



The *Great* Canadian  
Catholic Hospital History Project

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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## Providence Villa and Hospital

by  
Mabel MacPhail-Pillar

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# PROVIDENCE VILLA AND HOSPITAL



TO SISTERS, WITH LOVE

Mabel (MacPhail) Pillar

“TO SISTERS, WITH LOVE”

by

MABEL (MacPHAIL) PILLAR



THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THE GLORY OF GOD AS  
A TRIBUTE TO THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mrs Mabel (MacPhail) Pillar has been a resident of Scarborough for more than 23 years. From her kitchen window she can look out on Providence Villa.

She has been an active member of Providence Villa Auxiliary for the past fifteen years. She has also been actively involved as a member of Victoria Park United Church, since coming to Scarborough.

In 1976 Mabel had a biography of her mother published.

Periodically, her writings appear in Canadian publications.

Mabel and her husband, Frank, have three sons: Robert, Donald and John.

## FORWARD

### A PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

This is just 'the tip of the iceberg' as far as the history of the 'Old House' is concerned. It has been an enlightening and heart warming experience for me to talk so openly with the Sisters of St. Joseph, the residents, the staff and the volunteers. Every day is a labour of love; a proclamation of the Charity of Christ; a witness of service and a rededication for tomorrow.

There were so many eager to tell of their experiences and anecdotes that reflect the love and care that is administered daily within the Villa... but time did not allow. Perhaps another time, another theme will bring forth added gems of wisdom.

To those who have co-operated with me and given me encouragement, I say a sincere 'thank you' -- you will know that your suggestions, your enthusiasm, your guidance has been incorporated in this résumé.

A shy old resident, past 93 years, shared her mother's philosophy with me in the following words: "Do your best; it may not be the best, but it's the best you can do."

Yes, I have tried to do my best.. I am aware it is not the best .. but please.. you do your best now to understand and enjoy it.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE HOUSE OF PROVIDENCE

The House of Providence, 65 Power Street, Toronto is as familiar and nostalgic to 'old timers' as the First of July picnics at the Island -- free samples at the Canadian National Exhibition and marching in Labour Day parades.

To the youth of today (who have grown up in a society in which subsidies, unemployment insurance, government grants, allowances and welfare are acceptable substitutes for independence) it is almost inconceivable that a charitable institution, such as The House of Providence, run by the Sisters of St. Joseph could and did open its door freely to the poor.. the crippled.. the lost.. the retarded.. the sick.. the homeless.. the addicted.. the destitute and the unloved of the city. There, everyone, without regard for race and creed, found peace, understanding and love through the kindness and graciousness of the Sisters who administered to their spiritual and physical needs.

The reputation for hospitality from the Sisters was known city wide. "No one was ever turned away at any hour, day or night, no questions asked" was passed on by the transient grapevine.

At times the numbers who were cared for, swelled to more than six hundred souls; this did not include the 'overnight guests' who when all the beds were filled, were content to sleep on mattresses on the basement floor (an area referred to rather flamboyantly as Bosca Hall). These overnight guests



might be habitual acquaintances who slept off their indulgences and returned to the streets or their homes next day; others might be young transients who stopped to rest and be fed before renewing their search for employment; a search which extended during the Great Depression from coast to coast across Canada.

The House of Providence first opened its doors in downtown Toronto in 1856. The early work of charity and public service performed by the Sisters of St. Joseph, is a fascinating chapter in the history of Toronto.

In 1850, Count Armand de Charbonnel was consecrated Bishop of Toronto, and four years later returned to Rome to discuss a request for erection of a House of Providence. Permission was granted. The Holy Father told the Bishop he would ask God that this House never be destroyed by fire, and that its work would never fail for lack of funds.

The early years were a constant struggle for survival. The Sisters solicited alms from door to door; took in washing and had to carry the water from King Street at 2 or 3 in the morning, at a cost of 25¢ per barrel. Drinking water came from a small outdoor pump on the grounds.

From Sister Zoe, I heard of a little miracle which took place in the early days of operation. Provisions were low; there was no flour and no money to buy any. So the Sisters of St. Joseph prayed and they prayed. Meanwhile, a farmer was returning from a mill where he had brought his wheat to be ground into flour. When his team of horses approached the gate of The House of Providence, they slowed down and refused to pass the gate. The good farmer then let them turn in. Needless to add, the farmer was welcomed with a refreshing

cup of tea.. and the Sisters got their flour!

For more than 50 years, over one period, The House of Providence also served as an orphanage. Nan Forman (a member of the Auxiliary) remembers going with her mother to this orphanage. Nan was fascinated with a group of little babies. She singled out a white one, a black one and a Chinese one and said, "When I get married, I'm going to have one of each colour -- just like these!"

Also, at one time, people suffering from consumption (tuberculosis) could not be admitted to any city hospital. They were cared for by the Sisters.

The old House of Providence was a haven of hope for 28,000 people during the years it was in existence. Statistics confirm 'the original home first opened to serve the destitute, the sick, the infirm, the incurable, the unloved.' A nun says, "From that day on, the Sisters of St. Joseph have continued this work."

Do you remember The House of Providence Annual Garden Party? It used to be THE social event of Toronto. The 'high and the mighty' of society rubbed elbows with the 'lowly and the poor' at a bingo table; for that brief interlude they were on equal terms

The first 'Catholic Picnic' as it was affectionately called was held on a fine Spring Day in 1870; on 24th May (Queen Victoria's birthday and a national holiday); thereafter it continued to be an annual social event up to 1917. During World War 1 it was discontinued, but renewed again in 1951. The last one held at the 'Old House' was in 1961 prior to the move to the present site of Providence Villa.

In 1977, with a budget deficit of \$100,000 per month, for the care given by the Roman Catholic Sisters, it was decided to revive the big event and the Providence Villa Spring Festival was reborn, on Saturday, 28th May. Opening ceremonies, which began at noon, featured Lieutenant Governor Pauline McGibbon and Archbishop Philip Pocock, in addition to various church leaders.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “I REMEMBER”

“I remember” is a very common expression heard around Providence Villa and invariably the memory reverts to the days spent at the ‘Old House of Providence’.

