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Documenting the legacy and contribution of the  
Congregations of Religious Women in Canada,  
their mission in health care, and the founding and operation of Catholic hospitals.

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**Projet de la *Grande* Histoire  
des hôpitaux catholiques au Canada**

Retracer l'héritage et la contribution des  
congrégations de religieuses au Canada,  
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 5: 1910-1935**

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

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*Estelle Mitchell, S.G.M.*

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# LOVE SPANS THE CENTURIES

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Volume V  
*1910-1935*



Estelle Mitchell, SGM  
Member of the Montreal Historical Society,  
the Society of Canadian Writers,  
the International Council of Archives.

# **LOVE SPANS THE CENTURIES**

The General Hospital of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal  
"Grey Nuns"

Volume V  
1910-1935

**WITH OPEN HEARTS  
AND READY HANDS**



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*From the original French edition,*  
*EN TOUTE DISPONIBILITÉ*  
*Sœurs de la Charité de Montréal*  
*"Sœurs Grises"*  
*1910-1935*  
*by Estelle Mitchell, SGM*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

Annals	Ann.
Archives	Arch.
Chronicles	Chron.
Monthly Circulars	M.-C.
Community – Communities	Cty – Cts
Congregation	Cong.
General correspondence	Gen. corr.
Mother-House	M.H.
Particular Memoirs	Part. men.
Monsignor	Msgr
Mister (messrs)	Mr (mss)
Montreal	Mtl
Biographical Notice	Biog. N.
Priests of St. Sulpice	p.s.s.
Sister (Sisters)	Sr (Srs)
Grey Nuns of Montreal	SGM

## PREFACE

The fifth volume of the history of the General Hospital of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal "Grey Nuns", **WITH OPEN HEARTS AND READY HANDS**, which I have the honor to introduce, is the work of an accomplished historian, Sister Estelle Mitchell. While gleaning through the years 1910 to 1935 of our community archives, the author brings to light many achievements during twenty-five years of history, a task which reveals the vastness of her knowledge and the value of minute documentation gathered during the past four decades.

It is with profound gratitude that I thank her for having brought to fruition this research which reveals the apostolic fecundity of that quarter century of our history.

Through the episodes narrated in this book, we see the unfolding of this historical development which has spread throughout Quebec, crossing the borders and expanding into numerous foundations in the United States and even to the distant shores of the Arctic Ocean. Love sustained the courage of the missionaries and helped them to overcome all difficulties: fires of doubtful origin or epidemics afflicting even the most sturdy among them, claiming the lives of many of those already weakened by nutritional deficiencies. What courage was needed to brave the long periods of darkness in the Canadian North or

the isolation resulting from the slowness of the mail which reached its destination only twice a year. Hidden self-denial in this manifestation of love is reflected in these undertakings established with an **availability** like that of Marguerite d'Youville, so filled with love for Jesus-Christ and the poor. It is this reality which is reflected in the book so appropriately entitled **WITH OPEN HEARTS AND READY HANDS**.

Two exceptional religious held leadership positions in the Congregation during this period of our history: Mother Anna Piché and Mother Octavie Dugas, two leaders who, each in her own way, awakened in the sisters a generous response to go forward in faith as did Abraham and to **serve** willingly as did Marguerite d'Youville.

Mother Piché who had joined the Grey Nuns in a spirit of total dedication, bore witness to the fact that she was, indeed, taken at her word. She was not spared difficulties during her apostolic journeys to the Northwest Territories! She lived out her ministry of service through the exercise of simple and loving authority. Mother Piché clearly realized what she was asking of her sisters when she invited them to become exiles in a Siberian climate and to place themselves at the service of a culture totally different from their own, in fields which His Holiness Pius XI called "the most difficult missions" and which merited for them the title of **HEROIC WOMEN**.

The author introduces us to another superior general, Mother Octavie Dugas, "a woman of total abandonment". Her mandate was marked by the establishment of challenging foundations. Hoping to promote a vigorous and prosperous Institute, she was able to invite generous responses through her own example. Under her leadership, vocations were numerous, the young and the not-so-young were eager to embrace various works, and learned to persevere unwaveringly during a lifetime of service. It was under her governance that, for the first time, the daughters of Marguerite d'Youville had the privilege of serving in Inuit Territory at Aklavik to proclaim there the love and tenderness of the Father God who cares for all his children.

**WITH OPEN HEARTS AND READY HANDS** calls to mind acts often requiring uncommon heroism. Throughout the story so beautifully related by the author, we find the confirmation of the axiom: "Go to the Grey Nuns, they never refuse". May this saying ever remain timely, particularly during 1996, proclaimed by the United Nations Organization as the International Year for the Elimination of Poverty. Then we shall be "ever available" to serve the Church according to the needs of today's world.

Sister Estelle Mitchell is to be congratulated and thanked for having immortalized for us another portion of the sublime story of a mission of love in the service of Jesus-Christ and the Poor!

Bernadette Poirier,  
SGM, Superior General  
(1991-1996)



## INTRODUCTION

### WITH OPEN HEARTS AND READY HANDS

... to serve the underprivileged

This title covers another period of the history of the Grey Nuns of Montreal, a period extending over the quarter-century between 1910-1935, the eighth since the foundation of the Institute.

At January 1, 1911, membership in the community totaled 992 religious including both vocal and auxiliary sisters, functioning in various capacities, not only in Quebec, but throughout Canada and the Northern United States, as indicated in the accompanying map. Beyond the mother-house area, these missions extended through five vicariates or canonical provinces whose boundaries differed from those of the geographical provinces. The province of St. Boniface, in Manitoba, included two institutions in Saskatchewan, two in Ontario and another, the school in Fort Totten, North Dakota (U.S.A.).

Though the number of institutions totalled fifty-nine, this did not reflect the exact number of works carried out. To name only the mother-house for instance, which sheltered (besides the administrative group of the Congregation), a home for the elderly, a crèche (foundling home), an orphanage, a center for the formation of candidates (novitiate), a School of Home

Economics for girls, a safe refuge for working girls, and an area designated as an employees' residence which contained several rooms for candidates aspiring to the priesthood.

Statistics reveal that, at the beginning of 1911, 1,035 persons lived at the mother-house under the governance of the General Council composed of the superior general and her three assistants<sup>1</sup> elected for a five year term by the members of the General Chapter.

The members of the General Council had important responsibilities: a high priority was that of maintaining within the religious family, the values and objectives which gave birth to its foundation and developing a profound interior life based on evangelical teachings. These inspire the Grey Nun to recognize the Lord Jesus in those who appeal to her for assistance; an attitude of cooperation at work; responsibilities and requirements of community life; a spirit of solidarity, initiative and adaptation relative to new needs that might arise. Convinced of the priceless value of life, the Grey Nun sees in each human being a member of the large human family journeying towards its eternal destiny. It is to these pilgrims of the infinite that she witnesses her faith (Jm 2, 18) "by consecrating without reserve, her time, her days, her skills, her very life, to work" in order to serve God and thus live in conformity with the teaching of our saintly Foundress.

The choice of such a career proceeds from the mysterious grace of vocation, this call of God who knocks at the door and crosses the threshold when it is opened. (Rev. 3:20). The pursuit of the ideal begins with a period of formation which allows the candidate to consider the requirements of religious life and the authenticity of her desire to conform to it.

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<sup>1</sup> The General Chapter of 1915 elected four ass't gen., the vicariates became canonical provinces to which was added the Canadian far North, making a total of six provinces.



At the time, ninety-seven novices and seventeen postulants at the novitiates in Montreal and St. Boniface were being initiated to "a life of perfect union and charity (...) and in universal detachment, to serve in the person of the poor, Jesus-Christ whose members they have the honor to be"<sup>2</sup> The aspirant would soon recognize that the program was well beyond her strength and, like those who preceded her, drew from her life of union with God, the courage to follow the Lord.

It was the responsibility of the major superiors to admit to temporary or perpetual vows, the candidates who had met the necessary requirements. The quality of the candidates assured the progress of the various works, the stability of missions and made possible the creation of other posts, particularly those in the land of the great white silence which will be described in the course of this narrative.

Appointments to administrative posts, dealings with parochial, social and inter-community groups, the writing of chronicles, annals, publications, these are all fields of activity pertaining to major authority. Moreover, there was the cherished project of working for the advancement of the Cause of Mother d'Youville, a Cause that had been introduced in the ecclesiastical courts of Rome in 1890. The apostolic process advanced very slowly in the opinion of the Grey Nuns eager to see the Roman authority present the Foundress as a model. This hope generated an in-depth study of the Youvillian spirituality in view of reviving the spirit of charity of this great Canadian woman recognized by her contemporaries as "ever available": "Go to the Grey Nuns, they never refuse".

The two superior generals who shouldered these responsibilities during the years 1910-1935, spared no effort "to keep the flame alive" (M. Scouarnec). Their main concern was to nourish this flame and so to enkindle in the sisters' lives the charity of the one who had greatly loved Jesus-Christ and the poor.

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<sup>2</sup> Rule 1738, art. 10.



## CHAPTER ONE

### 1910-1911

The annalist recorded the joy manifested by all who witnessed the opening of the Chapter Room door at the Grey Nuns' mother-house on the morning of Monday, October 3, 1910.<sup>1</sup>

Accompanied by chanoine Georges Gauthier, pastor at the cathedral, and Father Charles Lecoq, Provincial Superior of St. Sulpice, his Grace, Archbishop Bruchési of Montreal who had presided over the Chapter of Election, proclaimed the names of those religious elected to govern the Institute: Superior General, Mother Anna Piché; Assistants General, Sisters of the Sacred Heart<sup>2</sup>, Elizabeth Ward, and Eugénie Dionne. Sister Eugénie Letellier was named Mistress of Novices while Sisters Royal, Malépart, Malard, Pion, Desnoyers, McKenna and Dugas

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the details are drawn from the Monthly Circular Letters which a few years later will be designated under the title of annals.

<sup>2</sup> According to custom, Sr. Leocadie l'Heureux chose this as her name in religion to distinguish her from her sister who had preceded her to the novitiate. This custom ended in 1920.

as councillors, completed the number twelve stipulated in the Letters Patent of June 3, 1753.<sup>3</sup> The Archbishop congratulated the newly elected and thanked the members of the previous administration. He intoned the Te Deum and then withdrew after having signed the telegrams to the various houses announcing the names of the newly-elected members.

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The appointment of Mother Anna Piché surprised no one but herself although she ought actually to have suspected it. Since the date of her religious profession on September 27, 1881 at the age of twenty, Sister Piché had always been deeply aware of her commitment. In addition to her unfailing devotedness, she gave evidence of a rare sense of adaptation which enabled her, not only to learn the English language, but to perform satisfactorily the triple roles of child supervisor, teacher and musician at the Protectorate of Mary Immaculate in Lawrence, Massachusetts. When she left, after ten years of service, Bishop Beaven of the Diocese of Springfield stated, "I would accept Sister Pichés by the dozen!"<sup>4</sup>

On January 31, 1891, the young religious had been named founding-superior of St. Anne's Orphanage in Worcester, Mass. It was not an easy post as we learn from the early history of the institution.<sup>5</sup> However, the difficulties did not frighten nor hinder this woman, frail in appearance but strong in her trust in Divine Providence. She had learned long ago that all lasting works are founded on the cross. As an adolescent, she had responded to an invitation to join a teaching community, a task which she found too easy, saying: "I want to become a sister where I will experience difficulties." This simple phrase proved that she had already understood and adopted a profound lesson. Having

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<sup>3</sup> Another ancient custom destined to disappear by decision of the Chapter of 1915.

<sup>4</sup> Gravel, Sr. J., *Mère A. Piché* p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> See "Love Spans the Centuries", Vol. IV, pp. 187-190.

entered the novitiate on March 31, 1879, she was initiated to religious life by Sister Victorine Stubinger assisted by Sister Estelle Lanthier, while Sisters Octavie Dugas and Eugénie Letellier were assigned to the novitiate as senior novices. The novice became familiar with the Master's teaching ... "If you wish to follow me, take up your cross" and, from the life of Mother d'Youville, she drew many examples which sustained her courage. It is highly possible, on the other hand, that she chose the life of a Grey Nun because she had been profoundly impressed by stories of the heroism of the sisters who labored in the land of the great white silence.<sup>6</sup>

Sister Piché patiently overcame the difficulties at St. Anne's Orphanage in a spirit of conciliation and resourcefulness necessary for the survival of the work. The innovations sometimes astonished Mother Deschamps, Superior General, herself an exceptional woman, who predicted: "This young sister will go a long way!"

Sister Piché's ten-year stay in Worcester was followed by her appointment to the French language school in Salem. In September 1901, 1,584 students were registered and pursued their studies under the direction of twenty-three sisters and six lay teachers who earned the commendation of the Superintendent of Public Schools. In 1903, the Grey Nuns withdrew from that school in favor of a religious community which had been exiled from France, thus saving it from extinction. The same thing occurred with the St. Cécile School in Leominster, opened two years previously, which they relinquished in favor of another French community likewise struggling for survival. Sister Piché returned to the mother-house in Montreal in 1902,

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<sup>6</sup> The family of Alexis Piché and Tharsille Payette dit St-Amour, of Repentigny, moved to Montreal while Anna was still a child. They lived in the district of St. Henri where the Grey Nuns had a school, and there, had been impressed by the accounts of the difficulties experienced by the missionaries of the Canadian far North. Miss Piché completed her studies with the Sisters of St. Anne and at St. Joseph Academy with the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame.

having been summoned because of the resignation of Mother Filiatrault as third assistant general followed by her appointment as superior of the Youville vicariate. ( Mother Filiatrault had, in fact, been named third assistant general, but resigned upon the advice from Archbishop Bruchési who believed it preferable that an ex-superior general not be on the Council of her successor.) The General Council entrusted the vacant post to Sister Piché. On this occasion, the humble Grey Nun had only one comment: with the psalmist, she exclaimed "The Lord raises the poor from the dust, to give them a place with princes of his people." (Ps. 113)

To her new duties, Sister Piché was given the added responsibility for the home for the elderly, the orphanage, the crèche, the care of young working girls,<sup>7</sup> all of whom were sheltered in the recently completed (1903) St. Mathieu wing of the motherhouse. In her usual manner, Sister Piché watched over the well-being of these persons, urging the sisters and employees to spare no effort so that the orphans and elderly might find within the convent, the atmosphere of a Christian home. Concerned as she was with the preparation of the young girls for their future role as 'exceptional women' she established the School of Home Economics in 1905.<sup>8</sup>

Everything seemed relatively easy for Sister Piché. Authorities did not hesitate to entrust her also with newly-inspired missions. She was delegated to the hospital in Morristown, New Jersey and assumed its direction to replace the superior whose health was failing. About six months later, at the twelfth General Chapter, Mother Piché was elected first assistant general to Mother Filiatrault who was re-elected as Superior Général.

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<sup>7</sup> These were probably girls whose identity was unknown and who were not adopted, but were cared for by the Grey Nuns. A superior was named for the orphanage in 1907.

<sup>8</sup> This school became the Familial Institute affiliated with the University of Montreal.

The superior general knew well the competence and generosity of the one whom she called her 'right arm'. It was this conviction which moved her to entrust to Mother Piché the visitation of the missions in Alberta. She was thus able to admire, at first hand, the marvelous work being carried out in this 'sunny province' as well as in that of Manitoba where she stopped on her return. Evidently, her visit was highly successful. However, in early January, the sisters were astounded to learn that Mother Piché's life was in danger. Apparently, the medical diagnosis was complicated by exhaustion. Everyone was overjoyed to learn a few weeks later that a surgical procedure had been performed and proved successful. However, the patient was ordered to take a long convalescence to extend beyond the twenty-first Eucharistic Congress scheduled for September, 1910. "Eight months of rest, do you realize that? How can I cross my arms while you are overburdened with work?" objected Mother Piché. The superior general maintained her decision and the assistant left Montreal for St. Peter's Hospital on April 18th. Little did she suspect that she would return earlier than foreseen.

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Less than two months later, came the announcement in three successive news bulletins addressed to Mother Piché: Our Mother is ill; Mother Filiatrault is dying; Our Mother died on Saturday, June 11th, at 4:55 a.m. The assistant general returned to the mother-house the next day. She knelt at the side of the deceased who, "even on her funeral bed, seemed happy to be surrounded by her daughters and her poor."

Along with her companions and on several occasions, Mother Piché expressed edification at the success of the apostolate of this worthy religious whom the capitulars had thrice elected to lead the Congregation. On the morning of June 14th, his Grace the Archbishop celebrated a pontifical Mass and presided at the final prayer. He added: "I will express in your name the farewell which the Church addresses to its deceased members."<sup>9</sup> The dignitary was accompanied by Monsignor

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<sup>9</sup> Biography of Mother Filiatrault.

Lepailleur, Father Thibault and Father Girot, p.s.s., replacing Father Charles Lecoq, the provincial superior, who was in Europe at the time. Among those who, with the celebrant, accompanied the mortal remains to the crypt were Bishop Racicot, auxiliary bishop, and ninety-two members of the clergy, several of whom had been protégés of the Grey Nuns. There were also representatives of every religious Congregation including those of our sister-communities, the élite of Montreal society and relatives of the deceased. The place of burial was near those of Mothers Deschamps and Slocombe and close to the tomb of the Venerable Mother d'Youville.

Requiem Masses were celebrated in the houses of the Grey Nuns, namely at the Nazareth Institute for the Blind, one of Mother Filiatrault's favorite works and where she had spent many years as local superior. In this 'house of harmony', they outdid themselves by interpreting a Perrault Mass in four voices in memory of the one "who had so loved beautiful chant and who had herself been gifted with a lovely voice."

The heart of every Grey Nun was touched by the thoughtfulness of Mother St. Anaclet, the superior general of the Congregation of Notre-Dame who invited the grieving family to their convent for the celebration of a Requiem Mass, saying: "On Saturday, June 18th, our two communities will be united in prayer on behalf of the Mother whom you rightfully mourn and whose loss we also regret."<sup>10</sup>

Because of the position she held as first assistant general, Mother Piché found herself automatically promoted to the general leadership of the Institute but, by depositing the keys of the house at the feet of the Mother of God, she clearly indicated her intention to proclaim Mary as the acting superior.

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<sup>10</sup> At the time of the fire at the mother-house of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, in 1893, Mother Filiatrault had welcomed 13 daughters of Mother Bourgeoys to the Grey Nun infirmary. Three had been transported by stretcher; a novice was among them and she pronounced her religious vows on her deathbed.



In her letter of June 22nd, summoning the General Chapter for October 3rd, Mother Piché revealed the sentiments which filled her soul "The Lord has called our venerated Mother to her reward, leaving the entire family in mourning. We might be tempted to complain if faith were not there to remind us that trials are often the mysterious ways through which God sanctifies us (...). Let us be united in mind and heart as the regular program must continue and we know that this leaves little leisure time." Mother Piché, who dreaded being inactive, saw her fears dispelled by the events which followed in succession: annual retreats, ceremonies of clothing and religious profession, the golden jubilee of six zealous workers, the death of two of the sisters,<sup>11</sup> the lodging of five Sisters of Charity of Evron en route to Alberta and the launching of projects in preparation for the Eucharistic Congress.

Like the other religious Communities of Montreal, the Grey Nuns responded to the expectations of Archbishop Bruchési who solicited their collaboration to accommodate the Church dignitaries arriving from every direction. This work began early in July. The chronicles recorded that barricades were set up everywhere, adding with humor: "One would need wings to get around the house."<sup>12</sup> She mentioned the excellent disposition of the senior sisters who gave up their quarters for the convenience of the visitors. This section, established by Mother Filiatrault, had been opened only two years earlier. The sisters generously accepted a stay in the infirmary or in temporary exile on the farms at Côte-de-Liesse and Châteauguay.

Forty-two delegates were assigned to the mother-house: bishops from the United States where the Grey Nuns were stationed, especially Bishop Beaven of Springfield, Father Bailly — the superior general of the Assumptionists as well as Father

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<sup>11</sup> C.M. 1909-11. Sr. Parent whom Mother Piché was replacing temporarily in Morrystown and Sr. Marie-de-la-Providence whose burial was held in the crypt.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid* p. 509.

Marie-Clément Staub of the same Congregation, pastors of various parishes, dignitaries representing clergy from the Canadian West, including Father A. Béliveau, chancellor and future archbishop of St. Boniface. Eight extra altars were set up in the chapel where about twenty Masses were celebrated each day.

The activities of preparation complicated the assistant general's task of attending to the entire Congregation, responding to mail which was sometimes addressed to Mother Filiatrault from missionaries who were still unaware of her death. She was assisted by Mother Dionne and Mother Ward. This extra workload which called forth everyone's good will was interspersed with favors from heaven. Thus, the chronicles noted on August 18th: "Lord, are we in the presence of a miracle? Our dear Sister Marie-du-Bon Conseil is healed following a second novena to Father Olier."<sup>13</sup> She had been declared incurable, so the initial reaction of her nurses was that of disbelief. However, the reality was undeniable as the sister took a hearty meal and, by her lively spirit and the expression of her gratitude, succeeded in convincing the skeptics. Mother Piché accompanied the sister to the seminary as she had insisted on making the announcement herself to the superior, Father Lecoq who, having returned from Europe on July 26th, rejoiced at the evidence and gave thanks to Divine Providence. He did not remind Mother Piché of his admonition to her, addressed from Rome, regarding the rest which had been prescribed.

Already, visitors kept arriving at the mother-house whose reputation had begun to snowball. The Congress delegates who were guests at the mother-house marveled at seeing so many works operating under the same roof; they certainly provided favorable publicity for the Grey Nuns. The guest register included the names of bishops from Boston, New Orleans, Mexico, Angers, Namur, Poland and Brazil. Bishop Albana of Brazil presented to Mother Ward a request for Grey Nuns for his vast diocese.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> C.M. 1909-11, p. 509.

<sup>14</sup> The Grey Nuns opened a mission in Brazil in 1957.

These visitors had the opportunity to see the sister who had been miraculously healed and was now serving as a receptionist.<sup>15</sup> We can imagine that this extraordinary healing was of particular interest to the Sulpician priests, especially to the Reverend Father Garriguet, Superior General, who came with Father Lecoq for a brief visit on September 1st and then returned two days later. The reverend Father visited the sisters' living quarters, the infirmary, the novitiate, the industrial school, the home for the elderly and the orphanage where he was welcomed with song. He was visibly moved and renewed to them the assurance that, as long as St. Sulpice would have a seminary in France and in Montreal, the Grey Nuns would benefit from the solicitude of the sons of Father Olier.<sup>16</sup>

On Sunday, September 4th, the rhythmic steps of the horses on the pavement announced the arrival of the highest dignitary, his Eminence Cardinal Vincent Vanutelli, the papal delegate with his retinue to whom Archbishop Bruchési introduced the community. The Prince of the Church then attended a simple but dignified reception where the orphans performed in his honor.

It is understandable that the annalist would report in great detail the visit of Father Xavier Hertzog, p.s.s., the Postulator for the beautiful Cause of the Venerable Mother d'Youville currently creating great hopes. He shared with the sisters, the various phases which were already completed and those now ready to be pursued. He expressed his pleasure at being in Montreal and becoming acquainted with the mother-house. His first impressions since his arrival on Canadian soil were those of profound admiration. He added "You do everything in a wonderful manner. I have admired the great streams of water in old Europe, but after having seen Lake Champlain and contemplated your beautiful St. Lawrence River, Lake Geneva now seems like a mere basin and our rivers like small streams."

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<sup>15</sup> She returned to her post in Morristown after the Congress.

<sup>16</sup> C.M. 1909-11, p. 522

The imposing celebrations of the Congress manifested the faith of the Canadian people. Before the closing procession on Sunday, September 11th, the large community room on Guy Street opened its doors to welcome three hundred dignitaries. A banquet presided by His Eminence, Cardinal Legate, was held at which the students in Rhetoric from the College of Montreal waited on the tables. The memories of this exceptional gathering were immortalized by a free-lance photographer.

The procession began at two o'clock, leaving the church of Notre-Dame and arriving at Jeanne Mance Park five hours later. The size of the crowd escorting the Blessed Sacrament was estimated at 500,000. We read in the annals: The moon and stars seemed happy to brighten such a spectacle! Cardinal Legate, himself, brought to Hôtel-Dieu the monstrance containing the Sacred Host made from Manitoba's finest wheat, while other heads of wheat, ripened by the Alberta sun, decked the repository — a feature which inspired an anonymous poet with these verses:

Golden blades which graced the plains  
of Manitoba and Alberta  
Wheat chosen from the distant harvests  
You have, from its base to its summit  
covered with a beautiful triumphant arch  
the altar for Jesus, King of Montreal  
...  
Today, as a relic  
You will be preserved and cherished;  
You have, beneath the mystical arch  
Been blessed by Jesus-Christ (Free translation)

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The splendid ceremonies of the Eucharistic Congress coincided with the preparation of the Grey Nuns' scheduled quinquennial Chapter. The delegates, arriving from the western provinces and the United States for this great event, were deeply impressed by the atmosphere of prayer and silence reigning at the mother-house despite the great number of visitors. On

September 14th, Bishop A. Pascal, Apostolic Vicar for Saskatchewan, celebrated a pontifical High Mass in the convent chapel. About ten days later, Bishop Gabriel Breynat from the Mackenzie District, responded to the invitation of the assistant general who asked him to speak to the sisters about the works accomplished by our heroic women. Not only was progress being made in the spiritual realm, but there was also notable improvement in other areas as well. Fort Resolution, which opened in 1903 as the most recent post, was already being enlarged. The mud-walling system was abolished so there was no more clay being splashed on the altar during heavy rainfalls. The convent, constructed of wood, now had a hot-air furnace (which the bishop himself had installed as the plumber had failed to appear). The Minister of the Interior, who had visited Fort Providence and given a favorable report on the teaching to the aboriginals, was invited to dinner. Upon leaving, the Honorable Minister frankly admitted that Catholic institutions were superior to those operated by other denominations.

Bishop Breynat also spoke of the 'temporary' novitiate which had been established with the authorization of the Holy See to favor native vocations. Three candidates had received the grey habit on January 10th during a celebration which deeply touched all those who witnessed it.<sup>17</sup>

Mother Despina, Superior of the St. Boniface Province, spoke of the visit of His Eminence the Cardinal Legate to St. Boniface; Bishop Langevin and the Hon. Mr. Roblin, Premier, had met him at the station on September 18th. The dignitary blessed the minor seminary building which was almost completed and, the next day, celebrated Mass in the small chapel of the white house. He then returned to Rome by way of the United States.

The sharing of all this information helped to create a special atmosphere appropriate for the elections at the Chapter which

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<sup>17</sup> C.M. 1909-11, p. 567.

opened at eight o'clock in the morning and ended less than two hours later — with the expected result.

Had Mother Piché hoped that her frail health would be reason enough to spare her the weighty responsibility of leadership? That remained her secret. The future would prove that, in spite of her physical frailty, she would manifest courage, determination and longanimity enabling her to discern the ways of God on the Institute entrusted to her leadership.

Her deep faith led her to draw from the spirituality of our Canadian Marguerite, the grace of an invincible trust in Divine Providence, an attitude recognized not only by the capitular sisters but by the entire religious family. This was reflected by the annalist who congratulated the delegates on their inspired choice of Mother Piché whose religious virtues would make of her a leader according to the Heart of the Eucharistic Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

In a letter addressed to the entire community, the newly elected superior general expressed her thanks to the sisters for their messages, reflecting their spirit of faith, their religious convictions and their generous commitment. She wrote: "Had I not known it beforehand, it would have been consoling and easy to recognize how all of you have at heart the greater welfare of the Institute, the expansion of its works and even more, the sanctification of all its members (...). Our saintly predecessors would bless us for the resolve to walk in their footsteps."<sup>19</sup>

To walk in the footsteps of those who blazed the trail constituted an important resolve for the superior general. She soon proved this by perpetuating a precious custom. Mother d'Youville, bearing witness to the quality of her gratitude, had once written: "This house will never forget its benefactors." It happened that Doctor Rottot, an outstanding benefactor, died on

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<sup>18</sup> "Eucharistic Jesus" evidence of the firm devotion initiated at the Eucharistic Congress.

<sup>19</sup> Letter of October 29, 1910.

September 25th. He had served the Grey Nuns as a physician for twenty-seven years, along with his function as professor of medicine at Laval University in Montreal. It was said of him that the kindness of his heart was as great as his scientific knowledge, and his wisdom as generous as his heart (...). For him, medical knowledge had taken on its true character, namely, that of a ministry. Weary of hearing unfavorable comments concerning the Crèche, this revered doctor came to the defense of the Grey Nuns. He had even gone to the United States to investigate other comparable institutions and to consult with medical personnel and those responsible for the care of infants. Upon his return, he reassured the sisters, saying, "Your institution compares favorably with other similar institutions."<sup>20</sup> On October 12th, a solemn service was held in the convent chapel and presided by his Jesuit-son, assisted by Sulpician Fathers Fournet and Bouhier.

The Crèche and the orphanages pursued their humanitarian mission under the direction of Sister L.O. Dugas who also assumed the direction of the home for the elderly.<sup>21</sup>

The Chapter ended on October 7th and, while the missionaries prepared to return to their respective posts, Sister Charbonneau was called to her final destination. Her funeral was held on the morning of October 11th, celebrated by Bishop Ovide Charlebois, a relative who had recently been named Apostolic Vicar of Keewatin.<sup>22</sup>

After a brief stay in St. Boniface, Fathers Garriguet and Hertzog returned to Montreal. During his visit on November 5th,

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<sup>20</sup> C.M. 1909-11, p. 556. Two Sisters of the Immaculate Conception came to be initiated to this work in order to bring help to their missions in China.

<sup>21</sup> In resol. #10, the Ch. decided that responsibility for the area known as the hospice, would be entrusted to a local superior. Sr. Dugas replaced Sr. Dalton who took charge of the St. Joseph Hospice of Montreal.

<sup>22</sup> Bishop Charlebois received episcopal consecration on November 30th at Assumption. Regina became a diocese in 1910 with Bishop Elzéar Mathieu as first pastor in June 1911. In 1912, a bishop was named for Calgary and the episcopal See of St. Albert was transferred to Edmonton.

the Postulator for the Cause of Mother d'Youville expressed his enthusiasm for the Canadian West, "a land of extraordinary wealth and fertility which promises to become one of the most beautiful and flourishing countries in the world. Father Superior and I will return to our country somewhat Canadian and will remain Canadians at heart."

The memorable year of 1910 was drawing to a close. In accordance with tradition, Mother Piché summarized its events in a circular letter dated December 23rd, anniversary of the death of our Foundress. She recalled the glorious days of triumph for the Blessed Eucharist in our city and added the heart-warming news that "today we received a cable, signed by Father Hertzog, announcing that Cardinal Merry del Val has been assigned to the Grey Nuns to serve simultaneously as protector and Cardinal Ponent for the Cause of Mother d'Youville."<sup>23</sup>

The superior general called to mind the memory of the beloved Mother Filiatrault and that of the twenty other sisters who had died during the year. With profound faith, Mother Piché remarked: "Let us not bemoan their departure; they had long yearned for heaven. Let us allow them to rest in peace in the company of those whom they had loved here below." Mother also reported that the orphans, the poor and the sick had come to our house in greater numbers.

## 1911

On January 6, 1911, the chronicles recorded a death that would invite the entire Congregation to relive one of the most glorious chapters of its history. Sister Adéline Audet-dit-Lapointe

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<sup>23</sup> It will be recalled that Bishop Merry del Val who had been delegated to Canada by His Holiness, Leo XIII in 1897, had remained at the mother-house during his stay in Montreal. On June 28th, he had even prayed at the bedside of Mother Deschamps who died the next day. (Love Spans the Centuries, Vol. IV. P. 244)



returned to God whom she had served so generously. At her bedside were: the superior general, who endeavored always to be present when one of her sisters was being recalled to the Father's house, and Mother Ward, the assistant general, who had been Sister Lapointe's companion on the frightening trip to the North in 1867.

With deep emotion, Mother Ward spoke of Sister Lapointe, described by Mother Slocombe as a 'genuine treasure'. She commented on the exceptional gifts of the humble religious who, in recognition of her skills, had been called upon to found a convent in the distant land of Fort Providence in the Northwest Territories. First and last at every task, this sister proved herself to be a true Grey Nun, self-forgetful and finding her pleasure in bringing joy to others.

Foundress at Fort Chipewyan in 1874 (the second northern mission), then of the convent at Ste-Anne-des-Chênes in Manitoba in 1883, co-foundress of a "Fourneau économique" and of the St. Antoine Hospice in Montreal, Sister Lapointe also attended to shoe-repairs and was in charge of housekeeping and visiting the needy. She had never refused a task and always devoted herself to it wholeheartedly.

Mother Piché also evoked personal memories which affirmed the qualities of their departed companion. She recalled her own first years as founding superior at St. Anne's Orphanage in Worcester, Mass., where Mother Filiatrault had assigned Sister Lapointe to assist her. This servant of the poor undertook the task with indomitable courage and, thanks to her concern for the welfare of the orphans, she assured the survival of the institution by literally procuring their daily bread. At the time of her departure in 1895 she was even been referred to as 'Our Daily Bread' in an article published in the local newspaper.<sup>24</sup>

Sister Lapointe had also earned the special gratitude of two members of the Priests of St. Sulpice, one of whom, Father Jude

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<sup>24</sup> C.M. 1892-95, pp. 143-144.

Thibault who presided at her funeral on January 9th, claimed that she had been of immense help to him in attaining the priesthood.<sup>25</sup>

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In keeping with the Constitutions which prescribed that the superior general must visit each of the institutions at least once during her mandate, Mother Piché left for the American missions on January 16th. There were thirteen houses beyond the American border. Two of them were in Toledo, Ohio and were attached directly to the General Administration, while another, Fort Totten, N.D., belonged to the Manitoba Province. Ten other posts consisting of four hospitals: Cambridge, Mass., Morristown, N.J., Nashua, N.H., and New Brunswick, N.J.; four orphanages: Nashua and Salem in N.H., Lawrence and Worcester in Mass.; and two 'homes', namely St. Helena's and St. Joseph's<sup>26</sup> located within Boston, were all visited by the Mother whose loving kindness was appreciated by the sisters.

The superior general and her secretary, Sister Desnoyers, were met at the station by Mother Tassé and taken to Holy Ghost Hospital in Cambridge where the provincial administrative headquarters were located. This hospital, founded in 1895,<sup>27</sup> created both admiration and fear. People admired the compassion with which the patients with incurable illnesses were welcomed and remained until their death. However, fear prompted some passersby to cross the street when approaching the building, as though this would avert some danger which made them cringe.

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<sup>25</sup> At the death of the head of the family, Sr. Lapointe had come to the help of Mrs. Thibault and her children.

<sup>26</sup> Shelters for working girls established in 1888 and 1899. The St. Joseph's Home was for Afro-American girls.

<sup>27</sup> The foundresses arrived in Cambridge in the Fall of 1894 and lived in a modest house near the future hospital.

After having visited with each sister individually, Mother Piché met with lay employees and volunteers who provided precious help. She visited throughout the house noting that a few renovations were needed. At the end of the visitation, she commended the sisters on their marvelous work. She shared with the community news which had arrived from Montreal informing her of events which had occurred during her absence. A sensational one was a letter from His Holiness, Pius X, confirming the appointment of Cardinal Merry del Val and the granting of his Apostolic Blessing to the entire Congregation. She also paid tribute to the deceased sisters, among whom was Sister Lapointe (mentioned earlier) who had worked in the United States. The valiant missionary was not forgotten.

Mother Piché arrived in Worcester at eventide on February 16th and the following morning attended Mass celebrated by Father Marie-Clément, an Assumptionist priest, former chaplain and close friend of St. Anne's Orphanage. He was an ardent promoter of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.<sup>28</sup>

During his homily the celebrant drew his inspiration from the Gospel of the day: "There is one among you whom you do not know." (Jn 1:26) After extending a cordial welcome to the one whom the Sacred Heart had chosen as his representative for a select portion of the Church, he continued "The Mother whom we greet was the foundress of this house. She planted the small

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<sup>28</sup> Born in the German part of Alsace in 1876, Father Marie-Clément learned French prior to becoming a student at the College of the Assumptionists, a Congregation founded in Nimes in 1850. He studied at the St. Thomas Aquinas College in Rome where he obtained doctorates in Philosophy and Theology. Ordained on March 19, 1904, he became director of a house of formation, and was then assigned to England where he learned the English language preparing him for future work in the U.S. Stationed at the Worcester College founded by his Congregation in 1904, his obvious giftedness as a preacher merited him an assignment in that area following a period of chaplaincy at the Grey Nuns' Orphanage. In New England, the preacher had a broad field of action where 500,000 French-speaking people lived in four of the parishes (Hérault de l'Amour, by C. Quintal).

seed which has become a large tree providing shelter and happiness for so many."

It may be recalled that Father Marie-Clément Staub had stayed at the Grey Nuns' mother-house during the Eucharistic Congress held the previous year. Eager to spread devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus among his hostesses, he soon realized that he was preaching to the converted. In fact, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus dates far back in Grey Nun history.<sup>29</sup> Mother Piché summarized the development in a letter of May 12th, inviting the sisters to join the Archconfraternity of Prayer & Penance, clarifying that this was not a new association.<sup>30</sup> The only new element was that this apostle of the Sacred Heart recruited active associates among the orphans whom he enrolled upon his arrival in Worcester in January 1910, and whom he called his first battalion. Father Marie-Clément could henceforth count on the full cooperation of the Grey Nuns.

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Mother Piché had scarcely returned to Montreal on March 10th, after a seven-week absence, when she and Sister McKenna headed for New Mexico, U.S.A. where the Grey Nuns were being invited to take charge of a sanatorium in Deming. She had been told that the area was considered to be one of the healthiest in the world.<sup>31</sup> The acceptance of this foundation would contribute to the continued fight against tuberculosis whose

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<sup>29</sup> On October 23, 1731, Mme. d'Youville was enrolled in the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart at the Ursuline Monastery in Quebec; by Oct. 7, 1747, devotion to the Sacred Heart was flourishing at the General Hospital, having been established by Rev. J. de la Colombière, a brother of Blessed Claude; on May 5, 1749, a Decree of Pope Benedict XV erected the Confraternity at the General Hospital. The register contained the names of Sulpician priests, Normant, Déat and others as well as those of the Grey Nuns and the Sisters of Hôtel-Dieu; on June 3, 1761, Mother d'Youville erected a chapel in honor of the Sacred Heart on the day following the conquest. (Ann. 1926-27, p. 99)

<sup>30</sup> Gen. Chap. & circ. 1849-1937, p. 239.

<sup>31</sup> C.M. 1909-11, p.759.

ravage among young missionaries was particularly deplorable. The trip between Montreal and Deming required three days and two nights by train as well as a stopover in Denver, Colorado. The arrival of the sisters in Denver created such a sensation that the local newspaper commented upon it, suggesting emphatically that the sisters should establish themselves there rather than at Deming. The proposal was not accepted and the travelers returned to Montreal on April 15th.

With edification, the annalist commented on the superior general's readiness to conform to the routine of the large household. Rising at dawn, she was the first to arrive at morning prayer and attend to the task of serving the poor; she presided at Council meetings where important questions needed study; she took part in household chores and each evening, she would visit the sick sisters and then attend community recreation where, like the most humble novice, she would knit vestments for the poor.

On behalf of the Congregation which she represented, this woman dealt with distinguished people of the world and with Church dignitaries, where her readiness to respond to the most humble requests evoked admiration. On March 16th, she attended celebrations for two hospitalized centenarians both living at the mother-house, Pierre Desjardins and Pierre St. Amour (the latter aged 103 years). The younger man was able to move about by wheelchair and would assist his friend at mealtime and help him light his pipe. In return, he was taught the alphabet by his elder because he hoped to become able to read the newspaper.<sup>32</sup>

On May 6th, the orphans were delighted when the Religious of the Sacred Heart from Sault-au-Récollet invited the group of 150 children for a picnic in the country. On the shores of Rivière-des-Prairies, the children thoroughly enjoyed themselves while under the supervision of the students of the school.

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<sup>32</sup> Ex. article from LA PRESSE quoted in C.M. 1809-11, pp. 743-744.

They found the orphans interesting, well-mannered and talented in their own way as they sang Gregorian chants and other songs, ending with their gratitude expressed 'a capella'.

Because the number of these dear orphans of both sexes was on the increase, a larger building was erected on the farm called St. Charles at Côte-de-Liesse, in order to provide them with more space and allow them to enjoy the country air. The realization of this project did not, however, delay the one for a sanatorium, the need for which became keenly felt once more during the summer of 1911.

On July 5th, Mother Carroll, superior of the St. Albert Province, came to Montreal suffering from tuberculosis. She had expressed the wish to die in Montreal, the cradle of her religious life. This generous daughter was born at Birr, King County, Ireland on May 10, 1854 and came to Montreal at the age of seventeen determined to become a Grey Nun. She was welcomed by Mother Slocombe and learned French at Asile St. Joseph and, on November 15, 1871, entered the novitiate located in Old Montreal. Having made profession on May 2, 1874, and spent some time in the United States, she was assigned to the mission of Lac-la-Biche (now in Alberta) in the fall of 1875. When she informed her family of this assignment, her eldest sister, Ellen, decided to come and join her, and to also become a Grey Nun. The two sisters met on May 12th and Sister Carroll left for the west on the 31st.<sup>33</sup> The career of this valiant woman included fourteen years at Lac-la-Biche, sixteen years at Holy Cross Hospital which she founded in 1891, in Calgary, Alberta, three years as provincial superior of the Alberta missions, during which term she visited the difficult posts of the

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<sup>33</sup> Details from the biographical notice of Sr. Carroll: Ellen, her sister who chose the name Sweeny (her mother's name), entered the novitiate in July, 1876 and died on March 4, 1878. During this period of our history, we find the names of 4 sisters from Germany, 3 from England, 3 from Austria, 4 from Belgium, 27 from France, 3 from Hungary, 18 from Ireland, 1 from Poland and 1 from southern Russia. This list is not exhaustive.

Far North. Now she spoke with calm of the final journey as though it were an ordinary event.

The sisters had difficulty accepting the prognosis of her terminal illness. "If God wills that she should be healed," wrote the annalist, "nothing is impossible to him." God had allowed himself to be touched in favor of Father Walter Speeman, a protégé of the Grey Nuns who, at the time, was present for the celebration of the superior general's feast-day (on the vigil of the feast of her patron, St. Anne). Yes, this priest had been healed and would be returning shortly to St. Boniface and then to the United States to continue his ministry.<sup>34</sup>

Father Speeman who had been miraculously healed was pleased that he would be traveling in the company of Mother Piché on her way to Manitoba and Alberta for her official visitation. Again this time, she would be accompanied by her efficient secretary, Sister Desnoyers, who would record many details about incidents occurring along the way. A stop at Don, Ontario, near a Catholic Church, allowed the provisional chaplain to celebrate Mass. Following breakfast at the rectory, they met Miss Bouvier who drove them with her team of horses to the station of Owen Sound. After four hours by train, they arrived at the dock and embarked on the Keewatin which would be sailing on Lake Huron. Unfortunately, the night was foggy and the boats blew their sirens throughout the night, making sleep impossible.

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<sup>34</sup> In 1904, Fr. Speeman, a youth from Germany, had fled the obligatory military services required by his homeland in order to become a priest and celebrate Mass 'at least once before his death'. Enrolled in the Seminary of Montreal, he was a protégé of the Grey Nuns. The climate there being unsuitable for him, he accepted Bishop Langevin's invitation to go to St. Boniface to complete his studies. Ordained on June 29, 1906, he returned home to visit his family. While in Montreal, he stopped at Guy Street where Mother Piché, then assistant general, gave him a relic of M. d'Youville to which he attributed his healing. Upon his return from Germany, Rev. Speeman went to the U.S. where he ministered in the Diocese of Carleton. He evidently had a lengthy career as he celebrated his golden jubilee of ordination in 1956.

Nevertheless, the travelers arrived on time at Lake Superior whose vastness gave one the impression of being on an open sea. At eight o'clock on August 3rd, they landed on firm soil at Dryden where they boarded a train to Winnipeg, Manitoba. They made a brief stop at Kenora where they were met by two sisters with two students from the residential school who had come to meet the superior general. They finally arrived in Manitoba's capital city at two o'clock.

Contrary to their original plan, the stay at St. Boniface was brief. Responding affirmatively to the pressing invitation of Father Kavanagh, a former pastor at St. François-Xavier, they visited this first mission established by the sisters in Manitoba and then left for the sunny province of Alberta.

The provincial house established on the scenic hilltop of St. Albert lodged the provincial council, a home for seniors, an orphanage and a school. From that base, Mother Piché visited the schools at Fort Qu'Appelle (Lebret) and Lestock, in Saskatchewan (both part of St. Boniface), and then the missions of the St. Albert Vicariate: Youville Home, the industrial schools at Dunbow and Saddle Lake,<sup>35</sup> the hospitals of Calgary, Saskatoon. She also visited the hospital in Regina belonging to the St. Boniface province. The superior general was visiting at the Edmonton General Hospital when, on August 21st, she received a telegram announcing the death of Sister Carroll. The loss was keenly felt by the missionaries who were unanimous in proclaiming the merits of this worthy provincial superior. "The news has deeply afflicted us; she was so good, so good to us", wrote Sister St. Angèle, superior of the Convent of the Holy Angels in Fort Chipewyan.<sup>36</sup> In 1909, Mother Carroll had been to those northern missions and the heroic women (named thus

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<sup>35</sup> Schools where trades were taught in addition to the regular program.

<sup>36</sup> The northern missions and the school at Lac LaPlonge-Beauval were under the Alberta Province. (C.M. 1911-12, p. 50; letter dated Sept. 29, 1911).



years later by a renowned author) had appreciated her wonderful qualities.

For some time, Mother Piché had considered going to that remote area; the autumn season was not favorable, so the trip was planned for the following spring. She had announced her project in a letter to the missionaries, which news prompted Sister St. Angèle to add to her reply: "Eight months separate us from the blessed day when we will welcome you with great affection. It is impossible, Reverend Mother, to tell you the intensity and the ardor of our longing!" She also stated that she had obtained from the Northwest Company what she called a "passport" ensuring more rapid transportation.

In early September, the brave travelers returned to the canonical province of St. Boniface where ninety-two sisters were stationed at the hospitals of St. Boniface and St. Roch, and at Hospice Taché. These surrounded the old house erected in 1847 which they were now preparing to leave. The growth of the Congregation, (seven novices had pronounced their vows on August 14th), the role of hostess which they were called to exercise toward new communities arriving in Manitoba,<sup>37</sup> were all motives justifying the move from the modest building which would remain as a hospice for the elderly and the incurable.

According to her custom, Mother Piché lost no time in going to visit the brave sisters who had shouldered the difficulties of the early days and contributed to the development of the missions in the 'now flourishing' province of St. Boniface. Sisters Fisette, St. Thérèse and Laurent, all early pioneers, were happy to share their memories.<sup>38</sup> The planned transfer from that house

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<sup>37</sup> On April 6, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd arrived and remained with the Grey Nuns until their house was completed. The Carmelite Sisters came in July of the same year.

<sup>38</sup> Sister Fisette, on loan from the sister-community of St. Hyacinth, Sister Thérèse from that of Ottawa, arrived in 1850 and 1855. Sister Laurent, whose religious profession was advanced by three months, arrived at the Red River Settlement in 1850 at the tender age of 18 years.

which was once considered a marvel, primarily because of the number of window panes,<sup>39</sup> surely affected these dear elders. Sister Fisette was in the infirmary while Sisters St. Thérèse and Laurent still served the sick and the needy. It was said that Sister Laurent incarnated Mother d'Youville's tireless charity as she went out each day on the streets of St. Boniface.

Hospice Taché, St. Roch Hospital, the imposing St. Boniface Hospital, the St. Vital School, the Convents of St. François-Xavier, Ste-Anne-des-Chênes, St. Norbert and the orphanage in Winnipeg, were all visited by the superior general<sup>40</sup> who expressed satisfaction with the ongoing achievements observed there.

The blessing of the huge new vicarial house attached to Hospice Taché, forming a cross whose arms measured 270 feet by 50 feet, was held on September 14th. The building was four storeys high and was surmounted by a large dome.<sup>41</sup>

His Grace, Archbishop Langevin, was accompanied by twenty members of the clergy as he walked through the immense house to bless each area. At the reception which followed, he congratulated Mr. Lusignan, the contractor, and Mother Despins, the provincial superior, who had, in effect, served as area supervisor. The secretary noted that the house was very practical and built with foresight to last for a century. The chapel, as yet unfinished, was formally opened on Christmas Eve to coincide with the 79th anniversary of the religious profession of Father Dandurand, o.m.i., who had arrived on the shores of the Red River as a young missionary.

Mother Piché, who attended the blessing, understood the feeling of the pioneers who would leave:

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<sup>39</sup> Tessier, A. "Vers les Pays d'en Haut", p. 214.

<sup>40</sup> The houses of Ontario and Fort Totten, N.D., would be visited on the return journey.

<sup>41</sup> Letter of Sister Blanchet to the mother-house, C.M. 1911-12, p. 46.

this former house  
witness to another age  
bearing, buried  
in the midst of foliage,  
so many precious memories  
of former seasons.<sup>42</sup>

but she sensed their generosity and was edified by their silence.

She approved the provincial council's plan to entrust the Youville farm to two sisters. Until then, it had been operated by a farmer who shared the produce. The increasing number of elderly people and orphans justified this change. Moreover, the farm would become a place of rest for the sisters<sup>43</sup> as was being done at 'Ferme St. Charles' in Montreal.

Three weeks after the blessing of the new headquarters for the vicariate, Mother Piché began her return trip, with stops as foreseen at the schools of St. Marguerite in Fort Frances and of St. Anthony in Kenora (both in Ontario). Meanwhile, a cloud overshadowed the St. Michael School in Fort Totten, N.D., established in 1874 to serve the Sioux tribe and which could no longer count on the protection of Major Forbes. The agents who succeeded him did not have the same favorable influence over these natives; moreover, there definitely reigned a pervasive fanaticism. The missionary sisters, nevertheless, continued as educators and nurses in the midst of these difficulties.

The superior general and her secretary arrived back at the mother-house at eleven o'clock on the night of October 29th. They were met by the sisters, eager to express their cordial welcome and proceeded to the chapel where they sang the Magnificat.

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<sup>42</sup> Poetry of Jacques Dalcroze, entitled: "O ma chère maison" (Oh my dear house).

<sup>43</sup> This farm was later extended by the purchase of Prairie Grove in 1914. It was sold in 1937 as the staff was needed for another foundation.

The superior's long absence did not affect the routine and exceptional activities at the mother-house. Mother Piché, herself, had planned the celebration for the ordination to the priesthood of Father Alberic, of the Order of the Reformed Cistercians, which was held in the chapel on August 24th. Two days later, the new priest, brother of Sister Daignault, a Grey Nun, and of Mother St. Albinus of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, returned there to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice. Visiting the sisters in the community room, he shared his happiness in these words: "I am pleased to express my appreciation for what you have done for me and for my family (...). You welcomed my mother in your midst; the last years of her life were happy (...)." She, whom he likened to Monica, did not see her Augustine attain the priesthood. "I envisioned her in her place in the chapel during my ordination."<sup>44</sup> The fervent monk did not limit himself to a verbal testimony; from the Priory of Notre-Dame-de-Mistassini, Lac St. Jean, on September 24, 1911, he wrote a long letter to Mother of the Sacred Heart, Assistant General, asking her to convey his gratitude to Mother Piché "for the priceless favor of allowing me to be ordained in your chapel. I felt her presence all the more as I recalled the genuine sympathy with which she surrounded my dear deceased mother, and for which I had hoped to thank her personally on that occasion."<sup>45</sup>

October marked the visits of Bishops Langevin of St. Boniface, Pascal of Prince Albert and Grouard of Fort Chipewyan, all of whom proclaimed their indebtedness to the Grey Nuns. Bishop Grouard stated that during the severe trials which included the drowning of three brothers, Oblates of Mary Immaculate, and the destruction of the mill by fire, he was supported by the generous collaboration of the sisters of the Holy Angels Convent. All three bishops deplored the closure of the mission at Ile-à-la-Crosse. The sisters who had come as replacements had declared themselves unable to cope with the

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<sup>44</sup> C.M. 1909-1911, pp. 885-887.

<sup>45</sup> C.M. 1909-1911. Pp. 27-28.

difficulties inherent in this "Capital of a Solitude". The bishops maintained the view that this post was reserved for religious of French ancestry and robed in grey.

The sisters were also honored by a visit from Bishop Stagni, the Apostolic Delegate, who requested prayers for his special ministry. On October 8th, the doors of our convent opened to welcome the Sisters of St. Joseph from Bourg, France, who stopped in Montreal for a few hours before moving on to Minnesota. Father A. Fournet, a Sulpician chaplain who had met them in Europe, had directed them to the Grey Nuns. The annalist's entry stated that of the twenty-two sisters who had arrived, only seven actually were sheltered at our house.<sup>46</sup>

Father Fournet returned from France on October 14, 1911. In his visit to the sisters, he told them that he had met the Venerable Mother d'Youville at the Visitation Monastery in Paray-la-Monial. Her beautiful portrait was mounted on a crushed velvet banner which had apparently been embroidered by our Sister Gravel. This banner was located to the left of one of the Venerable Marguerite Bourgeoys while, below these, was a photograph of the Venerable Marie-de-l'Incarnation mounted on a blue satin medallion.<sup>47</sup>

Mother Piché, gave the sisters a summary of her travels, the consolations and joys which she experienced in each of our houses where fervor, fidelity, devotedness, self-sacrifice and evangelical poverty reigned. Naturally, she deplored the small number of missionaries for such a broad field of action; but she was grateful to Divine Providence for the thirty-three postulants who were preparing to enter the "Grey Nun cohort". Meanwhile, this cohort was also being severely tried: St. Joseph's Orphanage in Winnipeg was afflicted by an epidemic of scarlet

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<sup>46</sup> The other sisters were probably received at Hôtel-Dieu and/or with the Congregation of Notre-Dame.

<sup>47</sup> Father Fournet had noted these details in a letter addressed to Mother Piché and dated August 29, 1911.

fever where even some of the sisters became ill, and where three of their charges died in spite of competent nursing care.

While November brought to mind those who had gone to their eternal homeland, it also brought other sorrows and joys. Among the joys was the arrival of four Grey Nuns from Quebec who came to learn how to make wax figures of the Infant Jesus and other crafts. Among them was Sister Marie-de-l'Eucharistie, a talented artist who willingly initiated Sister Marie-du-Rédempteur to her own particular art. These fraternal encounters are recorded from time to time through the years in the history of the extended family. Bereavements, successes, celebrations of one or other of the sister-communities were shared, to be intensified or diminished, according to the situation.

