 1765.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ann. 1950-51, p. 980.





## CHAPTER V 1890-1892

In November 1889, the chronicler wrote with a note of sadness that the Community had withdrawn from the project of establishing a hospice at Ste. Thérèse de Blainville. Father L.A. Charlebois, pastor of that parish, had requested this favor in July of the preceding year. He was supported at the time by Mr. Drapeau, a benefactor on whose help he had depended. Unfortunately, Mr. Drapeau died suddenly on November 19th and the Grey Nuns had to withdraw from this project which Mother Filiatrault and her bursar had deemed advantageous when they had first visited Ste. Thérèse.<sup>1</sup>

The chronicler concluded that Providence had other plans, for in the course of 1890 four new foundations were formally accepted and would become realities in 1891 and 1892. Among the events which Sister Panet, the chronicler, recorded daily, there was one whose importance surpassed

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<sup>1</sup> The visit had taken place on the return from St. Jérôme (Circ. mens. 1887-92, p. 284).

all the rest and which brought unspeakable joy, not only to the Mother Community but also to the Grey Nun Communities of St. Hyacinthe, Ottawa and Quebec. The "trans-atlantic cable" brought the news, at 2 p.m. on March 27, that the Cause of Mother d'Youville had been brought before the Roman Court. On the same day, the news was relayed by telegram to all Grey Nuns and immediately a three-day thanksgiving celebration was planned. Father L.W. Leclair, p.s.s., a member of the Canadian College in Rome, strongly encouraged this expression of gratitude by writing to the Superior General:

I consider this event as one of the most important for the Canadian Church and for your Community in particular. It is one of the most beautiful fruits of the tree planted by Mr. Olier.<sup>2</sup>

The official portrait of the illustrious candidate was entrusted to the artist, J.C. Marois, who finished his task on April 26.<sup>3</sup>

While the Sisters savored in advance the hope of their Foundress' Beatification, the Grey Nuns would experience once again that no happiness is complete. Mother Deschamps, the bursar, noticed a slight curving of the pillars of the major nave in the chapel.<sup>4</sup> Further research revealed that some masonry already affected by decay, threatened to collapse. The work of consolidation which consisted in adding steel arches to connect the four pillars,

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<sup>2</sup> It is common knowledge that the Sulpicians greatly helped Mother d'Youville in her foundation. Fr. Leclair's letter was dated May 3, the same day which sixty-nine years later marked the beatification of "this first flower of the Canadian Church".

<sup>3</sup> This original painting is preserved at the Mother House. Multiple photographic copies were produced for the promotion of the Cause.

<sup>4</sup> Vie de Mère Deschamps, Sr. Collette, p. 365.



was begun on April 11 and completed on October 15.<sup>5</sup> Since the chapel had to be evacuated, a benefactor who wished to remain anonymous, suggested that this would be a good time to erect a steeple and he offered the necessary funds. The benefactor, as everyone had surmised, was Mr. Richard Devins; he was imitating the generosity of his sister, Mrs. Tiffin, who had donated the white marble statues for the side altars.<sup>6</sup>

There were anniversaries which the Sisters would have liked to highlight but they had to be content with mentioning them in the chronicles and to celebrating only locally. The golden jubilee of the founding of the Grey Nuns of St. Hyacinthe was among these. Mother Deschamps and Sister Reid were delegated to these celebrations where the following comparison was established: On May 8, 1840, Sisters Thuot, Pinsonneault, Guyon and Jauron had left Montreal. In 1854,<sup>7</sup> Sisters Pinsonneault and Guyon came back to the Mother House in Montreal. The Sister-Community at this time numbered 185 Sisters, 35 novices and postulants and the works inaugurated by Mother d'Youville were already being carried out in several institutions. Archbishop Fabre of Montreal who, fifty years earlier had served the first Mass at the Hôtel-Dieu in St. Hyacinthe, now officiated pontifically on this great feast day.<sup>8</sup> On August 27 he left for Rome. Mother Filiatrault at this time was having discussions relative to the withdrawal of the Grey Nuns from the school of Notre-Dame-des-Neiges, according to the long-established policy of giving

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<sup>5</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1887-92, p. 460. The urgency of these repairs necessitated the postponement in 1891 of the Triduum of thanksgiving.

<sup>6</sup> These statues were installed for the feast of the Presentation of Mary on November 21.

<sup>7</sup> The first-named died in Montreal on Jan. 23, 1890 while Sr. Guyon died two years earlier on Nov. 21, 1888.

<sup>8</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1887-92, pp. 186, 352, 401-402.

priority to more remote missions. But, the people headed by their pastor, Father N. Maréchal would not hear of it.

For twenty-eight years the Sisters have been taking care of our sick, of our needy people and our orphans. We love them too much to let them go,

said the people and the Sisters had to resume their labor of love.

As for the school for day students at Hospice St. Joseph, which had functioned for some thirty years and was under the direction of Sisters Vigneau and Charon, it was permanently closed on June 25.<sup>9</sup> During the same month, in the chapel of this institution, Father Othon, a Franciscan, highlighted the return of his Order to Canada by celebrating the Eucharist.<sup>10</sup> Thus recognition was being given to the successors of "the first missionaries to spread the Gospel in this country." noted the chronicler.<sup>11</sup>

The cross, brought to the New World by the Récollets in 1615, and given to the Grey Nuns, would henceforth shine on the steeple of their Mother House. It was installed on September 2. This iron cross weighing nine hundred pounds, measuring twelve feet in height rests on a base representing the globe, also of iron and measuring three feet in diameter. While the Pomminville contractors and their employees undertook the perilous task of installing

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<sup>9</sup> Circ. mens. 1887-92, p. 425.

<sup>10</sup> 25 années de vie franciscaine au Canada p. 29. The Franciscans settled in a humble dwelling in St. Joseph's parish. Two years later, they would occupy the houses of Mr. Judah, thanks to the generosity of Mrs. Tiffin and Mrs. McKonkey. The hospice furthermore would shelter the Patronage St. Elizabeth where young ladies assembled to do sewing for the poor. This initiative started in Dec. 1891.

<sup>11</sup> Circ. mens. 1887-92, p. 414. The details which follow are taken from the same source except when otherwise stated.



this glorious sign, the Sisters and their protégés recited the rosary. When finally the cross had been hoisted to the top by means of pulleys, Mr. Guimond grasped it and settled it firmly. Then removing his cap, he recited the verse, "Hail, O Cross, sign of our Redemption." Touched by this moment of intense emotion, all the spectators removed their caps. The Grey Nuns on seeing the sign of the Redemption, remembered the role which trials had played in the life of Mother d'Youville.

The decree awarding the title of Venerable to this beloved Mother arrived in Montreal on August 31, 1890 having been brought from Rome by Father J.B. Proulx, the pastor at St. Lin parish and vice-rector of the University. He was staying at the Grey Nuns in order to complete his work, the union of the Victoria medical school and the Faculty of Medicine of the Laval University in Montreal.<sup>12</sup> The Bill concerning this was adopted on November 28 and on December 19 the Grey Nuns celebrated the event. To the congratulations addressed to him, Father J.B. Proulx, the distinguished pastor, responded that he was only the fifth wheel in the powerful motor.

The Grey Nuns, particularly those at Notre Dame Hospital and who were jokingly called "the Laval Sisters" rejoiced that this thorny problem had been resolved. This was especially true of Sister Perrin, the Assistant General who had returned to the post of Superior at the Hospital at the end of 1889.<sup>13</sup> There was reason to hope that a new period was beginning for this institution where the daughters of Mother d'Youville had now been working for ten years.

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<sup>12</sup> Rumilly, *Hist. de la Prov. de Qué.* V. VI pp.176-177. All this happened in the reign of Mercier.

<sup>13</sup> Sr. Stubinger having been named Formation Director, the medical staff claimed the services of Sr. Perrin who was later replaced by Sr. Marie-Joseph in 1891.

Mother Filiatrault had inaugurated her term of office by recalling that "the first thrust of the founders (the rule) bears the seal of the Spirit of God; one does not alter it without peril". Since she was responsible for the direction of the Institute, when confronting the problems which arose, she would ask herself, "What would Mother d'Youville do in a similar case"?<sup>14</sup> The memory of the Mother of the Poor opening her door to all the needy always moved the Superior General to action. Consequently, the works multiplied to the point where early in 1891, the chronicler exclaimed "It is like in the time of St. Theresa, when from one day to the next new foundations would appear".<sup>15</sup> The comment was justified since, during January, two new projects were undertaken and another was being prepared to open before the end of the year.

Yet, the works already in existence were being accompanied by certain difficulties. At St. Jérôme for example, the Sisters had lost a powerful protector in the person of pastor Labelle who died on January 4. Hardly a fortnight later, the college in that parish was destroyed by fire and the Sisters had to assume the responsibility for the boys' school.

At Châteauguay, the Sisters operated the agricultural school and six orphans were being trained under the direction of Sister Aresse. They would learn to till the soil and be trained in various skills and would provide help in erecting a beautiful crucifix on the mound to replace the one destroyed by a thunderbolt on January 13, 1889.<sup>16</sup> The

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<sup>14</sup> Not. biog. Mère Filiatrault, A.S.G.M.

<sup>15</sup> Circ. mens. 1887-92, p. 517.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 664.



school would not last however, for the Quebec youth proved to be more captivated by the salaries offered by American factories than by the perspective of breaking new land.

In Toledo, there was more hope for the survival of the orphanage. While the Episcopal See was vacant,<sup>17</sup> canvassing had been authorized by Monsignor Boff, the administrator, and ten Grey Nuns were warmly received in as many parishes.

As for the Toledo hospital, circumstances would prove its usefulness. At the time of the terrible railway accident headlined in the papers, all the personnel were mobilized to care for sixteen wounded men, burned and numb with cold. Five of the victims died but the others were saved; the Sisters were the object of glowing testimonies.<sup>18</sup>

In Lawrence, Massachusetts, a fact was recorded in the annals of the Community. The local authorities had not paid the compensation due for the orphans who were without resources so the Sisters had received the order to hand over sixteen of these children to the bearer of the letter. Sister McKenna was formally opposed to this. Father O'Reilly, the pastor, appealed to the parishioners who paid the debt while an elderly spinster who had been received at the hospice under the semblance of poverty, bequeathed her wealth to the orphans<sup>19</sup> and thus the problem was solved.

Such stories reaching to the Mother House served to ward off the boredom which often results from routine.

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<sup>17</sup> The Bishop of Cleveland died Apr. 14, 1891.

<sup>18</sup> The accident happened at the end of November 1891. Sr. Peltier, formerly the Formation Director, became Superior at the hospital in September.

<sup>19</sup> This fact was recorded in Nov. 1890. (Circ.mens. 1887-1892, p. 493.)

Other stories were related verbally, for example, when the heroic missionaries, Sisters St. Michel-des-Saints, Daunais, Lemay and St. Charles returned to the Mother House after periods of ten to thirty years and were greeted with joy and a true veneration. Having left with the enthusiasm of their youth, they returned now bent with age, fatigue and privations. Their appearance foretold the most eloquent eventuality for the candidates now being prepared in the novitiate.

Other worthy apostles visited the Grey Nuns. Among them were Bishops Grouard and Pascal elevated to the episcopate in 1891, the year which coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival in Montreal of the Oblates of which they were members.

The event par excellence of 1891 was that of the celebration of the Introduction of the Cause of Mother d'Youville before the Roman Court. The Triduum was set for the two last days of March and the first of April. All the details of the program, save one, had been carefully planned.

The Superior General pursued her visits to the Grey Nun institutions in Montreal. She had a bad fall as she was leaving Ste-Brigitte Refuge on the evening of February 17. She returned to the Mother House with great difficulty and the doctor diagnosed a simple fracture of the right leg. This simple fracture however, proved to be complicated and when the Triduum began, Mother Filiatrault was confined to her room and therefore unable to attend. Meanwhile, she reconciled herself to the situation. Had not the Venerable Mother whose achievements were being celebrated, been herself immobilized by a painful knee at the time of the founding of her religious institution? Mother Filiatrault was not the type to lose herself in conjectures; the cross was being offered to her and she accepted it generously, content to unite her jubilation to



the echoes which reached her from the chapel, recently restored. In order to conform to the prescription of non-cult<sup>20</sup>, the paintings representing Mother d'Youville teaching the devotion to the Eternal Father to her charges and that depicting her absorbing devotion to the Heart of Jesus,<sup>21</sup> were moved to the back of the nave.

Each day of the Triduum there was a High Mass and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament with an appropriate homily. Thus, the attainments of the great heroine of the day were highlighted at the Mother-House by the Archbishops of Montreal and St. Boniface, the personnel of the Archbishop's residence, the priests from the Seminary, the pastors of parishes in which there were Grey Nuns, the Oblate Fathers, the Jesuits, the Franciscans and especially priests who had been former protégés of the Mother House.

On the second day, the students at the Collège de Montréal, musicians and singers were heard at Mass and then in the Community room where they interpreted a Cantata in honor of Mother d'Youville. The Cantata was repeated for the Superior General.

On the last day celebrations were exceptionally solemn and there were numerous invited guests. Places of honor were reserved for members of the Sister-Communities of St. Hyacinthe, Ottawa and Quebec. After the Mass, the guests assembled at the tables in the dining room following which

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<sup>20</sup> This trial started March 14, with the following as members of the Tribunal: Bishop E.C. Fabre, judge; Canon P. Leblanc, associate judge; Father Rousseau, p.s.s., postulator; T. Kavanagh, promoter of the faith; P.N. Bruchési, actuarial notary and A. Le Valois, p.s.s., recorder. Mother Filiatrault and Sr. Stubinger appeared before this tribunal in September "to give their testimony."

<sup>21</sup> Vie de Mère Deschamps, Sr. Collette, p. 49. These paintings were offered to the Grey Nuns by Fr. Faillon in 1854 and 1856 respectively. They were transferred as early as 1885.

they gathered in the Community room where the present was linked to the past. The Decree which held the place of honor was surrounded by symbolic daisies (Marguerites).

On the wall to the right hung two paintings. One represented the heroine, the other her great grandfather, Pierre Boucher.<sup>22</sup> The chronicler commented:

The story of the life of Pierre Boucher is possibly one of the most beautiful pages of our history. During the first sixteen years of her life, our Venerable Mother had the advantage of knowing her great grandfather. She even had the joy of living for some time in his home where she was inspired by his principles and edified by his examples.

This recall of Madame d'Youville's maternal ancestry particularly impressed Archbishop Taché as well as Father F. Adam, pastor at Hochelaga and Father E. Pépin, pastor at Howick. All three claimed to be descendents of the famous great grandfather and consequently were related to the Foundress.

On this same day, the eighteenth anniversary of Archbishop Fabre's Episcopal Consecration was highlighted by a panegyric in the chapel. The Archbishop of St. Boniface gave a commentary on the TE DEUM, Mother d'Youville's favorite prayer. This time with the convenience of a wheelchair donated by Mrs. Tiffin, the Superior General could attend the closing celebrations at the Mother House. More than 430 Grey Nuns and 116 novices took part in these celebrations, either in person or in spirit and a voluminous correspondence began on this occasion.

These memorable days were to have a glorious tomorrow. Each of the missions and the General

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<sup>22</sup> The Honorable C.E.B. of Boucherville loaned the painting to the Sisters. Archbishop Taché had it copied to offer to the Mother House.



Administration of all the Sister-Communities would have their Triduum. The Sisters of Ste. Anne from Lachine also offered the Grey Nuns a painting closely representing the oldest portrait of the Foundress. At Varennes, Marguerite Dufrost de Lajemmerais' birthplace, the population celebrated with particular joy as was the case in St. Boniface; Archbishop Taché never missed an occasion to point out that the discovery of the west was due in great part to Pierre de la Verendrye, aided by his nephew, Christophe Dufrost de la Jemmerais, respectively uncle and brother of Marguerite d'Youville.

Mother Filiatrault who had been allowed to make the trip, attended the Triduum in St. Boniface. Alas, she could not however visit the Sisters further north. The rule made it mandatory for her to visit them before the end of her first mandate as Superior but because of her ailing condition, she was unable to do so. The Sisters of the Mackenzie region keenly felt this privation. They had looked forward with such eagerness to her coming that "her breakfast awaited her on the table" wrote Sister Ward a few months later.<sup>23</sup> The regret of the missionaries was equalled only by that of the Superior who undoubtedly had to say like the Foundress, "Pray that God will give me the strength to carry all these crosses and to make a holy use of them."<sup>24</sup>

### **THE INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL, ST. BONIFACE, 1891**

The Industrial School of Qu'Appelle and of High River proved to be sound investments. Therefore, it was not surprising that Archbishop Taché would soon secure the same benefit for the native children of his own area. Since the law grouping Natives on Reserves had come into effect,

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<sup>23</sup> Letter of Dec. 1891.

<sup>24</sup> Letter of Mother d'Youville to Fr. de l'Isle-Dieu, September 18, 1765.

three 'encampments' had been established around St. Boniface. The Archbishop did not hesitate to solicit financial help from the Federal Government and no sooner had he obtained it, than he moved into action. Because of the unavailability of an institution, the girls were received at the provincial house of the Grey Nuns. Since 1846, it had become the custom to take in every type of project, at least at their outset. On July 1, 1889, thirty-five girls were received there and two rooms on the north side were set up as classrooms.

In the following year, construction of the Industrial School for boys (mostly of the Sauteux tribe) was begun on the Sisters' land.<sup>25</sup> On December 28, 1890, in the presence of a large attendance, Archbishop Taché blessed the new building to be completed only in the following spring. It was opened on January 2, 1891 however, and after the necessary grooming,<sup>26</sup> sixteen pupils made a noisy entry.

Sisters Lassisseraye and d'Eschambault were assigned there: the first as Superior, the latter because she mastered both English and French as well as the Cree, Sauteux and Sioux dialects, a fact which students would observe with delight. Father Joseph Lavigne was the first to assume the duties of chaplain.

At this school, as in the other schools already in existence, the children made rapid progress. The institution became so popular that soon, regretfully, the Sisters were forced to refuse admission of any more pupils. In May 1892, there were eighty pupils while the Department had set the number at sixty. A stable, a cobbler shop and a carpenter shop were areas where the native boys learned appropriate skills. Famous bishops and renowned visitors, among whom was Governor Schultz, stopped at this

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<sup>25</sup> Archbishop Taché to Mother Filiatrault, July 26, 1890.

<sup>26</sup> *Vers les Pays d'en haut*, A. Tessier and H. Biron, pp. 183-184.



institution and were amazed at the children's vocal performance and especially at their skills.

It was not easy however, to maintain discipline in a mixed school, for the girls had been moved from the Provincial House in 1897. A firm hand was required and Father Dorais, an Oblate, became Principal at the school where seven Sisters were now employed.

In 1901, one hundred pupils, of whom sixty-seven were boys and thirty-three were girls, pursued their studies. Among the latter, four would become Auxiliary Sisters.

"We have reason to be proud of the successes obtained at this school", Sister Pagé wrote during a visit to Fort Alexander<sup>27</sup> where the former pupils were now established and whose behavior was a credit to those who had been their teachers.

Alas, as civilization invaded the territories, the Reserves moved farther away so that even the Industrial Schools had to be transferred elsewhere.

In 1905, the few pupils in St. Boniface moved to Fort Alexander while the Industrial School closed its doors after fifteen years of operation.

### **HOLY CROSS HOSPITAL, CALGARY, ALBERTA, 1891**

On the morning of January 21, 1891, Miss Madeline Beemer who had arrived from Toledo a few days earlier, donned the garb of the Sisters of St. Martha in the Community room of the Mother House. She would receive her practical training in the West since she had courageously accepted to join the group of Sisters who were leaving for Calgary that same night. The prayers of the itinerary were offered in the chapel at four o'clock in

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<sup>27</sup> Excursion which took place July 18, 1899.

the afternoon and three hours later, Sisters Carroll, Beauchemin, St. Marc and Gertrude (Miss Beemer's new name) boarded the train. The foundresses brought no treasure other than their trust in Divine Providence. In fact, by the time they reached their destination<sup>28</sup> their capital of \$209.75 had been depleted to \$73.75. At 2 a.m. on January 30, in extremely cold weather, the Sisters arrived in Calgary, a little town which owed its existence to the altered route of the Canadian Pacific Railway.<sup>29</sup> Father Leduc, an Oblate priest, had been expecting them for the past several hours but had sought in vain for a vehicle to convey them to their destination. The Sisters, laden with their luggage, were forced to trudge their way to the Convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus a quarter of a mile away. The latter greeted them with friendliness but regretfully declared that they could not give them lodging. The new arrivals therefore patiently awaited Mass time, then after a light lunch, directed their steps toward the hospital which was as yet unfinished. This was a small two-storey house measuring 20 ft. by 20 ft. equipped with a stove incapable of providing sufficient heat for the needs of the residents. The wind penetrated from all sides. Old mattresses and blankets bought at an auction were set in place while the meager capital was further diminished.

The Sisters were pleasantly surprised by the arrival of Sister Cleary, Superior at the school in Dunbow near Calgary. Seeing the destitution of her companions, she cordially invited them to come to Dunbow. The foundresses declined but Sister Carroll sent Sister Beauchemin along in consideration of her feeble health.

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<sup>28</sup> These details are extracts from *Circ. mens* and biographies of the foundresses.

<sup>29</sup> *Hist. abrégée de l'Ouest*, Morice, p. 107



Moved by the situation of the Sisters, a few charitable women sent various articles while Father Leduc supplied them with food.

On April 1, a patient was admitted to the six-bed hospital. He was so well cared for that he became a publicity agent and eventually sixty-four patients were admitted during the first year. It was evident however, that the small house was insufficient for the needs. It became necessary to build. Bishop Grandin donated land, the Oblates supplied 25,000 bricks, the women organized a bazaar and the tireless Sister Carroll went to canvass in the construction camps along the line of the Canadian Pacific Railway. By May 3, 1892, the contract was signed for the construction of a new building the cost of which was estimated at \$6,000.00.

The Sisters were already in debt but Divine Providence was watching over them. Sister Margaret Devins, who had inherited the fortune of her brother, Richard, gave the sum of \$10,000.00 to Holy Cross Hospital, while a public calamity would win them the affection of the population. A small-pox epidemic broke out in Calgary. Local authorities appealed to the Sisters for help. Courageously two of them went to their new field of action. The small-pox patients were sheltered under a tent in a pitiful state of abandonment. One of the patients was actually in a state of putrefaction. Even the doctor did not dare to come near her, but the compassionate Sisters attended her to the end. Their ministry lasted five weeks and when they returned to the fold, they were compelled to burn their clothing in order to avoid spreading the infection. Instead of resting, the nurses went about overseeing the work of construction.

The hospital was blessed on November 13 and on the 25th the Sisters moved in. Of the three storeys only two were completed but the cost had already reached \$15,000.00. The project however, was on a good course

and would not cease to develop. "Even the most fanatic non-Catholics readily agreed that there are no nurses like the Sisters of Charity".<sup>30</sup>

The existence of a Catholic hospital gave rise to envy and soon another building was rising for the benefit of non-Catholic patients of the area, so that the Sisters had reason to fear some rivalry especially since the town was experiencing an economic depression in 1896. "Calgary is not today the flourishing city which it had become", wrote Sister Carroll.<sup>31</sup> "Crop failures have discouraged the farmers so that a large number of them have left the country." Two years later, the situation was reversed when the railway workshops appeared in Calgary, bringing to the town seven or eight hundred more people. The competition of the non-Catholic hospital suffered a serious set-back in early January 1900 when a conflict arose between the authorities and the nurses. Consequently, twelve patients left the institution to seek treatment at Holy Cross Hospital. Among these patients was the director of the hospital himself who had been "our most zealous adversary", noted Sister Carroll. As a result, it became necessary to plan for a further extension which was realized in 1906. The School of Nursing opened the following year. That same year a miners' strike caused a shortage of coal and the laundry workers, among whom was Sister Gertrude, were forced to return to primitive methods. Calgary was still unaware of its black gold. The crisis was temporary however, and the town soon began to experience a period of astounding development. As for the institution founded by the Grey Nuns, it continued to grow in size and to improve the quality of care dispensed. For many years to come the Grey Nuns would pursue their humanitarian and Christian service

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<sup>30</sup> Sr. Carroll to Mother Deschamps, Sept. 15, 1893.

<sup>31</sup> Letter of April 13, 1896.



to over five hundred patients which the hospital was able to accommodate after the successive expansions.

**ST. ANNE'S ORPHANAGE, WORCESTER, U.S.A.,  
1891**

Father J. Brouillet, the pastor of the francophone parish in Worcester, Mass. had appealed to the Grey Nuns in 1884 in order to obtain their services for the establishment of an orphanage. The reply had been affirmative, but the project had to be postponed in favor of other projects previously accepted. The delay was deplored by the pastor, and five years later he encouraged the plan of "Young Ladies of the Third Order" to transform the building used as a school chapel in South Worcester into a shelter "for thirty-five orphans and five elderly persons."<sup>32</sup>

The initiative failed and the group dissolved. Several of them came together again elsewhere and persisted in living together as a community despite the interdiction from competent authority. This was complicated by the fact that these young women had obtained their charter of civic incorporation which guaranteed them the sharing of common goods.<sup>33</sup> They left the orphanage on Southgate Street where there were now seventy-eight orphans as well as elderly and handicapped persons. Father Brouillet renewed his appeal to the Grey Nuns. He was so persuasive that two days later, on January 30, 1891, the Superior General took the foundresses to Worcester. They were Sisters Anna Piché, St. Georges, Poitevin and Ste. Hedwidge: four Sisters carefully chosen.

Sister Piché was thirty years old and had less than ten years of religious life, but already despite her frail

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<sup>32</sup> *Le Livre d'Or*, - A. Belisle, p. 72.

<sup>33</sup> The situation would stabilize however and from this small group would come a worthy religious community.

appearance, she was known as a strong woman, a woman with a great heart, one of whom any sacrifice could be asked. Impressed by the courage of the 'heroic women of the far North' the young lady had once declared she wanted "to be a Grey Nun in order to experience extreme deprivation". Her wish would be fulfilled in Worcester where the sympathy of the population was divided between the Tertiaries and the Grey Nuns.<sup>34</sup>

The early period of their stay appeared glorious, for the elite of society welcomed the daughters of Mother d'Youville most cordially. The reception took place at the Casino where the speaker stated that

even though the faces of the new arrivals are not familiar, the brilliant renown of your community has reached us here. As we left the shores of the St. Lawrence, we brought with us memories of the heroic abnegation which for two centuries has been the pride of our land (...) You can count with certainty on the entire sympathy of the ten thousand francophones of Worcester who will be happy to help you in the rugged task before you.<sup>35</sup>

A beautiful bouquet of flowers was offered to Mother Filiatrault who thanked the donors and promised that she would increase the number of Sisters, for she had already observed that four would not suffice for the task.

The Superior General kept her promise and sent additional help which was particularly appreciated as Sisters Lapointe and Kègle arrived before the end of February. The

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<sup>34</sup> Sr. Piché became the Superior General of the Grey Nuns from 1910-1920 and from 1930-1935. She was the first Superior General to visit the northern missions and she experienced all sorts of difficulties in her travels from 1912-1933, despite the improved conditions; therefore, one could conclude that the 'petite' Mother had a special vocation for hardships.

<sup>35</sup> Circ. mens. 1887-92, pp. 522-523.



first had been a foundress of the missions in the distant Mackenzie region, so Sister Piché and all her companions held her in high esteem, an esteem which would never decline as this great missionary had a marvelous ability to adapt. It was said that nothing was impossible to her. The people of Worcester would get a clear idea of this, even those who had at first displayed a certain reticence towards the Grey Nuns. She initiated the project of loaves which was practically the sole manner of assuring the daily subsistence. Despite this, it occasionally happened that tables were bare. St. Joseph was then called upon and small miracles happened. A baker once forgot to add salt to the dough, then offered his loaves to the orphanage; the contribution was gratefully received.<sup>36</sup> Sister Lapointe was not astonished at these little happenings and she continued her humble task of canvassing. Soon people became familiar with the silhouette of this Sister of Charity, always so pleasant and understanding. She was nicknamed "our daily bread" and everyone granted her requests.<sup>37</sup>

In May, Mother Deschamps, the bursar came to Worcester to provide temporary relief. Sister Piché greeted the former Superior General with delight. She knew that her experience would be most helpful to her. The house was already inadequate to meet the requests for admission. The bursar suggested the purchase of land near the town where a small building would be erected. The citizens

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<sup>36</sup> Sr. Rodier to the Sisters of the Mother House, Feb, 1900. The secretary was recalling the beginnings of the Community.

<sup>37</sup> Prematurely exhausted by hard work and extended fasts in the far North. Sr. Lapointe was recalled to the Mother House in 1895. The Worcester Journal published a laudatory article about the worthy religious. "We have seen her at work daily, rain or shine. If we have reason to be proud of our orphanage, we have contracted an enormous debt toward Sr. Lapointe who, by her untiring zeal and her indomitable energy succeeded in placing the Catholic Orphanage of Worcester in the forefront of charitable institutions of New England." (Circ. mens. 1892-95, pp. 743-744).

objected to this preferring a more durable project. In the meantime, the farm-house occupied by Sisters McKenzie and St. Georges, the guardians, was repaired.

The construction began in May 1892. At Sister Piché's request, Mother Deschamps turned the sod and the St. Anne Orphanage on Granite Street began to rise. Eleven Sisters were employed at this project which sheltered more than one hundred orphans while the others who visited the homes of the poor discovered dire poverty which they endeavored to relieve.

Exactly two years after their arrival in Worcester, the Grey Nuns entered the new orphanage where they were able to accommodate 140 orphans. The house was blessed on May 30 by Bishop Beaven of Springfield, who manifested great interest in this orphanage well situated outside of town and which had all the advantages of country living. Two years later, in November 1897 people were deploring the fact of it "being so far away and without a telephone", since a forest fire had started in the vicinity of the institution. Three employees had failed to control the destructive element. According to them only a squad of fire-fighters summoned by telephone could control the blaze. The zealous workers had not counted on the Sisters' trust in their special protector. Sisters Piché and St. Jérôme-Emilien went to the site of the fire and gave one of the spectators a small picture of Mother d'Youville to "set on one of the stakes." In less than fifteen minutes the fire was under control.

In the francophone parish of Notre-Dame the Grey Nuns pursued their charitable work to promote the faith and the French language. For many years to come they would teach in their own language, the orphans of the Canadian French who had come to the United States attracted by glowing promises.



Many young ladies from the Franco-American population eventually came to swell the ranks of the Grey Nuns.

- 1892 -

January saw the completion of the court case required by Rome to prove that no public cult toward Mother d'Youville had been encouraged. The term "public" cult must be defined, for the private cult, that is devotion to the Foundress, was intensifying among the Grey Nuns. Each Sister attempted to steep herself in the spirit of the early foundation and the Foundress' biography authored by Father Faillon, a noted historian, again became very popular. The Sisters wished to imitate Mother d'Youville's availability and attempted to imbue themselves with her total trust in Divine Providence and to follow the example of her incomparable tenderness towards her brothers and sisters.

Mother d'Youville had been particularly remarkable for her deep gratitude towards anyone who had rendered her the slightest service. "Never will this institution forget your kindness and those who will come after us will know of your generosity in our favor"<sup>38</sup>, she wrote to a correspondent. In another letter she stated: "My Sisters and I can only give you our prayers by way of gratitude."<sup>39</sup> One must not seek elsewhere than in these statements the source of the tradition established among the Grey Nuns of praying daily for their benefactors. It has become a custom to record their charities in detail, to note the date of their death and to tell the future generation "what they have done for us." Thus the death of François Plante, the former

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<sup>38</sup> Letter of Sept. 24, 1770.

<sup>39</sup> Letter of Sept. 16, 1764.

miller who had served twenty-five years at Châteauguay had been recalled.<sup>40</sup>

In January of that year the name of Mrs. Malhiot of Boucherville was recorded as having offered the Grey Nuns an oil painting of a portrait by Christophe Gamelin Lajemmerais, the nephew of Mother d'Youville who "between ten and eleven in the morning" on the day before her funeral, went to get the artist, Philippe Liébert so that he might record on canvas the traits of the Foundress then lying in state.<sup>41</sup> As such, Christophe Gamelin's portrait is that of a benefactor and deserves to figure among those of his illustrious aunt and her venerable great-grandfather, Pierre Boucher.<sup>42</sup>

Also in 1892, on the occasion of the accidental death of Miss Jessie Selby, the Sisters recalled the good services of the Doctors Selby, father and son, who served the Grey Nuns and their charges over the span of almost half a century.<sup>43</sup>

The month of February was noted for another death, that of Mr. Richard Devins who along with his sister, Mrs. Tiffin, continued the liberalities of their father, Mr. Peter Devins, toward the Grey Nuns.

Many years before, in 1848, he had offered the first organ for the chapel on the occasion of the entrance of his daughter, Margaret, into the Grey Nun Community. Seven

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<sup>40</sup> Deceased on Aug. 4, his funeral was held "in our chapel," and among others who attended were members of the clergy, including his son who was the assistant at Pointe-Claire.

<sup>41</sup> Vie de Mère d'Youville, - Sattin, p. 52.

<sup>42</sup> Mr. C. Gamelin Lajemmerais died a bachelor about the year 1800 at the home of his nephew, Malhiot, in Verchères.

<sup>43</sup> The care provided by Dr. S.B. Schmidt was recorded in 1800. This doctor who had become a convert at the time of the typhus epidemic in 1847, died on Nov. 4, 1892.



years later when his youngest daughter, Elizabeth, known in religion as Sister St. Patrice, was approaching the time of her perpetual oblation, he contributed the carpet for the sanctuary. Such examples did not fall on sterile ground. Mr. Richard Devins participated in the organization of the lottery for the building of the chapel. He contributed also toward the building of the steeple and the decorating of the chapel. Moreover, Mr. Devins was a fervent devotee of nocturnal adoration and he had been eager to offer the sanctuary lamp which burned constantly before the Host of the tabernacle. He provided in perpetuity for the upkeep of this lamp, probably to express his gratitude for obtaining the grace he had solicited for many years: the conversion of his spouse.<sup>44</sup>

A large congregation of faithful and members of the clergy gathered in the chapel on Guy Street for the funeral service of Mr. R. Devins. These were for the most part beneficiaries of Mr. Devins' bounty. On March 26, a commemorative service was held as was the custom for deceased Sisters thirty days after their death. For the first time permission was granted by competent authority to accompany on the organ the singing of the Requiem. Sister Margaret, the sole heir of the deceased, offered a new organ<sup>45</sup> for the chapel in order to realize a wish her brother had held dear.

Sister Margaret, an eminent musician herself, would make the new organ vibrate both on great feast days and during intimate community prayer. The missionaries from

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<sup>44</sup> Mrs. Devins embraced the faith toward the end of 1878 and died eight years later on July 5, 1886.

<sup>45</sup> This Casavant organ was inaugurated on Dec. 24. It had 785 pipes, 15 organ stops and two keyboards. Mr. Devins' estate would further serve for the founding or maintenance of certain missions in the west: the Industrial schools and the hospitals of Calgary and Edmonton.

remote regions who returned home to the Mother House after years of service abroad would marvel at its power and the beauty of its sound. Sister Ward, one of the heroic women who had left in 1867 was among these. Recalled to Montreal to participate in the Chapter to be held in October, she wrote to Mother Filiatrault "I cannot believe my eyes." She thought it was all a dream.<sup>46</sup> But the dream would materialize on September 20 after a journey which had been less difficult than that of 1867, a second voyage she had never expected to make. She had considered herself as destined to live and to die at the far distant convent of Providence which had become as she had described: "Our homeland, our home, our burial place."<sup>47</sup> Sister Ward had left the old Mother House on the river bank so this was the first time she saw the huge convent on Guy Street "with all its conveniences".<sup>48</sup> She met especially her former companions, notably the unique Sister Lapointe who had come from Worcester in order to see the valiant missionary.<sup>49</sup> Recalling how the news bulletins had been appreciated in the far-away territories, Sister Ward volunteered to serve as chronicler and conveyed her impressions to the missionaries. She mentioned in her letters the extraordinary invention of electric streetcars. "They circulate 'at full speed' through the main streets of the town," commented Sister Panet<sup>50</sup>. One thing is certain; Sister Ward marvelled at the growth of the community. She had visited the missions of the west located along her return route. Now she visited the neighboring houses, especially in Châteauguay where a school had been added

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<sup>46</sup> Letter of April 2, 1892.

<sup>47</sup> *Le Soleil Brille à Minuit*, Sr. E. Mitchell, p. 39.

<sup>48</sup> An elevator was installed on May 4, 1892 at the north end of the Guy Street wing.

<sup>49</sup> Sr. Lapointe had been the founding Superior at the convent of Providence.

<sup>50</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1892-95, p. 8



to the old manor. Châteauguay now belonged to a new diocese, that of Valleyfield, created on April 5 and where Father Médard J. Emard had become the Auxiliary Bishop.<sup>51</sup>

What especially delighted Sister Ward was the number of postulants and novices in whom she saw future subjects for her field of labor. In fact, most of them had been drawn to the Grey Nuns by the accounts of the heroic deeds of the missionaries. But the great Canadian North was not the only place where the Grey Nuns were called upon to minister. They were sought after everywhere and though the request of the pastor of St. Rose at Kankakee, Illinois had to be declined, in that same year, 1892, three new projects were undertaken; one in Montreal and two others in the United States.