Some of those who walked spritely through the doors of Providence Villa for the first time that chilly bright day on 28th January 1962, have gone to their reward; others have suffered loss of memory, as years take their toll in mind and body; but there are still a brave few who can recall vividly their happy days ‘in the old House’. Many hours are spent reliving those memories as they sit together and talk, for these past days hold fast in their memories, whereas more recent happenings fade with that day.

**Mr Peddle** must have been a young night-watchman at the ‘Old House’ as sixteen years later, he is a trim, little figure delivering mail and messages, setting up activity rooms, directing people to designated areas.. a real boon to the Sisters when they needed help throughout the institution.

**Mrs Eugene Fleming** has lived in the Villa ever since it opened, and previously, nine months on Power Street. “I don’t starve and I sleep well.” Her off-handed remark was meant to be complimentary. “I like being active -- it passes the time”, she continued, “I still can do mending for the residents -- take up cuffs of trousers and alter hem lines. I’ve

made aprons galore in my day. My eye sight is still good, thank the Lord, for I can still thread the finest needle in sewing."

To see Mrs Fleming, neatly dressed and walking about the corridors, one could scarcely believe her age to be 95. "I have arthritis in my back, but I have to have something to do, or I'll die.. I'm getting tired, you know."

Mrs Fleming offered me a chair beside her. "I enjoy a game of cards with my friends; they are in private rooms", and with a touch of humility (dating back to another school of thought) she added, "I am poor; I only play with them when they ask me."

**Margaret Slaney** lived twelve years on Power Street. At one time her mother, brother and she were residents. There she helped Sister Anna with the sick and infirm and was also fire warden of an area. "The Old House was a fire-trap in later years; although we were close to a fire station we were constantly aware of the danger."

Margaret likes fun and activity. She attends bingo every Wednesday evening; the Social Club every Tuesday afternoon and Saturday night. She is captain of a bowling team held 'across from the men's dining room'. Best of all entertainments, Margaret remembers the outings 'every Spring and Fall on a Sunday afternoon' when Father O'Neill from St. Joseph's Parish arrived with a hundred private cars to take the residents for a ride into the country. This motorcade was assisted through traffic by a police escort. After the ride they were taken to the Parish Hall for delicious refreshments and lively entertainment. "Queen for a day", Margaret adds with a wide grin.

**Anthony Vella** worked from 1940 to 1962 as chief cook for meats, vegetables and soups in the 'Old House' kitchen. "I'm eighty-three years past and I'm retired."

Cooking for such a large number of people must have been a mammoth chore. "Everything was chopped by hand then. We had one electric masher and a grinder which made work a little easier. Three big, three-burner gas stoves with deep ovens were used. Food was kept hot in dry steamers, which I'd say dried the food out too much -- nothing to compare with the stainless steam tables we have at the Villa now."

Tony wipes a lock of fallen hair from his eyes as he continues; "We had a huge steam pot for porridge and soup. A usual breakfast was oatmeal porridge and cream of wheat -- that was a good filler.. sticks to a fella's ribs, not like them 'puffs' and 'pops' they get in packages these days."

Trays of special diets were not often required. Each floor had a dining area where food was brought on large platters and in containers, on a lift. "You pulled a rope down to bring the lift up, and sent the rope up to make the lift go down", he demonstrated with his hands, to make his explanation clear. "Only those unable to go to the dining room were served trays, which were later washed and reset for the next meal." All dishes were washed by hand.. the men took their turn, as well as the women, in this endless task.

**A sweet, shy lady of ninety-three** remembers the 'Old House' with its peaceful homey atmosphere. There she supervised about 200 women -- old and helpless -- from 8.30 p.m. until morning. She was a conscientious worker and the Sisters learned to rely on her judgement. "It was nothing to have a taxi-driver pick up some old woman wandering around Sherbourne Street, around midnight or even later, wearing bedroom

slippers, a light coat - always carrying a shopping bag -- and bring her to the Sisters. Perhaps she'd be able to leave the next day if she wished.. sometimes though they had no real home, so they stayed the rest of their lives." She looked into my eyes as she declared, "It was a real work of charity then." Her hair combed lightly off her face, her sweet bright smile and dancing eyes so expressive among the soft wrinkles brought to mind the picture, reminiscent of 'Whistler's Mother' as she sat rocking beside her bed.

**Margaret Sheedy** came to 65 Power Street in 1939; she will be 82 in July. She was born on a farm about thirty miles from Renfrew, Ontario. For years she worked hard on that farm, but when her parents died, she came to Toronto.

At the 'Old House' she worked in the pantry, prepared vegetables, made beds, served trays, worked in the laundry and went to the Unit, sometimes." Now Margaret goes daily to the Crafts Room where she knits long scarves in bright soft wool. "I'm looking forward to going back home for a visit this summer; my cousin says she'll take me", Margaret adds with genuine enthusiasm. Her short rotund figure is an indication of her enjoyment and over indulgence at meal times.

**Miss Marjorie Larkin** remembers the 'Old House' for a specific reason. She was an employee of the Public Health Department of Toronto; she was sent to 65 Power Street for sixteen months to search for records of the residents who were applying for Old Age Pensions, which were first introduced in 1928.

The personal qualifications necessary for Old Age Pensions were seventy years of age; residing twenty years in Canada, date of admission to the Home, place of birth, parents names, and former address. This information was compiled on 3 x 5

cards. "Often this information was very difficult to obtain, for records were sparse; some non existent, as birth records were often overlooked, so many years had elapsed since immigrants had come to this country" Miss Larkin explained.

"I recall interviewing a little Englishman who worked at the Providence farm, who said he had been taught in Sunday School in England by Florence Nightingale." Miss Larkin remembers also, the breadlines at the door of the 'Old House', "No questions asked" as transients called daily for food and shelter.