Bishop Olivier Elzéar Mathieu who had received episcopal consecration on November 5th, came ten days later to visit the Grey Nuns before leaving for his western diocese. The new bishop of Regina expressed a high regard for the Grey Nuns, especially for those of Regina, Qu'Appelle-Lebret, Touchwood Hills-Lestock who would belong to his diocese. Upon arrival at his destination, the English-language newspapers proclaimed that Regina took pride in their new citizen.<sup>48</sup>

As the saying goes, days may follow one another and yet be very dissimilar. Early in the morning of November 24th, there came a telephone call announcing that the hospice built in St. Jerome, Quebec, in 1888 had been destroyed by fire. Fortunately, no lives were lost. The one hundred children and thirty elderly people who were attending Mass were immediately evacuated, the sisters hurriedly carrying the tots in their arms.<sup>49</sup> Mother Piché hastened to be with her sisters and was concerned that it might be impossible to rebuild the edifice. In fact, at a meeting held on November 28th, the villagers declared them-

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<sup>48</sup> Morice, P., *History of the Catholic Church in Canada* (French), para 4, p. 108.

<sup>49</sup> *Chronicles of the St. Jerome Hospice*, Nov. 24, 1911.

selves unable to assure the continuation of the work as they could no longer count on the support of the founders who had both died: Father Victor Rousselot, on August 31, 1889 and the pastor, Father Labelle, on April 4th of the current year.<sup>50</sup>

Although Father Rousselot had died twenty-two years earlier, the memory of this remarkable benefactor was frequently evoked by the Grey Nuns, especially in this year (1911) which marked the golden anniversary of the Nazareth Institute for the Blind which he had promoted and established. The celebration was already under way.

Previously, on March 25th, the annual concert was held featuring our virtuoso, E. Clarke, and renowned opera singer, E. Tessier; two other of our students, Messrs. Lamoureux and Pruneau sang several songs of romance. Mr. Tarento, a talented violinist, and Madame D. Masson, also an artist, likewise took part in this fund-raising event in anticipation of the forthcoming anniversary. The concert was a success and, with his usual eloquence, Archbishop Bruchési recalled the humble Sulpician's extraordinary career of benevolence. Besides helping the Agricultural Orphanage of Monfort, Father Rousselot had invested his personal fortune in works on behalf of the St. Joseph's Refuge known as Nazareth and in the founding of the Notre-Dame Hospital. He had imported manuals from France to initiate the Grey Nuns to the reading of braille. He was also an excellent professor. In 1870, Mother Slocombe had favored Sisters Dumouchel and Devins with a period of time at Perkins Institute in Boston, in New York and in Philadelphia to broaden their knowledge. It was encouraging to learn that these two students acknowledged that they had "learned little that was new."<sup>51</sup> The trip was at least an interesting break from their routine.

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<sup>50</sup> Auclair, Father A., in his book entitled "Father Labelle, Pastor", also mentions the generosity of Father Rousselot, one of the directors of the colonization society founded by the legendary pastor.

<sup>51</sup> Biography of Mother Slocombe, p. 418.

The event of November 27th opened with a piano solo by Miss H. Préfontaine, followed by a cantata and poetry by Alfred Lamoureux and music by Pierre Vezina; an address to the Sulpician Fathers was read by Mr. Pruneau; the children from the shelter offered a number entitled "Gratitude" written by Miss C. Lanctot and Mr. Elzéar Lachance; the tribute to the Grey Nuns composed by a former student was delivered by Miss A. Desjardins. Soprano and tenor voices sang with feeling:

O blessed name is that of Victor  
Whose glory rests in this dwelling place;  
You remain in our memory  
Like a mystical golden ray  
This priest with strong and valiant heart  
Came to us from France  
And brought us hope  
with his benevolent smile.

Some statistics were given. Nazareth had almost sixty visually impaired persons who, as organists, professors or specialized tradesmen, had undertaken the lifetime struggle and had succeeded, thanks to the founder and to the Sulpician Fathers who had planted so many works on the soil of Ville-Marie and, to the devotedness of the daughters of the Venerable Marguerite d'Youville.

A special message was addressed to Reverend Mother Piché, Superior General: "Worthy daughter of such a Mother, it was you, Grey Nuns, whom our beloved founder called in 1861 to the rescue of sightless children whom no one in our province had hitherto considered (...) You accepted the challenge of enhancing our life through practical education (...) From Nazareth came a superior general who was dear to us, the late Mother Filiatrault, along with so many other deserving workers who gave a new thrust to our Alma Mater by perfecting its classical and musical studies (...) But the most outstanding gift was in the favorable response which you, Reverend Mother, gave to one of our own who yearned to devote herself to the service of the poor." Our founder had once said: "My children, how happy I



would be to see some of you, men and women, consecrate your lives to God.”

The year ended in a memorable way. On December 7th, Bishop Ovide Charlebois who had been ordained at Assumption, came to preside at the clothing ceremony of twenty-seven postulants in the mother-house chapel. Three weeks later, Bishop Bruchési of Montreal received the vows of fourteen novices, among whom was Sister Marie-de-Nazareth (Fabiola Provost) a young sightless woman who would devote herself for those whose cross she shared and whom she would lead towards hope.



## STATISTICS RE: MINISTRIES AT JANUARY 1, 1912

### MOTHER-HOUSE-MONTREAL

School of Formation (Novitiate)<sup>1</sup>  
 St. Mathieu Shelter  
 St. Mathieu Orphanage  
 Home Economics School  
 Foundling Asylum (Crèche)

5 charitable works

1 institution

### YOUVILLE PROVINCE PROV. OF QUEBEC

St. Joseph Home for the Elderly  
 Varennes Home for the Elderly  
 Chambly Home for the Elderly  
 St. Benoit Home for the Elderly  
 Longueuil Home for the Elderly  
 Beauharnois Home for the Elderly  
 Notre-Dame-des-Neiges School (Mtl.)  
 St. Jean Hospital  
 Manor & farm (Châteauguay)<sup>4</sup>

### VILLE-MARIE

#### PROVINCE-MONTREAL

Nazareth School for the Blind  
 St. Patrick School for Boys  
 Bethlehem School for Boys  
 St. Henri-des-Tanneries Home  
 St. Cunégonde Home for the Elderly  
 St. Louis Orphanage  
 Notre-Dame Hospital  
 St. Paul Hospital  
 St. Antoine-de-Bonsecours Home  
 Ophthalmology Institute  
 St. Bridget Home for Girls  
 Youville Patronage

12 charitable works

5 homes<sup>2</sup>

1 orphanage

2 hospitals

1 hospice<sup>3</sup>

1 Ophthalmology Institute

1 refuge

1 patronage

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Total of 12 institutions

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<sup>1</sup> School of Formation (Novitiate)

<sup>2</sup> Shelter: a work mostly for students

<sup>3</sup> Hospice: a work mostly for care of the aged

<sup>4</sup> Châteauguay manor includes the farm and St. Joseph School

10 charitable works

6 homes  
2 schools  
1 hospital  
1 manor

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Total of 10 institutions

**ST. BONIFACE PROVINCE - MANITOBA**

**MANITOBA**

Provincial House, school of formation, orphanage  
Youville Home  
Youville farm  
St. Vital School  
St. François-Xavier School  
St. Boniface Hospita  
St. Roch Hospital  
St. Norbert Convent  
Ste-Anne-des-Chênes Convent  
St. Joseph Orphanage (Winnipeg)

**ONTARIO**

St. Marguerite School (Fort Frances)  
St. Anthony School (Kenora)

**SASKATCHEWAN**

Regina Hospital  
Lebret School (Qu'Appelle)  
Lestock School

**USA**

Fort Totten School

**ST. JOSEPH PROVINCE -  
BOSTON**

Cambridge Hospital  
Toledo Hospital  
Nashua Hospital  
Morristown Hospital  
New Brunswick Hospital  
Toledo Orphanage  
Salem Orphanage  
Lawrence Orphanage  
Worcester Orphanage  
Nashua Orphanage  
Working Girls'Home  
St. Joseph's Home

16 charitable works  
3 hospitals  
2 orphanages  
7 schools  
2 convents  
1 hospice  
1 farm

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Total of 16 institutions

12 charitable works  
5 hospitals  
5 orphanages  
2 homes

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Total of 12 institutions<sup>5</sup>

### **ST. ALBERT PROVINCE - ALBERTA**

Youville Home  
St. Albert School  
Calgary Hospital  
Edmonton Hospital  
St. Paul's Hospital, Saskatoon  
Dunbow School  
Beauval School (La Plonge)  
Saddle Lake Shelter

8 ministries  
3 hospitals  
5 schools

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Total of 8 institutions

### **NORTH-WEST TERRITORIES**

Sacred Heart Hospital (Providence)  
Fort Resolution School  
Chipewyan Convent

3 ministries  
1 hospital  
1 school  
1 convent

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Total of 3 institutions

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<sup>5</sup> of which two hospitals in Toledo were attached to the mother-house.



## CHAPTER TWO

### 1912-1914

The superior general anticipated a program which would leave her no respite during 1912. Since her election to the general administration, she had visited the provinces of the United States, Manitoba and Alberta, besides the houses in Quebec.

The Congregation had a total of 1,010 members located in sixty-eight houses in the U.S. and Canada. In the traditional letter of December 23, 1911, Mother Piché mourned the passing of twenty sisters. A few had died after a long career but others were only midway through their life journey.<sup>1</sup>

The formation program at the mother-house included ninety-seven novices and eighteen postulants; in St. Boniface, fifteen novices and eight postulants were being prepared to serve Jesus-Christ in the person of his poor. Now, Bishop Joseph Schrembs, requested a novitiate for his diocese of Toledo, Ohio. He spoke of this with Mother Piché who went there in early January to visit St. Vincent's Hospital and St. Anthony's Orphanage,

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<sup>1</sup> General Chapter 1849-1937, p.242

both of which were directly under the jurisdiction of the General Council.<sup>2</sup>

Upon her return to Montreal on February 1st, Mother Piché commended her assistant, Mother of the Sacred Heart, and Sister Laframboise, both of whom had worked assiduously to promote the progress of the fifty-nine students attending the School of Home Economics. This work had been important to her since 1905. She also rejoiced to learn that the St. Joseph Elementary School in Châteauguay, entrusted to Sister Landry, had an enrollment of forty-five students.

Among the eight shelters established in Montreal, that of St-Antoine-de-Bonsecours appeared to have finally emerged from the shadows after many difficulties, uprootings and transformations. Opened in 1877 under the name of St. Charles Home, in barracks known as the Marine Hospital, this ministry had been transferred to the house of Denis-Benjamin Viger in 1879. This was intended to be permanent but, in 1894, the neighboring properties next to the station were expropriated and the elderly had to re-locate; forty-nine of these were accommodated at the mother-house.

Until Father René Rousseau could find another place, it was decided to resort to an initiative which was called the Soup Kitchen. The two sisters who worked there resided at Notre-Dame Hospital, visiting the destitute and the sick in the surrounding area. Then Father M. O. Hébert, also a Sulpician priest, chaplain of the St. Vincent-de-Paul Center, opened a depot on Champ-de-Mars Street, where soup was served and clothing distributed. Thanks to the untiring generosity of the Sulpician priests, the St. Charles Home was reborn under the name of St. Anthony's Home in 1903.

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<sup>2</sup> In view of the difficulties encountered in the development of these missions, it was deemed advisable to keep these two houses under the direct authority of the Gen. Council.



It occupied a block of houses circumscribed by the Streets of St. Paul, des Commissaires, Friponne and Bonsecours. It contained lodging space for the elderly of both sexes, a school for impoverished children and a soup kitchen. Because of the generosity and collaboration of the Sulpicians, the members of the St. Vincent-de-Paul Society and the Association of the Ladies of Charity, St. Anthony's Home drew the attention of the press. Sister Rose-de-Lima Bonneau was actively involved in this ministry along with a group of the elite. Naturally, the superior general rejoiced at the progress of this work which, within a few years, would be entrusted to the remarkable Sister Bonneau, a former companion of her novitiate days.

Another highlight of 1912 was that the retreats at the mother-house were being preached by Father Marie-Clément. He had prepared himself well with regard to the spirituality of the Canadian-born Foundress of the Grey Nuns and he rejoiced at her special devotion to the Heart of Jesus. Along with 227 sisters, Mother Piché had followed the retreat which began on February 5th.

The preacher's eloquence had transformed his audience into apostles of his devotion to the Sacred Heart. He also accepted invitations from the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame and from the Sisters of St. Anne. Upon learning of Mother Piché's imminent departure for a visitation of the missions of the Far North, he gave her a supply of Archconfraternity folders, pictures and other precious souvenirs to which she herself added seven statues destined for these missions.

These missions, constantly challenged by dire poverty, had been visited in the past by assistants general: Sister Charlebois in 1879-1880; Sister Stubinger in 1893 and Sister Elizabeth Ward, one of the foundresses, who had made a heart-warming tour in 1906. Another superior general, Mother Filiatrault, had also contemplated a visit to the North but had been thwarted by inclement weather.

Following the example of the Good Shepherd, (Jn 10:14) Mother Piché wished to know those under her care. Travel

conditions having improved considerably, the General Council endorsed her plans to undertake the long journey. The project was not announced until the end of March when the climate seemed more favorable. Two missionaries, Sisters Dufault and Jobin, had left for the North in the fall of 1911. As usual, they had recorded the details of their trip and their story was read in all the missions. Mother Piché had requested that this reading be delayed until after her departure so that the sisters would not be unduly concerned with regard to her own journey. It was almost as though she had a presentiment of things to come, although she expected difficulties in the life she had chosen.

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Things appeared to go well. On April 10th, the pupils from the local orphanage performed a program entitled "Bon Voyage". Two days later, Mother Piché made a pilgrimage to the shrine of Notre-Dame-de-Bonsecours. On Monday, April 15th, two masses were celebrated in the chapel. Father Albéric, o.c.r., had come to Montreal with his prior to bid farewell to the superior general who would in turn greet his friend, Sister Daignault, a missionary out West. Emotions prevailed when Mother and her four companions crossed the convent threshold.<sup>3</sup> The group traveled to Kenora and then to St. Boniface, arriving on April 19th. The next day they learned of the wreck of the Titanic, a tragedy which was matter for their conversations when Bishop Langevin came to the community to greet the superior general. The sisters did not remain long in St. Boniface as the schedule was precise and it was important for them to reach the Alberta missions. Sister Girard accompanied Mother in view of becoming one of the new missionaries, but she unfortunately became very ill so that, upon arrival in Edmonton, other plans had to be made. Sisters Lavoie and Legoff had come from Saddle Lake to greet the superior general. Confident that she could

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<sup>3</sup> The companions were sisters returning to their post and a new missionary going for the first time. The details of this journey were taken from Mother Piché's diary and from letters written by the missionaries.

count on the generosity of these missionaries, Mother Piché chose Sister Lavoie to replace Sister Girard. She had judged rightly and the substitute sister did not even return to her convent; she found in Edmonton the things she would be needing. Sister Girard then left for Saddle Lake with Sister Legoff.

Mother Piché and Sister Lavoie had planned to leave for Athabasca Landing on May 3rd. When they finally got on their way, after a delay of three days, they made haste and traveled twenty-five miles in five hours! They stopped at 'Belle Ferme' where accommodation had been provided for them. There, they cared for a young man suffering from rhumatic fever. The following day, on their way again, the travelers experienced rocky roads and steep hills; they even had to get out of the carriage to walk long distances. Finally arriving at Athabasca Landing, they found shelter with the Sisters of Providence who, on the following day, opened their house for a wedding (an example of having to adapt to situations). Residents and guests shared the extra work entailed. Father Lefebvre o.m.i., informed the two Grey Nuns that they would embark the next day (the 8th) after the mid-day meal. The barges were there, but where were the guides? "They had attended the wedding where, unlike the Cana event, the supply of wine had not failed", wrote Mother Piché. Upon their return, the men could hardly stand; one was resting on the floor of the barge. The captain, Emil Shot, was at the rudder. At nightfall, the sisters had the difficult task of setting up their own tent – difficult perhaps, but less serious than the tragedy of the Titanic. The folding beds had remained with the rest of the luggage – the Lord knows where. Blankets were spread on the ground and the people covered themselves with heavy coats in the hope of getting some sleep.

Before continuing on their journey, Mother Piché cared for a bargeman who had injured his heel; his replacement arrived three hours later. The next day they could already hear the rumbling sound of the rapids which would have to be crossed the following morning. The sisters had to disembark on a nearby island, taking with them a small pail of butter which they dared

not leave behind. When it came time to set up camp, they were at a loss, until they met a young native to whom they offered a silver coin which works magic anywhere. He ran like a deer and soon returned with everything necessary to set up a tent. There was nothing for supper until along came a man by the name of Goulet. He had observed the sisters from a distance and brought butter, cheese, and biscuits which he gave them at the expense of the company where he served as a cook. Upon learning from Mother Piché that she and her companion had come from Montreal, he expressed pity for the hardships which they would experience and learn first-hand the difficult situations of those who lived there.

All these events with their unseemingly details were accurately recorded, including the psychology of the sisters who were successful in persuading the bargemen to recite the rosary together on a Sunday, as they rested on their oars!

On the night of May 22nd, a small light was seen at a distance, indicating the place where the missionaries were stationed. The guide suggested that it would be easier to go ashore in a small canoe. The sisters agreed, but the low water level created a problem, so the navigators removed their boots and pulled the canoe ashore. At last the sisters arrived at Fort Chipewyan near the Holy Angels Convent; it was eleven-thirty and the night was cold and dark. Those who dwelt there heard voices but could not see anyone. Apparently the scene of the encounter between the sisters was indescribable; a witness later stated that he had been moved to tears at a sight reminding one of shipwrecked persons grasping the hands of rescuers.

The official visitation began on May 24th and ended on June 3rd. While Sister Lavoie began her new assignment, Sister St. Angèle became the superior general's new companion, leaving the post where she had spent thirty years. After more painful adventures, including long waits and sudden departures, they arrived at Fort Resolution. Sister Girouard wrote on June 11th, "Our Mother arrived after a difficult journey. She was

greatly inconvenienced by the cold and the hunger, inconveniences of which none of us had previously experienced."<sup>4</sup>

When the sisters arrived at Fort Providence, the Oblate Fathers were celebrating the 50th anniversary of their settlement at that mission. Bishop Grandin, of blessed memory, had been the first to arrive there. Mother Piché listened to the missionaries as they rejoiced over the imposing new building known as the Sacred Heart Hospital, erected to replace an earlier structure, although the new one was still very modest.

The golden jubilee celebration was highlighted by a magnificent program executed by the students who were naturally endowed with music talent, both vocal and instrumental. Bishop Breynat was present to receive their homage on behalf of his Oblate confrères and to converse with the superior general, obtaining from her, the promise to provide sisters for two more convents in this frigid and uninviting land. Mother Piché had witnessed the heroism of her missionaries; she had observed their success and given them much encouragement. She was warm in expressing her satisfaction and pride in their achievements. She commended the fraternal charity evident among the sisters and set an example for them by sharing their tasks during her stay with them. The edification was mutual; the missionaries were untiring in their praise of the diminutive but admirable Mother who showed such understanding and who knew how to inspire them with a desire to give even more of themselves.

The return trip appeared to have been less strenuous, thanks to the "Graham" and the "Sainte-Marie", two boats which were more comfortable and more rapid than the barges. At Mother Piché's request, the passengers went ashore at about noon on July 25th. Sister Grandin, who was accompanying her, saw a solitary flower in the bushes. She picked it and, arranging it with a tuft of leaves, presented it to the superior on this vigil of the feast of St. Anne, her namesake. Mother declared that she had

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<sup>4</sup> Letter of July 14, 1912

never received a more gracious homage in a wilderness such as this.

On August 24th, Father Lefebvre informed the sisters that, upon their arrival at Athabasca Landing, a carriage would be there to meet them and bring them to the station where they would continue by train to St. Albert. He indicated a house where they would most certainly be welcomed. Trusting in this information, they however, experienced the following exchange:

– Madam, could you please give us a meal?

– I have nothing, Sister.

– We will accept anything you can give us.

– I have nothing Sister.

and the door closed upon them. To add to this unfortunate incident, the train was two days late. Finally, the travelers reached St. Albert, thankful for food and a comfortable bed.

On September 1st, the sisters left for Lac-La-Plonge, stopping at Prince Albert where they lodged with the Sisters of Sion. After another lengthy delay, they finally reached their destination on the 10th. The site was marvelous and merited its future name of Beauval. The superior general, whose temperature was elevated, due to an extreme fatigue, was persuaded by Sister Beaudet to take some bed rest before starting her visitation at Sacred Heart School. Her rest was respected and fervent prayers were addressed to St. Anne on her behalf. Sister Magella, who was her travel companion for the return journey, gave moving details of the voyage, claiming that no missionary had ever experienced as many difficulties and privations.

We are grateful to the writer who provided these details because Mother would probably have remained silent about them, ever mindful that she had become a Grey Nun 'to experience difficulties'.

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On her return from Lac-la-Plonge on October 1st, Mother Piché stopped at St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon where Sister Archambault, mistress of novices at St. Boniface,<sup>5</sup> was there to welcome her. Later, in a letter to the assistant general, she mentioned that Mother Piché was planning to attend the blessing of the new hospital in Regina on October 6th. She added: "Our good Mother, fearing that you would be concerned about her, wishes to reassure you that she has fully recovered from the illness experienced at Lac-La-Plonge, an occurrence which was more severe than you had originally been given to understand."<sup>6</sup> Good news for the sisters at the mother-house included the announcement that October 12th was the date scheduled for the superior general's return. It occurred a bit late, but did not diminish the warmth of the welcome. Professed sisters, novices, postulants, the orphan boys and girls, the elderly and the chaplains filled the entrance, the corridors and yard to welcome the arrival of their beloved Mother. The procession led to the chapel where the organ accompanied the chanting of the Magnificat. Records noted the presence, on this occasion, of Mother Duhamel, superior general of the sister-community of Ottawa, with Sister St. Jean l'Evangeliste.

As usual, Mother Piché returned to the daily routine as though it had never been interrupted. However, she acknowledged that she had gone blindly into an unknown land<sup>7</sup>, and would remain grateful that God's gentle Providence had returned her safely home.

The celebration of the feast of St. Anne had been delayed to October 15th. At the community gathering, Father Lecoq pleasantly betrayed one of Mother's secrets when he assured the assembly that God had given her the grace to have not a single

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<sup>5</sup> Sr. Archambault would soon be appointed provincial superior in Alberta, replacing Sr. Carroll who, due to ill health, had served only for a brief period.

<sup>6</sup> Letter dated Oct. 2, 1912.

<sup>7</sup> Letter of Sept. 3rd addressed to Mother of the Sacred Heart.

preference among the sisters. He added that she felt even more maternal than before her departure for the visitations. Like the Good Shepherd, she could say: "I know my sheep and they know me." (Jn 10:14)

Naturally the sisters were eager to inform Mother regarding events which had occurred during her long absence: the ordination to the priesthood of a protégé, Joseph Fortin, the visit from two Ursuline Sisters from Quebec, one of whom (Sister St. Olivier) had three aunts who were Grey Nuns. She also learned of the First Congress of the French Language in Quebec which had taken place from June 24th – 30th and which included a visit from Bishop Langevin of St. Boniface to the mother-house on July 4th. He had not mentioned the problems affecting his diocese as a result of a fire which had destroyed the minor seminary under construction,<sup>8</sup> and more recently, another fire which had reduced to ashes the new boarding school of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary.<sup>9</sup>

Approximately 400 sisters attended the retreats held between July 4th and July 22nd. On July 20th, the feast of St. Marguerite of Antioch, Father Marie-Clément Staub made this comparison which was recorded in the chronicles: "There is a Marguerite, beautiful and discreet, whose roots are in a tomb, but whose blossoms are in heaven. Reflecting upon the ways by which Providence had led the humble Marguerite de Lajemmerais in the works which she had achieved, we may well ask ourselves what we are accomplishing here below."

On August 24th, Bishop Georges Gauthier received the episcopal anointing at the hands of Archbishop Bruchési who was pleased that his Auxiliary was of the school of St. Sulpice. The banquet was held at the Grey Nuns' mother-house, a fact which the journal, *LA SEMAINE RELIGIEUSE*, mentioned as being almost a tradition.

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<sup>8</sup> There was reason to believe that this was the work of an arsonist.

<sup>9</sup> Was this misfortune possibly caused by the same person?



The construction of the future orphanage of Côte-de-Liesse<sup>10</sup> began on September 11th. Two days later, Archbishop McDonald, (titular of Gortina, Newfoundland) who was seriously ill and who had asked to be hospitalized at the mother-house, arrived by ambulance. He was assigned an apartment in the St. Mathieu wing and provided with an orderly and nursing sisters from Notre-Dame Hospital and from the mother-house. He died on September 17th, attended by Father Labrosse, the chaplain. A solemn Mass was celebrated the next day in the convent chapel in the presence of Father O'Reilly from St. Patrick's parish and relatives of the deceased. Archbishop Bruchési presided at the final prayers of his colleague whose remains were transported to Pictou in his home province.

It was mentioned earlier in this chapter that Bishop Joseph Schrembs, the first Bishop of Toledo, had requested of the Grey Nuns that a novitiate be established in his diocese. As a former student of St. Sulpice in Montreal, he had known the Grey Nuns for twenty-eight years and had remained a good friend. It was reported that, on a visit to the orphanage in February of that year, he had, with simplicity, sat at the piano and sung songs in German, English and French. Mother Piché was en route to the Far North when she received a telegram on April 29th announcing that Rome had responded affirmatively to the request of the Bishop and the Grey Nuns to open a novitiate in Toledo.

November began with a tragedy. The ferry boat "Cecilia" sank near the mound of Ile-St-Bernard at Châteauguay. Twelve passengers perished, among whom were the engineer and Mr. Leduc, the captain. When Mother Piché and the five jubilarians of 1912 came to the manor a few days later, they saw the wreckage and merchandise scattered about – a reminder of the fragility of life.

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<sup>10</sup> The architect was Mr. Piché, brother of the superior general.

Another such reminder occurred on November 15th when Mother Carpentier, superior general of the sister-community of St. Hyacinth, died suddenly while attending the 50th anniversary of their convent in Sorel. Mother Piché and Mother Ward attended the funeral on November 19th.

All was not sad, however. On his return from the West, Archbishop Bruchési praised the works of the Grey Nuns in that territory, declaring that improvements made over the nine-year period since his previous trip there made buildings unrecognizable. Mother Piché agreed, based on her observations during her recent visit to St. Boniface. There she had particularly noted the progress of the Youville Farm.<sup>11</sup> At the time, she had also approved the establishment of a new school at La Broquerie, Manitoba.

The Archbishop reported that the new organ at the vicarial house (a gift from the mother-house), had been inaugurated on November 14th and that the bell molten by the Paccard Company of Annecy had been blessed on the same occasion. This bell, weighing seventeen hundred pounds, was a gift of the Ritchot legacy, which had also established a scholarship for three orphan girls at the convent of St. Norbert.<sup>12</sup> Mother Eugenie Dionne, who had been delegated to attend the celebration, reported every detail of interest. Her companion, Sister Rodier, an experienced and talented musician who had injured herself in a fall, was unfortunately unable to play the beautiful organ at the closing ceremony on that memorable day.

Mother Dionne reported the success attained by the teaching sisters. Mr. Lang, the inspector for public high schools, had recently made a surprise visit at St. Norbert. After examining twenty-five students at the more advanced level, he declared

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<sup>11</sup> The former boarding school, opened in 1868, was sacrificed in order to use the material for the construction at the farm.

<sup>12</sup> We know that Msgr. Ritchot was pastor at St. Norbert and that it was at his insistence that the Grey Nuns opened the convent there.

himself completely satisfied. To his favorable report, he added the following comment: "If it is true that another kingdom exists beyond this one, you 'Ladies' deserve to have front seats there."<sup>13</sup>

Mr. Lang was not the only one to appreciate the teaching of the 'grey ladies'. Sister Diquère, who taught in the school at St. Albert, Alberta, forwarded to the superior general a report from Inspector J.A. McKenna which stated: "You passed with flying colors!" and included the following summary: "The establishment includes a day school and a boarding school for white children and another for the Métis and Natives (...) The teaching there can compare favorably with the best educational institutions. (...) Adjoining the school is a large farm; the boys who are interested in working there receive a salary of \$25.00 per month; the girls are initiated to domestic tasks. (...) The teaching is excellent and students progress very well. (...) Vocal and instrumental music, painting and needle-craft are taught. (...) Girls play the mandolin, boys have their band, all learn piano. (...) This institution is a real Alma Mater to them. The boarding school is under the direction of the Grey Nuns. These religious are doing splendid work and in a marvelous way."<sup>14</sup>

Having her own convictions as to the impact of competent Christian education, Mother Piché, like the foundress who, in her time, had given thanks to Divine Providence for choosing to "use the Grey Nuns to achieve some small good", expressed her satisfaction.

The attitude of service toward the human family continued as Father Marie-Clément, the director for the retreats, agreed to the request of the authorities of the community to have his conferences published. In the preface, Archbishop Bruchési

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<sup>13</sup> "S'il est vrai qu'existe un autre royaume, vous, Mesdames, méritez d'y occuper les premières places".

<sup>14</sup> Extracted from the report published in extensio C.M. 1911-12, pp. 262-264. The school had an enrollment of 238 students. French speaking students learned both French and English.

recommended the promotion of this publication, affirming that the sisters would draw from it new inspirations in the performance of their beautiful mission of charity. Mother Piché received the first copy of the book entitled "Mère et Modèle" (Mother and Model), on December 27th, a few days after having commented on the magnificent apostolate exercised in the Canadian Far North. She wrote "This visit kept me away from the mother-house for six long months. I consider the experience one of the best which a superior general can have. My heart was often distressed by the rigor of those distant regions, the privations and the isolation of our brave missionaries. I was nevertheless greatly consoled by their generosity in the evangelization they are able to accomplish in collaboration with the Oblate missionaries." Quoting the provincial superior of St. Sulpice, she stressed that the spirit of Mother d'Youville was the condition and the vital force of our Institute to be carefully guarded. In all humility, she added: "It is the prayer I formulate, both for you and for myself."

### **THE TOLEDO NOVITIATE TOLEDO, OHIO – 1912**

The prospect of a house of formation in Toledo, Ohio (meaning "beautiful river"), became a reality when Mother Piché was informed by telegram received on April 29th that Rome had authorized the project. On the same day, Father Charles Lecoq, the provincial superior of St. Sulpice, made the announcement to the sisters at the mother-house, adding that this novitiate would become a part of a distinct province of the Congregation, as recommended by Bishop Schrembs. The endorsement of Archbishop Bruchési who was in Toledo at the time was assured; he expressed genuine satisfaction at the news. He wrote "I am in this beautiful St. Vincent's Hospital, undoubtedly one of the best in the States, which I would be happy to have transported to Montreal. Both Protestant and Catholic doctors are justifiably proud of it. The School of Nursing attached to it is also flourishing."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The Archbishop of Montreal added: "We are far from the dark days of Cleveland", alluding to the difficulties during 1870-1888 when Toledo belonged to that diocese.

On May 20, Mother Ward was delegated to Toledo to examine questions relative to the novitiate; she was accompanied by Sister Ottilia whose family lived there. Several excellent recruits had come from the States to Montreal, willing to learn the French language. The opening of this novitiate would not end the custom since the candidates would be required to complete their religious formation in Montreal.

Mother Piché entrusted the foundation of the novitiate to Sister M. L. Octavie Dugas, who had been mistress of novices at the mother-house from 1902-1910. A woman of experience and of discernment, she well deserved the trust shown her by the superior general. She arrived in Toledo on the evening of October 22nd accompanied by a Franco-American novice by the name of Grégoire, the fifth in a family to have chosen the Grey Nun way of life.

The 'cenacle' occupied a small cottage which had been built near the hospital some thirty years previously to serve as a residence for the chaplain. With the chaplaincy service having been assumed by the Jesuits who were already stationed in Toledo, the cottage then served as an isolation area. This house was transformed into a residence for the new candidates and was officially blessed on November 21st; deadlines were met thanks to the collaboration of Sisters Duckett and Décarie, the hospital superior and her assistant. Sister Décarie apparently had even shared the work of the carpenters and painters.

The chapel containing two life-sized statues, would soon have to be enlarged. The limited space was barely adequate for the number of guests invited. Nurses, relatives of the postulant and of Sister Neuhausel, a novice coming from the mother-house, sisters from the orphanage and hospital, all gathered for the Eucharistic celebration during which Bishop Schrembs expressed his delight and great hopes for this foundation.

Father Nougaret, a native of France, was appointed as spiritual director for the novitiate. The Jesuits accepted responsibility for the translation into English of the Prayer Book and the Manual of Piety as well as of the Ceremonial for Clothing and

Profession events. The vestments were contributed by the neighboring houses. Divine Office was recited in two choirs with only one voice on each side, as other candidates did not readily appear.

In May 1913, the General Council appointed Sister Dugas as superior for the province of St. Boniface to succeed Sister Despins whose term of office had expired. She, in turn, was replaced as mistress by Sister Archambault whose health was now restored,<sup>16</sup> assisted by Sister McDougall, recently sub-mistress in St. Boniface.

Four postulants were clothed in the grey habit on the following September 8th in an event which renewed hope. But a year elapsed without any further admissions; moreover, the article of the Constitutions requiring the approval of the members of the General Chapter for the opening of a novitiate and of a new province was reviewed which resulted in a vote to suspend that project. Mother of the Sacred Heart, Assistant General, came to announce this decision; she returned to Montreal on July 15th with Sister Archambault and Sisters Mead and Leclerc, two novices who were willing to come to the mother-house to complete their formation.<sup>17</sup>

The attempt to establish a novitiate had proven premature. At the time, no one could foresee that it would be revived at a later date.

## **THE PAROCHIAL SCHOOL OF LA BROQUERIE MANITOBA – 1912**

The entreaties of Father Roch-Alexandre Giroux, pastor of St. Joachim parish, supported by Archbishop Langevin of St. Boniface, finally overcame the hesitation of the Grey Nuns. Since

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<sup>16</sup> She had resigned as provincial of the Alberta houses. She had also formerly occupied the post of novice-mistress in St. Boniface.

<sup>17</sup> Both of them pronounced their vows on December 13, 1915.

1910, the establishment of a school at La Broquerie to be operated by the sisters had been urgently desired. The name itself was an attraction, as it came from Henriette de la Broquerie, mother of Archbishop Taché and a grand-niece of Mother d'Youville. The pride which the Archbishop of St. Boniface took in this link with the foundress of the Grey Nuns was well known.

He had erected the parish of St. Joachim in 1883 and lay persons had been teaching at the four schools. A new building would accommodate five classrooms, only two of which would be utilized that year. The General Council approved the foundation on condition that it would be staffed with sisters already working in the province. On April 23rd, three novices of Manitoba had pronounced their vows,<sup>18</sup> a fact which was interpreted as a favorable sign from above.

On August 15th, feast of the Assumption, the three foundresses, namely: Sisters Maurice, St. Joachim, and Dupuis, accompanied by Mother Despins, Provincial Superior, boarded the Canadian National train en route to their destination. The pastor had organized a formal reception; most of the parishioners were at the station to welcome the sisters who were somewhat taken aback that their arrival was being acclaimed by the ringing of the church bells. Escorted to the church, the missionaries listened from their places near the sanctuary, to the praise of the Grey Nuns "who distinguish themselves by their spirit of sacrifice and by their devotion to duty."

Decorations, singing and music added a character of solemnity to the reception during which a festive meal was shared, followed by a tour of the unfinished building. The sisters were guests at the rectory for two weeks. Fifty students had registered on the first day but the number increased to sixty-eight within a month and onward.<sup>19</sup> This new foundation earned for the Grey

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<sup>18</sup> One of them is still alive as these lines are written: Sr. Pulvermacher is now 107 years old.

<sup>19</sup> St. Boniface Archives – La Broquerie School.

Nuns some degree of credit for the survival of the French language in the Canadian West.

## 1913

It was fortunate that the number of Grey Nuns was increasing as requests for foundations were mounting. Nevertheless, the forty religious who had pronounced their vows during 1912 did not suffice to meet the many demands.

The spiritual journey covered during the annual retreats, as well as the booklet "Mère et Modèle" which each one received at New Year's served to intensify the sisters' desire to deepen their intimacy with Mother d'Youville, their foundress. Father Marie-Clément expressed astonishment and admiration at the diversity of works undertaken. Since the early days when Mother d'Youville undertook to contribute towards the cost of studies for Pierre Mennard (sic), the Grey Nuns have continued this apostolate. From 1763 to 1912, they supported one hundred and twenty-four students, many of whom became priests.<sup>20</sup>

During 1913, it was learned that Father William Forbes, pastor at St. Jean-Baptiste, had been appointed to succeed the late Bishop Archambault as bishop of Joliette, Quebec. The chronicler<sup>21</sup> wrote "It is with legitimate pride that we greet in his Excellency, one of our former students." Congratulations were offered by the superior general who received this message in reply: "Few congratulations have touched me as deeply as yours. After my good parents, it is to the Grey Nuns that I owe what I have become. From the shelter at Nazareth and throughout my studies at the College of Montreal, I was supported by the Grey Nuns, ever the object of their solicitude and of their prayers."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "Mère et Modèle", p. 74, item 4.

<sup>21</sup> Both Forbes brothers, John and William, grand-nephews of Mother McMullen, the 6th superior general of the Grey Nuns, who also had two other aunts in the Community: Srs. Forbes and McDonnell.

<sup>22</sup> Letter of Aug. 18.



Another student protégé, Father J. Fortin, appointed vicar at Chambly, rejoiced at the fact that he would find Grey Nuns at the outset of his new ministry. He would encounter them again when assigned to the Canadian West!

The convent on Guy Street was considered a highly appropriate place in which to prepare for important functions. Dom Pacôme Gaboury, (of the Trappist Monastery at Oka), who had been elected to succeed Dom Oger (sic), sought the privilege of making his retreat there in preparation for his blessing as abbot; he received an affirmative reply from the Grey Nuns who were honored by this request.

Obviously, many of the events were conducive to remind the sisters of the nobility of their origin. They were visited by Father August Gosselin, a seasoned historian, who praised Madam d'Youville "a valiant woman in the evangelical sense, graced with a superior intelligence and a loyal and generous heart." He acknowledged the influence of the Sulpician priests who had guided her, stating "What a great advantage you and the Sisters of the Congregation had in having Father Faillon as historian! All has been captured in those lives! Father Faillon will remain the most reliable historian of both Mother d'Youville and Mother Bourgeoys (...). Cherish the spirit of your mother, her spirit of humility, fortitude, courage and abandonment to Divine Providence."<sup>23</sup>

The affirmation of this special visitor inflamed the deep desire of the Grey Nuns, and, in particular, of Mother Piché who guided their destiny. At the request of the local pastor, she assigned Sisters Donlon and St. Brigitte to visit the poor and shut-ins in the region of St. Anne, a service which already existed wherever there was a hospice or a school.<sup>24</sup> Such was the case for the School of Notre-Dame-des-Neiges where the Grey Nuns had been teaching since September 1863; it was a

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<sup>23</sup> C.M. 1913-14, pp. 153-154.

<sup>24</sup> C.M. 1913-14, pp. 153-154.

precious ministry but one which was to be transferred to a Congregation dedicated solely to teaching. The local population which had previously been successful in persuading the superior general to maintain this work,<sup>25</sup> finally lost their cause. At first she encountered lively opposition, pleadings, offers of "foundations", every effort was made to dissuade her once more. The 50th anniversary had just been celebrated in grandiose fashion on July 2nd. Nevertheless, the decision was maintained, though eased somewhat by the fact that the Grey Nuns would be advantageously replaced by the Sisters of the Congregation of the Holy Cross.<sup>26</sup> The withdrawal from this house was, in a way, compensated by the opening of two shelters.

### **KILLARNEY, OCTOBER 1913**

This foundation was, in reality, an extension of the St. Brigitte Shelter established in 1860 on behalf of underprivileged Irish immigrants; in 1913, a shelter for working youth was added. The two adjacent houses remained under the same administration. Three years later, at Father O'Reilly's request, an extension to this shelter would be built at Mont-Tremblant where these young people would be able to enjoy vacations in the country.<sup>27</sup>

### **ST. JEAN SHELTER, JULY 1913**

The pastor of Notre-Dame-Auxiliatrice parish, in turn, requested the establishment of a shelter for young working girls; by July 21st, the two first boarders were welcomed. The former 'Collège de Monnoir', able to accommodate eighty persons,

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<sup>25</sup> Drouin, Sr. C. Hôp. Gen. v.3, p. 131.

<sup>26</sup> On the occasion of the jubilee, the statistics showed that 5,292 students had attended the school; 2,426 poor had been assisted and 22,546 sick had been visited and treated.

<sup>27</sup> The latter post was closed in 1919.

served for this purpose. Sisters St. Jérôme, Raby and Coderre were named foundresses. However, after three years of loyal efforts, it was realized that this initiative failed to meet expectations and the doors were closed in 1916.

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The sisters of the metropolis were not the only ones to experience the disappointment of seeing a house close its doors or to rejoice at the rise to the episcopate of a spiritual son or a friend. The American sisters also had to resign themselves to leaving All-Souls Hospital established in Morristown, New Jersey since 1892. Father M.J.M. Flynn, the local pastor, had welcomed Sisters Shanessy, Marie du Sacré-Coeur, Eviston and de l'Ange Gardien on September 5th of that year. A Mr. Brady, well acquainted with the history of the Grey Nuns, had reminded those present of the heroism of the sisters during the typhus epidemic of 1847. Father Flynn had insisted that he would accept no other Community than that of the Grey Nuns.

The work had been established in the historic "Arnold Tavern" where Washington and his senior official had taken refuge during the War of Independence. As in other localities, ladies had volunteered to help in spite of the risks occasioned by caring for patients with contagious diseases. Smallpox was a life-threatening disease during 1902. The hospital gained a reputation for excellence. When Sister Shanessy died in 1898, she was given a state funeral. Later, when Sister Parent, the superior, returned to Montreal, the doctors came to visit her at the mother-house.

The hospital had a capacity of only forty beds; since it was a private establishment, it was not entitled to government grants. Mother Piché learned that, after Father Flynn, the founder and provider died in 1910, the sisters had to resort to canvassing in order for the institution to survive. Another consideration was that hospitals were becoming common-place in this prosperous town, so the withdrawal of the sisters would not cause serious problems.

The thirteen workers who had been assigned there returned to the mother-house at the same time as the eight sisters who had left the school of Côte-des-Neiges. It was realized once more that, with time, situations turn out well when entrusted to God's Providence. These houses which closed, enabled the Grey Nuns to pursue their objective to leave posts where they could be replaced in order to venture further out, as in the Canadian North.

During this same period, the sisters at St. Boniface were overjoyed at the arrival of Mother Dugas, their new provincial superior. They were likewise pleased at the announcement by the archdiocesan procurator that Father Arthur Béliveau had been named coadjutor to Bishop Langevin.

Born at Mount Carmel in the diocese of Trois-Rivières, Québec on March 2, 1870, Fr. Béliveau had come to Manitoba with his family, at age 12. After concluding his studies at the St. Boniface College in 1891, he entered the Grand Seminary in Montreal that same year. He was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Laflèche in Louisville in 1893. Two years later, he received his doctorate in theology from the University of the Propagation of the Faith in Rome.

The future bishop was firmly settled in St. Boniface where he was renowned for his talents and for his priestly qualities. By 1895, he had been named Chancellor of the diocese and became its procurator in 1905. The Grey Nuns considered him a devoted friend and brother since two of his sisters had chosen the vocation of Sisters of Charity.

Bishop Béliveau received his episcopal consecration on July 25, 1913, at the hands of Archbishop Langevin who affirmed that he was living one of the happiest days of his 18 year episcopate.<sup>28</sup> It seemed as though the Archbishop had a presentiment that his death was imminent.

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<sup>28</sup> Morice, Msgr. Langevin, pp. 297-298.

The newspaper entitled LA LIBERTÉ, recently founded by P.E. Guérin, gave extensive details of the elaborate ceremony which naturally concluded with a banquet at the Grey Nuns' Convent. Among the distinguished guests were: Bishops Pascal, Legal, Mathieu, and McNally, Fathers Edouard and Hormidas Béliveau, brothers of the newly-elect, and forty other members of the clergy. Sister Lagarde, the annalist, wrote that this was truly a memorable event in the history of that vicariate.

Days follow but do not resemble one another. Three weeks after this celebration, the annals recorded the extensive damage caused by a storm on the night of August 14th. The sky was aflame, rain fell with such force that the eaves over-flowed into the attic of the new house and the ceiling became loose and fell on the beds. The sisters had to busy themselves with pails and mops in order to minimize the disaster. St. Boniface had experienced more than one flood in its sixty-nine year history and this one would not be the last.

Meanwhile, a joyful event was recorded for the St. Albert vicariate; an addition to St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon which the STAR-PHOENIX reported as having been blessed by Archbishop Mathieu of Regina on November 1, 1913. The ceremony was attended by Mother Dugas and by Mother Pagé, the recently appointed superior of the St. Albert Province to which the hospital belonged. A large number of guests were present and the speakers spoke highly of their appreciation of the Grey Nuns.

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Mother Piché had withheld emphasis on the difficulties encountered during her visit to the North, but she had not forgotten them. She vowed to spare similar experiences to future travelers to those distant regions. She did not allow the publication of her travel diary until 1916 and, even then, she omitted many details. Fortunately, the sisters visited were less discreet and preserved them for posterity.

To ensure that travel would be less difficult in the future, the superior general appointed Sister Grandin who had journeyed with her for the return trip, and who was well acquainted with the area, (having been one of the foundresses) to become the procurator for the missions. This sister, native of France, would be capable of handling most details that might improve the conditions of travel as well as the living conditions for the sisters stationed in these remote posts.

Sister Grandin was stationed at Youville Home, the provincial headquarters for Alberta. The summer of 1913 bore promise of a bountiful harvest: wheat, oats, barley, and potatoes in abundance. The sister-procurator would find a means to share these with her companions who for so long had been deprived of substantial foods.

In Calgary, the population welcomed the appointment of their first bishop, Bishop McNally who, during a trip to Montreal, assured Mother Ward of his esteem for the Grey Nuns. In a visit to the sisters in St. Albert, the new bishop commented on the warm reception accorded him at the mother-house.

In September, Bishop Béliveau came to Montreal where he was welcomed at Guy Street. He celebrated the Eucharist at the Manor in Châteauguay, visited the farm in detail and stopped at St. Joseph School where he was entertained by the students. His Grace was accompanied by three priests from St. Boniface by the name of Allard (one of them an Oblate), all brothers of our dear Sister Allard – a detail which was recorded by the annalist.

The year ended with the implementation of an entirely new procedure. The superior general, according to the Constitutions, was required to make a visitation of all the houses at least once during her term of office. Mother Piché had entrusted responsibility for details regarding the mother-house to the assistant general or to another assistant. Then, as works increased, she had, on several occasions, delegated one or other of her assistants to visit some of the houses of the Institute which required an on-site study. Moreover, the governance particular to the mother-house occasionally required the

attention of all members of the General Council. It was therefore considered expedient to appoint a superior, supported by an assistant, who would be responsible for the routine activities of the local community. Sister St. Luce assumed this role on November 1st together with Sister Lefebvre as assistant until the next General Chapter could assess the wisdom of this decision.

## 1914

The year opened with a joyful announcement that came as a complete surprise. Mother Piché, accompanied by Mother Ward, would go to Rome in the near future. Archbishop Bruchési had repeatedly stressed the need for such a trip in order to promote the cause of Mother d'Youville.<sup>29</sup>

The purpose of the trip was to make known to competent Church authorities the missionary and humanitarian works of the Congregation founded almost two centuries ago, a fact which, in itself, would cast a light on the missionary impact initiated by its foundress.

In a circular letter dated February 19th, Mother Piché explained her choice of Mother Ward whom she considered "extremely well informed regarding all that concerned the missions of the Far North since she had been one of the foundresses. Moreover, she was the sole survivor among the sisters who had testified at the Process of Information regarding our Venerable Mother." This brave religious would be able to respond clearly to the questions which might be asked by the Promoter of the Cause. Another consideration was that, since Father Marie-Clément had been summoned to Rome by his superior general, he would be available as the author of "Mère et Modèle".<sup>30</sup> Archbishop Bruchési had prepared the way well

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<sup>29</sup> There had been question of this project during Mother Filiatrault's time, but circumstances did not lend themselves to its realization.

and would, himself, be leaving for Rome on February 24th. Aboard the "Franconia", he wrote to the sisters: "There I will await your superior general and Mother Ward."<sup>31</sup> A letter from Father Colomban-Marie, o.f.m., a staunch friend of the Grey Nuns, assured them of his availability upon their arrival overseas. They also knew they could depend on the customary help of the priests of the Canadian College to assist them.

The travelers left for New-Brunswick, New Jersey on March 15th where, two days later, they boarded the Caronia of the Cunard lines.<sup>32</sup>

Prior to this departure, news that a fire had ravaged the chapel of our Quebec sisters on February 20th reached Mother Piché who promptly expressed her sympathy to Mother St. Christine, their superior general. The following week, Mother St. Hélène, Assistant General, made a brief visit to Guy Street, giving Mother Piché the occasion to reiterate to all the members of her community the assurance of her prayerful support. She no doubt also expressed her profound appreciation for the advantage provided to Sister Marie-du-Rédempteur who was taking art courses at their studio under the skilled direction of Sister Marie-de-l'Eucharistie, of the Quebec community.

At the mother-house, life went on with its usual rhythm of pleasure and pain that is a part of life. Chroniclers and annalists gave many details of these, presumably in view of informing the

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<sup>30</sup> Father Marie-Clément would obtain the blessing of his Holiness, Pius X for the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and, from his superior general, Fr. Bailly, the authorization to pursue his project to found a religious community to be known as the Sisters of Ste-Jeanne-d'Arc. The founder, had always entertained great admiration for his "neighbor" born in Lorraine while he was Alsacian-born. (Quintal, o.c., pp.119-120)

<sup>31</sup> C.M. 1913-14, p. 314

<sup>32</sup> Mother Ward kept a diary of the voyage; also, correspondence was exchanged regularly between the travelers and the sisters at the mother-house. It is from these sources that details of the epic journey were obtained.



superior general, upon her return, of the joys experienced and the sorrows shared.

The Sulpician priests had customarily invited a preacher from overseas to direct the Lenten series at Notre-Dame Church, and then to visit the religious Congregations of Sulpician origin. Canon Desgranges visited the Grey Nun community on April 11th. He commented: "Your works are the most perfect expression of the evangelical ideal. When I search the Gospels, I observe that the most outstanding virtue is kindness and charity. The work which touches me the most profoundly is that of abandoned children (...) This needs to be continued unflinchingly, without looking back. Caregivers are somewhat like instructors teaching Gospel values through their example and by their work." This tribute encouraged them greatly to pursue their efforts to extend God's kingdom through all of their works. The industrial schools of St. Mathieu, St. Joseph in Montreal and in St. Benoit, were developing rapidly. At the Nazareth house for the blind where Braille was being taught, bringing eyes to their finger-tips, was added another achievement – that of excelling in gymnastics. Their success surpassed their hopes: they performed with a precision that could be the envy of those not visually impaired.<sup>33</sup>

News from overseas informed the sisters that the travelers had arrived at Gibraltar on March 26th and, two days later, had visited the Carrée House of the Missionary Fathers of Africa at Alger. There they met three Canadian priests. They were unable to meet Father John Forbes (a brother of the Bishop of Joliette), who had been the first Canadian to enroll in that missionary Congregation, as he was back home visiting his Grey Nun benefactors; on June 6th he announced to them his appointment to Uganda, Africa.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> C.M. 1913-14, pp. 399-400

<sup>34</sup> Father John, like his brother William, would also become a bishop.

But the news which brought forth the most joy and aroused many commentaries was that of the papal audience granted to the two Grey Nuns on April 5th. Archbishop Bruchési and Canon Lepailleur, a brother of Sister Dalton, accompanied them. The sisters had obtained pictures of the Holy Father, Pope Pius X, in view of asking him to autograph them. But alas, the chamberlain confiscated them under pretext that it was forbidden to present them to the Holy Father. Introduced into the Pontiff's presence, and invited by him to draw their armchairs closer, the superior general responded to his questions concerning the works carried out by the Grey Nuns. Then came some questions regarding the Cause. The Holy Father replied: "It is time to attend to this; see Monsignor Verde. This Cause must pass through all the procedures required by the Congregation."

As the audience came to a close, His Holiness, having learned of the incidence relative to the photographs, summoned the chamberlain to bring them to him. He wrote on one of them: "To our beloved daughters, the Grey Nuns of Montreal, with the hope that the Lord will richly reward them for all their charitable endeavors through the Apostolic Blessing which I give them wholeheartedly." On a second photograph, he wrote: "May God shower you with every blessing and be favorable and merciful to you."<sup>35</sup>

The pilgrims promptly presented themselves to Monsignor Verde who asked a multitude of questions. The interview ended with the sisters' expression of a wish: that the title of "Marguerite du Canada" be given to the venerable mother, a request which was readily granted.

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At the time of Mothers Piché and Ward's departure for Rome, a miniature ship surrounded by vigil lights had been placed before the altar at the mother-house to remind everyone

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<sup>35</sup> A few months later, these lines would be treasured as a real relic, and especially in 1950 when Pope Pius X would be canonized.

of the need to pray for the pilgrims. When the date of the return trip became known, the little ship was again displayed, inviting even more fervent prayers due to serious concern aroused by news of the shipwreck of the Empress of Ireland and the death of more than a thousand passengers at 'Pointe-au-Père'.<sup>36</sup>

On Friday, June 19th, Archbishop Bruchési, Canon Lepailleur, Father Panneton, Mother Piché and Mother Ward left Liverpool aboard the "Alsatian" for the crossing which ended on June 26th with the landing of the vessel at Quebec's Louise dock. The assistants, Mothers of the Sacred Heart and Dionne, brought the travelers back to Montreal in triumph as everyone gathered at the entrance leading to the chapel. After singing the Magnificat, they gathered in the community to hear more highlights of the journey: the visit in France to Father Garriguet, Superior General of St. Sulpice, a fervent prayer at the tomb of Father Faillon of blessed memory, the pilgrimage to Lourdes, visits to the Congregations which the Grey Nuns had helped upon their arrival in Canada, namely: the Sisters of Charity of Evron, the Daughters of Jesus, the Faithful Companions of Jesus and the Daughters of Wisdom. They also met the families of our devoted sisters from Brittany whom Mother Ward had initiated to the self-denial of northern life in her capacity as mistress of novices.<sup>37</sup>

The sisters in the infirmary had their share in the joys of the reunion before the evening meal. Later, there followed Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and a short visit by the Archbishop. All then retired for a well-earned rest. During the night the superior general received a call informing her that a terrible catastrophe had just occurred in Salem, Mass. where fire had destroyed part of the town. The St. Joseph School which had been turned over to the Sisters of St. Chrétienne in 1903 had

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<sup>36</sup> C.M. 1913-14, p. 383. The shipwreck occurred at the end of May.

<sup>37</sup> It was probably during this conversation that the sisters learned of the death of Fr. Marie-Clément's mother on April 16th in Kayserberg. The planned meeting with the Grey Nuns in Rome did not occur because Fr. Marie-Clément had left the Eternal City on March 20th.

been devastated. The orphanage where the sisters had worked since 1892 was likewise reduced to ruins. The superior general who had spent a sleepless night, fearful that there may have been a loss of lives, was relieved to learn that everyone had been brought to safety.