### THE OPHTHALMIC INSTITUTE, MONTREAL, 1892

The Nazareth dispensary opened in 1873 and moved to the Nolan house in 1881, for valid reasons had had to close in 1883. The great 'Laval-Victoria' quarrel having finally been settled,<sup>52</sup> Doctors Edouard and Henri Desjardins wished to resume their medical specialty. To this effect they addressed themselves to the Grey Nuns who in December 1890, agreed to build a small hospital connected to the Nazareth institution. It was thought at the time, that construction would be completed by September of the following year.<sup>53</sup> The land, having been flooded, the plans were altered. A three-storey building measuring 35 ft. by 62 ft. with a French roof and a basement had to be erected on piles. The official opening took place on Sunday, March 13, 1892. Everyone rejoiced that this institution was being

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<sup>51</sup> Rumilly's *Hist. de la P. Qué.*, V6, pp. 304-305. Fr. Emard was the assistant notary in Mother d'Youville's Cause.

<sup>52</sup> Rumilly, *La grande querelle de Laval et Victoria*, Bull, Hôp. N.D., 1880-90, p. 10.

<sup>53</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1887-1892, p. 488.

restored. There the renowned Doctors Desjardins dispensed competent treatment both in ophthalmology and in otorhino-laryngology.

In the fall of that year, five Sisters were assigned to the new institution. Doctors Boulet, Plamondon and Masson joined the Desjardins doctors. Twenty-three beds were made available to patients and an operating room was soon installed. In 1902, Doctor Edouard Desjardins retired and was succeeded by Doctor Rodolphe Boulet, who like his predecessor, had specialized in European universities.

In July 1907, the new director received a very important patient, namely Bishop Sbarette, the Apostolic Delegate to Canada. Doctor Lubet-Barton of Paris had recommended that he consult Doctor Boulet. Unfortunately, this doctor would witness the closure of the institute for lack of funds. On several occasions he had pleaded on behalf of the institution.<sup>54</sup> In March 1929 Doctor Boulet returned to France where he died in Paris on January 16, 1935.

After thirty-five years of courageous service, the Grey Nuns withdrew from the institution in order to dedicate themselves entirely to educating the blind at the Nazareth institution.

### **ALL SOULS' HOSPITAL, MORRISTOWN, N.J. 1892**

Nursing Sisters, clad in the Grey uniform, were popular in the United States. Father J.M. Flynn, pastor at Assumption parish in Morristown, "wanted no other community than that of the Grey Nuns to take charge of the hospital which he proposed to open in his parish".<sup>55</sup> Therefore, he entered into negotiations with Mother Filiatrault in November 1891 on the octave of All Souls day,

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<sup>54</sup> Dr. Boulet to the Hon. A. David, sec. prov., Oct. 1920.

<sup>55</sup> Circ. mens. 1887-1892. pp. 795-796.



hence the name of the future establishment. Several days later, the Superior General delegated Sister Painchaud, her assistant, and Mother Deschamps to discern on site the feasibility of this project. Their investigation was favorable and on the morning of August 5, 1892 Sister Shanessy and three companions set out for Morristown.

A committee of businessmen was formed and the old "Arnold Tavern" was purchased to be transformed into a hospital. This was a historic building as George Washington and his Chief of Staff had retired there in 1777. A plaque commemorated this fact. The four-storey building was inaugurated as a hospital on September 5. Soon patients flocked to it; the population was so sympathetic and generous that the Sisters were surprised they had not encountered the usual difficulties inherent in establishing such a project. However, Providence would see to it that they would have their share of crosses. Sister Shanessy, the founding Superior, died in office on March 11, 1898. She was given a state funeral. The doctors and the hospital administrators considered it an honor to carry her coffin to the church and then to escort it to the station as she was to be buried at Châteauguay.

Whenever an epidemic broke out in Morristown, the sick were taken to the hospital and the Sisters quarantined with them faced the danger of contamination as had their predecessors during the typhus epidemic in Montreal. The Grey Nuns had been chosen for the hospital in Morristown precisely because of this historical characteristic. A noted surgeon from New York, Doctor McBurney, spoke in praise of the institution; despite the conveniences existing at the non-Catholic hospital, the doctors preferred "All Souls". On May 24, 1901, Mr. Olcott would relieve the hospital of its debt by presenting a \$10,000.00 cheque to the Superior. He wished to express in this way his admiration for the nurses who had contracted small-pox while caring

for their patients. Two of them were so seriously scarred by the disease "that their own mothers would not recognize them."<sup>56</sup> Fortunately, the Sisters recovered and continued their humanitarian work until 1913, at which time the religious authorities decided to leave this well-equipped place in order to establish a hospital at Fort Smith in the solitude of the Canadian Far North.

### **THE FRENCH SCHOOL, SALEM, MASS. U.S.A. 1892**

A Canadian orphanage already existed in Salem since 1866; the Grey Nuns accepted to direct it in 1892. The number of children increased to such a point that according to Father Gadoury, the pastor, there was question of rebuilding it and adding a parochial school. On August 15, 1892 an Agreement was signed between the parish and the Grey Nuns relative to assuming the direction of the school. Six months later, on December 22, Sisters Desnoyers and Archambault left for this new field of endeavour. There also the population proved to be generous as everyone responded promptly to Father Gadoury's appeal and accepted the responsibility of providing generously for school supplies. Goods poured in from all directions. One poor lady offered her mite: "sixteen bars of soap." One francophone merchant for his part opened his store to the Sisters and invited them to help themselves to the dishes they needed.

On January 14, 1893 the pupils crossed the threshold of the school. Three hundred and sixty-four children were assigned to one or another of the ten classrooms in this four-storey building. Two months later, there were almost seven hundred of whom seventeen were boarders. Everyone was amazed at their progress as well as at the discipline observed. The pupils were said to be docile to the

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<sup>56</sup> Circ. mens. 1901-1902, p. 94.



bell; the program was perfectly timed by means of a marvelous device noted one correspondent. All the clocks activated by an electrical mechanism, struck at exactly the same time!

On December 20, 1893 the school narrowly escaped destruction by fire. A policeman patrolling the area noticed "flames on the third balcony." Without giving the alarm, he went up by means of a ladder and managed to extinguish the fire. "St. Joseph School is a blessing" proclaimed the pastor, Father Gadoury and when he attended the "customary sessions", his tears expressed his approval and his joy.

On September 7, 1897 on the occasion of the visit of the Honorable Adolphe Chapleau, a thousand pupils greeted the Lieutenant Governor and his wife to whom a bouquet of flowers was presented, along with an address in French.

The school however elicited some curiosity from outsiders. Thus, on October 13, 1899, the Superior was informed that the Inspector of Public Schools wished to examine the students. She was astonished at the request as the school was a private one but she did not decline. The visitor was satisfied with his findings. He verified that the study program was being strictly adhered to and that the English language was not neglected even though French was being taught. He expressed his amazement especially when he visited the classroom of the mentally handicapped. Finally, Mr. Perkins requested the privilege for certain teachers from other schools to visit St. Joseph's School. "They will be amazed as I am to observe the success of your pupils and that will be beneficial to them".<sup>57</sup> Mr. Perkins' report lauded the Sisters and the school grew in popularity. In September 1901, 1,584

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<sup>57</sup> Circ. mens. 1898-1901, pp. 309-312.

students were admitted. The mayor of the town, Mr. J.V. Peterson expressed his surprise at seeing the students so well trained<sup>58</sup> by the twenty-three Sisters and six lay teachers working in the school. All was going well in an ideal environment when in 1903, the Grey Nuns made an unforgettable and unforgotten gesture. There was question of the extinction of a religious congregation exiled from France which we shall see as the story develops.

The Sisters of Ste. Chrétienne endeavored vainly to express their gratitude when the Grey Nuns offered to relinquish their school to them. Fraternal relationships became firmly established between them and their benefactors.

To the great regret of the population, the daughters of Mother d'Youville left St. Joseph's School definitely on December 23, 1903. The affluence of parishioners was such that the parlors and corridors overflowed with people who came to express their gratitude and good wishes to the Sisters. Doctor Roulier, the physician serving the institution, was the spokesman for everyone as he addressed the Sisters:

I was a happy witness of the prodigious development of this project. I followed the construction of the building but especially the progress which in a very few years caused it to become not only equal to public schools, but even superior. In fact, francophone children receive here a solid education which is both classical and religious.<sup>59</sup>

The gratitude of the population of Salem would have as its only equal that of the Sisters of Ste. Chrétienne towards their benefactors, the Grey Nuns.

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<sup>58</sup> Circ. mens. 1902-1903, pp. 329-331.

<sup>59</sup> Circ. mens. 1902-1903, pp. 782-783.



## CHAPTER VI

### 1893-1895

The General Chapter of October 3, 1892 entrusted to Mother Deschamps for the fifth time, the mandate to govern the Institute, giving her as Assistants, Sisters Filiatrault, Stubinger and Painchaud as well as Sister Ward as Director of Formation.

Although this was not Mother Deschamps' first experience, she realized that many changes had occurred since October 3, 1853 when the responsibility of governing the Institute had first befallen her. The Superior General kept her intimate impressions to herself, but on the evening of the Chapter, she did evoke the past and thus revealed some of her inner sentiments. Thirty-nine years earlier, Mother Deschamps was thirty-four years of age. The Community had fifty-five Sisters located in four institutions. Now, fifty convents in Canada and the United States housed 477 Sisters working at various ministries.<sup>1</sup> The Superior General was now seventy-three years of age!

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<sup>1</sup> Circ. mens. 1892-95, p. 15.

Though her physical strength had been weakened by the wear of time, such was not the case for her mental faculties which remained keen. She performed with distinction the tasks entrusted to her in this her last mandate. Often Mother Filiatrault had assigned delicate undertakings to her and she had fulfilled her mission to everyone's satisfaction. The capitulars had chosen to give her this ultimate mark of esteem and well deserved appreciation as would testify "the numerous visits and letters of affection received lately" noted the chronicler.<sup>2</sup>

In Mother Deschamps there was a direct link with the past. She had known personally the older Sisters who had had the privilege of knowing Mother d'Youville's contemporaries. She had gathered from the lips of these beloved seniors the small details, the oral teachings which completed the delightful story and which gave such weight to her testimony in the Cause of the Foundress. Furthermore, Mother Deschamps was a woman who had received a firm call to the missions. She had founded twenty-six in the course of her preceding mandates.<sup>3</sup> As Assistant General in 1868, she had supported the initiative of moving from the General Hospital of the Charon Brothers to the Guy Street site. Through 1874-1878, she had had the chapel built at the Mother-House and undertaken the construction of the wing leading to St. Mathieu Street.

Since the Sisters had transferred to the west end of Montreal, the scenery had changed. At the time the Sisters had settled "in the country" and the neighbors were few. Since 1860, Mount Ste. Marie of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame, occupied the south corner of Guy and Dorchester Streets. At a short distance, also

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Four of these missions had closed for reasons explained earlier.



toward the west, there was now the Refuge of The Little Sisters of the Poor and since May 26, 1892, the Franciscan Fathers lived in their monastery, the former house of Henry Judah<sup>4</sup> which had been purchased through the generosity of Mrs. Tiffin and Mrs. McKonkey.

However, the intention pursued by the Grey Nuns at the time of the transfer of their Mother House was not affected. They had left the Pointe-à-Callières because of the unwholesomeness of the former dwelling due to annual flooding and had come to a place where they could "breathe the pure mountain air" in order to safeguard the health of the Sisters. But tuberculosis continued its ravages and all too frequently they had to deplore the death of young Sisters on whom they had founded great hopes.

Faced with this state of affairs, Mother Deschamps and her Council decided to consolidate the existing missions and for this reason not to accept for a few years the founding of any other missions.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Bishop Albert Pascal of Prince-Albert was not able to obtain Sisters for the Industrial School he had planned to open in his Episcopal See.<sup>6</sup> Four other requests which had come from the Northwest, from Lesser Slave Lake, and from the dioceses of London, Ontario and Springfield, Massachusetts also received a negative reply. One can imagine that it was not easy for the Superior to refuse new fields of apostolate.

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<sup>4</sup> Mr. Judah, formerly president of the Savings Bank had been a faithful friend of the clergy and of religious communities, notably of the Grey Nuns, especially at the time of the construction of the chapel. He died on Feb. 10, 1883, "and we owe him deep gratitude for the invaluable services rendered to us," the chronicler wrote. (Circ. mens. 1881-83, p. 508.)

<sup>5</sup> Circ. mens. 1892-95, p. 247.

<sup>6</sup> This was a legitimate refusal because it would have been a duplication of a similar Grey Nuns' school already in existence at Lac-la-Biche.

At the end of January 1893, in the bitter cold (the Montmorency Falls were completely frozen), Mother Deschamps directed her travels toward the American missions: Salem, Lawrence, Boston, Morristown and Worcester. At the latter place, she had the joy of seeing the Sisters settle in their new lodging.

On her return to the Mother House, she made known to the entire Community assembled, that Sister Stubinger had been delegated to visit the far northern missions, the most difficult to reach. The Sisters surmised that Sister Ward, who was present, had encouraged this decision for she had lived a quarter century in the land of the great white silence. The visiting Sister set out on her long circuit on April 3. A stop at St. Boniface would allow her to recognize "that the boarding school was flourishing and that the wing destined to expand the hospital was under construction."

On April 14, the Superior General went to Toledo, the mission most cherished, precisely because of the difficulties it had experienced. Now another cloud was again appearing on the horizon. The project of construction of a non-Catholic hospital was being contemplated by a Committee of women among whom were wives of the Medical Staff of St. Vincent's. Nevertheless, the Sisters were greatly appreciated there and the new prelate, Bishop Hortsman, readily honored them with his protection.

On her return from this visit, Mother Deschamps brought the mortal remains of Sisters St. Charles and Quesnel, deceased in Toledo in 1868 and 1873 respectively, who had been buried in "a funeral grove". The remains were taken to the common crypt after a Requiem Mass on May 19.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Sr. Collette, *Vie de Mère Deschamps*, pp. 375 -376.



When at the beginning of June, the Superior General left once more for Boston, she could not foresee the tragic event which would take place in Montreal nor surmise that the resolution "not to take on any new projects" would have to be suspended.

In the course of the afternoon of June 8, fire destroyed the Mother House of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame on the west slope of the mountain. In a short time Villa Maria was reduced to ruins. Only the boarding school bearing the same name was saved. The wind carried to the Mother House on Guy Street, "the baptismal certificate of one of the deceased Sisters of that Institute" drawn up on blue paper of large format. The Grey Nuns saw in this the sign of a visitation. In fact, Mother Filiatrault opened the infirmary to the daughters of Marguerite Bourgeois. Three of them arrived on stretchers on June 12, the feast of the Sacred Heart and ten others came a few days later. They were to remain there until their former Mother House on St. Jean-Baptiste Street was once more ready to receive them.<sup>8</sup>

When Mother Deschamps returned from her journey, along with Sister Ward, she hastened to the bedside of the Sisters in distress of whom one, Sister Ste. Rosalie, was a relative of hers. She was so touched by the tragedy, reported the chronicler, that when she met the Community she hardly mentioned the American missions and spoke only of the catastrophe of Villa Marie. For the benefit of the Sisters, she drew teachings from history. Years ago, after Grey Nuns had nursed the sick stricken with the typhus of 1847, they themselves had contracted the illness. According to medical advice, it had been necessary for those convalescing to rest in the country. The daughters of

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<sup>8</sup> That is July 18. One of them, Sr. Thomas Beckett, novice, died at the Mother House of the Grey Nuns after having pronounced her vows.

Marguerite Bourgeois had then invited the daughters of Marguerite d'Youville to their farm on Ile St. Paul. Through fear of contagion the employees on this farm had threatened to leave. The Sisters had been ready to face the challenge but Bishop Bourget had dissuaded them from doing so. The Sulpicians from the Seminary having offered their house on the Gregory farm, the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame had instead taken upon themselves the responsibility of furnishing and setting up the place for them. Thirteen Grey Nuns came there, accompanied by Sisters Marcelle Mallet and Julie Deschamps,<sup>9</sup> two young Sisters who would have been pleased to know that within a half-century the Grey Nuns would in like manner welcome thirteen Sisters of the Congregation.

All was not sadness for these two religious families since, at the Columbian Exhibition in Chicago<sup>10</sup>, the schools of Quebec as well as the industrial schools of the Canadian West achieved outstanding success. Flattering testimonies reached both communities. Mr. Serrurier, one of the representatives of the public ministry of France, confided to the Quebec Commissioner, Monsignor Bruchesi, "Your performance is so akin to ours that for a while I thought I was in France."<sup>11</sup> The Honorable Boucher de la Bruère, president of the Legislative Council, said "This exhibition is a credit to us and compares advantageously alongside the school exhibitions of the other countries whether non-Catholic or Catholic."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Sr. Mallet, Assistant, two years later became the foundress of the Srs. of Charity of Quebec.

<sup>10</sup> The previous year in the United States, the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' discovery of America was celebrated in grand style.

<sup>11</sup> Letter of Aug. 23, 1893.

<sup>12</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1892-95, p. 240.



Canon de Cazes, wrote to Archbishop Taché concerning the industrial schools of Manitoba and of the future province of Alberta

The pupils from the industrial schools directed by your good Grey Nuns attract and develop in many people from all over the world a new awareness of their capabilities. Sometimes as many as two hundred persons stop and gaze filled with admiration at these children of the woodlands civilized through Christianity and at the kindly Sisters of Charity known for their good works but whom many people have never seen. I believe, your Grace, that by allowing the Sisters to come here, you have contributed to making known what the Canadian Government has done for the Natives.<sup>13</sup>

Two years later, the Nazareth school, that of Notre-Dame-des-Neiges in Montreal and the industrial schools in St. Boniface and St. Albert were to receive medals and diplomas of honor acknowledging the excellence of their exhibits.<sup>14</sup>

The reputation of the Grey Nuns as teachers was no longer questioned and they were in "popular demand". Despite the decision not to open any further missions,<sup>15</sup> in September 1893 they accepted to teach the francophone children at Ecole St. Louis in Toledo, while in St. Boniface they took charge of the parochial school of St. Jean-Baptiste. It was understood that in these cases the Sisters were only meeting emergency situations and two years later, they transferred the positions to other teachers. The charitable works already established, claimed the

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<sup>13</sup> Letter of July 9, 1893. Sisters Malchelosse, Clément and Lassiseraye had been sent to Chicago with several of their pupils.

<sup>14</sup> The delay in receiving the insignia was due to the fact that the Exhibition had ended in blood. On Oct. 28, 1893, Mr. Harrison, Mayor of Chicago, was assassinated in his home.

<sup>15</sup> Mgr. Hortsman to Sr. Peltier, April. 27, 1893.

collaboration of all able-bodied personnel<sup>16</sup> and the General Council had already accepted the project for patients with incurable afflictions in Cambridge, Massachusetts, U.S.A. Father Thomas Scully, the pastor, had presented his appeal in person when the Superior General was in Worcester on business. In specifying that the institution would be for incurables, he struck a weak spot in Mother Deschamps' heart and she agreed to present the proposal to her Council. The foundation was accepted with the understanding that it would take place only toward the end of 1894.

The anticipation of a project so much in conformity with the initial inspiration of the Foundress elicited great enthusiasm in the novitiate of the Grey Nuns, where ninety candidates were being initiated to religious life. Sister Ward presented a realistic view of the difficulties inherent in a life of sacrifice. She had been in a position to experience this herself in the course of the quarter century she had spent in the Arctic region. But in the isolation she had felt there, she had also found true inner joy and serenity. Under her direction, the up-coming generation learned to discover the blessedness hidden beneath the perplexing appearance of the cross.

- 1894 -

Mother d'Youville had nourished a special devotion to the Cross and to those who would become her followers, she recommended "that each day they should pray to grow in love of the Savior's Cross."<sup>17</sup> Mother Deschamps, who for almost sixty years had been penetrated with the spirit of the Foundress, would in the course of 1894, have her hopes

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<sup>16</sup> Srs. Thuot and Drouin had been assigned to the Toledo school while Srs. St. Placide, Marcotte, Marion and Valade taught at St. Jean-Baptiste School.

<sup>17</sup> Rule of the Grey Nuns 1738, Art. 1.



foiled by trials and her faith tested on many occasions. Like Mother d'Youville, she could say "Pray that God will give me the strength to carry all crosses well and to make a holy use of them."<sup>18</sup> However, Mother Deschamps was not a woman inclined to self-pity and in January, when a serious health problem prompted her doctor to recommend that she receive the Sacrament of the sick, the Superior General complied and her attitude inspired fortitude and surrender in the Sisters who had gathered around her.<sup>19</sup>

It was felt that the Superior General was thinking of resigning, but as in the days of 1878, the Sisters would not hear of it. "May God spare her and we shall only hope that an increase in fervor throughout the Institute may be her consolation."<sup>20</sup> Three Assistants were at hand to carry out the visits to the various houses required during a mandate and so the Superior General could govern her Community without even leaving her room. It is there that the Council would meet and that the Sisters passing through to solicit her advice would be interviewed. With the help of a wheelchair offered by Mrs. Tiffin, their ever-ready benefactor, she was able to go to the parlor to receive visitors and especially to visit the poor and comfort the sick Sisters in the infirmary.

In February, the local authorities struggling against the scarlet fever and diphtheria epidemics prevalent in Montreal, expressed the wish to open the St. Camille Hospital to the patients thus afflicted. The Superior General fully approved the request. It was then that Notre-Dame Hospital took charge of St. Camille, one wing of which was reserved for patients of other faiths. The Grey Nuns did not leave the civic hospital however, as Sister Perrin, the

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<sup>18</sup> M. d'Youville to Abbé de l'Isle-Dieu, Sept. 18, 1765.

<sup>19</sup> Circ. mens. 1892-95, p. 336.

<sup>20</sup> Circ. mens. 1892-95, p. 449.

Superior at Notre-Dame had accepted the responsibility for its internal administration. Also, Mother Deschamps assigned Sisters Geoffrion, Dorion, St. Francois-Xavier and several novices. In a few months it was noted that ninety-nine patients had been treated and that eighty-one of them had recovered.

At the beginning of the year, two notable anniversaries had been anticipated; the second centennial of the Letters patent issued to Frère Charon on April 15, 1694, allowing him to establish a General Hospital at Ville Marie, and the fiftieth anniversary of the Grey Nuns' arrival in St. Boniface on June 21, 1844. The Superior General, always concerned with instilling in the Sisters the love of the poor, declared that April 15 of that year, 1894, would be the feast of the residents, the *raison-d'être* of the hospital. It so happened that for several days forty-nine new-comers had been staying at the Mother House. St. Charles Hospice, opened in 1877 for the most wretched and outcast, had been expropriated. Father René Rousseau, p.s.s., the founder had looked in vain for another refuge for his protégés. So the Superior General had opened the Mother House to them. With ingenuity, space had been found for the homeless. It was this large family that she visited on April 15, to become acquainted with the newcomers "assuring them that they were at home and that they would be cared for as well as they had been at Hospice St. Charles."<sup>21</sup>

At the mid-day assembly, the Superior General exhibited the old manuscripts for the benefit of the Sisters: the concession made to Claude Charon by Dollier de Casson in 1688 and the Letters patent bearing the signature of Louis XIV. By a happy coincidence evident to everyone, on this same day, April 15, Doctor Rottot

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<sup>21</sup> Two Sisters from the former hospice, Srs. Montgolfier and Duchesnault would establish residence at Notre-Dame Hosp. from where they would visit the homes of the poor.



declared the Superior out of danger. The love of the poor continued to produce marvels.

Mother Deschamps was unable to attend the golden jubilee celebration in St. Boniface. So she delegated her Assistant, Sister Filiatrault with Sisters Devins and Curran. The latter two would also visit the missions in Lebret, Calgary and Dunbow. The departure took place on the evening of June 13. Sister Devins experienced a certain apprehension in leaving her sister, Mrs. Tiffin, who for the last few years had been afflicted with paralysis but recent improvement allowed her to believe that the danger was not imminent.<sup>22</sup>

Alas, the golden jubilee celebrations which should have been joyful, were interrupted by trial. A telegram received on the afternoon of June 20 announced that Archbishop Taché had been anointed and on the 22nd another message brought news of his death at age seventy-one.

It is impossible to express the immensity of this loss, the extent of this grief, nor the pain in which the family of St. Boniface and the whole Institute are plunged. It is certain that the Community loses a sincerely devoted friend. Archbishop Taché, the dean and one of the glories of the Canadian episcopate had fallen at a critical point in the long struggle for Catholic schools in the west. During the long years of his episcopate, he consolidated our works in St. Boniface and paid the debts which our Sisters could not meet. The hospital and the boarding school where he spent his final days, owe him their existence. He was an exceptionally kind friend, noted the chronicler, resembling Mother d'Youville's comments concerning another benefactor.

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<sup>22</sup> Since 1893, Mrs. Tiffin had moved to an apartment above the business office. Father Martin, the former-pastor of Madawaska, became her Chaplain.

Mother Deschamps sent a long letter to her bereaved Sisters in which she expressed her high regard for the beloved Bishop and urged the Sisters to pay with their prayers the debt they owed him. She closed with this acknowledgement: "I myself count little on time, for my health is not improving much. Each of us in turn will soon go to the Father's House."<sup>23</sup>

On June 27 a solemn service was held for this illustrious person in the chapel of the Mother House. Several days later it was learned through Sister Filiatrault, the official visitor, that Archbishop Taché had discouraged the idea of postponing the jubilee celebration; therefore, the program followed its course at least on June 20 and 21, with a Pontifical Mass at the Cathedral and a historic presentation at Académie Provencher. It had been decided to make the celebration of the feast of St. Jean-Baptiste coincide with the jubilee. Triumphal arches were being set up in the streets. All were replaced with 'signs of mourning', and the great Archbishop was laid to rest on June 27 as Bishops Duhamel, Laflèche and Pascal celebrated the Requiem Mass. It was fitting that the eulogy be delivered by Bishop Laflèche who had shared his hardships. The Winnipeg press estimated that it was one of the most eloquent testimonies they had ever heard.<sup>24</sup>

The list of bereavements did not end with the death of the Archbishop of St. Boniface. In early July, Mrs. Tiffin's condition caused concern. The treatment which had appeared to help her eventually proved ineffective and on July 4, at 10 a.m. she died peacefully, without a complaint,

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<sup>23</sup> Letter of June 23.

<sup>24</sup> Dr. Taché, brother of the Archbishop, and former deputy and Minister of Public Works, had died on April 15. To the condolences, Mother Deschamps addressed to him, Archbishop Taché had replied, "I have lost a beloved brother and the Grey Nuns, a devoted friend."



entirely surrendered to the Divine Will. Mother Deschamps and the Sisters attended her in her final moments deploring the fact of Sister Devins' absence.

As we have seen, Mrs. Tiffin had distinguished herself by her bounty not only toward the Grey Nuns but toward many other religious communities and toward the poor who never appealed in vain to her charity. As a Franciscan tertiary, bearing the name of Sister Anna, she expressed a formal wish: that her funeral be marked by the greatest simplicity. Accordingly, on July 7, the service was held in the chapel of the Grey Nuns presided by the Franciscan Fathers. Many members of the clergy and delegations from religious communities were present. The Grey Nuns and many friends escorted her to her final resting place in the cemetery at Côte-des-Neiges. At the Mother House her memory is preserved from oblivion by the lasting beauty with which she adorned the chapel, particularly the paintings in the sanctuary reminding the Sisters of their devotion to the Father of Mercies, to the Heart of Christ and to his Cross.

The cross would again befall the Grey Nuns a month later. On August 4, Sister Robin, the Superior at the Nazareth Institution, died of a heart attack. An intrepid worker, she had performed with competence the duties of Assistant at the Mother House for fifteen years and since 1878, she had assumed the responsibility for the Institute for the blind "with a kindness and charity that might be equalled but not surpassed" stated an article in *Croix du Canada*. Testimonials of praise abounded at the Mother House, while at Nazareth her protégés along with the Italian population to whom she had opened the chapel for Sunday services, wished to offer her an ultimate homage. An overflowing crowd attended the Service at the Nazareth Institution where the *Libera* was sung by Miss Eugénie

Tessier, a famous singer accompanied by Miss Amelia Wiscam, professor of music.

At the Mother House on August 7, the funeral was simple as usual, as everyone gathered around Sisters Chupleau and Sainte-Croix, sisters of the deceased.

These departures strengthened Mother Deschamps' conviction that "her own time was short" but they did not lessen her determination to do God's work while there was still time. The several gaps created by death since January 1 did not hinder the process of foundation of the hospital in Cambridge. The passing of twelve Sisters had been recorded. The ages of eight of them ranged between twenty-four and thirty-three years. Mother Deschamps concurred with the opinion of Bishop Emard who in a visit to Châteauguay had said to the Sisters assembled:

The canonization of Mother d'Youville will depend on your maintaining in all its purity the spirit she bequeathed to you. It is not miracles which will prove her holiness, but it will be your works which will confirm that the Institute remains on the path traced by the Foundress.<sup>25</sup>

The process of canonization was well on the way. Father Captier, elected Superior General of the Sulpicians, was replaced as postulator by Father Palin d'Abonville; in Montreal, Father Hector Filiatrault accepted the function of vice-postulator. There remained however, for the Grey Nuns to give evidence that the seed sown in the early days of 1737 continued to bear fruit.

### **Holy Ghost Hospital, Cambridge, Mass. - 1894**

The day had come for the Grey Nuns to honor the promise they had made to Father Scully and to begin the

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<sup>25</sup> Circ.mens. 1892-95, pp. 478-479.



building of the hospital for incurables in Cambridge. In specifying that this institution would admit persons regardless of age or nationality provided they were incurable, the pastor had found the secret for breaking the determination of Council "not to create any new works for a few years."

When she had visited Boston in 1893, Mother Deschamps had been able to visit the proposed site of the future institution and on her return to Montreal, it had not been difficult to convince the members of her Council to accept this project which appeared similar to the first refuge established by Mother d'Youville.

By April 1894, the Superior General had selected the foundress, Sr. Hickey, the worthy home-visitor of the needy who never remained indifferent to distress. Sisters Fernand and Laviolette were designated as her companions and on September 26, the three Grey Nuns established residence in one of the modest houses on Hovey Street until the hospital was built. Charitable women welcomed them and promised their assistance. Three months later, the first Mass was celebrated in this house. This was a privilege which was apparently not repeated often for the Sisters travelled a mile daily to attend the Holy Sacrifice.

Patients abounded: cancer patients, the handicapped, the crippled. With regret the Sisters were forced to take in only those in greatest need. Difficulties arose concerning the establishment of a civic corporation and so construction was delayed to the great dismay of the Sisters who had no alternative but to refuse some very pitiful cases.

Finally, in May 1895, the foundations were dug for a hospital which would measure 160 ft. by 45 ft and two wings each measuring 80 ft. by 40 ft. It would be of brick and would accommodate a greater number of patients. Sister Hickey whose health was failing, had to be replaced

in 1897 by Sister Purcell, another marvel of charity whose humanitarianism would be highly praised by the population.

In October 1898, the Sisters occupied the completed building which Archbishop Williams of Boston blessed and opened to the public. Then began the series of small wonders which would confirm for the Sisters that they were accomplishing the work of Providence in Cambridge. Soon there were fifty-six patients, "rejected by everyone" for they had repulsive wounds due to cancer, gangrenous ulcers and other ailments which science could not heal or control. Untiringly, the Sisters lavished their care, applying dressings without a thought to the fact that they elicited admiration and astonishment among those who observed them at work. People began to question themselves in the light of the faith of these extraordinary women and to express the desire to come under their care should the need arise.

A poor woman in great distress came one day begging the Sisters to take her in. She said she would be willing "to sleep on the floor." A small clean place was prepared which she considered paradise. A few days later, she told the Sister she had had a dream. Someone had brought her a glass of Port. "That would do me such great good," she commented. Sister L'Heureux transmitted the request to Sister Purcell. Now there was no Port in the pharmacy. They were preparing to serve her a glass of Bordeaux when Sister Franklin appeared saying she had just received from a benefactor a bottle of Port wine! The three Sisters were filled with admiration and hastily satisfied the wish of the poor woman.

Mr. McIver, a member of the staff, having witnessed the dedication of the Sisters, confided to them at Christmas 1900, that he had become a convert to Catholicism because he had been won over by their example. "You really are what you appear to be," he added. Mr. McIver



was baptized December 23, on the anniversary of Mother d'Youville's death!

Bishop Emard of Valleyfield, passing through Cambridge in February 1903, praised the admirable work of the Grey Nuns there, as did many others! A thirteen year old child of extraordinary beauty requested baptism and received the God of the Eucharist. After his death, his companions deposited a beautiful lily on his tomb as an emblem of the purity of his soul.

Sister Darche received a letter in which the writer expressed his desire to help the hospital, "the only means by which he could show the high esteem he had for the example the Sisters were giving by their dedication." The signatory was none other than the renowned Professor Elliott Norton.

"There is no work more repulsive," wrote one of the Provincial Superiors during an official visit, "but no other is more visibly blessed by Divine Providence."<sup>26</sup>

Holy Ghost Hospital in Cambridge continues in the United States, the compassion of the great Canadian woman born on the banks of the mighty St. Lawrence River on October 15, 1701.

- 1895 -

In Mother Deschamps' surroundings, people were no longer surprised to see her, despite her age and infirmity, participate in community life "as if nothing were wrong." They noticed especially that, "faithful guardian of her trust, she maintains the established customs and highlights the anniversaries in view of reminding the Sisters why they are here."

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<sup>26</sup> The notes concerning Cambridge were taken from the chronicles of this institution.

She could also be seen at the beginning of the year presiding at the great assembly of the Poor and of their servants in the Community room. No one wearied of seeing the respect and exquisite courtesy she showed to the lowly and the meek. In this year of 1895, her greetings to the dear old folks were accompanied by a bonbonnière offered to each one by those who had supported the project of La Presse to bring cheer for the New Year.<sup>27</sup>

The Superior General also wished to highlight the 150th anniversary of the signing of the original commitment. At Mother Deschamps' request, Father Louis Colin, the Superior of the Sulpicians, read to the Sisters in Community, the text of this 'complete disappropriation' signed on February 2, 1745 by Mother d'Youville and her companions and since then, counter-signed by each Sister on the day of her final vows. "Never did any reading appear more solemn than that made on this anniversary", the chronicler noted; and she added

Mother General took advantage of the circumstance to share the following statistics: 762 Sisters have enrolled in the ranks of the Grey Nuns since 1737, of whom 518 are still living. All have been formed by the Sulpicians and the Seminary has a claim to our gratitude.

Nothing which concerned the past left Mother Deschamps indifferent. She proved this again when on August 15, she retrieved the Stations of the Cross, donated to the Grey Nuns by Father Vincent Quiblier on July 20, 1841. These stations had successively graced the chapels of St. Roch Hospital and that of St. Camille. Since the latter was now under the control of Notre-Dame Hospital, Mother Deschamps substituted other stations for this precious souvenir and had the older set re-installed at the

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<sup>27</sup> Circ. mens. 1892-95, pp. 567-568.



Mother House. An eye-witness of the ceremony of 1841, the Superior General wished to preserve these representations of Christ's suffering before which generations of Grey Nuns had meditated.

For Mother Deschamps, reverence for the past was not exercised at the expense of the interest she owed to the development of our works. Since she had been entrusted with the government of the Institute in 1892, transformations had been brought about, authorized by the Superior General and her Council. A wing had been added to the St. Albert mission; the school at Côte-des-Neiges had been moved to a larger building;<sup>28</sup> St. Jean Hospital was being organized; an annex of 65 ft. by 23 ft. was being added to Hospice St. Joseph in Chambly and in the spring, the digging of foundations for Hospice Ste. Cunégonde would begin. As for the hospital in Toledo, authorization was at last obtained to enlarge it and to initiate the necessary canvassing.<sup>29</sup> Founded since 1894, the St. Vincent Society brought together 'people whose lot had been kind to them' and also the majority of the doctors on staff; its goal was to maintain the high standards of the hospital and meet the competition of the non-Catholic hospital. Thanks to this society the first operating room was installed in August. We read in the chronicles, "Doctor H.J. Askid works marvels since he can take an x-ray in only thirty minutes."<sup>30</sup>

One can imagine the satisfaction which the Superior General experienced at seeing this project prosper after being so long threatened with extinction but which Divine Providence and some benefactors had saved. Two of them, Fathers Alfred and William Manning, Pastors of Ste. Rose-

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<sup>28</sup> The chapel having been rebuilt, the school occupied the basement of the new construction.

<sup>29</sup> Arch. Toledo, 1895

<sup>30</sup> Aug. 11, 1895.

de-Lima and of Youngstown, Ohio, visited the Mother House in the course of the summer. They probably made the Superior General aware of a cloud on the horizon. The Sisters at St. Vincent's Hospital had been notified that hereafter, the sailors would be treated at the non-Catholic hospital though no reason was given to justify this measure.<sup>31</sup> For almost forty years, the sailors had been treated at the Grey Nuns' hospital. The Sisters were surprised at this decision but they did not despair, for they had seen many things happen since they had begun working in the Ohio territory, territory of the beautiful Ohio River! One of the true friends who had contributed to the triumph of the cause, the respected P.F. Quigley, better known as Dr. Quigley, died on August 31. The Superior General and the Sisters who had lived in Toledo through the dark years 1884-1889 knew what debt of gratitude they owed this revered benefactor. The Superior General rendered an eloquent homage and recommended him to the prayers of the Sisters.<sup>32</sup>

Not only American visitors came to the Mother House. On his return from the March 19 consecration in St-Boniface of Bishop Adélarde Langevin, the successor of Archbishop Taché,<sup>33</sup> Father Albert Lacombe who had been in the company of the distinguished travellers, proclaimed the worth of the Grey Nuns back there, "They have the style and the charm of beautiful simplicity." As for Monsignor Racicot, uncle of the Bishop-elect, he declared that "nothing pleases the clergy more than the pleasant simplicity noted in your institutions." Bishop Emard wrote

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<sup>31</sup> Chron. St. Vincent, p. 34

<sup>32</sup> Circ. mens. 1892-95, pp. 746-747.