"At that time the pension was \$20.00 per month and \$18.00 was paid for room and board for the permanent residents. Many pensioners were so used to being without money that they stored the \$2.00 refund from the Sisters, in a drawer (with an elastic band around the bills) of their night stand. 'Home' you see, was a bed, a chair and a stand and their basic needs were all taken care of within the House."

"The Sisters of St. Joseph nearly had a fit when they learned they had to pay my salary for that sixteen month period; then I earned \$1,600 per year, which was very good for that 1928-29 period." Miss Larkin chuckled.

"When we were youngsters going to St. Paul's School, beside the 'Old House', many of the Sisters who lived in, taught us. We liked the old folks, and we were taught in our homes as well, "the love of giving" to those less fortunate. We'd buy candy at a little store nearby (you'd get a lot of jelly beans for a penny then) and we'd bring them to the old folks, who would cluster around the fence to meet us. They were so glad to see us and would make a fuss over us.. and pat our heads."



## CHAPTER THREE

### SISTER VICTORINE REMEMBERS

“Ask Sister Victorine, she’ll remember” was said again and again to me as I interviewed staff and residents.

Sister Victorine does remember.

“Yes, I could write a book about my memories at the ‘Old House’ but I guess I’ll never take the time”, she laughingly replied. “I worked with the men mostly in Bosca Hall -- served sandwiches and mugs of tea and coffee to line-ups which sometimes took up three street corners. These sandwiches were substantial. We made minced meat, eggs, baloney cheese, etc. Four rounds of the loaf filled and wrapped separately, were handed to the men. On Fridays, we served jam sandwiches, for at that time Catholics were prohibited from eating meat on that day.”

Sister continued: “It was not unusual to have about 150 men sleeping on narrow cots, single beds, and fold away army cots.. and when these beds were filled we had some extra mattresses we put down for the night.” About 50 of these men were between 65 - 70 years, the remainder were young transients, nice lads too -- many whose only fault was addiction to alcohol. They worked at daily chores throughout the House or at the Providence Farm. It was good therapy for them, as we tried so hard to rehabilitate them.

“No, I was never afraid of those men: they respected me.” Sister Victorine perhaps has forgotten an incident that Mr Peddle told me, about a loud, disorderly drunk who refused to obey her. Some of the lads, lolling about on their mattresses overheard him. They jumped to their feet, flexed their muscles and surrounded Sister Victorine. “No one would dare hurt or talk back to Sister, while any of us fellows were around”, Mr Peddle vowed, “or he’d answer to us.”

Sister Victorine knew how to handle and work with men; she used tact. “They would do anything for me that I asked them to do.” Perhaps the key word in her request was ‘asked’ instead of ‘tell’.

“Housecleaning was done in the winter time, as the men were indoors anyway. They scrubbed walls and floors, day after day, for it was a big place.”

A smile played on Sister’s face as she recalled the time she sent a young city lad to Providence Farm to harvest the hay and crops. At first he wasn’t keen on going, but she felt the fresh air and sunshine was what he needed to ‘get straightened up’. Her heart ached for him when she saw the blisters on his feet when he returned that night; but he went again the next morning and in time the change really improved his problem.

Each morning Sister and her helpers, seated at long tables, prepared 3-5 large clothes baskets of sandwiches for the men who lined up twice a day for food. The depression years were lean years for many within our city.

The men were brought inside, in groups, to be fed at these long tables and, after the meal, sent out another door. Often

it was their only source of food. Meanwhile the mugs were washed for the next lot coming in. Sometimes if a lad was hungry enough he joined the line again -- this time he might have his overcoat off, so he wouldn't be recognized. "Even if he was recognized, nothing was said to him, for if he was that hungry and willing to line up again, he deserved more", was Sister's philosophical judgement.

As there was only one daily Mass held in the early morning, Sister Victorine wakened her men and insisted that they attend, as religion was a vital part of their rehabilitation programme. They went willingly. Sometimes the old chapel was so well attended, chairs had to be placed in the aisles to accommodate the numbers.

Sister excused herself for a moment and returned with a tray of cookies and tea for us.

"New Year's Eve was counting time for the residents" she recalled, "so we always held a big party to keep them there." "Once we found two dummies in the beds -- two young lads created them before they took off for the night. The dummies looked so realistic that they were counted as bodies; so we all had a good laugh about that."

This New Year's count was what determined their help from the Province of Ontario, based on 10¢ per patient per diem.

"However, we did have a daily count of everyone and a system for admission for the 'overnight guests' and transients. An admission card with name and date of admission was attached to the recipients' beds. When a person left, this card was returned to the office. If they arrived back a few days later, they were re-admitted; but if they breezed in later that day,

the same card was re-issued.”

Sister meditated a moment before continuing, “We also received help from the City for those needy city cases they sent to us, at the rate of 25¢ per head per diem. This applied basically to the more permanent residents. That negotiation took time to process, and, of course, not all our cases were eligible, either. We had some residents who had ‘well-to-do’ families and they were able to pay their way. All in all, we had a lot to be thankful for.”

“Sometimes alcoholics would go straight for months at a time -- then something would build up within them, and they would have a real ‘bust’. After a time they would come back, shame-faced, to us. Mother Superior would say, “This is the very last time we’ll take you in” .. but they knew she didn’t mean it. Actually it was better to take back a trained worker, when they needed help, than to try to train a new one. Some men were so versatile that we would place them mostly anywhere the need arose. We liked to change them too, as it was good for them to accept a new challenge as a change from their regular menial task, day after day.”

“‘When have you last eaten’” was the first question Mother Superior asked when someone was admitted late at night. Then a call would come to Sister Victorine to prepare some food for the late comer. Usually Sister kept something aside from the evening meal for such emergencies. “If not, there was always plenty of eggs and bacon (bacon wasn’t the price it is now), mugs of hot tea and thick slices of crusty homemade bread to satisfy the heartiest appetite.”

“Even as late as midnight, we’d be called. It was always such great satisfaction for me to see that food being devoured

with real gusto. I never minded being called, no matter how late.' Sister smiled.