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This devastation ended the mission where our sisters had spent forty-eight years. Meanwhile, the other works in the United States were prospering. St. Joseph Hospital in Nashua, New Hampshire, which had just been enlarged, was already contemplating further expansion.

St. Anthony's Orphanage in Toledo was gaining popularity. Bishop Schrembs had chosen this site to hold the retreats for his clergy; they had come in two groups and agreed that the location was ideal. The orphanage cannot be mentioned without recalling the many difficulties which marked its history. The volunteers who had so generously shared their labors earned the well-deserved respect and gratitude of the sisters. Nor could one fail to evoke the memory of Eliza Homes, the generous volunteer who had spent so many years there until she retired at the mother-house to await God's call to her eternal reward.<sup>38</sup> There was also Jacob, the bell-ringer, who was given due recognition at the end of his long career.<sup>39</sup>

The circular from St. Boniface noted the deaths of their dearly beloved Sister Mary O'Brien on April 26th, and of Sister

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<sup>38</sup> Born in Ireland, Eliza, daughter of a soldier from the British regiment, grew up in Montreal. Orphaned upon the death of her mother, she was rescued by Sr. Hurley who was visiting the poor, and placed at the St. Mathieu orphanage. From there, at age 24, she became a volunteer in Toledo. She died on Dec. 10, 1914; her funeral was held at the mother-house.

<sup>39</sup> Born in Germany, Jacob arrived in Canada under circumstances which he could not explain. Converted to Catholicism, he became a trustworthy employee, a devoted servant, always available and faithful to his role as bell-ringer both in old Montreal and on Guy Street. His funeral was held at the mother-house. There, other arms rang the bell.

Fisette who had come from the sister-community of St. Hyacinthe and had made a priceless contribution. Sister St. Thérèse, known as their sister-doctor, was in failing health. She had come on loan from Ottawa and was almost abducted by the Natives when she had initially been recalled home. Sister Laurent, the Mother d'Youville of the poor, a professed sister for sixty-four years, amazed a younger generation, startling them by her remarkable memory!

In St. Boniface, the various works developed so that it became imperative to enlarge the hospital. Fortunately, the number of novices was increasing. Three candidates from St. Albert – a French-speaking girl, an English girl and one of Russian origin were also in formation there along with two others who had entered earlier. The recently founded Journal, the PATRIOTE DE L'OUEST, published in May the announcement that the Cause of Bishop Vital Grandin, whom many of the sisters had known, was being introduced in Rome. It was well known that Mother Slocombe had considered him a saint, as did the sisters of Alberta.

Mothers Piché and Ward became more acutely aware of the protection they had received during their trip when, on June 28th, two days after their return, they learned that François-Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria, had been assassinated by a Serbian student. War between Austria and Serbia was already raging and the conflict was so threatening that Canadian pilgrims in Lourdes were eager to return home.

Archbishop Bruchési who was presiding at the feast of St. Anne, praised the organizers who had so well summarized the phases of the trip, added this important remark: "While a beautiful celebration unites us here in joy, several other countries are in a state of unrest; cannons are fired, and soldiers are falling (...) Tomorrow, messages will probably announce that all the European powers will become volcanic eruptions (...)."

In order to end his speech on a more personal note, his Grace quoted from the author of Proverbs: "Who will find the valiant woman? I believe she is not far... She is frail, and at time

we fear for her days; she is spared wearisome duties. But, indeed, in this frail person, there is hidden much more strength and energy than anyone suspects. When one has traveled by land and sea, through towns and countryside, going even to the Mackenzie and crossing rapids and portages, snow and glaciers... is it not true that, in spite of a frail appearance, there is an extraordinary reserve of courage and energy?"<sup>40</sup>

Embarrassed by such praise, Mother Piché felt better when the speaker reminded this audience that there is another journey in which we are all engaged: the life of a Grey Nun which is to care for the sick, the poor and the marginalized.

These reflections were verified by the events which unfolded. On Saturday, August 1st, Austria, in alliance with Germany, declared war on Serbia; England gave an ultimatum to Germany; France and Russia (still czarist) mobilized their troops. All of Europe was aflame and bloody. To add to the misfortune, his Holiness Pope Pius X, whose motto had been "to restore all things in Christ", died in Rome on the morning of August 20th. The Lord had spared him the horrors of the world-wide conflict.

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The war definitely made itself felt in Canada. The Grey Nuns would have to adapt to unforeseen circumstances without sacrificing their daily duties and the projects under way. It had been decided some time previously to transfer the orphanage from the mother-house to Côte-de-Liesse. The new building was almost completed; the transfer of equipment had begun in early May. The three hundred orphans would benefit from the country atmosphere. At the opening on September 25th, Sir Alexandre Lacoste, spoke in a touching manner about the Venerable Marguerite d'Youville. He mentioned her sound judgment, her generosity, her commitment, qualities which he, too, had come

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<sup>40</sup> It was probably on this occasion that Mother Piché had said: "Your Grace is always at Laudes", to which the Archbishop promptly replied: "That is because you are always at Compline (accomplished)!"

to appreciate when he became the legal advisor for the Community early in his career.<sup>41</sup> Near the orphanage a building was being erected for the care of the elderly; those present at this event were invited to also attend that inauguration.<sup>42</sup>

There was some sadness at the departure of the orphans from the mother-house, as their joyous laughter, their well-executed singing and their presence in the sanctuary, where they reverently served at the altar, would be missed. As servers, they would be replaced by the student protégés whose number was increased to six.

In early September, Cardinal Jacques de la Chiessa was elected pope of the Catholic Church under the name of Benedict XV. Fortunately, Italy had declared its neutrality and so the cardinals had no problem coming to Rome for the conclave.

The tribulations which accompanied the war became felt more keenly as the young men were mobilized. Twenty-five to thirty thousand Canadian soldiers, of whom well over four hundred were French-Canadians from Montreal, stationed at Val Cartier since August 24th, prepared to leave for the battlefield. Priests of French origin were already being called to arms; some to serve as ambulance drivers, others as medical orderlies or as chaplains.<sup>43</sup>

Canada was far from the battlefields but the people were moved by news of atrocities to which Belgians were being submitted. The sisters at the mother-house and at Nazareth busied themselves with knitting and making warm vestments for the soldiers. At the mother-house and at the St. Joseph Shelter, soup and meals were served to the destitute; the number of needy kept increasing as well as at the St. Antoine Shelter, subsi-

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<sup>41</sup> Annals 1913-14, p. 487

<sup>42</sup> Ibid p. 488

<sup>43</sup> Letter of Fr. Tanqueray, p.s.s. to a colleague in Baltimore. Some seminarians were killed, others were seriously wounded or taken prisoners.

dized to a great extent through the generosity of the Sulpicians from the seminary.

Archbishop Nazaire Bégin of Quebec who had been raised to the cardinalate on April 27th, accepted an invitation from Archbishop Bruchési and came to Montreal on December 7th. Two days later, he visited at the mother-house on Guy Street. He said: "Here, you are called Grey Nuns, in Quebec you are known as Sisters of Charity." He exhorted his audience to pursue the good works formerly initiated by Mother d'Youville and especially to imitate her readiness to adapt to every misfortune.

### **ST. ANNE HOSPITAL FORT SMITH, N.W.T. – 1914**

Unpredictably, Sister Louise Léveillé would soon be called to adapt to the difficulties of the Canadian Far North.<sup>44</sup> She had already experienced those of the West when she came to St. Albert in 1890 after a two-week journey by rail and stage-coach. After twenty years of work, ten of which were served as superior at Saddle Lake, the missionary returned to the mother-house where she was pharmacist and ward supervisor, duties similar to those she had performed at Youville Home. Three years later, in 1912, she became superior at Lestock, Saskatchewan and in 1913, at the provincial house in St. Boniface. Finally, upon her recall to the mother-house, she learned that she had been chosen for the dual role of foundress of the hospital in Fort Smith and superior of the new vicariate of Divine Providence which included the already existing missions and the school at Beauval.

Sister Léveillé had always secretly hoped to be assigned to difficult missions, but later considered it unlikely in view of her age. However, her hope would, indeed, become a reality. Her travel companions would be Sisters Gadbois, Beaudry and

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<sup>44</sup> Details concerning Sr. Léveillé were taken from her biographical notice.



Verdon, the latter being destined for the community of Fort Chipewyan. They had no illusions about the difficulties that awaited them; these had been fully described in the monthly circulars.

A few days after their departure, the sisters would receive a letter from the superior general written while she was attending a pilgrimage at Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde in Marseille. She wrote that the sacrifice of not being present at their departure was offered to obtain Mary's protection during their arduous journey and fortitude so that the pain of separation might be less keenly felt.<sup>45</sup>

Leaving on the morning of May 7th, the sisters arrived June 16th at Fort Chipewyan where they remained for a few days. There, they were privileged to see Sister Laverty at work as a nurse, doctor, surgeon, dentist; she was consulted in preference to the government-employed doctor who visited yearly. This mission, like the others, was affected by the repercussions of the war. A correspondent wrote: "We are in a French colony. Priests, Oblate brothers and Grey Nuns from Brittany are preoccupied by the thoughts of France, their homeland. Moreover, starvation prevails and mendicants come to the convent in ever-increasing numbers."<sup>46</sup>

The travelers reached Fort Smith on June 23rd, after having crossed the rapids of the Athabasca and Slave Rivers aboard antiquated vessels. They experienced the same inconveniences which had attended the foundation of other posts. They arrived at their destination before the convent was ready so they lodged in a hangar until August 24th.

Fort Smith was the terminal point for navigation coming from the south because of a sixteen-mile rapid expanse which constituted an insurmountable obstacle. The new missionaries

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<sup>45</sup> Letter dated April 28, 1914

<sup>46</sup> Bishops of the Far North undertook fund-raising tours throughout Canada and the USA in order to support the Northern missions.

promptly set to work and the St. Anne Hospital opened its doors on September 7th. It was not fully appreciated at first; the natives brought in only those who were dying. On the other hand, the dispensary inspired less fear. It would be some time before people came willingly to the hospital where, among other shortcomings, water had to be carried from the cistern at the mission.

Ironically, in this glacial land there was, nevertheless, the threat of forest fires. Nothing was lacking to test the faith and trust of these truly heroic women; they were, however, determined to carry on with their primary purpose: the evangelization of their brothers and sisters of the large human family, the Métis and Chipewyan tribes who dwelled there.

### **THE SANATORIUM OF NOTRE-DAME-DE-L'ESPÉRANCE STE-AGATHE-DES-MONTS, QUEBEC – 1914**

To assign missionaries to the northern posts was certainly a praiseworthy endeavor providing that workers were available in adequate numbers.

Records reveal that, during 1914, thirty-two novices had pronounced their vows; but they also revealed that fourteen sisters, many of whom were hardly thirty years old, had died from tuberculosis.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the uncertainties occasioned by the war, it was decided, at the end of 1914, to acquire a house located in Ste-Agathe-des-Monts to serve as a place to care for the sisters afflicted with tuberculosis. The sanatorium was opened on December 17th and the first Mass was celebrated on the following day by Father Bazinet, the local pastor, volunteer chaplain and faithful friend of the Grey Nuns.

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<sup>47</sup> Sr. Ottilia, whom Mother Piché brought back from the North, died on Aug. 30th, 1914 at the age of 33 years.

The white house, hidden among green pines, on one of the mounds within view of Lac des Sables (Sandy Lake) could accommodate eight sisters and five lay boarders. The furnishings for the chapel were provided through the generosity of other convents: the altar came from the novitiate in Montreal, the statue of the Blessed Virgin from the Patronage of St. Jean d'Iberville, and the Stations of the Cross from the novitiate in Toledo.

Some renovations were made: the hangar was connected to the house by means of a corridor; the roof was raised in order to transform the attic into a dormitory; balconies facing the lake would favor fresh air therapy; a hot water furnace was installed in the basement and kerosene lamps were replaced by electric lighting. There was a farm with one hundred hens, two cows and a calf, providing them with eggs and dairy products. A horse and carriage was also at their disposal for visits to the doctor.

The sanatorium was administered from the mother-house under the direction of Sister St. Remi, the local superior. This initiative proved to be an excellent one as patients recovered their strength and health.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> C.M. 1915-16, pp. 471-474



## CHAPTER THREE

### 1915-1917

In her yuletide letter,<sup>1</sup> Mother Piché wrote: "Naturally, we wonder what 1915 has in store for us. Our hearts would be filled with a profound anxiety were it not that our eyes are focused on the Sovereign Judge." Indeed, she and her sisters needed to rely on Divine Providence; the new year was fraught with bad news, especially about France, "whose allegiance we uphold in our spirit and in our heart".

Canada would not be free of trials but, thank God, occasional happy events contributed somewhat to lighten the news – until the rationing of paper obliged the chronicler to make her entries less detailed.

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As a result of the slump in economy, the queues of the needy lengthened at the doors of shelters for poor: the hospices at St. Antoine, St. Joseph, St. Brigitte and St. Mathieu had become gathering places at meal-times.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of Dec. 23, 1914.

The needy lined up like students to receive their rations; their great numbers surprised and intrigued passersby. One day, a lady came down from her carriage to inquire about the kind of food served. In tears, she expressed her compassion and offered a generous monetary gift to assist this work. A few days later, the depot at St. Mathieu received four barrels of flour from the Ogilvy Company, thanks to the intervention of that lady, now identified as Lady Ogilvy.<sup>2</sup>

The sisters were no doubt reminded of the event which had occurred in 1760 when the first Grey Nuns discovered "six barrels of flour from an unknown source" which had appeared and put an end to the immediate danger of famine for the residents of the General Hospital.<sup>3</sup>

Evidently, the other soup kitchens also had many clients; in Old Montreal, Sister Bonneau undertook a collection of alms to assist them. She became a familiar figure to the businessmen of St. Jacques (St. James) Street, and to the merchants of the area. She won the sympathy of the farmers at Bon Secours Market who willingly provided for the vegetable soup which was served each day. Sister Bonneau did not limit her outings to the collection of food supplies; she sought out the infirm and the sick who were unable to make their way to the soup kitchen. Her collections were so successful that they merited for this servant of the poor, the title of 'Sœur Rosalie du Canada'.<sup>4</sup>

The distribution of rations to the needy aroused a spirit of cooperation and admiration. Father J. O. Maurice sent a check as a pledge of his goodwill and as a modest expression of the gratitude of the St. Vincent-de-Paul Society and of the municipal administration of the City of Montreal.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, Cardinal

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<sup>2</sup> C.M. 1915-16, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> A. Sattin, *Vie de Mère d'Youville*, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> Besides the support of the Fathers of St. Sulpice, Sr. Bonneau was assisted by the St. Vincent de Paul Society and by female volunteers organized in 1910.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of May 6, 1915.

Begin commented that he rejoiced at the family ties which united him to the Venerable Mother d'Youville, for he knew of no other community which did more material and moral good than that of the Grey Nuns.<sup>6</sup>

During the year 1915, there developed a tragic situation which was mentioned in both American and Canadian news. A strange ailment, similar to typhoid, was spreading at an alarming rate. This disease, later diagnosed as influenza, affected residents of the mother-house; in less than three months, six sisters had died (one of whom was a novice) as did three others under thirty years of age. The American hospitals in Nashua, Toledo and Cambridge were filled with the sick, while the St. Boniface Hospital opened its doors to three hundred soldiers when the epidemic spread through an entire regiment in Winnipeg.

The Canadian Far North, which one would have considered impenetrable to germs because of the intense cold, did not escape the contagion. To add to their hardships, the mission of Fort Resolution had to restrict meals to two a day because of the high cost of flour. Potatoes were abundant but there was a scarcity of fish.

Although the hazardous life of the missionaries was enough to test their courage, there were several other perilous occasions. At the convent in Fort Providence, the sisters struggled against a fire which threatened to totally engulf it. In Beauval, the sisters and their charges narrowly escaped asphyxiation and it became necessary to tear down the walls in order to avert the danger. At the orphanage in Worcester, a fire burned so wildly that the brigade had to be called. Montreal was also afflicted when, on April 25, 1915 a fire broke out in a wing on Guy Street; a month later, on May 27th, the St. Mathieu wing was threatened by destructive flames.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Letter of Oct. 6, 1915.

<sup>7</sup> It was later believed that these two alerts could be explained.

Father Perrin, superior of the Canadian College in Rome, came to Montreal for a visit. He informed the sisters of the following wartime news: Father Prou, a colleague, had died on the battlefield, as well a Father Dupaigne, an ambulance driver who had formerly helped the Grey Nuns on so many occasions during his stay in Canada. Father Baisnée from the seminary in Baltimore, had an arm amputated while overseas, but would be returning to the United States in mid-August.

However, not all the news was sad. Sister Lachance, a missionary in Fort Chipewyan, received a letter from her brother, a marist priest whom she had thought dead, advising her that he had been successful in escaping to Holland. Sister Fortier learned that her brother, an Oblate of Mary Immaculate, who had been carrying out his priestly and missionary duties in the trenches, expected to accompany the troops to Serbia. He ended his letter by saying: "It is time for the sisters in Canada to do something for our wounded men and I expect the Grey Nuns to come and open a hospital in Salonica."<sup>8</sup> This zealous Oblate had no idea that his wish would be fulfilled in part and that, soon, the Grey Nuns would be "going to war".

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Visitors to the mother-house continued to come. Archbishop Langevin who came on June 6, 1915, suggested to Mother Piché that a small plaque representing Mother d'Youville be made to distribute among families, saying: "This would be the fulfillment of one of my dreams." His wish was readily granted by the Grey Nuns; it would also be the Archbishop of St. Boniface's last gesture of paternal interest towards his missionaries.<sup>9</sup> Admitted to Montreal's Hôtel-Dieu Hospital, he died there on June 15th. The next day, his mortal remains were transported to the St. Jacques Cathedral where a funeral service was celebrated by

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<sup>8</sup> C.M. 1915-16, pp. 105 and 309.

<sup>9</sup> Bishop Langevin had come for the golden jubilee of priesthood of the Quebec Archbishop.



Archbishop Bruchési, assisted by Bishop Martin. Present also were Cardinal Bégin and ten other bishops; the eulogy was pronounced by Bishop M. Emard. Archbishop Bruchési accompanied the remains of his episcopal colleague to St. Boniface where a solemn funeral was held at the cathedral on the 19th. The people of Manitoba had lost a wonderful pastor, a defender of the faith, a promoter of the French language; the Grey Nuns had lost a devoted protector.

In December, the late bishop's auxiliary, Bishop A. Béliveau, was enthroned in the cathedral. He, who proudly proclaimed himself 'a native son', stated that, "to follow a Provencher and a Taché, to reproduce the heroism of a Langevin, would be an impossibility without the collaboration of those on whom I depend. My predecessors had two main objectives, duty and harmony; they wanted peace but between struggle and dishonor, there is only one path, duty, and I will endeavor to follow it." In the days ahead, the Grey Nuns would have cause to be grateful for their new protector's solicitude.

Despite the convent's austere program, there were joys related in the annals that would reach out to the entire religious family. Among these was the success of Sisters Coleman and Audette of Fort Totten, where prejudice against their religious dress seemed to have abated. There was also the proud mention of the success obtained by Sisters St. Simon and Fafard who had obtained the highest standing in their Pharmacology class at the University of Toledo. The impressive results obtained by the two little Grey Nuns were proclaimed during the graduation ceremony at Collingwood Hall on June 16th. The astonished audience expressed its congratulations by a lively applause.<sup>10</sup>

In the Canadian Far North, Father Pierre Duchaussois's arrival was warmly greeted. Bishop Breynat had called upon his literary skills to tell the story of the Grey Nuns' participation in the missionary endeavors. The writer, who had traveled with the

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<sup>10</sup> Letter of June 21, 1915.

bishop and Sisters St. Eugenie and Latrémouille, was surprised to find among the passengers, roosters, hens and cats which had been brought along. When a rooster took advantage of a landing of the barges to escape, the visiting priest rose to the occasion and joined in the pursuit.<sup>11</sup>

The date of July 28, 1915 marked another joyous event as Sisters Ward, Peltier, Daigle, Fernand, Joly and Goulet (the latter from St. Boniface), celebrated the golden jubilee of their religious profession. When the feast of St. Anne, Mother Piché's patron, was celebrated two days earlier, she had specified that there be no music or singing. However, the sisters found a way of circumventing her orders without actually disobeying them: they hummed a short tune to honor the occasion. "To her order, one must obey – and yet we need to celebrate our Mother, though she firmly forbids it. A short song, once a year, is quickly done without fatigue." (The words: song, firmly, done and fatigue rhyme easily in the French version).

On the evening of July 28th, the festivities were quite different when two heroic women, Sister Daigle and Mother Ward, were given recognition for their missionary achievements. True to his promise, Bishop Grouard celebrated the Mass of thanksgiving for them on the following morning. Accompanied by fourteen priests and friends, he congratulated the heroines during a visit to the community. Then, he turned to Mother Ward, the pioneer, recalling her long and dreadful voyage. Upon learning of the coming of the sisters, he had exclaimed; "Is this not tempting God? Will they be able to endure these horrible winters, with little bread – with fish and only fish, lacking most necessities?"<sup>12</sup>. He had, however, seen this young sister, only twenty-two years of age at the time and frail as a reed, endure all the privations of the missionaries, notably without bread, and eating fish, only fish. The heroine was also honored by the sisters who had made their profession in the

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<sup>11</sup> Letter of May 11, 1915.

<sup>12</sup> Duchaussois, "Femmes Héroïques", p. 60

years between 1892 and 1897 during which time Mother Ward had served as their mistress of novices. The English-speaking sisters also offered their respect. The celebration finished with the reading of a poem written by Father Lecorre, o.m.i., a missionary in Fort Providence, who had arrived there three years after the Grey Nuns. He had witnessed and shared the sisters' life of sacrifice. Now, suffering from twilight ophthalmia, the author of the poem ended with these words: "Know that a poor blind man shares wholeheartedly in this unique celebration."<sup>13</sup>

The festive atmosphere was followed by the preparation for the General Chapter which was to take place every five years. In early September, provincial superiors and delegates to this important meeting scheduled to begin on October 5th, arrived at the mother-house. This Chapter conformed to recent prescriptions, to statutes of the Holy See and included notable changes. The number of elected members would be limited to seven: the superior general, four assistants, a secretary and a bursar.<sup>14</sup> The General Council would then select the mistress of formation and the provincial superiors who were previously known as vicars.

According to custom, on the morning of the Chapter itself which opened on October 1st, Mother Piché laid down the burden of her office and took her regular place in the ranks. Three days later, under the presidency of Archbishop Bruchési of Montreal, accompanied by Fathers Lecoq and Many, Mother Piché resumed her position at the head of the Congregation. The Archbishop proclaimed her re-election along with those of Sisters Dugas, Dionne, of the Sacred Heart and McKenna as assistants. Sister St-Jean-Baptiste was re-elected as secretary and Sister Mailloux as bursar.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> C.M. 1915-16, p. 190.

<sup>14</sup> One must conclude that the Chapter abolished the prescriptions of the letters patent of 1753 limiting to twelve the number of administrators.

<sup>15</sup> Gen. Chap. 1849-1937, pp. 260-267.

After expressing his heartfelt wishes to the members of the General Council, the Archbishop added: "Your Mother will continue to govern as she has done for the past five years and God's blessings will be upon her, upon all of you and upon your works."

Before long, the entire Congregation was informed of the decisions of the fourteenth General Chapter. It was learned that a special indult from Rome would be requested to unite the two missions in Toledo to the St. Joseph Province in Boston and that the members of the General Council and the provincial superiors would now bear the title of 'Mother'. Henceforth, also, the sisters would be designated by their given names and their family names, a measure which abolished the former custom. The community definitively chose to bear the official name of SISTERS OF CHARITY OF THE GENERAL HOSPITAL OF MONTREAL, known as Grey Nuns.

The Chapter ended on Monday, October 18th. The capitular sisters returned to their posts or assumed new functions. Such was the case for Mother Ward who became superior of the mother-house, replacing Sister St. Luce who, in turn, was called to become superior at the Provincial House in St. Boniface.

As for Mother Piché, she courageously shouldered her heavy burden, maintaining always her usual modesty. She wrote: "I hasten to tell you how touched I am with your spirit of faith which I have often admired, but never more so than in this circumstance (her re-election). The poor Mother whom you welcome anew so filially, feels more inadequate than ever for the task ... With complete abandon to Divine Will, I offer you my wholehearted dedication."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Letter of Nov. 8, 1915.

## ST. MATHIEU MILITARY HOSPITAL – 1915

On November 20, 1915, Father Fortier had written to his sister; "I expect the Grey Nuns to open a hospital." There will, in fact, be a hospital, though not in Salonica; the Grey Nuns will go to war without crossing the ocean.<sup>17</sup> On Thursday, December 2nd, members of the National Committee for Military Hospitals came to visit the Grey Nuns in search of a place wherein to lodge convalescing soldiers. The superior general and her Council saw in this request, an opportunity to repay, in part, their indebtedness towards these wounded heroes. They offered the spacious wing of the St. Mathieu Orphanage left vacant as a result of the transfer of the children to Côte-de-Liesse during the previous year, but which had been destined for another purpose. This was recognized as another occasion "to admire the way of Providence which meets all needs".

Two days later, the newspaper announcement read: "The authorities have accepted the generous offer of the Sisters of Charity to accommodate two hundred wounded soldiers."

Promptly, everyone concerned helped with preparations: members of the General Council, department heads, nursing personnel all worked zealously. The set goal was to open this hospital on December 23rd, the anniversary of Mother d'Youville's death.

There was such ardor in the development of this project that the goal was accomplished ahead of schedule. At ten o'clock on the morning of December 17th, the first group of twenty-three soldiers was welcomed to the former St. Vincent Ward which had a capacity of one hundred beds. The soldiers found rest and a place to cast behind them the miserable conditions of the trenches.

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<sup>17</sup> Details concerning the military hospital are recorded in C.M. 1915-1916, p. 291 and following.

Lieutenant Colonel G.E. Beauchamp de Laval and his subordinate officers were in charge. The members of the General Council of the Grey Nuns were present to welcome these heroes. The superior general gave the invocation prior to the first meal which was served by five students from the Laval Hospital. From then on, grace was said by the sisters and volunteers from a committee that had been formed to oversee the comfort of the convalescing soldiers.<sup>18</sup> Because the government grant offered only seventy-five cents per person, such collaboration and the generosity of benefactors were priceless. Following in his father's footsteps as financial administrator, Mr. M. Z. Hébert, a benefactor of Notre-Dame Hospital, took up the same position for the two hundred patients to be admitted after furnishings were acquired.

The newspaper wrote: "We recall the wonders which the charity of the Grey Nuns was able to accomplish last winter on behalf of the unemployed. Only one jewel lacked in their crown. They have just merited it by opening a shelter for any Canadian, Catholic or Protestant, wounded in service to their country."

For their part, the Grey Nuns responded: "We are re-living a page of our history. Is it not recorded that, in 1758, like a gentle Providence, our Venerable Mother had welcomed soldiers in the hospital during the war?"

A Jesuit priest and an Anglican minister attended to the spiritual well-being of our guests who gladly returned to the hospital after a brief Christmas vacation. They had not dreamed that the lady volunteers were preparing a joyful program to usher in the new year. The medical staff and the wounded from Belmont Hospital were also invited to this festivity.

As expected, this entirely new work monopolized the news in our chronicles. At the year-end, Mother Piché considered the

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<sup>18</sup> Mesdames Z. Hébert, J. MacDonald, A. Hébert, Berkett and Fitzpatrick were members of this committee.

initiative as being of prime importance: "There are presently fifty soldiers in our care. The numbers will increase when the departments are furnished to accommodate two hundred. At our hospital in St. Boniface, our sisters care for one hundred and sixty-seven wounded soldiers. This is an eminently patriotic work. It is a great consolation for us to be able to make this contribution and, by this means, to reflect a new way of resembling our Venerable Foundress."<sup>19</sup>

## 1916

Barely twenty days had passed in the new year of 1916 when, already four of our members' names were recorded in the list of our deceased sisters. The Spanish flu, which history will call 'influenza', struck right and left without regard to age, gender or occupation.

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Reports from Fort Providence told of the grave illness of both Sister Yves and some students, several of whom died. In Montreal, death claimed twenty-two sisters and three tertiaries. Tertiaries were girls committed to God and admirably devoted to him and who had long served the Lord in his poor. These girls, called Franciscan Tertiaries, were considered members of the "Grey family". Their collaboration in various posts was appreciated and their length of service was duly celebrated. Such was the case of one of these, named Mathilda Saulnier, whose diamond jubilee was observed on July 9th.<sup>20</sup>

Many friends and benefactors would be mourned during that year. Father P. Auguste Fournier, p.s.s., chaplain at the mother-house from 1910 – 1912, died on May 10th; the saintly Father Frederic, an apostle devoted to the Holy Land, ended his earthly career on August 4th; Napoleon Bourassa, an artist-

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<sup>19</sup> Chapters and circ. 1849-1937, p. 271, letter of Dec. 23, 1915.

<sup>20</sup> C.M. 1915-16, pp. 524 & 573.

painter whose works were so admired in the chapel of the St. Joseph Hospice, died on August 30th; the funeral for Canon L.T. Adam, a descendant of Pierre Boucher – and hence related to Mother d'Youville, was celebrated in the Sacred Heart Church by his three nephews on September 5th, and Father Albert Lacombe, o.m.i., who died on December 11th after sixty-seven years of evangelization among the Black Foot natives. The list of the deceased kept increasing and news from overseas informed us that Fathers De Buysson and Bioletti, Sulpician priests, had died on the battlefield.

The terrible war continued; but it gave rise to many beautiful gestures, the memories of which are preserved in our chronicles. Some members of the Laval Hospital staff left to comfort the wounded in the line of fire. This group of volunteers attended Mass at the Grey Nuns' mother-house on Sunday, March 20th. In bidding them farewell, Archbishop Bruchési lauded the great and noble mission which they were about to undertake.

On this side of the ocean, all was not rosy either. In Ottawa, a devastating fire whose origin was never determined, reduced to ashes the parliament building, a superb monument of Gothic architecture. The next day, a munitions plant went up in flames. There were grounds to suspect that this was the work of a German spy. The rumor spread that in Montreal, the City Hall, Victoria Bridge and other buildings were equally threatened.

The chronicler, however, did not limit herself to tales of woe. In the community journal she related with genuine pride the article from the GENEVA TRIBUNAL of April 21, 1916, which proclaimed that 97,753 French civilians who had been abducted and brought to Germany, now were repatriated to their homeland, through the mediation of His Holiness, Benedict XV.

She also spoke of 'a smile from heaven', obtained through St. Joseph by the intercession of Brother André. Sister Siebenaller, a missionary in Fort Totten, had been suffering from an infection in a leg. She came to Montreal in October 1915, when her condition did not improve. A companion advised her to have St. Joseph intercede for her by going to St. Joseph's Oratory



on Mount Royal. Filled with faith and trust, the two Grey Nuns began a novena during which time they went to visit Brother André. Following the encounter, Sister Siebenaller descended the 140 steps unaided and, upon returning to the convent, she walked along the corridors without discomfort. This was most fortunate as, that very evening, the superior general received a telegram asking that the miraculously healed sister return to her teaching position in North Dakota. Without hesitation, the message was conveyed to her and she immediately prepared to return to her post.

Meanwhile, the superior general made her official visitation of the convents in Montreal and surrounding missions. This enabled her to observe their progress and difficulties. The St. Anthony Hospice had narrowly escaped a fire on April 11th, and was able to continue its charitable work.<sup>21</sup> Other similar works were equally successful; for example, the schools of Home Economics were literally flourishing. In order to continually improve the literacy program, pedagogical conferences for the instructors were organized under the leadership of Mother Dugas, an assistant general, with the help of Sister Dion, responsible for study programs.

The sisters involved in the local administration of the Notre-Dame Hospital, accomplished much under the direction of Sister St. Mathias whose competence and kindness merited her the respect of the sisters, doctors and staff. Nazareth, the school for the blind, was developing at a remarkable rate. After a shaky beginning, the braille library was expanding. A committee headed by Mr. Alfred Lamoureux, a blind professor assisted by Mr. Guillette, a visually impaired organist from St. Jean-d'Iber-

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<sup>21</sup> St. Anthony Hospice was more fortunate in this regard than were St. Ferdinand Hospital in Quebec and St. Elizabeth Hospital in Farnham, both under the direction of the Grey Nuns of Quebec and St. Hyacinth which were destroyed by fire a few months later. Some lives were lost in Farnham. Moreover, a violent fire destroyed the Trappist Monastery in Oka and the barn on our farm at St. Benoit.

ville, several sisters and sixty transcribers, was currently trying to recruit more helpers with similar qualifications. By multiplying the number of volumes, it would hopefully be possible to extend help to sightless people whom they knew to be living beyond the confines of the institution.<sup>22</sup>

Mother Piché expressed her warm appreciation for all the good accomplished by these zealous workers. She was quite unaware that this would be her last earthly encounter with Sisters St. Mathias and Létourneau, victims of the merciless flu who died on October 22nd and 24th respectively. Both of these sisters had been highly esteemed and drew eloquent testimonies.

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Many visitors who came to the military hospital expressed their surprise at the excellent set-up. During his annual visit on January 3rd, Archbishop Bruchési assured the sisters that the public admired the beautiful gesture posed by the Congregation and stated that there was no other institution like it in the entire British Empire.<sup>23</sup> When the Duke of Connaught came two days later, he paid an equally laudable tribute as he individually greeted the thirty-nine wounded soldiers, most of whom belonged to the 22nd regiment and to whom he spoke in excellent French. He also congratulated Mother Piché and her sisters in French for the establishment of a 'model hospital'.

The number of injured men increased rapidly. On April 8th, 137 soldiers, forty of whom were bed-ridden, were offered a retreat preached by Father Marie-Clément. Only sixty of them were Catholic. Prejudices had fallen; the soldiers were respectful and trusting towards the nursing sisters. One of these had commented about their quiet recollection as they knelt to pray and the fact that they all blessed themselves before meals. This impressed two American gentlemen, friends of our institu-

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<sup>22</sup> Bertha Galeron, a deaf & blind poet. Art. reproduced in C.M. 1915-16, pp. 631-634.

<sup>23</sup> C.M. 1915-16, p. 363.

tions in the U.S.A., who were visiting the hospital on June 1st. As Mother Piché accompanied them through the various departments, she observed their expressions of wonder at the soldiers' demeanor at meal-time. Their delight was boundless as they came to the Crèche where they saw about 150 babies in their cribs.

The soldiers learned various trades and engaged in numerous activities, including typewriting and art. Some followed courses in engineering. Each department had a recreation area for games and a library. Sergeant-major Kendall was responsible for physical exercises.<sup>24</sup> Even though the news media made no mention of the fact, Mother McKenna, an assistant general, noted that several of the men returned to their faith. Evidently, the sight of death at close range had opened their eyes.

On July 21st, a soldier by the name of Hildebert received the Cross of Leopold II. The ceremony took place in the courtyard facing Dorchester Street. There, Mr. Goor, accompanied by Mr. C. I. De Sola – the Consul in Montreal, Mr. Fyen – director of the Polytechnical School, Mr. Hicquet – president of the Belgian Union in Montreal, Father Jacquemain and several local Belgian citizens, surrounded the hero. Seated near the flag of Belgium, he listened as the Consul General said to him: "It is a great honor for me, on behalf of His Majesty, the King of Belgium, to confer the decoration awarded to Private Leon Hildebert who put his own life at risk for his country, his king, and for world freedom. At the beginning of hostilities, circumstances constrained you to enlist in the Canadian contingent, a decision which doubles your merit. I am pleased to decorate a hero wearing the uniform of this brave Canadian army. Private Hildebert, on behalf of King Albert I, I hereby award you the distinguished Cross of Leopold II with laurels."<sup>25</sup> One can easily imagine the emotions of the audience as the hero claimed that

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<sup>24</sup> Art. in LA PRESSE, recorded in C.M. 1915-16, pp. 594-595.

<sup>25</sup> Art. in LA PRESSE, cf. in C.M. 1915-16, pp. 531-532.

he had merely done his duty. Father Fortier, o.m.i., who was present at the event and who had served at the front, wrote in a letter to his sister: "I must not forget to mention that I, also, have received the Cross of Valor."

The Grey Nuns continued their services to the brave soldiers. There soon came a further request from government authorities asking the sisters to welcome more sick soldiers for a total of three hundred. It was an onerous request, but they accepted it wholeheartedly as their way of expressing their indebtedness to their country.<sup>26</sup>

On October 22nd, the 22nd French-Canadian Regiment of the Province of Quebec was honored at the magnificent Notre-Dame Church. There, over five thousand soldiers heard the Archbishop of Montreal praise their performance: "Nobly, the French Canadians did their part for the cause of civilization, of right, of justice. (...) They have affirmed their faith in the trenches, among the ruins, in mine-swept fields."

The effects of rationing, which were keenly felt, did not simplify matters; the Grey Nuns could well appreciate the foresight which, some years previously, had prompted them to establish farms. Their initiative enabled them to meet the needs of their larger houses. Unfortunately, the Far North was less favored; in Fort Providence, fish was scarce and gardens were seriously damaged by grasshoppers.

In Montreal, restrictions continued and the use of candles became commonplace, even in the chapel, in an effort to economize on electricity. Nothing was burned – no paper, no rags, not even old rubber boots and erasers. The superior general

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<sup>26</sup> On Nov. 8th, the funeral for an obscure soldier was held at the mother-house. A foreign soldier died at the English General hospital. Realizing that the deceased was Catholic, hospital authorities called upon the Grey Nuns. The funeral was presided by Father Dugas while the sisters attended to the singing; organ music and church bells resounded at the end of the service and a guard of honor presented arms. The chronicler noted that "prayers were offered for the unknown soldier who was led to us by God".

even suppressed the customary cake for her feast-day. The cake was appropriately substituted by another precious gift: the publication of the first volume of "The History of the General Hospital of the Sisters of Charity (Grey Nuns)" from the time of its foundation until 1821, a task accomplished by Sister Albina Fauteux. Archbishop Bruchési commended the volume saying that "This history is intermingled with the country's entire political life. The house has served as a refuge for every poverty and a shelter for all the homeless (...). Your author has rendered an immeasurable service to this country."<sup>27</sup>

The book dealt with the beginning of the Congregation and revealed examples of courage and heroism which the Grey Nuns of the 20th century are called to continue. Its arrival for the occasion of the superior general's feast diminished the atmosphere of melancholy caused by the departures occurring the next day, July 27th. Mother Ward, who had been named superior of the American province, was scheduled to leave for her new assignment.<sup>28</sup> Mother Piché with her secretary, Mother St Jean-Baptiste, would also leave to undertake the visitation of the missions in Alberta and Manitoba. The sisters were concerned because of rumors that the Spanish influenza was claiming victims there. To manifest her deep conviction that her life, her entire being, was in the hands of the best of Fathers, Mother Piché had stated: "Do not worry about my poor body."

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The journey began well. The group, consisting of the superior general, her secretary and two new missionaries, stopped in St. Boniface along the way. The secretary wrote of her admiration for the new Provincial House and the Youville Hospice which had been the pioneers' first home in 1844.

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<sup>27</sup> Letter of thanks from Archbishop Bruchési, July 17, 1916.

<sup>28</sup> She was replaced as superior at the mother-house by Sister Laboissonnière.

They then continued on towards Alberta from where the news bulletins would henceforth be issued. They visited Saddle Lake where, despite the proximity of the lake, the sisters had been deprived of running water since the foundation in 1898. Fortunately, a French priest had recently discovered an underground stream about three hundred feet from the house and running water had been available since August 4th. The house itself was renovated and enlarged prior to the visit, thanks to the cooperation of the sisters who became carpenters and painters, as needed. A tornado destroyed the garden shortly after the departure of the visitors.

...Arriving at the Edmonton General Hospital which had been modernized, they found it fresh and appealing. In spite of competition with two other hospitals, the Hospital remained popular, thanks to the excellent care provided.

...At the end of August, it was the Calgary hospital's turn to host the visitors who found the welcome equal to that in the capital city. They were gratified at the population's respect and appreciation shown to the nursing sisters.

This trip was interrupted by one to the residential school in Dunbow, near Calgary and High River. It was fascinating to see the charm of the girls who outdid themselves to entertain their guests. The students belonged to the Black Foot tribe, distinguished by their demeanor and their skills. Upon their return to Calgary, the travelers experienced a spell of cold weather which made it necessary to turn on the furnaces. Many crops froze, while those further north were spared.

... September 4th marked the date of the arrival of the sisters at St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. The building had been extended the previous spring and appeared in good condition. Because of its excellent reputation, the institution had a good chance of survival although it had a heavy debt. Saskatoon's population of six thousand at the time of the arrival of the first sisters had since increased to twenty thousand.

Next came the departure southward for Regina to see another flourishing hospital. Rumors prevailed regarding the merciless

influenza which was widespread; the superior general's secretary endeavored in vain to minimize these reports.

Circumstances did not permit a visit to the mission in Beauval in northern Saskatchewan which was now attached to the St. Albert province. The travelers, therefore, went instead, to Qu'Appelle in Lebret, a mission located on an ideal site with an enchanting landscape. The mission was attached to the St. Boniface province.

After having commented on the beauty of the site and the joy with which the superior general was welcomed by the sisters and Father Hugonard, Mother St-Jean-Baptiste found herself obliged to add the following sad news to her letter. On September 22nd, she wrote: "Mother General has an elevated temperature and is bed-ridden. Doctor Hendricks was summoned from the hospital in Regina. Hesitating to make the diagnosis of influenza, he expressed his concern by stating that he would return that same evening if the prescribed medications had failed to be effective."

The patient's condition worsened to the point where Mother Pagé, Provincial Superior of St. Boniface, and Archbishop Béliveau decided to hasten to her bedside. He acknowledged that his concern had caused him to spend a restless night; the worst was anticipated.

Naturally, this news aroused much consternation until October 5th when a marked improvement in the distinguished patient's condition was recorded. The sisters were gratified when, on October 15th, the Archbishop commended them on the happy result of their intercessions. Two weeks later, the superior had decided to pursue her visits to the houses of the Manitoba province.

The secretary was eager to report the accomplishments of the St. Boniface Hospital. With the completion of the St. Roch Hospital, it now was able to accommodate 525 patients among whom were many from the militia.<sup>29</sup> The School of Nursing was highly competent in the formation of nursing candidates.

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<sup>29</sup> The Provincial Government approved two grants on behalf of the hospital.

In Winnipeg, Mother Piché went first to visit Archbishop Sinnott,<sup>30</sup> and then St. Joseph's Orphanage where 125 boys were receiving a solid formation and were sheltered from the dangers of the streets.

The convents at St. Norbert and Ste-Anne-des-Chênes compared favorably with the schools in the East; most students achieved honorable standings. The same applied to La Broquerie School which accommodated only day scholars due to lack of space. The students there sought qualifications that would enable them to find a teaching position.<sup>31</sup> The difficulties that existed in Manitoba relative to this matter were well known; they were a result of the "neutralization" of schools promulgated on February 25th of the current year. Archbishop Béliveau responded by founding the Association for Education, a group consisting of heads of families, a body which soon earned general respect. The sisters, on their part, worked extra-long hours to teach religion and French to their students. They circumvented the law forbidding prayer by having them sing hymns!

The sisters at the St. François-Xavier Convent which had reopened at the end of November were happy to welcome the superior general in their new building – a structure three stories high and forty-two feet by forty feet in dimension. Rooms had been set aside for Father Kavanagh, a former pastor, now retired, to whom the sisters were deeply indebted.

In Ontario, the travelers stopped at the schools in Kenora and Fort Frances, the latter of which had opened ten years previously. Sister Girard who had newly arrived there as superior, had shared the same pleasant reactions as did the superior general and her secretary. The students entertained the guests with a

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<sup>30</sup> The Archdiocese of Winnipeg was erected on Dec. 15, 1915.

<sup>31</sup> As for the St. Vital parish school, it was closed at the end of the school year. Falling in ruins, the parish could not afford to replace it.



program of songs, dialogues in both French and English and by performing gymnastic exercises with considerable skill.

Mother Piché's return to Montreal, announced from Kenora, occurred on December 16th. Joy prevailed when the sisters chanted the Magnificat of thanksgiving. With characteristic modesty, Mother Piché gave a summary of her long journey. She spoke of the missionaries who labored tirelessly in the various posts; she gave news of the sick, dwelling only briefly on her own harrowing experience. She also expressed her grief at the deaths which had occurred during her absence. ... "The harvest is great but the laborers are few."

### **ST. MARGUERITE HOSPITAL FORT SIMPSON, N.W.T. – 1916**

At the beginning of January 1916, there were 1,098 members in the Congregation. By the year-end, even with the religious profession of forty novices, the membership was only 1,115 due to the twenty-three recorded deaths among the sisters. The laborers were, indeed, inadequate to meet the many requests for help.

However, there was no question of further deferring the foundation of a hospital at the heart of the Mackenzie region; Fort Simpson was the stronghold of Protestantism but also the Babylon of the North. The Hudson's Bay Company had established its district headquarters there; some of the Company's middle-class officials were favorably disposed while others were sometimes suspicious of the missionaries' activities. In 1911, the government had established an Indian agency in view of promoting the interests of the Native population of that area. Father Grollier, o.m.i., had preceded them in 1858 by opening a mission dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

It so happened that Mr. Gerald Card, the first government agent, was genuinely devoted to the welfare of the natives. A year after his arrival, he invited Father Andurand to establish a hospital for the Slavey, the Hare-Skin and Loucheux tribes

dwelling in the region. The project was referred to Bishop Breynat who readily welcomed it and entrusted to Fathers Andurand and Moisan and Brother Kraut, the task of erecting a three-storey edifice forty feet by sixty feet in dimension. For his part, Mr. Card supplied the materials and was helpful in every way possible,<sup>32</sup> while the bishop solicited help from the Congregation of the Grey Nuns for the internal management.

Sister Olivier, who had been seriously ill and who had attributed her recovery to the intercession of Mother d'Youville, was eager to fulfill her promise to devote herself to the evangelization of the natives. She was named superior at the hospital in Fort Resolution, replacing Sister Girouard who, more acclimatized to northern temperatures, was entrusted with the foundation of the proposed hospital in Fort Simpson. She would be assisted by Sister Ste-Rose-de-Lima from St. Albert and by Sisters Rouleau and Damase from Montreal. These two sisters left Montreal on May 5th and arrived in St. Albert after a 2,400 mile journey of which 125 hours were spent traveling by train, 172 by boat, 23 by stage-coach and seven hours on foot.<sup>33</sup>

From there, accompanied by Mother Leveillé, superior of the Divine Providence vicariate, they left at four o'clock on June 15th for Fort Resolution where they remained until the 27th. Here, some changes were made: Sister St. Cyr from Fort Providence would become the nurse at Fort Resolution while Sister Latrémouille would move further on. Her companions, who appreciated the diminutive missionary's devotion and apostolic ambitions, were reluctant to see her leave. After spending merely two years in the North, Sister Latrémouille, fearless in the face of danger, expressed disappointment at not having experienced the difficulties of the pioneers. Once, while on a small craft with a few students, there had appeared a most unwelcome visitor, a bear, who tried to embark. Sister Latrémouille gave him

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<sup>32</sup> Duchaussois, *Femmes Héro(ques)*, 2nd edition, p. 153.

<sup>33</sup> Details contained in a letter from Sr. Olivier.

a well-aimed blow on the snout which was a vulnerable area – and the brothers finished him off.

At midnight on July 17th, the Northland Trader vessel finally arrived at the wharf in Fort Resolution and Sisters Girouard and Latrémouille embarked for Fort Providence. The atmosphere was dark and rainy and the pilot had difficulty seeing through the fog, but they eventually reached Fort Providence safely some five hours behind schedule. Because of an influenza epidemic, the sisters did not linger there. Sisters Bouvier and Maria, missionaries at Fort Providence, joined the Fort Simpson foundresses while Sisters Rouleau and St. Rose-de-Lima, hastened to assume their new duties in Fort Providence.<sup>34</sup>

They arrived at Fort Simpson on July 20th, patronal feast of the Venerable Mother d'Youville, a date which inspired Sister Girouard to name the hospital "St. Marguerite". The foundresses accepted the fact that the hospital was not yet ready to receive them. They lodged temporarily at the Mission with their charges: a blind lady, three children afflicted with tuberculosis and an epileptic who had been living in Fort Providence. A few days later, three elderly men were entrusted to the sisters' care while awaiting the next boat-trip.<sup>35</sup>

Bishop Breynat arrived with a group of children, aged five to eight years, and a crippled girl walking with the help of crutches; he blessed the hospital on July 30th. Fourteen patients were already sheltered at the St. Marguerite Hospital, in spite of the fact that water had to be brought in. Yet, some time later, Fort Simpson would experience a flood! In their solitude, the missionaries considered that their lot could be likened to that of lepers, for their station was the most remote of the Grey Nuns' missions.

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<sup>34</sup> Letter from Sr. St. Eugénie.

<sup>35</sup> Apparently the Hospice of Providence ceased as such, and henceforth would function as a hospital and school.

Trials were not long in coming. Two departures, one of which was definitive, were recorded: Father Ducôt, the apostle of the Hare-Skins, who had exercised his apostolate at Fort Good Hope, Great Bear Lake and Fort Norman, died suddenly and Sister Latrémouille was recalled to Fort Providence to relieve Sister Yves whose health was causing concern. In the North country, no one was astonished that sacrifice was always near.

## 1917

War continued to devastate the countries involved; the number of victims was already estimated at nine million with no end in sight. Father Garriguet, the superior general of the Sulpicians, wrote: "Pray for us, for our beloved France and for our works. We are experiencing great tribulations; we have lost many seminarians, young priests and colleagues. It is consoling that they died bravely while serving their country."<sup>36</sup>

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On this side of the Atlantic, the effects of the conflict were also felt. Rationing increased, coal became scarce and people suffered from the cold, though less severely than did the sisters in the Arctic regions. Deaths likewise occurred; the Grey Nuns recorded the demise of three more friends and benefactors: Msgr Millette, founder of St. Peter's Hospital in New Brunswick, N.J., Father J.L. Gaudet, pastor at Varennes, Quebec, and Father Hugonard of Lebret, Saskatchewan. The grief for him was especially profound; this brave Oblate priest had established the Industrial School and had restored it after the fire of January 1904.

The Sioux natives remained constantly at the bedside of their friend during his final hours, weeping and asking for a blessing from their 'father' who had become another victim of the

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<sup>36</sup> Letter from Mother Piché, read in community on Jan. 21.

Spanish influenza.<sup>37</sup> Only a few months earlier, this authentic missionary had shared the anguish of the sisters as Mother Piché was laid low by this same illness whose cause was, as yet, unknown.

The superior general shared the grief of her missionaries, just as the sisters from Leuret mourned for their sisters in the East whose death notices seemed to come at monthly intervals. Mother Hamel who had served as the fifteenth superior general of the Congregation, died on March 11th, the feast of her patron, Mathilda. Mother Piché remained near her to the end, praying for this woman of deep faith who had spent herself totally in service to the needy. Formed at the school of the incomparable Mother Slocombe, Sister Hamel had supported the vision of Mother Deschamps in the various posts assigned to her: sub-mistress at the novitiate, bursar at the mother-house and then in St. Boniface for twenty-eight years. She returned in 1897 when the General Chapter chose her as assistant general and, five years later, as superior general. Six new missions were established during her term of office, one of which was the St. Antoine Hospice where she ended her active ministry.

Mother Hamel had further distinguished herself by her zeal in helping candidates to the priesthood; it was highly appropriate that the first alumni reunion of these former students, held on June 27, 1905, should take place during her term as superior general. Father Chevrier, p.s.s., had organized this gathering under the theme: "Your sons will come from afar."<sup>38</sup> On March 14th, several of these 'sons' attended her funeral presided by Father Hamel, a Sulpician, and two Fathers Deschênes, all nephews of the deceased. In addition, thirty-four other members of the clergy were in the sanctuary. The sisters' choir, directed by Sister Rodier, performed the Gregorian Mass; Archbishop Bruchési sang the prayers of acquittal. Over the past few years,

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<sup>37</sup> Letter dated Feb. 19, 1917, Sr. Baulne to Mother St-Jean-Baptist.

<sup>38</sup> From statistics about our student protégés, we gather: from a total of 107, 28 chose the priesthood while several were still students.

greater emphasis in liturgy had been placed on 'praying with beauty' and Mother Hamel had called upon the expertise of Father William, a Trappist monk to teach the choir.

The burial took place in the crypt beneath the chapel; her mortal remains were placed beside those of Mothers Slocombe and Deschamps, close to the tomb of the Venerable Mother d'Youville. Mother Hamel, like every other Grey Nun, had fervently desired to see the day when the Foundress would be proclaimed 'Blessed'. The precious Cause had, in fact, advanced to another stage during her term of office. In February 1904, a tribunal had been established to examine the heroicity of the candidate's virtues. On December 28th of the same year, Father Perrier, a notary public, was designated to ascertain the authenticity of her remains. During a recent visit to Rome, Lady Jetté, one of her biographers, heard Father Hertzog, the postulator of Mother d'Youville's Cause, declare: "This is one of the most beautiful Causes currently being examined by Rome." Communications with the Roman Court, always slow, were even more so because of the war which constrained the Grey Nuns to a very long wait. Like their Foundress, they were made to "walk in the dark while awaiting the light"(Is. 59:9) and, meanwhile, to reflect in their apostolate, the actions of the one "who had dearly loved Jesus-Christ and the poor".

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"The French Journal, LA PRESSE, has announced that, on the early morning of April 6, 1917, the United States, through President Wilson, has declared war on the aggressor ...The Nation must interrupt its industrial progress to begin the task of building arsenals for the army...The main ocean transport vessels will cease to serve passengers in order to liberate the crewmen needed."<sup>39</sup> The annalist made this entry on April 11th, just as our

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<sup>39</sup> The journey across the Atlantic was so hazardous that Archbishop Béliveau and Father Lecoq were praised both by Pope Benedict XV and the superior general of St. Sulpice for having undertaken it in 1915.

missionary sisters from the States were arriving at the mother-house for their annual retreat,<sup>40</sup> having been preceded by Mother Ward. A rumor had circulated that the provincial superior would attend the 50th anniversary of the founding of the mission in Fort Providence which Bishop Breynat wanted to celebrate with due solemnity during the summer. As the sole survivor of the five founding sisters,<sup>41</sup> her presence was anticipated to evoke memories of the 'terrible journey' and of the exile which the sisters endured as they sowed the seeds of faith in the souls of the little pagan children who were now good Christians. This invitation had originally been extended to Mother Ward at the time of her trip in 1906 when Mother Hamel had delegated her, as second assistant, to make the official visitation. At that time, her students who were now adults, told her: "Mother, I owe you my happiness."

Mother Piché relayed the invitation to the deserving one, but Mother Ward regretfully declined in view of her seventy-two years. Regretfully, indeed! Was she not attached to this strange territory which she had embraced as her homeland, her permanent home, her grave?<sup>42</sup> She had given of herself there for twenty-six years. Now the Lord had chosen to entrust to her, a ministry on other frontiers – works which had overcome their initial difficulties, and were at last prospering.