<sup>33</sup> The Archbishops and Bishops Bégin, Fabre, Duhamel, Lafèche, Gravel, Decelles, Emard, and Bishop Gabriels of Ogdensburg, N.Y. assisted at the consecration. Bishop Fabre was the consecrating bishop.



I had requested the advantage of staying at the boarding school, in the room where Archbishop Taché died. The hospitality received from your delightful Sisters gives me the pleasant duty of expressing to you here the thanks already offered to the Sisters in St. Boniface.<sup>34</sup>

The institution had been forced to close its normal school as a result of the infamous law of 1890,<sup>35</sup> a law which created a situation that saddened the final years of Archbishop Taché. However, Bishop Langevin proposed to carry on the struggle and thus support beloved Bishop Grandin who would not acknowledge defeat. The new bishop requested from Mother Deschamps the help of the intercession of Mother d'Youville "that she may inspire what is most beneficial for the people when the matter will be dealt with."<sup>36</sup>

Bishop Langevin was the last beneficiary of Sister Devins' generosity. On the occasion of his consecration, she offered him a beautiful silver-gilded chalice and paid in advance, the tuition for three seminarians. Less than a fortnight later, at 9 a.m. of April 1, Sister Devins passed away as Mother Deschamps hastened to give her a final blessing. The Sisters unanimously praised the merit of this courageous worker who had never flaunted her wealth and who had lived among them as the poorest of Grey Nuns. Her generosity toward the distant missions reflected her zeal for the Propagation of the Faith and deserved the grateful remembrance of all the Natives and of the sick whom her wealth had assisted.

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<sup>34</sup> Letter of Mar. 23, 1895.

<sup>35</sup> E. de Moissac, *Cloches de St. Boniface*, Dec.1972, p. 375. The same was true of the Normal School of St. Mary's Academy in Winnipeg.

<sup>36</sup> Bishop Langevin willingly agreed to Mother Deschamps' request concerning the novices of St. Boniface. Henceforth the latter would complete their formation at the Mother House.

The distant missions again became a priority in 1895. It all began when on February 11, Mother Deschamps received from Comte de Palys a copy of the pamphlet entitled, "Une Famille bretonne au Canada."<sup>37</sup> The author stated that news of the introduction of Mother d'Youville's Cause before the Courts of Rome had penetrated certain regions of our country where it had brought great joy. "Though Mother d'Youville was not born on our soil, she is the daughter of a Breton father," he explained.<sup>38</sup> This declaration moved him to establish the genealogy of the Du Frost de la Gesmeraye family after having briefly summarized the life of "the glorious Canadian born daughter of this family".

Did the tract contribute to making Mother d'Youville known in Brittany? Did it endorse the teaching of Father Augustin Lecorre, the Superior of the Providence mission? One is led to believe that it did. The Oblate of Mary Immaculate who had gone to France the preceding summer, arrived in Montreal on May 12 with seventeen compatriots among whom were six young Breton girls who had decided to become Grey Nuns. One of them, Eugénie, a niece of the missionary was only fourteen years of age. The ages of the others ranged from sixteen to twenty-two. Eugénie, of course, had to continue her studies.<sup>39</sup> As for Miss Françoise Prono, she was admitted to the novitiate. The other four, Jeanne-Marie Corformat, Mathurine Meliner, Hélène Danic and Julienne Kersusan went to the Arctic region where they received their formation. On May 13, these courageous girls exchanged their own graceful native

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<sup>37</sup> The Compte de Palys was vice-pres. of the Archeologic Society of Ille-et-Vilaine.

<sup>38</sup> Letter of Jan. 29, 1895.

<sup>39</sup> Sr. Eugénie Lecorre made profession Nov. 30, 1901 and died June 1, after 50 yrs. of religious life spent in various convents in Montreal.



dresses for the bonnet and habit of postulants. In this garb, they visited Sister Giquello, herself a native of Brittany, whose life was ebbing away on the field of honor for she had refused to go to the infirmary in order to remain with the little Auxiliary Sisters under her direction. The interview with this worthy compatriot was such as to confirm the candidates in their choice. Sister Giquello died on June 20 while, on that morning at ten o'clock, the contingent from Brittany aboard the St. Joseph, landed on the banks of the Athabaska. Father Antoine, the Assistant General of the Oblates and official visitor of the missions, joined the group. This visitor, on his return journey to Europe, came to discuss with Mother Deschamps his impressions concerning the missionaries of the Northland.

Back there they sacrifice themselves without receiving or at least without expecting anything in return from the Natives. They give of themselves with the most complete self-forgetfulness. They certainly sacrifice themselves to a heroic degree.<sup>40</sup>

The reports received at the Mother House corroborated this for, apart from indescribable solitude of this far away land, the Sisters faced daily difficulties concerning their livelihood. The statement, "The supply of fish has been insufficient, so we must eat berries," is recorded in the chronicles. Sister Stubinger who had visited the northern missions in 1893, felt unable to eat bread when she thought of the missionaries there who had been deprived of it since their departure.

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<sup>40</sup> Circ. mens. 1895-98, p. 21. Father Soullier, Sup. Gen. of the Oblates had visited the missions of the West the preceding year. He confided to Mother Deschamps: "Without the Grey Nuns in the industrial schools and elsewhere, we would be powerless. You complement our works and I have seen how the presence of the Sisters enhances the prestige of the faith among the Natives."

Mother Deschamps concluded with legitimate pride that the Sisters were doing God's work, not only in the cold North but also close by, with less publicity perhaps, but with every bit as much merit. The General Hospital was overflowing with patients. Often alas, a small baby which had been left stealthily, was found in the vestibule of the entrance on St. Mathieu Street. On June 13, for instance, Sister Dostaler noticed a bundle which was moving. It contained a small child with jet black, curly hair. Whether it was black or white, the Sisters would accept the infant. As the baby appeared to be in a sorry state, the ward mother took it to the Superior General. The latter, noticing that the child was moribund, summoned Monsignor Ramsay who was busy writing in an adjacent room. The priest baptized the child, giving it the name of Anthony, according to the liturgical calendar.<sup>41</sup>

Years ago, Mother d'Youville had been moved to pity for the fate of poor abandoned children. It was befitting that those who had committed themselves to follow her should continue her initiative. The Superior General often reminded her Sisters of the necessity of expressing their love through acts following the example of the Foundress who had not set any limits as to the works to be undertaken. It was this consideration which moved the Superior General to again over-rule the capitular resolution of 1892...

The invitation to found a hospital in Edmonton had been accepted. The Community had also taken charge of the Refuge de la Passion and now toward the end of 1895, it supported the initiative of Father Onésime Hébert, p.s.s., who opened a soup-kitchen coupled with a clothing department on Champs-de-Mars Street in Montreal. Sisters Montgolfier, Kennedy, Charbonneau and St. Stanislas were

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<sup>41</sup> Circ. mens. 1892-95, p. 671.



designated for this work. Their duties consisted in serving bread and soup to the needy and providing them with warm clothing. By December 26, the soup kitchen was functioning at full capacity as poverty was widespread in Ville-Marie and throngs of needy clamored for bread or work.<sup>42</sup>

The work thus begun, gradually expanded, especially when in 1903, the incomparable Sister Lapointe appeared, to be followed six years later by the unique Sister Bonneau.

### **THE GENERAL HOSPITAL, EDMONTON, ALBERTA - 1895**

In truth, the Grey Nuns had long been invited to Fort Edmonton, the most important of all western posts destined to become the capital of what would one day be the Province of Alberta. On her difficult journey as visitor of the remote missions, Sister Charlebois had written to Mother Slocombe, "I went to Fort Edmonton on February 7, at the request of Bishop Grandin. Sisters are wanted for Lac Ste. Anne and Edmonton."<sup>43</sup>

Bishop Grandin himself, in a letter dated August 20, 1872, wrote to Mother Dupuis,<sup>44</sup> "I understand the great difficulty you experience in designating Sisters for Fort Edmonton. However, I do not lose hope. In the meantime, the mission will be well established." A year after having unsuccessfully discussed with Bishop Faraud the possibility of withdrawing the Sisters from the difficult mission of Lac-La-Biche in order to relocate them in Edmonton, Mother Dupuis gave up the idea of supporting the apostolic plan of the Bishop of St. Albert. The project was postponed and

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p. 572.

<sup>43</sup> Letter of Feb. 11, 1872. The Sisters first settled in Lac Ste-Anne in 1859, moved to St. Albert four years later.

<sup>44</sup> The successor to Mother Slocombe who died June 22, 1872.

Bishop Grandin had to be content with building in Fort Edmonton, a chapel where his nephew, Father Henri Grandin would serve.<sup>45</sup>

In 1891, the railway was to reduce the distance between Edmonton and Calgary and would bring about a genuine boom in the future capital which was as yet only a small village, a supply centre for trappers and traders of the far North. There were only three general stores and one hardware store.<sup>46</sup>

In October 1894, Mother Deschamps finally accepted the proposal to found a hospital in Edmonton at the entreaty of Bishop Grandin who was himself urged by the requests of his people.<sup>47</sup> It was then that Sister Devins' earlier contribution proved valuable for it was used to purchase the land. As for the building, it was constructed by means of loans for which the Mother House assumed responsibility. The Sisters were speculating as to whom they should entrust the enterprise when Mr. Senécal arrived in Montreal. He had carried out the extension to St. Boniface Hospital. The Sisters appealed to him and he accepted to go to Edmonton and build a three storey edifice measuring 60 ft. by 45 ft. and having a hip-roof.<sup>48</sup>

On May 13, 1895 the foundations were laid and by July notice was given that the outside was almost finished and that construction was progressing rapidly. On August 1, the

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<sup>45</sup> Morice, o.c., V. 3, p. 220.

<sup>46</sup> Breynat, Mgr. G., *Cinquante ans au Pays des Neiges*, V. 1, p. 78.

<sup>47</sup> The establishment of a maternity department by the Sisters of Misericorde in 1900 would fill the void which existed at the Gen. Hosp. (Circ. mens. 1898-1901, p. 460.)

<sup>48</sup> Circ. mens. 1892-95, pp. 576-577. Mr. Senécal would also complete the Calgary hospital where two of the floors were left unfinished. The Edmonton hospital was built on the Hudson Bay property between Jasper and Victoria Avenues. (doc. 4)



foundresses arrived. Sisters Marie-Xavier and Gosselin<sup>49</sup> were to live in St. Albert, nine miles away until the hospital could be occupied. Sister Marie-Xavier had lived memorable times since December 1894. Her whole life had in fact been marked by the action of Providence who, wanting her a Grey Nun, had led her through an intricate course to a particular destiny. She was born at St. John, Newfoundland on June 10, 1837. By the time she had reached the age of sixteen she had decided to become a teacher. Desirous of also embracing religious life, she thought she would be excluded because of a congenital deformity of her left hand. In 1853, she went to offer her services to the Sisters in St. Boniface. They soon noticed her giftedness. Admitted to the novitiate in 1854, she pronounced her vows two years later and for thirty-three years she was employed at teaching young girls even while contributing to manual tasks despite her handicap. In 1889, Sister Marie-Xavier was designated for the care of the sick at the St. Boniface Hospital. Little did she suspect at that time, that she was preparing to become the foundress of the hospital in Edmonton. In the service of the sick, she had shown a dedication equal to that displayed formerly towards her students. It was from this field of action that the authorities recalled her in November 1894 to entrust to her the responsibility of foundress.<sup>50</sup>

On August 1, she left St. Boniface which had now become her true homeland since she had worked there more than forty years. "At her departure, there was quite a crowd at the station for many women in Winnipeg owe her

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<sup>49</sup> They preceded Srs. St. Dosithee and St. Léon who were taking a course in nursing at St. Boniface Hospital and Srs. Desmarais, Sanders and Coursol who arrived Dec. 16.

<sup>50</sup> Having arrived in Montreal on Nov. 27, 1894, Sr. Marie-Xavier left the following Jan. 28.

their advanced education," stated a local journal, the *Nor'wester*.<sup>51</sup>

Sister Marie-Xavier conveyed her impressions to Mother Deschamps in a letter dated August 8:

My companion and I have made the journey well always in the company of the Governors and their wives, Lord and Lady Aberdeen, Lieutenant Schultz and his wife (a former pupil of Sister Marie-Xavier who however did not mention this detail).

Lord and Lady Aberdeen came to visit St. Albert where they learned that Sister Marie-Xavier was to found the hospital.

They greeted me graciously, wishing me success and promising to recommend me warmly to the ladies of their society. I count on the promises of the Lord who helps the lowly and the humble of heart, the Grey Nun said in closing.

On Saturday, December 14, Archbishop Langevin blessed the hospital in the presence of Bishops Grandin, Grouard and Pascal, the clergy and many guests. The cortège stopped at the largest room. The Bishop of St. Boniface addressed the assembly in English while the Bishop of St. Albert spoke in French. The event concluded with benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel dedicated to St. Anne.

Reinforcement in the persons of Sisters St. Dosithée, Desmarais, S. Léon, Sanders and Coursol arrived the following day. Despite her courage, Sister Marie-Xavier was already giving signs of extreme fatigue.<sup>52</sup> The newcomers, like their predecessors could recognize everywhere signs of

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<sup>51</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1892-95, p. 750

<sup>52</sup> Sr. Marie-Xavier left Edmonton for the school in Lestock in 1897.



the Mother House's open-handedness. Fifty boxes and bundles received from Montreal provided all the necessities; even a statue of St. Anne had been sent.

The hospital opened only at the beginning of February. Soon there were twenty patients of whom four occupied private rooms. The others paid the fabulous sum of fifty cents a day. Several surgical procedures were carried out successfully and gained the confidence of the population who frequently contributed provisions such as flour, tea, sugar and rice. "We have two good cows, one of which was given by the St. Albert convent, the other by the Oblates", state the chronicles. In addition, the Sisters received from the Oblates a kneading trough lined with galvanized steel to the joy of Sister Coursol who had been kneading bread in a tin pan. Two Irish friends had a telephone installed at the hospital.

The Klondike gold fever which broke out toward the fall of 1897 brought about an amazing prosperity, but it was deplorable that many colonists abandoned their fertile plains for a fortune which was uncertain and perhaps even illusory.

In the meantime, things were not all rosy at the hospital, for the water supply became a problem. A well dug with great difficulty had caved in following torrential rains and the Sisters had to buy water from the town. And yet, "our establishment is a marvel for the country. Every day visitors admire its beauty," wrote the correspondent.

The gold rush attracted to Edmonton a motley population which soon clamored for "a non-sectarian hospital." Bishop Grandin set himself up to defend the facts. Presiding at the blessing of the parish church of St. Joachim, he took advantage of the occasion to explain what the General Hospital was and the role of the Sisters:

The hospital in fact existed since 1859 first at Lac-Ste-Anne, then in Saint-Albert when Métis families came and set up their huts near the mission in order to receive treatment and medications from the Sisters. When it was necessary to hospitalize the patients, the Bishop's residence was used. The Oblate missionaries gave up their rooms 'to sleep in bunk beds'. Later, thanks to a larger house, the Sisters were able to receive the sick. The nine miles separating St. Albert from Edmonton and the growing population of this town made it necessary to transfer the hospital "built by the Grey Nuns by means of loans." The sick of any faith and sometimes of no faith, have been treated in our houses, often in my own room, the Bishop continued, and never has any minister of whatever denomination experienced any difficulty in visiting his patients either at the Grey Nuns or at the Bishop's residence. The Sisters remain faithful to their traditions and will always respect freedom of conscience.<sup>53</sup>

The eloquent defense did not halt the construction of the non-Catholic hospital but it was the care by the Sisters which would be sought when small-pox broke out in Edmonton in 1901. As always, it was the evidence of their dedication which would win for the Sisters the highest esteem of those who saw them at work. In this City of Edmonton, capital of the Province of Alberta, erected on September 1, 1905, the General Hospital would continue to develop and adapt to the needs of an ever-growing population.

### **THE YOUVILLE PATRONAGE, MONTREAL, 1895**

On May 8, the chronicler wrote

Soon we will have a new project in Montreal, a work to which our Venerable Mother would have given a high priority. It is the Bureau du Refuge de la Passion, opened in 1861 by the late Father Picard, p.s.s., for the placement of

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<sup>53</sup> Circ. mens. 1898-1901, pp. 329-330.



working girls and which had remained under the patronage of the Seminary.

Misses Pratt and Cassant assumed its direction until 1866 when they were replaced by associates known as Little Sisters of the Poor. The latter adopted a religious garb in 1880 but were to disband five years later, in 1885.<sup>54</sup> The Little Sisters of Lourdes then took over the Refuge de la Passion until 1892 after which they withdrew and Miss Delisle became the director.

Located originally on St. Charles-Borromée Street, the Refuge was transferred to Joséphine Street, then to a residence situated on the corner of Lagauchetière and St. Urbain and purchased from Mr. O. Berthelet. The main building was of freestone and consisted of two storeys apart from the mansard roofs and the basement, and provided approximately fifty rooms distributed in three areas. Besides the placement office and shelter for the working girls, there had also been for the past ten years a clothing depot for first communicants.

Father Picard had long hoped to have Grey Nuns direct this project. Now that the wish of the Sulpician was about to be realized, the personnel did not show any enthusiasm but they eventually acknowledged the wisdom of the decision when they realized that the residents of the Refuge Ste. Brigitte appeared content.<sup>55</sup> This refuge was identical to the Refuge de la Passion and was being directed by Grey Nuns.

On August 6 the Sisters entered the Refuge, changing its name to Youville Patronage while maintaining its

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<sup>54</sup> Seven among these Little Servants joined a Franciscan community in Rome. Priscille Bourbonnais, formerly employed at the Toledo Orphanage, was part of this group. She died in 1893 after having been Director of Formation.

<sup>55</sup> A refuge opened for Irish girls since 1860. In Boston, the Grey Nuns performed the same work at St. Helena's Home.

purpose. Sister Peltier was the Superior, assisted by Sisters Jean and Ste. Eléonore. They met thirty-two workers. The placement office for domestic help was vacant and Miss Delisle herself had already left the premises. The only resource Sister Peltier had was a ten dollar bill which had been borrowed and was insufficient to cover the cost of bare necessities. The Sisters were not disconcerted for they counted on Divine Providence which did assist them; hardly eighteen months had passed when the Patronage was being highly lauded in the press.

The Youville Patronage is the humble violet which hides under meadow foliage. However humble this institution may be, it is nevertheless useful and even necessary to society. Thanks to the charity and the dedication of the Sisters who direct it, the young boarders and domestic helpers find there protection, support and encouragement.<sup>56</sup>

Young ladies were attracted to that place. By 1869 the house had undergone considerable improvements and already, at this time 3,319 girls had been received and helped to find employment. Benefactors had supplied the furnishings, the Mother House had provided the chapel with all that was necessary for worship, Mrs. Gérin-Lajoie had donated "the tabernacle with a delicate silk lining".

Two years later, a fire broke out at a distance of fifteen feet from the Patronage. Everyone believed that it would be destroyed; everyone that is, except the Sisters who had a surety ... the name of Mother d'Youville. The boarders were astonished at the Sisters' composure but as for them, they wanted to flee. The windows of a house farther away were broken by the heat but the fire did not reach the Patronage.

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<sup>56</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1898-1901, pp. 778-779.



Social change would bring about the closure of this Patronage after thirty-eight years of labor by about twenty Sisters who had served there. But the good accomplished would remain and this certitude sufficed for those who had long ago given without reserve, their time, their skills, their whole life to the Lord, serving him through the great human family.





## CHAPTER VII

### 1896-1898

At the end of 1895, the relative improvement in Mother Deschamps' condition allowed her to involve herself more in the cherished Cause of Beatification. The stage leading to the obtaining of the Decree of non-cult had been passed. It now remained to prove that the candidate's reputation for holiness, far from fading, was increasing.

The Superior General received the deposition of Sister Marie de l'Assomption, Superior, who testified that Marguerite Dufrost de Lajemmerais, the young native of Varennes, had left a lasting memory at the Ursuline Monastery in Quebec and "that her reputation had elicited thoughts about the glorious role she would play in the Canadian Church."<sup>1</sup>

For her part, Mother Deschamps listed instances and searched through all available memoirs as she prepared the testimony which she presented on March 5. Father Bourgeault, the Vicar General, Monsignors Leblanc,

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of Dec. 10, 1895.

Bruchési, Cousineau, and Martin, with Fathers Filiatrault, Brady, Perreault and Le Valois came to receive her deposition in a session which lasted four hours.<sup>2</sup>

The Superior General was highly pleased to have accomplished this duty of filial love. She was happy also that Father D.S. Ramsay had finished writing the Life of Mother d'Youville. This biography in English responded to a genuine need considering the number of houses the Grey Nuns operated in the United States and in the Canadian West. It was not the Sisters who had suggested to the author that this work be undertaken. He, himself, took the initiative after reading the book written by M. Faillon. The Sisters were pleased with this gesture, another proof of the Foundress' reputation of holiness.<sup>3</sup> It would appear that Father Ramsay initiated a trend since Mrs. Sadlier a famous author in Montreal wrote to Mother Deschamps, "If my health permits, I shall begin work as soon as possible on the life of your Venerable Foundress. She and the community she founded have been a blessing for our city."<sup>4</sup>

In June, the Grey Nuns received a visit from Father A.J. Captier, the first Superior General of the Sulpicians to visit Canada. This enlivened still further in their hearts the desire to see their Mother glorified. The visitor, who was also the first postulator of the Cause, told them

My admiration for the work of Venerable Mother d'Youville had always made me desire and hope for that which I am

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<sup>2</sup> Circ. mens. 1895-98, p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> The Catholic Record praised this biography "which describes in a simple and clear manner the most beautiful scenes which unfolded in the New World. We acclaim this biography as an addition to our historic literature and congratulate the Grey Nuns for having such a Foundress."

<sup>4</sup> Letter of Sept. 1896. Mrs. Sadlier was notable to carry out her project.



experiencing today, to see at close range, the expansion of the community she founded.<sup>5</sup>

Father Captier gave up his role as postulator to another Sulpician, Father F.C. Palin d'Abonville who had to resign the position due to health reasons.<sup>6</sup> He was replaced by Father F.X. Hertzog from the Sulpician Seminary in Issy. The latter wrote to Mother Deschamps, "I shall commit myself wholeheartedly to the service of this beautiful Cause."<sup>7</sup>

The Superior General received a large quantity of mail from all directions and from all classes of society testifying to favors received or requesting them. It was evident that Mother d'Youville was sustaining the courage of those who were continuing her mission and that she was answering their prayers. However, it appeared that she remained deaf to one vibrant request... Death was continuing its ravages within the community. It happened all too often that the Superior General had to assist Sisters dying at an early age after only a few years or even only a few months of dedication. These young Sisters obviously had given the supreme testimony of love, but there were so many requests for the collaboration of the Grey Nuns!

Since the early date of 1737, 258 Sisters had passed away. The burial space in the crypt beneath the chapel was fast becoming inadequate. For this reason, the Council decided that henceforth, the Sisters would be buried on St. Bernard Island at Châteauguay.<sup>8</sup> On July 24, Bishop Emard proceeded to bless the cemetery in a beautiful ceremony which reflected "the respect and dignity with which the Church dedicates the burial place of its members."

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<sup>5</sup> These details and others which follow were taken from the *Circ. mens.* 1895-98 unless otherwise stated.

<sup>6</sup> Fr. P. d'Abonville died Aug. 3, 1897.

<sup>7</sup> Letter of Sept. 7, 1896.

<sup>8</sup> The Superiors General were buried in the crypt until 1973.

Many of the Sisters present undoubtedly pondered as to when the hour would strike for them to be laid to rest on the mound, beneath the shadow of the huge cross.<sup>9</sup> The first to open the long line of Grey Nuns to be buried on St. Bernard Island was Sister Alexandrine Ste-Marie who died in her 26th year and the third of her religious profession.<sup>10</sup> However, there were joys that mingled with sorrow at the Mother House of the Grey Nuns. That year, 1896, the Sisters planned to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of Mother Deschamps' entry into the novitiate at the old General Hospital. Members of the Sister Communities, especially the youngest branch of the Institute, the Grey Nuns of Nicolet,<sup>11</sup> were invited to take part in the celebration. Six of the 'heroic women' who had left the Mother House over thirty-seven and fifteen years ago respectively and two professed from St. Boniface who had never been there were invited to come for the annual retreat and then attend the feast. "These meetings produced deep emotion in everyone". The chronicler adds, "Mother Deschamps cannot speak of the happiness these homecomings cause her without being moved to tears."

On September 8, the eve of the great day, the Superior General was serene and modest. She lent an attentive ear to the homages and thanked all the participants. With humor concerning the praises addressed to her, the Mother implored God's mercy, "They know not what they are talking about," she commented. This elicited long applause.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This cross was erected in 1891 and blessed on July 25, 1893. (Circ. mens. 1892-95, pp. 221- 222).

<sup>10</sup> Sr. Ste. Marie was buried Nov. 13, 1896.

<sup>11</sup> The Community was founded in 1886.

<sup>12</sup> Mother Deschamps was not a doleful person. The Sisters were unanimous in acknowledging her clever retorts.



Then came the presentation of gifts. According to the direction given not to offer anything personal, but rather that which would allow the Superior to bring joy: altar decorations, liturgical vestments, books, etc. But a precious parcel which had arrived 'from a great distance away' made her day. It was the altar-stone from the Château Lajemmerais of Médréc in Brittany. In 1891 proceedings had been undertaken to obtain this precious relic as well as the bell from the Château.<sup>13</sup> The results had been unproductive. The Pastor and the parishioners were too attached to these souvenirs. In 1895, after the publication of the brochure: *Une famille bretonne au Canada*, Mother Deschamps resumed her efforts by appealing to *Compte de Palys*. The request was agreed to in part. Father Aubré, the assistant pastor of the place, explained:

I asked the bell's consent. It replied: I would be happy to ring in Ville-Marie, but I belong to Médréc where I was cast from the offerings of pilgrims. The people of Médréc are attached to me and will not freely allow me to leave.

Mother Deschamps contemplated the altar-stone as a precious relic and attached a singular importance to the fact that it had reached its destination on that day.

Mother Deschamps was to experience other profound emotions as the orphans representing the houses she had founded, offered their homage. A scene lived out at Châteauguay more than a half-century ago was recalled. It was that in which Mr. Duranceau recalled for the young Sister Deschamps, the memory of Mother d'Youville, "I saw her serving a lunch to the children, as you are doing now. I myself was among them."

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<sup>13</sup> Proceedings undertaken during Mother Filiatrault's superiorship. It was in this château that Marguerite's father, Christophe Dufrost de Lajemmerais had resided before joining the army.

A former companion from the novitiate, Sister St. Joseph, the last survivor of the foundresses of the St. Boniface convent, sent a special message. She even put words on the lips of the pioneers of yesteryears, Sisters Valade, Lagrave and Lafrance.

From Toledo came a ciborium which had been used by the first missionary of the Ohio State. It had previously been given to St. Vincent's Orphanage by Father Amédée Rappe, later a bishop of Cleveland. Toledo was a house where the Sisters had suffered much, a house often threatened with extinction but which had survived thanks to Mother Deschamps' fortitude. To this house a hospital had been added, a hospital which for several years had faced rivalry from the non-Catholic hospital. The enthusiasm for the latter hospital diminished however, as the population recognized the high quality of the care given by the Sisters.<sup>14</sup> In order to assure this quality, Mother Deschamps authorized the establishment of a nursing school, the first Catholic school in Ohio and also the first of the nursing schools founded by the Grey Nuns. The beginnings were evidently modest. For an amphitheatre the students used a stairway while the professors, who were members of the Medical Staff, used the landing as a platform. Among these first students was Sister Elodie Mailloux who was being prepared providentially for a great role in the field of nursing.

The course was extended over a two-year period. Angela Traher was employed as a graduate nurse on October 15, 1897, at a monthly salary of twenty-five dollars. The first official graduation was held on August 28,

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<sup>14</sup> The sick sailors were returned to St. Vincent's hospital. This was undoubtedly a temporary measure for in 1898, Bishop Hortsman of Cleveland would ask his friend, Pres. McKinley of U.S.A., to entrust the care of the sailors to the Grey Nuns who had cared for them since their arrival.



1898<sup>15</sup> to be followed by many others for, at the celebration of the 60th anniversary, it was pointed out that three thousand nurses had received training at St. Vincent's and were disseminated throughout the world.<sup>16</sup>

- 1897 -

The new year was tinged with sadness for the city, the diocese of Montreal and for the whole Church, for on January 5, the funeral was held for Bishop Edouard-Charles Fabre who had passed away on December 30. Sister Fauteux wrote, "He died as a friend of our feasts and of our works" and in the daily diary from which the chronicles of the community were drawn up, she added "He died after granting Mother General's request that he bless the Grey Nuns and their ailing Mother."

The dear ailing Mother had no illusions concerning her condition, for her pain was becoming more intense. She would live a few more months during which time she would be aware of the Cross, the cross which she had greeted each morning according to the prescription of the primitive rule of the Grey Nuns. The cross had fashioned her strong character and the trials she experienced at the eventide of her existence would allow her spiritual daughters to grasp the depth of her faith, the strength of her hope.

On February 2, news arrived by telegram of the death of Sister St. Joseph, her dear companion of yesteryears. On the following day a letter arrived from the far North with the news that Sister Emélie Michon had also gone to her eternity on October 23rd. Two valiant missionaries had fallen on the field of honor; the first at St. Boniface, the

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<sup>15</sup> Alice Butler, one of the first graduates, had died accidentally in early August. She was awarded her certificate 'posthumously'.

<sup>16</sup> Chron. St. Vincent's Hosp. 1971.

adopted homeland which she had chosen not to leave.<sup>17</sup> As for Sister Michon, she had sustained to some extent, the austere life of the Mackenzie area since 1867, and now rested in the shadow of the cross in the cemetery at Providence.

Other bereavements followed. On February 17, Sister Bélanger, the Superior at the St. Jérôme Institution, died of pleurisy contracted while visiting the poor and on the same day, the Superior General learned of the death of her own brother, Joseph. She had not been able to attend him in his dying moments but she had delegated Sisters as nurses. She interpreted the departure of this younger brother, the last surviving member of her family, as a signal of her own impending call. Accordingly, she took advantage of Holy Week to prepare her meeting with the Master by making her retreat.<sup>18</sup>

The pre-eminent trial which darkened the final years of Mother Deschamps remained without question the matter of the Manitoba schools. The abolition of the grant had forced the closure of the normal school in St. Boniface. In the previous year, the boarding school had become a day school and now the Sisters were confronted with the withdrawal from this work which was to be transferred to the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary.<sup>19</sup> Bishop Langevin and the Catholics from Manitoba did not abandon the struggle. In several places, denominational schools were re-opened. Four pastors constituted themselves as school principals in their respective villages. The Archbishop himself, contributed toward the maintenance of about twenty schools while four others

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<sup>17</sup> Sr. St. Joseph had declined the offer to return to Montreal explaining that it had been too hard to leave at the time of her departure for the Red River in 1844.

<sup>18</sup> Sr. Collette, o.c., p. 447.

<sup>19</sup> Sr. M. Guichon, 1844-1944, p.17.



were operated entirely at his expense. The Grey Nuns continued to maintain their convents at St. François-Xavier, Ste-Anne-des-Chênes and St. Norbert.<sup>20</sup> They even accepted to resume teaching at the parochial school of St. Vital which had been suspended since 1888. However, Bishop Langevin reserved the Grey pioneers for a very specific work: the industrial schools on the Indian Reserves. "They were founded for the poor and the disinherited of the human family," he explained.<sup>21</sup> Mother Deschamps could not resist such an appeal. In the spring of 1897, the Archbishop of St. Boniface received an affirmative reply. Accepting this work in this sparsely inhabited region of Tundra Mountain<sup>22</sup> would constitute Mother Deschamps' swan song.

She would have two great joys at the end of her life: Monsignor Paul Bruchési's nomination to the Episcopal See of Montreal and a visit from Bishop Merry Del Val, the apostolic delegate of Pope Leo XIII.

Monsignor Bruchési was a former pupil<sup>23</sup> of the Grey Nuns and also notary for the Cause of Mother d'Youville. On the morning of June 26, the new Archbishop brought one of his first blessings to the beloved patient. Greeting him, she said, "Welcome! and God be praised for selecting you," and with a smile, she added, "The Cause of our beloved Mother is in good hands."

Archbishop Bruchési had come to pay homage to the Apostolic Delegate who, since June 21, was residing at the

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<sup>20</sup> The Trappists established at St. Norbert since 1892, assisted this convent by providing food.

<sup>21</sup> Letter of March 12, 1896.

<sup>22</sup> (Montagne du Tondre) Tundra Mountain, Touchwood Hills and Lestock were all names of the same place.

<sup>23</sup> Bishop Bruchési had spent some time at Asile St. Joseph, an institution under the direction of the Grey Nuns.

Mother House of the Grey Nuns. On the morning of June 28, the distinguished visitor came to the Superior General's bedside and joined in prayer with the Sisters.

In the peace and trust of one who knows in whom she had believed, Mother Deschamps breathed her last at dawn on the 29th. This eminent Grey Nun was taken to her final resting place in the company of a large attendance headed by the Archbishop-elect of Montreal, Bishops Gravel and Clut, many Sulpicians and members of the clergy, as well as delegates from all the religious communities of the city and surrounding areas. Old friends and friends from every class of society attended, to show what esteem they held for this beloved mother whose greatness was being solemnized. The retinue processed toward the crypt where the body was laid to rest beneath the chapel of the Sacred Heart, close to the tomb of Mother d'Youville. The chronicler noted, "For us this is but an aurevoir, for we shall often come here to pray for our beloved Mother."

The Grey Nuns would not be the only ones to kneel before this tomb. Stanislas Lestang had come to the General Hospital in 1838 as an employee. He had been assigned the task of burying the deceased Sisters. Mother Deschamps had said to him one day, "Will you do this for me?" The elderly man had agreed and had fulfilled his duty. In the course of his visits to the crypt, old Stanislas always knelt at the tomb of the one whom he had held in high esteem. Stanislas could not have expressed himself in this manner though he subscribed without hesitation to the eloquent message delivered by Father W. Leclair, p.s.s., to the Grey Nuns and which was one of the most complete tributes paid to the extraordinary woman Mother Deschamps had been:

I have known the Reverend Mother for many years and I have often had the opportunity to appreciate the superior qualities of her mind and heart. What especially impressed



me was her deep spirit of faith, the integrity of her character, her uncommon good sense, her charity, her positive and sound judgement, her strength of character in tribulations, her competency in handling the most thorny matters without ever offending the adversary, subduing him by the power of her reasoning, rather than by irony. She was always respectful of ecclesiastical authority but firm as a rock in the assertion of her right. She was a perfect lady, according to the world and a model religious, one of the best exemplifications of a superior that I have ever known. She was a daughter of the cross and had huge ones to bear but she was also a daughter of Providence and was never shaken by adversity. There is now one more saint in heaven. She is an example which will long remain in my memory as an expression of wisdom, moderation, kindness, and patience.<sup>24</sup>

### **NOTRE-DAME DE L'ESPERANCE, LESTOCK, SASK., 1897**

Sister Marie-Xavier had given proof of her organizational ability in the founding of the General Hospital in Edmonton, so she was chosen to establish the school at Tundra Mountain. Sisters Valade and St. Alexandre were her companions. The group of three left St. Boniface on July 12 for their destination. Touchwood Hills was part of the territory which was to be within the boundaries of the future province of Saskatchewan. The distance from this place to Montreal was estimated at 1,749 miles; but it was only fifty miles from the Qu'Appelle mission founded in 1884.

This post which had been served by the Oblates since 1891, became permanently established only five years later. The population was Métis, Cree and Sauteux and the school had been managed by a layman under the direction of the Oblate Missionaries. The number of children was limited to thirty and it was only in 1906 that the number

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<sup>24</sup> Letter of Sept. 15, 1897.

could be increased by ten. The pupils were financial wards of the Government.

The foundresses stopped first at Qu'Appelle where the Sisters of that mission attempted to retain them for a few days. This was a lost effort for the travellers wished to reach Lestock for the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel on July 16. The school being situated in a still pagan area,<sup>25</sup> Sister Marie-Xavier wished to entrust its success to the Virgin Mary, hence the name of Our Lady of Good Hope, adopted from the outset.

By 5 a.m. on July 15, the travellers were on their way in the company of Father Magnan and Sisters Goulet, Bergeron and Brabant of Qu'Appelle. Two hours later, they could see the school steeple. This inspired the Oblate to begin singing the *Salve Regina*. The singing remained a solo however, for the Sisters were too moved to join in. Undoubtedly all of them were reflecting on their responsibility for the foundation of the last mission accepted by Mother Deschamps and on the fact that its success was compromised by several obstacles.

The Sisters were amazed however, at seeing the installation. There was a stone building, sufficiently large and well lighted adjacent to the former school, which now served as a chapel for the Reserve. Twenty-seven pupils were there, rather stiff-mannered, intimidated by the appearance of the Grey uniforms they were seeing for the first time. However, these children of the woods would soon show rapid progress for, in 1898, at the time of Mother Filiatrault's visit, they greeted her with a song of welcome in French.

The task has been very difficult for the Sisters, the Superior General's secretary wrote, but with patience and God's help,

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<sup>25</sup> "The sun is honored as a god," wrote the chronicler in 1901.



in a relatively short time they made of these undisciplined children, the most charming Indian family one could wish for.<sup>26</sup>

The challenge had weighed too heavily on Sister Marie-Xavier's strength. She was compelled to leave after one year, and three months later, on October 18, 1898, she died at Holy Cross Hospital in Calgary.