Sister Victorine wears a modern white uniform, white shoes and stockings; a white veil is the only distinguishing feature worn over her thick snow white hair. Her strong unlined countenance and her kind eyes reveal even more than her words, the compassion she feels for God's family.

'Yes, I too, have heard that in the early days, the Sisters of St. Joseph were, at times, hard pressed for provisions, but'; Sister pondered a moment before she continued, 'No never in my time at the 'Old House' were we without provisions. Donations of all sorts, at any hour, might be left at our receiving door. Sometimes a huge transport truck would drive up with a full load of fruit and vegetables -- still good quality -- but past their peak for consumer marketing. We certainly were grateful, yet often we didn't even know the donor.'

Sister paused to catch her breath; 'I'd hustle the men out to help unload the transport. We'd store what we could, for future use; arrange to preserve and can (steam pressure in jars) as much as we could handle that way; our daily consumption in the fresh state took care of another portion; then, if there was still too much left over, we'd put it on the front lawn and we'd call some of the 30-40 families on our list, who were constantly in need, to come for it. They'd come in droves of kids and adults, swarming over the lawn with baskets and buckets; rejoicing and giving thanks in unison. Indeed, sometimes, we often called the Salvation Army to share in our good fortune too!'

From her storehouse of memories, Sister told of other donations - furniture, money and clothing, -- essential year round,

to meet the needs of the season. At that period housewives in Toronto usually did a gigantic house cleaning, Spring and Fall. New, end of the line or overstocked merchandise from local retail stores, along with warm, outgrown, out of style, used clothing were left at the 'Old House' office. This clothing was sorted, washed or sponge cleaned, if necessary, and distributed among the needy residents who had no income prior to 1928, at which time the Federal Government Old Age Pension was made available to those men and women of seventy years and older, residents of Canada for twenty years.

"We stored the clothing for the following season in the closets under the stairs. I don't think I ever looked for a cap, an overcoat or a pair of mittens, that I didn't find something suitable. It was just one of our daily little miracles that our needs were always met", Sister said gravely.

Along with her many and varied memories of the 'Old House' Sister Victorine has brought her compassion, her gentleness, her tact, her poise and her unselfishness to the new location -- Providence Villa -- where again she administers to the physical and spiritual needs of her men on 4 B.

"God Bless Her in the Work She is Doing" is their daily prayer.

To that may I add "Amen".

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE PROVIDENCE FARM

The Providence Farm was referred to over and over again, as I interviewed staff and residents. "Ask John Farrugia, he'll know" was the usual response to further questioning.

John Farrugia, plant superintendent, is a popular staff member; a familiar figure to many, his name is constantly being heard over the public address system. "Calling John Farrugia; John Farrugia please." He commenced working at the House of Providence in 1928 and before this present year ends he will have celebrated fifty continuous years as a faithful, loyal friend and employee of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

His easy going manner, his slow smile and friendliness with staff and residents, belie his heavy work schedule. However, I did 'corner' him and found that his knowledge of Providence Farm and the actual construction of the Villa was prodigious.

Providence Farm, John Farrugia told me was about 225 acres; a strip along the west side of Warden Avenue, extending from the area now occupied by the Fairfax Road factories and W. A. Porter Collegiate, to St. Clair Avenue E (St. Clair Ave E cuts through the property). On the other side of St. Clair Avenue E it extended to the now Warden Woods apartment areas (Senior Citizens apartments and low rental housing) and included a portion of the area which is now familiarly referred to as 'the bush'.

The farm was a beehive of activity. More than one hundred pigs were kept; some were bred for young piglings; some were sold to Toronto meat markets; others provided a goodly portion of the meat required for the 'Old House'. 500 hens and chickens provided eggs, as a year round source of nutrition.

Forty to fifty milk cows were kept year round. When newly freshened these milkers would produce 9-10 large cans of milk daily. Even this amount of milk was not enough for the needs of a single day at the 'Old House'. The bush land (not so overgrown with shrubs and alders as it is now) provided good grazing pastures for this cattle.

Acres of rhubarb were grown for canning purposes, as well as seasonal use. Refrigeration was large ice boxes, so rhubarb was not a practical commodity to freeze.

Apple laden trees in the orchards were a haven for youngsters who wished to steal an apple or two. Some plum trees were also planted and these fruits could be enjoyed raw. Canned applesauce provided needed vitamins during the winter months; plum jam added zest to a thick slice of crusty-homemade bread any season.

Fields of cabbage, turnips, potatoes, onions, peppers, beans, parsnips, carrots, beets and cauliflower grew in abundance. Cucumbers, tomatoes and celery were prepared as pickles, ketchup, chili sauce and relishes to add zest to winter meals. Excess fresh vegetables and fruit found a ready market in the City of Toronto.

On the Providence Farm, there was also a farm house which was divided into living quarters for the Sisters and a space



for regular farm help. A large barn housed the cattle and stored the hay and grain for winter stock. Unfortunately that barn burned down after the Fall Harvest in 1957 but it was not rebuilt as plans for construction of the Villa were already under way. So until the farm was gradually phased out in 1959 a 'make-shift' barn was used.

On 28th January 1962, two years and three months after the first sod was turned -- the residents and Sisters moved into Providence Villa, 3276 St. Clair Avenue E, Scarborough. The plans were three and a half years being prepared.

Partially, the reason for delay in starting was that another big Catholic drive for funds was on, and permission for the Providence Villa drive was postponed for a short time. However, this extra time was put to good use, as Sister Rose Marie and Sister Anna, (dynamic driving forces in promoting the move from Power Street) now made sure that their innovations would work. Along with John Farrugia, they visited fourteen institutions, in various stages of completion, in Ontario, Quebec and Detroit, to learn of special features in homes for the aged and infirm -- and to reject those which did not seem feasible.

So that all the Sisters of St. Joseph would feel a part of this great undertaking, Sister Rose Marie called a meeting once a month to bring the Sisters up to date with the progress of planning, to accept suggestions and ideas of what features could be improved upon -- what changes would be most beneficial to the residents.

"John Farrugia was a tower of strength to us" one Sister said, "He came every day to the building site, by streetcar to oversee the construction of the Villa."