The newspapers of Toledo gave detailed accounts of the blessing of the new School of Nursing. Bishop Schrembs, Doctor Coldham and Messrs. Tell and Fisher were enthusiastic in their praise of the quality of education provided in the school which had been operating for twenty years.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Since the outbreak of the war, an \$8.00 tax and the presentation of one's birth certificate were required from anyone who was not a naturalized American.

<sup>41</sup> Domitilde Letendre, also on the trip, is still alive. She is now retired at St. Albert, having become an Auxiliary Sister.

<sup>42</sup> Mitchell, E. *Le Soleil*...p. 37.

<sup>43</sup> C.M. 1917-18, p. 140.

As for St. Peter's Hospital in New Brunswick, N.J., where patients were welcomed without regard for race or creed, the utilization rate was such that plans had to be made to enlarge it.

The institution known as the Protectorate of Mary Immaculate in Lawrence, Mass., which had been in use for almost fifty years, had recently been endowed with a School of Home Economics. This program was managed by Sister Dalton who had originally supervised the setting up of the department.<sup>44</sup> This notable improvement in Lawrence was appreciated by the volunteer ladies and by Mother Piché who, it may be recalled, began her apostolate there immediately following her religious profession.

On April 24th, at the close of the retreat, the superior general shared with the sisters, the unfolding events of the community's history: the approval of the constitutions according to the Norms received from Rome on the previous day and bearing the date of March 4th; her forthcoming journey to the Far North to attend the 50th anniversary celebration in Fort Providence, the visitation of a few posts, including Fort Smith and Fort Simpson (both new foundations), as well as to deal with other important matters. She would be accompanied by Mother St-Jean-Baptiste, arrangements being made by Father Lefebvre, o.m.i., Procurator for the Missions.<sup>45</sup>

The departure was due within a few days, after the golden jubilee celebrations for Sisters Gratton, Quinn and Hébert, along with the diamond jubilee of Sister Joyal. These sisters would represent two hundred and ten years of service to the cause which they had chosen in their youth. The ceremonies of Baptism and First Communion of an Israelite gentleman were held in the chapel on that same day. He had been admitted to the St. Joseph Hall in January and had been guided by Sisters

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<sup>44</sup> C.M. 1917-18, p. 140.

<sup>45</sup> Father Lefebvre was a brother to Mother St-Jean-Baptiste and to Sisters Lefebvre & Daoust.



Richard and St-Jean-de-la-Croix. He was a well-educated and multilingual gentleman who had originally protested that he would rather be cut to pieces than renounce his beliefs. How could one not rejoice in the Lord at such a change of heart?

On the eve of April 30th, Mother Piché and her companion left once more for the cold North while Mother Ward returned to the United States, accompanying them in spirit and eager to read the bulletins describing their experiences.

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The superior general was frequently absent from the mother-house by virtue of the mandate entrusted to her. During her absence, directives concerning the administration, both locally and afar, having previously been adopted in council with her assistants, assured the smooth functioning of the Institute.

Unfortunately, she missed an important event when, on May 31st, Montreal held an enthusiastic reception for Marshal Joffre, victorious at the Battle of the Marne. He rode along the streets in triumph to lay a floral tribute at the monument of Maisonneuve. Then, he moved westward along Dorchester Street where the Franciscan monks saluted him, as did the soldiers hospitalized in the St. Mathieu wing of the mother-house, who had gathered on the verandah. Among these brave men were heroes from Ypres where the memory of the Canadian soldiers was immortalized (...) The mother-house of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, the Seminary and the College of Montreal drew the attention of the shrewd visitor. The English population residing along Atwater and Sherbrooke Streets had decorated their homes for the occasion (...) Along St. Hubert Street and Jeanne Mance Park, a large crowd greeted the distinguished guest while bands played the Marseillaise with resounding enthusiasm (...) A state breakfast was held at the Ritz Carlton Hotel where, by invitation of Colonel Blondin, Archbishop Bruchési blessed the table; the guests were edified to see Marshall Joffre make the sign of the cross before and after the meal (...) "I thank you most heartily for the warm welcome extended to me", he said. "These acclamations are directed to

France. I know that Canada, too, has done its part. We have seen your soldiers at work; they have shown an indomitable courage."<sup>46</sup>

The hero's visit lasted only a few hours, but the festive atmosphere returned in a lively way when, on May 17th the Société St-Jean-Baptiste and the Montreal Historic Society held a celebration commemorating the 275th anniversary of Ville-Marie.

As part of the celebration, a historic pilgrimage was held on the first day with approximately four hundred people in attendance. A stop was arranged at the Frères Charon Hospital and at other historic landmarks of Old Montreal. The next day, during the Eucharistic celebration at Notre-Dame Church, Father Papin-Archambault, s.j., recalled the first Mass at this very site so filled with memories.<sup>47</sup> Mothers Dugas and Dionne represented the Grey Nuns at that event.

The Guy Street Convent received the delegation of dignitaries which entered via the church entrance; they were greeted by the students and orphans from the various schools and by the soldiers who felt privileged to attend this gathering. A floral tribute was laid on the tomb of the Foundress while Father L. Bouhier, p.s.s., spoke on behalf of the Grey Nuns, saying "By thus honoring the memory of this valiant and heroic woman, you have eloquently demonstrated that Montreal remembers and intends to safeguard the values of the past."

However magnificent the celebrations, they did not interrupt the daily routine. The 160 beds in the military section were occupied; care was provided for some three hundred patients. Three hundred and fifty mid-day meals were served to both in-

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<sup>46</sup> C.M. 1917-18, pp. 154-157.

<sup>47</sup> It is stated that the first Mass was celebrated in the hamlet; in fact, Father Jamet assisted by Father Le Caron, two of the first Recollet priests, had celebrated the first Mass on the banks of Rivière des Prairies on June 24, 1615.

patient and out-patient soldiers.<sup>48</sup> Courses in hygiene were given by Sister St. Gabriel, followed by talks on child-rearing.<sup>49</sup>

Mother Dugas continued the visitation of houses in the area of Montreal, including those at Châteauguay where difficulties concerning the property of 'Iles-à-la-Paix' required serious attention.<sup>50</sup>

The details of these various activities seemed minor in comparison to news coming from the travelers to the Far North. Faithfully, Mother St-Jean-Baptiste kept the sisters in Montreal well-informed. During a brief stop in St. Boniface, she described the continuing expansion of the hospital; she mentioned the success of the teachers at the convent in St. Norbert where thirty-seven of the thirty-eight students had graduated with honors, an achievement which merited the Lieutenant Governor's medal for the school.

Mother Piché's stay in Edmonton was extended to allow a visit of the schools in St. Albert under the direction of Sister Savard whose competence was recognized by the Minister of Education. He appointed her to the Committee set to assess the results of student examinations throughout the province.

The promotion of nursing education was also a matter that required attention. Sister Duckett, responsible for planning a meeting to be held in Edmonton on July 10 – 12th, submitted her program to the superior general. Sister had stated her objectives very clearly in a letter dated April 30th. These objectives were: "To examine together a curriculum able to assure a sound forma-

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<sup>48</sup> Letter of Mother Piché, Dec. 23, 1917.

<sup>49</sup> These conferences written in collaboration with Mr. L. Regaudie, professor at Montreal College, are now in print.

<sup>50</sup> Thanks to documents contained among Father Faillon's papers and to others discovered in the judicial archives of Montreal, the deputy-minister of the Department of Lands and Forests, acknowledged that the Crown had no claim to ownership of these Islands. (Letter of Nov. 1917)

tion for nursing candidates (...) and to find means to touch their souls while relieving the physical ailments of their patients.”

Ice delayed the departure of Mother Piché and her companion. As a result, Sisters St. Dosithée and Nicol, who had arrived from Montreal on the night of May 10th en route for the North, were joined by Marie-Rose, a lay volunteer and all were able to continue their voyage with the superior general. From then on, mishaps began to occur. Sister St. Dosithée injured her foot, which raised concern that the trip might be further delayed; to everyone’s relief, Sister Doherty’s treatment was successful and the departure took place. Sister Grandin outdid herself in preparing supplies for the missions: the food-locker was well-stocked and the trunks secured in such a manner that they would arrive in good condition.

On May 17th, Mother Piché and her companions arrived at the Dunvegan station near St. Albert. The roads were so muddy that it took the carriage over four hours to cover the four miles. The sisters boarded the Canadian Pacific Railway train where they were all lodged in separate compartments – a luxurious inconvenience, indeed! Rain had covered the railway tracks which necessitated frequent stops and delayed their arrival at Peace River by an entire day. There, the sisters were waylaid again because their boat had already left. On May 20th, the Northland Call vessel appeared and the sisters embarked the following day. At St. Augustin, an hour’s stop-over allowed the Grey Nuns to visit with the Sister of Providence to the enjoyment of both residents and travelers.

The journey continued slowly because of obstacles in the water. By the time the pathway was freed, the boilers failed! The sisters took turns substituting as cooks, with the superior general doing a generous share. On May 23rd, the passengers were told that they would disembark shortly. They took off at seven o’clock, only to experience another incident: a colt which was aboard broke all his barriers and jumped into the water! With some difficulty, he was finally recaptured. There were also a few fowl but they presented no problem – and one even laid an egg.

At another stop, a native came to ask the sisters for help for his young daughter who was ill. Sister St. Dosithée went to visit her and suggested a treatment which evidently proved effective.

On the 25th, the sisters visited the Sisters of Providence stationed at Vermilion. They were welcomed with the same warmth as at St. Augustin. Sister Nicol was overjoyed to meet in this remote area, Father Letreste, the Oblate priest with whom she had crossed the Atlantic Ocean some years previously, on her way to the Grey Nuns' novitiate.

On the 27th, Feast of Pentecost, Mass was celebrated in a tent. Two old boards on supports served as an altar and later, as a table for the meal that followed. After the travelers had portaged four-and-a-half miles, they reached the McMurray vessel en route to Fort Chipewyan.<sup>51</sup> They prayed the rosary and sang hymns along the way, meanwhile thinking of the soldiers in the trenches whose suffering was undoubtedly greater than their own.

At eight-thirty, the McMurray advanced until high winds forced the captain to turn off the motor and go ashore. The crew chopped down trees in order to supply the boilers with fuel; this resulted in a delay which required a change in the itinerary. They decided, instead, to go to Fort Smith where Sisters St. Dosithée and Nicol with Marie-Rose disembarked on May 29th. Having been advised by a telephone call from Bishop Breynat, the missionaries came to the wharf to visit for a few hours.

On the 31st, the ground was covered with snow. The captain, amused by their disappointment, teasingly wished them a Merry Christmas! On June 1st, they finally reached Rabaska where a moment of silence in memory of Sister Lapointe brought tears to their eyes. The next day, a formal reception was held at

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<sup>51</sup> This refers to Fort Chipewyan or Chip, Athabasca or Rabaska and even to Holy Angels Convent.

which time the students presented an overview of the life of the superior general.

Before leaving Rabaska to return to Fort Smith on June 10th, the sisters witnessed the astonishment of the natives at the sight of an automobile, able to move without the help of horses or dogs! This time, the missionary sisters fully intended to retain Mother Piché and her companion and they opened their home to their guests; the house measured thirty-eight feet by forty feet and contained a day school for thirty-two students. The staff consisted of five sisters and three employees. There was plenty of food because of the availability of caribou; potatoes were plentiful, while poultry and cows supplied eggs, milk and beef.

Visits to the different posts always included a walk to the graveyard to pray over the tombs of the sisters who had died in the mission fields. Here they also visited the meteorological station which had been entrusted to the sisters; they were expected to faithfully record the temperatures and the variations of the seasons.

The visit to the convent in Fort Resolution began on June 18th after an all-night boat trip. On the way, a bed had been prepared for the superior general while the other sisters slept on the floor, except Sister Nicol who preferred to remain seated. A member of the crew gave the wake-up call by loudly proclaiming "Benedicamus Domino!"<sup>52</sup> Although the visitors had been expected since a few days, the local missionaries were all at the church when an Indian lady came to announce their arrival. The joy was mutual in spite of the fact that the crates containing gifts had been damaged somewhat by water, but salvaged articles were readily distributed. While there, Mother Piché and her companion also witnessed a miraculous catch of fish. They had gone out to see the abundant yield in the nets. The catches weighed from twenty to forty pounds. The secretary

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<sup>52</sup> This refers to an employee to whom Mother Stubinger, a delegate to the North in 1893, had given her family name.

wrote that the sun set at eleven o'clock and rose two-and-a-half hours later, so that one could read and write throughout the night. The longer period of daylight offered more possibilities for the upcoming jubilee celebrations in Fort Providence.

On July 1st, the group left Fort Resolution for the celebration in Fort Providence, the oldest missionary post. Sister Pinsonneault, who was observing her silver jubilee of religious life, went along with them; they reached their destination shortly before ten o'clock the next morning. On shore, nineteen flags signified the presence of as many nationalities. At the approach of the visitors young girls, grouped on the shore, burst forth with a song of welcome, while the boys clothed in military dress, joyfully discharged their rifles. Welcome signs hung from the fir trees. Fathers, brothers and sisters greeted Bishop Breynat and the travelers to whom they gave a jubilee badge – a ribbon on which was a daisy bearing a photo of Mother d'Youville and the words: "Souvenir of the Golden Anniversary." The coat-of-arms of the Oblates and of the Grey Nuns were used to decorate the hall. In addition, photographs of Bishops Faraud, Grouard, Clut and Breynat were prominently displayed. A banner addressed the following message to Mother Piché, the guest of honor: "Kindness brings you here and gratitude welcomes you." In a letter, the secretary raised the question: "Are we really in the distant Mackenzie? We could easily believe that we are back home!"

The celebrations began in the early afternoon of July 3rd. Bishop Breynat gave a review of the fifty years of commitment by the Grey Nuns. The audience shared his emotions. A picnic was held on the neighboring island where, thanks to the breeze, mosquitoes were not troublesome.

The next day, the Masses celebrated at six and six-thirty were well attended; the banquet was held at eleven-thirty and was served by the boys wearing white aprons and a towel on their arm. Bishop Breynat suggested that the magnificent cake which represented the humble refuge of 1867, be sent to their beloved Mother Ward. It was also agreed that another cake,

offered by Mother Leveillé, be sent to Sister Domitilde in St. Albert. The invited guests marveled at the well-filled plates while they recalled the memory of those who had taught them in years gone by.

The students performed capably in a concert during which they proclaimed that 591 children had received an education at the school in Fort Providence over the past half-century.

The celebration was an unqualified success. One project, however, had remained unfulfilled; the book by Father Duchaussois, o.m.i., entitled "The Grey Nuns in the Far North" had failed to arrive on time.<sup>53</sup> The bishop gave the only sample copy to Mother Piché. Even with the midnight sun, efforts to read it aloud were to no avail because her vision was obscured by tears.

On July 8th, the travelers reached Fort Simpson where the foundresses had patiently awaited them at the foot of a hill rendered slippery by the heavy rainfall. It took all of ten minutes to climb that hill before the St. Marguerite Hospital came into view. Sister Girouard was radiant with joy; two new residents were added to the household, namely, Sisters St. Dosithée and Davy, while Sister Nicol remained in Fort Providence.

The sojourn in Fort Simpson lasted until July 16th; the five missionaries accompanied the departing guests to the boat. They planned to stop briefly along the way at the other stations on their return trip, but this would be the final farewell for those who remained behind. Mother Piché encouraged and praised her missionary sisters; they, on the other hand, had profoundly appreciated the long conversations with this generous Grey Nun whose example motivated them to a joyous trust and gift of self.

The return trip again brought a multitude of incidents: frequent downpours, clouds of mosquitoes, a sixteen-mile journey aboard a carriage drawn by two scrawny horses threat-

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<sup>53</sup> The 2nd edition carried the title "Femmes Héroïques".



ening to drop them off along the way, navigation on a scow where the bedding, when rolled up, served as seats while an umbrella protected them from the occasional sunny periods.

At Fort Chipewyan, they finally boarded the Northland Trading Company boat en route back to Fort McMurray. The low water level made it necessary for the crew to pull the vessel with ropes for three miles.

Then, at seven o'clock on August 6th and to everyone's surprise, someone cried out "The train!" On it were Sister Lemaire with Cecile, a precious young sister, known as the little flower of the Mackenzie, who had given herself to the Lord on January 23rd at the mother-house. Having become ill, it was hoped that the climate of her northern birthplace would favor her recovery.

The sisters were given space in the baggage car while awaiting the return of the train; during the delay, food supplies had dwindled. Fortunately, there were provisions of merchandise nearby and six nice loaves of bread were produced to appease the hunger of the travelers.

The train left on September 5th. The secretary wrote: "We were shaken from one side to the other when, suddenly, the train stopped because the dead-locks had broken and the wheels had jumped the track." The sisters were asked to move with their luggage to the coal-bin where they were abundantly sprinkled with soot, coal and water. This was one difficulty which they had been spared on the trip of 1912...

It was finally possible to board a regular passenger train at Lac La Biche. There, they saw the assassins of Fathers Rioux and Rouvière, o.m.i., disembark accompanied by policemen. They were returning home after Bishop Breynat had obtained their release.

At one-thirty on September 7th, the sisters arrived at Dunvegan and went to St. Albert for a brief visit. Stopping briefly at other houses in Saskatchewan and Manitoba along the way, they arrived in Montreal without further mishap. Mother St-Jean-

Baptiste wrote her gratitude to God for protecting them amid so many perils. Sorting through the correspondence received during their long absence, she wholeheartedly endorsed Father Hertzog's comments in a letter addressed to Mother Dugas: "I admire Mother Piché's courage and bravery which have led her through so many difficulties in order to meet with her daughters, to comfort, encourage and incite them towards good. What an impact her presence and her words must have been wherever she passed! For your sake, may God spare her for many years to come! There is nothing more precious for a religious family than a good and firm superior who leads, by her example, along the way to gift of self." The prelate's words reflected the opinion entertained by the missionaries.

### **RETURN TO THE MISSION OF ILE-A-LA-CROSSE – 1917**

On September 24, 1905, the missionary sisters at the St. Joseph Home in Ile-à-la-Crosse had been recalled to St. Boniface. They had left tearfully, some of them having labored there for almost thirty years.

The directive to leave had been given by Mother Hamel in a letter dated May 24th. "After forty-five years of devoted service, sacrifice and privations, we must now abandon the mission. The good that has been started will henceforth be continued by religious from France. Expelled from their country, they are pleased to come and work there in the Lord's vineyard. While expressing his regrets, the Bishop nevertheless acknowledged our reasons. Hence, we see this as a sign of God's will made manifest."<sup>54</sup>

This post had become hazardous as the lake overflowed quite frequently, causing an alarming erosion. The ground on which the orphanage stood, originally quite elevated, was now below the level of the lake. The sisters could leave their dwelling

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<sup>54</sup> Letter quoted in C.M. 1904-06, p. 636.

only by canoe or raft.<sup>55</sup> It was quite understandable that the new missionaries found it impossible to adapt. "The good Lord seems to indicate that the Grey Nuns, apostles 'par excellence' of the most difficult missions, are the only ones capable of filling such a difficult post (...) The Indians are inconsolable. Your sisters, who rest there in the cemetery, seem to grieve your absence and to reclaim you."<sup>56</sup>

The Congregation had earlier tried to respond to their plea by opening a school in Beauval in 1909. Nevertheless, the people at Ile-à-la-Crosse, known as 'the pearl among our missions' even if some called it 'the Capital of a Solitude', earnestly wished for the return of the former missionaries. In the course of their visits to the mother-house on Guy Street, Bishops Legal, Pascal, Grouard and especially, Charlebois, all became advocates for the return of the sisters, a fact which eventually resulted in a change of heart.

The journey of the original foundresses in 1860 had taken sixty-three days. With more modern means of travel, it now took only twenty days. The sisters arrived at the Island on September 20th with two gun blasts from the boatman's gun notifying the population. The response was immediate!

The Chipewyan natives quickly came to the shore, welcoming with tears of joy, the sisters whose departure they had so vehemently opposed. A new convent had been built by Bishop Charlebois and Father Rossignol and would serve as a school, a hospital and a hospice.

Sister St. Nazaire was particularly pleased to return to this post where she had spent seven years. Named foundress at Beauval, she had given of herself unreservedly, but she always had kept a soft spot for her previous assignment, even though it had called for greater self-denial. With her companions, Sisters Elise Martel, Cécile Nadeau, St. Léopold and Sephora, she knew

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<sup>55</sup> Duchaussois, *Femmes Héroïques*, p. 46.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid* p. 47, letter of Bishop Pascal.

that, even with the improvements, many sacrifices would still be required at 'Ile-à-la-Croix', as the Grey Nuns sometimes called that mission. Floods would spare the new building, but it would be destroyed by fire while death would claim the lives of two generous missionaries over the next few years.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 1918-1920

Like her predecessors, the chronicler faithfully recorded the outstanding events which marked the history of the Congregation and of the various missions.<sup>1</sup> Naturally, the personnel of the mother-house, both religious and lay, found a space in this daily recording.

The records bear witness to the fact that the Grey Nuns valued their protégés and those who shared their work. The elderly took part in religious and community feasts; the commitment of the staff was frequently mentioned; anniversary dates of employment were celebrated, their joys and sorrows were shared. Let us read the chronicler's praise of "the good Louis Lapointe, the manager of the print shop, the skillful typographer between the years 1891-1916. In spite of the fact that he suffered from ataxy, Louis excelled in the tasks which he carried out efficiently. His funeral was held in the convent chapel on April 3rd.

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<sup>1</sup> Assigned to the secretariat at the mother-house, on Dec. 28, 1914, Sr. Clémentine Drouin wrote vol. 3 of the history of the Congregation after completing vol. 2 begun by Sr. A. Fauteux.

This good servant has truly earned our gratitude and we paid him tribute this morning."

However, at the dawn of the year 1918, the staff of the Crèche had included an aide who, though she appeared very kind in dealing with the infants, proved to be most unworthy of trust, as will be related shortly.

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On the morning of February 14th, a funeral was held for Sister Lupien, superior of Notre-Dame Hospital who had died two days previously, following surgery. This loss of a sister, still in her fifties, created a void keenly felt both by her religious family and by the hospital's administrative personnel. They "grieved the premature death of this Grey Nun whose wise directives had been highly valued."<sup>2</sup> In the absence of Mother Piché, who was making her official visitation in the American missions, Mother Dugas spoke in praise of the dear departed one during the evening recreation.

In the novitiate, nineteen candidates were preparing to pronounce their first vows, while fifteen junior professed sisters would make their irrevocable commitment at eight o'clock the next morning in the chapel dedicated to the Holy Cross.

Everything was proceeding quietly when, at seven-forty in the evening, an anguished cry came to upset everything; a fire was discovered in the Crèche! Quickly, "everyone rushed to the smoke-filled ward and the fire brigade was called."<sup>3</sup> "A fire at the Grey Nuns!" At this news, friends and neighbors, among whom was Archbishop Bruchési of Montreal, soon arrived on the scene.

The element of destruction had begun on the fifth floor of the St. Mathieu wing where the Crèche had been relocated to

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<sup>2</sup> Letter from Mr. A. Lessard. *Annals* 1917-18, pp. 293-294.

<sup>3</sup> These details and those following, are taken from the annals and dates mentioned above.

accommodate the military hospital. This Unit housed 169 infants whom the sisters hastened to remove from the danger. The flames spread so rapidly that the fire fighters forbade access to the area. Novices and professed sisters had rescued several of the little ones. Ignoring the command, Sister Côté went to the cribs and picked up four infants in her apron and was heading for the exit when she was overcome by smoke. Providentially, the firemen arrived on time to withdraw her and her precious burdens from the peril of death.

Convalescing soldiers, employees, sisters (among whom were the next day's newly professed) and helpful neighbors carried the children, aged between two and four years, down the fire escapes and brought them to the chapel, to the crypt and to the parlors.

The water pressure was becoming alarmingly low and the firemen dreaded a general conflagration so they ordered the evacuation of the elderly residents and sisters. His Worship, the Mayor, who had come to the scene, offered accommodation in public areas: Mount St. Marie, the mother-house of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, the Montefiore Club, the Protestant church, the St. Anthony Villa, all opened their facilities to the victims of the fire who were being transported by ambulances from the Notre-Dame Hospital, Hôtel-Dieu, Western Hospital or by the cars of friends and even by strangers who were eager to help.

Doctors centered their attention on the small children brought to the St. Justine Hospital, the St. Paul Hospital and to the Misericordia Crèche. "Our handicapped and elderly people, on stretchers or in wheel-chairs, were entrusted to neighbors while the soldiers found shelter at the refuge on Drummond Street. The priests from the seminary and those from St. Joseph's Oratory worked as brothers until the early morning, while the Franciscans and the Little Sisters of the Poor interceded successfully for us: heaven helped by sending a torrential rain," a torrential rain in February! The fire was brought under control by mid-morning.

This tragic mishap brought to an end the military hospital project. Fifty-three of the little ones perished in the flames! The sisters were inconsolable as was the superior general who had been notified by a telegram from Archbishop Bruchési, himself, who added: "The sisters were admirable in their efforts to save the children, I was there."

When the danger had been overcome, the poor, the sisters and the children who had been sheltered nearby, were returned to the main building. The babies were placed in baskets on long tables; a grocer provided milk and feeding bottles. Our female employees deplored the loss of their personal belongings but were grateful that their lives had been spared; they were lodged here and there. During the worst of the conflagration, after having rescued two children, one of the girls soon withdrew under pretext of having a severe headache. She was later found to be the pyromaniac and was soon transported to the Notre-Dame Hospital for supervision and care.

"After a night of anguish, peril and bereavement, there followed the ceremony of religious profession," wrote the chronicler. Presided by Archbishop Bruchési, his eloquent words dealt with the spectacle which he had recently witnessed: "At the time, you ignored the danger and thrust yourselves to the rescue of those poor little ones ... Unfortunately, some children perished; you loved them but will see them no more ... and, like Rachel, you weep over those who have no one else to mourn for them ... Let us look back to that day in 1765 when, during an experience similar to your own, Mother d'Youville saw flames engulf the General Hospital which she had barely finished transforming into a shelter for the sick and the poor. Was she discouraged? No, she intoned the *Te Deum*, a hymn that one sings at happy times." The Archbishop then invited the assembly to sing the *Te Deum* to express their faith and their abiding trust.

Mother Piché returned from the States the following morning. Assembled at the entrance, the sisters stood in an impressive silence, a silence which the Mother interrupted by saying "I have come to weep with you." A few hours later, she



allowed her heart to speak: "One must carry one's cross even when it is given in abundance! These words of our holy foundress came to mind when I received the Archbishop's message.<sup>4</sup> If the loss had been only of a material nature ... but at the sight of the cruel death of these innocent victims, our grief remains speechless."

The fifty-three little ones were brought back from the morgue on February 19th and the Mass of the Angels was celebrated the next day. Thirty-six small white caskets were placed near the sanctuary. The novitiate choir sang appropriate hymns while the assembly which filled the chapel expressed its profound emotion. The annalist wrote "Many sobs were too deep to stifle." After the Archbishop had given the final blessing, the procession lined up as the choir chanted the *Laudate Pueri Dominum*: 'Children, praise the Lord!' The students of the Industrial School, in black costume and white veil, and a few elderly men, carried the caskets.

The soldiers stood along the path to the twenty hearses which waited there. Several police stood by to maintain order, an easy task, as everyone stood in silence; men removed their hats as a sign of respect. A witness stated that "what they never would have had in life, death by fire gave these infants the majestic respect of a crowd deeply moved. They enter into history." It was an unforgettable sight to observe this final leaving through the gaping doorway to St. Mathieu Street while the wing in ruins bore witness to the recent tragedy. There remained only the framework of the two stories in ruin; the lower floors had also been damaged. The outside air had free rein through these gaping openings as the February wind fanned the brazing embers. It would be urgent to cover these openings until re-construction could begin.

Archbishop Bruchési appealed to the charity of the public who responded generously in spite of hardships imposed by the

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<sup>4</sup> Letter of Feb. 19, 1918, Gen. Chap. pp. 254 and following.

war. The annalist listed the amount of alms and the names of the contributors; among these, was recorded the offering from a five-year old child who had come to empty his piggy-bank on behalf of the babes of the Crèche: the offering was of one dollar.

The Archbishop remarked: "You have the sympathy of the whole country." In fact, there came messages, not only from the local population but also from across the Atlantic: from His Holiness, Pope Benedict XV via cablegram from Cardinal Gasparri, from Father Garriguet, the superior general of St. Sulpice, who unwittingly wrote words identical to those spoken by Mother Piché: "I weep with you, over you and over your precious house", from the United States, from the Church's hierarchy, from all levels of government, from clergy of all denominations, from proprietors of large and small stores, there came messages expressing compassion and encouragement.

Religious congregations, too, came forward to extend a helping hand. The sister-communities of St. Hyacinthe, Quebec, Nicolet and Ottawa where a similar tragedy had recently occurred,<sup>5</sup> all manifested their bondedness by words and comforting visits.

Generous ladies organized card parties and there was soon born a movement known as 'Welcome to the Cradle',<sup>6</sup> under the direction of Mrs. Thibodeau. A tombola, organized by this group, opened its doors on December 11th and lasted several days. Students of the Industrial Schools of Mount St. Marie, Villa Maria and of the high school held sales of items collected from the stores of Dupuis, Morgan and Almy. In the midst of this intense activity, a sister one day brought in a 'live item', a newborn whom she had just found on the doorstep. A dramatic event!

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<sup>5</sup> On Jan. 19th, the hospital in Ottawa was engulfed in flames, resulting in the death of four children. (Letter of Jan. 22, 1918).

<sup>6</sup> Life memberships were purchased for \$100.00 plus an annual fee of \$10.00.

The smiling baby girl was quickly surrounded. Mr. and Mrs. Patenaude volunteered to be godparents for this 'nameless' infant whom they would love and raise in the years ahead. No time was lost in purchasing a lovely white dress at one of the pavilions, and the chaplain was called to baptize the infant whom they named Thérèse. This happy event brought joy in the midst of hardships resulting from the fire.

The inquiry into the disaster continued, with questions raised on possible causes. Mother of the Sacred Heart, Sisters Laframboise, Maranda and Cordelia testified that nothing in the sleeping rooms or the adjoining rooms could have caused the catastrophe. Mr. McMahon, the coroner, noted that the sisters were hesitant to point to a criminal hand. Detective Rioux, of the Provincial Security Commission, persisted. Having checked the list of employees, one name retained his attention. He then asked to meet each of these persons individually. The guilty one, finding herself unmasked, admitted her fault which Chief Lorraine carefully recorded; this had not been her first offense. Furthermore, upon returning from her stay at the Notre-Dame Hospital, she had again attempted to start a fire.<sup>7</sup> Finally, on September 22nd, the mentally unstable girl was committed to the St. Darie Home for several months.

Meanwhile, on May 2nd, three sisters went to the graveyard of Côte-des-Neiges to attend the burial of the babies and to place there, the terse epitaph: "To the memory of young children, victims of the fire at the Grey Nuns' Foundling Asylum, February 14, 1918." It was with great sadness that the chronicler entered these details; she expressed her sentiments thus: "One must not forget that this is an historical record, and so, no compromise is permitted."

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<sup>7</sup> There was question whether the beginning of other fires mentioned earlier may also have been attributable to her. Bertha C. had been employed at the mother-house before her transfer to the Crèche.

During these weeks of disquietude, the chronicler made more lengthy entries about bereavements which touched friends and members of the community. When Mother Piché had completed her visitation of the American missions, she went, on June 15th, to be with her only sister, Mrs. Juneau, who died two days later. A week later, Mother Dugas, the assistant general, suffered the loss of a brother, Judge Dugas.

The chronicler wrote of the sorrow of the sisters at the several bereavements occasioned by the death of members of the Grey Nuns' extended family, former students and protégés, which had occurred four times during 1918. Fathers Perron and Joubert died at ages forty-nine and thirty-two years respectively. Then there was Father Gianfrancesco who had been referred to them by Father Lecoq upon his arrival from Italy, and who had served during five years as chaplain for persons hospitalized at the mother-house. Father Jude Thibault, a protégé of the unforgettable Sister Lapointe, had been treated with special consideration. Having served as chaplain for the Grey Nuns at two different times, he had returned again in 1915, declaring that he had come to die in the service of the sisters to whom he was forever indebted.

Father Thibault died on July 30th, at the age of seventy years and in his forty-seventh year of priesthood. His biographical sketch is included in the annals of the Grey Nuns where mention was made that, on July 16th, he had received a visit from his three brothers: Joseph, Clovis, a pastor in Syracuse, N.Y., and Alphonse, a doctor.

Two other former students received congratulations and then sympathy from the sisters. Bishop John Forbes, a nephew to Sisters Forbes, McDonnell and McMullen, was one of these. His brother, William, was the bishop of Joliette; John, the eldest and the first Canadian to join the White Fathers of Africa, was named coadjutor to Bishop Streitcher, apostolic vicar of Victoria-Nyanza, in Uganda, in December 1917. Rejoicing over their protégé, the Grey Nuns willingly embroidered his mitre and inserted relics in the pectoral cross of the newly-elected bishop.

Mother Piché congratulated this former student who wrote to her on March 30th expressing his heartfelt thanks. Bishop John was unaware of the death of his father<sup>8</sup> which occurred very shortly after he had learned of his son's appointment. The mother, who was more privileged, had said of her sons: "I did not allow them to roam the streets, nor did I tolerate their whims." To these words, the chronicler added: "Your sons, the chosen of God, will carry the torch, they will be your honor, O worthy mother!"

Besides mourning the deceased, the sisters grieved the loss of others who had left for the battlefield. Fathers Cognet and Pustienne left on May 9th to defend their motherland. A summons was also expected for Fathers Dupaigne, Legrand and Carré. Conscription was likewise imposed in Ireland<sup>9</sup> while, in Canada, the implementation of national registration caused some anxiety. Upon Archbishop Bruchési's inquiry, the Honorable Mr. Doherty replied that there was no question of requiring cloistered and other religious to leave their convents, but rather to explore the services which the government might expect without breaching their way of life.<sup>10</sup> Because an end to the worldwide conflict could not be anticipated, Cardinal Bégin delegated Bishop Georges Gauthier, an auxiliary bishop in Montreal, to visit the Canadian soldiers on the battle-field.

Upon his return from a trip to Europe, Bishop Breynat expressed his opinion that warfare could be considerably prolonged. He shared with the sisters, information about the problems in his own diocese: the flood in Fort McMurray where the warehouse for the northern missions was located, caused many privations, especially at Fort Resolution and Fort Simpson. At Fort Providence, the missionaries and those under their care, had to move to Beaver Lake because of the scarcity of fish in

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<sup>8</sup> Death occurred on March 25, 1918.

<sup>9</sup> Annals 1917-18, p. 583.

<sup>10</sup> Letter of June 11, 1918.

their area<sup>11</sup>. Sister Latrémouille wrote: "We live like the natives, under a tent and around the fire."

The uncertainty of the world situation stirred the sisters to trust in Providence. Hence, work to rebuild the St. Mathieu wing of the mother-house was undertaken with a minimum of delay. At Côte-de-Liesse, the agricultural school attached to the St. Charles farm, was opened. The director, Sister Amanda Tassé-Aubry, welcomed the first six students on September 1st, in the little white house which the sisters had named Our Lady of Peace.<sup>12</sup>

The farm faced the orphanage which had opened in 1914 and the other building which had remained unfinished due to the war. During this time was born the idea of transforming into a Crèche the building originally intended for the elderly. The idea took root but only after further tribulations had been overcome.

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The Minister of Justice had given the assurance that "there would be no question of governmental directives requiring the sisters to leave their convents." Nevertheless, only a few weeks later, men and women religious hastened to attend the sick and dying afflicted with a strange illness which had soon become worldwide. It was finally identified as an influenza which began in Spain (hence its name of Spanish Flu), and spread to France and Portugal. From the Pyrenees, the epidemic spread to Belgium and to the military frontiers.<sup>13</sup>

The illness, having made its entry into Canada, reached epidemic proportions by early July.<sup>14</sup> The Somali, a vessel

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<sup>11</sup> Annals 1917-18, pp. 667-668.

<sup>12</sup> Biography of Sr. Aubry, Annals 1912-13. The school closed in 1926.

<sup>13</sup> "Epidemics of fever or flu received at Hôtel-Dieu in 1734 and 1918", by Dr. E. Desjardins. Hôtel-Dieu de Montreal, 1642-1973, pp. 247 and following.

<sup>14</sup> Ten Grey Nuns died of the influenza in Jan. 1916, Annals 1917-18, biographical notes p. 4.

arriving from India, came down the St. Lawrence River to Montreal at which time some of the seamen complained of general malaise. Orders were immediately given to the captain to take them to Grosse Isle where eighty-nine members of the crew were immediately hospitalized.<sup>15</sup>

The plague soon reached Montreal. By the end of September, the entire city was overrun. The chronicler advised its readers that, due to the epidemic, her annals would not be sent to the various houses until October. In fact, by October 10th, it had worked such havoc that firm preventive measures were ordered by municipal authorities and the Board of Health. The Archbishop of Montreal decreed that there were to be no religious services in the city's churches; the schools also were closed.

The Grey Nuns did not await the edict before entering into action. Like their predecessors, their sympathy prompted them to volunteer their services. The superior general made this known to the emergency hospitals where the staff were unable to cope with the situation. Doctor Harwood eagerly accepted the offer. Called to combat in the field of sacrifice, Mother Piché, who had clearly specified that only volunteers would be called upon to serve, was gratified to learn that all the sisters had responded affirmatively to the invitation.<sup>16</sup> She stated with emotion: "I bless the Lord for having maintained in our community, the spirit of devotedness of our predecessors."

"Death strikes without mercy; two thousand persons struggled against the plague," wrote the annalist. Already, three teams of sisters were at work. Mother Dugas, the assistant general, appointed seventeen sisters among the various sections of the city to visit in the homes; they became nurses, drug dispensers, cooks, laundry workers, night guardians and embalmers.

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<sup>15</sup> E. Desjardins, cited above, p. 256.

<sup>16</sup> These and other details come from the Annals of 1917-18, p. 777 and following.

Mothers Dionne and McKenna assumed responsibility for the direction of the Civic Hospital on Moreau Street and that of Meurling Refuge, assisted by sixteen sisters. These teams left the mother-house at seven-thirty each morning and returned at eight-thirty in the evening except the volunteers at the Civic Hospital who worked around the clock. Two other nurses visited a destitute Protestant family each evening.

Mother Piché shared the tasks of the staff of the Foundling Asylum (Crèche), visited the sick, the novices and postulants, as well as the students at the Industrial School. At the lodgings for senior citizens, the epidemic appeared less severe. The convent on Guy Street, however, had become a large hospital with 145 patients and where twenty-two care-givers had to withdraw because of illness. These were replaced by jubilarians and other elderly sisters eager to do their part.

The register of deceased sisters, begun on October 19th, included the names of seven sisters, among whom were the local superior and a postulant in her early twenties. The closed coffins remained in a mortuary room until they could be buried in the graveyard at Châteauguay.

The epidemic became so widespread that Archbishop Bruchési found it necessary to call upon every religious community for assistance. The Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame came to work with the Grey Nuns while the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary went to assist the Religious Hospitallers at Hôtel-Dieu. The Sisters of Providence and the Sisters of St. Anne made home visits, the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception went to help the Chinese colony in Montreal, the Brothers of St. Gabriel and those of Holy Cross went to the hospitals of Notre-Dame and St. Paul.

There were scenes never witnessed before; priests who celebrated mass in empty churches, would go out in the streets bringing Holy Communion and blessing the parishioners who had been alerted by the great bell of Notre-Dame Church.



Contrary to the advice of her Councillors, Mother Piché went to the Meurling and Civic Hospitals to share the work of those engaged there. Many people returned to the faith, and there were numerous conversions to this religion which inspired such charity.

No one was spared; death touched rich and poor alike: doctors, clergy, professionals and day-laborers. Records indicate that during the month of October, in Montreal alone, 16,466 persons were afflicted, 2,811 of whom died. At St. Jean-sur-le-Richelieu, the need was so great that the Grey Nuns' Refuge had to be transformed into a hospital.

The United States did not escape the scourge. Six sisters, among whom was Mother Ward, the seventy-four year old provincial superior, became ill. Fortunately, everyone recovered. The hospitals in New Brunswick, Toledo and Cambridge were filled to capacity. In Nashua, there was question of closing the hospital because of the shortage of staff, but instead, they launched an appeal for help. The call was heeded by a number of ladies and girls. The mayor came to serve broth to the patients. The chaplain washed dishes and served as telephone operator; he was even known to remove a floor mop from the hands of a sister whose great fatigue was apparent.

From St. Boniface came the following report: In Regina, four sisters, eighteen nurses and twelve employees became acutely ill. At the St. Boniface Hospital, twenty-two sisters, thirty-one nurses and 450 patients became victims of the influenza virus. At the St. Joseph's Orphanage, 120 students and all the sisters were bedridden except three who remained on duty, mostly out of compassion. In Kenora, all the sisters except one, plus forty-seven students received care from two sisters who had come from St. Boniface. In Lestock, the situation was like that in Kenora. In Le Bret, the superior, Sister Proulx, was the first to become ill, and then, the students. At the Provincial House, 134 students, twenty-seven sisters, sixteen novices and forty-one elderly persons were bedridden; six of the students died.

Caring for the sick, were six Sisters of the Holy Family, two Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart, two Daughters of the Cross of St. Andrew, two Sisters of St. Joseph and six Jesuit scholastic brothers. Two Ruthenian Sisters and five Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary came to help Mother Pagé, the provincial superior, who had lent her own sisters to a house in greater need. The convents of St. François Xavier, St. Michel, St. Anne and La Broquerie were fortunately spared and were able to help with the care of those in need.

The St. Albert Province was not so fortunate. Mother St. Augustin, the provincial superior, hastened to the hospital in Saskatoon which was filled to capacity. All the sisters were ill; one of them, Sister St. Léonce, died. In Edmonton, nine of the 150 patients, died. The scourge was ably controlled by the competent treatment of the doctors and the devoted care of the sisters. At Dunbow, the teaching staff and students had all required treatment.

In St. Albert, the convent, though surrounded by homes with sick people, seemed to escape the contagion, so the sisters were able to care for their neighbors. In Calgary, all the sisters had fortunately recovered.

It was presumed that the missionaries in the North would be immune from the danger when, alas, several persons at the Fort Chipewyan mission did become victims of this terrible disease. Sister Lemaire had heard about them and went to care for them in their own homes. At Saddle Lake, Sister Nantel had to embody the triple role of nurse, doctor and agent. People there were dying of starvation as much as of influenza. She obtained and delivered supplies for the sick. For nineteen days, the sister crossed the reserve in every direction, accompanied by a student. One day, she stopped at the home of the agent in quest of a meal; in response, a well-filled tray was placed on the pavement for her (...) The Sisters of the Assumption in St. Paul called for her help; she spent eight days with them and had not even time to visit her family who lived nearby.

LA PRESSE, of Montreal and other newspapers, were endless in their praise, reporting: "Among the communities who have contributed the most to check the terrible curse, it is appropriate to give special mention to the Grey Nuns." Doctors in Canada and the United States also warmly praised them. The tribute which touched them the most, however, was that given them by Father Regaudie, p.s.s.: "If your Venerable Foundress came to survey her community, she would certainly find here, through the grace of God, many traits of the ideal 'sister of the cross, the sister of charity' which she had envisioned and was finally able to establish." The sisters in Montreal who received this tribute, knew that it applied equally well to their companions whose endeavors also rose to heroic heights in other posts across the country.

In early November, when the proclamation that the epidemic had been overcome was announced, the Te Deum burst forth in all the now re-opened churches as directed by the Archbishop of Montreal. The next day, November 11, 1918, came the joyful news that an armistice had been signed. The climate of peace, greeted with joyful acclamation, made possible the restoration of order and of regular activities in the convents. However, consequences of the disastrous period remained, due especially to the loss in the number of workers. Mother Piché wrote: "I am desolate over the loss of so many of our young sisters." She was, nevertheless, comforted at the thought that these 'victims' had freely offered the supreme proof of love: the gift of their lives on behalf of their sisters and brothers.<sup>17</sup>

The news of the victory over the influenza virus proved to be somewhat premature; it re-appeared shortly after the new year, 1919, this time at the orphanage in Liesse where two hundred sisters and children were laid low. Once again, an organization was promptly set up to care for the bedridden. Mother Dugas assumed the leadership and shared tasks which she later dele-

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<sup>17</sup> Circular letter of Nov. 1918.

gated to another sister. By February 8th, the epidemic had penetrated into the archdiocesan residence. Hospitalized at the Hôtel-Dieu, were five members of the clergy, among whom were Archbishop Bruchési and his auxiliary; Bishop Gauthier endeavored to fill in for the absent ones. Mother Piché readily offered the help of Sisters St. Gabriel and Ziegler, an offer which was accepted with gratitude.

The flu did not relent: "It spent the winter with us, infiltrating the seminary," wrote the chronicler. The Hôtel-Dieu Hospital was filled to capacity; Mr. Urique, the director, exposed the situation to Sister Dalton, the superior<sup>18</sup> who provided extra help.

A provisional hospital was set up on the St. Vincent Ward, formerly used by the military. Twelve beds were installed and four nurses were assigned: Sisters Chrétien and Ziegler for day duty and Sisters Bourget and Véronneau for nights. By the time it was able to close its doors, on May 18th, the 'seminarians' hospital, as the place was called, had cared for a total of eighteen patients.

One of the seminarians wrote: "If we call our professors by the title of 'father', we may call you our 'kind mothers', since your charity can only be that of a mother."<sup>19</sup>

The trials of these special 'mothers' were not over; two of them, both missionaries in Alberta, namely Sisters Breynolf and Céline from Saddle Lake, died during December. Sister Nantel, the valued nurse in that same mission, also became a victim, but fortunately recovered.<sup>20</sup>

On February 20, 1920, the municipal council of Montreal decided to re-open the hospital on Moreau Street and to entrust it again to the Grey Nuns. Once more, Mother McKenna, with

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<sup>18</sup> Sr. Dalton replaced Sr. Laboissonière who died of the flu.

<sup>19</sup> A collective letter signed by Paul-Aimé Lafortune.

<sup>20</sup> Sr. Lavoie at the mother-house, Dec. 1919. Sr. Nantel was nursed by sisters of a French community where she had to stop on the way to the hospital.

several nurses, braved the cold and the storms to exercise their charity at this post. But, just before leaving the house, Sister Carrier was asked to care for students at the school where six girls were seriously ill; one of them, Diana Vaillancourt, aged fourteen, died on February 22nd.

A new field of action opened on February 26th, when the influenza scourge reared its head in the parish of St. Laurent; three Grey Nuns nursed the sick in their homes until they too, became ill.

After four weeks of operation, the Moreau Hospital closed its doors on March 24th. Ninety-seven patients had been cared for, sixteen of whom died.

The volunteer nurses returned to their convent with the following blessing from one of the doctors: "Sisters, you deserve a trip to Bermuda!" In their eyes, no trip could equal in value, their gratification at having been able to help their patients to recover. Similar sentiments by the sisters are found in all the writings about this very busy period.

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The tumultuous years of 1918-1920 strangely resembled those experienced more than a century before by the Mother of Universal Charity and her companions. Epidemics, wars, conflagrations, nothing was missing, not even the regret 'at not being able to do more'. We are reminded that Mother d'Youville deplored the lack of space at the General Hospital. With adequate resources, she would readily have erected a building capable of lodging at least two hundred needy persons (September 22, 1769).

Many needs increased; war had multiplied the number of crippled and orphans. The Grey Nun family totaled 1,114 sisters at the beginning of 1918; after two years, it had increased only to 1,135, in spite of the addition of sixty-eight new members. The epidemic and advanced age had created voids. In the wake of their Foundress, the Grey Nuns of the twentieth century drew courage and strength from the conviction that "Providence is admirable." (October 17, 1765).

The assistant general, Mother Dugas who had gone to make the official visitation of the western provinces on February 19, 1919, returned home only on December 6th. The reports which she had sent to the mother-house regarding the works accomplished, reflected her satisfaction. The greatest evidence of success lay in the fact that the Grey Nuns were being called upon to establish new works. In Fort Totten, for example, the sisters were asked to open orphanages. There was also a request to establish a boarding school in Legal, Alberta.

Because of her duties in Alberta, Mother Dugas had to sacrifice the pleasure of attending a wonderful celebration which took place in St. Boniface on March 23rd for the observance of Father Damas Dandurand's 100th birthday. He was the first French-Canadian to become an Oblate of Mary Immaculate and had become the oldest priest in the world. Mother Dugas had previously missioned in St. Boniface on two occasions and so had seen this zealous Oblate at work. The local chronicles related the following about the event: "The venerable old man, in a wheel-chair, was brought to a place of honor in the sanctuary where he was surrounded by young orphans. Invited by Archbishop Béliveau to bless the assembly, he spoke in a firm voice, proclaiming the great care which God takes of those who serve him faithfully, gave thanksgiving to the Lord, appreciation to the incomparable Grey Nuns and congratulations to the children." He omitted no detail, giving proof of his claim: "My ship, launched on the ocean of life a hundred years ago, is still in quite good shape."<sup>21</sup>

The level of utilization of the Grey Nuns' Hospitals in Alberta and Manitoba certainly indicated a need for expansion. The quality of care provided there, was in keeping with progress. This motivated the General Council to allow nursing sisters to attend a convention to be held in Chicago for doctors and nurses. Mothers McKenna and Ward attended, as well as several missionaries from the United States and western Canada,

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<sup>21</sup> Letter of Sr. M. A. Beauré, Aug. 1919.

notably Sisters Duckett and Allaire. Similar meetings were subsequently held in St. Paul, Minnesota,<sup>22</sup> in Montreal and in Calgary. The Holy Cross Hospital received honorable mention for its system of classification of medical records, a system which was unanimously adopted.

While the Grey Nuns strove for progress, they always maintained a preferential option for service to the needy. An agricultural school was built for orphaned boys; courses in hygiene were given to employees, a course in puericulture was in effect at the Crèche. St. Joseph's professional school of home economics was affiliated with the University of Montreal, while the one at the mother-house was working towards a similar goal. Two more nursing sisters from Toledo were studying for a degree in pharmacology. Their schools of nursing maintained high standards. The one at St. Vincent's Hospital in Toledo received the commendation of Dr. Smith from the American College of Surgeons for its progressive stance. The Holy Ghost Hospital in Cambridge was held in high regard. Two patients, who had been refused admission elsewhere because of their serious mental handicaps, were accepted at the hospital and treated with compassion and competence.<sup>23</sup>

To commemorate its 25th anniversary of foundation, Bishop Breynat came from the Mackenzie to consecrate the altar of the chapel. This gesture was in tribute to Mother Ward (the only survivor of the epic northern journey of 1867), who now lived at the hospital.<sup>24</sup>

The bishop from the Mackenzie and his colleagues were always welcome at the home of the Grey Nuns. Bishops Grouard, Joussard, Charlebois and Father Fallaize stopped briefly at the mother-house on their way to Europe, as did Arch-

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<sup>22</sup> Letter of Mother Ward to Mother Piché, July 1919.

<sup>23</sup> This refers to a sister of the Sisters of St. Chrétienne Community and to the H. Coakley family. *Annals* of 1919-20, pp. 176 and 331.

<sup>24</sup> Letter of Mother Ward to Mother Piché, Dec. 28, 1919.

bishop Legal of Edmonton and Bishop Pascal of Prince Albert. The latter two came to Guy Street on March 30, 1919. The bishop of Prince Albert intended to retire in France, while Archbishop Legal returned on November 16th, happy to have visited his homeland once more. Alas, on March 11th of the following year, he was called to God while his colleague, who had remained abroad, died in Aix-en-Provence four months later (July 4th).

The ultimate departures of these valiant missionaries were not the only ones regretted by the sisters. Doctors E. Desjardins and A. Mercier, both renowned for their dedication, (one as a specialist at the Institute of Ophthalmology and the other as a victim of his zeal in caring for patients afflicted with influenza) had also died.<sup>25</sup>

The mission of Lebret was once more adversely affected. Father A. J. R. Dugas, o.m.i., who had succeeded the late and ever-regretted Father Hugonard, died on December 24, 1918, apparently a victim of the deadly effects of influenza.<sup>26</sup>

In Montreal, too, death continued to create voids. Mention is made of Father N. Troie, the provincial superior of St. Sulpice since barely fifteen months and Father B. Pelletier, p.s.s., who had distinguished himself by his solicitude for the orphans, the handicapped, the poor and the unemployed; regarding the latter, the chronicler made the following entry: "The good that he has done in Montreal is known to God alone." The death of Lady Jetté who had published "The Life of the Venerable Mother d'Youville" in 1909, occurred on June 2nd. This biography, begun in Montreal, was completed in Spencer Wood. Archbishop Bruchési had told the author that he was particularly touched that the praise of the humble Grey Nun should come forth from the Lieutenant Governor's residence.<sup>27</sup> Another

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<sup>25</sup> Dr. A. Mercier died on Oct. 10, 1913 and Dr. Desjardins on March 2, 1919.

<sup>26</sup> Fr. Dugas was Mother Dugas' nephew.

<sup>27</sup> Letter of Dec. 12, 1899. Lady Jetté was the spouse of the Lieut. Gov. of Quebec.



respected friend of the sisters, Lady Lacoste, who had always been a model of piety, modesty and devotedness, died suddenly on December 15th, regretted by the orphans and by all those whom she had helped.<sup>28</sup>

Traditionally, the Grey Nuns pray for their benefactors, both living and dead. The Foundress had prescribed this duty from early times, as is noted in her writings: The words "this house will never forget your many kindnesses; they are inscribed in several of our books so that those who will come after us, may know your generosity on our behalf," had been addressed to Mr. C. Héry on September 24, 1770. Father Faillon, the third biographer of Mother d'Youville, was impressed by her ready attentiveness to express her gratitude on so many occasions.<sup>29</sup>

The historian, Sister Albina Fauteux, also drew the attention of her readers to this particular characteristic of the Foundress's soul.<sup>30</sup> She not only admired the Mother of Universal Charity; she imitated her. During the recent influenza epidemic, she had been assigned to make home visitations where she cared for the afflicted with exemplary compassion. She continued to do so, even after the conquest of the plague. In time, however, she herself became ill and died on June 27, 1920.

The obituary notices continued. On Sunday, August 22nd, the death of Canon R. Descarries, pastor of the parish of St. Henri, was learned with dismay. He had founded the hospice in that parish in 1885 and had continued to support it with great generosity. Consequently, the beneficiaries of the kindergarten and of the hospice, as well as the entire parish, were greatly indebted to him. The loss deeply affected his three nieces and their Grey Nun companions who worked at the hospice whose future was now less assured.

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<sup>28</sup> Sir Alexander Lacoste was the Community's legal advisor from 1877 to 1893.

<sup>29</sup> Life, by Fr. Faillon, 1852, p. 299.

<sup>30</sup> A biography that was published after the author's death.

Also compromised, was the ministry at Ile-à-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan, which had been destroyed by fire on April 1, 1920. In spite of every attempt to rescue her from the flames, a young handicapped person had perished. In a very short time, the entire place had become an immense inferno. The sisters and their twenty-five boarders were temporarily lodged in the rectory, the four sisters occupying a single room. The students slept on the floor and attended classes in the attic. Bravely, Sister St. Nazaire wrote: "Do not be too concerned about us. Providence will look after our needs." Indeed, Providence was vigilant, as the influenza which was all around, failed to touch anyone at the mission.