Sister Victoire Thiffault replaced her and work continued at Tundra Mountain "where there was no more mountain than there was a lake at Lac-La-Selle" noted Mother Filiatrault's secretary.<sup>27</sup>

Though there was no mountain, there were other difficulties. Sisters Valade and Prono were once obliged to spend the night in the open during a terrible storm in December while they were mid-way between Qu'Appelle and Lestock. The school master whom the Sisters had replaced spread the strangest calumnies against them in order to destroy the esteem the Natives had developed for them. This attitude influenced the agent of the school who was already hostile toward them. But he eventually would change his opinion when at his visit, he was literally overcome by the good conduct and the genuine progress of the children. Furthermore, he congratulated the Sisters and said to them, "I am pleased that you are doing good here. I promise that I shall do all in my power to cooperate with you."<sup>28</sup>

At Lestock as in other places where the Grey Nuns worked, there were conversions of 'master sorcerers' and of good pagan women, one of whom would aptly say, "If the God whom the Sister says she loves so much, were not

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<sup>26</sup> Sr. Boulanger, letter of June 28, 1898.

<sup>27</sup> A mountain and a lake did in fact exist, but not close to these two schools.

<sup>28</sup> Ann. 1898-1901, pp. 98-99

good, he would not have put in her heart so much kindness for the poor Natives."<sup>29</sup>

The missionaries in fact, did not limit themselves to teaching the rising generation; they visited the poor, the needy, and when the epidemic of Spanish influenza wrecked havoc in 1918, the Grey Nuns hastened to the bedside of the sick. Unfortunately, all would in turn be afflicted with the illness, except one who cared for them and for the forty-seven pupils also bedridden.<sup>30</sup>

The school became so popular that it had not only to be extended but replaced. The new building was inaugurated on June 17, 1931. It consisted of a four-storey main building while each wing had three storeys. It could accommodate 110 pupils which alone was a credit to the teachers for the Government authorities had at first limited the number of pupils to thirty.

Twelve days after the inauguration of the new school, that is June 29, fire destroyed the laundry, the bakery, the shop, the garage and the old school, but the new building was spared. Meanwhile, the community authorities having recently accepted the direction of the St-Vital Sanatorium for tuberculosis patients, the Sisters regretfully had to be withdrawn from Lestock in order to staff the new project. In April 1932, they left Tundra Mountain where they were replaced by the Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart and of Mary Immaculate.

Thirty-five years of labor gave the Grey Nuns the satisfaction of having carried out at Lestock a work that would endure.

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<sup>29</sup> Sr. Valade to Mother Gen. May 21, 1899.

<sup>30</sup> Ann. 1917-18, pp. 867-868.



Our pupils are a consolation to us. We have the satisfaction of noting the perseverance of those who have been baptized. And what is rarer still, the seniors are showing gratitude. One of them whose life was a success would give testimony to Sister Marie Xavier in this way: "If I am happy today, I owe it to her good advice." We would like to believe that this person proclaimed aloud what others believe in their hearts.

- 1898 -

The General Chapter of August 14, 1897, again entrusted the government of the Institute to Mother Praxède Filiatrault, providing her with the following Assistants: Sisters Mathilde Hamel, Elisabeth Ward, and Louise Painchaud. Sister Elisabeth Roy assumed the responsibility of Director of Formation. Ever since the early years of the Institute, the custom had been maintained of electing other Councillors in order to constitute the twelve stipulated in the letters patent of 1753.<sup>31</sup> This time however, five among these Councillors would become vicarial superiors by virtue of the decision ratified by the Chapter of dividing the various works into canonical provinces.<sup>32</sup>

Sister Perrin was entrusted with the Ville-Marie province consisting of the houses in Montreal and she resided at the Mother House. The houses outside the city were given to Sister Stubinger who would reside at Châteauguay. Sister Reid's share was the American missions with residence at the orphanage in Salem. Sister Dionne replaced Sister Hamel whose twelve houses belonged to the Manitoba and Saskatchewan area plus two located in the United States. As for the province of St. Albert, its Provincial Superior was Sister Letellier who had jurisdiction over the houses in

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<sup>31</sup> Art. 9 Letters patent signed by Louis XV, June 3, 1753.

<sup>32</sup> These canonical provinces did not necessarily have the boundaries of the civic provinces.

Alberta, northern Saskatchewan and those in the Northwest Territories.

Statistics indicated that at August 1, 1897, the Institute had 553 Sisters, 100 novices and postulants with, in addition, 75 Little Auxiliary Sisters and 43 candidates aspiring to the Sisterhood. Though recruitment showed a real increase, the fact still remained that tuberculosis was taking its toll and the ranks were decreasing. This moved the Sisters to call on St. Joseph to whom solemn promises were made "if he granted an improvement in the health of the Sisters."<sup>33</sup> Despite the crisis of the schools in Manitoba, the projects claiming the cooperation of the Grey Nuns were on the increase. Mother Filiatrault had been well trained. She had an ear to the needs of her time. Thus, in January 1898, she perceived that the time had come to establish a Nursing School at Notre-Dame Hospital. She had conferred with the Medical authorities of the institution over the past year and all were in agreement concerning the need for a school. A recent experience proved that the project was in fact overdue. St. Camille Hospital which since 1894<sup>34</sup> had been partly connected to Notre-Dame, had its funding cut off and so the Sisters withdrew. Only an ad hoc organization was retained in case of an epidemic. Doctor Laberge took charge of the new administration and used the services of graduate nurses from the Victoria Hospital to provide care.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Devotion to St. Joseph goes back to the early history of the Grey Nuns. Mother d'Youville considered him as the faithful and humble laborer who earned the livelihood of Jesus. She ordered a painting representing Joseph in his workshop in order to remind the Sisters of their role as providers for the poor.

<sup>34</sup> This hospital was divided into two sections of which one was under the responsibility of the anglophone hospital.

<sup>35</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1895-98, pp. 115-117.



The message was easy to grasp and it was understood by the Superior General. Notre-Dame Hospital was dear to many Grey Nuns and Sister Perrin who had worked there many years could not forget it since it was within the territory for which she was responsible. But, on Saturday, January 29, about 10 a.m., fire broke out in the clinic room. Fortunately, an intern sounded the alarm and shortly volunteer firemen appeared on the scene and managed to control the flames which had reached the operating room. "Contrary to what the Press had reported, the staff had remained calm in the circumstances, thus preventing panic and maintaining order", wrote the chronicler.<sup>36</sup>

At Notre-Dame Hospital, the collaboration of the Grey Nuns had evidently been appreciated for thanks to the generosity of the administrators, Sister Grandin, one of the nurses was rewarded with a trip to St. Albert where her elderly uncle, Bishop Grandin was nearing the end of his praiseworthy career. He had seen his fellow bishops disappear one after another: Bishops Bourget, Faraud, Taché Fabre.<sup>37</sup> Bishop Grandin was only sixty-nine but the apostolic works in the most difficult corner of the world had taken their toll on his health. In the previous year he had been given a coadjutor in the person of Bishop Emile Legal who was consecrated on June 17, 1897. To see his niece again, to chat with her about France, their dear homeland, would be one of his last joys, one which would last four months.

Sister Grandin did not go alone to the Canadian West for the Superior General's presence was required to deal with serious problems, especially in St. Boniface where there was question of expanding one of the missions.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 565.

<sup>37</sup> Card. Taschereau also died on Apr. 12, 1898 and Bishop Laflèche on July 14 of the same year.

Before her departure, Mother Filiatrault along with her Council decided to build along St-Mathieu Street, the wing which had appeared on the original blueprint of the institution. This wing was to measure 180 ft. by 60 ft. and have five storeys. It would be exclusively reserved for the orphans of both sexes. Mr. Venne, the architect, drew up the plans and Martineau, Prénoveau, Pauzé and Sons began the construction on May 4, a Wednesday, the day dedicated to St. Joseph.

The Superior General would not attend the inauguration of the construction project for she had left for the West on April 21, in the company of Sister Boulanger whose duty it was to keep the travel diary. However, Mother Filiatrault would herself give sign of life from time to time. It was she who acknowledged having left Montreal with a grave worry "concerning the missions in° the United States because of the Spanish-American war.<sup>38</sup> The Sisters had written from Boston

This event is bringing bereavement to families. The schools, factories and businesses were closed in order to allow everyone to attend the departure of a regiment for Cuba. Two other regiments left last week.

Near Edmonton, the Superior met four Sisters of Providence en route to their new mission in Peace River. The latter re-assured her concerning the fate of the Grey Nuns in the United States.

Mother Filiatrault's itinerary led her successively to St. Boniface, Calgary, St. Albert and Edmonton and finally, to Lac-La-Biche founded in 1862 and which had never yet been visited by a Superior General. Unfortunately, she was unable to reach Ile-à-la-Crosse where her presence was

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<sup>38</sup> Letter of May 26, 1898.



however keenly desired.<sup>39</sup> Trials did not release their grip on this poor mission. Sister Lajoie wrote

Fire destroyed the barn on December 14. Eight of the animals perished in the flames; however, we were able to get four out before they were too badly hurt by fire. More recently, on January 12, she underlined the haste with which kindly neighbors helped build a temporary barn. In order to show them our gratitude, we served them a plentiful meal at which meat saved from the fire was the main dish. Sister Lajoie added that as a result of a Government decision, the humble convent became a "boarding school".

At the end of her visit, the Superior General confided, "These dear missionaries! When I consider the sacrifices they so generously accept, I am tempted to kiss their footprints." It was painful for her not to be able to go also to the Sisters living in exile in the far North, who in December still ignored the identity of the new Superior General.

### **THE NURSING SCHOOL, NOTRE-DAME HOSPITAL, MONTREAL, 1898**

Notre-Dame Hospital which had been in existence for eighteen years had grown by leaps and bounds. It now accommodated twenty-two patients in private rooms and 113 in public wards. There was an average daily occupancy of ninety-one patients and statistics revealed that 132,999 patients had been treated through 1891-1892.

The administrators with the help of the Ladies' Auxiliary were attempting to liquidate the \$25,000.00 debt contracted for expansion while the Medical Staff assured the quality of medical care.

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<sup>39</sup> Sr. Letellier, the Prov. Sup. would visit this mission in the course of the same summer.

There were three English language nursing schools in Canada<sup>40</sup> and it was thought time had come to offer the same advantage to francophone candidates.

Mother Filiatrault understood that "good is accomplished at the price of sacrifice." For this reason, she encouraged eleven of her Sisters to submit to a rigorous study program in order to obtain a nursing diploma.<sup>41</sup> Sister Elodie Mailloux who in 1897 had been part of the first group of students at St. Vincent's Hospital in Toledo, was recalled in August because of failing health.<sup>42</sup> Now she had excellent experience and showed remarkable aptitude for nursing. Blessed with a broad culture and genuine kindness along with great firmness, the young Sister possessed a natural insight for this type of work. She had a stately bearing and, unbeknown to her, was called the "Marquise" by the hospital staff. In her new function, the Marquise was always a humble religious, competent, dedicated, undaunted by difficulties, and though she was understanding, she would not tolerate mediocrity in the students. She inculcated respect for their profession and especially respect for the patients entrusted to them.

On Friday, January 15, 1898 at 3 p.m., Doctor Charles Hébert gave the first class to the eleven student Sisters, of whom nine were destined to later constitute the teaching staff of the school.

The first graduation took place on June 12, 1899 and even though Sister Mailloux figured among this group, she was recognized as the foundress and first director of the school. The practical experience which the Sisters had had

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<sup>40</sup> Angers, A.F., *Ec. d'inf. Hôp Notre Dame*, pp. 27-28

<sup>41</sup> *Circ. mens. 1898-1901*, pp. 178-179.

<sup>42</sup> *Circ. mens. 1895-1898*, p. 465. There is reason to believe that Sr. Mailloux did not graduate in Toledo. Miss Angela Traher is considered as the first graduate of this school.



with the sick explained why the course was shortened in their favor. The normal cycle was three years.

Recruitment however was slow. It was only on October 1 that the next entry was recorded. Six other candidates soon registered but all would leave after a short stay. Nursing had not yet acquired any prestige as a profession. It was considered as a mediocre trade and candidates who met the requirements by way of instruction could then lead an easy life at home. At the second graduation, it was another group of eleven Grey Nuns who would receive their diplomas.<sup>43</sup> Only the lay person who registered at the Notre-Dame school in 1900 would persevere to the end. After three months of probation, she received five dollars a month for personal expenses. The training received was considered fair salary.<sup>44</sup>

The Sisters were so happy about the perseverance of Miss Helen Routh that they wished to give her graduation a character of grandeur. On October 23, 1903, an assembly grouped together Bishop Racicot, Father R. Labelle, Superior of the Sulpician Seminary, the doctors and their wives, as well as the Ladies Auxiliary and finally Sister Mailloux herself who had become the Assistant General of the Grey Nuns during the previous year.<sup>45</sup>

Doctor E.P. Benoit gave a highly appreciated discourse which was reproduced in its entirety in the community chronicles.<sup>46</sup> The eloquent speaker, after having established that Notre-Dame Hospital

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<sup>43</sup> Circ. mens. 1902-03, p. 126

<sup>44</sup> A.F. Angers, o.c., p. 34. Unless otherwise stated, the details concerning the school are drawn from this book.

<sup>45</sup> Appointed Oct. 6, 1902, she was replaced at the school by Sr. M.A. Duckett.

<sup>46</sup> Circ. mens. 1902-03, pp. 736-742.

was a medical organization which can compete with any similar institution, stressed that the hospital was born of the harmonious union of secular charity and the religious apostolate, of civic dedication and of the ecclesiastical benevolence; and if it had become a success, it is that it counted on the moral support of powerful protectors, on the dedication of men and women of the world, on the entire cooperation of the Sisters for whom this has not been the first battle. The speaker stressed the attainments of these Sisters. What gave our institution such great stability was to have been able to count on the will to work, the intelligent initiative and on the admirable sense of duty which characterized the followers of Mother d'Youville (...) When I observe them at work, I can see on their faces the calm determination of our ancestors.

Doctor Benoit acknowledged to the candidate that he knew that she had appreciated the competence of her instructors. He congratulated her on her choice and predicted that "the secular Sister of Charity in a blue dress and white bonnet would be a credit to the career she had chosen."

Definitely, the Grey Nuns were being affirmed. Doctor E.P. Lachapelle, the medical director read the annual report in which it was stated that Sister Weekes, a 1902 graduate from Notre-Dame School, had just been appointed professor of hygiene and of patient care by the Government of Manitoba and of the Northwest Territories.<sup>47</sup>

If it had taken five years from the date of the foundation for the Notre-Dame School of Nursing to graduate the first lay nurse, it would be different in the future: by 1904 there was a housing crisis for students. It was the soup kitchen opened in 1895 on Champs-de-Mars Street which would

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 743.



be utilized. Its two upper storeys were rented to serve as the first residence for nurses.

The school continued to progress under the direction of Sister Duckett who deserves the credit for having in 1905 written the first study manual in French for the students. Sisters Duckett and Fafard are also credited with organizing advanced education which in 1922 would bring about affiliation with the University of Montreal. It was equally by their initiative that "La Veilleuse", a professional review for nurses was founded. By now, the School of Nursing was transferred to a beautiful building erected in 1924 on Sherbrooke Street.

Through the following years, the school would prove worthy of its origin. Under the direction of a Grey Nun, aided by several assistants, an attempt was made to encourage high standards of teaching and the nurses who trained there would be a credit to their Alma Mater. Many Grey Nuns who had graduated from Notre-Dame went elsewhere - in Canada and the United States to administer similar schools. A long list is recorded of lay nurses who also distinguished themselves in the service of humanity and who even served overseas in both world wars.

### **HOSPICE TACHE, ST. BONIFACE, MANITOBA, 1898**

One of the reasons claiming the presence of the Superior General in St. Boniface was that of the boarding school or Taché Academy. The institution of which Bishop Taché had been the architect dated back to 1883. He had been successful. Pupils of neighboring regions and even from the United States had pursued advanced studies there until the Greenway law rendered it impossible to continue the work. By 1893 it had become a day school. The following year the pupils from this school had joined those of the Convent of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. Now,

the Provincial Superior was being urged to adapt the building to another purpose.

The orphan girls were moved there and in March 1898<sup>48</sup> a crèche had been opened. The old Provincial House, despite its scanty space, had sheltered these various works until the hospital was opened in 1871 and also the boarding school in 1883. An annex known as the yellow house had lodged the orphans.

In the year, 1898, there was question of utilizing the former boarding school in order to group the various works. Mother Filiatrault, in the course of her visit, realized that in fact the population of the former boarding school could be increased. It would henceforth be known as Hospice Taché in order to perpetuate the memory of its untiring benefactor.

In agreement with the Provincial Council, the Superior General granted all the necessary authorizations so that henceforth both the orphans and the elderly could be lodged there. By September, a kindergarten would open for small boys.<sup>49</sup> The decision was so pleasing to everyone concerned that it was decided that the event should be celebrated by a superb picnic on the lawn. The Superior General and Sister Dionne, the Provincial Superior considered it an honor to wait on the table. For her part, the secretary commented, "The former boarding school would not lose any value by becoming a charitable institution."<sup>50</sup> In September, she added,

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<sup>48</sup> Circ. mens. 1895-98, p. 190

<sup>49</sup> Sr. Guichon, o.c., p. 18. The Crèche would close in 1904 in favor of the Misericordia Sisters. As for the kindergarten, it would close in 1907.

<sup>50</sup> Sr. Boulanger to the Mother House, July 31, 1898.



It is on the 9th of this month that we shall open wide our doors to the physically disabled and the penniless, the orphans, the elderly, small babies. All will be welcomed with joy.

If the secretary could have foreseen the future development, she would have greatly rejoiced. By 1905 the hospice had to be expanded and this time it would be Mother Despins the new Provincial Superior, who would direct the work and it was under her administration that the Provincial House would be moved there in 1911 while the former house was henceforth designated to house the aging population.

On June 15, 1922 fire broke out in the attic of the Hospice. A cry of alarm awoke the Sisters and the children, but fortunately the fire brigade brought it under control.<sup>51</sup>

The Grey Nuns were not disheartened. They undertook the necessary repairs and in 1923, because of the great number of requests for admission, the Sisters decided to move back to the 1846 building.

At the time of the Centennial in 1944, Hospice Taché had 412 boarders: elderly, handicapped, paralytics, with non-Catholics as well as Catholics representing nine different nationalities. A department for elderly priests had also been set up. Forty Grey Nuns assisted by one hundred employees provided the service in this Youvillian establishment for the relief of human misery of all kinds.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Circ. mens. 1922-23, pp. 171-172.

<sup>52</sup> This work would expand as seen by comparing the former hospice with the beautiful Centre Hospitalier Taché Inc. erected during 1970 -80.

## LAC LA BICHE CONVENT MOVED TO SADDLE LAKE, ALBERTA, 1898.

The school of Our Lady of Victory established at Lac La Biche in 1862 experienced a great many difficulties and hardships of every description. We recall that during the Riel insurrection in 1885, the Sisters had been forced to leave their convent and seek refuge on an island where they remained for three weeks. Food supplies reached the distant mission only with great difficulty so that when hunting and fishing were poor, the whole household experienced long periods of fasting common to the northern missions.

Bishop Grandin deplored the incessant difficulties to which this mission was prey. He suggested to Mother Filiatrault that the Sisters be transferred to Saddle Lake. It was for this reason that the Superior General made it a duty to reach this far-away post as soon as she arrived in the West, that is, in May 1898. She was aware of the fact that her missionaries were attached to this corner of the earth. She wrote:

It is difficult to leave this place where for thirty-six years many of our Sisters have sacrificed themselves, to give up this house whose walls were discreet witnesses of such abnegation.<sup>53</sup>

It was for this reason that she wanted to bring to the Sisters the comfort of her presence for the "great upheaval" would occur during the summer. The Superior General encouraged the Sisters to accept the sacrifice

for this move will result in God's greater glory. By settling at the very centre of the Reserve, we shall provide Christian teaching to a larger number of children.

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<sup>53</sup> Letter of Mother Filiatrault, May 26, 1898.



Sister St. Placide was appointed Superior of the future establishment and with her companions left Lac La Biche on July 22 to journey toward the new mission which would be known as Hospice St-Joseph.

The discernment of Bishop Grandin and of Mother Filiatrault would soon be justified for the people of the Reserve were happy "to have Sisters" and Mr. Gibble, the Government agent highly praised their teaching skills following his first official visit.

The Sisters themselves would soon say

The supernatural consolation which we receive from these youngsters, so fresh, so new, so open to the teachings of the faith, amply rewards us for the sacrifice we had to make in exchanging the Lac-La-Biche mission for this new residence.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, there were difficulties at Saddle Lake. Frost and strange insects destroyed the crop in 1900.<sup>55</sup> The chronicles of the house would indicate on several occasions that the crop was poor because of torrential rains, worms and mice. Moreover the epidemics which affected the frail pupils had obliged the teachers to serve as nurses.

Though they lived on the shores of a large lake, the Sisters stated in 1912 that there was still no water at Hospice St. Joseph; so it was decided that a well would be dug. At a depth of 200 ft., "there is still little hope."<sup>56</sup> It was only in 1916 that the Sisters could enjoy the benefit of "Sister water." This water would fall in abundance, accompanied by hail, wind and lightning during a tornado in July of that year which destroyed crops and broke 144 panes of glass about the house.

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<sup>54</sup> Ann. 1898-1901, pp. 117-118.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p. 157.

<sup>56</sup> Ann. 1911-1912, p. 372.

At the sight of the disaster, and following the example of their beloved Foundress, the Sisters thanked God by reciting together the Magnificat. To be true to history, they should have recited the Te Deum...

The era of trials did not end there for the influenza of 1918 and hunger claimed many victims. Sister Nantel, the visiting nurse, travelled throughout the Reserve for three weeks going as far as St. Paul, where the Sisters of the Assumption, also affected by the epidemic would call for her services.<sup>57</sup> Two Grey Nuns, Sisters Breynolf and Céline eventually fell victims of their dedication.

In 1928, fire destroyed the barn. The destruction of the entire mission was narrowly avoided but extreme hardship was again the lot of the Sisters and their wards. This time however, they realized that they had not sown in vain. For it was the Natives of whom several were former pupils, who would come to their help. Several arrived on horse-back from a distance of twelve miles to offer their services. "I was touched by their sympathy" wrote the Superior who added, "My companions are admirable in faith and resignation. They greatly edify me."<sup>58</sup> Three years later, in 1931, this local community would again be transplanted, this time to St. Paul, Alberta where the Grey Nuns would carry on their mission of civilization at the Residential School of Blue Quill.

### **ST-ANTOINE SCHOOL, PORTAGE-DU-RAT, KENORA, ONTARIO, 1898**

On her return from Lac La Biche, the Superior General again stopped at St. Boniface in order to confer with the Sisters of the province concerning the creation of another mission. Bishop Langevin had presented a request to the

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<sup>57</sup> Doss. Sr. Nantel

<sup>58</sup> Ann. 1928-1929, p. 207.



Superior on February 3, 1898 to obtain missionaries for Portage-du-Rat which was later to be called Kenora, situated at the mouth of the Winnipeg River. The Sauteux lived there and when Bishop Taché had visited them in 1845, they had refused to receive him.

In the previous year, 1897, Father P.H. Cahill, an Oblate, had determined to establish a school in that area.<sup>59</sup> He rented the house of Charles Laverdière and hired former pupils from the Indian School of St. Boniface as teachers. His ambition did not stop there for he had obtained Government help to build a school for fifty pupils. In the first fourteen months of teaching, five teachers had succeeded one another, so difficult was it to train these children of the forests.

Bishop Langevin, as well as Father Cahill, recognized then that they must appeal for help from the Grey Nuns. He explained to the Superior General "There are almost 3,000 pagans whom we hope to convert by means of their children who are destined to be apostles to their race." He praised the site of the school on the shore of the beautiful Lake of the Woods, 132 miles from Winnipeg, and he added:

The worthy followers of Mother d'Youville have raised a monument on the banks of the Red River far more durable than marble or brass. I offer you this boarding school as a proof of my trust and to recognize the inappreciable services which your Community has rendered to our young country for well over fifty years.<sup>60</sup>

Such an appeal could hardly remain unanswered and Mother Filiatrault encouraged Sister Dionne, the Provincial Superior, to appoint the foundresses. Sister Duffin was

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<sup>59</sup> Sr. Guichon, o.c., pp. 59-60

<sup>60</sup> Orph. Winnipeg, hist. doc. 5.

named Superior and Sisters Ste. Lucie, a professed from St. Boniface and Marie, an auxiliary, were her companions. All three left the vicarial house on November 2, 1898 accompanied by their Provincial Superior who wished to see for herself the welcome which the Grey Nuns would receive. The Oblate Fathers exhibited great joy as did the pupils. The Sisters were amazed at the sympathetic welcome of the latter, but knew that despite this, their task would not be easy. The severe cold easily penetrated the building, the dietary regimen left much to be desired, and besides, there was no domestic help. The foundresses were not surprised to find the water frozen in the house's only supply barrel.<sup>61</sup> Had not the Sisters in the far North accepted the fact that they could not write because the ink had solidified? Sister Duffin did not dwell on the difficulties but rather, she described the beautiful site and spoke of the lovely islands studding the great Rainy Lake.

The presence of the Sisters soon brought about a transformation in the pupils similar to that which had been observed elsewhere. By the spring of 1899, the Sauteux children were singing the Mass with an artistic ability which delighted their parents. As the missionaries had hoped, the pupils were excellent publicity. Soon the adults themselves were calling on the Sisters. A poor woman suffering from tuberculosis asked to be taken to the convent. Unfortunately, when her husband removed her from the canoe where she was reclining, she could not be carried any further. Sister Duffin hastened to her but could do nothing more than to recommend her soul to God.<sup>62</sup>

The missionaries would have more success with the young daughter of Doctor Moksgabaw, nicknamed "the Chief devil of the Reserve," who had allowed Catherine,

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 60-61

<sup>62</sup> Sr. Duffin to the Mother House, July 12, 1899.



one of his two daughters, to live with the women of prayer. Victoire, the youngest, soon was influenced by her elder sister and when she was having a hemorrhage, she said to her father, "Get the missionary, I want to be baptized like Catherine." The famous magician hastened to the mission to request baptism for the little one.<sup>63</sup>

By 1908, the school had succeeded in eliminating desertions completely though there were seventy-eight pupils. There was an increasing number of pupils but unfortunately, in 1930 the Grey Nuns had to leave Kenora after thirty-two years of work. Their services were required for the foundation of the St. Vital Sanatorium for tubercular patients. The Natives were vulnerable to this disease.

The Sisters of Jesus and Mary and the Sisters of Providence at the request of the Oblates, secretly organized the farewell gathering. After a song written for the occasion, a child of the forests read to the Sisters an address which drew tears, for the reader said:

Thank you for your untiring zeal and your entire dedication. You have taught us to know God and we shall try to be worthy of the teaching received. We know that you will not forget us and be assured that we on our part will always remember our devoted Grey Nuns of Kenora<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ann. 1902-03, pp. 50-51.

<sup>64</sup> Ann. 1930-31, pp. 344-346.





## CHAPTER VIII

### 1899-1902

Hardly a year had gone by since Mother Filiatrault had been re-elected to govern the Institute and she had already opened two new houses while the school at Lac La Biche had been transferred to Saddle Lake and Academie Taché had been transformed. This was a great deal of change if one considers that the prudent resolution that no new works would be accepted was still in effect.

The number of Sisters at the beginning of January had risen to 582, an increase of twenty members, while thirteen deaths had been recorded in the past year. Furthermore, there were fourteen Sisters in the infirmary and other valiant workers worn with age or afflicted with tuberculosis who could no longer participate in the community works.

On January 5, the Superior General accompanied Bishop Shanley of Dakota who was visiting the Mother House for the first time. He was amazed at the many works sheltered in this large house. Undoubtedly, this sight sufficed to convince him that it was unwise for him to request another house for his diocese. This attitude did not

apply to the pastor of a parish in Ohio, for a committee from Illinois, and for Bishop Albert Pascal each of whom were requesting the foundation of a hospital.<sup>1</sup>

The Grey Nuns continued to edify people by their proficiency as nurses. After difficult beginnings, St. Vincent's Hospital in Toledo and Holy Cross Hospital in Calgary were developing an excellent reputation and, about Calgary it could even be said

that the non-Catholic hospital, rather than being detrimental to us, is instead an asset. Well informed people cannot help but notice the superiority of our organization over that of the lay institution.<sup>2</sup>

Truly, everything in Calgary was progressing since Father Lacombe, the intrepid Oblate, would soon announce that a Normal School would be established under the direction of the Faithful Companions of Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

That year, the Apostle of the Blackfoot had reached the fiftieth year of his priesthood and the Grey Nuns of St. Albert would celebrate the anniversary in a worthy fashion. There would be a gathering in the humble convent where the pupils would present a drama summarizing Father Lacombe's illustrious career. Archbishop Langevin of St. Boniface who was present could not conceal his admiration. With tears in his eyes and emotion in his voice, His Grace thanked both the teachers and their pupils for being such a credit to the Catholic School System.

The Alberta missionaries would in truth be overwhelmed in September when on the 17, they received a visit from Archbishop Bruchési of Montreal. He himself

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<sup>1</sup> Circ. mens. 1898-1901, pp. 91 and 92.

<sup>2</sup> Sr. Carroll to the Mother House. June 1899.

<sup>3</sup> Circ. mens. 1898-1901, p. 129



would recount the grandiose reception he was given in this small corner of the world.

The venerable Bishop Grandin and his clergy greeted me with the sound of bells while flags fluttered above the Cathedral, the convent and many houses. We embraced and I accepted to be the second coadjutor for a few days.

The Archbishop of Montreal presided at Mass the following morning where he delivered the sermon both in French and in English. He presided at a concert executed by the pupils of the convent in which young Praxède, Mother Filiatrault's godchild, sang a charming little song.<sup>4</sup> Archbishop Bruchési went also to Edmonton and Calgary on his way to British Columbia.<sup>5</sup> On his return, he would say concerning this trip, "I was delighted to observe that the kingdom of God is being extended there by our clergy and religious communities."<sup>6</sup>

Every Grey Nun has the certitude that even in the lowliest task, "she is truly a co-worker with Christ" (Co. 1.3:9). She realizes however, that she cannot accomplish all the good which is offered to her zeal everywhere. This was painful to the Superior General who had the responsibility of attending to the development of already existing projects. In the fall of 1898, she had attended the blessing of the hospital in Cambridge. During the year 1899, she also visited the missions of Toledo and Morristown while

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<sup>4</sup> On one of her visits to the West, the Superior General had accepted to be the godmother of a poor abandoned child to whom she gave her own name: Praxède Filiatrault.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Mother Filiatrault, Sept. 17, 1899.

<sup>6</sup> Visit from Archbishop Bruchési to the M. House. Nov. 4, 1899. On Sept. 18 he had sent the Sup.Gen. the following telegram: "Archbishop Bruchési wishes you to share in our special holiday. Your god-child, Praxède Filiatrault." On his return he had stopped at the Toledo missions.

she delegated her Assistant to carry out the official visitation of the other American houses. There Sister Hamel realized the popularity of the Patronage in Boston as Bishop Williams had chosen to purchase another house to accommodate the working girls. Sister Letellier, the Provincial Superior responsible for the Alberta houses, went to comfort and encourage the Sisters in the far North. Through her delegate, Mother Filiatrault learned that life there was still lived in a heroic fashion with only a few less stressful intervals. Sister Doucet, Superior of the convent at Chipewyan even obtained a small miracle. The gold rush of 1898 had attracted many seekers to this distant land. Two of them, one of whom was a brother of Father Lacombe, stopped at Chipewyan, then at Providence. There they received news of the disaster that had occurred at Dawson which thereafter became a ghost town. They became volunteer carpenters and helped to build the convent which the Sisters occupied on March 16. The small miracle consisted in finding carpenters in the dead of winter in this frigid country.<sup>7</sup>

Sister Letellier reached Providence on July 8, earlier than was customary for the North. She was introduced to this new house of which the residents said, "We can hardly believe our comfort." The visiting Superior meanwhile concealed her emotion before such poverty.

In delegating to the Assistants and the Provincial Superiors the visitation of the far-away houses, the Superior General was able to ensure the development of the projects everywhere. As for the houses in Montreal and surrounding areas, and even in the United States, it was easier for her to visit them herself. In the course of 1898-1899 the Nazareth Institution and the Hospice St. Joseph in Beauharnois would

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<sup>7</sup> Sr. E. Mitchell, *Le Soleil*, p. 133.



expand. The same was true of St. Anne's Orphanage in Worcester, U.S.A.<sup>8</sup>

Even at the Mother House, there was plenty of building in progress. While the kitchen in the St. Mathieu wing was being expanded, balconies were also being added to each storey of the main wing and to the one parallel to Guy Street. The chapel was wired for electricity and the chronicler wrote, "flooded with so much light, one feels as though one is transported into glory" and she noted that the number of bulbs in this area alone was 675.

Concerned about the health of the Sisters, Mother Filiatrault had "a simple platform covered by a rustic roof" built in the yard. "There were long rows of tables and benches while lattice work protected the Sisters from the view of passers-by." There prescribed holidays could be taken through the summer now that the old Carmel had disappeared.

Mother Filiatrault had a remarkable sense of adaptation but she showed equal respect for the past. She remembered the devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows instituted at the old hospital by Father Faillon in 1855. Eager to maintain this devotion, she had a beautiful small shrine set up in the St. Anne corridor. In the centre was a picture of the Mother of God holding the body of her deceased son, while on either side were two angels bearing instruments of the passion.

On the doors of the old hospital at Pointe-à-Callières there had been the monogram of Mary. The Superior General wished to have the same monograms installed at the new Mother House. The chronicles state that the senior Sisters were very pleased at the re-appearance of the Marian sign. However, the doors were more numerous than

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<sup>8</sup> Hist., Orph. Ste Anne, Feb. 6, 1900.

in the old hospital. It was then that another small miracle came about. A worker who had found one of these monograms under a rubbish heap, brought it to his mother. She in turn gave it to one of the little Auxiliary Sisters saying, "Give this to your Superior. It belongs to her since my son found it where he works,... at the former Mother House of the Grey Nuns." Great was Mother Filiatrault's joy at receiving this souvenir just as she was looking for a model of this antique monogram.

The Grey Nuns had a deep devotion to Mary. Mother d'Youville had had recourse to Our Lady in particular instances during her life. It was also to the Mother of God that she would go to seek comfort in times of trial. Thus, it was before Our Lady of Sorrows that the Sisters gathered on July 23 upon learning of the death of Sister Brady, one of the foundresses at Toledo and who had labored there for forty-four years. There were touching demonstrations for her in the parish. A solemn requiem High Mass was sung by a Jesuit in the chapel before a large attendance. The Ursulines offered their services for the choir as Sister Brady and another Sister had provided the singing at the first religious profession which had taken place in their own monastery in Toledo.

On August 20, Sister Brault, the most senior member of the Institute, passed away having accumulated to her credit sixty years of service to the Lord. On October 28, the Sisters deplored the death of Sister Mary Ann Pumphrey at age twenty-eight. The young Sister, a native of Harbor Grace, Newfoundland, had been visited on October 12, by His Excellency Bishop Diomède Falconio, the first Apostolic Delegate to Canada. He had formerly been a missionary in Newfoundland where Mary Ann had received her first Holy Communion from the hand of the future papal delegate.



Nine deaths had been recorded in 1899 and despite this decrease in the number of laborers, a new project was begun toward the end of the year.

### ST. ROCH HOSPITAL, ST. BONIFACE, MAN., 1899

The care of contagious cases had been assumed by the Grey Nuns of this province since 1881. On May 15, Mr. Magher had loaned his house near the hospital so that the Sisters could use it to care for cases of small-pox.<sup>9</sup>

When the epidemic was over, the house was returned to its owner. When the cholera epidemic erupted in 1885, the Grey Nuns who were again called on to care for the afflicted, converted "an old ice house" in order to isolate the patients.

Bishop Henri Faraud, Apostolic Vicar in the Athabaska-Mackenzie region, retired in St-Boniface in a house which he had purchased and considerably improved using his ability as a capable carpenter. He died there on September 26, 1890 at the age of sixty-seven.<sup>10</sup> The Sisters of Miséricorde took over the place temporarily in October 1898.<sup>11</sup> The Grey Nuns then purchased it to house the staff caring for the sick, while another building 24 ft. x 26 ft. was erected for contagious cases.

Construction could not begin until the end of September 1899. Work progressed rapidly but a virulent influenza complicated by scarlet fever and typhoid erupted in the fall compelling the Sisters to once more receive the sick in the former quarters.

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<sup>9</sup> The details which follow are drawn mostly from the chr. of this house.

<sup>10</sup> Benoît, *Vie de Mgr. Taché*, V. 2, pp. 690-700.

<sup>11</sup> Morice, *o.c.*, V. 3, pp. 342-343.

Contagious cases were admitted to the isolation building only on April 25, 1900 and from this date the area continued in operation. Administration had been provided by St. Boniface Hospital and it was only in 1902 that a Superior was appointed in the person of Sister St-Wilfrid. Since no hospital existed for the treatment of tuberculosis, eighteen beds were reserved for this category of patients.

Soon the City of Winnipeg through its representatives appealed to the Grey Nuns to accept all contagious cases in the capital at a compensation rate of seventy-five cents per patient-day.

In 1910, fire broke out at a saw-mill in the neighborhood of St. Roch. The people were surprised that the hospital was not engulfed in the disaster but the Sisters proudly attributed the protection to their beloved Foundress. In the following year, the St-Roch unit became distinct from St-Boniface Hospital; in that year, 460 patients were treated there.