John Farrugia shrugged off the praise with a grin. "I had to come every day, there was so much construction going on at any one time, that I didn't dare let it get ahead of me -- for I couldn't be everywhere at once."

Good materials and good inspection were the essential ingredients which made Providence Villa (almost an eight million dollar investment) the well constructed institution that now stands where the apple orchards and vegetable gardens had flourished.

"It was built at the right time; it is estimated that thirty million dollars in 1978 would not build a similar structure. The 'Old House' survived more than a hundred years and we're looking ahead to that type of endurance", John Farrugia replied as he hurried away with a sheaf of papers in his hand. "Seventy five per cent of my work now is paper work for the Government."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE CHAPEL

“When one is young and healthy, religion may be your pattern for a way of life; but when one is old, and time is running out, religion becomes life itself.”

It was with this in mind that the Sisters of St. Joseph planned their new chapel so meticulously, so that every resident could participate in Mass and visit the chapel at any time. The chapel is definitely ‘a drawing card’ to those whose religion is very important. It is also comforting to know that a priest is in attendance for a 24 hour vigilance and that he will come to the bed side of an ill patient.

A Sister brings over the public address system, morning and evening prayers, in addition to news of the Villa and the outside world, and birthdays of that day.

The chapel was planned with remarkable foresight. There are two long rows of pews with wide aisles between, to accommodate wheelchairs and which can be entered from either end. On the far sides of these are two rows of short stubby pews which hold 2 people. A Sister explained that besides being a fire regulation, this way there are more end seats, so that residents do not have to climb past one another to get in or out.

The chapel is situated on the third floor, opposite the Auditorium. However, there are fourth and fifth floor balconies overlooking the chapel, so that those who do not wish to come down to the third floor can still take part in the service.

To the right of the chancel is another chapel in which hospital wheelchair patients and stretcher cases can feel 'close to the action' without actually entering the main chapel. In this hospital chapel is a confessional booth which can accommodate a stretcher.

Acoustic material behind the 'rosettes' and back panels directly below the ceiling, are very effective in bringing the spiritual message to those who are hard of hearing. Confessionals are equipped with hearing aids. There is a P.A. system microphone at the back of the chapel for a Sister to lead in prayers.

The chapel, as well as the auditorium, is air-conditioned.

The interior of the chapel is majestic, harmonious and significant. It is an admirable combination of old and new beloved fixtures.

A huge crucifix is mounted on an amber concave base made from 4" x 4" glass blocks, 1" in thickness. A canopy of similar clear glass blocks, in a brass enclosure, allows the overhead lighting to pass through, and combined with indirect coloured lighting on either side, creates a breath taking spectacle.

The corpus of natural wood was imported from Italy; the cross woodwork was made in Toronto.

A large marble altar and marble altar rails, imported from Italy, were a gift from Francis Deck (from Fran's Restaurant).

The smaller altar and lecterns were donated by the families of Sister Teresa Marie and Sister Matilda in memory of loved ones.

Recessed statues of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, in solid wood, custom designed, were also imported from Italy.

Hanging lighting fixtures, especially designed, were manufactured in Brantford, Ontario.

The drawings for the stained glass windows on either side of the chapel were created by a Toronto artist, Russell Goodman, and the windows were made by Luxfer Prism, a Toronto company. The Mystery of the Rosary was Mr Goodman's first major assignment and at that date, it was his greatest achievement. When the sun pours in through these windows, coloured sunbeams dance on the pews. The shades of rose and blue in each window become increasingly darker than the preceding window as the story of each window progresses to the back of the chapel.

The statue of St. Anthony and the statue of St. Teresa were taken from the chapel of the 'Old House' and placed on either side of the chancel area.

The Stations of the Cross, also from the chapel of the 'Old House' were refurbished, with their bright colours somewhat subdued in keeping with the decor of the new chapel. Indirect lighting was an added feature.

The electric organ, still in good tone, was taken from the old

chapel, as well.

Outside the chapel, in the hallway leading to the hospital, are the stained glass windows from the 'Old House' chapel. Also, rose windows, resembling a ship's porthole, once above the altar in the old chapel, are now in the hospital chapel. The delicate work of removing, recutting and resetting these beautiful panels was under the expertise of Luxfer Prism. In doing research, I spoke with a man who remembered well their important assignment and gladly gave me the necessary information.

Besides services in the chapel for Roman Catholic residents, non-denominational services are held elsewhere and are conducted by Reverend Forte, an Anglican clergyman. Ministers come from neighbouring churches to hold special services and they receive a gracious welcome from the Sisters of St. Joseph.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE CRAFT ROOM AND ACTIVITIES

The craft room on the fifth floor of the Villa hums with activity at any given time, under the guidance of Sister Zoe and her assistant, Mrs Hammel. Thirty to forty ladies come at various times -- not necessarily every day -- to sit around the bright cheery room to do handwork.

“Everything and anything -- knitting, crocheting, embroidery, ceramics, dolls of all descriptions”, says Mrs Hammel. “They can come and go as they please; some do their work in their rooms. I serve them tea and cookies, morning and afternoon. Once a week I bring in some homemade baking. If I seem to have forgotten, I get a gentle hint, for they love them!” She laughed.

**Mrs Cox** from British Guiana makes beautiful crocheted lace table cloths. “It takes me about three months to complete one. I make it in four pieces and then crochet the pieces together. This one is for the Spring Festival. They will probably sell raffle tickets on it.”

**Mrs Lula Haddad** from Palestine crochets beautiful coloured squares to make afghans.

There is something for everyone to do. Some of these busy fingers are misshapen, painful and arthritic, but disabilities do not hinder a willing worker.

**Miss Drummer** an arthritic and in a wheelchair, crochets dainty baby dresses in multi-coloured hues.

**Mr McVean** 72 years old, mute and blind comes to the crafts room every day, to roll ribbons and cut nylon stockings in half inch pieces to be used to stuff dolls. He is only able to communicate with his sister (also mute, but with partial sight) for he knows sign language which is 'written' on his hands. "It is beautiful to see him in the chapel; he 'talks' to the Lord with his hands. He has such a peaceful expression always, that God must have him in His heart" explains Sister Zoe.