There were also other fires. At St. Vincent's Hospital in Toledo, a serious alert was given, but the menace was averted before much damage was done.<sup>31</sup> In Lawrence, in mid-winter, when the streets were obstructed by snow, a fire broke out in the barn and became a threat for the orphanage. Fortunately, the wind soon changed direction and the building was saved.

The buildings on St. Pierre Street and the University of Montreal fell prey to flames in the fall of 1919. In Ontario, the parish church in Fort Frances was entirely destroyed, the fire having been deliberately set. Consequently, it was deemed prudent to provide greater security around the school.

To these misfortunes was added a strike by 250 workers at the aqueduct on January 1, 1920 and many homes were affected. Fortunately, the artesian well which had been dug on the grounds belonging to the Grey Nuns, six years earlier, sufficed for the needs of the mother-house. The Hôtel-Dieu Hospital was entirely without water; the General Hospital offered to receive their 350 patients while the Royal Victoria Hospital was able to provide drinking water. Outremont, the neighboring town, was well supplied and did not suffer any inconvenience.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> This occurred on July 24, 1919.

<sup>32</sup> *Annals of 1919-20*, p. 399.

In St. Boniface and Edmonton, there had been a strike of transport workers, depriving the people of mail. There was also a scarcity of paper due to the strike, so correspondence was forcibly limited. However, the annalist received news of the tribute paid to Sister Laurent by the editor of *LA LIBERTE*, the French newspaper of St. Boniface: "Let us praise this fervent religious who has devoted herself for seventy years in the very center of western civilization. We commend her ongoing charity toward the poor and her long vigils at the bedside of the sick. We wish her strength to continue this good work."<sup>33</sup>

Her reaction to this testimony was related very simply in a letter to Mother Piché: "After God, it is to the cradle of my religious life, this other mother, that I drew the spirit of faith and charity which I have carried throughout my long missionary life (...) I have no illusion regarding the fact that I am at the eve of my time herebelow. Before being summoned to the hour of departure, I earnestly wish to assure you of my profound gratitude."

From St. Albert, it was learned that the restoration of the old convent had been completed, thanks to the help of the sisters who, like their forebears, transported supplies and helped the carpenters.<sup>34</sup> When Archbishop O'Leary who had recently arrived in Edmonton, visited the place, he declared it the most beautiful in western Canada. He added that he was even more impressed by the pageant of the 425 students being cared for by the sisters.<sup>35</sup> He also expressed satisfaction at the birth of yet another foundation in his vast diocese, a work that had long been desired by his predecessor.

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 500.

<sup>34</sup> Biography of Sr. St. Augustin.

<sup>35</sup> Annals 1919-20, p. 680.

## THE ST. EMILE SCHOOL LEGAL, ALBERTA – 1920

A small village began to form around the church of this locality in the year 1903. Three years later, four school districts were established within the confines of the territory. Father Normandeau was the first to obtain for his own use, coal from the deposits found there. On June 26, 1904, Archbishop Emile Legal presided at the confirmation of forty-eight people and, by the following year, the parish numbered seventy families.<sup>36</sup>

On several occasions, the archbishop and the pastor, Father Guertin had made pressing invitations to the Grey Nuns to open a school capable of serving the 275 families which now constituted the parish; the parents were also eager to have the sisters come to teach their children of school age.<sup>37</sup>

The four foundresses, Sisters Surprenant, St. Polycarpe, Corriveau and Sephora came in the summer and settled in a two-storey house with twelve rooms. On September 1st, they welcomed one hundred students. It was understood that the sisters would also be making home-visits.

The building developed rapidly and boarders were admitted when, in 1931, the school included a residence under the name of Sacred Heart Convent. The success of the students was exceptional. After a few years, a student, Leona Proulx became the top contestant of all the schools of Alberta, an achievement that was duly highlighted in *LE PATRIOTE*. The sisters also fostered several young women who, in time, entered the ranks of the Grey Nuns.

The year 1920 marked the end of Mother Piché's mandate; the constitutions limited to two terms the exercise of the role of superior general. Both she and all the members of the Congregation had lived through unforgettable experiences. In her circular letter of December 23, 1918, Mother Piché wrote: "The last ten

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<sup>36</sup> Morice, "Short History of Western Canada", v.3, pp. 393-394

<sup>37</sup> Annals 1934-35, p. 164.

years have passed like the telling of one's rosary with its joys, its sorrows and its glories."

The sorrows were related as they occurred; the glories were acknowledged, though often concealed beneath crosses. The spirit of sacrifice and of generosity were especially evident during the epidemic. The Crèche was restored; the kindergarten, the vocational school, the department for elderly women, even the addition of an art studio in the St. Mathieu wing, all became a reality. Ten new works came into being and, at the beginning of the current year, the admission of 116 novices and postulants seemed to assure replacements in the ranks of the religious family.

There were also great joys: the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919, ending the hostility; the visits to Canada of General Pau, a hero of the wars of 1870 and of 1914, of Cardinal Mercier, Primate of Belgium and savior of the glorious Belgian nation, of Edward-Albert, the Prince of Wales,<sup>38</sup> all of whom came to express the thanks of their country to the Canadian people who had greatly contributed to the victory.

In spirit, there was rejoicing at the great celebration of October 16th, when the Basilica of Montmartre in Paris was solemnly consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Grey Nuns shared the joy of Father Marie-Clément who attended the ceremony,<sup>39</sup> as they also shared his legitimate pride when his compatriot, Joan of Arc was elevated to sainthood.<sup>40</sup>

The memory of a renowned Canadian, Georges-Etienne Cartier, was immortalized when his monument was unveiled in Montreal on September 6, 1919. A few days later, his daughter, Miss Hortense Cartier from France, came to visit the Grey Nuns. Invited by Mother Piché to tour the large house, she showed a

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<sup>38</sup> The future King Edward VII.

<sup>39</sup> Letter of Oct. 16, 1919.

<sup>40</sup> May 16, 1920. The religious community founded by Fr. Marie-Clément was called Sisters of St. Joan-of-Arc.

lively interest in all the works, but especially in that of the Foundling Asylum. She exclaimed: "If I lived here, I would spend my time caressing these dear children." Her eyes filled with tears when the orphans presented her with flowers.

Miss Cartier was not the only one to be enticed by the charm of these little ones. When in Montreal, our American friends continued their custom of attending "the Sisters' little Mass" and were always impressed at the sight of the sisters processing to the chapel after the noon meal while alternating the verses of the psalm, Miserere. This custom dated from the time when the sisters lived in Old Montreal. It continued at Mont St. Croix (location of the present mother-house) and always ended with a visit of the guests to the wards for the elderly and then, to the true center of attraction, where dwelt the precious little children.

Before leaving her position of leadership, Mother Piché again acquitted herself of another very pleasant duty, that of expressing her gratitude to the community. She wrote: "If any good was accomplished over the past ten years, it is due to your untiring devotedness which often extended to heroism" and, the dear Mother closed her remarks by soliciting the prayers of her sisters, prayers which she stated were the most precious and most valuable gift for her life that was fading and her eternity that was approaching.<sup>41</sup>

Eternity was still some years away, as, at the end of the deliberations of the General Chapter of October 4th, she signed the minute book as the superior of the Province of St. Joseph in Boston, U.S.A.

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<sup>41</sup> Letter of Aug. 16, 1920.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 1920-1924

The capitulants, assembled in the community room on October 4, 1920, chose the following members of the General Council: Mother M.L.O. Dugas, Superior General, along with Mothers Eugénie Dionne, Margaret McKenna, St-Jean-Baptiste, Tassé and Elodie Mailloux as councillors. Bishop Georges Gauthier, auxiliary bishop of Montreal, congratulated the members of the Chapter for their prudence and wisdom.<sup>1</sup>

The momentum given to the Institute, under the governance of Mother Piché, was able to continue as most of the members of Council had shared in the important decisions of recent years. Mother Tassé, the newest member, had gained the trust of the capitulants, based on her personal qualities and on her extensive experience in a variety of situations.

Mother Dugas, who had entered the Grey Nuns on July 14, 1876, soon revealed the richness of her personality, her talents and especially the authenticity of her calling to serve the poor.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to ill-health, Archbishop Bruchési had been confined to his room since several months.

Daughter of Aimé Dugas, a notary, and of Sophie Poirier, member of a large family, she was blessed with a profoundly Christian education and solid instruction. In that family, five members chose religious life: two sons became Jesuit priests, two daughters became Sisters of St. Anne, and one became a Grey Nun.

After two years of initiation to religious life, Sister Dugas made her profession on February 6, 1879, with the first group to pronounce their vows in the chapel on Guy Street which had been blessed by Bishop Fabre on December 23rd of the previous year.

Mother Deschamps, who was superior general at the time, soon discerned the exceptional qualities of the young religious and named her a senior and then sub-mistress at the novitiate. It was during this time that, on March 31, 1879, she guided the first steps of Sister Anna Piché who was destined to head the Congregation and whose successor she had now become.

In a letter to the sisters, she wrote: "Your spirit of faith touches me deeply, as I feel confused to occupy this post, and totally powerless to fill it worthily by myself, but I count on the all-powerful grace of God (...) Fortunately, I need only to allow myself to be inspired by the examples and lessons of those who came before me."<sup>2</sup>

In these few words, Mother Dugas revealed herself completely: a woman of faith, of boundless trust in the goodness of God as Father. In her trials, she knew how to perceive the role of the cross as did Mother d'Youville, and she was convinced that God's kindly Providence also could fill with joy those who abandon the control of their lives to him.

Surrender to God's goodness was the superior general's outstanding characteristic. She had promoted this teaching during her charge as director of formation, as well as at the

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<sup>2</sup> General Chapters of our Institute 1848-1937, p. 308.



mother-house, and in her responsibilities as pharmacist. This she did also, as local superior at St. Boniface Hospital, as director of the St. Mathieu wing in Montreal and then as provincial superior in St. Boniface. It was during this time, in 1915, that the capitulants entrusted her with the charge of assistant general.

Mother Dugas had a genuine love for history; she organized the museum, affirmed the importance of traditions and adhered to them. She recalled the example of her predecessors, especially that of the Foundress, while still being attentive to implementing new methods to meet growing demands in the exercise of the various works.

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Mother Dugas would have many opportunities to exercise her numerous inherent intellectual and spiritual gifts. Challenges at social, familial and other levels evolved rapidly in this post-war period. Sometimes it appeared as though the Atlantic Ocean had become narrower since mail-service had now improved and a greater number of visitors came from overseas.

When the chapter entitled "statistics" was examined by the capitulants, considerable progress was noted. Growth was also registered concerning the activities carried out in the area of Montreal: 342 elderly persons hospitalized and cared for; 2,964 students accommodated, of whom 1,171 orphans received schooling from kindergarten to diploma level; 14, 449 visits to the poor and to the sick in their homes where nursing care, medications, food and clothing were dispensed; 158 vigils with the sick and dying; 81,119 dressings, 8,344 medical prescriptions dispensed and 1,825 families assisted. These totals give an overview of the good being accomplished. The number would have been considerably more if the activities of the 1,135 Grey Nuns of the Canadian west, the Far North and the United States had likewise been recorded. Stability was assured in the fact that 166 novices and postulants in Montreal and St. Boniface would provide personnel. This number was still insufficient to enable the community leaders to acquiesce to the request of the bishop of Eastern Galatia. Bishop Szeptychi had been impressed by the

works he had seen at the mother-house and pleaded for a foundation in Russia; he invoked the high probability that many vocations would surely want to join the Community.<sup>3</sup>

The year 1921 proved to be a very busy year. The superior general began it by making the official visitation of the mother-house and its four filial houses. She delegated one of her assistants to visit the other houses in Montreal until she could go there herself during her term of office.

Mother Dugas found that there had been significant progress in all these areas which now had electricity. She rejoiced that St. Benoit convent was likewise blessed. At the request of parishioners there, a school for boys aged five to twelve years would soon be opened.

The modest St. Anthony hospice at Bonsecours, which had struggled since its foundation in 1877, would definitely emerge from its shadows under the leadership of Sister Bonneau, assisted by her companions and volunteers. To the work of the soup-kitchen and serving the homeless each day, was added a clothing department. For the impoverished children who attended the free school near the hospice, picnics at Ile Grosbois were organized and Christmas, with gift-laden trees, and other festive occasions were celebrated regularly to dispel their misery.

Sister Bonneau's clients kept increasing to the point of becoming a motley crowd; the young and not-so-young, professional and new marginalized persons, ex-prisoners, alcoholics, happy and morose idlers, regular wanderers, all of whom will henceforth be referred to as 'homeless'. Through all these tasks, Sister Bonneau endeavored to relieve every problem encountered. The thought occurred to her to organize a retreat for her protégés. The Franciscan priests agreed to lead it; the sister was deeply moved at seeing the reaction of the participants. She

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<sup>3</sup> Annals of 1921, Nov. 5, p. 278.

reported: "During those days, I saw old men weep and had to leave the room to conceal my own emotions."

This marvelous servant of the poor became well-known in spite of her modesty. The clothing department was located near Friponne Street, a name of ill-repute. (There was question of changing the name and Sister Bonneau was asked to find a replacement. She challenged the proposal, though she regretted it when, a few days later, the name was changed to Bonneau Street.) The intended compliment faded when she began to receive mail addressed to: The Reverend Sister Friponne, Bonneau Street!

The foundations at Killarney, at Youville Shelter and at the St. Brigitte Refuge proved to be sound investments; they offered reliable protection to young girls working in the metropolis or seeking employment there. A similar foundation in Boston, known as the Working Girls' Home, delighted Cardinal William O'Connell who praised it at every opportunity.

In St. Henri, to the hospice originally destined to care for tots, was added regular kindergarten classrooms attended by 390 boys and girls preparing for the regular school program. Moreover, twenty-six orphans frequented classes offered by the Sisters of St. Anne<sup>4</sup>. Lodgings for the elderly existed there as well as at St. Cunégonde, Varennes, St. Jean-sur-le-Richelieu, St. Antoine in Longueuil, St. Joseph in Chambly and St. Joseph in Beauharnois. St. Patrick's and the Catholic Orphanage overflowed with children while the schools of home economics at Bethlehem, at the St. Joseph Residence and at the mother-house were all highly successful.

At Institut Nazareth, the education and instruction given to the blind boys and girls enabled them to qualify for a trade or a profession in view of earning gainful employment. At the current year-end, the institution was honored by the visit of Mr. and Mrs. Vincent d'Indy. The chronicler reported this event, as

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<sup>4</sup> Arch. of St. Henri Shelter.

follows: "The distinguished visitors arrived at eleven o'clock. The wife, tall and beautiful, accompanied the master, the great septuagenarian and kindly virtuoso (...) When the choir interpreted the Cantata Domino which he had composed, he rose to compliment the singers. With toys, the youngest students executed Haydn's symphony and were rewarded with hugs from Mrs. D'Indy (...) In the chapel, these same youngsters sang the Salve Regina and the Quae est Ista of César Franck, knowing that, by giving homage to the master, his devoted student would be very pleased (...)."

The renowned artist and his wife were shown the shop where they admired the various pieces of wickerwork made by the blind: chairs, arm-chairs, household items and more delicate objects.

Two months later, Gabriel Cusson, a student at the school, won the Academy of Music's Prix d'Europe. A boarder at an early age, he studied under the direction of the sisters and lay teachers, among whom was Mr. Arthur Letondal. A graduate from a school affiliated with the University of Montreal, Cusson had specialized in piano, organ and cello. In Paris, he pursued voice, composition and organ, fortunate to have been supported by benefactors.<sup>5</sup>

The Grey Nuns were very pleased with the success achieved at the Nazareth school. Was not Mother d'Youville's first protégé a blind lady, Françoise Auzon?

The motherland, which had been referred to as 'faraway France', commissioned towards its former colony, some of its heroes who had played an important part in the recent conflict. The daily newspapers announced the arrival of Marshal Fayolle who came to acknowledge the help of the Canadian forces and the involvement of civilians during the war. The France-Amérique mission brought the expression of France's gratitude toward Canada. Marshal Fayolle was to present a flag to the

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<sup>5</sup> Annals 1924-25, pp. 212-213.

22nd regiment but, to his embarrassment, Colonel Dubuc confided to Father R. Labelle, that a flag would have to be made and ready for June 24th! The superior of St. Sulpice suggested: "Go to the Grey Nuns (...)."

Sisters St. Claire and Ursin began at once to produce the emblems needed for the blue standard, but, since there was not enough time to embroider them, two artists, Sisters Marie-du-Rédempteur and Alma Lussier were called upon to paint them; the flag was completed and given to Colonel Dubuc who was delighted with the results.

Mr. Dandurand, president of France-Amérique, conveyed the admiration of Marshal Fayolle to the artists; a few months later, the flag was returned to the Grey Nuns studio to have the painted work replaced by embroidery.<sup>6</sup>

"If Marshal Foch knew of your talents, he would surely come to have his portrait painted here," said the Colonel when the highest commander of the armed forces, in turn, came to Montreal on December 12th. High tributes were extended to him. The sisters were not visited, but they recorded their edification at the gestures of faith made by this famous man: attendance at Mass and respectful signs of the cross, gestures which the Americans also had admired during the war.<sup>7</sup>

Progress in the Grey Nuns' ministries was not confined only to Montreal. The houses in Toledo, Ohio, literally prospered. St. Vincent's Hospital was patronized by patients of many nationalities and creeds; students at the school of nursing attached to it since 1896, recorded notable success. During the summer months, St. Anthony's Orphanage was transformed into a retreat center for clergy. Statistics also indicated that seven of their former students had become members of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

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<sup>6</sup> Annals 1921, pp. 155 & 171.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 331.

As she reflected on these successes, Mother Dugas recalled the 1880's when serious difficulties almost destroyed these two apostolates. The Lord chose to intervene on time, thanks to the intervention of Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore.<sup>8</sup> Now, the demise of this benefactor was announced at the end of March.

As bishop for the past fifty-three years and cardinal for thirty-five years, this eminent prelate was involved in the life of his country and in that of the Church where he played an important role among men. Through the intervention of Ambassador Jusserand, the government of France had made him a member of the Legion of Honor on October 23, 1918. The Cardinal used this opportunity to pay homage to the Sulpician priests, stating, "Almighty God has made no greater gift to the American Church than when he inspired Bishop Carroll to invite them to Baltimore."

On the day of Cardinal Gibbons's burial, Mr. Ritchie, Governor of the State of Maryland, proclaimed a civic holiday to honor the passing of this great man, while President Harding said of him: "The death of this man is a loss for the nation."<sup>9</sup>

On learning of the honors bestowed on this churchman, Mother Dugas realized anew that "Providence accomplishes great marvels", words which were included in her daily prayer.<sup>10</sup> The calm which she showed amidst disconcerting circumstances was observed by those around her. They were equally edified by her efforts to maintain the primitive spirit within her religious family.

The Grey Nuns deplored the delay in the process of the Cause of canonization of Mother d'Youville occasioned by post-war conditions. Then, somewhat to their astonishment, circumstances lent themselves to the realization of a cherished dream:

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. "Essor Apostolique", p. 103.

<sup>9</sup> Annals 1921, p. 79.

<sup>10</sup> Invocations to Divine Providence prescribed by M. d'Youville from the beginning of the foundation.

that of a proclamation of the heroicity of the Foundress's virtues as a result of a petition countersigned by the bishops of all dioceses where the Grey Nuns were established. This step forward was particularly welcome in this year marking the 150th anniversary of Mother d'Youville's death.<sup>11</sup>

The reconstruction of the area where Mother d'Youville had surrendered her beautiful soul to God was already in progress. Built with material from the room itself, this precious relic was located in the crypt.<sup>12</sup> Mother Assistant Tassé was assigned responsibility for the project designated as the Room of Memories.<sup>13</sup> The coat-of-arms was placed in evidence during this period of preparation. According to Father Sattin, this insignia had been made in 1829 (...) The symbols which comprised it represented inexhaustible charity, courage, magnanimous zeal and great love for one's neighbors, all qualities personified in the beloved Mother.<sup>14</sup> Mother d'Youville's spiritual portrait, described in a pamphlet by Sister Clémentine Drouin, and in a booklet attributed to Father Dubois and published as a tract, would, hopefully, make her better known.

Anniversaries seemed to abound. At St. Boniface, the 50th anniversary of the founding of the hospital was celebrated on August 24th. Mother Eugénie Dionne, an assistant general and former provincial superior, along with Sister Lamoureux, a former local superior of the institution, were present. By this time, the modest building of 1871 had been replaced by a spacious edifice able to accommodate five hundred patients. The celebration lasted two days.

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<sup>11</sup> Mother d'Youville died Dec. 23, 1771.

<sup>12</sup> General Chapters 1849-1937, p. 303, art. 5.

<sup>13</sup> The reconstruction was carried out with the financial help of the various houses. Note that the students in Ft. Chipewyan contributed \$15 from sales of needle-craft.

<sup>14</sup> Annals 1921, pp. 398-399.

Excerpts of the speech given by Doctor Collin, surgeon, were reproduced in the annals of the community<sup>15</sup> and read, as follows: "A half-century is not a long time in the life of an institution destined to endure for several centuries. More than 124,000 persons of every nationality and religious persuasion have come here to seek restoration to health or the lessening of their pain; thousands of others will continue to come, and the Sisters of Charity and their collaborators will pursue the rewarding task of saving lives and soothing pain. As we consider the worthy mission which the St. Boniface Hospital has fulfilled during these fifty years, we trust wholeheartedly that it may continue to endure from age to age, like a giant tree solidly rooted in these fertile plains."

For his part, Doctor McKenty signaled the fact that "The first inspection of Canadian hospitals by the American College of Surgeons added the name of the St. Boniface Hospital to the list of approved institutions. I am confident that our hospital will always keep this place of honor as long as it remains under the management of the Grey Nuns."<sup>16</sup>

Two months later, the missionaries of Manitoba had another occasion to rejoice: Father J.H. Prud'homme, one of their former students at Provencher school, was consecrated bishop on October 28th. He recalled that he had been taught by Sister Laurent and affirmed that he was privileged to bring to his episcopal see in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, the precious gift offered to him by Archbishop Béliveau: the crozier having belonged successively to Bishops Taché and Langevin.

The great day of December 23rd was approaching. On the 9th, there came a cablegram from the Sovereign Pontiff extending an Apostolic Blessing to the Institute as a pledge of divine favors. Father Noel Fauteux gave conferences on the life and works of Mother d'Youville. On December 21st, Mother

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<sup>15</sup> Annals 1921, p. 264.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. pp. 267-268.



Piché offered her special gift by bringing, from Boston, four postulants who had made their entry in the small chapel of Lawrence and now came to receive their religious formation in Montreal.<sup>17</sup>

On the morning of the 22nd, representatives of the sister-communities came to the mother-house to rejoice with their elder sisters by visiting the Room of Memories located close to the vault containing the remains of the Venerable Foundress.

The solemn Mass on the 23rd was celebrated by His Excellency, Bishop Pietro di Maria, Apostolic Delegate. In attendance were: Bishops Gauthier of Montreal, Forbes of Joliette, Breynat of the Mackenzie, and Decelles representing the bishop of St. Hyacinthe. Five hundred religious and lay guests filled the nave where they enjoyed the choir now highly renowned for its Solemn chant.

Following the Holy Sacrifice, Bishop Gauthier blessed the Room of Memories which elicited many favorable comments. Those present also appreciated the privilege of kneeling at the prie-dieu formerly used by the Foundress.

Evening closed on this lovely day, soon to be followed by that commemorating the birth of Love Incarnate. The next day, the students from the professional school and those of Nazareth performed for the Board of Governors of the Foundling Asylum and their spouses. A play summarizing the Foundress's life, the development of the various works which she had inaugurated, and the transfer of the Institute to Guy Street, fifty years earlier.

Mrs. Marie Gérin-Lajoie, who had presided at this gathering, interpreted the sentiments of the audience, as follows: "I hesitate to speak at this time and risk to distract you from the deep and fond emotions which you are experiencing. This Community of Grey Nuns, which we have always venerated, has drawn us

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<sup>17</sup> The postulate in Lawrence was only temporary, and was later transferred to Cambridge.

more intimately today and we have almost heard its heart beat (...) Could we part without telling these women, perhaps our relatives, and certainly our friends, of our admiration for their untiring devotedness? (...) Our religious Congregations do not rise solely to the glory of God, they are a glory to our race (...) Let us praise this Community which has given rise to four other mother-houses: St. Hyacinthe, Ottawa, Quebec and Nicolet. The Grey Nuns conduct 205 establishments, 5,596 sisters of whom 3,900 live on to accomplish this imposing work (...) Blessed be the great Christian woman who has presided over our destiny; we hope soon to venerate her in relics on our altars. We celebrate today, the 150th anniversary of her entry into eternal life. This woman who was so self-effacing, now appears glorious in the history of the Church and of our motherland. Sisters, you are the living image of your noble Foundress."<sup>18</sup>

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Mrs. Gérin-Lajoie's hopes echoed the most ardent wishes of all the members of the Community, but especially of Mother Dugas. On several occasions, she had stated: "This favor is linked to our fidelity to her spirit and to her example of charity on behalf of the destitute." The superior general did not minimize the difficulties presented by such an ideal, but instead, she stressed the Foundress's devotion to the cross. "The cross was a part of her life," she declared, "and yet, her hope remained invincible." On August 20, 1766, Mother d'Youville had written to her niece: "Crosses are essential to salvation," but she remained confident that God's help would arrive on time. She had also written: "Providence is admirable; it has resources beyond our understanding."

As the years went by, the Grey Nuns had many opportunities to note the alternance of joys and sorrows. The news from overseas announcing the death of the Sovereign Pontiff, Benedict XV

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<sup>18</sup> Mrs. Marie Gérin-Lajoie is the mother of the foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of Good Council.

on January 22, 1922, reached them in the fourth week of the new year. The entire world proclaimed the merits of this incomparable pastor; he had been an advocate of peace during the war and had achieved a better relationship between the Holy See and the governments of Italy and France. It was learned that, in Rome, flags were flown at half-mast, a homage that had been omitted for over a half-century.

The Sovereign Pontiff's message to the Grey Nuns at the time of the 150th anniversary, had included this uplifting phrase: "The Holy Father and the Congregation of Rites have a particular interest in the Cause of Beatification of the Venerable Mother d'Youville" (signed by Cardinal Gasparri).<sup>19</sup> The desire to see the Cause progress, and the hope that had been somewhat enhanced by the very rapid process of those of the little Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the humble Bernadette of Lourdes.<sup>20</sup>

Now the dream underwent a new and indefinite delay. Surely, the Pope will have a successor; His Holiness, Pius XI was elected on February 6th, but it would be some time before this matter would be brought up again for study. The fact remained, however, that the Venerable Mother was becoming better known and loved if one judged by the many visits to the Room of Memories. People came to implore favors and to ask the heavenly Father to glorify his servant. The numerous favors obtained were submitted to the authorities for study.

Admiration for Mother d'Youville reached beyond the frontiers of her native land, thanks to a book written by Father Duchaussois, o.m.i. Writing from LaRoseaie, Vendée in France, a lady named Mrs. Martineau, attributed the heroism of the missionaries of the Far North to the inspiration of the Foundress. In appreciation, she sent a generous monetary offering to the

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<sup>19</sup> Annals 1921, p. 332.

<sup>20</sup> These two candidates to sainthood would be canonized in 1925 and 1933 respectively.

hospice at Great Slave Lake (Fort Resolution), to provide medicine for the sisters, those holy women deprived of all comforts.<sup>21</sup>

With the delivery of this tribute, there arrived a bulletin reporting that Montreal's City Hall had been a prey to flames during the night of March 3rd; the important documents were, however, saved from destruction. Three weeks later, the Basilica of St. Anne-de-Beaupré burned to the ground; the loss was incalculable, as so many precious souvenirs were attached to this temple. Four days later, Montreal's Church of the Sacred Heart was likewise completely destroyed. The population began to suspect that these mishaps were perhaps attributable to racial tensions or religious fanaticism. Such was, however, not the case in the trial that fell to Châteauguay: a thunderbolt had struck the cross on the mound. This misfortune had occurred once before, in 1889; the cross was soon replaced, as it was once again by September 3rd. The forty-five foot cross would once more dominate the mound where it served for a focal point for pilots. May it also have served to remind the residents that their only hope was in the cross!

This theme of Christian hope was artistically proclaimed by Theodore Botrel, a bard from Brittany, who came to Montreal in April. The Grey Nuns were privileged to attend a conference by this gentleman, sometimes referred to as 'the psalmist of the 20th century', and also a recital given for the benefit of the blind of Nazareth and their professors. As his predecessors had done, Father L. Bouhier, at Notre-Dame, had been responsible for obtaining this entertainment for the Communities of Montreal.

It was also with pleasure that the chronicler announced, on May 13th, a remarkable favor granted to the Priests of St. Sulpice and dated December 23rd, 1921, a date particularly significant to the Grey Nuns. By Apostolic letter, Benedict XV gave it the

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<sup>21</sup> Father Demers who was studying in Rome reported that Father Duchaussois, while giving a conference in the Capital of Christianity, shared with his audience, his admiration for the Northern missionaries.

permanent privilege of accepting the direction and management of seminaries entrusted to them by bishops throughout the world, without having recourse to the Holy See.<sup>22</sup> This was decidedly an unprecedented favor, as was explained in the Franciscan Review: "Prior to accrediting the Priests of St. Sulpice as eminently qualified to educate the clergy, the Pope had received a unanimous favorable opinion from the bishops (...) to this effect. This was, in fact, an outstanding testimony to the Sulpicians established by the Venerable Jean-Jacques Olier. The fifteen or so original seminarians multiplied in France and in America. Though they had become important landlords in Montreal, they continued to deal kindly with the humble and the unfortunate; their wealth made it possible for them to make discreet offerings and sometimes even princely gifts. Learned men and popular authors, they ever remained examples of simplicity; as priests, they exercised truly apostolic zeal in ministering to souls."

Among the protégés of the Grey Nuns, several have become Sulpicians; others have become diocesan clergy, or members of various Congregations; some have joined the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and it is with these that the sisters labored "in the most difficult missions of the world,"<sup>23</sup> those of Canada's Far North.

It is also with the Oblates that the ministry of industrial schools for the natives has been exercised in the western provinces. One of these, the school at Dunbow, closed its doors after thirty-eight years of operation. Founded in 1884 by the renowned Father Albert Lacombe for the Black Foot Nation, the school, at first, played an important role. Later, the house began to deteriorate and the number of students declined due to the increasing number of day schools on the reserves.<sup>24</sup> Eight other

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<sup>22</sup> Annals 1922-23. P. 125.

<sup>23</sup> This designation was made by His Holiness, Pius XI, after Bishop G. Breynat had acquainted him with the difficulties of the missions of the Far North.

<sup>24</sup> S.G.M. Arch. files of High River, Dunbow.

schools in the west were staffed by the Grey Nuns, as well as one in Fort Totten, N.D. This school which had opened at the request of the Benedictine priests in 1874, had doubled its function by opening a small hospital where nurses treated the Sioux whose language they attempted to learn.

During the summer of 1922, the superior general attended the golden jubilee of Father Jerome who had dedicated forty-five years to the development of this work. Bishops O'Reilly of Fargo, N.D., Wherle of Bismark and fifty priests escorted the jubilarian, leaning on a cane and surrounded by a guard of honor consisting of the most prominent among the Sioux. It was a supreme homage to this priest who would not live to see the 50th anniversary of that institution two years later; he died on December 27, 1923.

From Fort Totten, Mother Dugas went to St. Boniface in mid-July, shortly after having learned of the fire which had occurred at Hospice Taché during the night of June 14-15th. No lives were lost but the building was seriously damaged. The municipal authorities, who visited the place, could find no explanation for the fire. It was finally thought that it had been deliberately set.

Without delay, Mother Dugas began the visitation of the houses of Manitoba. She had barely left Fort Frances when she learned, on October 2nd, of the conflagration in Ontario. A forest fire claimed about forty victims and left 5,000 homeless. Five cities and towns were destroyed, among which was Haileybury, the episcopal see. The sisters expressed their sympathy to Bishop Latulippe, a friend of the Community, who had three nieces as Grey Nuns.<sup>25</sup> The sympathy of the Grey Nuns was likewise extended to the Sisters of Providence who had also been stricken. Mother Gamelin's daughters had experienced the loss of two of their houses in Haileybury while, on the same day, a part of the mental hospital of St. Jean-de-Dieu in Montreal had

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<sup>25</sup> Bishop Latulippe died the following Dec. 14. "One of the country's most noble figures". In him, the Church lost a heroic pastor, and French Canada an outstanding leader.

also become prey to flames. It was no longer doubted: one or several arsonists were attacking religious institutions. This opinion was corroborated by a message from Mother Allaire, Provincial Superior, informing the superior general that the Provincial House and the St. Boniface Hospital had received threats.

In her role as member of the Council of the Catholic Hospital Association, Mother Dugas attended the doctors' convention in Winnipeg on September 1st. On November 12th, she gave a conference at a nurses' convention on the responsibilities entrusted to a hospital superintendent. Her address brought warm congratulations from Father Moulinier, s.j., head of the American Catholic Hospital Association.

Mother Dugas encouraged the sisters to attend these events, just as she urged the teachers to become competent educators, promoted courses relative to agriculture for those employed on farms, encouraged learning the solemn chants of Solesmnes at the Benedictine school, facilitated courses in English and lessons in art.<sup>26</sup>

The superior general's directives also specified the need for leisure and vacation, not only for students but also for the sisters and for all categories of people in their care. She was never concerned that this might be abused. She trusted the dedication generously exercised by everyone amid many hardships, with the words: "I felt that our Venerable Mother would look upon her daughters' apostolate with genuine satisfaction." She had written these lines in December while in St. Albert,<sup>27</sup> as she was preparing to leave for the schools of Holy Family in Ile-à-la-Crosse and of Sacred Heart in Beauval.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Sr. Marie-du-Rédempteur made a beautiful tableau of the Eternal Father, while Sr. A Lussier gave Sr. Dalton a painting of St. Agnes, the patron of her superior at the mother-house.

<sup>27</sup> This refers to her traditional message of Dec. 23 (Gen. Chap. of our Inst. 1849-1937 p. 320).

<sup>28</sup> Mother Tassé, Ass't Gen., replaced Mother Deegan, suffering from ill-health. Mother St. Grégoire succeeded her as provincial and Mother Tassé returned to Montreal after an absence of eleven months.

At eight-thirty on the morning of December 20th, Mother Dugas, accompanied by Sister Raymond, left Big River. Brothers Auguste and Lavoie, o.m.i., Mr. Guétre, a postulant, and a boy from the school in Beauval completed the caravan.<sup>29</sup> The equipment was quite primitive: on the first sleigh were placed two trunks, one of which served as a seat; there were also provisions for the travelers and for the horses, cooking utensils and various instruments which might be needed in case of accidents. The sisters took their place in a trailer attached to a sleigh. Several stops were made along the difficult trek and the two Grey Nuns were relieved to be occasionally invited to a warm meal by former students of the school who lived along the way. They reached Beauval in the evening of December 22nd.

The joy of meeting was mutual and very much savored. Mother Dugas shared with the sisters, news received from Montreal: the condition of the health of the senior sisters who had missioned in Beauval, the celebration of the 75th anniversary of St. Patrick's parish, the blessing of the cornerstone of Notre-Dame Hospital being built at the angle of Sherbrooke and Maisonneuve Streets rather than in Old Montreal, and finally, a benefactor's princely gift of a Casavant organ to the mother-house.

Alas, to this list of news, was added that of the fires: in November, the University of Montreal, the shops of the Beauport shelter under the management of the Grey Nuns of Quebec and the destruction of most of the town of Terrebonne. At St. Boniface, the College was totally destroyed and ten lives were lost, namely, those of a Jesuit priest and nine students.<sup>30</sup> On December 5th, it was the Sulpicians who were severely tried when their house of solitude at Oka went up in flames. The local citizens, both Protestant and Catholic, fortunately, were able to save the church and the convent. This accident was attributed to an explosion in the heating system. If the superior general had

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<sup>29</sup> The notes were taken from the superior general's travel diary.

<sup>30</sup> Fr. Jacques Dugas was rector of this college from 1903 to 1908.



been less far away, she would have known also of the destruction of the Notre-Dame-des-Victoires Church, Quebec's old historic temple, one of the most venerable religious buildings of the country, which was reduced to ashes on December 21st. There was soon evidence that the destructive power of fire would continue when, on January 3rd, the Provencher School in St. Boniface, under the direction of the Marist Brothers, was completely annihilated by flames.

At Beauval, seventy-two students received instruction in this neat building, supplied with electricity and steam heating. Mother Dugas observed the excellent behavior of the children at prayer who also were delighted by her distribution of gifts.

The stay in Beauval came to a close on December 29th and the Mother left for Ile-à-la-Crosse. During this cold season, four stoves were needed to maintain a reasonable temperature; the nights were frigid. This inconvenience did not seem to hamper the cheerful disposition of the residents. Mother Dugas wrote: "I doubt that happier children could be found anywhere."

In spite of the drifting snow, the travelers took to the road again on January 8th. There was sadness because Sister St. Nazaire (replaced by Sister Raymond) was leaving the place where she had spent so many years, to become the superior at Beauval. After having experienced the hazards of the North, the superior general arrived in Saskatoon on the 23rd where she remained until returning to Montreal on February 10th, accompanied by her secretary, Sister Panet, and Sister Duckett who had been named consultant for the hospitals operated by the Grey Nuns.

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The cross appeared again under its most dreaded form, affecting the entire community, particularly that of the Little North (the term used to designate the two posts of northern Saskatchewan, namely, Ile-à-la-Crosse and Beauval).

On September 29, 1923, everyone at Ile-à-la-Crosse was in a holiday mood; they were going to pick berries, a joyful event

for the students and one which often included a picnic. To a large motor boat was attached a canoe carrying Sister Cécile Nadeau and seven students. The canoe struck an under-water post and capsized. Four young boys were rescued, but the other three, along with Sister Nadeau, were submerged and drowned. The entire population of Ile-à-la-Crosse shared this bereavement and attended the funeral in the parish church on September 30th. "How mysterious are God's ways," said Father Rossignol, the superior at the mission, "We believed that Sister Nadeau was needed here. She was doing so much good; she was young, only twenty-nine years old, she seemed well suited for a long career. Very active, devoted, intelligent, well-liked by her students; yet, the Lord chose to take her unto himself."<sup>31</sup>

The sisters of Beauval, including Sister St. Nazaire who had known the dear departed one intimately, attended the funeral. The superior had no idea that she, herself, would be the next fatality. A typhoid epidemic broke out in Beauval; in spite of the care provided by the seven sisters on staff, 150 Chipewyan children died. Sister St. Nazaire was tireless in caring for the afflicted when she, too, contracted the disease. Her companions who cared for her pleaded with her not to leave them, to which she replied: "I believe that I will die but, have no fear, I will beg the Lord to put an end to this scourge which so distresses you."<sup>32</sup> She died at eight-fifteen in the evening of November 19th. Bishop O. Charlebois, Apostolic Vicar for Keewatin, wrote the following message to Mother Dugas: "In spite of our fervent prayers, the Lord did not choose to heed us. He recalled our good and saintly Sister St. Nazaire. This death, following on that of Sister Nadeau, leaves us in great distress."<sup>33</sup>

The loss of these two excellent missionaries brought to a total of twenty-four, the number of unanticipated deaths in 1923. Meanwhile, the services of the Grey Nuns were being

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<sup>31</sup> Lesage, "Capitale d'une Solitude", pp. 162-163.

<sup>32</sup> Duchaussois, "Femmes Héroïques", pp. 48-49.

<sup>33</sup> Letter of Nov. 30, 1923.

solicited more than ever for apostolic works. News was already circulating that a new post had been accepted at Aklavik, which the Inuit called 'top of the world'.

The cross extended its reach beyond the Little North. In Toledo, the land of abundance, diphtheria and scarlet fever epidemics necessitated a quarantine of the orphanage, while in Worcester, St. Anne's Orphanage was condemned by the safety inspectors because it was not fire resistant.

At St. Boniface, hard times continued for over three years and many families had to abandon their farm. The sisters' concern for the needy prompted a gesture on their part which, Archbishop Béliveau said, filled him with awe. The General Council endorsed a proposal to assign the Provincial House, newly built in 1911, to the use of the elderly and orphans, while the sisters would return to the old convent. The transfer took place on October 22nd and 23rd, at the time of the commemoration of the centenary of Bishop Taché's birth.

Perhaps this notable event and the recall of the zeal of the first Oblate bishop of western Canada had aroused old prejudices. During the night of December 31, 1924, a fire broke out in the hen house on the Youville farm. It was discovered early so the damage was minimal and only the old part was destroyed. The prompt arrival of the fire brigade enabled them to save the new part of the hen house.

Around this time, authorities of the Jesuit College of St. Boniface, which had also been destroyed by fire some time earlier, rejoiced upon learning that financial help would be available to hasten the restoration. Cardinal Bégin, the Archbishop of Quebec, had appealed to the spirit of solidarity of the Catholic population of that province, and they had responded with remarkable generosity.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The College & Seminary were merged into one building. St. Boniface Chron. P. 71 & 109.

In spite of the difficult times, the work of restoring the St. Roch Hospital was finally completed and the building, once in disrepair, was again well equipped to conform to its specific purpose. The institution was blessed and opened to the public on August 30th.

In the east, redesigning had taken place at the hospital of St. Jean-sur-le-Richelieu. On May 31st, the newspaper, LE CANADA FRANCAIS, published the following announcement: "The public will be pleased to learn that the hospital has been completely updated and now has modern facilities comparable to those in the larger hospitals of Montreal."

The hospitals in Montreal! They were still vulnerable to arsonists: the hospital for Incurables, the Bruchési Institute, the Gamelin Hospice, all were, in turn, engulfed in flames within the year. The 350 incurables were received at the Monastery of the Precious Blood and at the Catholic Orphanage until they could be accommodated in the various hospitals of the city. The Knights of Columbus sheltered fifty in their club rooms at St. Henri. Both ambulatory and bed-ridden patients were housed at the Catholic Orphanage. Every space was occupied. Lieutenant Colonel Ostell, president of the Committee for the orphanage was involved with these placements.

The superior general of the Sisters of Providence wrote to Mother Dugas: "Your community deserves a special tribute of gratitude. Your sisters at the Catholic Orphanage and at the St. Paul and Notre-Dame Hospitals continue to be admirable in caring for our dear patients." Ten patients found shelter at the mother-house on Guy Street, while the Catholic Orphanage provided hospitality to the ten sisters entrusted with the reconstruction of the damaged building.

The Grey Nuns were not entirely spared; in this same year of 1923, the employees' residence at Châteauguay was threatened by fire on November 23rd. It was impossible to obtain help from the outside as there was no bridge and the ice on Rivière-du-Loup was still too thin. The situation was handled very capably and total destruction was averted, a favor attributed to Mother d'Youville.

Four months later, on March 24, 1924 another alarm sounded at the mother-house. While making his rounds, the night watchman had detected flames escaping from the laundry room. The north wing was overcome by smoke. An order was given to evacuate the place at once, as the fire fighters feared the destruction of the entire wing. Fortunately, two stairways and skillful feats facilitated the escape. All lives were spared and a fervent *Te Deum* arose after all danger had been overcome.

In the midst of so many trials and tribulations, Mother Dugas' attitude was particularly admirable. Nothing seemed to diminish her great trust, her surrender to divine Providence. Without anxiety or many words, she moved forward regardless of difficulties which were faced with great objectivity; so, on January 17, 1924, she signed a contract to pursue the construction which had remained at the planning stage for the past ten years, and now begged completion. Government authorities generally gave financial support to institutions of charity<sup>35</sup> but could not cover all the costs entailed for this project, so a loan became imperative. This building, which had initially been destined as a shelter for the elderly, would, instead, be used for the work of the Crèche and the kindergarten; seven hundred children, aged from birth to six years, would be located in this fire resistant building.<sup>36</sup> Sister Benoit was appointed superior. She resided at the neighboring orphanage while following the progress of the work. Messrs. Piché, architect, and Morsen, contractor, completed the building by the end of the year.

During that time, Mother Dugas planned to visit the five missions of the Far North going as far as fifty miles from the Beauport Sea, to choose the location of the future mission of Aklavik. To Bishop Breynat who had requested missionaries for this post located at the 68th parallel North, the superior general had replied: "You may always count on the Grey Nuns; rather

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<sup>35</sup> Annals 1921, p. 203.

<sup>36</sup> The space liberated by the transfer of the small children from the mother-house, would be transformed into a department for the elderly.

than refuse, we would close other houses where replacements might be found." The reason given by the bishop was to announce the Good News to the Inuit who considered themselves as super-human but who remained vulnerable to the vices of white people. For this reason, it was deemed important to counter-balance the influence of miners who were generally not devout people.

The departure from Montreal took place on May 8th, but Mother Dugas, with Sisters St. Gregoire and Létourneau, did not reach Waterways, (a distance of three hundred miles from Edmonton) until the 28th. The superior general was eager to see these missions, so difficult of access. It had sometimes happened that letters sent in mid-August reached her only at the end of June of the following year!

Troubles, both anticipated and unexpected, awaited the travelers. The railway ended at Waterways; from there, the sisters walked along difficult paths until they reached a wharf where a flat-boat awaited them.<sup>37</sup> They climbed aboard the Northern Echo which was most uncomfortable, then on old barges which occasionally landed on reefs due to low water levels. At times, they could not advance without waiting long hours or even days. It was impossible to land at Fort Chipewyan, so the travelers mounted a frail barge with, as navigator, Coadjutor Bishop Jousard who had been waiting for them since a few hours. The missionaries who greeted them at the shore were so filled with joy that one could almost hear their hearts beat, leaving them speechless for a moment. Later, they recounted the various events of the past years: they spoke of the epidemics of influenza, smallpox and measles, the quarantine imposed by a stern doctor whom all the sick consulted and who actually did accomplish wonders. Father Le Doussal, and a child of destiny known as little George, had both died.

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<sup>37</sup> Details ext. from Mother Dugas' travel diary.

The departure from Fort Chipewyan took place hastily at midnight on June 14th. Mother Girouard, the provincial superior, joined the group at this point. The travelers had been navigating for barely an hour when the boat landed on a sandbank. An automobile from Fort Fitzgerald brought the passengers to St. Anne's Hospital in Fort Smith where the visitation began on Sunday, June 15th. There were thirteen patients at the hospital while six children, residing there, attended the school. The Trader vessel, which was expected on the 17th, arrived two days late. After the customary visit to the graveyard, the sisters went to the shore, hoping to embark, but the boat did not leave until the 20th. There were numerous stops along the way to gather firewood. During the long periods of waiting on deck, they were devoured by hungry mosquitoes. On Sunday, June 22nd, the vessel dropped anchor in front of the mission of Fort Resolution because it was impossible to dock. At this early hour, the sisters were still asleep. Doctor Bourget, who was notified by his sister, went to meet them in his small boat.

After having met with the sisters individually, Mother Dugas visited the school and found that the students were a credit to their teachers. This impression was endorsed by Doctor Bourget, the agent for Indian Affairs, who had arrived at the Fort the previous year. In a report, he wrote: "I congratulate you and your co-workers for the evident progress of the students entrusted to you (...) It must be a joy and a source of legitimate pride to see your persevering efforts crowned with success."<sup>38</sup>

The Lady McWorth boat, en route to Fort Providence, and due on July 1st, arrived only on the 3rd. A large cabin, reserved for the inspector of the Hudson Bay Company, was made available to the sisters. Along the way, they occasionally met students

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<sup>38</sup> These successes were a consolation for the missionaries who had been saddened by the Lebeau affair. Wed to a former student, he killed his wife, Adelaide and her child. Sentenced to death by hanging, he was visited by the sisters. He acknowledged his fault and died after having expressed his repentance.

of the school and Mother Dugas was pleased to observe their gratitude towards their teachers. Before leaving for the next post, Mother wrote in her diary: "Mother St. Grégoire was delighted to see, once more, the Mackenzie country so dear to her heart; she was warmly greeted by the residents on Saturday, July 5th." She also mentioned the presence of Doctor and Mrs. Bourget who had arrived there ahead of time with their young daughter.

Fort Providence! It was here that it all began fifty-seven years earlier. "The building now threatens to fall into ruins and constantly requires repairs; it is dark and gives one a feeling of sadness (...) Nevertheless, the sisters are cheerful and generous." After having spent time with the missionaries, the superior general visited the camps of the natives. She observed that the children bore rather unique names, such as King George, Queen Mary, etc. Baptiste Bouvier, one of Mother Ward's former students, gave five dollars to Mother Dugas as a mark of appreciation towards his former teacher. She wrote: "From these old walls comes the odor of poverty, of humility and of devotion, as reminders of the apostolic zeal of its founders. By living here, one experiences a sentiment of veneration as though in the presence of precious relics; our sisters realize this and endeavor to remain worthy of their predecessors."

After waiting for five days, the travelers left aboard The Pioneer vessel. The captain was disappointed that he had no cabin for them. The sisters were grateful for a place on the deck. But Mrs. Bourget, who had noticed a yacht attached to The Pioneer, asked that it be made available to the sisters; she set up four mattresses to assure their comfort. The farewells were tempered by the prospect of a brief stop on the return trip.

The arrival at Fort Simpson occurred on July 28th. After the noon meal, the guests visited the house which they found quite functional. They also admired the attractive parish church which had been built by the Catholics and Protestants together and which gathered all these Christians for the yearly midnight Mass. As at other posts, devotedness was a standard characteristic and Mother Dugas reiterated to the sisters, her genuine pride at their generosity.



On July 31st, it was announced that The Distributor vessel which had arrived the day before and was scheduled to leave early, could not leave, however, until three o'clock in the afternoon. This time, the travelers were directed toward Aklavik, a fifteen-day return trip. Mother Dugas wrote that there was only one distraction, but it was a magnificent one: the view was breath-taking!

The journey continued with stops at Fort Norman and at Fort Good Hope, the latter of which contained a fortress; there were no roads but there were sidewalks to the church. After Mass, the sisters shook hands with the natives, among whom were Celestine and her husband, Barnabé, both former students of Mother Ward, as well as others who had been taught by Mother St. Grégoire. Mother Dugas wrote in her journal: "I bless the Lord for having this dear Mother as a travel companion; she promotes goodwill all along the way."

On Monday, they reached the Arctic Red River, then Fort McPherson and finally, on August 5th, they arrived at Aklavik, the land of the Brown Bear, where they saw about fifteen small houses. Mother St. Grégoire who had visited there the previous year, noted that little had changed.

The arrival of the sisters surprised the two Oblate brothers who were building a house for the missionary. The visitors looked around to choose a spot for the convent. This complex, built of wood and measuring thirty-five by fifty feet, would include a hospital and a school. The barrenness of the soil rather astonished the superior general; a few wild flowers seemed to smile at the passersby who picked them as souvenirs.

In the humble abode of Brother Berkschoeffer and Latreille, the sisters placed an image of the Venerable Mother d'Youville with the invocation: "I entrust to you this house in Aklavik. May all the sisters who will be working here become holy and make God known to the dear Inuit people." In the afternoon, they went to the chosen area to install, in the trunk of a spruce tree, a statue of the Immaculate Conception, patroness of the future convent, with the date of August 5, 1924. Medals of the Blessed

Virgin, Saint Joseph and a picture of Mother d'Youville, were also buried there. Mother considered this as 'a taking of possession' and added, "I am mindful that today, at the mother-house, aspirants are being admitted for initiation to the Grey Nun way of life." She had already stated that she saw in the forthcoming profession of thirty-three novices in February, the Eternal Father's endorsement of the project for Aklavik.

The return journey began on August 6th with brief stops at inhabited posts where sick persons were brought aboard: a paraplegic man accompanied by his wife, a blind native was cared for by the sisters. On Sunday, August 10th, they stopped at Fort Norman to attend a Mass celebrated by Coadjutor Bishop Fallaize who had recently visited Aklavik. He entrusted to the travelers, a young girl of the Hareskin tribe who had severely burned her right hand; infection had set in, the five fingers had fallen off and the hand looked like a cauliflower. The 'three Mothers' endeavored to bring relief to the poor girl while also attending to the blind lady. A messenger came to tell Mother Girouard: "The old woman is calling for you", only to learn that the woman wanted help to 'unplug her pipe'! The sisters also cared for people ill with the flu. During one of the stops, the person responsible for the passengers, gathered a bouquet of wild flowers which he offered to the sisters, along with a request: to provide the services of a sister to care for all the travelers during the season of navigation. Naturally, the request was not accepted.

The sick were left at Fort Simpson while the remaining passengers continued their way with stops made at various posts as foreseen. On August 9th, they arrived at Fort Chipewyan for the celebration of its 50th anniversary which was taking place the next day.

In spite of his eighty-five years, Bishop Grouard had made the trip there; he was led to the place of honor in the sanctuary and gave the homily. He was deeply moved as he recalled the difficulties experienced at the time of the foundation. When the sisters came first to Providence, had he not exclaimed: "Is it possible that women would come to affront the challenges of cold, of isolation and of the extreme deprivations of the North?"

Following the banquet to which the entire population had been summoned by the bell in the humble belfry,<sup>39</sup> Bishop Jousard, coadjutor to Bishop Grouard, read a telegram in which Mr. Poincaré, president of the French Republic, conferred upon Bishop Grouard, the Cross of the Knights of the National Order of the Legion of Honor. "A distinguished linguist, a true scholar, an artist, a printer and especially, an experienced missionary, it is becoming that the Cross of Honor should adorn his chest."

Among those who attended this feast was Father Napoleon Laferté, an Oblate and a native of Fort Chipewyan, who had been ordained the previous year by the venerable elder. Soon, Patrick Mercredi, another student of 'Chip', would be leaving for Edmonton to study for the priesthood. In the opinion of the Legionnaire of Honor and of the Grey Nuns, these native vocations were the ultimate decoration, discerned by the Master of the harvest to those who spread the Gospel.

Except for Mother Girouard who returned to her post in Fort Smith, the travelers left for Edmonton on August 25th and arrived four days later; by September 11th, Mother Dugas was back home at Guy Street. She gave the sisters an interesting account of her long trip. Upon hearing these details, Mother Ward undoubtedly relived the cherished memories of Fort Providence in 1867. She was the sole surviving member of the original group.<sup>40</sup> The superior general went also to the infirmary where other former missionaries eagerly listened to news about their fondly-remembered fields of endeavor.

The superior was updated about major events which had taken place during her absence: the observance of the 300th anniversary of the consecration of Canada to St. Joseph by the Recollet priests in 1624. The Grey Nuns were reminded of their

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<sup>39</sup> Bell, from the original General Hospital, which Mother Dugas brought back to Montreal.

<sup>40</sup> Accompanying her was another person who had given herself to the Institute and later became an auxiliary sister bearing the name of Sr. Domitilde. She died at St. Albert on Jan. 21, 1922.

Foundress's devotion to the guardian of the Holy Family. The Oratory on Mount Royal was growing in importance as a result of Brother André's zeal.<sup>41</sup> On June 24th, the citizens of Montreal celebrated their national feast by taking part also in the blessing of the cornerstone over which the luminous cross of Mount Royal would soon rise.