In 1922 it was decided to erect a new and larger building with a hundred-bed capacity. By 1942, preventative measures had controlled contagious diseases so the hospital was closed to such cases and became an annex of St. Boniface Hospital<sup>12</sup> while the Sanatorium remained for the treatment of tuberculosis.

### - 1900 -

In the heart of every Grey Nun, there was a common hope, that of their Venerable Mother's Cause progressing toward beatification. Therefore, one is not surprised that in the chronicles every event concerning the Cause was reported, such as correspondence from Rome as well as any

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<sup>12</sup> St-Roch was later converted into a residence for female employees of the hospital while one department was reserved for a few isolation cases.



initiative taken by the faithful who shared with the Grey Nuns their veneration for Marguerite d'Youville.

In the two first years of the twentieth century, entries would be prolific on the subject. Sister Fauteux was replaced as chronicler by Sister Fortier who in turn recorded all that concerned the precious Cause.<sup>13</sup> It was with unmitigated joy that Sister Fauteux announced on February 4, that a biography of Mother d'Youville by Mrs. Jetté had been published. Mrs. Jetté was the wife of the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Quebec.

May the reading of these pages contribute to the advancement of the Cause which Mrs. Jetté has served with such zeal over the past fifteen years,

was the chronicler's wish shared by the Grey Nuns of Montreal, of St. Hyacinthe, of Ottawa and of Quebec.<sup>14</sup> Father G. Bourassa, a diocesan priest, eulogized the book in *La Semaine Religieuse*:

I hope that it will make further known and loved the religious family of the holy Foundress whose maternal love we admire and which helps us to understand the word of the Divine Master: You shall know the tree by its fruits.<sup>15</sup>

As for the author, she herself explained the genesis of her book.

The thought of writing another biography would never have occurred to me; but in 1884, having been chosen by Father Bonnissant, the Postulator as one of the witnesses in

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<sup>13</sup> Sr. Fauteux was directed by the Sup. Gen. to collect old documents and memoirs. From these would result Vol. 1 of *Hôp. Gén.* and also a biography of Mother d'Youville.

<sup>14</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1898-1901, p. 368.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 369. Fr. Bourassa was from Laval University in Montreal.

the trial, I had the occasion to study this remarkable life in depth. Archbishop Fabre and Father T. Harel, the Apostolic Notary asked me to make a draft of my notes and to publish them. Three years ago, I was again called on to witness and Archbishop Fabre and Monsignor Bruchési renewed the request encouraging me so strongly that I soon set to work.<sup>16</sup>

Mrs. Jetté extolled the merits of this illustrious Canadian woman.

Living at a time when the women of this country were often called to heroism, Madame d'Youville however, was noteworthy among them by her great personality and her sublime virtues.

Archbishop Bruchési of Montreal congratulated the author saying:

You have written an important chapter in the history of the Canadian Church (...). Your study was not limited to external events. You entered into the intimacy of the Foundress' life and you followed her in her continually ascending walk toward perfection(...) Begun in Montreal, this biography was completed in Spencer Wood and it is pleasing to me that from the Governor's house would come such a eulogy of the humble Grey Nun who was a servant of the poor, the sick and the orphaned.<sup>17</sup>

The Archbishop of Montreal was sincere when he said:

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<sup>16</sup> Mrs. B. Jetté, o.c., pp. XXIII et XXIV. Mrs. Jetté had known the Grey Nuns for many years. Being a niece of Sr. Brault, a cousin of Sr. Thibodeau of Ottawa, and having one of her own sisters in the Ottawa Community, she had full access to information from senior Sisters, contemporaries of Sr. Brault who had entered the convent in 1835 and died Aug. 20, 1899, after 64 years of religious life.

<sup>17</sup> Letter of Archbishop Bruchési to the author, Dec. 12, 1899. Judge Jetté was named Lieut. Gov. Jan. 1898.



This biography in making known to the world the work of the four Grey Nun communities, will earn for the author the gratitude of all those who continued the Foundress' work extending even to the Mackenzie region.

Knowledge of this literary work would have repercussions even in France, for thanks to the delicate attention of Mrs. Fabre, the Sisters received an issue of *Paris-Canada* in which Mr. Hector Fabre, brother of the deceased Archbishop of Montreal, had published a commendatory article.

This life of Mother d'Youville is admirable and is admirably well told, he said (...) Mother d'Youville having been born in Canada, her memory is particularly dear to us. Today it is the spouse of the Lieutenant Governor who is soliciting for her, exaltation by Rome, as if nothing had changed since the time when Governors were appointed by His most Christian Majesty and were called Champlain or Frontenac.<sup>18</sup>

The diversity of the works established long ago by the great Canadian lady is continued today in Montreal and beyond its borders. There is a variety even at the Mother House and His Excellency Bishop Falconio, currently on an official visitation at the Grey Nuns, was impressed. "He expressed his astonishment and his admiration," the chronicler noted.

His Excellency was moved at the sight of the babies at the crèche and of the orphans of school age but the Delegate did not visit St. Mathieu wing as yet unfinished. It was only on May 10 that the orphanage was transferred there while the crèche would follow in May 1902.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Article signed Hector Fabre and reproduced in *Circ. mens.* 1898-1901, p. 403.

<sup>19</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1902-03, p. 103.

Before the year 1900 had ended another project called for the dedication of the Grey Nuns. An epidemic of measles was raging at the college in Montreal. The Sulpician priests had to become orderlies but they did not hesitate to yield their duties to the followers of Mother d'Youville. Their country house was converted into a hospital and Sisters Charpentier and Rosconi aided by Sister Aldéa, an admirable little auxiliary Sister, zealously lavished care on the students who recovered rapidly. The requests did not come only from Montreal. Archbishop Langevin of St. Boniface had not given up his plan of founding an orphanage for boys in Winnipeg and the Grey Nuns were again invited.

### **ST. JOSEPH'S ORPHANAGE, WINNIPEG, MANITOBA, 1900**

A tall Grey Nun, Sister Gertrude Duffin, had shown an exceptional ability for adaptation when she had gone to found the Industrial School at Kenora. She soon won the admiration of her 'bronze family' whose parents were equally won over by her amenity and her welcoming attitude.

In April 1900, she was recalled to Montreal where she remained three weeks. She had no idea what was awaiting her, for the Superior General had selected this native of Toledo, who had adjusted so well to the Canadian West, as foundress of the orphanage. Sister Duffin expressed surprise when she learned what role had befallen her, and so Mother Filiatrault invited her to go before the Blessed Sacrament to offer her sacrifice. In connivance with the sacristine, the Superior General had reserved a surprise for her. While she was recollected at the back of the chapel a signal was given and all lights went on. Electricity had just recently been installed. Sister Duffin was overcome with



awe and believed she was in glory.<sup>20</sup> She admitted that this fore-taste gave her the courage she needed and she left Montreal in the evening of May 2 en route toward her future duties.<sup>21</sup>

The project under the direction of a committee of lay persons led by Father P.D. Guillet, o.m.i., the pastor, had its base in the former Ste-Marie rectory. Sister Ward, the second Assistant General who was then visiting the houses in the West, described it as follows:

The house can easily accommodate about thirty children. It has a recreation room, porches, a refectory and dormitories as well as a kitchen, a pantry and finally room for the Sisters. The foundress will find that there is electricity and a lovely recreation yard where the children, between five and twelve years of age, can play.

Sister Duffin arrived in Winnipeg on May 7 on the eve of the blessing of the orphanage which was not yet completed since seven men were still at work. The need was urgent and the children would have to be admitted without delay. The foundress wrote:

There were many people and poor Sister Duffin stood in the corridor in order to be present to all these visitors. Sweat and tears blinded me.

But the sense of humor in this Grey Nun soon prevailed. At the sight of the laborers about their business, Sister Duffin concluded philosophically, "We must be resigned to work in the sight of God and of men."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> A.S.G.M. Biog. Sr. Duffin

<sup>21</sup> During her stay in Mt'l. Sr. Duffin was pleased to notice that "as in the past" the Americans still visited the Mother House during the noon hour.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Sr. Duffin, May 1900.

We read in the chronicles that initially, five children were admitted and "we had to begin by dressing them for, as they are, we could consider them naked." By the beginning of July, twenty-four were attending the Brothers' school close to the orphanage and the people of the neighborhood were astounded at the rapid transformation in these children who but a short time ago had no other home than the streets. Soon a Ladies' Auxiliary was formed under the direction of Mrs. H.T. Champion. Their generous help was appreciated for the Government grant was minimal.<sup>23</sup>

The work was already thriving when Mother Filiatrault visited in 1901. By 1904, the thought of expansion had to be considered. Land valued at \$1,500.00 was purchased from the Oblates. In that year, Sister Duffin was replaced by Sister St. Alfred when she was called to assume the direction of the hospital at Morristown. Two years later the expansion was completed and seventy-four orphans were cared for with an increased staff. Sister Bellavance, one of the newcomers would give the orphans exceptionally good care and be loved by them as a mother.<sup>24</sup> The thankless function of canvasser befell her but as she combed the countryside people said of her that "she went about here doing good."

St. Joseph's Orphanage fortunately escaped the hurricane of August 10, 1907, although a great many trees were twisted and broken. A school two miles from there was completely destroyed while a new house was lifted from its base with its roof planted in the ground several feet away from its foundation. The house of the Champagne family was carried 380 ft. away from its original site. As the storm waged, Mrs. Champagne and her three young

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<sup>23</sup> Orph. Wpg. Chron., p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> A.S.G.M. biog. Sr. Bellavance.



daughters saw "the iron framework of a bed being completely twisted."<sup>25</sup>

In 1910, the orphanage was enlarged again and the capacity was increased to accommodate 150 children "who gratify us by their love and application" wrote Sister Prince. In 1915, an English periodical in the Capital City granted prizes to two pupils of the institution who distinguished themselves in a composition entitled "The Seven Wonders of Winnipeg."<sup>26</sup>

Epidemics worked their havoc at the institution but the only death recorded was that of Sister Bellavance who became a victim of influenza on November 7, 1918. Soon there would be 346 children of sixteen different nationalities in this institution where all were developing in a choice setting largely supported by public charity.<sup>27</sup>

When the Grey Nuns withdrew from the orphanage in 1938, they were replaced by the Sisters of Providence of Kingston. At the request of Bishop Sinnott of Winnipeg, the pioneers assumed the founding of a hospital at Ste-Rose-du-Lac. It was with regret that the Sisters left this institution where they had served for thirty-eight years but they were accustomed to leave a thriving institution in order to open another where they would again experience the hardships inherent to a new foundation.

### - 1901-1902 -

The early customs had been preserved with great respect by Mother General. Thus, early in 1901 on either side of the chapel entrance a framed sentence was placed which read: To the Eternal King, the immortal, invisible, and

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<sup>25</sup> Circ. mens. 1906-08, pp. 366-377.

<sup>26</sup> Circ. mens. 1916-1918, p. 273

<sup>27</sup> Circ. mens. 1922-23, pp. 218-221.

only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever (1 Tim. 1:17). The other, taken from Ps. 84, read "How lovely is your dwelling place my King and my God. My soul sings for joy before the living God".

As was the case for Sister Ethier,<sup>28</sup> many Sisters returning to the Mother House after years of service in the missions found in the new place the quotations they had meditated upon long ago at the old hospital of Pointe-à-Callières.

Mother Filiatrault, anxious to encourage this remembrance of the past in order to ascertain the direction for the future, entrusted to Sister Boire, one of her secretaries, the editing of a pamphlet indicating the principal events which stood out in the life of the Foundress and her Community "to our day".<sup>29</sup>

From far and wide testimonies of special favors attributed to the intercession of Mother d'Youville abounded. Thus in January, when a fire almost completely destroyed the buildings on the block circumscribed by the streets of St. Sacrament, St. Pierre, St. Paul and St. Nicolas, only the store of Messrs Martin and Lapiere was spared. Mr. Martin stated that the protection was attributable to Mother d'Youville whose picture he had affixed to the walls of his house and store. The grateful merchant would in the future be generous toward the northern missions.

Mr. Martin was not the only one in Montreal to consider Mother d'Youville an eminent woman, worthy of the highest honors for in December, at the Superior General's suggestion, City Council which had decided to

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<sup>28</sup> A.S.G.M. doss. Sr. Ethier. The practice of using thought-provoking "quotations" was continued under the Superiorship of Mother Hamel.

<sup>29</sup> The pamphlet was distributed to the Sisters on the Sup. Gen.'s feast day and a new edition soon became necessary.



convert Marché Ste. Anne into a recreation park, called it Place d'Youville.<sup>30</sup>

Alderman Martineau stated that the biography of Mother d'Youville written by Mrs. Jetté may have played a part in the awakening of interest among the people who now knew better the Foundress "of one of our most worthy institutions."<sup>31</sup> The alderman little knew that he was echoing the decision from Rome which that year proclaimed the Decree De Fama, that is her reputation of holiness. The Grey Nuns learned the news in a letter from Father Louis Colin, Superior of the Montreal Seminary who had been to Rome in June. This new step toward beatification aroused among the Grey Nuns an enthusiasm which was manifested by a greater desire to imitate the Mother of Universal Charity. Meanwhile, before her departure for the visitation of the St. Boniface vicariate, Mother Filiatrault acquiesced to the request of Father Troie, the pastor at Notre Dame and named Sister Charpentier sacristan for the 'Parish'.

The Superior General fulfilled her duty of visiting each of the far away missions except that of Tundra Mountain which her secretary called the "Mountain of Sacrifice and of Privations."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The name of Parliament Square had first been suggested but on Dec. 16, 1901 Place d'Youville prevailed with 28 votes to 6.

<sup>31</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1898-1901, p. 783. Two biographies had been published till then. There were no more copies of the one written by Father Faillon, historian. The English biography, written by Mgr. Ramsay "at the request of the American missions" had been distributed in the United States. As for the two memoirs of Fr. Charles Dufrost, son of Mde. d'Youville, the writings of Fr. E. Montgolfier and of Fr. Antoine Sattin, p.s.s., they had remained as manuscripts.

<sup>32</sup> Sr. Boire to the Mother House, May 18, 1901.

She had no sooner returned from the West than she left for the United States to deal with the persistent problem, that of the orphanage in Toledo. The Bishop wished to bring it under diocesan jurisdiction, to which the Superior General agreed but the transfer would take place only later at which time it would be called St. Anthony's Orphanage to distinguish it from St. Vincent's Hospital.

On her return from such a circuit, it was not surprising to read in the chronicles, that the Superior General had returned to Montreal on June 29, "tired and ailing;" and yet, she had chosen to be present at a family feast, that of the golden jubilee of Sister Gaudry's religious profession which was being celebrated that same evening. A poem was sung to her which summarized her Grey Nun activities at the service of the children at St. Joseph's Asylum where formerly she had welcomed a lively, intelligent little boy who was now the Archbishop of Montreal. Mrs. Bruchési had also wished to offer the humble Grey Nun a basket of natural flowers as well as two well-chosen books. On the following day, the Archbishop himself came. He evoked his own memories of the past and though admittedly, he was strong and could control his emotions before audiences, he was visibly overcome at the memory of the steps of St-Joseph Asylum. For their part, the Sisters and especially Sister Gaudry herself had not forgotten him who as an adolescent, had accompanied his father to the annual banquet for the old folks. The celebration ended joyfully; but several days later, when Sister Gaudry saw that the feast-day song had appeared in the press, she was mortified. She would have preferred anonymity as would have done her Mother and Model who had never sought personal glory.



## LEOMINSTER SCHOOL AND NASHUA ORPHANAGE, U.S.A. - 1901

Two new foundations were accepted in 1901; both in the United States: the school of Leominster in the diocese of Springfield, Massachusetts, and the orphanage of Nashua in that of Manchester, New Hampshire. The first lasted only two years due to the fact that the Sisters were recalled in order to relieve other missions where the staff was overburdened.

As for the second, it opened on April 9, under the direction of Sisters Deguire and Paquin and would rally the sympathy of the population as it was maintained only thanks to the people's generosity. Hardly two years had elapsed when consideration had to be given to a new and larger building. This institution would fulfill a social and humanitarian purpose for many years.

Mother Filiatrault whose term of office was nearing its end, still had much to accomplish and she would not evade her responsibility. Along with her Council, she decided to expand the St. Anthony's Home for the elderly in Longueuil<sup>33</sup> while in the spring of 1902, work began at the Mother House on the construction of a boiler-room measuring 35 ft. by 40 ft. The old boilers could not produce sufficient heat for this huge building. The installation of "enormous boilers measuring 12 ft. by 6 ft. in diameter" did not occur without difficulty. A motor had to be installed in the neighboring yard to provide heat for cooking while the laundry was done at one of the missions close by: either at Hôpital Notre-Dame or at Asile Ste. Cunégonde.

On May 28 while this work was going on, the crèche was moved to its new quarters on the fourth floor of the St.

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<sup>33</sup> P. Arch. 1872-77.

Mathieu wing. Professed Sisters, novices and postulants helped to move the children who protested loudly since the chronicler noted that a veritable cacophony was heard which could have grated the ears of artists.<sup>34</sup> Statistics on this occasion indicated that, since the distant days of 1754, 32,952 children had been taken in by the Grey Nuns.<sup>35</sup> This crèche in its new quarters drew many visitors, namely Doctors Rottot, Hingston, Lachapelle and Cormier, Father Bourassa from the University, as well as "forty women eager to see these small babes in blue and white, who were so tiny and so sweet" and to admire the large sunny nurseries.

It was understandable that the burden of work affected the Sisters' health. On July 11, they deplored the death of Sister Marguerite Stacy-Michel, a heroic little Auxiliary Sister of Iroquois origin, born at Caughnawaga whose career ended at age twenty-three. The chronicler wrote of her:

She had edified us by her piety and her selflessness no less than by her patience during the pneumonia which brought an early end to her life.

In order to minimize the effects of the excessive workload, days of relaxation at the Carmel were restored. This was a property situated in the parish of Westmount where the Sisters occasionally spent a day of leisure. This property was now smaller in size since part of it had been given up for the establishment of a chapel at the request of Archbishop Bruchési.<sup>36</sup> Two years earlier a fire had partially destroyed the modest chalet where the Sisters had found shelter. Fortunately, the chalet had been repaired, for the day the Sisters had chosen to go there often turned out to be rainy.

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<sup>34</sup> Circ. mens. 1902-03, p. 103.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 225

<sup>36</sup> Land given up April 20, 1900 for the construction of a chapel which would later become the Church of St. Léon.



Despite hard work, bereavements and difficulties, life was not gloomy at the convent. On July 29, when forty-five Grey missionaries arrived from the States for their annual retreat, a triumphal welcome was organized for them as some of them had not been to Montreal for two or three years. The children of the orphanage perched on trapezes and swings waved American flags and beat drums the sound of which was accompanied by joyful hurrahs to celebrate the home-coming. While the new arrivals were surprised, the Montrealers felt they had outdone the Americans in hospitality.

The retreat restored silence in the convent. This silence impressed the mitred abbot of the Trappist Monks of Oka although he was himself a specialist of silence. He had come to appeal to the charity of the Grey Nuns. On July 24, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, their monastery had been destroyed by fire while all the monks were in the fields. Though they hastened to the scene, they were able to save only the sacred vessels and a few altar decorations. The Father Abbot now solicited the help of the Sisters to make habits for his monks.

True to tradition, the followers of Mother d'Youville undertook the task of making the large white cassocks and the black scapulars worn by the sons of St-Benedict. Mother d'Youville had introduced a similar service to the clergy of the various parishes, notably that of l'Assumption, the first appearing in records kept by the Foundress herself.





## CHAPTER IX

### 1903-1906

When on October 6, 1902, Mother Mathilde Hamel accepted to guide the destiny of the Institute she did not anticipate all the events which would highlight her five-year mandate.

Providence however, had admirably prepared her for her duties. Having entered the convent on October 16, 1856 when Mother Slocombe was Director of Formation, Sister Hamel had the privilege of being initiated to the interior life, to the Youvillian spirituality by a woman highly gifted, a model religious; a privilege which the novice - and later the professed Sister would appreciate at full value. The young religious pronounced her vows on October 20, 1858 and was appointed assistant-director in the novitiate, then bursar at the convent in St. Benoît. On April 27, 1869, she left for the Canadian West where she soon gave proof of her ability for by 1871, she became principal at the boarding school and then Superior. Before entering the convent, she had been a teacher. She became distinguished as such in St. Boniface where difficulties ensued from an

unauspicious law.<sup>1</sup> It was said of her that her damaged and torn hands were evidence that she labored at construction simultaneously with education.<sup>2</sup>

In 1872, at the time of Mother Slocombe's premature death, she had been delegated to the Chapter and had arrived in Montreal on July 9 with Sister Charlebois, the Assistant General hastily summoned from the West where she was on an official visitation of the various missions. In November, Mother Dupuis announced that Sister Hamel had been named Superior of the vicariate of St. Boniface, a position which she held for the term prescribed by the Constitutions. She then remained in the Council as the Assistant. A teacher in the full sense of the term, Sister Hamel indeed promoted education; "We are educators", she would say to her Sisters and this watchword expressed the high regard she had for teaching. With equal magnanimity she attended to all works of charity.

She had an excellent understanding of the eminent dignity of the poor and had no greater joy than that of helping her needy brothers and sisters. She therefore

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<sup>1</sup> The details concerning Mother Hamel were taken from her biography kept in the ASGM. It is interesting to note that Elisabeth Levesque, one of Miss Hamel's students, would follow her to the Grey Nuns eight years later under the name of Sr. Roy and would in turn fulfill the duties of assistant-secretary, organist at the Mother House, professor of French, English and music at the Nazareth Institution, Director of Formation, capitular at the Chapter of 1897 and secretary to the Superior General at the Chapter of 1902. She died on March 15, 1908. One of Sr. Hamel's younger sisters, Sr. Miville also entered the novitiate. She died May 25, 1902.

<sup>2</sup> The building in question here was the first boarding school, the 'yellow house' to which an extension was added in 1871. In 1881-83, under the direction of Archbishop Taché, the larger boarding school was built which after 1898, became part of Hospice Taché.



approved the foundations. At her instigation twelve new works were opened over a five year period.

In 1892, she was delegated by Mother Deschamps to carry out the visitation of the convents in Alberta, a mandate which she carried out to the great satisfaction of all the Sisters. Three years later, her health was declining so Sister Hamel was recalled to the Mother House for reduced activity during which she would visit a few of the American missions. She returned to St. Boniface in October and two years later was elected as Assistant General in the Congregation.

This humble religious was appreciated for her vast experience which enabled her to provide a precious contribution within the Council. Her long stay in St. Boniface, the stopping point for all travellers en route for the Territories, allowed her to become acquainted with the Grey Nun missionaries on their way there, especially those recruited in Brittany by the Oblates. She lived through the dark days of the Riel uprising 1870-1885. She saw Archbishop Taché at work as well as Bishops Faraud, Clut, Grouard, Pascal, Legal and the famous Bishop Grandin who died on June 3, 1902 highly esteemed for his holiness. The "saintly" Bishop thanked especially the first Grey Nun laborers who came to the remote lands. He entrusted to his coadjutor, Bishop Legal, the completion of the cathedral for which the excavation had just begun.<sup>3</sup> The illustrious work of the beloved Oblate would continue and his Cause would one day be introduced in Rome.

As Assistant General, Mother Hamel had been able to observe Mother Filiatrault at work and to become acquainted with the management of the general

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<sup>3</sup> Circ. mens. 1902-03, p. 11. Sr. Grandin was at her uncle's bedside. As for Fr. Grandin, nephew of the deceased, he returned from St. Paul des Métis in time for the funeral on June 10.

administration. In this capacity she had reflected a kindness and firmness which won her the esteem of the Capitulars who entrusted to her the general responsibility of the whole Community. As Assistants, she was given Sisters Elodie Mailloux, Elizabeth Ward and Praxède Filiatrault while Sister Octavie Dugas assumed the duties of Director of Formation and Sister Roy those of secretary.<sup>4</sup> In her own way, Mother Hamel would show that "though the administration changed, the spirit remained the same."<sup>5</sup> Consequently, two weeks after her election when the feast of Sister Mailloux was celebrated, the Superior General amiably remarked that on this day, the title of assistant applied to all the Sisters.<sup>6</sup>

When on October 17, Father Lacombe visited the Grey Nuns they were happy to learn that the diplomatic and religious mission entrusted to him two years earlier by the bishops of the West, had been successful. He had sought to obtain Ukranian religious missionaries destined to protect the faith of the Ukranians, Greeks and Ruthenians dispersed in the vast Territories. There were 25,000 in the diocese of St. Boniface alone. The eminent Oblate had gone to Vienna in 1900 accompanied by Sisters of the Franciscan order who served as interpreters. He was received in audience by the Prime Minister and expressed the desire to go to the Ukraine. The Government paid his travelling expenses and Father Lacombe was welcomed by the Bishop of Ukraine who promised to help his compatriots. On his return to

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<sup>4</sup> Sr. Mailloux was the Superior at Notre-Dame Hospital. The Administrators expressed their regrets at her departure but were comforted at the thought of the honor which befell her. As for Bishop Langevin, he experienced great pride in the fact that Mother Hamel and Sister Dugas, two former missionaries of St. Boniface, had been judged worthy to be chosen by the Capitulars.

<sup>5</sup> Message addressed to the Srs. Oct. 23, 1902 by the Dir. of the College of Mtl.

<sup>6</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1902-03, p. 171.



Vienna, the missionary was granted an audience by the Emperor Francis Joseph during which he was thanked "for the support he is showing by pleading the cause of the empire. All means must be taken so that those people do not lose the faith," said the Emperor.<sup>7</sup>

There was a delay of two years before the promise could be realized but then the dauntless Oblate was delighted to announce to the Sisters that "four Basilian priests and one brother as well as a diocesan priest and four Sisters are on their way to the missions".<sup>8</sup>

The calamitous persecution in France would bring about the other arrivals. Thus the Poor Clares settled in Valleyfield and the Sisters of Notre- Dame de l'Espérance in Montreal.<sup>9</sup> The Grey Nuns themselves received a visit from exiled persons on April 27. Father Lecorre returning from France had brought with him two young ladies who wished to embrace religious life. Having come to visit his niece, Sister Lecorre, he expressed his astonishment that she did not show more interest to the young ladies. It was then that the Grey Nun recognized in one of them the resemblance of an older sister. As for the second, she hesitated. It was however a younger sister who was only nine years old when Eugénie had left home seven years previously. One can imagine that only tears could express the joy of meeting once again.<sup>10</sup>

Another moving incident happened in Calgary on October 19. The Filles de Jésus whose eighty convents in

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<sup>7</sup> Fr. Lacombe's account of Apr. 10, 1902, reproduced in *Circ. mens.* 1902-03, pp. 71-75.

<sup>8</sup> Fr. Lacombe obtained from Sir Shaughnessy, Pres. of C.P.R. a considerable rebate for the travels of these missionaries from Montreal to the far Northwest.

<sup>9</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1902-03, p. 81.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

France had closed, had accepted Bishop Legal's invitation to assume housekeeping duties at the bishop's residence in St. Albert and of the Oblate rectory in Edmonton. Sister Marie de St. Elzéar, the Superior of the group, was the elder sister of Sister Prono, a Grey Nun who had been recruited in Brittany and had become a missionary in Calgary. "She thought that she had said a final farewell to her five religious sisters when she left Brittany in 1895; and now she would again see one of her older sisters." She expressed her joy in a letter to Sister Ward. "I am all the more pleased because I had never for a moment expected to see any of my relatives in Canada (...) Bishop Legal will be in Calgary on June 19 to meet them"<sup>11</sup>. The Filles de Jésus, on their arrival in Montreal, went to the Sisters of Providence. It was there that they received Mother Hamel's invitation to visit the Mother House. Sister Marie St. Elzéar was moved when she saw the convent where her sister Alice had been initiated to religious life.

If unexpected meetings brought joy which was shared by all the Grey Nuns, it is also true that trials were likewise shared by all members of the community. Toward the end of December 1902, it was learned that the school at Kenora had narrowly escaped a fire as had the Orphelinat Catholique de Montréal on February 1, 1903 when the shelves and all their contents had been reduced to ashes. In both cases, the protection was attributed to Mother d'Youville.

The Grey Nuns sympathized with the woes of the northern mission of Providence tried by an epidemic. All the children were afflicted first by measles, then by scarlet fever followed by diphtheria and dysentery.<sup>12</sup> As for the Athabaska station, they praised Divine Providence which

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 164-165.

<sup>12</sup> Sr. Beaudin to the Mother House, Nov. 21, 1902.



had so admirably provided for the needs by a plentiful crop of potatoes along with an abundance of fish which had been caught without difficulty.<sup>13</sup>

In Montreal, there was a strike at the street car company in early January when the national pride<sup>14</sup> over hockey was at its height. The Grey Nuns heard about it but their daily program was not altered thereby. This was not the case on February 16 when Archbishop Bruchési came in person to inform the community about the new directive concerning the election of the General Council. His Grace was in Rome at the time of the Chapter of 1902.

Had I presided at the elections, I would have established what I am establishing now, said the Archbishop. After two or three terms of administration, a Superior General must have acquired much knowledge and experience (...) It is important then to place her in a position where she can exercise the most influence possible. This is what led me to suggest that Mother Filiatrault resign. I could not impose this since she had been elected by the Chapter (...)

Mother Filiatrault understood the wisdom of this suggestion and in all freedom she resigned her position as third Assistant General. "Henceforth she will be responsible for the Youville Vicariate and will reside in Longueuil (...) It is I who suggested this resignation, I alone, and I assume the full responsibility for it," declared the Archbishop.<sup>15</sup>

Mother Filiatrault took up her new position the following day and three days later, the vacancy was filled

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<sup>13</sup> Sr. McDougall to the Mother House, Dec. 23, 1902.

<sup>14</sup> Rumilly, O.C., V. 10, pp. 205 and 206.

<sup>15</sup> Words reproduced in a letter from Mother Hamel to the Srs. dated Feb. 20, 1903, Archbishop Bruchési also announced that he had become the ecclesiastical superior of the Grey Nuns, thus replacing Fr. Louis Colin, p.s.s., who had died Nov. 28, 1902. Fr. Charles Lecoq replaced the latter as Sup. of the Seminary.

when the Council chose Sister Anna Piché, then Superior at the school in Salem. The faith shown by Mother Filiatrault was equalled only by the humility with which the new Assistant accepted the promotion. Though she was small in size, she was magnanimous of soul.

Mother Hamel, eager to be better acquainted with the convents of the Boston vicariate, set out for the great city on February 27. She was therefore absent from the Mother House when His Excellency, Bishop Donato Sbaretti, the new Apostolic Delegate, visited on March 11. Like his predecessor, he was amazed at the diversity of ministries and was prompted to say in faltering French:

Your vocation makes you resemble God who is universal truth and goodness. Other communities usually have only one work. Your Institution is an honor and a glory to society, to the Church and to God.<sup>16</sup>

Sister Mailloux did the honors of the house with the distinction which characterized her.

Three days later, the Superior General's patronal feast (Ste. Mathilde) was celebrated at the school in Salem. While all the Sisters of the Mother House were there in spirit, only Sisters Ste. Angèle and Boisvert, missionaries from the far north, were delegated by Sister Mailloux to attend the festivities. The Sisters of Salem experienced a great joy which would however demand a ransom.

Mother General returned from the United States on the morning of April 17. During her absence, five novices had dedicated themselves irrevocably to God and several postulants had donned the new black and white habit adopted at the last Chapter.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, death had

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<sup>16</sup> Circ. mens. 1902-03, p. 310.

<sup>17</sup> This new uniform was worn for the first time on Dec. 18, 1902.



also brought ravage since Sisters Chapleau and Lavallée-St-Octave had been called back to God, the latter being only twenty-two years old.

The Institute however numbered 635 Sisters despite the precocious deaths and the General Council consented to create a new mission in the land of the great white silence at Fort Resolution on the banks of Great Slave Lake. Sister Boisvert who expected to return to the convent in Providence would have only a brief stay there since to her befell the duty of founding the Hospice of St. Joseph near one of the largest bodies of fresh water in the world. Bishop Isidore Clut had been residing at Lesser Slave Lake for several years. He had received episcopal consecration at the hands of Bishop Faraud on August 15, 1867 at the mission of the Nativity at Lake Athabaska where the first Grey Nuns, en route to the Mackenzie region, had stopped for a few days.

Bishop Clut was not present at the arrival of these missionaries as he had died on July 9 at the age of seventy-one after forty-six years of apostolic work in the most remote area of Canada.

The greatest bereavement of all and one which affected the entire Church, was that of His Holiness Pope Leo XIII who died on July 20 at the age of ninety-four. Archbishop Bruchési wished to signal the event and at four o'clock in the afternoon, the bells tolled from every steeple in the locality. The Cathedral was decked in mourning only three weeks after it had taken on a festive atmosphere. The occasion then had been the unveiling of a monument in memory of Bishop Bourget. The sculptor was Philippe Hébert while the pedestal of Canadian granite was the work of Georges Piché.

In the course of a visit to the Grey Nuns on August 9, Father Clapin, Superior of the Canadian College in Rome,

underlined that "the Pope may die but the papacy lives on." He spoke in high praise of Cardinal Sarto, the patriarch of Venice who on August 4 had been elected as Pius X. The Grey Nuns did not yet know that this election would bring about an innovation requiring help from the Trappist Monks at Oka. On August 16, the Archbishop of Montreal ruled that henceforth, "the high Mass and Vespers would be celebrated every Sunday in the chapel. Plain chant must be adopted for these according to the method of Solesmes". The new Pontiff's predilection for Gregorian chant was known and he heartily encouraged those who attempted to reform liturgical music.

The Superior General therefore appealed to Father Guillaume from the Trappist Monastery and he came to teach the Grey Nuns "to pray with beauty." The followers of Mother d'Youville deemed themselves well rewarded for the services rendered to the Trappists when their monastery had been destroyed by fire in the previous year.

The Trappists were not the only ones who considered themselves indebted to the Grey Nuns. Since August 31, they had hosted four Sisters of Ste. Chrétienne who had been expelled from France and had crossed the Atlantic at the request of a priest from the United States. Unable to speak any English, it was impossible for them to meet requirements. It was then that the General Council of the Grey Nuns decided, with the approval of Bishop Williams of Boston, to concede to them the school in Salem where teaching was conducted in French. The Sisters in exile were overjoyed and could find no words to express their gratitude. They left the Mother House on December 12 and aware of the difference in teaching methods, they requested the help of Sister Darche who left on January 2 to go and share with them her long experience. This community was saved from extinction and would flourish



on American soil. The Grey Nuns were the first to rejoice at their good fortune.

## HOSPICE ST. JOSEPH, FORT RESOLUTION

### North West Territories, 1903.

The Vicariate of the North West Territories was subdivided in the fall of 1901. Bishop Grouard remained the titular of the Athabaska region while the Bishop of Andramyte, Bishop Gabriel Breynat, assumed the direction of the Mackenzie area. The youthful Bishop was consecrated in the chapel at St- Albert on April 6 of the following year by Bishop Grouard who had ordained him at Liège eleven years earlier. The consecrating bishop was assisted by two veterans, namely Bishop Clut and Bishop Pascal while Archbishop Langevin of St. Boniface presided at the celebration. Bishops Dontenwill and Legal were present as well as ten members of the Clergy.<sup>18</sup>

The Bishop-elect seemed crushed beneath the burden being placed upon him while everyone in the congregation had in mind Bishop Grandin, who because of extreme weakness, had been unable to participate in the event.

Though the young Bishop was overwhelmed by the honor which had befallen him, he resolved to promote the cause of these "the most difficult missions in the whole world" where he had already been working for several years. He knew on what conditions his predecessors had obtained the cooperation of the Grey Nuns. In 1859, when Archbishop Taché had requested a few Sisters to found convents at St. Albert and Ile-à-la-Crosse, he could not even promise to provide their livelihood. Mother Deschamps had then replied: "In that case, our sisters shall fast along with

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<sup>18</sup> Circ. mens. 1902-03, p. 78.

<sup>19</sup> Drouin, Sr. C. o. c., V. 2, p. 103.

the Oblates and shall beg God to help both".<sup>19</sup> This first step on the path of heroism was to be followed by many others and it was as a sequel to this unforgettable response that the missions of Providence and Chipewyan had been opened in 1867 and 1874 respectively.

Bishop Breynat having stopped in Montreal on his way to France, visited the Mother House of the Grey Nuns on January 23 and obtained from Mother Hamel the promise to send other Grey Nuns to this remote part of the earth. It was he who announced the news to the community assembled. He commented:

I have visited the missions of the Yukon. Everywhere I found much abnegation and good will; but the channels of communication with the civilized countries being much easier, the sacrifices do not compare with those of missionaries in the extreme north.<sup>20</sup>

It was decided that the new mission would be established at Fort Resolution so it was inferred that the Sisters named would have to be persons determined to accept any sacrifice. Mother Hamel selected Sister Boisvert who had come to Providence in 1882. Consequently she was well aware of the difficulties which awaited her, especially of the fact that the difficulties foreseen have a way of being replaced by the unimaginable. She was given two young Sisters professed on March 13, 1903, namely, Sisters McQuillan and G n reux and two precious helpers, Sisters Honorine and Ernestine.

The group left Montreal on Monday, April 20 and arrived in Resolution in mid-June. It had been thought that the summer season as well as the ships plying the Mackenzie would greatly facilitate the voyage. Sister Boisvert had prudently avoided setting a precise itinerary.

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<sup>20</sup> Circ. mens. 1902-03, p. 271.