**Miss McVean** 10 years older than her brother, makes poodles, on which Sister Zoe puts the finishing touches. Several oil paintings on the craft room walls are a credit to Miss McVean's talent. A teaching Sister from a city school, who works with mute children, comes one day a week to learn sign language from Miss McVean, so that her gift of communication may be passed on.

**Miss Pittman** at 98 years young, knits beautifully. She has been at the Villa since she was 90. "The young minister at St. Bede's Anglican Church very kindly made arrangements for my admission here."

For Miss Pittman the thrill of her life time was a six months world cruise, from November 1928 to May 1929, on a Red Star liner, the first large ship to go through the Panama Canal. "I've attended three coronations; George V, George VI and Queen Elizabeth. I remember sitting on the sidewalk all night, waiting for the royal procession of our present Queen."

With these beautiful homemade afghans, dainty baby sweaters, shawls, hanger covers, scarf and mitten sets, slippers, dolls,



etc. a booth will be set up at the Spring Festival; in addition, a year round sale of goods keep these ladies busy and content. "It passes the time to be busy."

Just in case one might think that only women are creative, **Harry Clark**, 94, is writing his memoirs of 1902 - 1910 era. "I'll be here 5 years this coming September and I've enjoyed every day of it." He looked up from his new electric wheelchair which is essential because he has a stubborn case of phlebitis in one leg.

Mr Clark's hobbies are varied; wood working, mint stamp collecting, writing contributions for the Providence Villa Views (a quarterly newsletter compiled by the residents and Sister Yvonne.)

"I liked to dance and I was quite a pool player in my day. After I quit playing football, hockey and baseball, I still managed teams. I organized the 'Harry Clark Bowling League' -- I've attended 22 of their bowling banquets, they come for me every year."

Making records is one thing, but keeping a work reference dated 1897 from his school principal when he left school at 13 years is something else.

"Last year I made 37 wooden trains and 2 cars, and 14 milk trucks for last year's Spring Festival; I don't believe I will have that many this year." "Whew!" I breathed as I left him smiling and packing away his treasures in an orderly fashion.

"There is so much going on here, I don't have time to write my family letters", one gentleman remarked as he studied the weekly activity directory in the main floor foyer.

It read as follows: Scripture Reflections  
Wheelchair Bowling  
Cards  
Bingo  
Woodworking  
Shuffleboard  
Creative Art and Painting  
Fun and Fitness  
Crafts  
Confessions  
Villa Club  
Social House - Tuesday and Saturday

“Extra entertainments are cropping up all the time” said Sister Anastasia, programme director for some activities. Bingo is run by St. Vincent de Paul of Scarborough Conference. The Social Club, under the direction of Trudy Savori, who arranges entertainment and volunteers, is a popular spot Tuesday afternoons and Saturday night. The auditorium is set up cabaret style and a wee deoch an doruis is shared with friends.

The Knights of Columbus put on a St. Patrick’s Party and a Christmas Party.

The Auxiliary of Providence Villa plays an active part in entertainment. The auditorium decorated for the occasion with witches, pumpkins, scarecrows and skeletons; excellent live entertainment, prizes and refreshments (with a large percentage of residents in costume) is their Hallowe’en effort.

Also, a large Christmas Party, with three Santas required to cover the distance in the Villa and Hospital and to shake hands with every resident; again talented entertainers; home-made goodies and a gift for everyone, are major undertakings

for the Auxiliary members.

A monthly birthday party, on a different floor each time, with a huge cake, ice-cream and personal gift is greatly enjoyed by the residents.

A Spring Bridge and Euchre, open to the public, and opportunity sales, Spring and Fall, are money raising endeavours which make these parties possible. The Red Cross Corps Capers come to entertain yearly; two of these star performers are members of the Auxiliary.

Outings to shopping plazas, gardens, Canadian National Exhibition grounds to see the rose gardens, etc., are arranged for by amblycar and members' cars, for wheelchair residents who might otherwise never be able to leave the grounds, are another concern of the Auxiliary members.

"Sometimes, especially around Christmas, we have so many groups offering to entertain, that we have to refuse or make arrangements for a later date-- our people are on the go so much, they're exhausted." Sister Anastasia knows the situation well, "It's all so splendid, they just can't resist going when it is so available."

**Daisy Overall** 85, one of the beloved members of the Auxiliary, who volunteered her service weekly, to the hospital crafts room recently 'retired' after almost ten years and she was given a rousing farewell party by her fellow craft workers.

Formation of a Senior Guild and a Junior Guild is a recent addition of volunteer services. Already 70 adult members have graduated and 46 junior members. Graduation ceremonies are held for each class and a certificate presented to those who

pass the requirements laid down in a course outlined by George Brown College.

There are so many little chores such as feeding patients, pushing wheelchairs, chatting with residents, writing letters and giving a feeling that 'someone cares', that more and more members are encouraged to join the Guild and Auxiliary.

A Residents' Council provides a liaison between the residents and the Sisters. Sister Liguori meets with them monthly, however, everyone seems so happy, they probably haven't much negotiating to do.

There are those few in the Villa to whom these activities do not apply, for they spend their entire day bed-ridden and in a state of detachment. The secret of their contribution to society is locked in their memories; God alone knows the purpose of their lingering. Their unresponsiveness to the present leaves them only with their vivid childhood memories to entertain them.

Perhaps this is God's plan that they may have 'roses in December'.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SPECIAL CARE WITH SISTER JEANETTE

Blessed are they who understand my faltering step and palsied hand.

Blessed are they who know that my ears today must strain to catch the things they say.

Blessed are they who seem to know that my eyes are dim and my wits are slow.

Blessed are they who look away when coffee spills at the table.

Blessed are they with a cheery smile who stop to chat for a little while.

Blessed are they who never say you've told that story twice today.

Blessed are they who know the ways to bring back memories of yesterday.

Blessed are they who make it known that I'm lonely, respected and not alone.