The new Notre-Dame Hospital which was blessed on August 26th, assembled church dignitaries along with the honorable Mr. Taschereau, Premier, the honorable Athanase David, Secretary, and the Board of Governors.

Doctor Lotbinière-Harwood gave a scholarly address. After having recalled the memory of Father Rousselot, p.s.s., of Doctors Lachapelle and Généreux, of Sir Rodolphe Forget, he described the advantages of the new structure and predicted its future renown. Competent doctors and the devotion of the sisters and nurses, chosen from among the most distinguished graduates, to fulfill that noble mission would assure its success.

The year 1924 ended on a note of joy and gratitude. In her traditional letter of December 23rd, Mother Dugas wrote: "Two days ago, the Church poured its blessings upon our new Foundling Asylum (Crèche). The Lord looked favorably on our trust in his Providence and brought to fruition an enterprise which had appeared rash in the eyes of many."

To Mother Mailloux, the bursar general, who had requested financial help necessary to complete a home for the elderly, the honorable Athanase David, Secretary, had replied that, if she specified the Crèche in her request, he could guarantee her of support from the government. The secretary alluded to this

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<sup>41</sup> Bro. André occasionally came to kneel before the "miraculous" statue preserved at Hospice St. Joseph, near the cathedral. This statue, ordered from overseas, finally landed at the far end of our garden after the vessel bringing it across had been ship-wrecked. The trunk containing the statue bore only the following indication: "Grey Nuns of Montreal".

recommendation and declared himself happy to have contributed to its realization.

Doctor Leduc, who was attached to the Crèche, summarized the history of foundling care from the beginning of the colony to the present. He paid tribute to Mother d'Youville who "cared for these forsaken little ones since 1754, even when the authorities of that era refused to grant any assistance."

Invited guests toured the institution. They stopped at the chapel to view the remarkable sculptured altar which dated from the time of the first mother-house on the river front. An equally precious relic was the statue of Our Lady of Victories, donated by the Sulpician priests.<sup>42</sup>

This establishment where seventy sisters, helped by one hundred and thirty pediatric nurses, was dedicated precisely to Our Lady of Victories. The members of the team would all do their utmost to substitute for the absent mothers of these infants, loved with predilection by the One who said: "Suffer little children to come unto me."

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<sup>42</sup> This statue was evidently brought from France by the first Sulpicians who arrived in Canada in 1657.



## CHAPTER SIX

### 1925-1929

The passage from one year to the next is a moving experience for the Grey Nuns at the mother-house. Traditionally, at seven o'clock on December 31st, the members of the General Council and the two hundred and some sisters meet to exchange greetings for the new year.<sup>1</sup>

In her letter of December 23rd, Mother Dugas had suggested appropriate dispositions with which to welcome the holy year 1925. "Let us wrap ourselves in the silence of the Incarnate Word," as did Mr Olier, founder of the Sulpicians. "Following the example of Mother d'Youville, let us endeavor to imitate the Eternal Father," and she added this explanation: "Let us be inspired by the prodigality of this Divine Father who gave his Son to the world." The sisters readily grasped their Mother's intent: "Let us examine the needs of our poor, of our sick and of the children entrusted to us; let us consider the methods most

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<sup>1</sup> There were 246 sisters at the mother-house. The elderly and sick sisters confined to their rooms, were visited by the superiors, as were the old folks of the home.

conducive to providing the best possible care to their souls, their minds, their hearts and their health."<sup>2</sup>

On this particular new year's eve, the superior general's fondest wish was that formulated by the Foundress in 1771: "Dear sisters, may the most perfect union reign among us." They made their own this supreme prayer of Mother d'Youville during the holy hour which preceded the dawn of the new year.

Following the high Mass on January 1st, other gatherings took place: the elderly, the protégé students, employees, nurses, students and the children from the kindergarten, all made their appearance in the community room. The annalist commented on the sadness that would result from their transfer to another residence.

After this procession, the sisters went to greet those unable to visit them. The superior general distributed cigars and goodies to these handicapped persons so lovingly remembered.

Other visits continued during the days that followed. Father R. Labelle, provincial of St. Sulpice, reminded the sisters of the Holy Father's intentions; peace in the world, the return of stray sheep to the fold and an improvement of the situation in Palestine that would facilitate access to the holy places. Priests living in the recently opened department<sup>3</sup> and the Franciscans from Dorchester Boulevard came in turn to offer their greetings. The visit by the Jesuits took place on the morning of January 6th and, this year, was presided by Father Jacques Dugas, the superior general's brother.

The liturgical calendar proclaimed a new feast: that of Christ, King of the Universe, and announced the beatification and canonization of several persons whose life was already

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<sup>2</sup> Letter of December 23, 1923.

<sup>3</sup> The transfer of the foundling asylum freed considerable space which was adapted for priests-in-residence on the 1st floor of the St. Mathieu wing, while the 2nd and 4th floors were made available to female boarders.



well-known in Canada.<sup>4</sup> It also included the dates of the missionary exposition to be held in Rome, the capital city of Christianity. The community calendar, meanwhile, would include the holding of a General Chapter, the foundation of an Inuit mission and, a few months later, the foundation of a hospital at St. Paul, Alberta in 1926.

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The announcement of the grandiose celebrations to be held in Rome aroused new hopes relative to the Cause of Mother d'Youville. Consequently, the annalists, the chroniclers and correspondents approached with renewed zeal their duty to report favors obtained through the intercession of the Venerable Mother. Greater efforts were made to study her life and her spirituality in view of broadening her influence. This study reminded the sisters of the teaching in the Book of Wisdom: "the faithful agreed to the divine law that they would share alike the same blessings and dangers" (18,9). The reminder was a timely one as would soon become evident. On February 3rd, Sister Mathilda Toupin-Fafard died after a very brief illness. Comments recorded by the annalist included: "Everyone at Notre-Dame Hospital mourned with us this sudden departure. Tributes of regret accumulated, bearing witness to the high esteem and deep respect in which the deceased was held in the health care community where she had been Director of Nursing and president of the Nursing Alumnae of the University of Montreal." In an article entitled "A Patriotic Nurse", her intuition was acknowledged and her role acclaimed for having created, in January, 1924, the revue entitled "The Night Nurse". Death overtook her while she was working on the organization of an advanced course in Public Health soon to be established at the University.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Canonizations: Theresa of the Child Jesus, May 17; Madeleine Sophie Barat, May 24; Jean-Baptiste Vianney, Curé of Ars, May 31. Beatifications: Bernadette Soubirous, June 14; Canadian Martyrs, June 21 and Oct. 15, 1926, the beatification of the Martyrs of Sept. 1792.

<sup>5</sup> Ms. A. Ferland-Angers, *Annals 1924-1925*, biography of Sr. Fafard.

The reminder of death was often before the Grey Nuns, particularly when, in early March, an earthquake shook the city of Montreal and caused an explosion in the St. Jacques Basilica. On that same day, the mother-house received news of the passing of the incomparable Sister Laurent in her ninety-third year. The list of her many kindnesses during her seventy-five years spent under St. Boniface skies would be long, indeed. A tiny tot had described her perfectly when, in reply to the question: "What is charity?" he responded: "Charity is Sister Laurent, my papa said so!"

The grim reaper did not stop there. Sister St. Donat, superior at the Beauharnois Hospice, died on March 3rd, a death greatly deplored because of her exceptional qualifications. Monsignor Théodule Nepveu, the great benefactor of the hospice, died on the following May 11th. It is touching to note that the annalist also faithfully recorded the passing of our dear "tertiaries", Mathilde Saulnier, who died in Montreal at the age of ninety-two, and Henriette Poirier, who died in Toledo, where she had spent more than fifty years. These two faithful co-workers received the same funeral honors as those given to the Grey Nuns.

The Canadian church suffered the loss of Cardinal Bégin who took pride in the fact that he belonged to the lineage of Mother d'Youville. He died on July 18th; his successor, Bishop Paul-Eugene Roy's earthly career ended on the following February 21st. Mother d'Youville would have said: "We must bless the God of the Cross, though he presents it to us in abundance."

Over and above their daily tasks, the sisters readily assumed the work entailed by the missionary exposition in Rome. Canvases painted by the artist, Sister Marie-du-Rédempteur, depicted the history of the Institute, statistics of missionary works, as well as mountings of photographs of the Indian missions, including those of the Brown Bear country which Mother Dugas had visited the previous year. Moreover, they sent to Rome, a tableau made of bleached caribou hide representing

the various Northern missions; rivers and streams were shown by pieces of broken mirrors, a real masterpiece which drew the Sovereign Pontiff's attention.

The foundation at Aklavik naturally became the primary concern as the time of departure drew near. However, the interests of the other houses were not overlooked. The work with the blind continued to prosper, and the need to expand it became imperative. Mr. Léonide Perron, Minister of Highways, came to visit the workshops during February. One of the students spoke the words of welcome saying that he looked forward to the dignitary's return to a Nazareth better able to accommodate the two hundred students. Two sisters were assigned to recruit blind youths from the countryside. This endeavor bore fruit and the recruits were able to benefit from an education which would enable them to have 'eyes at their finger-tips'. After twenty-five years of teaching at the institution, Mr. Arthur Letondal, received a doctorate in music from the University of Montreal, an achievement that was also attained by Mr. R. O. Pelletier, a former organist at the cathedral. Paul Doyon and his colleague, Gabriel Cusson, had both received a European award. The annual concert held in 1925 was again an unqualified success, a truly artistic performance according to Sir Lomer Gouin.<sup>6</sup>

The General Chapter of October 5th retained Mother Dugas in her post as superior general; she would be assisted by Mothers St. Luce, Margaret McKenna, St-Jean-Baptiste, St. Louis-de-Gonzague and Mother Virginie Allaire as general bursar.

The superior general thanked the members of the previous council and welcomed those who would now collaborate in governing the Institute. The individuals may change but the objective remains: united in mind and heart, to work for the well-being and happiness of all those entrusted to them.

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<sup>6</sup> In order to help this work, Fr. J. Senay, s.j., published a pamphlet entitled "Our Unknown Workers".

In her letter of October 10th, Mother Dugas expressed the hope that all the sisters would pray the Master of the harvest to raise up many apostolic workers.<sup>7</sup> This was all the more imperative as the services of the Grey Nuns were often sought while the needs of the missions currently in operation continued to increase.

A new wing was added to St. Vincent's Hospital in Toledo and to the hospital in Cambridge; the orphanage in Worcester, Mass., was rebuilt, a place which Father Marie-Clément designated as the "mother-house of the Sacred Heart". The Archconfraternity came into being there and continued to be promoted from these headquarters. Mother Dugas and her secretary attended the opening of the new building. There they met Father Edmond Perreault who introduced himself as an alumnus of the orphanage. At his retirement, accommodations were provided for this benefactor, a gesture for which he was truly grateful.<sup>8</sup>

The hospital of St. Jean-sur-Richelieu was now enriched with a school of nursing under the direction of Sister Marie-Rose Lacroix. The first graduation was held on October 15th for Misses Marie-Louise Guillet, Yvonne Couillard and Amanda Forgues and declared by the CANADA FRANÇAIS as "an epic event in the annals of our city."

The sisters rejoiced when, during the ceremony which unfolded in Rome on June 21st, His Holiness, Pius XI beatified the eight Jesuit martyrs of the years 1640-1650. The event coincided with the 300th anniversary of the arrival of those missionaries in Canada. Canadian Martyrs! Their glory was well known. Father Jacques Dugas, vice-postulator for the Cause, frequently alluded to them during his visits to the community.

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<sup>7</sup> The next year, more than 100 recruits were registered.

<sup>8</sup> Fr. Perreault had originally exercised his ministry at Repentigny, Quebec, and it was from his hand that Mother Piché received her God for the first time.

The Grey Nuns could recall Pierre Boucher's association with these heroes of the faith. As a youthful Mortagnais, he had arrived from France in 1635, to share the missionary life of the Canadian Jesuits stationed at St. Marie-des-Hurons for four years. During this time, on April 11, 1640, when an insurrection arose at the St. Joseph residence, Pierre Boucher suffered a wounded arm while Fathers Chaumonot and Brébeuf were severely beaten.<sup>9</sup>

Twenty-six years later, Pierre Boucher, then governor of Trois-Rivières, planned to establish his Manor at Iles-Percées which he would name Boucherville. Having presented in writing the motives for his decision, the nobleman ended with a prayer: "In order to succeed, I pray the good Lord, through the merits and intercession of his faithful servant, Father Brébeuf, to facilitate this endeavor." Pierre Boucher anticipated the voice of Rome. It was this venerable patriarch, esteemed by the entire colony, who would care for his great grandchild, Marguerite de Lajemmerais, orphaned in 1708 and who taught her true values. Evidence that the pupil benefited from these teachings was proven when the heroicity of the virtues of the great Canadian woman would be acknowledged by the Roman Congregation of Rites. On November 23rd of the current year, Monsignor Angelo Mariani, Promoter of the Faith, would confirm the findings in a letter of greetings addressed to Mother Dugas.<sup>10</sup> In announcing this news to the sisters, the superior general lauded the heroism of the missionaries who had accepted exile in faraway Aklavik, and whose sacrificial life would surely contribute to the advancement of this precious Cause. She added the remark that "their generosity and zeal have inspired them to accept this occasion of sacrifice with joy, but it is our duty to constantly support them."

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<sup>9</sup> Fr. Latourelle, s.j. A study on the writings of St. Jean-de-Brébeuf, pp. 86-87.

<sup>10</sup> The session was, however, referred to Jan. 18, 1927.

Mother Dugas shared Father Duchaussois' admiration and emotion for the sisters missioning in the North, and was gratified that other generous souls also burned with the desire to follow them, saying: "How I would love to be sent there. That would, indeed, be true missionary work!"<sup>11</sup>

## THE MISSION OF THE IMMACULATE-CONCEPTION AKLAVIK, N.W.T. – 1925

The project was born in 1917 and Mother Piché, then superior general, had said: "Give us a signal and we will go."

Bishop Breynat was increasingly distressed upon seeing those parts of the country invaded by strangers. Whaleboats from San Francisco, miners coming to exploit oil wells, Hudson Bay and Northern Trading Companies often came to this small locality on one of the islands at the Delta of the Mackenzie River, located one hundred and twenty kilometers from the Arctic Ocean.<sup>12</sup>

These strangers would generally establish their residence in the area and "they did not offer good example," wrote Bishop Breynat in 1921, a fact which no doubt explained the establishment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police there as early as the year 1922.<sup>13</sup>

Bishop Breynat delegated Father Fallaize to go to the area to assess the physical and spiritual needs of the Inuit. In 1923, Mother Girouard, Provincial Superior, had visited the Mackenzie Delta which, from a distance, gave the illusion of being a floating village. She was accompanied by Sister Ste-Rose-de-Lima and both became objects of curiosity. The Protestant ministers and the Inuit received them well.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Femmes Héroïques*, 2nd edition, pp. 158-159.

<sup>12</sup> Remarks by Fr. A. Duport, o.m.i., *Annals* 1924-25, pp. 331 and following.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid* p. 332.

<sup>14</sup> Letters in *Annals* 1922-23, p. 354.

The report of these forerunners dispelled the last hesitations. It was decided to go to the land of the Brown Bear. There the sun shone at midnight from May 24th to July 14th, long days were replaced by eight long months of winter, when the sun was hidden from November 24th to January 14th.<sup>15</sup>

As was stated earlier, the superior general herself, had gone there with Mothers Girouard and St. Grégoire, to choose the location for the school and the hospital. On her return trip, when she stopped at Fort Resolution, Mother Dugas appointed Sister Alice McQuillan in preference to several other volunteers, as foundress of the future post. The sister was astonished as she had not expressed her desire, save in the intimacy of her prayer to the Heart of Jesus. She wrote a few days later: "You took me completely by surprise; I apologize for not having hugged you in gratitude for the trust which you have shown me, the most unworthy of your daughters."<sup>16</sup>

This "unworthy" Grey Nun had, however, proven her worth. Shortly after her religious profession, she had become one of the foundresses of St. Joseph's Convent at Fort Resolution. A journey which can now be accomplished in two days, took them two whole months. Sister McQuillan was initiated to her work in a hovel – the attic of the rectory, which she could reach only by an outdoor ladder and which had become a kingdom for mice.

The young missionary exercised her talents as a teacher during twenty-two years, while helping also with other tasks for which the missionaries were responsible: caring for the sick in their homes, especially during epidemics, preparing fish to be hung on high trestles beyond the reach of dogs as they did not have the luxury of refrigerators. She saw the population gradually acknowledge the need for education, helped with the building of the church and, during famines, share with the sisters the results of their caribou hunt. This sharing had never occurred

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<sup>15</sup> Report of Fr. Duport, p. 331.

<sup>16</sup> Letter, Aklavik file.

before as, until then, Bishop Breynat had avoided calling upon the charity of his parishioners.

When matters are entrusted to Providence, things can turn out very well. In 1918, there came to Fort Resolution an Inuit family by the name of Katouck who established their home next to the convent. The father and mother, Natit and Kanniak, and the children were called respectively: Joseph, Anne, Mary and Gabriel. The children attended school and the parents became regular visitors. Natit built himself an igloo on the vast lake. Kanniak was ecstatic before the clothing worn by the white people; her vanity was irresistible and soon adopted the new fashion.

This relationship with the Inuit family enabled Father Fallaize and the sisters to understand the psychology and the language of these intelligent and sympathetic visitors. The family became Catholic and later returned to the land of the Brown Bear.

The two companions assigned to join Sister McQuillan were Sister St. Adélar and Sister Marie-Donatien. The provincial superior, Mother Girouard, planned to accompany them for the departure scheduled for June 24th. Sister McQuillan, who had the flu, gave cause for concern. In order to reassure her companions, she decided to attend the picnic on June 22nd. They were astonished to see the Distributor, a boat of the Alberta and Arctic Corporation, make its appearance earlier than expected and the passengers had to embark at once. Thus the Lord spared them all a sad farewell.

Fathers Duport and Lefebvre were aboard ... as well as 50,000 feet of boards and planks obtained to build the convent.

Brief stops were necessary along the route; including a few hours at Providence, the old mother-house of the North where it had all begun. Here Sister Firmin replaced Sister Marie-Donatien who was extremely seasick. The haste with which Sister Firmin gathered her belongings was admirable and evidenced of her eagerness to go to the new foundation.



The vessel sailed along the Mackenzie of a thousand faces along which were very tall mountains. Indescribable ramparts left free reign to one's fantasies as one could see feudal-like towers, strong castles linked by a delicate lace of stone with high and superb peaks.<sup>17</sup>

On June 25th, the travelers reached Fort Norman where resided Fathers Houssais and Fallaize and a helper named Gabriel, who was absent at the time. Sister McQuillan would have been so pleased to see him again, but she did meet other former students here and there along the river and was greeted with joy.

At Fort McPherson, the sisters met the pastor who invited them to visit a sick man. When they returned aboard the Distributor, they knew that at the next stop, they would arrive at the limits of the world, Aklavik, to announce the Good News.

They disembarked at five o'clock in the morning of June 29th. The Inuit people looked the sisters over from head to foot, even though they had previously seen these "women of prayer". But this time, they were coming to live among them, hence the need to be more circumspect.

At the station to greet them were: Father Joseph Trocellier, the director, with Brothers Beckschaefer, Latreille, Berens, Kerautret and the workmen, Lucien Mercier, Lucien Bourget and Alphonse Mandeville, the pilot in charge of the scows. After Mass, Brother Beckschaefer served breakfast in an old log house twenty feet square<sup>18</sup> which would shelter the sisters until the convent was ready. A few improvements were made to the shanty: boards were aligned on joists, a window was cut out having four squares but no glass; instead, there was a screen as protection against the mosquitoes which mercilessly endeavored to attack the new arrivals.

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<sup>17</sup> Description by Mother Dugas during her trip.

<sup>18</sup> Observations of Fr. Duport, p. 331.

Though limited in space, the house served many purposes: there was a chapel in a far corner isolated by a paper wall, a parlor, a dormitory, a medicine cabinet, a kitchen and dining room. Twenty-one persons took their meals there though there were only nine plates, cups and saucers.

The next boat trip brought crates containing contributions for the community: church vestments and an organ which was a gift from the St. Joseph Hospice in Montreal. What startled and moved the curious onlookers to admiration, was the "adorable" wax Jesus which had been made in the workshop of the mother-house. It provoked the admiration of the Loucheux and of the Hareskin tribes. They kept making many comments and asking questions which the sisters were happy to answer. Their curiosity having been satisfied, they probably did not realize that they would contribute to awakening the interest of the Inuit whose cautious attitude had not yet been fathomed.

But Providence would intervene anew in a divine way. The Oblate brother who had just returned from bringing in wood from the shore line, had allowed his dogs to run about freely. A lively drama ensued when the dogs immediately attacked the small daughter of one of the employees. The household was alerted by the screams; Father Trocellier dispersed the animals while Sister McQuillan picked up the bleeding child and brought her to Sister St. Adelard who administered first aid. The doctor declared that the child was mortally wounded. The sisters made it a duty to encourage the parents and to storm heaven. They prayed to the heart of Jesus and to the little Thérèse, while remaining at the child's bedside and continually changing the dressings. After a few days and to his great surprise, the doctor observed that the wounds were, in fact, healing. He claimed that he could not understand all this, while the sisters knew very well that their prayers had been answered. They were overcome with gratitude, as their apostolic work would have been seriously compromised if the child had died.

Little Adeline lived with the sisters for quite awhile, during which time she was somewhat spoiled; she ran about the house and, in her own way, she, too, became an apostle.

From then on, the sisters' courage was renewed, and their faith and trust deepened; the Lord would find the way to reach these souls to whom they had come to bring "Light".

On August 3rd, Mother Girouard took leave of the heroines, admitting that she was probably the least courageous among them. She knew very well that her co-workers would have to go through eight terrible winter months – one long night – awaiting the thaw of both the Mackenzie and the cautious reserve of the Inuit.

The sisters moved into their new dwelling on August 26th, although only two rooms had been completed. They had become painters and carpenters so that the hospital/school might soon open its doors to the needy. They also prepared the ground and planted lettuce.

The sisters may not have realized to what extent they had aroused the admiration of those who observed them at work, especially that of Father Trocellier who wrote to Mother Dugas: "I admire the three brave sisters whom you have sent. They are always cheerful and no task is refused. They accept privations with joy and a sense of contentment: I am edified and deeply touched."<sup>19</sup>

Hard work, noise, the daily monotony, the cold, dark nights, the isolation, mattered little. What weighed upon these three Grey Nuns was the vain expectation of a visit from these Inuit who were known to have a firm and enduring will, indomitable courage, and a lively intelligence with eagerness to understand. Then a marvelous surprise! During Christmas night, at the Mass of dawn, a most unusual event occurred. The noise of seal-skin boots was heard, the door opened slightly and, softly as possible,

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<sup>19</sup> Letter of Sept. 1925.

forty Inuit men, women and children entered the chapel. They did not kneel but awaited the end of Mass and then approached the crib in which lay the “adorable” Infant of whom they had heard, this Infant who had brought healing to the little Adeline. They left saying: “We will come again.”<sup>20</sup>

In fact, twenty-five of them returned two days later and asked to see the crib, not realizing that they would be attending their first catechetical teaching. Sister McQuillan even invited them to pray with her.

The joy of the sisters was a delight to behold, immeasurable. Soon new missionaries were added to their number. Sister Desrochers replaced Sister St. Adelard; Sisters Clara Gilbert and Marie-Rose Poulin came to join the group. One of these exclaimed: “It takes less joy to fill a small house; ours is overflowing,” reaffirming Father Duchaussois’ earlier testimony: “What struck me the most, that which definitely convinced me of the fact that these women form part of a structure cemented in divine charity, is the unity which binds the daughters to their mother, their fidelity to the roots of their religious and apostolic life.”<sup>21</sup>

In fact, there was regular correspondence between the mother-house and this distant post, and, fortunately, mail seemed to travel more safely than in nearby places.

“The annals are the mother-house’s messengers to the sisters of the various houses, bringing news, good and sad. Shared, the good news became sweeter still, while the sad lost some of its bitterness,” noted the chronicler as she communicated that, during the year 1926, the bi-monthly bulletin would be entering its 50th year.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Letter of Sr. McQuillan, *Annals* 1926-27, p. 78.

<sup>21</sup> *Femmes Héroïques*, pp. 183-184.

<sup>22</sup> Prior to Nov. 1877, circular letters were handwritten.

Before this anniversary, the annals had a new misfortune to announce. The still incomplete re-building of the convent at Ile-à-la-Crosse, which had been destroyed by fire in 1920, was again subjected to destructive flames. During the night of February 19-20th, flames crackled noisily. Students and sisters barely had time to dress and escape without panicking. They found themselves barefooted in the snow in frigid temperature. An overheated chimney had evidently caused the disaster. Everything was destroyed, even the decorations which had given a festive air to the building: Bishop Charlebois had been expected to celebrate here the 100th anniversary of the approval of the Congregation of Mary Immaculate.

The sisters and students had to return to the upper floors of the rectory until the boarding/day school was rebuilt...hopefully by October. The season was favorable for the transportation of the materials and wood could be found in Beauval.

Sister Jubinville wrote to assure her superiors that they were not in great distress. "Conditions are better than after the first fire. When we will have what is needed in clothing and shoes, we will be fairly well off. Evidently, the good Lord wishes to detach us; we surrender to his holy will."

They truly were detached, as they had lost their profession crosses. Their courage was inspired by the words of Mother d'Youville when her first refuge was destroyed on January 31, 1745, "Henceforth, we will live in greater poverty."

Help with obtaining shoes and clothing seems to have arrived quite soon, but, when time for the move into the new building came, there was no furniture as all the wood had been used for the construction. However, an Oblate priest made shelves with raw wood and chairs from aspen blocks.

Besides this tragedy, came the news of the passing of Bishop John Forbes (White Father), a former protégé;<sup>23</sup> there was also

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<sup>23</sup> The first Canadian to join the Missionaries of Africa. Bishop John Forbes was obliged to retire at the sanatorium in Pau, France, hoping to regain his health. God had other plans; the patient died shortly after his mother.

the premature death of Father Dufresne, chaplain of the St. Mathieu wing, at the age of thirty-nine and who had been there since only two months. Furthermore, there were the deaths of young sisters who had given hopes of a promising career. Benefactors of the sisters, too, were warmly remembered, especially Father Charles Lecoq, ecclesiastical superior of the Grey Nuns from 1904 to 1926. The chronicler wrote on March 26th: "We have the privilege of welcoming our revered superior under our roof. He occupies a room next to that of Father Many, p.s.s. Both will receive the best care possible." His death occurred on April 6th. From across Canada and the United States, the seminary received testimonies of gratitude and sympathy. This eminent theologian had been actively involved in the formation of several generations of priests currently serving parishes and religious houses throughout North America.

As for more agreeable news, one item was related in detail on June 28th. Several church dignitaries from France and Belgium, who had attended a Eucharistic Congress in Chicago, came to Montreal before returning home. His Eminence, Cardinal Dubois, archbishop of Paris, appeared very pleased to learn that the Foundress of the Grey Nuns was of French ancestry. He asked many questions concerning the apostolate of the sisters. A similar interest was shown by His Eminence Cardinal Charost. These two dignitaries entertained their audience with details about their respective countries, thus affording the sisters a "tour of Europe", as one of them remarked. This dialogue also provided the readers from afar with information about the happenings back home.

Among other news, it was learned that sixteen sisters had attended a convention for nurses in Chicago where the theme dwelt on the importance of adequate preparation for those entrusted with patient care. This inspired the General Council to name Sister Elodie Mailloux as Director of Nursing at Notre-Dame Hospital. This excellent choice met with overwhelming approval. Sister Mailloux had been involved in the establishment of the nursing school in Toledo and that of Montreal's Notre-Dame Hospital, back in 1898. Her broad experience in

the hospital field would be an asset in promoting adaptations required by developments in medical science, adaptations suggested by Sister Fafard.

Chronicles from the North naturally had an important place in the annals where daily entries were made. In fact, it was those chronicles which fed the accounts of the correspondent. Any omissions or delays in the postal service were a great disappointment for the missionaries. Sister Dufault once wrote from Chipewyan: "Navigation has been closed since the third week of October. A traveler who had tried to bring the mail was shipwrecked; the bags had to be opened and the contents dried so that news arrived very late." The news that did arrive was hardly legible, and certainly not recent. Thus, it was with much delay that news of the death of Mother St. Grégoire<sup>24</sup> and of her replacement by Mother Evangeline Gallant, reached its destination, as well as that of Mother Piché's return from the States at the end of her mandate as provincial superior. A fact not included in the annals but which was related by her future biographer who had been deeply edified, was that this little Mother had volunteered to work in the missions of the Mackenzie.<sup>25</sup> Mother Piché would see the Northern missions once more, but not as a missionary. Instead, she was assigned as superior at the sanatorium in St. Agathe. This prompted the annalist to comment: "Several among us would be tempted to wish they were victims of tuberculosis in order to become the object of her maternal care!"

The difficulties of the North did not seem to deter generous souls. More fortunate than Mother Piché, Sister Louise Duport, who had come from France a few years earlier to join the heroic women, finally received her assignment for this distant land. Upon her arrival at Fort Smith, she met her uncle, Father Duport who failed to recognize her at first. This was not surprising as it had been twenty-three years since he had last seen her as an

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<sup>24</sup> Mother St. Grégoire died at the mother-house, July 17, 1926.

<sup>25</sup> Biographical notice: Mother Piché by Sr. J. Gravel, p. 83.

eight-year old child. When the truth dawned on him, the uncle and niece were deeply moved, as were those around them.

Some days later, the travelers reached Fort Providence, the mission to which she had been assigned; it was there that she learned that her uncle had been elected as a delegate to the forthcoming Oblate General Chapter. Their encounter was brief, as the worthy missionary would not return from this voyage, for he died in France, on December 24th.

Valor is not limited to Northern missions as, in spite of the heavy cross of Ile-à-la-Crosse in early 1926, a new foundation was accepted within the borders of Alberta.

### **ST. THÉRÈSE HOSPITAL ST. PAUL, ALBERTA – 1926**

In this small village located between Fort Pitt and Edmonton, and founded by Father Albert Lacombe in 1896, the need for a hospital arose when six hundred French Canadians arrived as colonists on April 11, 1909. Doctor Charlebois had set up his practice there in 1907, and was assisted by Doctor Gagnon who came three years later. Patients had to go to Cold Lake for hospital care.

By 1916, there was question of building in St. Paul itself, a project soon abandoned but which arose again with greater intensity at the time of the influenza epidemic in 1918. Doctor J. P. Decosse encouraged the project and the members of the municipal council presented their request to the Grey Nuns. Mother Dugas visited the place in 1922, but did not judge it immediately feasible.

Three years later, a group of women decided to take the initiative. After raising funds, they opened a humble dwelling able to lodge six patients; with two beds being reserved for emergencies. They named the house Charlebois Hospital in honor of the first doctor who had set up practice in St. Paul; he unfortunately died in 1925. The women's initiative was praiseworthy but lacked the elements of stability, so a new request was made to the Grey Nuns. This time, the invitation was accepted.



On September 9, 1926, Mother Evangeline Gallant, Provincial Superior, and her assistant, Sister Robichaud, accompanied Sisters Marie-du-Carmel and Jeanne Longtin, both nurses from the hospital in Saskatoon, to this primitive hospital in St. Paul. They entrusted it to the young Carmelite nun of Lisieux who had been spreading her favors on Canadian soil, and whose statue was brought along by the foundresses.

It took courage and especially imagination to consider the existing house as fitting for a hospital...A telegram and letter of welcome signed by the superior general touched the new arrivals who set to work at once. They promptly prepared a chapel when the trunks containing objects required for celebrations of the Eucharist had arrived.

There was running water available, but no space for a laundry, as the previous administration had relied on services from the outside.

Unfortunately, the situation was very difficult: crops were poor due to inclement weather. It was a comfort to the sisters that the school at Saddle Lake,<sup>26</sup> where seven companions missioned, was only a short distance away. Gradually the difficulties diminished, and the foundresses learned well from the practical experience of the first charge nurse, Miss E. Lafond. They also appreciated the arrival of Sister Olympe (Mélaurée Lamirande).

On land given by the Oblate Fathers, construction of a hospital was begun; the excavation and separations for the basement were completed before the year-end.<sup>27</sup> Tribute is due to the laborers who gave their services gratuitously. The people of St. Paul and surrounding areas were generous despite the poor crops, so pleased were they at the prospect that their sick would be cared for by the Grey Nuns.

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<sup>26</sup> This school, founded at Lac La Biche in 1862, was transported to Saddle Lake in 1898.

<sup>27</sup> G. N. Archives, St. Paul, Alberta file.

Everything went so smoothly that by August 16, 1927, the hospital was officially opened. Mother Gallant, Sister Robichaud and Sisters Prono, St. Benjamin and Tétreault attended the ceremony. The next day, the first mass was celebrated in the chapel where appropriate hymns were sung under the direction of the mayor's wife.

Within a short time, patient care was organized with the help of Sisters St. Benjamin and Tétreault, also nurses from Saskatoon, who had become members of the local community.

"We have an artesian well which provides good water for drinking but hard for laundry purposes. The electricity available is not sufficient for the X-Ray machine...so Sister Tétreault uses the table as her bed for a few months; the village has promised to get a stronger current but this will take some time. The hospital has twenty-one beds, of which sixteen are already in use. The university has allowed the opening of a school for nurses, as an affiliate of the Edmonton General Hospital. Four young ladies have already registered."

From 1928 on, the hospital operated at full capacity, and fulfilled the population's expectation that the Grey Nuns stay would most likely be permanent.

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The joyful news announced three years previously by Father Jean Verdier, Sulpician, was realized on October 17, 1926. The one hundred and ninety-one martyrs of the French Commune, of whom eight were members of the Company of St. Sulpice, were beatified.<sup>28</sup> Among these Blessed, was André Grasset de St Sauveur, born in Montreal on April 3, 1758 and baptized the following day at the parish church and who later become a canon at the Cathedral of Sens, in France.

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<sup>28</sup> Fr. J. Verdier, p.s.s., superior of the Catholic University of Paris, had been delegated to Canada by Fr. Garriguet, in the summer of 1923. During a visit at the manor of Châteauguay, he spoke with the sisters about the Martyrs of Sept. 2, 1792 in 'Le couvent des Carmes' in Paris.

It was fitting that Montreal should celebrate this event worthily. On Sunday, December 12th, in the vast church of Notre-Dame, a large crowd attended a Mass celebrated by Bishop W. G. Forbes, a relative of Blessed Grasset. Father Olivier Maurault, the pastor, "chose to let others praise the eight other Sulpician Martyrs while he centered only on André Grasset, whom he particularly admired." Furthermore, he planned to write a book on the life and martyrdom of "our compatriot".<sup>29</sup>

For the Grey Nuns, the rejoicing had a special character; a letter of Mother d'Youville addressed to Mr. Grasset de St Sauveur (the father) on November 5, 1765, gave evidence of the excellent relations existing between the St-Sauveur and the Grey Nuns.<sup>30</sup> The St-Sauveur family had probably gone to bid farewell to Mother d'Youville and her companions before returning to France. The Grey Nuns believed that, in heaven, Blessed André's gaze and that of the first future Blessed, our Canadian Marguerite, had surely met. The intercession of Blessed André was implored so that the "halo of the blessed" would soon also shine over Mother d'Youville.

In her letters, as in her conversations, Mother Dugas would remind the members of her religious family that the obtaining of such an honor was contingent on the efforts of each sister to walk in the steps of the one who had shown such great love for Jesus-Christ and the poor. This love for the poor by Mother d'Youville was manifested through her works, through her love for Jesus and through her faithfulness in carrying her cross after him.

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<sup>29</sup> Annals 1926-27, p. 318 and p. 362.

<sup>30</sup> Mr. De St-Sauveur had married the daughter of Mr. De Fonblanche, the only citizen who had extended a helping hand to the Grey Nuns at the fire of Jan. 31, 1745; Mr. De Fonblanche held Mother d'Youville in high esteem, and told this to Mr. De St-Sauveur who gave her his slave when he left. This slave served as a cook at the hospital for 57 years. (Anc. J. V.II, p.81).

Once again, the cross was presented under the form of fires which occurred only ten months apart. The year 1926 was drawing to a close when, on December 20th, three telegrams arrived at the mother-house announcing a fire at Fort Totten, North Dakota, the serious fall of Sister St. Alfred, Superior, and her death two days later.

The fire had broken out during the night; one of the sisters discovered it and gave the alarm. In spite of the darkness, the students were led out in an orderly manner, three of them being transported in their beds.

Concerned about the sisters who had retired in the attic, the superior went to check on them. Shortly afterward her own absence was noted. One sister braved the smoke and called to Sister St. Alfred who replied: "Yes, I am coming down." Just then the floor broke through and the injured Sister St. Alfred had to be carried, first to a neighbor and then, transported to the hospital at Devil's Lake. During these tragic hours, the sisters could only watch helplessly while the church and school burned: the water pressure was getting alarmingly low and the fire brigade could not arrive quickly enough due to the condition of the roads.

The Sisters of Mercy and of the Presentation of Mary offered help to the victims by giving them clothing and shelter. Mother Eugénie Dionne and Sister Delia Clermont hastened from St. Boniface with crates of supplies. By the time they arrived, Sister St. Alfred (Margaret Hogan) had died on Monday, December 20th.

Five of the thirteen missionaries of Fort Totten sorrowfully accompanied the victim to St. Boniface. They were embraced as their tears mingled with those of their grieving sisters who helped them find suitable Grey Nun clothing.

Upon their return to Totten, they went to the Fort where Sister Jude described their situation as "being very cramped, with the kitchen serving also as the community room. For their meals they sat at a small table or in the stairway; the stove was unreliable; there was one sewing machine and nine chairs.

There were no taps so water was collected in two large tubs. In the dormitory, there were three beds and a cot while four sisters slept on the floor." Sister Jude thought this was fair comfort.

In the midst of this sad situation, the sisters were surrounded with sympathy both by the laity and by religious sources. Help came from the mother-house and from the convents, all eager to alleviate the lot of the victims of this disaster.

While considering the future of this mission, Mr. W. R. Beyer, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, wrote to Mother Dugas: "We are deeply saddened by the loss of the Grey Nuns' school (...). The future is uncertain; it rests in the hands of the Washington Bureau. Be assured that we will do all in our power to make the conditions favorable for the remaining sisters. They have accomplished a marvelous work and their efforts have resulted in a success that cannot presently be estimated."<sup>31</sup>

What warmed the superior general's heart even more, was to hear the fire victims establish a parallel between their situation and that which had confronted the Grey Nuns on January 31, 1745. They stated that God had spared them since it was not very cold outdoors. Such courage surely touched the heart of God, our Father, and the school of Fort Totten would rise again. This time, it would be entrusted to the care of the Carmelite of Lisieux under the name of Little Flower School.

The community was gradually overcoming the emotions occasioned by the fire at the school of Fort Totten when, behold, a telegram transmitted to the mother-house, news of another frightful drama. During the night of September 19th, the mission of Beauval became prey to flames, engulfing twenty victims: nineteen small boys and Sister Lea their supervisor. "Had a terrible crackling sound not awakened me, we would all have perished," wrote the superior. "I hastened to give the alarm. The smoke was so dense that we could not see ahead. We tried to reach the small boys' dormitory by the safety-ladder. It was a lost

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<sup>31</sup> Letter of Jan. 4, 1927.

cause. It seemed that the floor had broken through before it had reached the central stairway, as the charred remains were found near that area."

Consternation was profound and the tears were plentiful at the thought of the poor children and the gentle companion of whom Father M. Lajeunesse said: "Her loss is a bereavement, not only for her religious family, but for the school and for this territory...Gentle, motherly for the children, this excellent child-care worker had a keen sense of her responsibilities."

In their extreme poverty, their companions from Ile-à-la-Crosse who, themselves, had experienced a similar trial, hastened to their side. It will be recalled that the latter place had rebuilt its school with wood which had been brought from Beauval. Fortunately the forest was dense and so there was hope for another reconstruction...Then came another misfortune since the fire that had destroyed the shop and the tools needed by the workmen, seemed to delay the plans indefinitely. But hope is tenacious when faith is profound and the Sacred Heart School in Beauval would surely rise up again. Meanwhile, classes were held in an old house that had been loaned to them.

It seemed as though the missions of the Far North were spared the devastation of fires. Yes, at Fort Smith, there were forest fires close to the St. Anne Hospital. A heavy smoke made sleep almost impossible. The fire was about three miles away from the Fort and the wind blew in that direction.

Directives were given to pump water and to fill the barrels: the church and the hay stacks were endangered. The men went to work, but soon the well was dry. It seemed impossible to escape when they were surrounded by the blaze like a belt. However, there was another recourse, prayer, a prayer that was addressed to the one whose devotion to the destitute the sisters wished to emulate. The sisters and children multiplied their supplications and placed pictures of the Venerable Mother in strategic places. They were aware of the imminent danger, but confidence triumphed. They were not let down as, early the next morning, there came a heavy rainfall, and in record time, the dense smog was dispelled.

The hazard of destruction was averted, but the daily sacrifices remained as drought prevented the usually good potato crop from growing any larger than the size of an egg yolk and milk had to be rationed because of scarcity of water for the livestock.

Like Mother d'Youville, the Grey Nuns could say: "There are many crosses at a time" to which they would add as she had done: "Each day, I admire divine Providence which has always sustained us." In fact, in the midst of all these tribulations, came the long-awaited message from Rome. The sudden healing of Sister Jean-Marie, from the sister-community in Ottawa, said Msgr Mariani, presents all the elements necessary to consider the fact as a miracle.<sup>32</sup> "The sister had suffered from an eye ailment – a paralysis of the optic nerve – due to chronic nephritis. She was healed overnight on the seventh day of a second novena to Mother d'Youville." This naturally aroused new hopes and a renewed ardor in the pursuit of charitable works.

In Montreal, the sisters endeavored to comfort the families overcome by the tragedy of January 25th. The fire which destroyed the Laurier theater had resulted in the death of seventy-eight students and serious wounds for the survivors. When a new outbreak of typhoid fever appeared, the Grey Nuns again went to serve at the civic hospital on Moreau Street.

Due to failing health, Mother Dugas was unable to visit the Northern missions, and so she delegated this function to her councillor, Mother St. Louis-de-Gonzague.

In the Alberta province, the building of an addition to the Holy Cross Hospital in Calgary and to the convent in Legal were forcibly delayed in spite of the fact that the list of prospective boarders was getting longer.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Gen. Chapters of our Institute 1849-1937, p. 348. The favor occurred on the preceding Feb. 7th.

<sup>33</sup> This small convent takes pride in the fact that two of its first students later became postulants with the Grey Nuns.

In St. Boniface, the building of a school for nurses was progressing well; the number of students was also increasing rapidly, especially since the hospital had attained University affiliation. The renown of the hospital in Regina, which had experienced a difficult beginning, had increased to the point where the addition of a new wing became imperative.

Things were definitely not at a standstill, as a new work would arise within the boundaries of Saskatchewan.

### **ST. JOSEPH HOSPITAL GRAVELBOURG, SASKATCHEWAN – 1927**

In 1906, Archbishop Langevin of St. Boniface went to Willow Bunch in southwest Saskatchewan where, at the request of the local inhabitants, he administered the sacrament of Confirmation to a few children. He concluded that the region, located 145 miles from Regina, would be a good area for development if enough farmers could be recruited. He chose Father L. P. Gravel, a colonizer, whose ability was well known. The choice was a fortunate one; later, it was said of him that "the village which now bears his name, owes him all that it has become." The colonizer succeeded so well that it became opportune to found a parish by early August, 1927. The Archbishop of St. Boniface, named Father Joseph Arthur Magnan, o.m.i., as pastor. Two years later, the population of Gravelbourg rose to 250 families.<sup>34</sup> Father Gravel had succeeded in establishing a model parish and a stronghold for the French language in this area of the province. Things were not always easy, but the priest-founder, with his bright mind and untiring zeal, was able to overcome them.

The village grew to the point where, in 1927, Bishop Mathieu of Regina, to which area Gravelbourg now belonged, asked the General Council of the Grey Nuns to establish a

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<sup>34</sup> Morice, Bishop Langevin, p. 238 and p. 250.



hospital there. The village gave the property; Doctor Marcel Lavoie organized a fund-raising committee; the rural municipality and the village of which Messrs. L. Braconnier and H. Coutu were mayors, pledged the sum of \$15,000. But the cost of construction would be well beyond that amount. So, Monsignor Marois, the vicar-general for Regina, and Doctor Lavoie went personally to explain the situation to the Grey Nuns in Montreal. They returned with the promise that the sisters would be coming, an assurance which rejoiced both the delegates and the population.

Gravelbourg could be reached by train since 1913. Sisters Despins and Duckett arrived on July 26, 1927 after a five-day journey. Sister Despins, who had served as provincial superior in St. Boniface, had considerable experience in matters of construction while Sister Duckett excelled in the organization of patient care. The sod turning ceremony, presided by Monsignor Maillard, took place the next day. The future edifice would be known as St. Joseph's Hospital, according to a promise made by Father Gravel.

Mother Allaire, Bursar General, came to visit the premises on October 4th; she returned to Montreal on the 16th after having welcomed Sister Eva Lapierre, as local superior, along with Sisters St. Elizée and Mélanie Nault. The sisters lived in the basement of the church; they had scarcely been there nine days when they were privileged to host an eminent patient: His Excellency, Bishop Andrea Cassulo, the apostolic delegate, who had arrived from Regina. He was accompanied by his retinue and two Grey Nun nurses were entrusted with providing care prescribed for the distinguished visitor who was suffering from a carbuncle on his neck. Feeling slightly better, the patient felt it unnecessary to observe the rest which had been recommended and, on Monday, October 24th, he went to visit the stronghold of the French Canadian nation which Gravelbourg had become. The nurses continued to care for him in the church basement until his departure two days later.

The work of construction, entrusted to Mr. J. L. Guay, contractor, progressed well; by April 29, 1928 the official opening was held for this four-storey building, each measuring eleven feet in height.<sup>35</sup> Monsignor Marois presided at the blessing assisted by Father J. Magnan, Provincial Superior, and Father Joseph Guy, both Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

The band from Mathieu College, formed in 1917, marched along the streets and sang the joy of the parishioners who came in large numbers. At the Knights of Columbus hall, guests and friends of the project gathered for the banquet offered by the sisters. The meal was served by the St. Joseph's Ladies' Auxiliary wearing nurses' caps. A few patients had already been admitted, so one of the speakers concluded by saying: "The hour of service has begun for the Sister of Charity who will perpetuate in our midst, the evangelical decree. She will nurse the sick and awaken in souls the virtue of hope so necessary to those who suffer."

There would still be difficulties as, in 1929, the crop was almost a complete failure due to the continued drought; in 1931, severe sandstorms, real cyclones buried everything so the surrounding Grey Nun missions had to support the new institution. In 1932, things were no better and the village experienced a severe famine. A concert was organized to raise funds on behalf of the hospital. To lessen the difficulty, the government authorities also gave a grant of twenty-five cents per patient per day; relief came mostly from the fact that the Ladies' Auxiliary organized a variety of activities to supplement the income.

However, Gravelbourg did not have only trials; an honor befell both the town and the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. One of its members was elected to episcopal dignity in the person of His Excellency, Bishop Rodrigue Ville-neuve, who became head of the new diocese of Gravelbourg.

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<sup>35</sup> A solarium was added to each storey in the following year.

He received the sacred anointing on September 11, 1930, at the hands of His Excellency, Archbishop W. G. Forbes, of Ottawa in the Cathedral of that city. Present were seven archbishops, fourteen bishops and numerous clergy.<sup>36</sup> Among the guests were Mothers Piché and Dalton representing the Grey Nuns who were overjoyed at the honor bestowed upon their new mission field and especially to recognize in the presiding prelate, one of their former protégés.

### **THE RADIUM INSTITUTE, MONTREAL SEPTEMBER – 1927**

The University of Montreal invited the Grey Nuns to assume the management of the Radium Institute, located at 4120 Ontario Street. The direction of the Institute had previously been entrusted to lay managers. By September 16, 1927, the General Council had found it appropriate to accept the proposal.

The Institute had been in existence since Doctor J. Ernest Gendreau had observed the ravages of cancer and the possibility of occasionally healing the condition. In November 1921, he decided to confront the challenge by establishing the Radium Institute for the study and treatment of this ruthless illness. From the Government he obtained funds necessary to acquire one-and-a-quarter grams of radium, and, from the city of Montreal, the authorization to establish the Institute in the former city hall located in the Maisonneuve district.

Officially created by a contract between the University of Montreal and the Provincial Government on November 11, 1922, the Institute was one of only thirteen hospitals in North America officially recognized by the American College of Surgeons. It was also affiliated with the Radium Institute of Paris and considered one of the best organized in America.

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<sup>36</sup> On March 8, 1928, Bishop Forbes succeeded Bishop Emard as Archbishop of Ottawa following his death on March 29, 1927.

In order to assure a solid and scientific base for the foundation, Doctor Gendreau had spent an extended time in Europe, especially in Germany where, in his opinion, were gathered the best physicians of the world. He had also studied the properties of radium under the direction of the Curie couple who had discovered the healing properties of the precious metal. The founder was backed by Doctors Lacharité, Dufresne, Pinsonneault, Laporte and by Doctor Jutras, pathologist, so the Institute already enjoyed a well deserved prestige.

Upon the recommendation of the University rector, himself, and assured of competent lay help, the internal management was accepted by the Grey Nuns. Sisters St. Roch, Coderre and St. Justin went there on September 19, with the tact and patience essential for the exercise of their responsibility.

The house soon shone with cleanliness and food services had improved through the competence of Sister Coderre, duly assisted by a cook worthy of the name.

Far from bathing in affluence, the missionaries had purchased two bowls "on credit", a situation soon corrected by the treasurer. The sisters, however, were on their own to set up a chapel. They were generously helped by Father Conrad Choumont, pastor of the parish of St-Nom-de-Jesus. He pleaded their cause at the chancery office and obtained there, without charge, the hosts and wine necessary for the cult. The first Mass was celebrated by Monsignor Piette, rector of the University; doctors and staff attended while Roger Forte served as altar boy. He later became a member of the Society of Jesus.

Patients who were cured and many benefactors, among whom was Mrs. Jean-Baptiste Rolland, remained good friends and cooperated with the proper functioning of the Institute enabling the experts to exercise their art while the Grey Nuns pursued their role as sisters of charity.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Archives of the Grey Nuns of Montreal, file of the Radium Inst.

Life was also active in other areas. Mother St. Louis-de-Gonzague, delegated for the visitations in the Far North, recognized that fact during her long and difficult journey. She had left the metropolis on May 12th and, after brief stops at the provincial houses of the West, went on to the northern posts.

She reached Fort Providence on June 28th, aboard a motorized canoe which was almost as primitive as that used by the foundresses sixty years previously. She was accompanied by Mother Girouard who had recently completed her mandate as provincial superior and was replaced by Mother Lachance, Sister Girouard promptly left for Aklavik. They arrived on Saturday, July 9th at eleven o'clock at night along with fourteen students who joined them along the way at the Red River and at Fort Good Hope. This brought the number of students to thirty-eight, so that an expansion of the Aklavik residence became a necessity.<sup>38</sup>

"The little refuge", in this Far Northern post, which had served also as a hospital, as mentioned by Sister McQuillan in October of 1926, had become a reality. Better still, it had been approved by the government. Two, and sometimes three patients, found shelter and care during the winter.<sup>39</sup>

On the following day, the crates arrived resulting in an explosion of joy from the students who had heard of the liberality of Mothers Piché and Dugas. The visitor reported to Mother Dugas: "I would have given anything to have seen you preside at this spectacle! The children thanked in French, sang in English and danced as natives. I have already expressed to you my lively admiration for these people so recently discovered. What efforts have been made by our sisters; they had at first to communicate by signs, then by syllables, and finally by songs, and already, after only one year, their young pupils are able to take part in a

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<sup>38</sup> Two little purebred Inuits were among this number, to the joy of the missionaries.

<sup>39</sup> The gov't was less sympathetic to the school than to the hospital.

choir. You could not have heard without emotion, the Gregorian chant at the Mass on the day following our arrival." A lady by the name of Mrs. McDougall praised the sister who had directed the choir. The visitor continued, "You will be reassured about this small group lost in the bush in the summer time and in the ice of winter when I tell you that it is generously provided for with warmth and provisions of food. They are fed fish and potatoes twice daily; for breakfast, they have pork and beans and oatmeal. Moose meat is their favorite food; they sometimes get eggs from the convent at Fort Providence, cabbage and carrots from elsewhere and sometimes even molasses when it arrives safely! One fine day they received oranges which the children threw about like balls, thus doubling their pleasure." The visitor did not give details of her departure, possibly because it would have been too emotional. They left at one-thirty in the morning of August 11th, in a heavy downpour and wailing winds like the mourning of nature, leaving behind the admirable women who continued to spread the knowledge and love of God in this land where the weather is often so unpredictable.

The official visitor, Mother St. Louis-de-Gonzague, would experience other emotional events. At the 60th anniversary banquet held at Fort Providence, she heard the Great Chief proclaim: "This feast is given by the great leader of the sisters, not by the one of this convent, but by the one who came here once before, do you recall? This time, she had to go to the Fort at the end of the waters. You must pray for her that she may be happy at the end of the current."

This simple language was an echo of the message received from His Holiness, Pope Pius XI, when he, once more, blessed "the Grey Nuns of Montreal for their untiring devotion and for the countless sacrifices which they accept in the most difficult of all missions."<sup>40</sup> As one sister stated: "These countless sacrifices presented themselves under a variety of aspects." A decision

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<sup>40</sup> Letter from the Vatican, dated March 25, 1927 and signed by Cardinal Gasparri.

from Rome transferred to the Mackenzie vicariate, the mission of Chipewyan which previously had belonged to Athabasca. The sisters of that mission wrote: "We willingly pass over to the shepherding of Bishop Breynat who is known to us;" meanwhile their regrets were shared by Bishop Grouard and his auxiliary, Bishop Joussard. The elderly Bishop Grouard, in a letter dated July 12th, from the vicariate which now bears his name, wrote to his beloved daughters: "Bishop Breynat will be in a better measure to help you since I am now elderly and at quite a distance, but he will not appreciate you more than I have done."

"The deserving Oblate had described himself as 'old and far away' yet, at the beginning of 1927, he had been to France, had given conferences on behalf of the missions and kept up a faithful correspondence. He accomplished this in spite of his eighty-seven years, and maintained a free spirit worthy of a Bishop Baunard", wrote the annalist.<sup>41</sup>

The official visitor returned to her Guy Street home on October 22nd, accompanied by Sister St. Rose-de-Lima, a missionary from the North now restricted to a vegetarian diet. The two travelers shared with the sisters news about the happenings in that land. They spent more time with Mother Ward whose active career was drawing to a close,<sup>42</sup> though her interest in the northern missions was in no way diminished. Meanwhile, Mother Piché who had become superior of the Ville-Marie province, and now resided at the mother-house,<sup>43</sup> rejoiced to learn about the progress made in those difficult missions. She was particularly overjoyed when she read in a letter from Aklavik: "We had a reunion at Christmas; the skits were very well presented by our little ones. There were twenty-eight guests and Doctor Ward, a non-Catholic, commented the next day: 'You were unknown; now everyone is on your side'." Another doctor

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<sup>41</sup> Annals 1926-27, p. 352.