Fortunately so, for the St. Alphonse delayed by the wind, also had to struggle with floating ice which finally imprisoned it. The Sisters had to spend the night aboard the ship while the shore appeared so close they could have stepped off. Finally, at eleven o'clock in the morning of June 19, they landed before a crowd of inquisitive Natives who had gathered there. A native woman eyed the newcomers from head to foot and declared in a doctoral tone: "Their dress would be prettier if it were red." Nevertheless, despite the color of their dress, the Sisters were welcomed with joy. However, Fathers Dupire and Mansoz could not conceal their embarrassment. The missionaries had not been expected this year. The letter announcing their coming reached its destination one month after their arrival. Consequently only a roofless framework could be seen near the mission. Like their predecessors the newcomers of the twentieth century learned to adapt to circumstances and the attic of the Oblates' house became their refuge. This refuge which was six feet high in the centre was only four feet at the sides. Besides, it was the place where the meat, dried fish and other provisions were stored, while mosquitoes and mice considered it their domain. It was on their knees that each night the foundresses spread out on the knotted floor the blankets for their beds. They were soon overtaken by sound sleep. One night, their slumber was interrupted by the strange sound of rattling of sleigh bells close by. They thought of reprisals on the part of the mice, but Sister Ernestine bravely investigating the corner from which the sound was emerging discovered a cord fastened to a harness to which bells were attached. An anonymous hand had been pulling the cord. This was a false alarm probably playfully caused by their hosts and so philosophically, they went back to sleep.

In the end, despite the progress of the new century, the foundresses at Resolution experienced the same difficulties as their predecessors had except that they were the object

of Miss Tierney's bounty. Miss Tierney, who was a boarder at the Mother House, seemed bent on imitating Mrs. Tiffin's generosity. She sent to Resolution a box containing articles and vestments for the liturgy.<sup>21</sup> On July 24, the Sisters moved into their house as yet unfinished but the space was occupied only gradually, as each area was completed. Blankets were hung as partitions and a ladder close by gave hope that soon the second storey would have a proper floor.

In the meantime, the school was opened. Three girls and two boys were taken in, given a bath and cleared of vermin. This procedure was the sole condition for admission. One little boy was offended and fled naked from this unfriendly place which took all the clothes off one's back. He was soon returned by an Oblate Brother.

In September, twenty-five children registered. They had no notion of discipline and the circumstances did not make it any easier for the mud-walling kept falling to the floor leaving open gaps through which the children could see what was going on outside. If the children of the wilderness thought that the distractions would last forever, they were mistaken. As a born educator, Sister McQuillan lost no time in capturing their interest and soon the children in her care were eager to learn.

In Resolution as well, hunger was experienced and Bishop Breynat had to appeal to the 'parishioners'. Never before had this procedure been used, as the Amerindians of these regions believed they were doing the missionaries a favor by placing their children in school. This time, the

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<sup>21</sup> Miss Tierney was happy to supply natural flowers for the Mother House chapel on feast days. She had the small monstrance decked with family jewels and supplied the organ with electric bellows. On the day her lady-companion entered the novitiate, she celebrated the event by donating a golden ciborium mounted with two diamonds. Miss Johnson entered on Nov. 21, 1903 but left the following Oct.



procedure was successful. Parents brought their contribution: eleven elk which became the daily menu. This monotony was difficult to adjust to and despite her generosity, Sister G n reux admitted defeat and returned to her homeland.

Despite all odds, the school progressed and in 1925 when Sister McQuillan left Resolution to found another convent, she claimed she had evangelized four generations. She went to Aklavik, the Brown Bear country, fifty miles from the Beaufort Sea. "In the souls of these children, I could recognize the Christian influence which I had attempted to impart to their parents or grand-parents."<sup>22</sup>

Along with her companions she shared the honor of a testimonial addressed by Doctor Bourget to Sister Ste. Eug nie on February 22, 1924.

If the white people can circulate here without fear of ambush from the Indians, if they can count on help from these people, if their property is relatively safe anywhere, it is due to the faith brought to the Natives by the bishops and priest missionaries.

He revealed his great appreciation for the instruction dispensed by the Sisters.

I congratulate you and your personnel for the very visible progress made by the children under your direction. It must be both a joy and a pride to see your efforts being crowned with success.

January 2, 1932 marked the passing of Sister Honorine who very quietly had accomplished so much good. Two years later, on June 22, 1934, Sister Ernestine returned to God after two years of suffering in the infirmary at the Mother House.

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<sup>22</sup> ASGM. doss. Sr. McQuillan.

The seed sown by the foundresses had produced a hundredfold. There was now a prosperous convent in Resolution and in February 1939, a hospital was built which would be enlarged in 1947 and again in 1953.

When in 1942, a company of 1,218 American soldiers, for the most part blacks, came to build a highway to Alaska along the Mackenzie, they were amazed to find a hospital functioning in such a forbidding land. The newcomers would have other surprises. Their ultra-modern apparatus, caterpillars, bull-dozers, planes, hydro-planes and bombers could not replace the need for barges. These champions of speed were forced to fall in step.

Bishop Trocellier eloquently summarized the work of the missionaries in Resolution at the fiftieth anniversary in 1952 which was celebrated one year early.

In coming to the North, the Grey Nun missionaries undertook the most difficult work ever and they wrote a glorious page of Church History.<sup>23</sup>

#### - 1904-1905 -

On December 10, 1903, twelve new members were added to the institute when they pronounced their vows. This number had been exceeded only once in the course of history when on February 2, 1887, thirteen novices had dedicated themselves irrevocably to God.

Mother Hamel decided to transform the community room into a parlor for the occasion of profession day. The newly professed were amazed while the older Sisters were greatly pleased remembering that formerly it had been thus on days of profession or vesturing.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Mitchell, Sr. E., o.c., p. 220.

<sup>24</sup> Formerly, breakfast was also served to the parents of the newly professed. This custom was abolished in 1868 as candidates had become more numerous.



Twenty-seven novices also donned the grey habit and everyone was pleased that our various works were attracting enthusiastic young ladies eager to serve a beautiful cause under the Youvillian banner.<sup>25</sup>

At the beginning of this century destined to be so filled with disturbances, there were various events which resulted in favorable publicity for the Grey Nuns. Early in December 1903, Sister McKenna was surprised to read in "La Presse", an article entitled: Youville. She learned that at the request of Mr. Joseph Deschâtelets, the postmaster, the postal area known as Bouqie was to be changed to Youville.<sup>26</sup> Mother Hamel then addressed to the postmaster a letter of appreciation accompanied by a biography of Mother d'Youville.

There were many activities on the Superior General's agenda for 1904, for the fiftieth anniversary of Asile St. Joseph in Montreal was being planned as well as that of Asile Youville at St. Benoît. Both institutions had been founded by Mother Deschamps and her memory remained very much alive there. As for the Convent of Bethlehem founded in Montreal in 1868 during Mother Slocombe's term of office, it had financial difficulties, but the situation appeared to be improving. The St. Vincent de Paul Society organized fund-raising activities with benefits being almost totally applied to maintaining the work, this at the instigation of the first vice-president, Mr. J-B. A. Martin, benefactor of the mission at Athabaska.<sup>27</sup> Example draws

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<sup>25</sup> There were twelve deaths in 1903 so this profession group only filled the gaps.

<sup>26</sup> The area was bounded on the south by the city limits of Montreal and of St. Louis, on the east by Villeray, on the north by the Sault and on the west by Ahuntsic.

<sup>27</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1902-04, p. 889. It had at first been stipulated that receipts would be divided between the Convent and the St. Vincent de Paul Society which claimed only \$100.00 to defray the administrative expenses.

people along so the Catholic School Board decided to give an annual grant of \$300.00 retroactive to September 1, 1903.<sup>28</sup>

The Superior General planned also to visit officially the Toledo missions but this project had to be delayed because of two heart attacks which called for prudence.<sup>29</sup> Then tragedy struck. A telegram on January 5, announced that the school at Qu'Appelle had been destroyed by fire. This school belonged to the vicariate under her charge and she had followed its progress with tireless interest. News received towards the end of the previous year from Sister Goulet had allowed her to believe that all was well in this mission as the Superior had said "she was living in heaven".

Now fire had completely destroyed it. Our school is a pile of smoldering ruins, wrote Sister Goulet. If the fire had occurred at night, we would all have perished. The following day she added: we shall continue the work, but it will be with great difficulty. I do not know where we will go but we must find a place.

Mother Hamel did not delay to express her sympathy by telegram to the Sisters so far away; then she suggested to the Sisters residing at the Mother House that they send their best clothes to the missionaries so sorely tried. The missionaries were using the chapel pews as beds "to which mattresses and pillows have just been added," so that the correspondent expressed her gratitude to the Superior General by begging her

not to worry about us. We are determined to pursue the work, come what may. The Sisters deem themselves

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<sup>28</sup> Mr. A. Chatigny to Mother Hamel, Feb. 11, 1904.

<sup>29</sup> Sr. Ward, 2nd Asst. Gen. would be delegated for this visit.



fortunate to have the use of the parish church until the old cobbler shop is ready for occupation.<sup>30</sup>

Fire did not bring devastation only to the West. On January 19, "fire broke out in our own neighborhood and in a short time, Ste. Cunégonde Church was reduced to a pile of ruins". While reconstruction was going on, the Grey Nuns' institution in the parish served as the parish church. Six hundred persons could be accommodated. Obviously this occurrence brought about great commotion and fatigue as classrooms had to be moved to the basement. The Sisters hoped to be as generous as the missionaries in the West.

However, not all was grief for news came from Rome concerning the Cause which had just entered a new phase. Proceedings were established in order to evaluate the heroicity of the candidate's virtues. Under the presidency of the Archbishop of Montreal, a tribunal was set up for this purpose to which the following were called to testify: Grey Nuns of Montreal, Ottawa, Quebec and Nicolet as well as a Sister of the Congregation of Notre Dame and Lady Jetté.<sup>31</sup>

The sessions of this tribunal began on February 22 lasting until mid-April and many years more for they ended in Rome only in 1955. The scarcity of Mother d'Youville's writings and the two world wars constituted serious obstacles to the progress of the Cause.<sup>32</sup> For the time being, no one doubted it. With the firm hope that soon the

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<sup>30</sup> Letter of Jan. 30, 1904.

<sup>31</sup> Lady Jetté had been received in audience by Pope Pius X toward the end of 1903. In Rome, she had also met Fr. Hertzog, the Postulator who, speaking of the proceedings of Mother d'Youville, told her: "This is one of the most beautiful Causes before the Court of Rome."

<sup>32</sup> In order to compensate for the scarcity of her writings, the Court of Rome would call for a historical study in 1931. The study was approved in 1950 by the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

Foundress could be invoked as Blessed Marguerite, Mother Hamel set out for the Canadian West where she would visit officially the houses most difficult to reach.

For fear that the visit would be delayed as a result, the Sisters of St. Boniface had exercised great discretion concerning the dangers which threatened them. The Superior General arrived during the flood crisis which was similar to that which she had witnessed in 1882. The Sisters had to go by canoe from the Provincial House to the hospital where after the ground floor, the first floor had become the refuge for the livestock.<sup>33</sup>

The stop-over in St. Boniface was extended as it was here that the elderly and sick Sisters had retired. In the infirmary, Mother Hamel met Sisters Cusson, Ste. Thérèse and Connolly. The latter was related to Mother d'Youville<sup>34</sup> and had been a valiant worker whose apostolate she had admired when she herself had been missioned to the Red River in 1869.

The boarding schools at Ste-Anne-des-Chênes and St. Norbert also were visited by the Superior General. In the latter parish the visiting Superior saw Monsignor Norbert Ritchot, the devoted pastor, whose role in the 1870's she recalled.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Sr. Roy to the Mother House Apr. 25, 1904. This message called to the mind of senior Sisters the floods at Pointe-à-Callières which long ago had necessitated moving cattle to the choir-loft of the chapel.

<sup>34</sup> Grandfather Connolly had married Miss Gamelin- Maugras, the second generation niece of Mother d'Youville. Sr. Connolly's mother was of the Cree tribe, a daughter of a great chief esteemed by the Whites. Sr. Connolly died on Oct. 7, 1869.

<sup>35</sup> Mgr. Ritchot, sent to Ottawa during the Riel uprising of 1870, was arrested and imprisoned at the episcopal residence where he had been staying. Mgr. Ritchot died at the local convent of the Grey Nuns on Mar. 16, 1905.



Mother Hamel saw the progress made in all areas, especially in schools. In 1904<sup>36</sup> the Clercs de St. Viateur had settled in Makinac, in the region of Lake Dauphin, while the high school founded in St. Boniface in 1902 by Bishop Langevin gave promise of success. The house-chapel attached to the school became the cradle of a new religious community, that of the Oblate Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and of Mary Immaculate.<sup>37</sup> On March 23, Misses Alma Laurendeau of St. Boniface and Ida Lafricain of Montreal had received the holy habit and dedicated themselves to education as qualified teachers, especially in poor parishes.<sup>38</sup>

May 30 marked the departure of the Superior General for Calgary, Edmonton and St. Albert, the provincial base for the missions of the future province of Alberta. Concerning the institution established there since 1863, Sister Roy, her secretary, wrote praises undoubtedly expressed by the Superior General herself.

This institution is certainly one of our finest, both by the number of children it serves as by the site it occupies. It offers the children the immense advantage of learning how to cultivate the land so that they can then become responsible Christian settlers.<sup>39</sup> The school is under government control and to the satisfaction of the teachers, inspectors report that it is well managed and that progress is more noticeable here than elsewhere. Though these gentlemen are non-Catholic, they decided that all the teachers of the district should assemble here for the annual convention.

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<sup>36</sup> Morice, o.c., V. 3, p. 418.

<sup>37</sup> Jean, M. o.c., pp. 155-156.

<sup>38</sup> Morice, Vie de Mgr. Langevin, pp. 218-219.

<sup>39</sup> Massive immigration was occurring in the Canadian West. In Sept. 1904, 800 French Canadians arrived. In 1906, there were 47,000 immigrants.

After having given abundant counselling and encouragement to the missionaries, the Superior General and her secretary undertook the return journey stopping at Kenora and finally arriving in Montreal on July 2, after an absence of two and a half months.<sup>40</sup>

During this lapse of time, the Mother House had changed parishes. From the confines of the parish of St. Joseph of Richmond, it was re-assigned to that of St. Jacques le Majeur, Titular of the cathedral.<sup>41</sup> Another mission was added to the canonical province of Ville-Marie, a foundation authorized by the General Council. St. Anthony's orphanage would prove to be Mother Hamel's work of predilection. She dedicated to it the final years of her active life and after having occupied the highest position of authority in the Congregation, she humbly served the poor in that mission.

Mother Hamel was concerned about perpetuating by her words and especially her examples, the virtues formerly practiced by the Mother of the Poor. To this end she endeavored to restore the old customs. Circumstances were well suited to recall Mother d'Youville's devotion to Mary during this year in which the fiftieth anniversary of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was being celebrated. While the chapel and hallways were being decked with flowers and streamers, the Superior General sent for "two statues of the Virgin Mary which had been in the old Mother House and were now in the mansards and had them refreshed". One of them,

measuring four feet six inches in height was set in a place of honor in the lobby of the Guy Street entrance with the

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<sup>40</sup> Mother Hamel had to conform to the itinerary arranged by her assistant and was unable to go to Qu'Appelle, the mission tried by fire and which moreover was in no state to receive her.

<sup>41</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1904-06, p. 73.



following inscriptions: THEY HAVE ESTABLISHED ME THEIR GUARDIAN. The second statue measuring five feet was placed in the secretariate.

The year ended in this festive atmosphere culminating in an unexpected joy. Father Perrier, notary in the Cause of Mother d'Youville, announced that authenticity of the Foundress' remains would have to be verified. Questions immediately arose: Shall we be allowed to attend the opening of the tomb? the Sisters asked. The reply was that only members of the Tribunal and several secretaries would be admitted. All were disappointed; but behold, on December 23, the notary changed his mind and agreed that between two sessions of the Tribunal, the Sisters could file before the open coffin. Consequently, at eleven o'clock in the morning, all the Grey Nuns of neighboring houses and their companions of the Mother House came to contemplate the beloved remains. The chronicler concluded:

Those of our Sisters who were here on January 17, 1884 when these remains were placed within the brick wall, have noticed no change except that the wax covering the forehead has yellowed slightly and reveals a small opening (...) After our departure from the crypt, Father Perrier deposited in the coffin a cylinder containing the official declaration relative to the authenticity of the Remains. The coffin was again sealed and placed within the wall. There our Venerable Mother will continue to rest until the time when the Church will proclaim her Blessed.<sup>42</sup>

### **HOSPICE ST. ANTOINE, MONTREAL, 1904**

Decidedly, the chronicler for the Grey Nuns did not always concur with the newsmen. She deplored their report

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<sup>42</sup> Circ. mens. 1904-06, pp. 307-308.

of an intimate celebration; that of Sister Gaudry's golden jubilee in 1901. On May 3 of 1904, she wrote:

Sister Mailloux, our Assistant General, has learned that according to *La Presse* a new Institute of Charity has just been founded by Sisters Montgolfier, Lapointe, Joly and Chartier. These Sisters are too attached to our Community to think of separation but they generously accept the hard labor and fatigue necessitated by the expansion of an enterprise which has led to the setting up of a new house.<sup>43</sup>

This was in fact the case. Hospice St. Antoine was no more nor less than the continuation of Hospice St. Charles established in the barracks on the water-front in 1877. In September 1879 it had moved to the house of Denis-Benjamin Viger which in 1894 was doomed to give way to "large and splendid hotels."<sup>44</sup>

Forty-nine of the residents from the hospice were transferred to the Mother House on Guy Street.

The Sisters however, were not resigned to leaving this area where they had been serving so well. Sisters Montgolfier and Duchesneault transferred to Notre Dame Hospital and continued their ministry of visiting the poor and the sick until December 1895 when the soup kitchen opened on Champs-de-Mars Street. It was there that soup as well as the main meal were served to itinerants while clothing could be obtained from the depot maintained by the Sisters. The initiative became very popular during these difficult years and at the outset of 1903, it became imperative that Hospice St. Charles be re-activated. Father O. Hébert, a Sulpician, obtained the authorization to utilize for this purpose "the block of buildings between the

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95

<sup>44</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the details concerning this work are taken from the brochure entitled: *Cent ans d'histoire*.



Friponne and Bonsecours Streets, St. Paul and rue des Commissaires." On October 12, the work began to adapt two of these houses to the new enterprise. The seven stores were taken over gradually until the last lease expired. The tenants, merchants of garden produce, had not been particular concerning details of cleanliness. Three loads of spoiling vegetables had to be removed in order to empty the premises.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, on May 3, 1904, the transfer of the Soup Kitchen to Hospice St. Antoine took place. The group consisted of ten elderly men, six women and four girls ranging in age from twelve to fifteen years. A school was also opened there for the needy children of the area.

The work was supported financially by the Sulpician priests and the St-Vincent-de-Paul Society while the Sisters worked there with great zeal. Among all the others, one would leave the indelible memory of a Sister of Charity who undaunted, sought out persons who were abandoned or whom she discovered isolated in foul hovels, in make-shift shelters, even in the ruins of abandoned houses. She was known as Canada's Sister Rosalie, then later designated simply by the name of Sister Bonneau, a name which was immortalized by the fact that this place would eventually be known as Accueil Bonneau. This institution exists for the homeless, itinerants and vagrants to whom help is offered without any attempt to restrict them. However, these persons are offered the possibility of rehabilitation based on respect of their personhood and the safeguard of their anonymity.

The Sulpician priests, members of the St-Vincent-de-Paul Society, Grey Nuns, Franciscans, diocesan clergy, professionals, members of other Christian denominations, volunteers and benefactors all contributed to the support of

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<sup>45</sup> Circ. mens. 1904-06, pp. 92-94.

this work to ensure its survival created precisely to assist an itinerant population. Its existence would be justified as long as there were itinerants, vagrants and people without an identity or a haven but who are part of the human caravan.

In the course of the recent decades, foundations had been numerous. It was not surprising therefore that there were now anniversaries to celebrate. Last year the golden jubilees of Hospice St-Joseph in Montreal and Hospice Youville in St. Benoît were celebrated.

In 1905, the events entailed the Golden Jubilee of the orphanage in Toledo and the inauguration of the new St. Boniface Hospital which had been entirely rebuilt.

It is the largest of its kind in Manitoba. The former hospital was humble in appearance alongside the new structure which measured 200 ft. by 42 ft. and was five storeys high.<sup>46</sup>

Archbishop Langevin who on May 3 attended the episcopal consecration of his uncle Bishop Racicot in Montreal, returned to the West bringing with him a gift from the Superior General: a statue of the Sacred Heart. On June 5 the Superior wrote from the hospital, "We gave the most respectful welcome to the Royal patient(...) The work is progressing actively (...) The nurses received their diplomas last night." Finally, on October 15, the archbishop attended by numerous clergy, blessed the 'ideal hospital' in which there were already 280 patients. Sister Mailloux, the Assistant General, participated in the celebration and returned to Montreal via Toledo in order to attend celebrations there.

Sister Mailloux therefore, was not present for the return from exile of the Sisters from Ile-à-la-Crosse on October 24. Ten Sisters arrived in St. Boniface, having received

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<sup>46</sup> Circ. mens. 1904-06, p. 635.



instructions from Mother Hamel to abandon the mission after forty-five years of dedication, sacrifices and privations. The Superior General explained:

The good work begun by our community will be continued by French Sisters, the Sisters of St. Joseph who have been expelled from their country. The Superior added: I know that this act of submission will cost you great effort and sacrifice but God's will has been manifested.<sup>47</sup>

The ten missionaries did in fact arrive with tearful eyes. Several of them had spent in this mission thirteen, twenty-seven, thirty-two and thirty-four years of their life. It had taken two weeks to travel the distance from Ile-à-la-Crosse to St. Boniface partly by wagon, partly by boat; but furthermore, they had had to resist the pleadings of the Montagnais who wanted them to stay. The Grey Nuns had accomplished a great work of evangelization there. It would require a book to unveil the secrets of the toil and sacrifices heroically endured by these missionaries.<sup>48</sup> Ps. 126 reads: "Those who wept as they went out carrying the seed will come back singing for joy, as they bring in the harvest." Such was not the case for these missionaries who knew well that there was yet much to be accomplished. For the time being, they did not know that there would be better days ahead for them and they accepted other postings in the Province of Manitoba.

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<sup>47</sup> A first recall had occurred in 1902 and was then reversed because the situation seemed to have improved but repeated flooding having unsettled the house, it was judged prudent to withdraw the Sisters. In 1907 their replacers occupied the new convent built by the Brothers.

<sup>48</sup> Article which appeared in "Les Cloches de St- Boniface", signed by an Oblate priest. It was impossible for the author to list all the trials: fire, drought, food shortages, epidemics, etc.

In Toledo, there was great joy on October 24, the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the first contingent of Grey Nuns. The two wings added to St. Vincent's Hospital had been blessed on July 25. The Superior General had delegated Sisters McKenna and St. Mathias.<sup>49</sup> The marvelous work accomplished by the Grey Nuns had been highly praised.

From the very humble beginnings has sprung up the splendid institution known as St. Vincent's. Except for the hospital in Cincinnati, this is the largest and the most completely equipped in the whole State of Ohio.<sup>50</sup>

The Jubilee celebration for the Orphanage however, was postponed till fall. This feast was enhanced by the presence of His Excellency Bishop Hortsman and Monsignor Boff, one of the first pastors of the St. François de Sales parish. The decor, the singing and music all contributed to the dignity of the celebration. The sermon delivered by Father Moran retold the journey of the foundresses from Montreal to Toledo, stressing their courage and spirit of sacrifice and he called them heroines of charity. The guests assembled at a banquet following which the story of the institution unfolded in an operetta performed by the orphans. The memory of Sister Hickey was evoked. She was the only surviving Sister from the first group but was unable to attend the celebrations due to ill health.<sup>51</sup> On the other

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<sup>49</sup> Mother Hamel visited Toledo for the first time May 26 to June 17, 1905. She had learned about the difficulties which characterized the beginning of the mission. The secretary conveyed her thought when on May 31 she wrote: "According to appearances, the time of struggle has passed for our Sisters. Mother Deschamps must be watching over her work of predilection."

<sup>50</sup> Article which appeared in *La Presse* and was reproduced in *Circ. mens.* 1904-06, pp. 579-580.

<sup>51</sup> Sr. Hickey was celebrating the golden jubilee of her religious profession that year.



hand, Eliza Holmes, the devoted tertiary who had accompanied the foundresses, was present. She was jubilant at seeing the progress and amazed at receiving such deference. Her role had been a humble one, yet so precious.

Eliza had wished to remain a Franciscan tertiary and to devote herself as such without joining the Association of the Little Auxiliary Sisters who in this year were incorporated with the Grey Nuns entitling them to the same rights and privileges. On April 6, they donned the grey habit and made temporary vows as did the choir Sisters.<sup>52</sup>

In all the houses of the Grey Nuns, the canonical establishment of the Association was greeted with joy. These worthy helpers who had shared the labors of the Grey Nuns were warmly welcomed into the same religious family. They had made such a precious contribution to the diverse works especially where these were exercised with the greatest difficulty, notably in the North West Territories. Concerning the latter, the Grey Nuns learned with equal joy that other annexations had occurred in this memorable year. Two new provinces had joined Confederation.

As for Alberta, it is amusing to read the account of Sister Dandurand, the Provincial Superior to Mother Hamel:

I think you would be interested to know about the changes occurring at this time in your North country. First, you must know that with the remnants of the Territories, they have made us a province which is the third in size in Canada. The inauguration took place on September 1. Edmonton, the young capital, outdid itself. Eight thousand dollars had been

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<sup>52</sup> Until then, a novice made perpetual vows at profession. Henceforth, vows would be renewed annually for five years providing each candidate with ample time for reflection. A variation was introduced in the uniform of the auxiliary Sisters. A white band about the face would replace the black one.

voted to host the guests, and to decorate and light the streets with electricity.<sup>53</sup>

Neither the writer nor the recipient had any idea of the resources this remnant of the Territories would later provide. Meanwhile, the Sisters were glad to belong to the same country despite the fact that the distance remained the same but allowed more frequent visiting.

However, the feast par excellence which delighted all the Grey Nuns in 1905 was the first alumni reunion of the former pupils of the Grey Nuns at the Mother House on June 27. These former pupils were evidently not those who had attended their elementary schools, but rather poor students or those with a fragile health who could not adapt to an advanced program. This assistance dated back to the days of 1760 when Mother d'Youville had assumed a large part of Pierre Menard's travel costs and tuition when he was studying philosophy in preparation for the priesthood.<sup>54</sup> Having returned to Canada on June 4, 1764, Father Ménard became pastor at Chambly where he died in 1792.<sup>55</sup> The followers of the Foundress had continued this work and for 145 years, they had fostered recruitment of the clergy by providing students with board and room at the convent on a volunteer basis or by assuming a part of the cost of their studies.

Father Désiré Chevrier, a Sulpician, had organized this meeting and had contacted seventy-five former students still in the metropolis or vicinity, inviting them to this "family feast" as Mother Hamel had called it when she was told of the project. Thirty-four former students responded affirmatively. The others apologized as they were prevented

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<sup>53</sup> Letter dated Oct. 5, 1905.

<sup>54</sup> The absence of a bishop in Canada and the uncertainty as to when the vacancy would be filled had prompted this initiative of Mother d'Youville "to save the Church in Canada".

<sup>55</sup> The body exhumed in 1868 was found perfectly preserved.



by the duties of their ministry or other obligations. All expressed their regrets as well as their desire to contribute towards the offering of a sum for the promotion of the Cause.

The feast began with the Eucharistic Celebration followed by an address by Father John Forbes, the Superior of the White Fathers in Quebec.<sup>56</sup> He recalled yester-years when the students had access to the various chapels at the Mother House or had attended religious professions and funerals. He disclosed that among the 106 students who had come here since 1839, forty-one had dedicated themselves to God, and of this number, thirty were still living.<sup>57</sup> The speaker was happy to call himself, along with the other participants in this feast, 'the spiritual grandson of the great Canadian woman'. After the banquet, the guests walked through the garden and then assembled in the Community room where they saw the following inscription: "Your sons shall come from afar." Then Doctor Dosithée Martel, the senior of the group expressed the gratitude of those who, having received different gifts, had turned to other careers: doctors, judges, lawyers, notaries, pharmacists, journalists, public officials and merchants. Today these persons serve society in an honorable manner as a result of having spent a few years at the convent and benefitted from the examples of the Sisters.

Doctor Martel recalled the memory of the men's house on McGill Street where they had stayed and where he had come to know the two Forget boys, Canon Trépanier, Alexandre Deschamps and the unfortunate Riel. He made it a duty to mention Mother Deschamps, the "extraordinary woman, the truly strong woman who through a quarter century had led the community with such wisdom and

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<sup>56</sup> The two Forbes brothers would one day become bishops.

<sup>57</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1904-06, p. 519.

success". He proclaimed that since the arrival of the Grey Nuns in Chambly in 1869, "I continue to be the object of their solicitude". He did not mention however, that he was also dispensing generously his knowledge and his care to the Sisters at the hospice without expecting any remuneration.

Father Lecoq, the Superior at the Seminary, addressed the final message.

You were students of the Jesuits and of the Sulpicians, he said in substance, and they fed your mind while the Grey Nuns were mothers to you. The years that you spent in their house have produced a lasting influence on your lives. If you owe the Grey Nuns gratitude, they also are thankful to you. You are a credit to them in the various positions in which Providence has placed you. Be proud of what you have received from them and be blessed for the good you are accomplishing.

One of these students, by the name of Speeman, was of German origin, and had escaped from his homeland to seek access to the priesthood in the New World. Welcomed at the Grey Nuns, he remained only a few months. Because he could not adapt to the climate of Montreal, he accepted the offer to pursue his studies in St. Boniface. From a distance, he joined in today's celebration and stated that thanks to the kindness of the Sisters, he would be ordained on June 29 of the following year. Returning to Europe a short time later, he stopped in Montreal to assure the Sisters that he was leaving with a heart full of gratitude toward the community. Thus another priest would henceforth approach the altar of God, the joy of his youth because in the past Marguerite d'Youville had understood her role as daughter of the Church.



## THE SCHOOL OF HOME ECONOMICS - MONTREAL 1905

For several years there had been question in Montreal of specialized schools, such as existed especially in Belgium, with the main goal of training young ladies in "Christian piety and in the skills of home management".<sup>58</sup> The idea appealed to the Grey Nuns who had always been concerned about preparing young ladies for their future responsibilities. Unbroken tradition proved that Mother d'Youville had herself taken the means available in her time of preparing the orphans under her care to provide for their own subsistence. The St. Mathieu wing had been added to the Mother House exclusively for the orphans.

With the passing of time, Mother Hamel decided in March 1905 to establish a home economics school which would include a school curriculum equivalent to that of regular schools as well as a program of home economics.

Sisters St. Hilaire and Champoux inaugurated their apostolate on March 22. To Sister Piché, the third Assistant General, befell the responsibility of arranging the program so that the allotment of teaching time would be fairly appropriated to the achievement of both goals. Soon all was working out to the satisfaction of the teachers and their pupils.

Gradually the teaching staff increased and additions to the program included music, voice culture, elocution, art, etc. In one word, the school was training "exceptional women" who, out in the world, would constitute the best publicity for the school. It became necessary to expand and students from the outside were admitted as boarders. The Sisters experienced legitimate pride when they held an

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<sup>58</sup> Circ. mens. 1895-98, p. 555. The chronicler was relating the words of Mgr. Bégin addressed to the Sisters on Jan. 5, 1898.

annual concert associated with a display of crafts and a distribution of diplomas from the Department of Education.

The standards were raised and the school became affiliated with the university. The young ladies who obtained degrees would in turn hold teaching positions in similar institutions.

The home economic school opened in 1905 would become a recruitment centre for the Grey Nuns. The students observed their teachers who performed their duties with competence. Admiring their serenity, they discovered that religious life, far from stifling talents, rather enhanced them and conferred on those who shared them willingly, the privilege of exercising a profound influence on emerging generations.

### L'HOPITAL ST-PAUL, MONTREAL, 1905

The matter of treating contagious cases had for many years been of primary concern for Notre-Dame Hospital. In 1894, Doctor Edmond Persillier- Lachapelle had obtained from municipal authorities that a civic hospital would be established on Moreau Street. It was a temporary hospital as we have seen.<sup>59</sup>

In 1901, the City made two agreements: one with the Montreal General Hospital and the other with Notre Dame. As a result two hospitals were erected. The Alexandra Hospital served the anglophone community while St. Paul was to serve the heavily populated French area of the City. Sir Rodolphe Forget became the benefactor of the new hospital by purchasing the necessary land at a cost of \$30,000.00 on Sherbrooke Street facing Parc Lafontaine.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Bull, Celebrations at N. Dame Hosp., Miss Deslauriers, July 31, 1979, p. 7. The relationship of the St. Camille Hosp. was highlighted therein.



Plans were hastily drafted and the chronicler of the Grey Nuns jokingly noted: "Expert architects have not yet succeeded in conceiving an ideal plan. A Grey Nun has decided to come to their help." At the time of the great banquet served annually to patients, Sister Ste. Cécile made a cake representing St. Paul's Hospital. She received compliments from everyone. The administrators decided to offer the masterpiece to Sister Mailloux, the Assistant General.<sup>61</sup>

The architects Marchand and Hackell, finally succeeded in presenting a plan acceptable to all and in April 1904, construction began. It was completed by the end of June 1905. The institution was officially opened on October 29, and on that day it was blessed by Archbishop Paul Bruchési, hence the name St. Paul. However, the cost of the building was fifty percent higher than estimated. This resulted in great perplexity for the administrators for it was understood that St. Paul would be part of the future Notre-Dame Hospital. The existing structure was a victim of aging. Despite using cosmetics on 'the old lady', according to the prescription of one of the doctors, the cracks in the walls revealed its age while the waiting list proved the inadequacy of its accommodation.

On December 1, 1905, the new St-Paul's Hospital opened its three wings to contagious cases. Doctor J. A. Leduc, a young intern aged twenty-five became the medical director. The Grey Nuns assumed the management and on that day, the first patient was admitted. This non-Catholic young man was afflicted with scarlet fever.<sup>62</sup> Despite preventive measures advocated by authorities, notably the quarantining of homes where there was contagion, epidemics continued to be rampant. Because

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<sup>60</sup> Benoît, Dr. E.P., *Hist. N. Dame Hosp.*, pp. 20- 21.

<sup>61</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1902-03, pp. 221-222.

other hospitals refused to admit this category of patients, St. Paul's became popular.

By January 1, 1906 fourteen Sisters were on staff and had much to do, as 479 cases were admitted that year with diphtheria, scarlet fever, or measles. Four hundred and fifty-seven recovered and twenty-two deaths were recorded.

The cost of hospitalization was set at one dollar per day so the young hospital could hardly meet its budget. The result was that Notre-Dame's financial difficulties almost brought about its ruin.

In 1910, Archbishop Bruchési appealed to the charity of the people and set the example himself by donating a thousand dollars. The necessary amount was slow in coming however and it was only in 1913 that the Notre-Dame project could be pursued. Again matters would be complicated by the outbreak of the First World War and it was only in 1933 that the mother institution erected in 1924 on Sherbrooke Street, could remodel St. Paul's and establish contingent services for by then medical science had succeeded in controlling disastrous epidemics.

In the course of twenty-eight years, St. Paul's hospital meanwhile had accommodated thousands of Montreal citizens of whom an impressive number had recovered.

- 1906 -

By January 1, the Institute of the Grey Nuns had 698 regular Sisters and 205 auxiliary Sisters while 125 candidates were preparing for their future career in the novitiates of the West as well as at the Mother House. Meanwhile, at the Mother House there were 710 protégés: old folks, orphans, children born out of wedlock and boarders, so that work was not lacking. Everyone's good

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<sup>62</sup> Circ. mens. 1904-06, pp. 672-673.



will was required in order to participate in the proper functioning of the large institution sheltering such an array of works. Consequently, the auxiliary Sisters serving at the College of Montreal were withdrawn "in conformity with the spirit of the Constitutions", the chronicler specified.<sup>63</sup>

Mother Hamel as we have seen, had visited the houses of the West since her accession as Superior General. The time had now come to visit the missions of the North West Territories. The Sisters of these distant regions already had her sympathy for she remembered the years lived in St. Boniface, a post which was still primitive at the time she arrived there in 1869. The difficulties which had altered her health were very minor compared to those which complicated the work of heroic women in the far North. The Superior General had to acknowledge that she could not go personally to express her appreciation and offer counselling and so her Assistant, Sister Ward was delegated to go in her stead. She had been one of the foundresses of the first mission in that area, the Convent at Providence.

Sister Ward had thought it an illusion when she had been recalled from the North in 1892. Having arrived there in 1867, she had been convinced that she would live out her life and be buried there. She again thought she was the object of an illusion when she was entrusted with the mandate of visitor. But the illusion was dispelled when on April 18, she boarded the train for St. Boniface, then to St. Albert. She left there on May 11 with Sister St. Grégoire to go to Landing where they would board a boat sailing toward the Mackenzie.