Blessed are they who know I'm at a loss to find the strength to carry the Cross.

Blessed are they who ease the day, in loving ways, on my journey home.

Although it was only 10.30 a.m. when Kay Upshall and I knocked on the door of Special Care, Sister Jeanette and her assistant Mrs Lawlor greeted us warmly. They did not know, in advance, of our visit, yet everything was spotless and organized.

They took us first to the solarium, or common room, for the 38 men and women who live in Special Care. Here they have activities together but have separate eating and living quarters. This room is bright, cheery and comfortable with a fireplace at one end, a variety of pictures on the walls and homey touches throughout.

'Buffy' a beautiful green budgie, a real favourite of all, tried to 'steal the show' by fluttering and twittering in his cage. "He flew in an open window and has stayed ever since" Sister Jeanette said, "Once I found a slow K. (vitamin pill) in his water dish. I guess someone wanted to share a goodie with him."

Sister told me that Special Care is probably the least understood area of the Villa. People do not understand that our people are only different in that they are forgetful and might wander.

"Any precautions we take is simply for their own protection. They are perfectly harmless and have feeling of loneliness and of being unloved, the same as the rest of us. They want to be respected and to be a part of a family too. They do not have nearly as many visitors as they should! Perhaps they do forget about the visit afterwards, but they thoroughly enjoy the visit for the moment at least."

"We look upon them as our family", Mrs Lawlor explained;

“When they become ill and helpless (the average age is 86, so we have to respect that) we try to care for them here as long as we can for we hate to see them moved from their familiar surroundings.”

Mrs Lawlor smiled at an old man as he hobbled past. “We have a reality programme to keep them from regressing further. Dominoes is a real favourite, beach ball throwing and bowling, crafts, if they are able, all help to get them to move their limbs. They are happy in their own little world - and they do not have too many frustrations.”

Two ladies sat rocking as their hair, newly shampooed and set in curlers, dried. “Yes, we give them total care here; except for permanents, we do all the weekly hairdressing. There are 18 men and 19 women, at present, so with that number we can afford to give them special attention.” We sponge off their clothing, and wash their personal things, in this automatic washer, instead of sending them to the laundry, as the machines are hard on some types of material.”

Sister Jeanette pointed through the window to a fenced area. “We keep them confined for their own safety. They could not cope with traffic etc. In summer we have a patio, umbrella and chairs, where they can relax and enjoy the fresh air. We hope to have a bird bath this spring, for they love to watch the action and will carry out crumbs to feed the wild birds.”

Men and women eat in separate dining rooms. Food is brought in hot carts from the main kitchen and is served from a small kitchenette. Music is played from a radio for a soothing effect, as they eat. A bulletin board indicates in large readable printing the day, the month and the year, birthdays of residents, and a weather summary.

“Indeed sometimes if a cloud passes over, and we have written a sunny day, someone will remark ‘doesn’t look very sunny to me’. We do try to make them aware of as many incidental things as we can get across.”

Mrs Lawlor has worked in Special Care for almost eight years. “Perhaps my only regret is that I cannot spend as much time with the residents as I would like to.. talking with them.. listening to their stories and sharing their past, but there are so many other things, such as paper work for the government and chores to do, that the day is never long enough for me.” “Some people say it is a dreadful thing to put a bib on an old person. I do not agree. It is practical and these old people are bound to be shaky at times. We set the bibs out and invariably they ask for them, for they too, like to be tidy and clean. We never talk down to them, and we always insist that our help shows respect, love and understanding, for who knows what they might be like themselves some day!”

Sister was emphatic about her practical measure.

Some residents sit at individual tables with a drawer facing away from them, so that the meal is eaten in proper sequence. “For those with a sweet tooth, the dessert might be the first item eaten, we watch and give them their courses as they finish each one” Sister Jeanette said.

St. Patrick’s, Hallowe’en, Christmas and Birthday parties are gala affairs and greatly enjoyed by the residents and staff. Kay Upshall, an Auxiliary member, who always arranges the Birthday and Christmas parties in Special Care was given a warm welcome by Mrs Hattie who was reading a letter from her daughter, Nellie, in Lochaber, Nova Scotia.



Mrs Hattie has a private room and above the bed is a hand painting of her old home set among the trees in Lochaber, with the River Goshen flowing by. She doesn't remember who gave her the picture but she does remember all about her home. It is her special link with the past.

There are private rooms 'with a favourite squashy chair from home' and rooms large enough to accommodate 5 or 6 beds. These rooms are exceptionally cheery, bright and sweet smelling; bright drapes are drawn back from spacious windows and colourful matching bed spreads create a delightful haven. Above each bed hangs 'something personal to relate to'.. a family gathering or graduation picture, to retain a link with their past.

We left the warm friendly atmosphere of Special Care as the residents were hustling off for their noon meal. I carried away with me two predominant thoughts: (1) Buffy knew what he was getting into when he flew in that open window, and (2) Sister Jeanette and her staff do practise the beatitudes!

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### LOOKING AHEAD WITH SISTER LIGUORI

Sister Liguori came, as Executive Director, to the Providence Villa and Hospital on 2nd February 1976. She is the seventh Sister to serve in this capacity since the institution opened 28th January 1962. Sister Rose Marie was the main thrust in the transition from the House of Providence to the Providence Villa. Sister Louise, Sister Vianney, Sister Raphael, Sister Mary Frances and Sister Mary Kathleen were Sister Liguori's predecessors.

Before coming to Providence Villa and Hospital, Sister Liguori had been Assistant Administrator of St. Michael's Hospital and has also served as President of the Society of Hospital Pharmacists. Her grandparents and parents had lived in St. Paul's Parish, so the House of Providence and its traditions are not new to her. The bold changes in religious life over the past ten years has produced a different concept of Sisterhood. To see her trim figure in a mod flowered blouse and skirt, her light hair combed softly off her youthful brow, one would easily mistake her for a chic business woman; however, her quick dazzling smile and compassionate eyes are her 'give-away'.