<sup>42</sup> She entered the seniorate the following March.

<sup>43</sup> By decision of the Chapter, the provincial superiors of Ville-Marie and Youville, now dwelt on Guy Street.

even wanted to send his patients there rather than to the Anglican hospital.<sup>44</sup>

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Mother Dugas' patronal feast, set at June 21st, coincided with the graduation of nine young ladies from the regional School of Home Economics.<sup>45</sup>

After having congratulated the students, Monsignor Piette, rector of the University, added: "I want to congratulate the Institute which has trained you. I must say that I have known the Grey Nuns since my childhood and am pleased to bring them homage on behalf of the University. We not only consider them benefactors of our Montreal society, but as a glory for our history. When we sought to establish a modern hospital on Mount Royal, and looked about for a place where there would be a meeting of science and art, science and devotedness, science and sensitivity, our choice was directed toward the Grey Nuns."<sup>46</sup> It was this motive which prompted the decision to send Mother Virginie Allaire, General Bursar, and Sister Frieda Ziegler, to Berlin for a Congress on dietetics in early April. The choice of these two religious was most appropriate. Mother Allaire had been promoting a university education for nurses, while Sister Ziegler's success as a dietitian was widely known.<sup>47</sup> In fact, the Dietetic Manual to which she had largely contributed, had just been published and had been highly praised by well qualified persons. Appreciation came even from overseas. Mr. Leon Gémond, director of the International Bureau of Home Economics in Fribourg, Switzerland, had written: "I thank you

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<sup>44</sup> Annals 1928-29, pp. 68-70.

<sup>45</sup> This refers to the liturgical feast of St. Louis-de-Gonzague and not that of St. Louis-de-France, Aug. 25th, patronal feast of the Institute and commemorating the memory of Fr. Normant, p.s.s. protector of the young community since 1737.

<sup>46</sup> Annals 1928-29, p. 103.

<sup>47</sup> There was rejoicing that Sr. Ziegler would be able to see her family still recovering from the war.



for having sent me your manual, and I congratulate you for this interesting work presented in a polished, literary style. Any further document relative to your work would greatly interest me."<sup>48</sup>

It became evident once more that Mother Dugas promoted among her sisters, the achievement of qualifications which would enable them to undertake leadership roles. However, this was done without sacrificing fidelity to tradition, to the primitive spirit of zeal which attended the birth of the Institute. And so, on the occasion of her feast, she offered to the members of the community a pamphlet entitled "Meditations Arising From Memorable Anniversaries in the History of the Grey Nuns."

Following the Congress, the two sisters visited Switzerland, France, England and Italy, where a special mandate had been given to Mother Allaire: to meet with the dignitaries involved with the Cause of the Foundress. A recent favor: the healing of Father Prévost, p.s.s. was currently under study by Father Olivier Maurault, p.s.s., who had been named vice-postulator. The process confirming the healing of Sister Jean-Marie would take place in Ottawa in the near future.

The news from Rome already livened hope in the hearts of the Grey Nuns. In a long letter, Mother Allaire described the papal audience of June 5th when His Holiness Pius XI, after having recognized the costume of the Canadian Grey Nuns, said to them: "I bless all the sisters and their works, I bless them wholeheartedly, even those, and especially those, who devote

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<sup>48</sup> Letter of March 16, 1928. Srs. St. Gabriel, Ziegler and Fugère had contributed to this manual, while Sr. J. Gravel did the editing. The manual made the School of Home Economics eligible for affiliation with the University of Montreal. Since 1924, courses in dietetics had been given by Srs. Duckett, Fafard and Labrosse to student nurses. The treatise on Home Economics that was being prepared met with similar success. It was recommended as a teacher's manual by Mr. J.E. Caron, Minister of Agriculture, via the Council for Public Instruction. (Annals 1928-29, p. 334).

themselves in the Far North and who must suffer from the cold."<sup>49</sup>

Monsignor Mariani, prefect of the Congregation on Rites, "welcomed the pilgrims with kindness and with great interest", added the correspondent. "It is probable that Cardinal Lepicier will replace Cardinal Bonzano, Reporter for the Cause."<sup>50</sup>

The travelers had no idea of the surprise which awaited them in Paris. The project that had been under study for some time: the addition to the Nazareth house had advanced a step forward. It was decided to move it where there would be considerably more space. In agreement with her council, the superior general had delegated Sister Marie-des-Neiges to Paris to visit renowned institutions and study European methods. She left aboard the *Empress of Ireland* on July 18th in the company of four Sisters of the Cross of St. André and, in France, she joined with "our sisters to visit hospitals and health institutions, especially those involved with controlling the spread of tuberculosis."

The sisters lodged with the Servants of Mary, a Sulpician community. Father Jean Verdier, who had visited Montreal in 1923, was very gracious to the visitors. On October 30th, the sisters returned home except for Mother Allaire who went on to visit hospitals in the United States. Though weary, Sister Marie-des-Neiges was eager to return to her precious sightless people. Sister Ziegler was assigned to the province of Manitoba which would henceforth benefit from her remarkable talents. There, she met the superior general who had left Montreal on July 15th to visit the western provinces.

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<sup>49</sup> Annals 1928-29, pp. 98-100, letter of June 6, 1928.

<sup>50</sup> The rumor soon became a reality. In a letter to Mother Dugas, Mgr. Mariani announced the departure of the travelers whom he "enjoined to return with you to attend the celebration of the glorification of the Venerable Foundress".

Considerable progress had been made since her last visit. The St. Boniface Hospital profiled its majestic silhouette on the banks of the Red River. The School of Nursing, opened on March 7th, pursued its task with proficient medical professors and well-qualified teachers able to prepare competent nurses.

Mother Dugas expressed her satisfaction with Gravelbourg's St. Joseph Hospital which she was seeing for the first time. In Fort Totten, the mission school was gradually being rebuilt: two stories were already completed and the opening of the school was anticipated for early December.<sup>51</sup>

In the province of sunny Alberta, the sisters and staff of the young St. Theresa Hospital in St. Paul were complimented by the Archbishop of Edmonton and appreciated by the population. In Calgary, the addition to the Holy Cross Hospital was finally becoming a reality. It had been necessary to first demolish the decrepit wing of 1891. Providentially, on the very day that the work began, May 9th, there arrived from France a large statue of St. Joseph with hatchet in hand. This was seen as an omen of success. A charitable lady had also paid for the furnishing of a room and bequeathed several thousand dollars to this benevolent work.<sup>52</sup>

As for the hospice in Saddle Lake, it had narrowly escaped destruction when a fire was detected late at night by Sister Albertine, the supervisor of the farm who saw the flames engulfing the barn. Unfortunately, the employee was unable to save the six horses, but the house and the other building were spared.

Mother Dugas' visitation did not include the northern missions about which she learned disturbing news: Fort Simpson was rife with influenza, as were Forts Resolution and Providence. In these already poverty stricken posts, there were many

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<sup>51</sup> The cost of rebuilding was undertaken by the Benedictine priests, not by the Department of Indian Affairs in Washington. The re-opening of the school took place only in December of the following year.

<sup>52</sup> Letter of Sr. St. Jean-de-l'Eucharistie to Mother Dugas, May 15, 1928.

deaths while the over-worked missionaries could hardly suffice with their task as some of them had also become ill. At Fort Providence, poverty was extreme, but the sisters nevertheless agreed to shelter a mother and her two children who were dying of starvation in a tent. The mother had not even the strength to chase away the dogs which tore at her clothes. The next day they took in another mother with her two children. One of the sisters wrote: "As I pushed the cart, my eyes were filled with tears. It seemed as though our Venerable Mother escorted us and must have been pleased with our efforts."<sup>53</sup>

There was really only Aklavik which did not experience too many hardships: the potatoes were preserved from the frost; fishing had been relatively good, and Divine Providence had directed caribou toward the Mountain, so the hunters did not need to build an over supply of game.

"As I complete the lengthy visit of our St. Boniface and St. Albert provinces, I am gratified that our works are successful and abound to God's glory," wrote the superior general on December 23rd. She had, unfortunately, been obliged to return without having visited the missions of Ile-à-la-Crosse and Beauval, as the latter place had as yet not recovered from the fire of 1927.

When Mother Dugas returned to Montreal on January 16th, she found an entirely renovated house. During four months an excellent group of workers had taken it by storm, so to say; electricity was installed in places not previously supplied, the roof was painted, the belfry was bronzed, the fire-doors were replaced, the number of fire alarm stations was increased, larger quarters were made available for retired priests.<sup>54</sup> The chapel was renovated by a paint job which restored its original beauty; this work was completed by December 23rd, the very day of its 50th anniversary.

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<sup>53</sup> Annals 1928-29, p. 209.

<sup>54</sup> The number of retired priests would increase to four.

As was customary, Father J. Carrière, rector of Collège St. Marie, celebrated Mass there on the feast of the Epiphany; he evoked memories of the birth of that tradition. Upon their return to Canada in 1842, the sons of St. Ignatius opened a novitiate at Carré Richmond, in the Rodier house which had since become the Bethlehem convent. They remained there for eight years during which time the Grey Nuns attended to the sewing and laundry for the personnel and highlighted certain feasts by serving a plentiful warm meal for the novices. In 1848, Father Schiensi formed the first nucleus of a German congregation which met every Sunday for three years in the chapel of the Grey Nuns in Old Montreal. These various services prompted the Jesuit priests to refer to the Grey Nuns as the second Providence of their Society.

That tradition of hospitality had existed since a few months when Monsignor V. Helenowski, a Slovak priest, fluent in six languages, had been searching for Polish Russian, Hungarian and German people living in Montreal. Each Sunday, he would gather them in the Nazareth house to celebrate the Sacred Mysteries with them.<sup>55</sup>

Among other notable events of 1929, was the Latran Accord. The annalist entered in the bi-monthly circular the complete article on this topic which had appeared in LE PELERIN. After having summarized the events of 1870, the journalist had made reference to the fact that, shortly after his election in 1922, His Holiness Pope Pius XI published his first encyclical in which he manifested hope for the re-establishment of good relations between Italy and the Holy See. On August 6, 1926, the prime minister, the Honorable Mussolini, announced to the Holy Father, his intention to solve the Roman question<sup>56</sup>(...) The

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<sup>55</sup> Annals 1928-29, p. 259. Mgr. Helenowski entrusted three young Polish students to the Grey Nuns while they attended the Collège of Montreal. They served at the altar in return for their lodging. (Ibid. pp. 496-497).

<sup>56</sup> Annals 1929-30, p. 297-301. Several religious who had lived through the years 1867-70, were able to relieve them for the benefit of the younger generation; the departure of the zouaves from Canada, notably of Adolphe, one of the three protégés of the Grey Nuns; the embroiderers of the time had made a flag according to drawings of Napoleon Bourassa and the seamstress had helped with the making of the uniforms.

Accords were signed at noon, on February 11th, in the palace of St. Jean-de-Latran, in the year marking Pius XI's priestly jubilee. The Pontiff was looked upon as Pope of the missions, and Pope of "Christ the King", a feast which he had established in order to obtain a cessation of the religious persecutions in Mexico. He later added another intention, that of the struggle against communism.

May 19, 1929 marked the centennial of the renowned Notre-Dame Church. His Eminence, Cardinal Rouleau, archbishop of Quebec, Bishop Georges Gauthier, administrator of the Montreal diocese, Bishops Brunault of Nicolet and Langlois of Valleyfield, and a large number of clergy enhanced the ceremony by their presence. Naturally, the Grey Nuns were in attendance. They were touched to identify among the souvenirs exhibited, two chasubles, beautifully crafted and retaining their luster, that had been embroidered by their sisters in 1800. On this festive occasion, the Grey Nuns presented another chasuble to renew the expression of their gratitude towards their noteworthy benefactors.

It was on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the foundation of the Sisters of St. Vincent-de-Paul, during the year 1929, that Mother d'Youville's daughters learned that they did not have the monopoly on the name "Grey Nuns", a name originally given by St. Vincent himself to this admirable Congregation "committed to a spirit of piety, adaptability and especially of charity in all its dimensions."<sup>57</sup>

A most welcome feast for the Grey Nun family was the golden jubilee of Mother Dugas' religious profession, a celebration combined with that of her patronal feast day on June 19th to the 21st. Her daughters, like faithful reapers, went through the vast fields of memory. On that day, they presented her with their sheaves and the homage of their respectful gratitude.

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<sup>57</sup> Instruction of Fr. L. François, p.s.s., April 19, 1929.

The long corridors of the mother-house, the chapel, the dining room were all festively decorated. By poems spoken or sung, the superior general's feast was well summarized: her entry into religion at the age of seventeen, her religious profession on February 6, 1879, the list of the functions entrusted to the young religious and the gradual rise to posts of leadership: mistress of novices, provincial superior, assistant general and superior general. Mention was also made of the foundations established during her leadership: the convent in Legal, the transfer of the Foundling Asylum to Côte-de-Liesse, the Radium Institute, the hospitals of Aklavik, St. Thérèse in St. Paul, St. Joseph in Gravelbourg, and the one which came into being at Ile-à-la-Crosse as well as projects in the planning stages.

The apostolic blessing of the Holy Father, transmitted by His Eminence, Cardinal Merry del Val, a privilege confirmed by telegram signed by Cardinal Gasparri, was read aloud. A message, also much appreciated, was that from Father René Labelle, provincial superior of St. Sulpice, who was in Europe at that time.<sup>58</sup>

The homage from Father Duchaussois was particularly pleasing to the Reverend Mother wherein her sisters-in-arms were given recognition "You are the Mother, the inspiration, the animator of this legion of women apostles of whom it could be said, that if they had not been a part of the New World, a great void would exist, wide open in the flanks of these nations, today so lively and prosperous (...) Was not the first cry of the pioneer Oblate Bishops of the Far North an appeal to the Grey Nuns and why? Because they had been convinced that, without the daughters of Mother d'Youville, no real progress would have been possible, no permanent good accomplished."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The passing of Father Garriguet, Sup. Gen., which occurred on April 22nd, called forth delegates to the General Chapter of the Priests of St. Sulpice.

<sup>59</sup> Letter of June 1, 1929, *Annals 1928-29*, pp. 426-427.

The pastors of every diocese wherein the Grey Nuns labored also addressed their congratulations and best wishes to the heroine. Friends and benefactors were generous while respecting the admonition that no personal gift be given other than offerings on behalf of the poor or objects towards the cult for the benefit of churches and the parishes most in need. Flowers adorned the sanctuary; one of the most beautiful bouquets was secretly brought by the jubilarian to an elderly man retained in his sick room and whose absence she had noticed during the salutation in the community.

On June 20th, the actual day of the celebration, His Excellency Georges Gauthier, archbishop-administrator of Montreal and numerous clergy, of whom several were former protégés, were in the sanctuary. Archbishop Forbes wrote his regrets at his inability to attend, adding that he "would definitely be present in thought and prayer".

At eventide of this beautiful day, the final chorus celebrated the charms of the lake "of holy abandonment", thus highlighting the outstanding characteristics of the one whose half-century of service was being celebrated: blind trust in Providence in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. At the Youvillian school, one learns that the cross intertwines with joy, be it only to remind one that pure joy is not a constant in our lives.

On the morning of the observance of the patronal feast, June 21st, Mass was celebrated by the jubilarian's younger brother, Jacques, the Jesuit priest. On the previous evening, he had evoked many childhood memories. On the morrow, he congratulated the sisters "for the manifestations of the family spirit which I have just witnessed (...) this sincere affection which you have for your good Mother. I say good because I have never seen her otherwise, and this is one of God's great blessings. Let us live in thanksgiving," said he, "The most beautiful celebrations may pass but gratitude should endure."

In her letter of thanks, Mother Dugas mentioned the warm cordiality which had united, for a few hours, the members of the larger Grey Nun family, namely the sister-communities of



St. Hyacinth, Ottawa, Quebec, Nicolet, Philadelphia and Pembroke. She underlined the generosity of benefactors, the excellent rendition of the various items of the program and, especially, the richness of the spiritual bouquet.

The gift, produced in the studio by Sisters Marie-du-Rédempteur and Flore Barrette, was particularly appreciated. On six canvasses, five feet by nine, were reproduced, with astounding realism, impressive scenes depicting the life of the Foundress.

Another welcome gesture was Archbishop Gauthier's acceptance to preface the "Life of Mother d'Youville" written by Sister A. Fauteux who had died in 1920. Her text had initially been preserved for the great occasion of the Beatification. The process for the miracle attributed to Mother d'Youville: the healing obtained by Father Prevost, was currently being studied by the Congregation of Rites,<sup>60</sup> and there was great hope for a happy outcome.

On his return from Europe, Father Labelle also expressed his ardent hope. During his visit to the convent on August 9th, he brought to the sisters the message of esteem of the newly elected superior general, Father Jean Verdier. The Lord had truly designated him for this post. Vice-superior for two years and assistant to the late Father Garriguet,<sup>61</sup> the new superior knew all the houses of France and of America and he instructed Father Labelle to convey his esteem and devotion to all the Sulpician communities. Mother Dugas brought this message to the sisters of the United States when she left for her official visitation. on August 19th. The houses of Nashua and Worcester had suffered respectively the loss of Father Richard, pastor of St. Louis-de-

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<sup>60</sup> Letter of Mgr. Hertzog, Jan. 1, 1929.

<sup>61</sup> Fr. J. Garriguet had died on the preceding Apr. 22nd, after some twenty-five years as superior. He had come to Canada in 1910 at the time of the Eucharistic Congress in Montreal. He had lived to know the good news that the 26 seminaries torn from the company by the State had been restored to the sulpicians. (Annals 1928-29, p. 481).

Gonzague parish and of Father J. Edmond Perreault, protector for the "mother-house of the Sacred Heart", who had retired there, and remained a benefactor of the orphanage.<sup>62</sup> That institution had been honored by the visit of His Excellency, Mr. Paul Claudel, French ambassador to the United States. Sister St. André reported that "Our distinguished guest appeared touched by the tribute offered to him in French by one of the orphan girls. He was moved to tears by the reading of 'La Vierge à Midi', which he had written."

The superior general returned from the States on September 10th, a date which coincided with the closing of study sessions concerning "the social and charitable works within Montreal". Mother Allaire had spoken about orphanages and their problems, underlining the fact that education in the home was definitely preferable to that in institutions. In her conference, she pleaded in favor of adoption, providing that the prospective family met the criteria established by competent authority.

Mother Gallant, who had taken part in this study session, hastened back to St. Albert upon learning by telegram, that the convent in St. Albert had suffered damage from a fire. She had just returned when, on September 28th, another fire broke out on the farm. A conflagration was feared due to the proximity to the other buildings and straw stacks. The superior reported that these had been spared by Divine Providence.

It seemed that these misfortunes in the Alberta province preceded a series of misfortunes, one of which affected the entire country: the crash of the stock market in October, 1929 occasioned unprecedented distress: entire families lived on relief provided by federal and provincial governments; some found refuge in abandoned warehouses or in idle street cars

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<sup>62</sup> These deaths occurred on March 13th and 29th. Mother Piché attended the funeral of Fr. Perreault.

because they were unable to pay rent on their homes.<sup>63</sup> Emergency posts were set up: soup kitchens and clothing depots.

The Grey Nuns were accustomed to such diverse activities. In the St. Mathieu wing of the mother-house, a substantial noon meal was served daily to a long line of needy people. At the St. Antoine Hospice in Old Montreal, Sister Bonneau accomplished marvels with the ongoing support of the St. Vincent-de-Paul Society. She seemed gifted with a sixth sense which enabled her, not only to detect the needs of her clients, but also how to meet them. She was admired for the rare sensitivity which she showed toward the destitute and for her deep trust. Even the most traumatic circumstances did not dismay her. "God is here, and we are his instruments for the service of the poor, so why should these divine resources fail us?" Every Grey Nun convent across the country entertained a similar attitude toward those who sought their help.

Mother Dugas encouraged every initiative to help "brothers and sisters of the great human family." She likewise gave freely of herself; her active role during the epidemics in the city were not forgotten. In union with the members of her Council, she took part in the supplementary activities resulting from every difficult situation. She experienced a very personal trial when, while celebrating the feast of Mother d'Youville on October 15th, a telephone call summoned her to the bedside of her brother, Jacques, who was seriously ill at the Hôtel-Dieu Hospital. He died a short time later. This sudden death helped the sisters to realize that the superior general had not sought in vain "the intelligence of the mystery of love of the cross" (an invocation contained in a community prayer).

In St. Boniface, the sisters regretted the departure of the Carmelites which had been announced three years previously; this was due to the heavy tax burden placed upon them. A bond had been created between the contemplatives and the Grey

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<sup>63</sup> Mr. des Rivières; "One Woman, a Thousand Children", p. 175.

Nuns who had welcomed them in 1912. They recalled that "The daughters of the Venerable Mother d'Youville were the very first to open their doors to us upon our arrival and they have continued to exercise the most generous and ingenuous charity in our regard (...). Let us mention the occasions when they entered our cloister to attend to suffering members of the family of St. Thérèse. The secret of their material and other gifts we entrust to God."<sup>64</sup> When the cloistered nuns left St. Boniface, their departure was considered a bereavement for their benefactors.

The Grey Nuns were further grieved by more deaths; the mail of October 24th, announced the drowning of Father Lecuyer in the deep Mackenzie River; two days later, a telegram advised the sisters of the passing of Archbishop Olivier Mathieu at the hospital in Regina. "This loss was a serious one for the Church, especially that of the west where troubling questions brewed relative to the teaching of religion in the schools. He was a peace maker who possessed the art of rallying both Catholics and Protestants to the just cause," are among comments gleaned from the annals.

At the mother-house, Father Tranchemontagne, chaplain for the elderly died on November 9th, after a very brief illness.<sup>65</sup> These departures reminded the sisters of the brevity of life and that only eternal values endured. This consideration especially sustained the courage of the valiant missionaries working in the great white silence and in northern Saskatchewan.

It was toward these brave women that Mother Dugas delegated her assistant. The winter season being the most favorable time for travel, Mother St. Louis-de-Gonzague arrived there on December 11th.

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<sup>64</sup> Extracts from the chronicles of the monastery. The Carmelites gave a beautiful statue of the Sacred Heart to the Grey Nuns at the time of their departure.

<sup>65</sup> He was replaced by Fr. A. Paiement, a former student of the Grey Nuns at the St. Cunégonde Hospice.

The convent in Beauval was not yet rebuilt and so the teachers and students continued to live in the borrowed house. Meanwhile, the mission of Ile-à-la-Crosse was doing much better; a hospital that had been joined to it, opened its doors on April 11, 1928.

### **ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL ILE-A-LA-CROSSE, SASKATCHEWAN – 1928**

Sister Martel had written the previous year, that the corridor uniting the hospital was rising but was still incomplete. With evident pride, she added: "We now have electric lighting in the hospital itself and on the first floor of the school. I thought I would never see that at Ile-à-la Crosse! We find it very convenient."

The hospital was built, thanks to the influence of Doctor M. M. Seymour, a practicing Catholic and an official of the Saskatchewan government. Distressed by the frightening number of deaths from the epidemics of 1918 to 1920, the minister had confided to Father Rossignol: "I have always wanted to leave something which would be a legacy of my life's work. I will found a hospital (...)" Supported by the minister of health, Doctor J. M. Ulrich, that dream was fulfilled after six years of negotiations (...) It was the Department of Indian Affairs' responsibility to construct a sixteen-bed hospital; the provincial government would have charge of the maintenance and of future repairs; the salary for a resident doctor would be a shared expense while the internal administration would be entrusted to the Apostolic Vicar of the Keewatin who would in turn, delegate his authority to Father Rossignol.

The Oblate priest, evidently, retained the services of the Grey Nuns.<sup>66</sup> The nurse in charge, Sister St. Adolphe, spared no

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<sup>66</sup> An extract from the 20th anniversary of St. Joseph's Hospital of Ile-à-la-Crosse, by Dr. P.E. Lavoie reproduced in the *Annals* 1948-1949, pp. 623-628.

effort toward achieving an early opening of the hospital. The inhabitants of the region readily crossed its threshold, convinced that the sisters would heal their every ailment.

Mother St. Louis-de-Gonzague listened with interest to the details of the progress made: she admired these genuine missionaries, so committed to their role as apostolic workers. She was happy to remain there over the festive season, a privilege which the missionaries valued more than a Christmas gift. The Mother Assistant was pleased to share with these exiles the news arriving from Montreal. They had known, since the end of October, that Indo-China would soon have a Sulpician seminary. However, they were unaware of the news that the superior general of St. Sulpice, Father Verdier, had been named Archbishop of Paris, to succeed Cardinal Dubois. The missionaries read with emotion, the articles published in *VIE CATHOLIQUE DE FRANCE, LE DEVOIR* of Montreal and the eulogy pronounced by Father Melanson at the time of the magnificent festivities at Notre-Dame church in Montreal. He declared that "The new dignitary is competent as an artist, an architect, a musician and a man of letters, but he is foremost a Sulpician."

Mother St. Louis-de-Gonzague, who left on February 21st, went to visit the convent in Legal to which a wing had been added. In Manitoba she discussed with the local authorities the project which Archbishop Beliveau had submitted to the Grey Nuns. He wanted a sanatorium in St. Vital, built on the right bank of the Red River, at the precise spot where Louis Riel was born in 1844, a place for the treatment of patients afflicted with tuberculosis.<sup>67</sup>

Mother Dugas had written in her letter of December 23rd, "Let us value our distant missions. Let us be grateful to God; let us beg of the Eternal Father to give us the grace to imitate this

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<sup>67</sup> L. Primeau, "The Centennial of the Grey Nuns", p. 13. The new building would assure spiritual care for the sick.

divine Father so that our zeal may be entirely directed to his glory and the good of neighbor.”

Mother St. Louis-de-Gonzague saw the realization of this initiative in the missions of the “Little North” where the missionaries showed the depth of their faith through the quality of their ministry.





## CHAPTER SEVEN

1930-1935

At the beginning of the year 1930, statistics indicated that there was a total of 1,294 Grey Nuns. Of this number, 260 lived at the mother-house; thirty of these were staying in quarters accommodating the aged sisters; in the health center were twenty patients eager to return to their field of activity. The other two hundred served in various locations: in the health center, in the quarters where they cared for 211 elderly persons, for forty-eight boarders and employees as well as in the formation center, where 126 novices and postulants learned how to become servants of the poor in relation to their future apostolate.

Six sisters attended to ninety-six students at the Regional School of Home Economics which received high praise from visitors, among whom were His Eminence, Cardinal Rouleau, Archbishop of Quebec and from His Excellency, Bishop Cassulo, the apostolic delegate, during their visit on February 11th and 15th respectively. On the 24th, the school was privileged to receive the visit of the Honorable Cyrille Delage, Superintendent of Education, accompanied by Mr. A. Désilets, Director of Agricultural Programs. Their purpose was to evaluate the quality of teaching and the general progress of the students. As a result, the superintendent authorized the school to grant diplomas.

Meanwhile, Mr. Désilets, who echoed Mr. Delage's praise, added the comment most appreciated by the professors: "Your school corresponds to the ideal of your Foundress: the formation of a feminine elite whose influence will permeate families of French Canada."

Mr. Désilets proclaimed, as did many other readers, that the *Life of Venerable Mother d'Youville* was one of the most beautiful books written about dedication and education.

As previously stated, it had been hoped that the publication of that biography would coincide with the announcement of the beatification of the Foundress. Unfortunately the death, in December 1929, of Monsignor Mariani, promoter of the Faith, followed by that of Cardinal Merry del Val, protector for the Institute, on February 26th of the following year, occasioned a further delay for the precious Cause.<sup>1</sup> The biography, however, fulfilled its purpose: to arouse devotion towards this Canadian Marguerite, a fact proclaimed by many visitors. Among these, was Father Duchaussois,<sup>2</sup> about whom the chronicler wrote at length when she gave an account of his visit to the sisters on March 21st. Alluding to his small stature, the Oblate priest said: "You were eager to meet me, I believe. Now, the impression must be a disappointment! Ah, is that him? So what? Even if one is short, one may still consider himself a giant." After this humorous introduction, the visitor spoke eloquently, arousing emotion and pride in his audience. "As I grow older, I am better able to assure you that my preferences and my admiration center more and more on the North (...) In no other place have I met greater devotedness, self-denial, and heroism than that which I

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<sup>1</sup> As a delegate to Canada in 1897, Cardinal Merry del Val stayed at the Grey Nuns' mother-house.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Breynat and Fr. Duchaussois stopped in Montreal on Jan. 9th, the first en route to France and Italy, the other on his way to Florida to visit the houses operated by the Srs. of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. Since the Cause of Beatification of Mother Marie-Rose had been introduced in Rome, the renowned author was called upon to make her life and works known.

have witnessed there (...) You may well be proud to belong to this Congregation which has brought the faith to the farthest reaches of the New World (...) How I would like to convince the novices and postulants that God has led them to one of the most deserving communities."

The bishop-elect of the vicariate of Grouard, Mgr. Joseph Guy, visited the mother-house on March 23rd to meet the Grey Nuns whom he had known well as his first teachers at Bethlehem Convent. Father Guy was to have received the episcopal anointing on March 19th, but, due to injuries suffered in a train accident, he required two months of convalescence which he spent at the Regina Grey Nuns Hospital. The ceremony was rescheduled for May 1st at the Sacred Heart Church in Ottawa. Mother St. Luce, the assistant general, and Sister Charlebois represented the Grey Nuns along with Sister Marie-de-l'Assomption, a special guest and former teacher of the new bishop.<sup>3</sup>

Returning from Europe on May 20th, along with several recruits: eight Oblate priests, four brothers and three postulants, Bishop Breynat informed the Grey Nuns that a boat named Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes would henceforth make an annual trip across the icy waters, thanks to financial assistance from His Holiness, Pius XI, who covered one-half of the cost. The boat would facilitate the replenishment of supplies to distant posts. The next visitor, Bishop Charlebois, who came on the last day of May, was less joyful. To Mother Dugas, who inquired about the restoration of the school in Beauval, the "saintly bishop" as he was called, shared information about his troubles. The convent of the Oblate Sisters in Cross Lake had burned down, claiming ten victims. Since then, the orphans and sisters lived in a hangar. It was important, therefore, to give them priority by erecting a fire resistant convent built according to government specifica-

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<sup>3</sup> On the following May 15, the episcopal consecration of Bishop J. C. McGuigan, a devoted friend of the Grey Nuns and a cousin of Sr. McQuillan was held in the cathedral in Edmonton. He had become the successor of Bishop O. Mathieu to the See in Regina.

tions. The sisters in Beauval were aware of the situation and accepted to wait, demonstrating once more that "souls accustomed to sacrifice have a patience that is infinite" (Pascal).

Patience is essential to whoever is committed to God's will, a truth that was illustrated in the 'Semaine Missionnaire' an exhibit which opened in Montreal on September 21st. The week included a display of objects from different areas of the globe and a series of conferences with slide projections "Publicizing the glorious work of the 1,528 Canadian missionaries spreading the Gospel from the Equator to both Poles."<sup>4</sup>

This event coincided with the arrival of the delegates to the General Chapter of the Grey Nuns scheduled for October 6th in this year of 1930. In conformity with the Constitutions, the superior general presented to the capitular sisters a report on the different events which had marked the history of the Institute over the past five years.

In the Far North, there was the fire on June 3rd which destroyed the St. Marguerite Hospital in Fort Simpson in less than two hours. The school was spared by means of continually soaking wet blankets placed around the building as long as the fire raged. The sisters moved to the main floor while the students were located on the upper floor and patients were made comfortable on the lower level.

All was not adversity in the great white plains. In the mission of Fort Providence, the old convent was replaced. Sister Girouard wrote that the sisters grieved the demolition of the original convent so filled with memories.

In Aklavik, the sisters continued to marvel at their success. The Inuit people became more docile and, at Christmas-time, came to give a concert to the fifty students of the school, amusing them with their mimicry. The small hospital had

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<sup>4</sup> The exhibition was held at the military riding school on Craig Street. The conferences were diffused by radio CKAC.

received eight patients, one of whom practically forced his way in. Dissatisfied with the care given at the Protestant hospital, he found a way to escape and went to seek admission at the Catholic hospital. The bishop and police were duly notified, and tried to bring the patient back, but he insisted that he would rather die right there between the two institutions. He presented his case so vehemently that he was allowed to remain at the place of his choice. Ironically, his name was Mr. Luck!

In St. Boniface, the construction of the sanatorium continued under the supervision of Sister Rose Letellier who required new helpers. For this purpose, it was decided to turn over to the Sisters of St. Joseph, the school in Kenora where the Grey Nuns had missioned for thirty-two years.<sup>5</sup>

In the St. Albert province, the newly built School of Nursing in Saskatoon, able to accommodate two hundred students, was a real accomplishment.

On American soil, the sisters in Toledo were celebrating the 75th anniversary of their presence there. St. Anthony's Orphanage had overcome its earlier difficulties and St. Vincent's Hospital was prospering. The neighborhood took this opportunity to voice their appreciation to the sisters. The celebrations lasted three days, with both Catholics and Protestants participating; 350 former students attended as well as the first interns who began their career at the hospital. The various groups were invited to a meal served by the students of the Ursuline Sisters, their ever-faithful friends. These sisters marveled at the fact that the "Canadian Grey Nuns enjoyed the favor of the general public, although they did not belong to the diocese nor to the country, but solely as a result of their intelligent and untiring service to the poor."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Fr. Baillargeon, together with the Srs. of Providence, and the Srs. of the Holy-Names-of-Jesus-and-Mary, organized a meeting where the students expressed their gratitude to the Grey Nuns for their untiring devotion in serving the population and especially in regard to youth.

<sup>6</sup> Annals 1930-31, p. 135. Mother Duffin, provincial superior to the superior general.

In Montreal, within the boundaries of the Ville-Marie Province, a new work was added:

### **ST. MARY'S HOSPITAL MONTREAL – FEBRUARY, 1930**

Established in 1924, to serve the English-speaking Catholics, the hospital was originally entrusted to the Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph who withdrew five years later.<sup>7</sup>

Lord Shaughnessy's residence, at 905 Dorchester, (now René Lévesque Boulevard) could accommodate fifty patients. The president, Dr. D. Hingston, had a staff of twenty-eight doctors; he was also responsible for the financial administration. During its original rise to prominence, the institution had accommodated about 4,000 patients, while 2,000 others were treated as out-patients.

The Board of Administration fully intended to continue its project; it called upon the Grey Nuns and appealed to Archbishop Gauthier who spoke on their behalf. He pleaded the cause so well that the Grey Nuns accepted the internal administration of St. Mary's by sacrificing a similar service at St. Joseph Hospital in Nashua, U.S.A. Fortunately, this exchange was averted. Mother McKenna, a general councilor, with the help of a few sisters, worked at organizing the services; the distance between the mother-house and the hospital was easily crossed. By March 1st, the hospital reopened under the direction of Sister St. Simon, Superior, assisted by Sisters Brien, Poitras, Carney and Josaphat. The first patient, Miss Mary Boyle, was admitted on March 20th and, six months later, nine candidates were admitted to the School of Nursing.

Two other fields of action in Montreal had to leave their original dwelling: the Nazareth house and the St. Joseph Profes-

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<sup>7</sup> Administrative problems were responsible for their departure (Hôtel-Dieu de Montreal, C. Kerr, p. 307).

sional School of Home Economics. The latter place, close to the cathedral, was being expropriated; the civic authorities had decided to widen the Cemetery Road – which became Cathedral Street. That ministry was transferred to Lot 494, in Villeray, Sault-au-Récollet.

As for the Nazareth house, the need for expansion had been recognized for some time and had now become imperative.<sup>8</sup> The building of the new establishment was already in progress at 4565 Queen Mary Road, not far from St. Joseph's Oratory and would make it possible to better respond to the numerous requests for admission of sightless students.

The St. Henri Orphanage, built in the quarter by that name, was also being completely renovated. The medium-sized building of 1885 was demolished and replaced by a larger one. A committee of businessmen, under the chairmanship of Mr. Allan Bray, a municipal magistrate, was set up as a non-profit civil corporation for social, philanthropic and charitable purposes. The building would be ready by autumn to shelter the sick, the elderly and orphan boys and girls. Besides the four sisters working in the orphanage, there would be fourteen other employees: nurses, teachers and individuals in charge of support services.

The report dealing with personnel and works bode well for the Institute and for the members of the administration; it was unanimously approved. Mother Dugas added her spiritual testament: "I thank you for the happiness given me during these past years and I invite you to give to the incoming superior the same marks of respect and trust as you have shown me."<sup>9</sup> The future superior general! She was sixty-nine years old and, for almost

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<sup>8</sup> On May 1, 1929, they left the Ophthalmic Institute in view of the transfer. This institute was an extension of the Dispensary founded in 1873 by Fr. V. Rousselot. Srs. Desjardins, Boulet, Plamondon and Masson had served there skillfully. Henceforth, the services of hospitals with departments of ophthalmology would be used.

<sup>9</sup> *Annals* 1930-31, p. 220.

half a century, she had been giving herself totally to the responsibilities entrusted to her. Should it not be time to retire? Yet, it was that precious diminutive Mother Piché whom the twenty-four capitular sisters would restore to the post of leadership of the Institute on October 6th. Her assistants were Mothers Evangeline Gallant, Virginie Allaire, St-Jean-Baptiste, G. Duffin (Mary G. O'Brien) and Elodie Mailloux.

Mother Piché was so astonished at having been re-elected that she forgot to retire to the quarters of the superior general and needed reminding. She did not, however, need reminding about the responsibilities that would be hers to bear. She assumed them with humility, convinced that God, who had entrusted her with this burden, would help her to bear it.

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The chronicler made the following entry for the morning of February 12, 1933: "Today the entire world is in expectation because the voice of the Pope will be heard for the first time, *Urbi et Orbi*, thanks to a radio station in Vatican City which opens on this day. The inventor, Marconi himself, presided at the installation of the equipment which will make it possible for the Head of the Church to speak to his faithful everywhere." The Grey Nuns were able to hear him, as Father Paiement, chaplain for the old folks, and Messrs. Deschamps and Clement, employees, had come to make the installations in the community, in the health center and in the School of Home Economics.<sup>10</sup>

The translation of the message quoted in the annals would be read, meditated and especially appreciated by the missionaries whom the Holy Father specifically called "the propagators of holy belief in Christ."

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<sup>10</sup> The Grey Nuns would soon begin using the radio. Sr. L. Ferland, during the Catholic Hour broadcast, gave conferences on M. d'Youville on Oct. 11th while on the following Nov. 1st, Mother Allaire addressed the audience about Crèche d'Youville (Annals 1930-31, pp. 653 & 691).



These precious missionaries hastened to congratulate the superior general on her return to the helm of their ship and invited her to visit them. The visitation of the western missions was scheduled for the year 1931. It would have been easier to leave during the winter season but circumstances made it necessary to delay the plans.

The General Chapter maintained the directives pertaining to apostolic activities; a few minor adaptations were made relative to the religious dress of hospital sisters assigned to work in operating rooms. Only one decision required approval from Rome: an Indult was required to allow the regrouping of the four English houses of Montreal under the jurisdiction of the province of St. Joseph in Boston. The Indult included the transfer of the orphanage in Liesse, of the Foundling Asylum and the sanatorium of St. Agathe to the Youville canonical province.<sup>11</sup>

In her letter of greetings for December 23rd, the superior general renewed the admonition for each sister to follow closely the one who, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, had rallied three companions to serve the needy "ever attentive to their needs, never rebuffed by their moods, seeing in their person, Jesus-Christ whose members they were honored to be."<sup>12</sup>

"To see God in our companions; to see God in the elderly, the sick, the children, the infants, our students" were recommendations of the mother who stressed the necessity of intimate life with God in order to grow in faith.

The need to study in order to keep abreast of modern requirements was constantly borne in mind as being of prime importance. The sisters engaged in teaching took advantage of courses at the 'Institut Pédagogique'; the nurses attended special interest sessions; courses in English were widely promoted at the

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<sup>11</sup> All three works were directly attached to the mother-house. The English-speaking houses were: St. Patrick's Orph. in Killarney, Fr. Dowd's Memorial Home and St. Mary's Hospital.

<sup>12</sup> Dispositions to be upheld following the rules adopted in 1738.

mother-house under the direction of Mother Duffin.<sup>13</sup> Every sister was warmly encouraged to acquire the knowledge that might enable her to fulfill, with competence, the task entrusted to her.

Thus, Sister Gamache began the year by attending courses in agriculture at St. Hyacinth. Achieving first place in the competition organized for farms within the county of Jacques-Cartier, she received a diploma, accompanied by an award, conferring on her the title of agronomist.

The orphan boys learned from her how to cultivate the land (the great nurturer of humanity), benefited from her teaching and shared her enthusiasm.

Another brave worker unwillingly drew the tributes of her fellow citizens. Sister Bonneau was not a noisy zealot, and did not seek praise for her apostolic activities. "Do not remove the face of Christ from the poor whom I help," was once her response, meaning that the privilege of serving them was ample reward. Those who observed her profound charity, however, wished to underline, in a worthy manner, the 50th anniversary of the religious profession of their 'Sister Rosalie of Canada'. The members of the St. Vincent-de-Paul Society drew up a long list of invitations: Church dignitaries, members of the religious community, of her family, of benefactors, former students from Longueuil and Nazareth, where she had begun her apostolate, were invited to the St. Antoine Hospice. In the evening of February 7th, a reunion was held during which time the career of this servant of the poor was highlighted. The superior general delegated Mothers Gallant and St-Jean-Baptiste, a thoughtful gesture; she too was a jubilarian and her presence might prompt a sharing of the tributes if she had attended the celebration herself.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The 90 novices and 32 postulants currently in formation had the advantage of courses in theology and history.

<sup>14</sup> Sr. Bonneau pronounced her vows on Feb. 8, 1881 and Mother Piché on Sept. 27th of the same year.

The next day, February 8th, a Mass was celebrated at the hospice with Father O. Maurault, p.s.s., as presider and where he read a cablegram from Rome: "The Holy Father extends his paternal blessing to Sister Bonneau on the occasion of her jubilee." Finally, the media published a lengthy article about the heroine, who then eagerly returned to her task and apron as a servant.

Matters did not rest there. Sister Bonneau was again acclaimed during the community jubilee celebrations held April 14th to 16th. This time, Mother Piché and her seventeen companions were with her for the honors of the threefold event: community celebration, religious celebration, and celebration with the elderly, the protégés, friends and students from the various schools.

The superior general heard the recitation of a new kind of rosary: the joys, sorrows and glories that had marked her half century of apostolate: the foundation of the orphanage in Worcester, Mass., the journeys to the Canadian North in 1912 and 1917, to Rome in 1914, the fire in the Foundling Asylum, the influenza epidemic of 1918, the creation of eleven new posts between 1910 and 1920, steps taken relative to the Cause for Beatification. Special mention was made of the countless acts of benevolence, examples of her fidelity and of her open-heartedness which exemplified the climate of union bequeathed by the foundress.

A tribute of appreciation was addressed to each jubilarian for the apostolates exercised over the past fifty years. At the solemn high Mass on April 15th, His Excellency Bishop A. Béliveau, Archbishop of St. Boniface, assisted by Bishops Charlebois and Hallé, were accompanied by forty priests, sixty religious from various congregations, the sister-communities, numerous lay dignitaries, all united in a climate of thanksgiving.

The students from the various schools were also part of the celebration. The veil over the superior general's career was again lifted. During the presentation, Bishop Villeneuve from Gravelbourg was ushered into the hall. He explained: "I could

not come until today; I expected to make an intimate visit, and I find myself in the midst of this marvelous assembly. I am deeply touched by what I have heard. Your Mother asked me to come to her defense. I will do so totally. The violet that was mentioned, is not your Mother, nor is it the 'little Anna'. The biography which you have presented is rather the workings of God's grace in her. I believe that I have responded adequately to your request, have I not, Mother?"<sup>15</sup>

The celebration ended on this humorous note. The cloister was restored to its quiet solitude, wrote the annalist, as she faithfully entered notes of the vast correspondence received from across Canada, the United States and even France and Italy.

Besides the congratulatory messages, there came encouraging news from Rome. The Cause had moved a step forward. A commission had been established under the chairmanship of Dom O. Quentin, o.s.b., to study the documents concerning the candidate for beatification. Mgr. Hertzog stated that it had advanced to the historic phase. The writings of Father Charles Dufrost, of Mr. Antoine Sattin and other contemporary documents would be photocopied and sent to the postulator. Dom Quentin requested fuller details about the sources mentioned by Mr. Faillon, historian, in "The Life of Mother d'Youville". Sisters Valois, Drouin and Léonie Ferland were entrusted with the task of researching this information. A new biography authored by Sister St. Blanche, from the sister-community of Quebec, came at a very timely moment. Entitled: "A Disciple of the Cross", this document would "inspire sentiments of pride in the hearts of our people," declared Mgr. E. Laflamme.<sup>16</sup>

The humble Marguerite was emerging from the shadows. Attendance at the daily novena prayers at the crypt in the mother-house was increasing. Stained glass windows depicting the foundation and growth of Ville-Marie would soon be

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<sup>15</sup> Annals 1930-31, p. 437.

<sup>16</sup> The biography was published early in 1932.

installed in the Notre-Dame church. The window to the left was being reserved for Mother d'Youville; it would be divided in three parts recalling her devotion to God as Father, to the Savior's Cross and her various works.<sup>17</sup>

The gentle solitude that followed the jubilee celebrations did not last long, as at the end of April, there was held at the mother-house a convention for nurses, under the theme: **Improvements Needed Relative to Patient Care**. Conference speakers dealt with various aspects of care and stressed the need for cooperation among the various groups: physicians, orderlies, religious and lay nurses, personnel whose interventions centered on the patients' well-being, the 'raison d'être' of the hospital. Mother Piché presided at these sessions, thus giving credence to her intention to pursue the measures necessary to attain the goal.

The end of May marked the departure of the personnel involved with the St. Joseph Industrial School; that ministry along with the orphanage for boys, aged six to twelve years, would continue at St. Michel Boulevard (Cremazie). The pilgrimages to St. Joseph moved to the side of Mount Royal where the humble Brother André was accomplishing wonders.

The miraculous statue,<sup>18</sup> before which the wonder-worker had knelt many times, would have a place of honor in the future building, but what could not be brought there would be that modest sanctuary whose hallowed walls had seen a multitude of people passing through; there was also the pulpit where renowned speakers had successively addressed the devotees; there was the organ music and the festive songs which had charmed a pious congregation for over a half century.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> This stained glass window was installed in Nov. 1931.

<sup>18</sup> See Ch. 5, footnote #41 relative to this statue.

<sup>19</sup> The remains of the benefactor, Mr. O. Berthelet, were disinterred and transported to the Grey Nuns crypt on Dec. 6th of the preceding year. Several beneficiaries of his generosity would come to pray at his tomb. The Brothers of Charity, upon leaving their foundation on Montigny Street on July 21, 1932 were among these.

The sisters who had been helping for more than twenty years felt some sadness. They were inspired by the Book of Wisdom: "There is no stable dwelling beneath the sun," a truth confirmed by two dismal newscasts. A telegram announced that his Excellency, Archbishop Béliveau of St. Boniface, had recently suffered a stroke. It was learned also from the news media that His Eminence Cardinal R. M. Rouleau had succumbed to a heart attack on May 31st.

The superior general assured our sisters of St. Boniface of her regrets and the fervent prayers of the Montreal community for his recovery. Archbishop Béliveau had been looked upon as a defender of the Church, of religious communities, of denominational schools and of the French language.

The Grey Nuns had admired the Cardinal of Quebec, a man of God and a true friend as Mother d'Youville might have called him. As Bishop of Valleyfield, he had been very generous with his sound teachings and good advice to the Grey Nuns of Châteauguay and Beauharnois. Promoted to Quebec, he had acknowledged Mother d'Youville in our sisters of that city. During his last visit to Montreal, on February 11th, he had announced, with pleasure, that a new house would soon open in the capital city bearing the name DUFROST, the name of the Foundress. He had also stated: "I saw your hospitals in the West where much good is accomplished; Mother d'Youville must be gratified with the development of her works."<sup>20</sup>

The visit to these western missions was on the agenda for 1931. Mother Piché and her secretary, Mother St-Jean-Baptiste left Montreal on June 4th to undertake a journey that would be considerably easier than that of 1916, thanks to improved transportation. She did not dwell upon possible difficulties. The secretary was faithful in keeping a travel diary; news bulletins from the mother-house commented on their adventures and gave news about activities at home.

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<sup>20</sup> Annals 1930-31, pp. 31-32.

The departure from Montreal took place at eight o'clock in the evening; after brief stops in Manitoba and Saskatchewan along the way, they undertook the trip to Beauval on June 10th. It was expected that an Oblate brother would meet them in North Battleford and bring them to Green Lake. When he failed to appear, a vehicle was rented to cover the 180 mile journey, much of it on dangerous roads. The following morning, they began a seventeen hour trip by canoe where they had to cross thirty-seven rapids, three of which were extremely hazardous.

Upon the arrival of the dignitaries on June 13th, the students readily joined in a triple celebration: the birthday, the golden jubilee and the patronal feast of the superior general. Mr. Morrison, a government inspector from Ottawa who happened to be there at the time, seemed favorably impressed with what he saw and heard.

The visit included a walk to the cemetery to pray over the graves of Sisters St. Nazaire and Cécile Nadeau, a tour of the unfinished house and of the classroom which had been set up in the church basement.

The departure which had been planned for June 22nd, was delayed because of high winds which made the lake dangerous. The travelers left on the 24th aboard a large flat boat which was also transporting construction materials. The wind rose again, obliging the sisters to seek shelter in a small hut where they were welcomed by a Protestant gentleman married to a former student from Ile-à-la-Crosse. After a few hours, they continued on their way and arrived at Ile-à-la-Crosse by six o'clock.

The school, rebuilt after the fire of 1920, did not have all the conveniences common in southern regions but, thanks to the nearby hospital, there was running water. The hospital was so poorly built that water penetrated through the window panes when it rained. Moreover, the furnace was faulty and made it necessary to use stoves to supply heat during the day, but not at night.

Amid these problems, the superior general maintained her calm, her smile and her ability to listen to the sisters. All received from her, comfort and a new thrust to serve the sick or to teach their students. Her secretary faithfully recorded all these observations.

Their agenda included a visit to the graves of five deceased missionaries. Scheduled for July 1st, their departure was once more delayed because of high winds. Farewells were made hastily, leaving little time to express regrets. The boat was, at first, tossed by the strong wind and then, the motor stopped! After an unsuccessful struggle, the navigators decided to use oars. Providence intervened when a traveler came by and offered to tow the boat to Beauval, from where they left for Green Lake on July 8th.

This time, the canoe had to go against the current and, consequently, that part of the trip took two days in all kinds of weather: rain, scorching sun, thunder, lightning and hail which lasted till mid-afternoon. The guides wanted to take advantage of the calm to cross the great rapid known by the foreboding name of 'gate of hell'! Due to the low water level, the pilots had to maneuver the boat with poles for a distance of three miles.

At nightfall, the sisters retired in a tent on the hillside; the oarsmen rolled up in their blankets beside a fire which directed the mosquitoes towards the tent, making a restful sleep impossible.

Finally, the group reached Green Lake where Father Pascal, nephew of the late Bishop Pascal, volunteered to drive the sisters to North Battleford. Leaving early in the morning, they drove along stony roads rendered slippery by the rains. Then, suddenly, the vehicle went to the right, crossed a ditch and came to a complete stop in a field; a tire was lost in the ordeal. When that was repaired, they encountered a cyclone shortly before arriving at the station, only to find that the train had already passed! They sought refuge at the convent of the Sisters of the Child Jesus where they were received with great kindness.



On July 11th, the two sisters took the train to Saskatoon where they arrived at midday. The itinerary would proceed more smoothly from then on, but the delays experienced this far, obliged them to alter their plans.

Since they were in Saskatchewan, Mother Piché decided to visit the five houses there where fifty-five sisters worked as nurses or educators. The hospitals in Regina, Gravelbourg<sup>21</sup> and Saskatoon had an excellent reputation for care. At St. Paul's Hospital, Sister St. Ignace-de-Loyola from the sister-community of Nicolet had recently completed her course in nursing. The superior general was happy to announce that, at the request of Father Turquetil, she would accompany Sister Fafard to Chesterfield to open a hospital in the sterile land of Hudson Bay.<sup>22</sup>

The industrial school in Lebret, located in an enchanting part of the province, was progressing satisfactorily. It was there that, in 1916, Mother Piché had been extremely ill and caused grave concern. She again became ill here but recovered after a few days of rest. The journey continued to Lestock which boasted a new school that had been blessed by Archbishop McGuigan on June 17th. On that occasion the students demonstrated their talents and were complimented by government officials. However, another trial befell the new building. On June 29th, an explosion in the laundry severely wounded the engineer while fire spread very quickly to the other buildings. The new building was spared through the competent efforts of the employees and volunteers. The following year, this ministry would be transferred to the Oblate Sisters because the Grey Nuns were called to serve at the sanatorium.<sup>23</sup>

The travelers left Saskatchewan at the end of August. They had just arrived at the Holy Cross Hospital in Calgary when

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<sup>21</sup> The drought in Gravelbourg continued.

<sup>22</sup> Fr. A. Turquetil became apostolic vicar for Hudson Bay on Feb. 23, 1932.

<sup>23</sup> The Oblate Sisters took possession of the school at the beginning of Apr. 1932.

Bishop Breynat came to visit them, inviting them to Fort Resolution where Father Fallaize would receive episcopal consecration on September 13th. The superior general did not acquiesce because of plans to visit the Far North in the following year.<sup>24</sup> The spectacle of the grandiose ceremony delighted the people of the North. Bulls received from Rome authorized two priests to assist the consecrating bishop because of the difficulty for other bishops to go the Mackenzie. However, Archbishop O'Leary of Edmonton and Forbes of Ottawa, along with Bishops Guy and Charlebois, actually were able to attend Bishop Breynat who conferred the episcopate upon his coadjutor.

The Grey Nuns of the area delighted in their role as hostesses for this very special delegation, which overshadowed the passage of the renowned Lindbergh couple on a world tour.<sup>25</sup>

Mother Piché offered her warm congratulations to the new bishop who answered on September 24th: "You are very kind to have remembered the youthful chaplain who served temporarily in 1917<sup>26</sup> (...) and I know that you will continue the charity of your prayers on my behalf (...) The Grey Nuns are an important and choice part of the vicariate; they will be my comfort and my mainstay."

Comfort and support are qualities which the superior general witnessed as she saw the good accomplished in the missions of Alberta. The hospitals in Edmonton, Calgary and St. Paul were as effective as those in Saskatchewan; the convents in St. Albert and Legal were highly successful in teaching regular programs and in the promotion of the French language.

The visit to Saddle Lake brought to the forefront some of its history. The post had originally been established at Lac La Biche

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<sup>24</sup> Letter of Sept. 3, 1931.