The journey would last five and a half months and would be a triumphant tour for the former teacher who heard her pupils of long ago admit to her "I owe you my

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<sup>63</sup> Circ. mens. 1904-06, p. 899. The Sisters of the Holy Family, founded in 1874, replaced the Auxiliary Sisters.

happiness." Emotion was at its peak when she reached Providence where all residents had gathered on the shore to greet her. She wished to share her impressions of this experience with Sister Lapointe, her former companion who this year was celebrating her golden jubilee. From Chipewyan she wrote her a touching letter recalling memories of bygone days:

I am writing from Athabaska, the little community which you founded - at what price! - in 1874. God alone can reward you. Our Sisters who are continuing your work keep a grateful memory of you. I am speaking of Athabaska but what could I not say about our dear Providence. Thank you for having been such a good mother and on this glorious day, please accept my congratulations and best wishes.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to this letter there was another from Pierre Mercredi, a former pupil who also told the jubilarian his admiration and that of his fellow-pupils. This homage was sent along with an otter skin.<sup>65</sup> As she left the North land, Sister Ward was overcome with grief for she knew from experience the overwhelming solitude which was the daily lot of the missionaries in this remote land. On her return she again stopped in St. Albert where the school was continuing to progress and to earn the highest praises of the inspectors.

Sister Ward did not see the little convent lit up with what was called "Siche gaz" (gas light). A few weeks after her departure, the correspondent from St. Albert wrote:

The bright rays coming directly from the North-West are not the northern lights. This luminous radiance surrounding our monastery is produced by "gaslight" which emits a

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<sup>64</sup> Letter of June 14, 1906. Sr. Lapointe was now working at Hosp. St. Antoine in Montreal.

<sup>65</sup> Letter dated June 13.



profusion of luminous rays. The apparatus was installed in November.

The visitor of northern missions arrived in Montreal on October 3 while preparations were in progress for the celebration of the Superior General's golden jubilee of religious life. Festivities began in the afternoon of October 15 when many missionaries and delegates from the Sister Communities came together. They extolled the accomplishments of this "valiant woman whose career had been so abundantly filled with good works," and who since 1902, had founded four new missions and approved two projects now being developed in Fort Frances, Ontario and in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Mother Hamel did not hesitate to look forward while still manifesting great respect for the past. Like her predecessors, she insisted on preserving precious objects which dated back to the early days of the community. Thus the bell dated 1771, the year of Mother d'Youville's death, received its third mounting after 135 years of use. Mother Hamel parted regretfully with a note that had been autographed by Mother d'Youville in favor of Mr. David Ross McCord who had insisted on obtaining this favor, "Thus we are contributing to a national project," explained the Superior.<sup>67</sup>

The rosary beads of Sister Mézières and of Mother Beaubien which had been inherited by Sisters Chevretils and Youville respectively were also preserved. In early times, the custom was that the Superior gave a rosary to each novice on her profession day. Sister Youville had received hers from Mother Beaubien, her half-sister. As for the life-

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<sup>66</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1906-08, p. 225. Unfortunately, the "gaslight" could not serve as fuel; the cold would register -35°. "We do not feel the furnaces," wrote Sr. Dandurand. On the following day she added: "the weather is milder. We are thawing out completely!"

<sup>67</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1904-06, pp. 934-935.

size statues representing St. Francis of Assisi and St. Anthony and had been sculptured either by the Hurons or the Algonquins and given to the Grey Nuns by the Recollets, Mother Hamel deemed she ought to return them to the Franciscans. According to Sister Labrèche, the statue of St. Anthony looked like "a saint who had fallen from his earlier fervor". The first chronicler of the Grey Nuns never missed an occasion of manifesting her humor. Sister Ward remembered the long letters so eagerly expected especially when she was in the land of the great white silence. Alas, the dear visiting Sister never saw Sister Labrèche again. Deceased on May 21, she had been laid to rest on the slope of the mound at Châteauguay.

Small marble headstones replaced the wooden crosses which had not withstood the inclemency of the weather.<sup>68</sup> Each one bore the name of the Sister and the dates of her birth and death.

The year had been marked by several deaths, notably that of Sister Curran who had helped Monsignor Ramsay to write the English biography of Mother d'Youville. The author had died on February 23 and his helper, four days later. These departures were highlighted in the chronicles of the community and were accepted in the light of Christian hope.

The year-end of 1906 brought joy for the whole community. An oil portrait of the unforgettable Mother Deschamps was donated by the Sisters of St. Anne. Mother Deschamps had been a woman with noble ambitions and being a missionary at soul, she had been responsible for the apostolic expansion of the Grey Nun Congregation.

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 883, marble tombstones installed in Sept.



## ST.-MARGUERITE SCHOOL, FORT FRANCES, ONTARIO, 1906

In 1731 when Mr. de la Vérendrye came to the small rapid where Rainy River begins, he did not foresee that he was leading the way that would one day be followed by women walking in the footsteps of his niece, Marguerite d'Youville. Christophe Dufrost de Lajemmerais, Marguerite's youngest brother was a member of his group of explorers and had contributed in the establishment of Fort St. Charles on this spot.

This fort had disappeared by the time the first Grey Nun missionaries had travelled through there in 1844 on their way to St. Boniface. Little did they realize that they were setting a new landmark in history nor could they foresee that other Grey Nuns would follow who, though invited in 1905, would arrive only on March 22 of the following year. Bishop Langevin had evoked these events of history in order to move Mother Hamel and her council to pursue his plan of establishing an Indian School here.<sup>69</sup>

The Grey Nuns could easily find other Sisters capable of replacing them in their schools for Whites; but such was not the case where the Indians were concerned. Their giftedness as missionaries made them difficult to replace.<sup>70</sup>

Sisters Emilie Lajoie-Caron, the Assistant Provincial, and Marguerite-Marie had the honor of opening the school and on May 6, Sisters Hermine Girard and du Précieux-Sang were assigned, soon to be followed by Sister Albina Goyette. The white house had four storeys. Soon thirty-two children of the Sauteux tribe were welcomed. The pioneers

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<sup>69</sup> Guichon, Sr. M., o.c., pp. 61-63. The Indian school of St. Boniface had closed because of the influx of whites. In 1905 the school at Fort Frances replaced it.

<sup>70</sup> Tessier, A., o.c., p. 209

found an unexpected helper in the person of Mrs. Wright, the wife of the agent at the Fort. Mrs. Wright spared no effort to lighten the burden of the foundresses.

The pupils soon showed remarkable progress and the little 'pagans' who stood along the fence and observed them, soon begged for the privilege of also being admitted. This was a great joy for the Sisters who felt rewarded for their sacrifices and who banished boredom by contemplating the beauties of nature.

The site of the school was unique and from it one could see Rainy Lake whose colors blended with the blue sky and the green trees. However, the Sisters soon experienced a certain irony. "Wood is not lacking but water is" noted Mother Despina, the Provincial. "The level of the lake has gone down so much that the piping no longer reaches it. Water must be hauled in barrels."<sup>71</sup>

These difficulties had been foreseen and accepted and did not jeopardize the Sisters' work for they adapted to the situation willingly. One day, they undertook to care for a poor 'squaw' who was very ill and whom they brought to the school. The patient feigned to be in a deep sleep when the Sisters spoke to her of God; however, she woke up 'in extremis' and after accepting to be baptized, she died.<sup>72</sup>

The cross above the school signified that it was a haven of salvation and an elderly Saulteux brought his adopted son to die there on January 10, 1940 without in the least suspecting that this would cause great commotion. The number of pupils had doubled and now a dormitory had to be transformed in order to accommodate the patient.<sup>73</sup>

A new school would, in the course of time, house 106 boarders. Classrooms were then set up in a separate

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<sup>71</sup> Circ. mens. 1906-08, p. 232.

<sup>72</sup> Sr. Girard to the Mother House, Jan. 25, 1909.



building so that, as in the remote North and in the far West, the Sisters could pursue their task of Christian teaching, the source of true civilization.

### ST. PAUL'S HOSPITAL, SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN, 1906

The establishment of a hospital in the young Province of Saskatchewan did not take place in the usual way. There were hardly 2,000 people in Saskatoon. Its territory was increased by extending its limits along the northern branch of the Saskatchewan River.<sup>74</sup> This increase gave it the status of a city.

On September 25, 1906, Sisters Guay and Phaneuf came to the young city in order to canvas for funds to maintain the missions in St. Boniface which were in desperate need. The two Grey Nuns went to the rectory to seek lodging. To their great surprise, they came to a house which had been transformed into a hospital. Four patients rejected by their families had been taken in by Father Paillé, a missionary in this region. The Oblate in turn, manifested his surprise saying: "Are you coming to care for our patients?" The Sisters explained their goal but the missionary presented his request: "Give us a hand at least until we can find some nurses."<sup>75</sup>

The Sisters who had been away from their provincial headquarters for six weeks requested some time to reflect. They then went to the local hotel where they were given hospitality. While they were deliberating, a certain Mr. Cahill came to explain his situation. Mrs. Cahill, his mother, who was gravely ill, required constant care. This latest

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<sup>73</sup> Sr. Ste-Christine to Mother Gallant, Jan. 21, 1940.

<sup>74</sup> Morice, o.c., pp. 137-138.

<sup>75</sup> These details and those which follow are taken from the file of St. Paul's Hosp. preserved at ASGM.

request closed the debate and the Sisters went immediately to the sick woman. Sister Phaneuf became her nurse while Sister Guay took over the improvised hospital assisted by a young lady who, though pious and dedicated, was in no way competent for her new task.

Four days elapsed and the number of patients increased. On October 2, Dr. Stewart, aware of the precious help provided by the Sisters, begged them to extend their stay. They replied that in order to do so, they would require special authorization from their Superior. The doctor then addressed his request by telegram to Mother Despins (Provincial Superior in St. Boniface) and on the following day, received an affirmative response. In the meantime, the whole population of Saskatoon rose to request a permanent hospital directed by the Sisters.

Fathers Paillé and Vachon then arranged for the Provincial Superior to visit Saskatoon and Mr. Cahill, delighted with his mother's recovery, covered her travelling expenses. Mother Despins supported the request made to Mother Hamel but the latter, after studying all aspects of the situation felt she could not endorse the request. The community had recently refused other mission projects. The Saskatoon population was not disheartened by the apparent failure. Four citizens with Father Vachon at their head, appeared at the Mother House on January 10 in an attempt to obtain a reversal of the decision. It was well that they did for on January 19 the project was accepted.

Through the course of these deliberations the two Sisters continued their nursing services on a volunteer basis. On the eve of Christmas, they decked the parish church and the faithful came from forty and even sixty miles away to attend the midnight Mass. The people felt that the two Grey Nuns in the depth of their heart were praying that the delegation would be successful.



News of the acceptance was proclaimed on the 19th and two days later, Sister Mailloux, the Assistant General, left Montreal with Sister Blakely destined to become the fourth pillar of the foundation. Sister St. Dosit  e who was named Superior for the new hospital was then in St. Boniface and would join the two travellers.

The new foundation bore the usual stamp of unexpected incidents. Eighteen hours of rail travel separated Saskatoon from St. Boniface. The Sisters left there on January 23 in weather recorded at fifty-four degrees below zero. An engine 'overcome by the cold' stalled on the rails and two other engines were required to move it while, on the road alongside the train, a collision had occurred. To make a long story short the contingent reached its destination after five days and six nights. All the clergy of the place and the two 'casual nurses' were at the station to meet them. They were brought to the rectory as Doctor Willoughby's house which had already been purchased to serve as the first hospital could not yet be occupied. The owner had been driven out of town by the cold. The Sisters on the other hand, were happy that they were not obliged to provide fuel, for it was both costly and rare. As soon as the cold spell broke, canvassing began. The good people of Saskatoon showed their gratitude by giving generously. Admiration overcame any religious prejudice.

By March 19, the hospital, dominating the town from Pleasant Hill, was opened. Already plans were being drawn up for an addition. Sister Fernand, who had worked in Toledo, was delegated for the task but the original plan had to be shelved in favor of a temporary structure which was opened in June. It was soon filled with patients afflicted with typhoid and pneumonia as well as accident victims. As the typhoid epidemic was raging with fury, some had to be placed in the unfinished attic. Even the Sisters were stricken. Sister Carroll, the new Provincial, accompanied by

Sister McKenna, the treasurer, were urged to come. They found the patients on the road to recovery but deplored the Superior General's order not to admit any more patients. Providence intervened and no patient requested admission while the interdiction stood. Once it was lifted, patients came in numbers.

This was not the end of hardships for the Sisters however. In February 1918, they were snowbound for three days, without electric power or telephones. "We were in fact in a state of siege" wrote Sister Dandurant, "and furthermore, our supplies were running low"; but when a doctor accidentally drove into the steps of the hospital, making a break-through, the blockade was demolished. The Sisters recognized this as an intervention of Divine Providence.

By 1910, the population of 5,000 three years earlier had grown to 25,000 and a new building became necessary. It was opened in 1913. Two years later, more space was needed. In 1918 the nursing Sisters were themselves afflicted by the influenza epidemic and one of them, Sister St. Léonce, died.

In 1924, a new hospital was built a few hundred feet from the original building. To this structure, two wings would later be added; one to the east, another to the north. In Saskatoon the Sisters would open a nursing school as they had done in St. Boniface, Montreal and the United States. The hospital which came into being 'accidentally' during an epidemic in 1906 would for many more long years, serve the population of Saskatoon and neighboring areas.



## CHAPTER X 1907-1910

Mother Hamel was in the fifth year of her mandate. During her term, five new works had come into being. At the beginning of 1907 there were other requests, one of which would obtain an affirmative response while another was put on hold. The author of the latter request, Monsignor O'Grady, the pastor of St. Peter's, New Brunswick, New Jersey, would not acknowledge defeat. On the contrary, he promised to make repeated attempts until his request would eventually be granted.<sup>1</sup>

The community at this time numbered 711 choir Sisters and 207 auxiliary Sisters. Their life span showed definite improvement so that each year, the golden jubilee and even diamond jubilee of a few Sisters could be celebrated. However, these celebrations were usually followed, if not by complete retirement from active life, at least by a lesser degree of activity in the works of the community. In short,

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<sup>1</sup> Circ. mens. 1906-08, p. 413.

this was the twilight before the dawn of eternity and these Seniors serenely awaited the hour of their call.

This time had come for Sister Perrin, the tiny Sister who had accomplished great things but whose preferred work had been Notre-Dame Hospital which she had helped to establish. She had followed its progress and later had shared the financial concerns of the administrators. Sister Perrin would not see the successful outcome of these difficulties for she died peacefully at 8:30 a.m. on Friday, February 22.<sup>2</sup> The messages of sympathy which came from the Sister communities, from the various Congregations in the City and from Notre-Dame Hospital, highly lauded the courage of this true Grey Nun who had served faithfully and without flinching in the assignments which had been entrusted to her. Successively co-foundress of the Quebec branch, of the school in Sandwich, Ontario, pharmacist holding a certificate as an inventor, first Superior at Notre-Dame Hospital, Assistant General and first Provincial Superior of the Ville-Marie area, Sister Perrin had well deserved the esteem of the community.

Doctor Benoît expressed the appreciation of Notre-Dame Hospital. The highest homage was awarded to her by the Ladies' Auxiliary: "It was she who taught us to love the sick and to serve them." If it had been the custom to allow an epitaph on her marble tombstone, Sister Perrin would certainly not have desired any other, but only two dates were allowed: those of her birth and death. Meanwhile, to perpetuate the memory of the Sisters deceased since the foundation, Mother Hamel had a catalogue set up in February 1907 bearing all their names.

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<sup>2</sup> The chronicler stressed that Sr. Perrin died precisely at the same time and on the same day as Sr. Elizabeth, her niece, who died in 1879.



In the course of her life, Sister Perrin had often ascended the mound in Châteauguay to pray for her deceased companions. Now her turn had come to rest there. In the winter season the distance from Montreal was covered by train as 'The New York Central' passed through Châteauguay. In the summer time, two ships served Montreal - Châteauguay. The resident Sisters would then meet the coffin as it arrived at the wharf and accompany it to the chapel for the singing of the Libera before the procession filed toward the mound. In winter however, the procession stopped at Bethlehem, the old mill dating from 1687 and converted into a funeral chapel in 1865. The bodies of the deceased Sisters remained here until spring when burial again became possible.

Sister Perrin was probably not laid in state at the usual place because since February 11, carpenters had taken over the corridors of Holy Cross and St. Joseph where great hammering was going on as the floors of pine wood, already worn out were being replaced by maple wood from St. Benoît. 102 trees selected among those which were beginning to dry supplied two thousand board feet of lumber. Gradually the flooring would be completed also on the other storeys.<sup>3</sup>

The earliest part of the Mother House completed only in 1871 now showed the wear of time. Major repairs were planned for the main kitchen and a third elevator was installed. In the course of this work "a serious crack" was discovered necessitating the rebuilding of the exterior wall which caused this work to be completed only in 1908.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, such was not the case for the "Red Cross" erected on the corner of Guy and Dorchester Streets in 1871, renewed in 1883 and already going to ruin. On

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<sup>3</sup> Circ. mens. 1906-08, p. 244.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 695-697.

September 25 it was replaced by another, an exact replica, which recalled to passers-by a gruesome act: the assassination of Jean Fabre and his wife Marie-Anne Bastien on June 6, 1752.<sup>5</sup> by Jean-Baptiste Goyer dit Bélisle.

The farm on the corner of Guy and St. Catherine Streets led neighbors to complain. Mr. H.A. Ekers, the mayor, came in person to examine on the spot, the grounds for these complaints. After verifying that everything was in good condition, the magistrate however felt constrained to yield to the complaints of neighbors and he advised Sister St. Jérôme, the farm manager, to move the herd of cattle elsewhere. The chronicler notes:

There are however 250 similar farms in the city. The crèche alone has 118 small babies on milk which must be obtained under the best possible conditions. Transportation would affect negatively the quality of the milk.<sup>6</sup>

The Sisters defended their case "while the cows chewed their cud and slept peacefully in their quarters", the chronicler added; but it was realized that eventually, the neighbors would win their point. Therefore, on July 19, Mother Hamel bought the farm of Mr. W. Tait which was located in St. Laurent parish.<sup>7</sup>

The Superior General, while attending to the proper functioning of the various works, also had to prepare the General Chapter for the end of her mandate was approaching. Despite this, she took interest in events on the outside. At the time of the great catastrophe when the

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<sup>5</sup> The cross had originally been erected across from the entrance to the chapel. The Sisters moved it to its present place in 1871. (Circ. mens. 1881-83, p. 572)

<sup>6</sup> Circ. mens. 1906-08, p. 239.

<sup>7</sup> The old farm at Pte. St. Charles having been sold, the proceeds were applied to the purchase of the new property.



structure of the Quebec bridge collapsed into the St. Lawrence, she contributed generously to the relief fund while the Sisters attended the funeral of the thirty-three victims from Caughnawaga.<sup>8</sup>

In mid-September, delegates to the Chapter arrived from the West and from the United States and on Thursday 19, the solemn retreat began for the 137 participants. Calm and silence reigned throughout the house until the morning of September 28 at which time Mother Hamel declared the retreat ended and gave each Sister a copy of the Custom Book, a collection of prescriptions to follow, customs inspired by former practices but adapted to present circumstances.

On the morning of October 7, the Chapter was begun with Archbishop Bruchési presiding. The delegates elected the new General Council constituted as follows: Mother Filiatrault with Sisters Piché, Dionne and Ward as Assistants and Sister Dugas maintaining her responsibility as Director of Formation.

With an ease denoting a life-long practice of humility, Mother Hamel assumed her place in the rank and file while Mother Filiatrault who in 1903 had resigned as Assistant General, once again accepted a responsibility whose burden she had twice before shouldered.

"It cannot be doubted that the members of Council are definitely chosen by God", stated the chronicler and she also added the praise of Archbishop Bruchési concerning Mother Hamel, "I am in duty bound to thank her for the good she has done to the Clergy of my diocese and to the poor during her administration."

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<sup>8</sup> Circ. mens. 1906-08, p. 377.

## THE REGINA HOSPITAL, REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN, 1907

Regina is the Latin word for queen. The town was given this name by Edgar Dewdney in honor of her Royal Highness Queen Victoria. On December 3, 1881,<sup>9</sup> he had become Lieutenant Governor of the Territories and in 1883, chose Regina as the capital of that region even before Saskatchewan had become a province. The Mounted Police had their headquarters nearby and a few small buildings indicated that missionaries were established there. The Catholic minority was mostly of German origin.

On December 17, 1905, Bishop Pascal blessed the church erected by Father Suffa. Measuring 90 ft. by 50 ft., it appeared adequate but soon it had to be enlarged as the small town was developing rapidly.

Bishop Grandin travelling from St. Boniface to St. Albert in 1883, had passed through the town. He had been amazed then at the rapidity with which he had been able to cover the 800 miles in two weeks including a stop at "the little rag town", the future city of Regina.<sup>10</sup> Since that time, things had improved and Archbishop Langevin was now planning to build a hospital there. He deemed it wise to wait till that of Saskatoon was accepted before again soliciting the collaboration of the Grey Nuns. He was surprised when he learned that the Sisters were disposed to develop the two simultaneously. The relative proximity of Regina to Saskatoon had certainly influenced the decision for the Sisters realized that this would allow the personnel of both missions to give one another a hand in time of need.

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<sup>9</sup> Morice, *Hist. abrégée Ouest can.* p. 107

<sup>10</sup> Breton, *Mgr. Grandin*, p. 281.



On May 2, 1907, Sister Duffin, selected for the task in view of her experience, left the Mother House in the company of Sister St. Cyr, en route for Saskatchewan. Sisters Daoust, Wagner and Lechasseur would join them shortly. They reached their destination on May 23 and lived temporarily in the old rectory blessed by Bishop Taché in 1884.<sup>11</sup> For the time being, the hospital would be set up in the old church. But Doctor Johnstone decided to sell the little sanatorium which he had built and furnished. The Sisters bought it on June 7. They occupied it on June 26 and Father Suffa celebrated the first Mass in the chapel which bore the title Regina Coeli. It was thus that the Sisters would privately designate the hospital as the non-Catholic majority of the population did not view favorably the coming of the Sisters. One of the most prominent surgeons of the place, "a former leader of the Free Masons" unleashed all his energy to prevent the success of their enterprise.<sup>12</sup>

The Sisters were already at work at the sanatorium which had been acquired with patients already hospitalized in it. Furthermore, Sisters Duffin and St. Cyr nursed a Mrs. McCusker who was stricken with a terminal illness and who lived close by the hospital. The woman was moved by the dedication of her nurses for she knew they were overburdened with work. "Salaries being extravagantly high," hired help could not be obtained and persons willing to do housework were very rare. Mrs. McCusker also noticed that handiworks made by the Sisters: namely the sale of badges and even canvassing, did not yield the results hoped for. Then she decided to give them a beautiful dress of black lace bought in Venice for \$800.00. "You can easily sell tickets for five or ten dollars and the

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<sup>11</sup> Guichon, Sr. o.c., pp. 54-55.

<sup>12</sup> The chronicler, out of concern for charity, did not name the famous doctor.

revenue will be for your work", she suggested to Sister Duffin.<sup>13</sup>

Fortunately, Mrs. McCusker was not the only person who was interested in the young hospital and the Sisters were touched when generous folk offered them produce of their farm.

The Sisters suffered another inconvenience: the mosquitoes which were said to be the size of .....birds, so vicious was their sting. Both the Sisters and the patients feared they would be eaten alive "and another kind lady, despite her husband's hesitation which Sister Duffin feigned not to notice, generously offered screens for the doors and windows."

Mosquito stings were minor compared to the effects of the subtle and tenacious opposition which was constantly felt. Regardless of this, poverty-stricken patients flocked to the young institution and on October 1, the Sisters recorded with regret, "We must refuse patients for lack of space". In short, the situation was so precarious that they wondered if the project would survive. Furthermore, Sister Daoust, one of the nurses, had to undergo the amputation of an infected thumb. Misfortunes do not usually come singly. In early January of 1908, in bitterly cold weather, the furnace broke down and five days elapsed before repairs were completed. Fortunately, there were not many patients. They were moved into a small room where there was a stove which had to be fed constantly. Sister Duffin sent her companions to the Qu'Appelle mission while she remained on duty with Sister Léonidas and Sister McKenna, the bursar who was visiting the new hospital.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1906-08, pp. 327-328.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 558-559.



The heating system had hardly been repaired when an epidemic broke out and it was then that people observed how available the Grey Nuns were. They refused no one and treated each case with such dedication that they aroused amazement at first and then admiration. As a result, Sister Duffin received a letter dated April 22, 1908 informing her that

the Municipal Council had unanimously resolved at last evening's meeting, that a grant of \$1,000.00 be made to the hospital in appreciation of the effort put forth to provide hospitalization during a difficult situation when the Victoria Hospital was filled to capacity.<sup>15</sup>

The circumstances allowed a comparison between the two institutions which had the same goal and it became evident that the little Regina hospital had won public favor. Mother Filiatrault observed this during her October visit.

The hospital is full. The doctors, who are good non-Catholics, bring their patients to it and go to the Victoria hospital only when they cannot find a bed at the Regina Hospital(...) Six lay nurses have been hired and their service is heroic. The one in charge on night duty must wait until one of the Sisters gets up so that she may occupy her bed.

The doctors insisted on meeting the Superior General, as did the Ladies' Auxiliary who gave a report of their activities during the eighteen months of their existence.<sup>16</sup> In short, the matter at hand was the need for expansion. This inspired Mother Filiatrault to delegate Sister McKenna, the bursar, to examine the feasibility of the project. The official visitor recommended that there should be no delay. The hospital had an excellent reputation thanks to Sister Duffin who had led the way and who since then had been

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<sup>15</sup> Letter of Mr. J. Kelso Hunter, City Clerk, to Sr. Duffin.

<sup>16</sup> Sr. Desnoyers, secretary, at the Mother House, Nov. 5, 1908.

replaced by Sister Dandurand. When the Municipal Council was faced with the perspective of either losing the Sisters or of granting land for a new building, the "rate-payers were unanimously in favor of the grant" and for their part, the Sisters promised to build the hospital within two years. This victory, for it was one indeed, annulled the "evil efforts" of a notorious adversary. He himself would admit:

At Council and elsewhere I did all in my power to oppose the project and despite all this, the Sisters have succeeded, so I said to myself: Since these women are stronger than I am, I shall get on their side.<sup>17</sup>

The Sisters hastened to draw up plans and Sister Dandurand, the Superior was preparing to go to the Mother House to submit them for approval when she had a stroke and died on January 4, 1910. She was succeeded by Sister Pagé in 1911, the year in which Bishop Olivier-Elzéar Mathieu became the head of the new diocese, a detachment from that of St. Boniface. He established his episcopal see in Regina. A Roman prelate, he had been rector of the Laval University in Quebec, his place of birth.<sup>18</sup> The first non-Oblate bishop in the West, he arrived in the capital on November 11, 1911. He was given a triumphal welcome with a candle-light procession, a powerful band, decorated streets and buildings. Nothing was spared and the newsmen, though non-Catholic, reported the event to everyone's satisfaction. It was not surprising therefore that the new Bishop was sympathetic toward the hospital. Fortunately, it had been missed on the path of the destructive tornado that swept through the area on June

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<sup>17</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1922-23, pp. 319-320. The first surgeon in the region admitted this to Father Verdier, Vieban and Labelle, Sulpicians visiting Regina in September 1923. Fr. Verdier, then the Sup. Gen. of the Sulpicians, was later promoted to the rank of cardinal.

<sup>18</sup> Morice, o.c., V. 4, p. 107.



30, 1912. Devastation had been great and the death toll high.

On Sunday, October 6, the hospital was blessed and the nursing personnel was increased for there were fifteen of them by the year end. This was only a beginning, for the Regina hospital would continue to grow as would the School of Nursing. When the time came in 1939 for the Saskatchewan Government to establish a clinic for cancer research, its choice would fall on the Regina hospital. Two years later the nursing school, which already had two wings, needed to be expanded further.

In 1957, when the fiftieth anniversary of the institution was being celebrated, Dr. D.S. Johnstone, the former proprietor of the small sanatorium where the Regina hospital was born, came from Vancouver to participate in the celebration. Though he was non-Catholic, he proclaimed over the microphone and before television cameras, "If the Grey Nuns' hospital in Regina has survived, it is thanks to the spiritual life of the Sisters."<sup>19</sup>

Dr. Johnstone's testimonial strengthened in the Grey Nuns the conviction they had acquired early in their religious life: "Whoever would do God's work must remain close to Him". The vigor of their fifty-year-old institution inspired them to give thanks to God for the countless sacrifices accepted by their predecessors who were the ones truly responsible for the vitality of the institution.

### **THE ST. CHARLES FARM, VILLE ST. LAURENT, 1907**

When the Grey Nuns had been forced to comply with the order to find another place to establish their farm, Mother Hamel had purchased 226 acres of land at Côte-de-Liesse. From the beginning, this was called St. Charles farm

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<sup>19</sup> Sr.J. Laporte to the Mother House, June 24-28,1957.

in honor of Father Lecoq, Superior of the Sulpicians. Mr. W. Tait, the former proprietor, consented to manage it. He lived in a house close to the main residence where, in early May 1908, Sister Clémentine and Mrs. Brault came to live. Later, Sister Montgolfier, a diamond jubilarian, eager to share in community work, would join them.

The farm Sisters were edified by the fine work done by the former proprietor. He not only directed the workers but gave a hand at the various tasks like a simple employee. "This non-Catholic gentleman and his family are most respectful toward the community," wrote the chronicler and she added, "The crop has been excellent: 80 tons of hay, about 1800 bushels of grain, 907 sacks of potatoes." As for the cows, they appeared perfectly adapted to their new environment and the chickens were providing a plentiful daily yield of eggs.

In the course of the winter of 1909, the farm Sisters were visited by the seminarians of the philosophy class who in announcing their visit had requested that they be served a glass of milk for their journey had been on foot. The bursar granted more than the students had requested and they were served milk chocolate, apples and oranges. On May 24, the chapel was blessed. Mass would henceforth be celebrated there twice weekly. The Sisters were overjoyed, especially Sister Montgolfier who till then had to travel two miles back and forth to attend Mass. This joy was shared by the Sisters of other missions who offered vestments and various items for the liturgy.

The farm soon became a picnic place for the students of the home-economics school who gave a hand at picking potatoes while they enjoyed the fresh air and sunshine.

Gradually, the house became organized. On March 12, 1910, Sister Thuot was named Superior and the farm became a place of convalescence and rest for the sick



Sisters while it also served for those who were destined to become farm managers at Châteauguay, St. Albert and St. Boniface.<sup>20</sup>

One Sister especially would become famous at the St. Charles farm. In 1940, Sister Rose-Aimée Gamache was awarded a gold medal for agricultural merit by the Provincial Government. To hear Sister Gamache speaking about the earth was to meditate on the care of Providence in supplying the needs of mankind. "This wonderful feeder of humanity is greatly ignored", she would say. "We thrive on what it produces and we neglect to admire it and to thank the Lord who made it so rich and so productive". With these few words, Sister Gamache lifted up to God, Creator of the earth, the honor bestowed on her on the day she received the medal.

Under the direction of this competent Sister, the project developed.

To the original house, a wing was added in 1939 which could accommodate twenty-two Sisters. Alas, however, on November 2, 1946, about 4 a.m., fire broke out in the hayloft and spread with the rapidity of lightning. The work of firemen from Montreal and Ville St. Laurent was limited by low water pressure. Two heifers were lost, but 160 milk cows were saved and would be sheltered in the stable and the pigsty while the overflow would go to Senator Raymond's former property. This created an inconvenience as the property was at a distance of three-and-a-half miles from Liesse.

This event did not moderate Sister Gamache's enthusiasm for she succeeded in rebuilding what the flames had destroyed. However this farm lady was forced to

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<sup>20</sup> Since 1908, the Youville farm, situated 4 miles away from the St. Boniface provincial house, had been under the care of a farmer. From Dec. 1911 it was managed by two Sisters.

abandon this work for on July 26, 1951 the Sisters were advised that the farm was being expropriated in favor of the Canadian National Railway. Through the year that followed, Sister Gamache supervised the moving of livestock and farm equipment to the farm at Châteauguay. Only God knew what went on in the heart of this genuine farmer as she left the place where she had worked for more than thirty years. From her contemplation of nature, from the spectacle of grain dying in order to produce a hundredfold, Sister Gamache drew strength to bear this trial. Moreover, she would never cease to proclaim her admiration for the soil which rested under the snow, came to life again with the April showers and, with the heat of the summer sun, again produced a golden harvest. In imitation of St. Francis Assisi toward whom she had a special devotion, Sister Gamache praised God for Sister Earth from which mankind draws its subsistence.

### **ST. PETER'S HOSPITAL, NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY, U.S.A., 1907**

Monsignor O'Grady, pastor of St. Peter's Parish in New Brunswick had visited the Mother House of the Grey Nuns in 1881. Impressed with the order which reigned there, the young priest had said to himself: "These are the Sisters I will get some day to set up and maintain a hospital."

Twenty-five years had elapsed, but the determination of the priest had not lessened. In the course of the winter of 1907, he wrote repeatedly to the Superior General requesting Grey Nuns for the founding of a hospital in his parish. Each time, Mother Hamel had answered that the project was impossible due to the scarcity of Sisters. The pastor persisted. He called upon the intervention of one of his friends 'already known among us,' said the chronicler, and both declared that they would continue their entreaties



until they obtained an affirmative reply.<sup>21</sup> The forthcoming General Chapter suspended the consideration of the requests but they were resumed when the new Council took office. Before such perseverance, the Grey Nuns finally yielded, admitting that there were still some people capable of imitating the persistence of the biblical man who compelled his friend to give him bread in the middle of the night.<sup>22</sup>

On November 4, Sister Piché, the Assistant General, set out for the States with Sister McKenna and Sister St-René who was convalescing and had agreed to try out her strength in a new environment. Monsignor O'Grady, who had reached the fulfillment of his hopes, could not adequately express his joy. The Agreement was soon concluded whereby the Grey Nuns assumed the administration of a diocesan project. Sister Dolan was summoned by telegram on her return from St. Boniface. Hers would be the duty of setting the project in motion with the help of Sisters St-Jérôme and St-Onésime both on loan for a while.

By mid-December, twenty-five patients had registered and there were almost as many conversions. As Monsignor O'Grady had hoped, the sight of the Sisters' dedication had encouraged several patients "to set their spiritual affairs in order."

During May 1908, Sisters Fennell and Ste. Fortunate went to Victoria Hospital in Montreal to study the organization of the various services in order to adapt the ideas at St. Peter's. They were courteously welcomed and

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<sup>21</sup> The chronicler did not name this friend. We do not know if it was Mgr. Bruchési or Fr. J.-H. Millette, the pastor at St. Louis de Gonzague in Nashua. We would opt for the latter who in 1907 had completed the building of a hospital which he also entrusted to the Grey Nuns.

<sup>22</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1906-1908, pp. 413-414.

the Grey Nuns in turn invited the authorities of the Royal Victoria Hospital to the Mother House. The Superintendent accepted and brought with him three women recently arrived from Europe. The visitors were both astounded and edified with what they saw and the superintendent concluded: "If we succeed in doing a little good it is only at the cost of money but with you Sisters, it is at the cost of sacrifices."

In New Brunswick, the Sisters would encounter sacrifices; obviously these were not of the same kind as the privations experienced by the missionaries of the far North; nevertheless, the small number of Sisters meant heavy work loads and the effect appeared in the health of the missionaries. In this great country with such a cosmopolitan population, sad events occurred. Thus, on March 22, 1909, Monsignor O'Grady had to attend a Hungarian man sentenced to be hanged for murdering his niece. Despite his sensitiveness, Monsignor wished to accompany him to the scaffold, noted the chronicler.<sup>23</sup>

The little St. Peter's Hospital would develop and, in time, a nursing school would be added and without any noisy publicity, it would provide in the field of nursing all the good which its founder, Monsignor O'Grady of happy memory had hoped for.

### - 1908 -

Mother Filiatrault courageously resumed her responsibility as Superior General and pursued the initiatives of her predecessor. Thus, she saw the New Brunswick Hospital come to life in the previous fall and in December, shortly before Christmas, she saw St. Patrick's Orphanage moved to Outremont. Several years previously the Parish board of the Irish population had purchased a

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<sup>23</sup> Circ. mens. 1909-11, p. 115.



forty-acre lot for this purpose. Despite the diligence of Sister St. Jacques, the grey stone house was as yet unfinished and the workers were still completing installations. Access to the residence located in open country was easy because of street cars. The children enjoyed fresh air, sunshine and solitude for the building was surrounded by four orchards of fruit trees and beautiful yards where they could play.

In May 1908, the institution was visited by Cardinal Logue, the Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of all of Ireland. It was a glorious day for the new home, a memorable day which would be recorded in the chronicles. It would also be one of Sister St. Jacques' final joys for on June 19, she was admitted to the infirmary after a time spent in Notre-Dame Hospital where doctors had declared her case terminal.<sup>24</sup>

Another orphanage was completed in 1907 in Toledo. Having become diocesan, the institution had also changed name. It was now called St. Anthony's Orphanage while the name St. Vincent was reserved for the hospital. Mother Filiatrault delegated Sister Ward, her Assistant to the inaugural ceremony which bore the stamp of American prodigality. A large quantity of natural flowers and plants was received and despite unpleasant weather a procession of 1,500 members with banners and bands escorted Bishop Hartzman of Cleveland on the morning of October 27.

The Superior General herself went to Toledo in February at which time she was literally besieged by the Bishop, the clergy and the population requesting more Sisters since there was now question of opening a day nursery in a cottage adjacent to the hospital.<sup>25</sup> Mother Filiatrault felt compelled to yield to the request on condition that in the

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<sup>24</sup> She died on Dec. 1, 1908.