Sister Liguori has specific aims for Providence Villa and Hospital; firstly, to enlist a large number of volunteers - both senior and junior; secondly, to maintain the traditions of the 'Old House' in which no one was ever turned away. In 1978

that is a big order! Nevertheless in the few months Sister Liguori has been going on speaking engagements to schools, etc., she has formed both a senior and junior guild, each having 70 - 75 volunteers.

Sister Liguori has raised the spirit and morale of the Villa by having regular meetings with staff and residents. She has gone out into the community and has become involved with shared services between the Scarborough hospitals and medical health services. She has opened up the Providence Villa and Hospital to the community by means of a Spring Festival.

Why an Annual Spring Festival? Proceeds expected are in the vicinity of \$100,000. Where are they going?

These are the questions being asked as the days race by to 3rd June. Medical Science has increased the life span from the Biblical 'three score and ten' to an additional 10-15 years. Average age of Villa residents is 86 years. Several residents are past the one hundred mark; just recently a man passed away, having reached 105 years.

"Better care and housing, relief from financial worries, through Government pensions have added years to life; therefore, we must aim to add life to these years" is Sister's motto. "Those who walked through the door so spritely 16 years ago, are now needing more care. We have fewer Sisters entering the Religious Order, of late. Inflation, higher wages, higher cost for utilities, food, oil and maintenance; higher level of nursing care for those who are requiring extra care at an alarming rate; are factors we have to contend with."

Each year there is a mounting deficit at the Villa, especially since two years ago when they withdrew from the United Way

Campaign to protest the admission of Planned Parenthood, an agency whose service includes abortion counselling. The decision to withdraw in March 1976 was a declaration on behalf of 'reverence for life'.

John Farrugia's suggestion to hold a 'strawberry social' similar to the ones held on the grounds of the 'Old House' was accepted and plans for making the community, churches, and parishes more aware of the Villa produced the successful Spring Festival on 28th May 1977.

The annual cost to run Providence Villa is slightly less than five million dollars. The Ministry provides a per diem grant for a substantial portion of the operation; the balance of expenses have to be met by the Sisters of St. Joseph and voluntary donations. Capital expenditures are not recognized as part of the funding and the money has to be found for this purpose also. The money raised will be used to help meet the extra expenses in providing better services for the residents.

In an Institution of this size, more volunteers are needed to help with the services and problems such as loneliness and frustration felt by many, which has to be filled by the Christian Charity and love of others.

The Sisters of St. Joseph are concerned about the future. For months they have worked long, strenuous hours with the Committee and with the residents, preparing to make this Festival a success. They have opened up their Home to the parishes, neighbouring churches and the public in hopes that more people will become personally involved with the Villa and the work of the Sisters of St. Joseph with the aged and senior citizens.

Sister Liguori is fortunate in having, in addition to the support

of all the Sisters, such men as Joe Bennett, Chairman, and Bill Phelan, co-ordinator of the Spring Festival activities.

Joe Bennett besides being an outgoing dynamic driving force behind the activities is a 'walking encyclopaedia'. "No wonder, if I am" he grinned, "I have been coming here for ten years to visit my mother. You're bound to become involved when you see a need for help and unconsciously absorb information from the daily activities of the House". Joe's dedication shows in his voice and his expression.

There is such a great need for volunteer help; and it is such a marvellous training place for young people to learn how to deal with humanity. People are getting older; and becoming more dependent in every aspect; more staff is required; but the budget won't allow for additional staff.

Joe shakes his head gravely; "There is no simple answer. For instance, feeding the ill is so time consuming. It takes me an hour each evening to feed my mother; she even dozes off between bites. Twenty years ago I was working from my parish for my mother's generation - now I'm work for me!" Joe's enthusiasm is contagious; "We're here to work; we're here as a team.. talk about the Festival.. keep talking.. there's bound to be something coming from it" are his favourite platitudes.

Bill Phelan is a big man (in stature) and he thinks 'BIG'. He has a down to earth approach to every situation; "no hedging - no hassling" a project is either 'on or off' as far as he is concerned. He expects a response to his request and invariably he gets it! He leaves the details to a committee, for he knows it will live up to its commitments.

Bill has an excellent rapport with the Sisters of St. Joseph.

He chided the Sisters for not taking anything for granted. Special prayers, starting early in May, were said over the public address system each day to ask God to bless 'the day' and bring favourable weather. The sun shone so bright all morning, the chocolate cakes turned to chocolate drinks - he winked at the Sisters as he continued; "Then the Sisters got so busy they forgot to keep on praying: within an hour the temperature dropped drastically and a strong wind came up which nearly blew us all away! So don't let that happen again, Sisters"; he wagged a warning finger.

"Sister Liguori tries so hard to make or re-create the warmth and hominess of the 'Old House', within the grandeur of the Villa", Sister Laura Anne, her assistant, told me. "She had the old parlour furniture refurbished; collected and framed old personal pictures and scenes from the 'Old House' and these now hang in the hallway outside the parlour".

These pictures are an interesting collection; many have dates and all have names for identification. One picture shows the rows and rows of cots (beds) 40-50 in a dormitory, where a bed, a chair, and a stand was 'home' to many. Wide wooden stairways winding above one another, to the fifth floor.. "You took the stairs, slow and easy"; remembers Sister Zoe. The 'Old House' kitchen with the huge cylindrical soup pot and antiquated utensils, hold many memories for the older residents.

These and many other fond memories we hope to preserve, as we realize time takes its toll; age dims the mind and memories fade with the passing years. As the poem (by Robert Herick) which I memorized in my childhood so aptly put it:

“Gather ye rose-buds, while ye may  
Old time is still a flying;  
And this same flower that smiles today  
Tomorrow will be dying.”

Remember the pilgrimage of Count Armond de Charbonnel, the Bishop of Toronto, who in 1850 brought back from the Holy Father, the blessings for the ‘Old House’ and the assurance that its work would never fail for the lack of funds.. we who are blessed with health and comfort in 1978 must ponder and recognize our obligations to the Sisters of St. Joseph..... dare we let them down ?