<sup>25</sup> Leising, o.c., p. 123. The Lindberghs came to Aklavik and expressed surprise at the sight of a hospital so well equipped at the end of the earth.

<sup>26</sup> While convalescing in Montreal, Fr. Fallaize replaced the chaplain of the Home for a few months.

in 1862 for the evangelization of the Cree and Chipewyan natives. Twenty-two years later, in 1898, the mission was transferred to Saddle Lake, eighty miles distance from there.

Now, the convent was beginning to deteriorate. The Oblate Fathers decided to build closer to St. Paul. The school would henceforth be designated as Blue Quill Residential School, after a native chief. To the great joy of all the sisters, this change of site would bring them closer to St. Theresa Hospital.<sup>27</sup>

Before leaving Alberta, Mother Piché gave to the sisters news that would touch the entire Institute. The Sisters of Ottawa, first of the Youvillian family to do so, had accepted an overseas mission in Basutoland (Lesotho), Africa. These brave women had come to kneel at the tomb of "our Venerable Mother" before leaving. At the moment of their departure on September 29th, all the personnel of the mother-house gathered to wish a happy journey and a fruitful apostolate to the five sisters whose joy was obvious. They were accompanied to the Bonsecours wharf by their superior general, Mother St. Bruno and her councillors, Mothers Gallant and Duffin as well as Sisters Drouin and Vallée, all of Montreal. There, they were met by Archbishop Forbes of Ottawa who came to give a final blessing to his brave spiritual daughters. The development of this missionary enterprise would be followed with interest and its success entrusted to Mother d'Youville through daily novena prayers.

Mother Piché and her secretary had no difficulty reaching St. Boniface where they arrived at the beginning of October. That province had a total of 255 professed sisters, twelve novices and five postulants. It maintained sixteen institutions, five of which were in Saskatchewan, one in the U.S.A. (Fort Totten) and one in Ontario. At Fort Frances the school celebrated its 25th anniversary. The superiors were privileged to visit Fort St. Charles where LaVérendrye and Christophe Dufrost de

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<sup>27</sup> The new house opened its doors on Dec. 7th of that year.

Lajemmerais, respectively uncle and brother of the Foundress, had set foot exactly two hundred years earlier.

In October, the visitors went to the American mission of Fort Totten where the Sioux natives presented their homage to the superior general on the occasion of her jubilee. They recalled the memory of the early valiant missionaries: Sisters Pagé, Allard, Cleary and Arsenault. Then came a tour of the rural convents of St. Norbert, La Broquerie, Ste-Anne-des-Chênes and St. François-Xavier. Mother Piché was pleased to hear the students speak impeccable French. She admired their progress in Gregorian chant, in piano and violin.

They returned to St. Boniface in early November where, on the 6th, they arrived at the most recent foundation:

### **ST. BONIFACE SANATORIUM ST. VITAL, MANITOBA – 1930**

The erection of this imposing structure began on June 27, 1930; the main building, in the form of an H was to be 240 feet long and 255 feet wide; it had four stories and a lower level; it was in reinforced concrete and built on piles. Each section had an elevator and all the commodities needed for the care of tuberculosis patients. The central portion contained two hundred beds for adults, while one of the wings could accommodate fifty children.<sup>28</sup>

Archbishop Béliveau, who had conceived the idea for this foundation, saw its realization with obvious satisfaction. However, he was unable to officiate at the blessing although his health had improved. The ceremony was held on Tuesday, September 29th, presided by Msgr. Jubinville, Vicar General.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The second wing was reserved for the various services. Report given by Mother Dionne, *Annals* pp. 681-684.

<sup>29</sup> Due to the delays in Beauval and Ile-à-la-Crosse, the superior general failed to arrive on time for the inauguration.

In the evening a reception was held for invited guests; in the absence of the lieutenant-governor, the Hon. John Bracken, Premier of Manitoba, declared the Sanatorium officially opened. He warmly congratulated the Grey Nuns for having endowed the province with this means of combating tuberculosis.

Mother Piché and her secretary were welcomed to the Sanatorium which, after only one month of operation, already had 106 patients entrusted to the care of eleven sisters.<sup>30</sup> In less than a year, 432 patients had been admitted. It was an impressive sight to see at least thirty-five patients transported to the chapel in their beds for Sunday Mass surrounding the altar dedicated to Christ the King.

During a visit to the mother-house, Father L. Primeau stated that the economic crisis was keenly felt in Manitoba; consequently the St. Joseph Orphanage and Hospice Taché were filled to capacity. It had been providential that the Grey Nuns had returned to their original home in favor of the elderly. The superior general was highly satisfied and encouraged the generous missionaries before returning to the mother-house.

After an absence of six months, her entry to the large convent was a solemn one as the entire household assembled to greet Mother Piché who had again revealed herself as a calm and strong person whose influence inspired the sisters with joyful generosity in God's service.

The superior general made rounds to visit the sick and elderly sisters to deliver the messages that had been entrusted to her. Several of the sisters had served in the west for many years and were pleased to realize that they were not forgotten.

A few days later, it was learned that Bishop Villeneuve had been named Archbishop of Quebec. The people of Gravelbourg were dismayed at the news. Mother Piché reported that they had

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<sup>30</sup> Because the sisters were needed at the Sanatorium, the missions of Kenora and Lestock were transferred to other religious communities.

suffered from drought, the grass was dry and the trees had lost their leaves. To her telegram of congratulations, the archbishop replied: "Touched by your gracious sentiments. I bring Gravelbourg along in my heart."<sup>31</sup>

Many Grey Nuns in Montreal carried in their heart memories of the years spent at the Nazareth School for the blind. That ministry was about to leave the residence which Father Victor Rousselot, p.s.s., had inaugurated on December 23, 1861. The outstanding benefactor had died on August 31, 1889. His generosity was warmly remembered on Tuesday, December 22, 1931 during the celebration of a farewell Mass in the chapel, a requiem in memory of benefactors, professors and students. Many of those in attendance, Mother Piché among them, had seen the founder at work, encouraging the sisters to become familiar with braille and to recruit candidates from the countryside who might benefit from the instruction made available to them.

The efforts of professors and teachers were crowned with success. Persons such as Cusson and Doyon had been awarded the prize of Europe; more recently, Clara Lanctôt had won the highest score for the most original poem printed in *POESIA*, a publication of Alfordville, Seine, France. In June of the previous year, Louis-Philippe Lainesse received a law degree with great distinction and won three prizes; a young Italian named Di Biasio, excelled in composition over his French-speaking classmates and, furthermore, was becoming a pianist and a violinist with a promising career.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> This honor to the o.m.i. was preceded by two deaths: those of Bishop Grouard on Mar. 9th, and of Bishop Dontenwill on Nov. 30th. The sup. gen. was replaced by Fr. P. T. Labouré, knowledgeable in several languages and an accomplished musician. Fr. A. Melanson was named bishop of Gravelbourg.

<sup>32</sup> In an article appearing in *LE DEVOIR*, and reproduced in the *Annals of 1931*, pp. 562-63, the author wrote: "Nazareth is not only a music school, but serves as such by offering academic courses similar to those which the sighted follow."

The priests of St. Sulpice had always given very generous support for the ministry to the blind. One who had particularly distinguished himself in this regard was Mr. René Labelle who had been their chaplain from 1893-1900. After becoming provincial superior for the Company, he continued his interest in the organization until his death on October 4, 1931, which Mother Piché learned about during her travels.<sup>33</sup>

Mr. Louis Bouhier, pastor of Notre-Dame parish, and also former chaplain at Nazareth, reviewed the history of this old residence where he had, for many years, witnessed love and experienced pain. The speaker's eloquence seemed to have inspired the artists who outdid themselves during the musical program.

The "dear old house" was vacated on February 13th at which time the students joined the sisters and teaching staff who had moved to the Queen-Mary Road four days earlier.

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When one considers the number and especially the quality of visitors at the mother-house on Guy Street, it would seem that they gave the sisters an opportunity to gain through them a broad vision of missionary life; such visits compensated for the shortcomings of radio reports which were as yet very limited!

During 1932, besides the bishops of the dioceses where the Grey Nuns worked, there came the apostolic vicars of the Suez Canal, Bishops Hiral and from Szepingkai, Manchuria, Bishop L. A. Lapierre.

The visiting bishops from the west and from the north always spoke to their audience about the trials and successes within their territory – news which often preceded reports written weeks or months earlier.

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<sup>33</sup> Letter of Dec. 23, 1931. Fr. R. Labelle replaced Fr. R. Neveu.

The rapidity of air travel was much appreciated. Bishops Breynat and Prud'homme also often mentioned this; the bishop of Prince Albert once stated that he accomplished, within two hours, a trip which would have taken him twelve days by canoe! As for Bishop Breynat who became designated as "the flying bishop", he highly recommended that mode of travel even with its unpredictable delays...In Fort Chipewyan, where he had celebrated midnight Mass, the children's choir had sung so beautifully that even the dogs, who usually howled in all the notes of the canine scale, had observed a profound silence. The bishop warmly congratulated the choir for this achievement. The celebration was so joyful that the Chipewyan children did not want their visitor to leave the next day. They prayed with such insistence that a heavy fog made it impossible for the plane to take off, a fact for which the children claimed credit.<sup>34</sup>

On April 17th, Bishop O. Charlebois told the sisters in Montreal that the missionaries in Beauval had finally moved into their new school, after having waited three years!

Bishop Karl Alter of Toledo, en route to Dublin, Ireland, for the Eucharistic Congress, visited on June 10th. He expressed satisfaction at the good being accomplished in the city of his episcopal see; he recalled certain events having spent seventeen years as chaplain at St. Anthony's Orphanage and he hoped that the spirit of Mother d'Youville would always remain lively among her daughters.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Sr. M. L. Champoux, *Annals 1931-32*, p. 41. Bishop Breynat was created a Knight of the Legion of Honor as a result of his 40 years of apostolate in the North. The Consul pinned on the knight the cross formerly given to Bishop Grouard and generously ceded by Bishop Guy.

<sup>35</sup> Bishop Alter received his episcopal consecration in June 1931, just as the St. Francis-de-Sales Cathedral was rising from the damage caused by a fire which almost totally destroyed the church on Jan. 9th. As a native son of Toledo, the young bishop was warmly welcomed by both Catholics and Protestants.



His visit had been preceded by that of the archbishop of Quebec on May 14th. Archbishop Villeneuve stated that he was pleased to have Grey Nuns in the capital city, but admitted that his fondness remained with Gravelbourg. "When I was afflicted with typhoid fever at St. Joseph Hospital last year, I was able to observe, first-hand, what went on in the institution where heroic devotion reigned just as much as in the far-off missions. The economic crisis caused much suffering out there; I feared that the sisters would be recalled to Montreal, but your charity let them remain with us...that will bring you special blessings. Conditions are improving in my former diocese. There has been rain and the crops are plentiful."

Bishop Turquetil, apostolic vicar of Hudson Bay,<sup>36</sup> came on May 19th. He spoke to the sisters of the marvels worked by the little St. Thérèse on behalf of his barren territory. He said: "It was the Inuit people who promoted the cause to have the Little Flower proclaimed patroness of missions throughout the world."

Bishop Peter Monahan of Calgary expressed praise for the Grey Nuns of Holy Cross Hospital. Born in St. Lin des Laurentides, he spoke French fluently, to the satisfaction of a great number of his flock.

The brief visits of these dignitaries instilled sentiments of gratitude in the souls of those who had labored in these missions. Also, as a consequence, the rising generation looked forward eagerly to one day being assigned to these fields of apostolate.

An active daily program continued in the vast mother-house, and all remained disposed for any event. When an imposing funeral was held in the Montreal basilica for four firemen who had died in action, the sisters went to comfort the grieving families. They attended the funeral and, when the procession passed along Guy Street, the century-old bell rang its mournful notes.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The apostolic vicar was anointed at the Cathedral in Montreal on Feb. 23rd. Mother Piché attended the celebration.

<sup>37</sup> The 23 other wounded firemen were likewise visited; one who was transported to Notre-Dame Hospital returned to his faith before dying.

At the hospital of St. Jean-sur-Richelieu, the prison altar was tastefully decorated to mark the end of the inmates' retreat. They were deeply touched by the gesture and by the hymns sung during Mass. Had not Mother d'Youville likewise visited and assisted prisoners in her day?

The third annual retreat which had assembled many of the teaching sisters at the mother-house ended on July 12th. Mother Piché took this opportunity to voice her appreciation for their good work, but also commended the success obtained in the studies required for the exercise of those works. "Science has become a necessity", she said; "we have no right to undertake good works without the necessary qualifications, and that holds true even in the Far North." She mentioned that several nurses had obtained their baccalaureate in science from Mary Manse College in Toledo; others had distinguished themselves in pedagogy; two missionaries obtained their Grade XII with high distinction and successfully studied at the Normal School in Edmonton. The annalist too, was highly successful in a course in literature taken at the University of Montreal.

The superior general strongly recommended that the pursuit of studies be added to one's daily work. She also urged the sick and the elderly to uphold the students with their prayers. She added: "It is important to remember that we are, by vocation, servants of the poor and to rejoice that this competence is destined for their service."<sup>38</sup>

Among newsworthy items, were the following:

– the precious Cause of Canonization. A ray of hope had shone when Msgr. Della Cioppa was named lawyer, but the consultors required a more extensive study of the documents. The recent death of Father Estève, o.m.i, responsible for the interests of the Grey Nuns in Rome, would likely mean a new delay;

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<sup>38</sup> A recommendation which she renewed in a letter dated Mar. 25, 1935.

- the misfortunes as well as the progress of the missions in Toledo, in the Far North and in Montreal;
- the addition of a new wing to the hospital of St. Jean-sur-Richelieu<sup>39</sup> and a new project to begin on Ile-St-Bernard at Châteauguay;
- the news of the forthcoming visit of His Eminence Cardinal Jean Verdier, p.s.s., Archbishop of Paris and of Father Pierre Boisard, Vice-Superior of St. Sulpice, expected in Quebec on July 18th and in Montreal the next day.

As the saying goes: One person's joy is another person's grief. The announcement of the coming of the imminent visitor meant the postponement of the visits to the North until the following year, much to the disappointment of those who had looked forward to it with great eagerness. But, as women accustomed to sacrifice, they accepted the situation. These dear missionaries would hopefully find some consolation when they read the laudatory comments which the Cardinal made about them: "I cannot speak highly enough of my admiration for your works, and especially for those of the North. Your missionaries are heroic in their sacrifices." These words were spoken after the Mass celebrated on July 24th when the Archbishop of Paris addressed approximately four hundred religious in the community room. He added: "I will return on Tuesday to celebrate with you, St. Anne, the patronal feast of your superior general."

Faithful to his promise, the dignitary spoke to the sisters again on the morning of July 26th, saying: "Do you realize that your good examples motivate us? You have missions throughout Canada and in the United States. The Sulpicians also want to be missionaries. The Sulpicians of France are represented in Indo-China; the Sulpicians of Canada will soon be in Japan."

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<sup>39</sup> The pastor, Fr. Coursol blessed the ground selected for the edifice on Aug. 6th of the previous year.

His Eminence went to Châteauguay and found the site on Ile-St-Bernard so enticing that he would "willingly accept a post there as an associate chaplain."

He was moved to tears during his August 6th visit at Crèche d'Youville. He arrived at two o'clock in the afternoon accompanied by MM. Boisard, Bouhier, Maurault, Dupaigne, p.s.s., and the Holy Cross Fathers, Alias and Philius Vanier, Cousineau and Clément.

A battalion of young boys, aged four and five years, served as guards of the papal flag; they presented arms as His Eminence passed by; charming little pages waved the French flag. Directed by a young maestro, the blossoming artists with piano accompaniment played the flute, cymbals and drum; wee tots formed a part of the decor, smiling pleasantly, while the babes were carried by their nurses. These little people accompanied His Eminence to the chapel where they sang the Laudate in plainchant in perfect unison.

Red roses (becoming to cardinals) were offered to the dignitary whose only words, as he leaned toward the little girl, were: "It is France which embraces Canada," and kissed her. So lively was his emotion that no other comment was necessary.

Two days later, His Eminence bade farewell to Canada through a radio-diffused message. "As I leave the shores of the St. Lawrence, I want to express to all the French Canadians spread throughout the New World, my gratitude, my admiration and my brotherly love (...) Your country is beautiful and mightily appealing. God has visibly blessed this corner of the universe."

The cardinal-archbishop left for New England where French is commonly spoken, especially in Worcester, where he was a guest of the Assumptionist priests. Again, he lauded the Grey Nuns, apostles of the Far North, and the Sisters of St. Anne, the apostles of Alaska.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Card. Verdier and Fr. J. G. Bastien, Superior of the Pontifical College in Rome, left the U.S.A. aboard the Champlain on Aug. 20th.

At his farewell, the archbishop of Paris, spoke his admiration for a people who, within so few years, was able to establish flourishing institutions. The visitor had also learned that these flourishing institutions were not the sole prerogative of religious communities.

In fact, since 1907, there existed in Montreal, the St. Justine Hospital for children, due to the initiative of Mrs. Justine Lacoste-Beaubien, an exceptional lady whose dynamism drew to her some very select collaborators: Mesdames Le Vasseur, Masson, Hamel, Berthiaume, Thibaudeau, Rolland, Lacoste, Gérin and Bruneau. The hospital continued to progress under the leadership of the foundress who entrusted the internal management of the institution to the Congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom. From this initial enterprise, there arose: "Help for Crippled Children", the "Victor Doré School", and the "Notre-Dame Establishments".<sup>41</sup>

The soul of these later initiatives was Mrs. Lucie Bruneau who, one fine day, in 1932, called upon the Grey Nuns to help with a vacation colony.

### **VACATION CAMP "LE GRILLON" (Contrecoeur – 1930), then CHÂTEAUGUAY – 1932**

Mrs. Bruneau's request for Grey Nuns was immediately accepted. The superior general and her councillors recognized therein, a new opportunity to reflect the charity of their Foundress.

The project first saw the light of day at Contrecoeur in the summer of 1930. The country house entitled "Le Grillon", directed by the Daughters of Wisdom provided 'providential' vacations for crippled and underprivileged children.

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<sup>41</sup> Read: Des Rivières, "A Woman with a Thousand Children."

In 1932 "Le Grillon" was transferred to Ile-St-Bernard in Châteauguay, in the area called Pointe-aux-Sables (Sandy Point), a location leased free of charge by the Grey Nuns to the organization which erected a few cottages in which to lodge the children. The planning committee was responsible for transportation, nourishment and for building a road to the camp. The Daughters of Wisdom continued their collaboration, assisted by Sisters St. Joseph, Giard, Lord and Anastase of the Grey Nuns.

The camp was blessed on July 1st by Father Paul Desjardins, o.p., chaplain at the Manor. Mother Piché was in attendance, happy at the thought that these crippled children, like those from wealthy families, would benefit from the fresh air and sunshine.

On July 4th, twenty-seven little girls arrived at this lovely location accompanied by Mesdames Bruneau, Gibeault and Rolland. Their joy was boundless. They had never beheld so vast a horizon, "a lake so inviting and graced by a shore of golden sand."

Rainy days had been provided for by verandahs and by various entertainment: piano, record-players, and a well furnished library.

The pavilion contained space for a chapel where the first Mass was celebrated on July 5th by Father P. Lecomte, o.f.m., pleased that the Franciscans could, in some way, be associated with the project.

During their stay, the youngsters were offered a diversion when the sisters who lived on the Island invited them to visit the manor, the grotto and the man-made hill which served as a burial ground for the Grey Nuns. Responding to the thoughtfulness of their hostesses, they exclaimed: "Long live Mother d'Youville," whose life they had read about during their leisure. Time flies rapidly when one is happy. The vacationers were heavy-hearted when the time came to leave after three enjoyable weeks of fun.

Until the end of summer, groups of sixteen to twenty crippled girls and boys, came alternatively for a three week stay. One hundred and sixteen children had been accommodated.

The demand was such that it was necessary to build larger cottages. On August 26th of the following year, another unit became operative, and the organizers continued to dream of facilities that would enable them to meet all the demands.

Soon, guides and scouts joined the workers to organize outdoor activities and to serve as lifeguards for those learning to swim in these inviting waters.

Mrs. Gibeault, secretary of the planning committee, wrote to Mother Allaire, responsible for the project: "We wish to convey to you that we have been impressed, moved and grateful for your kindness on behalf of our vacation program. Without you, we would never have been able to provide our protégés with all the advantages they have enjoyed."<sup>42</sup>

Mother Piché left on August 17th to visit the American houses on important business. The admirable work accomplished in Cambridge and at the St. Helena Home were especially praised by Cardinal O'Connell.

In Nashua, St. Joseph's Orphanage was recovering from damages incurred in the fire of the previous year. At the hospital there, Monsignor Peterson remarked in a fatherly way about his fluency in French: "My mother used to bring me to your school in Salem."<sup>43</sup>

The visit continued to Lawrence where the superior general had begun her first assignment many years previously, to the orphanage in Worcester where she had been the foundress and to New Brunswick where St. Peter's Hospital was planning a new wing.

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<sup>42</sup> A young handicap, Ella Gervais, wrote to one of the sisters: "I am convinced that my infirmity is not an obstacle to my vocation as a little missionary through suffering and prayer. Thank you for having taught me that."

<sup>43</sup> Bishop J. B. Peterson replaced Bishop Guertin in the episcopal see of Manchester.

The return to the mother-house occurred on October 8th; during her absence, a few events worthy of note had taken place.

On September 12th, Mr. Romeo Neveu, p.s.s., the provincial superior, introduced Mr. Pierre Boisard, the vice-superior general of the Priests of St. Sulpice, who said: "We have known you from across the seas for a long time. Father Duchaussois' book has made you known throughout Europe where your Congregation is respected and loved." After having mentioned the various charitable works, he added: "What an admirable work your Venerable Mother initiated when she planted the mustard seed that became your Institute! I bless Providence who has afforded me the joy of celebrating in your chapel and, I thank you for the edification you have provided me. I am touched by all that I have seen in your houses, your orphanage in Liesse and Le Grillon established in the beautiful setting of Châteauguay. And, since St. Sulpice has become a missionary society, I ask you to pray that the charity of Christ may become incarnate and spread wherever we pass."

Accompanied to the infirmary and then to the seniorate which Mr. Boisard humorously referred to as "the senate", he commended the sisters for having contributed to the continuation of the works. He likewise exhorted the elderly boarders to accept the limitations of age in a spirit of hope. At the regional school, he was welcomed in song, to which he responded: "It would be impossible to find this song in some book; you have drawn it from the depth of your heart. I am deeply touched by the expression of your love for France. Even though the thought of my homeland is ever with me, time is not burdensome in your beautiful country, because I discover France in Canada."

During his visit to the novitiate, he remarked: "Hope is in the seed," as he urged the postulants and novices to cultivate a spirit of prayer that would inspire boldness in undertakings.

Prior to his departure, the vice-superior made the following entry in the guest book: "If, as declared St. John-the-Evangelist, God is charity, this was never better understood nor reflected



than in the beautiful community of the Grey Nuns. May the Lord keep in them the spirit of charity of the Venerable Mother d'Youville; may he bless their admirable works and multiply their vocations."

These testimonies strengthened in the sisters both a pride at belonging to a Congregation dedicated to works of charity and a determination to be ever faithful in following in the footsteps of the one who had opened the way.

A brief item which appeared in a newspaper aroused concern among the residents of Guy Street. "The boat in which four missionaries were traveling en route to the Far North has become ice-bound."

On November 13th, a telegram arrived announcing the disaster which had occurred in Lebret, a disaster which the journal *LA LIBERTÉ* described in these words: "The Catholic Indian School, one of the largest of its kind in America, has been completely destroyed by fire. The fire has been attributed to faulty electrical wiring. There remains nothing but smoldering ruins. There were no injuries."<sup>44</sup>

Mother St. Emilienne, the provincial superior of St. Boniface, completed the information: "In place of the large school, only two chimneys and a pile of ashes remain. No lives were lost, thank God; the sisters are brave and hope that the government will rebuild it without delay. Meanwhile, they find refuge in the basement of the old and the new church, in the parish hall, in the town hall, and the boys are lodged in the scholasticate of the Oblate Fathers."<sup>45</sup>

Reassured about the safety of their companions and their charges, the sisters were better disposed to share the joys of those who, in Montreal, were celebrating the centenary of the Catholic Orphanage located at Notre-Dame-de-Grâces. This

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<sup>44</sup> *LA LIBERTÉ*, a journal of the Canadian West, dated Nov. 16, 1932.

<sup>45</sup> Letter dated Nov. 19.

work was established by a committee of charitable ladies in order to relieve the extreme misery among the poor, specifically to protect the orphans whose number had increased at an alarming rate after the epidemic of 1832. Mesdames Blondin-Cotté dit Chalifoux, Quesnel, Petit, Morin and Prévost had, for fifty-seven years, assured the direction and support of the project until 1889. Father Rousselot then reminded the committee of the understanding of 1865 to the effect that the orphanage would be transferred to a religious community. It was at this time that the Grey Nuns became involved.<sup>46</sup>

The Ladies' Auxiliary which replaced the pioneers of 1832, cooperated with the sisters to organize the feast which was held on November 27th and 28th; a festivity that earned them high praise from the Montreal news media. Mother Piché, with her secretary and several former missionaries, some religious of the Congregation of Notre-Dame along with Sisters of Providence, viewed the unfolding of a century of history through the talents of budding actors from among the orphan protégés.

By the end of November, the weather was like that in midwinter with cold winds causing considerable inconvenience to the local population. This inconvenience was especially acute at the Grey Nuns' mother-house where the heating apparatus, installed in 1902, was being replaced.<sup>47</sup>

The installation of the new system would be completed only by early December; those living there tasted an experience that was routine in the Far North. Meanwhile, thanks to Bishop Breynat, they were given an opportunity to view a film on works of evangelization in his vicariate. This naturally resulted in increased admiration for those heroic women.

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<sup>46</sup> See "Essor Apostolique" pp. 106-108 which described the origin of this work.

<sup>47</sup> An extension was added to the wing parallel to St. Catherine Street in order to install three Babcock and Wilcox boilers.

A letter from Mother Lachance, the provincial superior for the North, put an end to the concerns about the missionaries who had been ice-bound. She wrote: "Be reassured, all four of us are comfortably warm and presently with our sisters who also had been wondering what had become of us." The difficulties happened in this way: the *Canadusa* left Fort McMurray on October 8th and reached Lake Athabasca on the 12th, after having been stranded about twenty times. At Ile-aux-Outardes (Goose Island), heavy ice obstructed the way and it was necessary to turn back; after waiting four days, the boatmen tried in vain to get through. They were forced to go back toward Pike Lake where the sisters stayed in a Hudson Bay company warehouse while waiting for the dog sleds. All efforts failed as ice surrounded the barge so the crew sought shelter in an arm of the river. The boatmen were suffering from the cold and needed to have extra winter garments; a sewing room was installed aboard the vessel and the task was soon accomplished. Finally, the weather became favorable; the wind opened a passageway and the craft limped along. The group arrived at its destination eleven days later than planned. Fortunately, they did not run short of supplies nor of good humor, a humor provided by two new missionaries who seemed surprised at nothing. The writer added that they had offered these minor inconveniences so that the forthcoming visit of the superior general would be uneventful and agreeable.

Mother Piché's agenda included a visit to the distant posts during 1933. The valiant septuagenarian's courage was admirable as she prepared to go again to the Arctic where she had previously made two journeys under great difficulties...

In the last days of 1933, she wrote: "The joy of making the visits to our houses in the Far North was very sweet for me (...) I saw our sisters at work, happy to devote themselves to the evangelization of the natives. Their cheerfulness in the midst of continual privations, convinced me anew that happiness is found in sacrifice generously accepted." Such language was applicable throughout the Congregation since the economic crisis was prolonged. Mother Piché called for strict economy in

order to be able to help a greater number of disadvantaged people. Then, too, the Holy Year proclaimed by His Holiness Pius XI, to mark the nineteenth centenary of the Redemption, was a call to self-denial.

The trip to the country of ice and snow was genuinely anticipated by the superior general: prolonged travels on barges or motorized canoes across vast lakes and over perilous rapids, unpredictable weather, uncertainty as to times of departure, all had been expected and accepted, when, lo and behold, all these difficulties were overcome. Friends of the Congregation, remaining anonymous, had negotiated with Canadian Airways and the trip from Chipewyan onward was accomplished by air.

Mother d'Youville, the Mother of the poor, once confided: "Providence is admirable, my trust is in it."<sup>48</sup> Mother Piché reiterated this prayer of trust as she recalled her previous travels through the land of snow and silence, a land where she would have liked to serve as a missionary...

Mothers Piché and St-Jean-Baptiste's departure from Montreal took place on May 17th; they arrived in Fort McMurray five days later where they experienced their first plane ride. After only ninety minutes, they landed on Lake Athabasca, near the convent of "Chip", bringing with them the first bag of mail of the season.<sup>49</sup>

The visitors were met with a joyful outburst; thanks to the rapidity of travel, they would be able to extend their stay. In Fort Chipewyan, as in the other posts, the superior general shared with the sisters news that had come in the mail while helping with sessions of bookbinding or sewing, unaware that she was edifying those who saw her at work.

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<sup>48</sup> Letter to Fr. de l'Isle-Dieu, Aug. 17, 1768.

<sup>49</sup> The boxes of gifts and toys given by the convents of Montreal and shipped without charge by the Hudson Bay Co., arrived safely at each post. The happy students acknowledged their reception to the various donors, especially to the students of the St. Cunegonde Hospice.

Mother Piché shared with the sisters, news of two important losses: Mother Dugas and Mother Ward whose deaths had occurred on March 16th and 27th respectively. After having enumerated the heavy responsibilities which Mother Dugas had borne, Mother Piché stated: "Pondering on her wonderful career, what edifying traits will be recalled! Among these, let us highlight her spirit of abandonment which revealed the quality of her faith and of her trust." Meanwhile, Mother Ward's memory remained lively in the North; she had been one of the pioneers who had reached her post after a frightening trip along the Mackenzie and had labored there for an entire quarter-century. Both of these Mothers had been visited on February 10th by Father F. Labouré, Oblate Superior General, who wrote in the guest book: "The Oblates express their gratitude to the heroic women whose zeal and devotion made possible the evangelization of the Canadian Northwest." The memory of these staunch Grey Nuns was mentioned often, especially during visits to the graveyards where rested two of the other foundresses, Sister R. Brunelle in Fort Chipewyan and Sister E. Michon in Fort Providence.

In Fort Smith, the charred relics of the buildings were proof of the heavenly protection that had saved the mission on the previous April 26th. There were few other changes except for the newly built attractive little church.

On June 2nd, it was Fort Simpson's turn to be visited. Thanks to Divine Providence, who allows a testing only to see it followed by joy, the hospital had emerged from its ashes. From there, the travelers set out for Aklavik on June 24th. At this northern post, they admired the midnight sun, mindful that in midwinter there would be six weeks of total darkness. There, too, the hospital and school buildings were still under construction. The Inuit people could not conceal their sense of wonder when they first saw electric lights. As they became more approachable, the missionaries were more hopeful regarding their work of evangelization. Mother Piché spread joy and encouragement; she was delighted to hear her daughters speak of their happiness at coming all this distance to spread the gospel.

Foremost among the news brought to the missionaries, were those concerning honors bestowed upon the Canadian church: Archbishop Villeneuve of Quebec had been named a cardinal; three priests had been named to diocesan sees, namely, Bishops Melanson to Gravelbourg, Joseph Bonhomme, o.m.i., as apostolic vicar of Basutoland, Martin Lajeunesse, o.m.i., as coadjutor to the apostolic vicariate of Keewatin. At the beginning of September, it was learned that Father Emile Yelle, p.s.s., had been named coadjutor to Archbishop Béliveau of St. Boniface.

In September, a large number of Canadians were assigned to work in foreign countries. Three members of the Grey Nuns of Ottawa left for Basutoland; two weeks later, twenty-two religious women and twenty-six priests, among whom were Sulpician Fathers P. E. Léger and C. Prévost, p.s.s., en route for Japan; all of these took part in a moving missioning ceremony at the church of St. Etienne.

There were also tribulations: During the winter season, two churches were the prey of flames, namely St. Louis-de-France and St. Jacques, Montreal's first cathedral. In July, the St. Anthony Hospice of Longueuil was endangered. Total destruction was feared, but the local fire brigade, helped by those from Montreal, were able to extinguish the flames. In Valleyfield, it was an almost total disaster when a fire razed the cathedral, the convent and the normal school.

Among the success stories, the superior general mentioned the daily miracles accomplished at the clothing depot by Sister Bonneau and her competent crew, joined by Father Archange Godbout, o.f.m., who was inaugurating a campaign against communism.<sup>50</sup> St. Mary's Hospital was developing so rapidly that it became necessary to seek a new location on the Côte-des-Neiges Road and Lacombe Street: A bilingual novitiate was

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<sup>50</sup> Even at the mother-house, the word fascism was heard from overseas visitors.

about to open in Cambridge, Mass., to welcome candidates to the Grey Nun way of life.

Before ending her visit, Mother Piché appointed Sister Lusignan as provincial superior for the Northern missions. She replaced Sister Lachance who would go to Aklavik to replace the superior whose health was failing.

On the eve of her departure from the land of the Brown Bear, on July 14th, Mr. Gilbert, the pilot for the flight, came to the convent where the Mother gave him a dainty plant on behalf of herself and her sisters. In offering his thanks, he wrote: "The pilot and his team thank the Reverend Mother and the personnel of the Immaculate Conception School. The gift of delicate flowers, which were brought to life in Aklavik, will remain a symbol of the marvelous work accomplished by the missionaries of your Church in the Canadian North. You bring beauty and encouragement to this barren land. As a result of contacts with the pioneers of your convents, the personnel of our company have developed a great interest in your works of charity and are disposed to help in any way possible to assure their continuation. We consider it a privilege to transport the superior general throughout the Mackenzie district." The generosity was further witnessed when the Mother discovered that the invoice for the telegrams which she had sent to the mother-house had been stamped "no charge". Mr. Nealy, whose brother had been the priest-chaplain at St. Joseph Orphanage, had chosen this way to express his appreciation for the beautiful work accomplished by the Grey Nuns in Winnipeg.

At Fort Providence which had always been considered as the mother-house of the North, the travelers arrived just after Sister Donatien had been transported to the hospital in Fort Simpson. The Mother went by plane to visit her. Here again, she received a canceled invoice.

A banquet was held in Fort Providence where the great Chief greeted "the Mother of all the sisters." The Mother, observing the natives coming in large number to receive their treaty allowance from the government, went to visit the tents of these children of the woods, offering them medals and encouraging words.

At the mission of Fort Resolution, the visitors observed that the Chipewyan children, the Dog Rib, and the Yellow-Knife children were docile and appeared willing to learn. The last stage of the journey, from Fort McMurray to Edmonton, took place on September 19th. Here, the plane was again the mode of transportation when Mother Piché had to send two other missionaries urgently needed in the North. Once more, the pilot refused payment under pretext that he was indebted to the personnel of the various missions there. This graciousness toward the visitors would one day be explained...while the entire voyage was decidedly a success compared to those of 1912 and 1917.

On her way home, Mother Piché stopped at the posts along the way, especially at Gravelbourg, stricken now with grasshoppers that were eating the crops, and at Lebret where the school had not yet been rebuilt. In St. Boniface at the beginning of October, she greeted the sisters at Ste-Anne-des-Chênes where the convent was celebrating the 50th year of its foundation. Statistics revealed that 7,000 students had passed through the institution, of whom seventy had chosen the vocation of religious life and priesthood.

On October 18th, Archbishop Béliveau and the population of St. Boniface welcomed Bishop Emile Yelle who had received episcopal consecration in Montreal's Notre-Dame church on September 21st.<sup>51</sup> The next day, he celebrated the Eucharist in the old white house to show his esteem for the first religious community established at the Red River.

Sensitive to this thoughtful gesture, Mother Piché expressed her appreciation to the new coadjutor before returning to Montreal where she arrived on the morning of October 21st.

As though she were returning from a walk in the garden, the superior general gave a summary of her trip to the sisters assembled in the community room. She lauded the travel by air, the

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<sup>51</sup> Archbishop Béliveau attended the celebration, during which time he stayed at the Grey Nuns mother-house.



speed of which enabled her to spend more time with the sisters in each of the houses of the North; she spoke with emotion about the sacrifices and hard work of the missionaries. Then she lost no time before going to see the senior sisters, many of whom had worked in these missions. In the afternoon, she went to visit the sisters in the infirmary and also toured the departments for the elderly.

The Mother was updated regarding the misery still resulting from the economic crisis, to which were added fires causing serious damage to the church of the Immaculate Conception and the complete destruction of the Grey Nuns' storehouse on 'rue de la Commune'. Moreover, there was a communicable disease in the metropolis which, during the summer, had been diagnosed as typhoid fever.<sup>52</sup> In December, there was contagion in the school of Home Economics; many students were returned to their families, while those from a greater distance were placed in quarantine at the school.

The Grey Nuns' competence in caring for contagious illnesses was well known; they had become renowned during the epidemics that racked the city when typhus struck in 1847. As a result of this reputation, they had been invited to assume responsibility for the St. Paul Hospital in 1905. At the time, this institution for contagious diseases was a part of Notre-Dame Hospital. Later, it was attached to St. Luc Hospital and given the name of Pasteur Hospital, with the sisters still being involved. The new place opened on December 17th; among the few invited guests were Mothers Gallant and Allaire from the General Council, Mother Piché having left for the United States ten days earlier with Mother Dionne, the newly-named provincial superior.

On the occasion of its 25th anniversary, St. Joseph's Hospital in Nashua, was honored with the visit of His Eminence, Cardinal

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<sup>52</sup> The Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame recorded six deaths, while over 40 sisters were afflicted. (Annal 1933, p. 451).

Villeneuve, accompanied by Bishop J. P. Peterson, Bishop of Manchester, several priests of French ancestry and a few Oblates. Founded in 1908, the institution had admitted 46,015 patients; the Primate of the Canadian Church praised the Grey Nuns for the devotedness which characterized them wherever they were called to serve.

South of the border came three candidates for the novitiate in Cambridge which opened its doors on August 5, 1933. Sister Perron, the mistress of novices, welcomed them to a small house located close to the Holy Ghost Hospital for incurables (now Youville Hospital). The clothing ceremony was held on the following February 5th. On that same day, in Montreal, St. Boniface and Cambridge, a total of forty-nine candidates began their formal initiation to religious life. It was gratifying to observe that the community was expanding, as there came pressing requests for new works, one of which was about to rise through the collaboration of the Grey Nuns.

### **SCHOOL FOR EPILEPTICS MONTREAL – 1933**

The ladies of the organization known as "Aid to Handicapped Children", inspired by the untiring zeal of Mrs. Lucie Bruneau, their president, founded the Notre-Dame Establishment. This project consisted of several enterprises, one of which was a school specially devoted to the care of epileptic children. Its specific task was to "welcome, evangelize, instruct, nurture, employ and remunerate epileptics of both genders and of all ages, without distinction of race or creed."<sup>53</sup> The project was a challenging one requiring several years for its fulfillment. One of its determining elements was clearly defined: a school for teachable epileptics who had been refused by the schools of the city and of the province.

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<sup>53</sup> An article signed by Mrs. L. Bruneau in the souvenir album of the 200th anniversary of the foundation of the Grey Nuns, with pages not numbered.

On October 3, 1933, a thirteen year old boy of Irish descent began to come one day each week to the office of the agency located in the St. Mathieu wing of the mother-house. He received private tutoring, thanks to the generosity of the director of social work. The collaboration of the Grey Nuns began on January 11, 1934. They could hardly refuse the request, knowing that one among the first persons listed in Mother d'Youville's registry was a patient suffering from epilepsy. The first classroom was in a space which had formerly served as the adoption bureau. Bus transportation brought the children under the guardianship of volunteers who also helped them at mealtime. Sister Marie-de-la-Croix was entrusted with the schooling for these handicapped children.

On May 18th, the ladies under the presidency of a Franciscan priest, planned a distribution of prizes to the students in the program. In appreciation, the teacher was given a book together with a letter reading as follows: "You have been one of the first workers, and thanks to your kindness, your experience, your calm and confident efforts, you have admirably supported us in carrying out this much needed ministry among our people."<sup>54</sup>

On October 8th, approximately fifty students were registered in this new type of school; boys and girls came, alternatively, three days per week. The school was placed under the direction of Sister Alexina Mailloux assisted by Sister Anastase. Mother Piché, whose heart was open wide to every misfortune, showed her predilection for these children; she would visit them from time to time and distribute objects of piety. They were so sensitive to her interest that they would address notes to her. "I am looking forward to seeing you again"; "You have a great heart and this heart is loved by God"; "I know that you have done many beautiful things during your lifetime. I believe that the greatest consolation on your deathbed, will be to have founded a school for your beloved epileptics."

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<sup>54</sup> Letter signed by Mrs. J. P. Gibeault, secretary.

The superior general had certainly supported this project whose future was now held in doubt by the foundresses. Mother Piché, however, entertained in her heart the certitude of its survival.

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In December of 1934 Mother Piché addressed her yearly message to the 1,405 sisters, the 126 novices and 36 postulants of the Congregation knowing full well that these would be her final recommendations. The mandate of leadership, which had been entrusted to her for a third time, was drawing to a close. She had succeeded in preserving the faith, in upholding the supernatural climate, a condition essential for progress in the pursuit of the ministries.

She wrote: "An ever increasing love for God, that is my wish for you. True love for God motivates one to better serve one's neighbor in whom we see the living image of Jesus, our Savior."<sup>55</sup>

Sixty-seven works across Canada and in the United States depended on the commitment of the Grey Nuns. The mother-house was also a real hive of varied activities – accommodating the novitiate, the home for the elderly, the School of Home Economics and social services. The latter covered a broad area of service as a result of the economic crisis. More workers were needed. An understanding was made with the authorities of Notre-Dame Parish to have the Little Sisters of St. Joseph replace the Grey Nuns for the upkeep of that vestry. The "Patronage Youville" (a placement bureau) no longer justified its existence because of the high rate of unemployment and therefore would be discontinued,<sup>56</sup> freeing some of the personnel from there to join the team of home visitors. This did not only include the task

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<sup>55</sup> Gen. Chapters 1849-1937, pp. 381-382.

<sup>56</sup> Formerly refuge of the Passion, founded in 1861 by Fr. E. Picard, p.s.s. The Grey Nuns had charge of it since 1895. This served as a placement bureau.

of distributing food to poor families, but also social work such as counseling, offering practical suggestions about cleanliness, hygiene and housekeeping. It was, in fact, a mobile school of home economics where mothers were taught cooking, knitting and sewing. Used clothing was made over and shown at prize-winning displays and then returned to the seamstress. It became a familiar sight for the learners to come and show their achievements to their teachers, the sisters and volunteer helpers recruited mainly from among the alumnae of their various convents.<sup>57</sup>

Among the social workers, a notable one was nearing the end of her career. In spite of a diagnosis of cancer in October 1933, Sister Bonneau, intent on serving to the very end, resumed her servant ministry. However, she eventually had to withdraw and, on August 3, 1934, with Mother Piché at her side, she surrendered her soul to God. News of her death spread with the speed of lightning; many people, among whom were bishops, priests, officials and especially the poor, the homeless and the unemployed, attended her funeral.

After the funeral service, the coffin had to be opened to allow her protégés to view, once more, this genuine Grey Nun whose example was an inspiration to a rising generation. The superior general expressed the hope that the prayers and sacrifices might allure recruits for the many needs.

The novitiate in Cambridge was such a promising venture that it was decided to give the Alberta province a similar benefit. On August 5, 1934, five local candidates<sup>58</sup> became the first novices admitted to that cenacle, under the direction of Sister St. Clotilde. It would take time, however, before these young sisters would adequately fill the gap left by the aging workers.

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<sup>57</sup> The alumni was founded in 1933, under the title of Federation of Marguerite d'Youville alumnae.

<sup>58</sup> Four of them had begun their formation at the mother-house and another in St. Boniface.

Qualified personnel would also be needed for a foundation soon to bear the name:

## **INSTITUT MARGUERITE D'YOUVILLE MONTREAL – 1934**

This foundation was to become the first French-language school to provide university education for candidates in the nursing profession. The Grey Nuns' responsibility for the education of nurses had begun many years previously through a series of events: the creation of schools of nursing – or of training candidates to care for the sick, as they were initially called, for example, the school in Toledo in 1896 and the one at Notre-Dame Hospital in 1898. The initiatives of Sisters Fafard and Duckett served to promote advanced courses for nurses, especially at the University of Montreal from July 16th to August 23, 1923, when the leadership decided in favor of establishing a formal course leading to a diploma in nursing sciences. A Grey Nun, particularly gifted, an excellent nurse, a forward looking woman and an innovative spirit would be mainly instrumental in giving body to this project.

Mother Virginie Allaire, an American, was initiated to the care of the sick at the school of St. Peter's Hospital in New Brunswick, N.J., where she became the director shortly after having received her diploma in 1915. She had already realized the inadequacy of nursing theory as it was being taught. She later became the superior at the hospital in Regina and provincial superior in St. Boniface. She promoted attendance at conventions, both in Canada and in the United States, in view of improving nursing education and competent leadership.

As a member of the provincial nursing association, she constantly recommended better education for nurses and for supervisory personnel. The validity of her interventions commanded respect; she became a member of the executive of the Catholic Hospital Association of the United States and Canada and president of the provincial Catholic Hospital Association.

She was elected general bursar for her community in 1925 and assistant general five years later, during which time she organized a program for directors of schools. In 1928, Mother Allaire was delegated to Europe by authorities of the University of Montreal to study ways to create, in Montreal, a school of advanced learning leading to a baccalaureate in nursing science.

In 1931, the Grey Nuns held a congress where they unanimously endorsed the urgent need to train specialists in every domain of patient care. As a result, several sisters were sent to study at universities in Canada and the United States. In 1934, the Grey Nuns' request for authorization to establish a baccalaureate nursing program under the auspices of the University of Montreal was approved by the Faculty of Medicine. Consequently an advanced school for nursing education was founded and placed under the aegis of the university.<sup>59</sup> On September 4th, a first class was opened in the St. Mathieu wing of the mother-house. It was announced in the annals that it would be known as 'Institut Marguerite d'Youville'. The initial courses would be given by professors from the philosophy department of the College of Montreal, by Sister Marie-Rose Lacroix, B.A., and by a few other Grey Nuns while four sisters attended the University of St. Louis, Missouri, to attain qualifications required to become faculty members.

Mother Piché encouraged competence in every area because she envisioned Grey Nuns' ministry from a supernatural perspective. She maintained that "every task, care of the poor, of babies, of the sick in hospitals or at home, teaching white children or natives, even the most modest occupations, are directed to helping the poor WHOM WE ARE HONORED TO SERVE, as Mother d'Youville proclaimed some two centuries earlier."

In this 400th anniversary of the foundation of Canada, His Majesty King George V bestowed the distinction of Commander of the Order of the British Empire upon eight Canadian digni-

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<sup>59</sup> Affiliation with the University was granted on Apr. 2, 1936.

taries, one of whom was the superior general of the Grey Nuns, Mother Piché, who was advised accordingly early in June. She maintained that the honor was merited by all the Venerable Foundress's daughters, "We have never worked for attention or renown," said Mother Piché, "but we accept the honor which belongs to God, the Church and as a testimony of appreciation for all works of charity."<sup>60</sup>

Among these works, those of the North evoked great admiration. Officials of other religious denominations had frequently benefited from their services and it was presumed that it was their commendation that inspired His Majesty's gesture. Moreover, it explained the high regard shown her during her trip overseas. To the announcement of this news to the sisters, Mother Piché added that the outstanding decoration was rightfully theirs.

Not everyone shared her views. The religious communities, particularly the sister-communities, diocesan and civil authorities, former protégés, alumni members, and friends all were eager to congratulate the Dame-Commander. Among the many letters received, some writers declared "that the king has honored himself by this gesture" (Bishop J. H. Prud'homme): "It is a tribute given to a Congregation that has spent itself generously over the past two centuries, it is especially a tribute to the one who has incarnated the ideal of charity and given such expansion to the works of the Grey Nuns" (A. Duranleau, Minister of Navigation). The Honorable R. B. Bennett, Prime Minister, added: "The marvelous work accomplished by your Congregation over the past two centuries continues under your direction and confers approval and distinction not only on it but upon you, personally, in your position of leadership."

This climate of praise did not sit well with the one whose modesty had long since been proven. She was more pleased with news bulletins that came from afar. A missionary en route to Fort Providence wrote to her: "My first gesture upon boarding

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<sup>60</sup> Letter of July 27, 1934.



the train was to thank God for having chosen me during this jubilee year of the Redemption to bring the knowledge of Christ afar. I was filled with an immense joy. As I looked through the window, the starry sky had never appeared so beautiful! I cannot thank you enough, Mother, for having given me such joy."<sup>61</sup> Another report described the ordination of Father Patrick Mercredi, a child of the Far North: a former student of the convent in "Chip", who had just returned from France, and who received priestly ordination on August 15th. That same day, the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the Holy Angels convent was being celebrated. Bishop Breynat conferred the priesthood on his protégé. Invited to speak, the new cleric expressed his thanks to his bishop, to the Oblate priests, and "to the dear and devoted Grey Nuns who taught me my first letters. I said 'sisters', I ought to have said mothers. In my affection and in my prayers, I do not separate them from my parents."

The superior general received news from her assistant, Mother Gallant, who was making her pastoral visits in the west. She learned that construction of the school in Lebrét was completed. Ninety students arrived for the opening in September, and more were expected.

The still-young hospital in St. Paul, Alberta, was experiencing serious financial hardships threatening its existence. The sisters sought the help of the Little Flower by writing to Mother Agnes, her oldest sister, who was prioress at the monastery in Lisieux. The prayers were promptly answered, and in gratitude, the institution's name would become the St. Thérèse Hospital.

Trips to the West seemed always to entail some incident; one occurred at Ile-à-la-Crosse and appeared minor at first, until the doctor declared that Mother Gallant's life was endangered due to an embolism. Fortunately, the next wireless message on November 11th announced that the danger was dispelled. The next day, Mother Piché, accompanied by Mothers Allaire and

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<sup>61</sup> Letter from Sr. M. A. Lacasse, June 3, 1934.

Duffin went to Rideau Hall in Ottawa to receive the insignia of Dame-Commander. The ceremony, marked by simplicity and dignity, lasted approximately thirty-five minutes.

Receptions held at the mother-house, at Bruyère College and at the boarding school of 'Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur' of the sister-community of Ottawa, reflected an atmosphere of joyful fraternity. The heroine's modesty was spared by bringing into the picture, the heroic women and the one who had initiated it all, the great Canadian Marguerite, whose promotion to sainthood within the Church was eagerly anticipated.

At the mother-house, the celebration unfolded in a gracious and orderly fashion. A page of history was invoked in which the four superior generals who had preceded Mother Piché as leaders of the Institute, came to express their satisfaction at seeing that the present was showing itself worthy of the past. To recall the past was a means "par excellence" of pleasing the Mother who had always found her inspiration in it.<sup>62</sup>

Canada's fourth centenary was highlighted by a program designated as the feast of Jacques-Cartier, an awe-inspiring spectacle, marked by the arrival of a delegation from France. The celebrations began in Gaspé and continued on to Quebec, Three Rivers and Montreal. The Grey Nuns were honored with a visit from Father Boisard, p.s.s., a member of the delegation. On that occasion, His Eminence Cardinal Villeneuve, received the rare distinction of the Great Cross of the Legion of Honor from the French government.

Some months later the Consul of France awarded to the Reverend Mother St. Valerien, the superior general of the Notre-Dame Congregation, the French Academy's gold medal. Mother St. Anne-Marie of the same Congregation and Mother Rivard

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<sup>62</sup> The second volume of the general history of the Congregation appeared in April. The draft completed by Sr. Drouin used the notes gathered by the archivists, especially Sr. Fauteux who had begun the draft.

from Hôtel-Dieu, were named respectively Officers of Public Instruction and of the Academy.

In Edmonton, Mr. Paul Suzor presented awards to Fathers Dupire, Gourdon and Le Treste, o.m.i., and to Sister Lachance, superior at Aklavik, as a tribute to their work in the missions of the North. The Consul expressed his pleasure to bestow upon Sister Marceau, who stood in for Sister Lachance, the decoration of Officer of the Academy. "I have frequently been asked what has impressed me the most during my visits to the Mackenzie. It is perhaps that I have never seen among those privileged to be there, faces that reflect more joy than those of the heroic women who spend their entire lives in nursing and teaching the native children. To hear them, to see their good humor and their smiles, one could believe that theirs is a uniquely privileged lot and that there is no more beautiful country than this barren land where they exercise their angelic ministry."

Surely, Mother Piché must have rejoiced that, this time, the award was given to those who truly deserved it ...

It seemed as though circumstances cooperated to imprint a seal of beauty and grandeur on the last stage of Mother Piché's role as superior. She very simply took up her daily program; faithfulness to attend exercises with the community, service of the poor, a daily visit to the sick and elderly sisters. She remained profoundly human, understanding and entirely centered on God. She welcomed her assistant, Mother Gallant, who returned from the West after an absence of ten months. When she learned of the accidental death of Sister Lavoie, Mother Piché was overcome with emotion and had to interrupt the recounting of details to the community. (Sister Lavoie met a tragic death when her sleeve became entangled in the heavy bread-mixer that could not be stopped soon enough to avoid a fatality.)

During her last visits in an official capacity to the local and surrounding houses, the sisters listened attentively to her encouraging words and recommendations. One of these latter ones especially revealed her nobility of soul. "Let us thank our

bishops, our precious priests of St. Sulpice, our benefactors, our employees and all those who collaborate in our works.”

On the feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1935, she addressed the entire community with these words: “Before laying down the heavy burden of leadership, I wish to thank you for your commitment. How I appreciated it over the past five years, as well as your many kindnesses to me (...) Let us always be mindful that, by our vocation, we are the servants of the poor and that our Venerable Foundress is our role model.”

The arrival of the delegates to the General Chapter was spaced out through the summer months; the capitular sisters were welcomed by a smiling and serene superior general who presided over the pre-capitular meetings with the wisdom of experience and the concern to maintain the flame of charity at the heart of this Institute which she had served so well throughout the fifty-four years of her religious life.

The formal opening of the Chapter took place on the morning of October 7th. The general administration members were: Mother Evangeline Gallant, Superior General, the assistants general, Mothers Eugenie Dionne, Virginie Allaire, Rose-Anne Laberge and Gertrude Duffin. Mothers Léonie Ferland and Elodie Mailloux were elected to the posts of secretary and bursar.

As they entered the community room to greet the newly-elected officials, the sisters’ eyes searched for the dear diminutive Mother Piché who had taken her place in the ranks as though she had never left them. This attitude of genuine modesty would continue to characterize her last years of life. A young crippled girl had recently written to her: “I know that you have done many wonderful things in your life.” Her contemporaries repeated these words of affirmation and one of her biographers would add: “The most wonderful of these things was the receptive attitude toward grace, an attitude of availability with regard to service of the poor which Mother Piché demonstrated throughout her long religious career. In the footsteps of the Mother of Universal Charity, she endeavored to recognize and to serve Jesus-Christ in the person of the destitute.”

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