<sup>25</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1906-08, p. 339.

city of Toledo itself, new candidates to the Sisterhood could be found. Doctor Donnelly established himself as a promoter of vocations.<sup>26</sup>

The Superior had no sooner returned from Toledo when she received a letter from Dr. J. P. Rottot stating that due to ill health, he could no longer provide professional service. "He had replaced Doctor Schmidt on November 9, 1880, and we have been pleased with his good care" the chronicler stated. The Superior General fully agreed and expressed to the doctor the appreciation of her community

who would regretfully lose a doctor whose respectability and knowledge have been its support through twenty-eight years and who was for her a counsellor and a devoted friend.<sup>27</sup>

Doctor G. Damien Masson, Doctor Rottot's assistant, succeeded him on March 17 and he assumed authority on St. Patrick's day.

Several deaths had touched the Grey Nuns since the beginning of the year. Fathers. F. Daniel and R. Rousseau were both Sulpicians. The first had been the founder and director of the Auxiliary Sisters; the second had founded Hospice St. Charles and had been chaplain at the Mother House from 1887 to 1890.

From Châteauguay precious souvenirs were received. One was the nail of a crucifix which had been planted on the mound in 1832. This crucifix was the work of Labrosse and had been venerated at Notre-Dame Church and before which Mother d'Youville had prayed. The other was a small wooden cross painted by Mother Slocombe and on which the following could be read: "God alone as witness, Jesus as

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 535.

<sup>27</sup> Letter of Mar. 16, 1908.



model, Mary for support and I always as sacrifice". Then in early May, Mr. Arthur Delisle sent to the Sisters the genealogy of his family. He was the grandson of Jean Delisle de la Cailleterie, the distinguished physician who, on the night of December 23, 1771, had seen a luminous cross above the General Hospital, "an incident which the Sisters had interpreted as a sign of Mother d'Youville's entry into eternal glory". This document and these objects of the past found their way to their appropriate place in the hall of souvenirs.

On May 13, the Sisters learned of the sudden death of Bishop Hartzman of Cleveland, the diocese to which our two missions in Toledo belonged. The Superior General recommended to the prayers of the Sisters this worthy shepherd who many times had lent the Grey Nuns a helping hand.

The Superior who was in duty bound to visit the missions at least once during her term of office went to Boston on May 20. Before her departure, she and her Council had decided to suspend the project of women boarders on the second floor of the central wing leading to St. Mathieu Street. These new apartments after certain modifications, would be assigned to the senior Sisters whose numbers were increasing.

On July 4, Mother Filiatrault returned from Lawrence where she had attended the blessing of the altar by Archbishop William O'Connell of Boston, the future cardinal. She was just in time to oversee the final preparations for the seniorate. She knew that the change would affect the elderly Sisters for this was an innovation and she wished to be there to facilitate their adaptation to new quarters which consisted of twelve rooms with access to the chapel balcony, a dining room, a community room and a porch. Until then, they shared common dormitories.

They would be better off in this new department but they had not realized this as yet.

The day after the Seniors had taken possession of their new domain, there occurred a deeply moving event, worthy of being highlighted. The Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame were leaving old Montreal to move to their new Mother House on Sherbrooke Street. One of their beloved seniors, Sister St. Alexis was the blood sister of Sister Youville, the eldest member of the Grey Nuns.<sup>28</sup> Sister St. Alexis expressed the desire to see her elder sister. She could not however come down from the carriage. As for Sister Youville, settled in the seniorate, she could not go to the parlor either. The case was settled by opening the garden gates allowing the carriage to enter while Sister Youville was carried to it on a chair. According to onlookers, the encounter was most touching. Sister St. Alexis wept a little while Sister Youville, blessed with a remarkable memory, re-assured her concerning her age. "You are not yet eighty-three," she said, "and I am eighty-six." The interview ended with an appointment to meet in heaven.

The end of July was marked by the coming of another distinguished guest, Doctor Cluss, a professor at the University in Vienna. Mr. Ekers, the former mayor, personally introduced Doctor Cluss and his colleague, Mr. Charles Strongman. These gentlemen were led through the main departments and were very pleased to have visited

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<sup>28</sup> Misses Zoé Beaubien and her twin sister, Hélène, born on June 15, 1822, were half-sisters of Mother Beaubien, Sup. Gen. of the Grey Nuns 1833-1843. According to custom, they had to change their names. Miss Zoé became known as Sr. Normant and Miss Hélène as Sr. Youville. Sr. St. Alexis of the C.N.D. was their youngest sister. Sr. Normant had died on Jan. 25, 1894.

<sup>29</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1906-08. p. 679.



this General Hospital of the Grey Nuns of which they had heard in Germany and in Belgium.<sup>29</sup>

Bishop Grouard needed no letter of recommendation in order to be welcomed at the Grey Nuns. This illustrious missionary was a long time friend, and was now prematurely worn out by apostolic labor. Upon learning of the coming of the Grey Nuns, the young Oblate who had come to the far North early in his career had exclaimed:

Is this not tempting God? Will they be able to survive the terrible winters without bread or anything? We men can make it by killing a hare or a muskrat. But Sisters!—when we have seen explorers reduced to eating their hired help!<sup>30</sup>

Since 1867, Bishop Grouard had seen at work these women who had earned his esteem and appreciation. On this day August 31, the Bishop, despite his proverbial serenity, was deeply moved as he shared with the Sisters at the Mother House the trials he had endured. Two confrères, Fathers Brémond and Brohan had drowned at the rapids of Fort Smith; two days later, the old residence of the Bishop of Athabaska which had become a storehouse for the missions, had been destroyed by fire. What the Bishop did not say but what the Sisters from the North would reveal was that on learning of the death of his two confrères, he had exclaimed: "Dear God, why did you not take me instead?"<sup>31</sup> Since this tragedy, he had become resigned and continued to value the consolations reserved for him by Providence. The inspector's visit was a happy event and the pupils of the school at Chipewyan performed marvelously well. The inspector himself highly praised the talent for improvisation apparent in the performance of Sister McDougall's pupils. They wrote an impromptu composition

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<sup>30</sup> Duchaussois, Fr., *Femmes Héroïques*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>31</sup> Letter of Sr. Dufault, dated June 20, 1908.

which charmed both him and the visitors. Needless to say, the Superior General experienced legitimate pride on hearing a person in authority proclaim the merit of her beloved missionaries. It was not to them, however that she would go on the morning of September 7, but to those dispersed in the fourteen houses of the St. Boniface vicariate. She would stop longer at the more recent foundations: Fort Frances, Saskatoon and Regina. She would attend the blessing of the cathedral in St. Boniface on October 4, but could not reach Kenora as the ice did not guarantee sufficient security.

Returning on December 16 after a circuit which had lasted three months and eight days, the Superior General was welcomed back with great joy. On December 21, she received a letter from Archbishop Bruchési then in Rome. He was reassuring her concerning the beloved Cause. Father Hertzog had informed Father Filiatrault, the vice-postulator in Montreal of a deficiency in the procedure of the 'ordinary trial'. The persons who had testified had not been named. This shortcoming had to be corrected. In case of the death of any witness, a certificate of burial had to be supplied.<sup>32</sup> The Archbishop of Montreal wrote:

The difficulty has been solved and the Cause will proceed on its regular course. All those who are involved in this cause are sympathetic to it. They find it beautiful and do not question its success.

Eager to share this joy with all the Sisters, Mother Filiatrault assembled them in the community room on December 21 and read them the letter which revived their hopes and inspired them to imitate more closely, their Venerable Mother whom they were eager to see honored by the Church.

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<sup>32</sup> Circ. mens. 1906-08, p. 750.



## THE ST-JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL, NASHUA, NEW HAMPSHIRE, U.S.A., 1908

A refusal was not easy in face of the persistence of the pastor at St. Louis de Gonzague in Nashua. Both the Earley brothers and the Grey Nuns became aware of this. During the winter of 1907, the latter were literally besieged by Father Millette who wished them to take charge of the hospital he was building precisely on the property owned by the Earley brothers. The latter had inherited a vast estate of six acres on a hill commanding a view of the whole town. Michael Earley, their father had come from Ireland in 1845, fleeing the great famine which afflicted his country. He prospered by the sweat of his brow and became a defender of the faith by sustaining the courage of his Catholic countrymen being persecuted by the fanatical elements of New Hampshire. Consequently, Mr. Earley had proven to be a powerful support for the pastor at St. Louis de Gonzague. It was probable that Michael Earley contributed financially to the founding of the Nashua Orphanage. He did not witness its opening however, for he died on March 28, 1901 at the age of one hundred years and six months.<sup>33</sup> The respected old man had proven by his own life that work does not kill. Furthermore, he had often mentioned to his sons that he had a presentiment that something great would one day be established on his property. It was precisely this disclosure which led the heirs to move their residence to "the acre of land they had reserved for themselves" in order to allow the building of a hospital.

Without hesitation, Father Millette began building while continuing to earnestly entreat the Grey Nuns for he was determined that it was they who should administer the various services in this modern hospital. Realizing that his

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<sup>33</sup> The orphanage opened on Apr. 9, 1901.

own repeated requests would not obtain an affirmative reply, Father Millette appealed to Archbishop Bruchési for help and the latter favored the foundation. The Superior General then named Sister Masseleau Superior of the future establishment while residing at the orphanage on Main Street. Each day, Sister went to Kinsley Street "where a superb building was under construction equipped with every modern convenience". The pastor had taken care to have the plan drawn up so that the chapel would occupy the space where Mr. Earley's room had been. The heirs were very sensitive to this for they would live out their old age close to the sanctuary which held such precious memories.

In early April, Sister Masseleau went to the Mother House for her annual retreat. During her absence, Father Millette along with Bishop Guertin, of Manchester, a staunch friend of the Grey Nuns, set the date of the blessing of the hospital for April 30. Sister Masseleau was given Sister Comeau as a companion and on Wednesday April 22, both went to the chapel where the Superior General recited the prayers of the itinerary and entrusted the foundation "to our beloved Mother d'Youville".

On May 1, the hospital was opened. It had a capacity of seventy beds and could compare with any other establishment of its kind according to Sister Marie-de-la-Présentation who arrived on May 12. She was the purveyor and as her wide experience in the hospital field facilitated her task, she was given the care of the chapel as well. The soil was suitable for the cultivation of flowers for the altar. A non-Catholic doctor noticed the sacristan's concern and was pleased to bring her beautiful roses from time to time. He even went to the chapel to see how artistically his floral tribute had been displayed.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Biography of Sr. M.-de-la-Présentation, the sister of Sr. M. Collette who was the author of the first chronicles written in 1877.



In a letter to the Mother House, the sacristan told of the Sisters' pleasant surprise on May 21, when Mother Filiatrault arrived in the company of Mother Malard, the Provincial Superior of the Boston vicariate. At this time, there were twenty patients. Eleven others were expected and here as elsewhere, the popularity of St. Joseph's Hospital had spread abroad so that it soon became necessary to request more workers. Eventually, there was question of expansion, of the establishment of a school of nursing and of building a day-care centre which the public would refer to as a little marvel.<sup>35</sup>

The pioneers of this institution frequently heard Father Millette express his satisfaction at having insisted on obtaining Grey Nuns. Also, he often recalled the memory of Mr. Earley, the humble worker and devout Catholic who had come from Ireland and whose exemplary conduct had inspired his sons to give up their land for a mean sum thus immortalizing the memory of their beloved father.

#### - 1909 -

The Superior General's program for the new year appeared extremely heavy; moreover, experience had taught her to expect the unexpected.

The year 1909 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Hospice in Varennes. There was also a meeting of the Council of Canadian Bishops scheduled for September; consequently a flow of visitors to the Mother House was expected. There were plans to renovate the interior of the chapel as it had not been refreshed since 1878. Châteauguay would be expanded by using the 'yellow hangar' formerly known as the dove-house which was located near the manor. Its second floor would be

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<sup>35</sup> Ann. 1938-39, p. 687.

transformed into sleeping quarters for the Sisters who needed rest.<sup>36</sup>

In the vicariate of St. Boniface, the services of the Sisters would be required when the remains of Bishops Provencher, Faraud and Taché would be exhumed and transferred to the crypt of the cathedral. The body of Archbishop Taché, who had died fifteen years previously, was found to be intact. It was clothed with episcopal vestments and the solemn funeral service and transfer took place on June 22.<sup>37</sup>

As for the canonical province of Alberta, it would observe the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the Grey Nuns at Lac Ste-Anne in 1859. The celebration of this anniversary would be made to coincide with the diamond jubilee of the priesthood of the illustrious Father Lacombe now eighty-seven years of age and whose gait was heavy but whose zeal had shown no decline. Mother Carroll, the Provincial Superior was delegated to visit the northern missions and would embark at Athabaska Landing in mid-June.<sup>38</sup> She found the convent personnel of Chipewyan in mourning because of the death of Sister Brunelle on December 10, 1908, a loss very keenly felt. This companion who had been co-foundress of the convent in Providence had dedicated many years to the mission of Chipewyan and had earned the affection of all.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1909-11, pp. 78, 153. In 1908, the sidewalk around the Mother House was also completed.

<sup>37</sup> The disinterment took place on Mar. 22.

<sup>38</sup> As of 1908, the Sisters in charge of the various provinces were addressed as Mothers. The custom was extended a little later to include all the members of the General Council.

<sup>39</sup> News of this death was received at the Mother House on Jan. 16, 1909. Another heroic woman, Sr. Michel-des-Sts., co-foundress of the convent in Providence would die on Nov. 23 of the same year.



For her part, Mother Filiatrault proposed to go to Alberta to carry out the official visitation of the various convents. The previous year's visitation had been limited to the houses of St. Boniface province. The Superior General however, was unable to stay any longer, for under the appearance of health, was concealed a certain level of fatigue, an exhaustion attributed at the time to her diabetic condition. "One must keep secret what one suffers" she would sometimes say, thus revealing her disposition.

To seek oneself, to withdraw within oneself is to waste one's time. Let us rather look to the divine perfections, let us love our Divine Master; he has done so much for us.<sup>40</sup>

In spite of her courage, Mother Filiatrault had to go to Châteauguay on January 15 for a rest. She was back at the Mother House by January 25 when Bishop Grouard, on his return from Europe, stopped at the Grey Nuns. He had been privileged to attend the Eucharistic Congress in London in 1908. He had received much consideration "because of my long white beard" he explained, but especially because of the frigid and distant country under his charge. The Bishop praised the automobile which had not yet appeared in the north but he was truly entranced with the airplane which travelled five hundred miles an hour.<sup>41</sup>

At the end of January it was learned that the Protectorate of Mary Immaculate in Lawrence had miraculously been saved from a fire, a favor confidently attributed to Mother d'Youville.<sup>42</sup> As if to inspire the Sisters to persevere in their devotion to their Foundress, the Cause

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<sup>40</sup> The notes concerning Mother Filiatrault were obtained from her biography.

<sup>41</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1909-11, pp. 41-42.

<sup>42</sup> Letter from Sr. St. Jean-Baptiste to Mother Filiatrault, Jan. 28, 1909.

advanced another step. The Congregation of Rites examined the validity of the diocesan action undertaken for the Cause of the Venerable Marguerite d'Youville.<sup>43</sup>

Alas, the enthusiasm elicited by this 'step forward' was soon to be replaced by a serious concern for on February 21, the Superior General was threatened with a stroke. "Good Lord, what will happen to us?" exclaimed Sister Panet, the annalist, as she remembered the dark days of 1897.<sup>44</sup> A strict diet and a complete rest prescribed by Doctor Masson warded off the danger, but the doctor remained inflexible concerning the planned trip to St. Albert. It had to be postponed.

It was from her sick room that the Superior would carry out her obligations, for the time being. On Monday, March 8, she received in her room, a visit from Bishop Pascal who was accompanied by Father Lemanceau, chaplain to the Sisters of Charity of Evron and by three Sisters among whom was the Superior General of this Congregation. These Sisters, invited to St. Albert by Bishop Pascal, were going to visit the place before settling there.<sup>45</sup>

The Superior presided at Council meetings and the decisions taken proved that she had not lost sight of the spiritual or material well-being of her large family. Early in her mandate, she had encouraged the introduction of gymnastics into the school program. This was an innovation whose value she had seriously considered. Brought up in the country by a knowledgeable mother, she herself had benefitted from physical exercise in the open air. Eager to deal with all aspects of training, physical, intellectual and moral, she organized a series of conferences on the development of children. The conferences were

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<sup>43</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1909-11, p. 74.

<sup>44</sup> The year of Mother Deschamps' death on June 29.

<sup>45</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1909-11, p. 83.



given by Father Girot, p.s.s., to all the Sisters at the Mother House and those from the surrounding missions. The novices were also included.<sup>46</sup>

Gifted with a beautiful voice, as a novice she had helped on feast days and during her stay at the Nazareth Institute, she had been able to develop the gift she had received. She often asked the Sisters to sing her favorite hymns for her. When she was requested to sing, she invariably chose the psalm: "I will bless the Lord at all times". One of the Sisters caring for the orphans had the art of vocal culture. Her school was so successful that her little choir was often called upon, especially by Father Payette, the pastor of Longueuil.<sup>47</sup> The Superior General encouraged these outings which developed in the children a liking for music and inspired them to put forth the effort necessary to become competent. After an evening on the feast of St. Cecilia, when the children's choir had achieved a brilliant success, the Superior General willingly allowed the group to be called Students of the St- Mathieu School of Singing and to be introduced to the Archbishop of Montreal as such.

The Superior loved to surprise the Sisters of the Mother House by appearing unexpectedly at certain gatherings. There were other occasions at which her presence was required. She made it a duty to be at the golden jubilee of five Sisters, among whom were Sisters Ethier and Boucher, two missionaries who had worked many years in the Canadian west. This was also the case on her name day, the feast of St. Praxède. She followed the whole program, visiting the poor gathered in the community room, greeting all the Sisters, visiting noteworthy persons from the exterior, mainly members of the clergy.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 181, et Circ., mens, 1906-08, p. 132. Sr. Laframboise was in charge of the choir.

Through the summer, the Sisters observed with joy that Mother Filiatrault's health had improved considerably and their opinion was strengthened by the fact that Sister Anna Piché, the Assistant General, was delegated to Alberta to represent the Superior General at celebrations which had been planned over many months. On her return, she would visit the houses of the St. Boniface Province. Sister Piché had become a Grey Nun in order 'to endure poverty and want and to work in the most difficult missions'.<sup>48</sup> But she had never seen the West having been assigned to American missions. Mother Filiatrault made it her duty to attend the celebrations at the Hôtel-Dieu of Montreal on September 1 commemorating the 250th anniversary of the arrival of the Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph. She participated in the first day of the triduum which was an intimate celebration within the cloister. In fact, the eighty Sisters invited were allowed to enter the cloister. The Superior was happy to see that there was little difference between the living quarters of the Hospitallers and those of the Grey Nuns. When a photographer was preparing to record on film a souvenir of this visit, the Superior General withdrew discreetly "through respect for our Venerable Mother who had never allowed anyone to paint her portrait", explained the chronicler.<sup>49</sup>

As had been expected, the Council of Canadian Bishops drew distinguished visitors to the Mother House. Meanwhile, on September 11, they were preceded by Sisters Royal and Duffin. The first had worked over fifty years in St. Boniface and the second had been a courageous foundress of the school in Kenora, of the orphanage in Winnipeg and of the hospital in Regina.<sup>50</sup> It is useless to say that the bishops of the West were happy to

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<sup>48</sup> Gravel, Sr. J., *Mère Piché*, p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1909-11, p. 256.

<sup>50</sup> Sr. Duffin went to replace Sr. Franklin at St. Patrick's, Déom. St., Outremont.



meet these worthy workers whose labors back home had been crowned with success.

Four days later, on September 15, it was Bishop Grouard who celebrated at the main altar and after breakfast, told the Sisters assembled, of his great satisfaction concerning the schools of the north. He would like to have another at Fond-du-Lac. He also announced that His Holiness Pius X had complied with his request and that a coadjutor had been granted to him in the person of Father Célestin Joussard who had been consecrated in Vancouver on September 5.<sup>51</sup>

On September 16, it was Bishop Legal who presided at the celebration. He did not stop at the convent, for the thirty-five bishops had to go to Quebec that same day to attend the Council chaired by Bishop Sbaretto, the Apostolic Delegate.

It is presumed that the western bishops were united and supported Bishop Pascal's request 'to resurrect the mission of Ile-à-la-Crosse'. The apostolic Vicar never let an occasion go by without expressing his regret at the departure of the Grey Nuns. "Religious fanaticism often rebels at the sight of a priest's cassock, but bows with respect at the sight of the grey habit of the Sisters of Charity".<sup>52</sup> Still more recently, on September 30, he addressed to Mother Filiatrault the following request:

To obey you and to please the community, I had consented to replace your Sisters with French Sisters. God seems to be telling us that only the Grey Nuns of Montreal, the apostles 'par excellence' of the most difficult missions of the Canadian West, are able to succeed in these difficult

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<sup>51</sup> Bishop Joussard, ill with a fever, was unable to accompany Bishop Grouard.

<sup>52</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1906-08, pp. 396-397.

places.(...) We have been refused by all the communities of France and of Canada. Where can we go? Canadian Sisters are being sent to China and Africa and they cannot evangelize their own country! This thought is painful and grieves my heart. Father Rapet came to tell us of his sadness and of the fate of this mission. We are all distressed and we have decided to write (to you) to implore your pity and that of the Mothers of your Council.

The Superior General readily affirmed: "The poor are the most precious asset of the Institute and we should deem it an honor to be their guardians and their trustees". She could not resist this appeal and on October 4, she announced to the Sisters, the re-opening of the mission. She added the comment that this heroic act required faith in God's Providence.<sup>53</sup> We are assured that the school is now situated at Lac-la-Plonge away from the danger of annual flooding which had motivated the Sisters' withdrawal.

Bishop Pascal hastily shared the news with Archbishop Bruchési who wholeheartedly endorsed the project. Father Rapet, who was in charge of the mission, could hardly contain himself with joy. On October 6, he tried to express the gratitude of his people. He considered that he had earlier been miraculously cured by Mother d'Youville. Condemned by medical science in 1885, he had recovered on the fifth day of a novena made by the Sisters.<sup>54</sup>

Although it seemed that the decision had restored the Superior General's strength, she did not feel able to attend the fiftieth anniversary of Hospice Lajemmerais in Varennes. She delegated Sister Ward, her Assistant and a group of Sisters who would sing at the Benediction in the evening. Mother Filiatrault was no doubt present in thought at the little village of Varennes. Here on October 15, 1701, had

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<sup>53</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1909-11, p. 287.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.



been born the eldest daughter of Christophe Dufrost de la Jemmerais, Madame d'Youville. A painting by the artist Georges Delfosse appeared on the white wall of the Cathedral along with those of the Founders of the Canadian Church,<sup>55</sup> indicating that the illustrious pioneers had not planted the seed in vain.

The year ended on a note of hope and optimism reflected in the statistics. A Sister of Quebec was inspired to count the total number of Grey Nuns who had followed in the footsteps of Mother d'Youville through the years from 1747 to 1909. It was established that 3,960 women, of whom 1,069 were deceased, had worn the grey habit in various places in Canada and the United States while in the different novitiates, 409 candidates were preparing for their mission of charity.<sup>56</sup>

### **THE SACRED HEART SCHOOL, BEAUVAL, LAC LA PLONGE, SASKATCHEWAN, 1909.**

A beloved senior Sister residing at the seniorate since its opening, experienced immense joy at the thought of the Sisters' return, if not to Ile-à-la-Crosse itself, at least to the school at Lac-La-Plonge, only fifty-five kilometers from the original site. Sister Marie-Rose Caron, known as Sister Agnès had co-founded the distant mission in 1860. In the company of Sisters Pépin and Boucher and of Luce Fortier, a tertiary, she had left the Mother House on June 4, had stopped at St. Boniface, leaving there on July 30 to arrive at Ile-à-la-Crosse on October 4.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The paintings were installed in the Cathedral on Aug. 8, 1909.

<sup>56</sup> One would have to add to this number the five professed who accompanied Mother d'Youville when she took possession of the General Hospital in 1747.

<sup>57</sup> Hist. Ile-à-la-Crosse, doc. C.

Sister Agnès had spent thirty-two years at that convent where she had contracted an infirmity which caused her to limp; when she left the mission in 1892, she was replaced by her younger sister, Sister Lajoie who assumed the office of superior. In 1905, Sister Lajoie through obedience had been obliged to close Hospice St. Joseph and return to St. Boniface, and then in 1909, to proceed to Montreal.<sup>58</sup> One can well imagine that Sister Lajoie who bore her name well, experienced deep gratitude at the thought that "the Sisters' work had not been in vain and that the prayers of the Montagnais and the Cree people would be answered".

Others came to congratulate the Grey Nuns. Among them was Father Lacombe who declared before the whole community:

The priests and bishops of the North were unanimously happy when the news of your acceptance came. I attribute your Mother's improved health to this act of generosity.<sup>59</sup>

Two days later, on November 6, Sisters St. Nazaire and St. Elisée arrived from St. Boniface where years before they had pronounced their vows. They were coming to visit the Mother House before again leaving for exile. Sister St. Nazaire had formerly spent seven years at Ile-à-la-Crosse, the Capital of Solitude, and now, she was returning as Superior. It was not exactly at the same place for the first location had become uninhabitable due to the danger of floods, but the second was reasonably close.<sup>60</sup>

These two Sisters left the Mother House on December 15. Sisters Beaudin, St. Adelin, Yvonne and Alice would join

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<sup>58</sup> Not. biogr. Sr. Lajoie.

<sup>59</sup> Circ. mens. 1909-11, pp. 304-305.

<sup>60</sup> Sr. St. Nazaire returned to la-Crosse as Superior at the opening of the mission in 1917. She would be the second foundress. she later returned to Beauval where she died of typhoid.



them later. According to an established custom, the Superior General led them to the chapel where prayers of the itinerary were recited, then to the community room for the kiss of peace. "It was the final greeting for many of us," the chronicler commented.

The group of missionaries met in Prince-Albert at 7:30 p.m. of January 8. They were welcomed by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Sion and the next day they went to greet Bishop Pascal whose kindness was of a nature to strengthen their determination to carry out God's work in this isolated country. The Sisters would leave Prince-Albert on January 12 or 13th they said, for departures and arrivals are subject to the weather in the 'Little North' as northern Saskatchewan was designated. They arrived at their destination at 6:30 a.m. on January 28. "We were tired although all had been done to make us as comfortable as possible," wrote Sister St. Nazaire.

Under the 'canvas' covers, we did not feel the cold, but the poor Brothers had to face the inclemency of the weather (...) We were glad to arrive after having spent eleven days and six nights travelling by carriage.<sup>61</sup>

The missionaries found the site beautiful even in its winter decor. The interior of the building was less attractive for there was no trace of paint and there was such disorder that only the Sisters could find the courage to tackle it. However, they were helped by the pupils of the highest grade. Twenty-five pupils had already registered and twenty-five more were expected but space had to be created by first establishing order.

In early March, the missionaries learned that henceforth, Beauval would belong to the Keewatin vicariate and five months later, news reached them that Father

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<sup>61</sup> Letter of Feb. 10, 1910.

Ovide Charlebois was named its first titular. On June 11, 1911, the humble Canadian Oblate, who had been promoted to the episcopate, visited the Beauval School. He praised the Grey Nuns highly and shared with them the hope that the Institution would be permanent. Little did they suspect at the time, that Beauval like several other missions would receive the baptism of fire, the impact of harsh trials, but the Sisters had already accepted the fact that the cross would be their lot as it had been for the first missionaries, for only the cross gives promise of a bright eternity.

### - 1910 -

A typhoid epidemic had been at its peak in Montreal since the latter part of 1909, and Archbishop Bruchési during his visit on the evening of January 8, congratulated the Council for having opened the shelter on Mance Street for the afflicted. "If it becomes necessary, I shall also open the churches and the cathedral to the unfortunate people" he declared.<sup>62</sup> The numerous deaths at the Mother House in the first semester of 1910 resulted from that contagion. Sisters Papineau and Dasimir died on January 1, Sister Baril on January 3, and by May 8 the list of names had grown to eight.

On the morning of January 8, the body of Sister Léa Dandurand arrived at the Mother House. She had died in Regina, not of typhoid but of a stroke. Mother Despins and Sister Lauzier escorted the remains and the Dandurand family gathered around the coffin to view for the last time "the exiled volunteer". The Sisters contemplated this companion whom they had known to be enthusiastic and joyful even in times of trial. The residents of the Mother House understood better the sacrifices of the missionaries

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<sup>62</sup> Circ. mens. 1909-11, p. 436.



far away, for they had likewise experienced cold and darkness; there had been a failure of water and electric power which lasted two days and allowed them to experience what life was probably like in places where water had to be hauled and where candles had to be used for lighting.

Mother Filiatrault had sustained the heavy schedule of the festive season without apparent fatigue but she noticed that her Assistant showed some signs of exhaustion. Indeed, Sister Piché had to submit to surgery on January 17, the outcome of which was doubtful and the Superior General was concerned. The Superior usually made her annual retreat in November to end with the renewal of vows on the 21st or in December to end on the 23rd, anniversary of the Foundress' death. This year, she thought her intimate time with the Lord should take place earlier. She knew that the Eucharistic Congress in Montreal, set for early September, would disturb the daily program. Furthermore, she would have to allow a long period of convalescence to her Assistant who was discharged from the hospital only on April 18.

In the meantime, Mother Filiatrault wished to fill in a gap. She had been unable to attend the golden jubilee of the Varennes institution last year. On March 29, she left for Hospice Lajemmerais with Mother Martin, the Provincial Superior and Sister Chénier, her nurse. All the Sisters interpreted in this little trip an indication that their 'Mother's' strength had been renewed.<sup>63</sup>

In early April, she had returned to Montreal where a long letter from the Sisters in Resolution awaited her advising that they were now in their new convent. The missionaries marvelled at the comfort provided by the hot-air heating system. It even awakened the flies and

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 391.

mosquitoes. This is a foretaste of what next summer will be like, commented the writer.<sup>64</sup>

The seventy-first birthday of the Superior General was celebrated on April 11, and knowing that she would be greatly pleased, the Sisters entrusted the major part of the program to the orphans of St. Mathieu's School of Singing. The gift 'par excellence' would be offered the following day when six regular novices and one auxiliary would make their temporary vows and four professed Sisters and four Auxiliary Sisters would make their perpetual commitment.<sup>65</sup>

On April 17, the first annual retreat opened at the Mother House with twenty-eight missionaries from the United States and the Northwest included among the 229 Sisters to whom Father Tourangeau, o.m.i. would recall the duties and privileges of religious life. Mother General remained in her office, available to the Sisters who wished to consult her. The next day, she was forced to interrupt the interviews however, in order to comfort by her presence and prayer, Sisters Lessard and Gaudry who would die at a twelve-hour interval. Through consideration for his former and first teacher, Archbishop Bruchési attended the funeral of Sister Gaudry and claimed the duty of performing the final absolution. These frequent reminders of the brevity of life entertained in the Superior General the thought that one day it would be her turn. Besides the nine Sisters deceased since the beginning of 1910, the death of Father J.-S. St. Jean, p.s.s., had also been recorded. He had been chaplain at the Mother House and had died on February 21st. His biography signed by Father Henri Garriguet, the Superior General of the Sulpicians, was received on April 22.

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<sup>64</sup> Letter dated Jan. 3 but written by bits and starts.

<sup>65</sup> Circ. mens. 1909-11, p. 406.



Like all the Montrealers, the Grey Nuns heard of the calamities that could be expected as a result of the appearance of Halley's comet. Scientists had first predicted that May 10 would be the inauspicious day, then moved the due date to May 18. Frequent storms were recorded on the 10th and it rained all day on the 18th. The chronicler reported that "people believed so firmly that extraordinary happenings would occur that many were surprised if not disappointed".<sup>66</sup> While on the outside, people expected calamities, the Superior General precisely on the 11th, received a letter from the Postulator of the Cause, informing her that a summary of the apostolic procedure had been printed. It contained more than seven hundred pages as they had added all the historic elements which could render this imposing figure (Mother d'Youville) more interesting.<sup>67</sup> The writer added: "I would like to be able to bring you news personally. It would be a joy for me to meet you and your great religious family". The journey would in fact take place as Father Hertzog came to the Mother House on September 5, but he did not meet Mother Filiatrault.<sup>68</sup> Did the Superior have a premonition of this? There is reason to believe that she might have for she gave up her plan to visit the Boston Vicariate in mid-May and went instead to the St-Charles Farm for a rest during which time she intended to set her correspondence with the 'North' in order. She knew that her letters constituted a great comfort for the Sisters who were so far away. For this reason, she wrote these letters to the missionaries herself.

During her stay at the farm, she received a letter from Sister Diquière with news concerning her godchild, Praxède Filiatrault. The Indian child had been taken at the time of her mother's death by Father Lacombe and the Superior

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 435-436.

<sup>67</sup> Letter of April 29, 1910.

<sup>68</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1909-11, p. 527

General who was then visiting Calgary, sent her to the convent in St- Albert which was already "filled to capacity". At the little girl's baptism, she had been named Praxède after her godmother. The child had grown more in grace than in health "for on May 14 she died at the age of fifteen after promising that she would remember her benefactor before the throne of God".<sup>69</sup>

The godchild and godmother were about to meet. The Superior General was in some way forewarned of this by a sudden malaise similar to the attack of paralysis of February 1909. She was chatting with "two good friends, elderly jubilarians of the Congregation of Notre Dame, when she became semi-conscious". Called to her bedside, the doctor succeeded in reviving her but the patient did not delude herself. As soon as she was able, on May 27, she returned to the Mother House. Though her condition was serious, she continued her task as Superior. She summoned her Councillors to her room to inform them of the alarming financial situation of Notre-Dame Hospital and urged them to pray for a favorable outcome. She also shared with them the letter received from St. Boniface giving details of the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of religious life of Sister Laurent. This "little Mother d'Youville" had become renowned in her service to the poor and despite her seventy-eight years, she was still active in social work with the most impoverished. The members of St. Boniface's high society who along with the companions of the humble Grey Nun, had celebrated her merits.<sup>70</sup>

In spite of her weakness, the Superior General followed all the events closely. When she received word that a sacrilege had been committed at St. Michel Church in Montreal, she prescribed a holy hour in reparation. On

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<sup>69</sup> Letter of May 17, 1910.

<sup>70</sup> Letter of Sr. Ste. Thérèse to Sr. Desnoyers, May 21, 1910.



Monday, June 6, unable to go to the chapel, she received Holy Communion in her room. In the afternoon, Father Lecoq, the Superior of the Sulpicians, came to pay her a visit. On that day he was boarding "La Savoie" for Rome and Paris to deal with important matters. It was a visit of adieu even though no one dared mention it.

On this same day, Mother Filiatrault expressed the desire that the Sisters begin a novena to obtain a cessation of the heavy rain which farmers were deploring at seeding time. Many believed the evils were due to the comet but the Sisters turned to prayer reciting the Miserere after the rosary and singing the Parce Domine with accompaniment on the organ.

The novena was in its third day when Doctor Masson, having diagnosed a diabetic abscess in his patient, "decided to incise it and inject serum at the site", recorded the chronicler in the daily diary. "It is the remedy of the hopeless", said the Superior who was not mistaken. Indeed, her condition worsened so that it was necessary for a nurse to remain at her bedside. On Friday 10, a medical consultation was held and the verdict returned unfavorable: the Superior's time was running out. Informed of the fact, the patient's reply revealed the attitude of her soul: "God's holy will be done". The sacraments were administered while she alone remained calm and serene surrounded by the Sisters who were disconsolate. She died at 4:55 a.m. Saturday, June 11 at age seventy-two and in the forty-sixth year of her religious life.

Three days later, her funeral was presided by Archbishop Bruchési of Montreal with ninety-two members of the clergy present while Sisters of every community, especially from the Sister communities and numerous friends of the Institute filled the nave and the balconies.

An impressive retinue accompanied the remains to the crypt where she who had been the twelfth, the fourteenth and the sixteenth Superior General of the Grey Nuns, would be laid to rest, beside Mothers Slocombe and Deschamps, two outstanding women who had deeply influenced her and near the tomb of the beloved Mother d'Youville whose worthy daughter she had been throughout her meritorious career.

Among the many testimonials awarded to the memory of this brave woman, that of Father L. T. Rodier, pastor at St. Raphael's in Williamstown, U.S.A. particularly touched the Grey Nuns. The pastor was the brother of Sister Fortier, the chronicler, and consequently he had often met the Superior General. He came to the Mother House on March 24, 1911 in the company of his friend, Raggi, an artist. Mother Filiatrault had died almost ten months ago but she had not been forgotten. The Sisters had deplored that her features had not been recorded on canvas.<sup>71</sup> Now the kind pastor offered the Grey Nuns a painting of their Superior by Raggi.

It is with great pleasure that I present to the Grey Nuns a painted portrait of Mother Filiatrault, he explained. She was a noble and worthy woman which her Sisters had three times chosen as their leader. If she had so deserved the trust of her community, I am sure it will please this community to have her imperishable memory perpetuated on canvas".<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> It will be remembered that the Superior General had refused to have her picture taken.

<sup>72</sup> *Circ. mens.* 1909-11, pp. 755-756.



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>In Retrospect.</b> .....	p. 11
<b>Chapter one 1877 - 1880</b> .....	p. 25
<b>Chapter two 1881 - 1883</b> .....	p. 61
<b>Chapter three 1884 - 1886</b> .....	p. 89
<b>Chapter four 1887 - 1889</b> .....	p. 133
<b>Chapter five 1890 - 1892</b> .....	p. 171
<b>Chapter six 1893 - 1895</b> .....	p. 201
<b>Chapter seven 1896 - 1898</b> .....	p. 235
<b>Chapter eight 1899 - 1902</b> .....	p. 267
<b>Chapter nine 1903 - 1906</b> .....	p. 289
<b>Chapter ten 1907 - 1910</b> .....	p. 335
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	p. 377







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