



*The Grey Nuns Ministries
in Western and Northern Canada*

VOLUME I

Thérèse Castonguay, s.g.m.

A Leap In Faith

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Dedication



To: ***Saint Marguerite d'Youville***
without whom the
Grey Nuns would not have existed and this
Leap In Faith would not have occurred.

Abbreviations



Archives

APA	Alberta Provincial Archives
EA	Edmonton Archives
GNRC Arch.	Grey Nuns Regional Centre Archives, Edmonton
MMY Arch.	Maison de Mère d'Youville Archives, Montréal
Nic Arch.	Maison Provinciale, Nicolet Archives
St.B. Arch.	Saint Boniface Provincial House Archives

Religious and priests

C.Ss.R.	Redemptorists
F.J.	Daughters of Jesus
Msgr	Monsignor
O.M.I.	Oblates of Mary Immaculate
s.c.e.	Sisters of Charity of Evron
s.g.m.	Grey Nuns of Montréal
s.g.n.	Grey Nuns of Nicolet
C.S.J.	Sisters of Saint Joseph
S.P.	Sisters of Providence
U.J.	Ursulines of Jesus

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Recalling names makes me proud of the many talents that generous people placed at my disposal while researching, writing and finalizing the manuscript. It brings back to mind the generous assistance of those who gave me free access to a huge amount of archival material: Sisters Marie Rose Hurtubise, Fernande Champagne and Louisa Dupuis at the Grey Nuns Regional Centre in Edmonton over the years, Sister Thérèse Vachon and Carole Boily from the Saint Boniface Provincial House Archives, Sister Gaëtane Chevrier and her staff from the Maison de Mère d'Youville Archives in Montréal and Sister Jeannette Boisvert from the Nicolet Provincial House Archives. Other archival searches were made much easier with the patient and ever-ready assistance of Sister Cécile Dupuis at the Edmonton Archdiocese Chancery Archives, Dr. Claude Roberto and Diane Lamoureux from the Alberta Provincial Archives, members of the City of Edmonton Archives, the Alberta Genealogical Society, the Edmonton Public Library, and the Alberta College of Physicians and Surgeons. To all of them, my sincere thank you. Many thanks

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When I could not see the forest for the trees, God's Providence helped me to find the precious editing assistance of Eileen Fedor whose patience and kindness easily tripled mine. Thanks a million, Eileen.

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Thérèse Castonguay, s.g.m.,

October 16, 1999.



Preface

A *Leap in Faith - The Grey Nun Ministries in Western and Northern Canada* is the first of two volumes narrating the arrival and missionary endeavors of the Grey Nuns from Montreal to the far West. This book vividly depicts the founding of the Grey Nun missions in Alberta at the request of the Oblate Bishops and priests. Beginning at Lac Ste-Anne in 1859 when the sisters arrived by Red River Cart, and leading us avidly onward through a span of 140 years, ending in 1999, we are fascinated by the valiant spirit of these young pioneer women. Highlighting the reality of each period and challenges faced, the author makes the history come alive.

As the stories unfold, the author reveals clearly the motivating factors beckoning the sisters to an unknown land and to different cultures. The sick needed healing; the dying, comfort; the children, education; and the people at large, the Word of God. The sisters were imbued with the spirit of their foundress, Saint Marguerite d'Youville. They were filled with enthusiasm, strong determination, perseverance and profound faith. Through their charitable deeds they strived to reveal the compassionate love of a Provident God. Despite poverty and lack of commodities, their gift of self was total and their creativity astounding. Every day they discovered goodness, generosity and help from those around them. Every day was indeed a *renewed Leap in Faith*.

Sister Thérèse Castonguay, author of the fascinating book *A Leap in Faith - The Grey Nun Ministries in Western and Northern Canada*, thoroughly researched the Grey Nun archives in Montreal, Nicolet, St. Boniface, Edmonton as well as many other sources in order to capture the essence of the primitive settle-

ments, their gradual development, the challenges and hardships encountered and the noble dispositions of the missionaries.

May the readers of this book be enlightened on the historical background of the Grey Nun foundations in Alberta and their many accomplishments. Thanks to the author, the content of this book is a gold mine of Alberta history, an inspiration for risk taking people of faith, and a source of encouragement to face the unknown with valor and strong belief in God's Providence.

May the inspirations aroused in this book call the readers to respond to the new challenges of the 21st century and influence its direction and path as did those pioneers of the 19th and 20th centuries. May we too have the same courage for a bold *Leap in Faith* when we hear the call.

Marcia Wiley s.g.m

Provincial Leader

Introduction

While the life and ministry of hundreds of women succeeded in earning them the rare title of *heroic women*, this attempt to capture in writing God's marvellous work in these people's lives is indeed a very humbling experience. Every page of this story confirms the amazing validity of Canon Lionel Groulx's words:

If there is a particular beauty to the history of our country, it is the collaboration of women to all great things that we have accomplished.

A leap in faith taken time and again since the arrival of the Grey Nuns in western and northern Canada eloquently demonstrates the appropriateness of this statement. Each leap in faith took on gigantic proportions in one's mind when researching every step of the Grey Nuns' glorious journey into the unknown, the unpredictable, the hazardous. These women truly deserved their hard-won title. Heroic women, they were indeed. A friend goes further and calls them heroic holy women!

The content of this history book is organized geographically and chronologically. As well some thematic descriptions are given within each mission and are identified with sub-headings. Geographically, we follow the civil Provinces comprised in the Grey Nuns canonical Province of Saint Albert, Volume I covers Alberta, where the Grey Nuns first arrived in 1859. In Volume II, we go to Saskatchewan, their second missionary field, in 1860, the Northwest Territories (NWT), in 1867 and finally Africa where Grey Nuns missioned in the 1970s and '80s.

Within each civil Province the chronological order is used except, when a mission transferred to another location, the history follows it, temporarily breaking the chronological order. Is it

confusing enough? If not, let us add this other dimension: some missions in northern Alberta were administered by the NWT canonical Province of Divine Providence during its existence from 1914 to 1980. Those missions are therefore presented with the Northwest Territories' civil boundary.

Until 1840, Lower Canada was only Québec and part of present day Ontario. The rest of the vast space to the Pacific and the Arctic Oceans was called Northwest Territories. In 1867, four provinces were confederated. Readers being familiar with today's provinces may appreciate these areas referred as 'today's Saskatchewan', or 'today's Alberta' instead of 'NWT'.

It was decided to use the 24-hour clock for indicating the hour of the day, the metric system, legalized in Canada in 1971, the Canadian Church-approved inclusive language, the modern vocabulary excluding words like savage, indian, pagan, etc., which may have been common terminology in previous centuries until the contemporary era gave them a pejorative meaning not intended at that time.

Throughout the 140 years from 1859 to 1999, the Grey Nuns worked in close cooperation with some 25 Bishops from eight dioceses: one diocese in the Northwest Territories, two in Saskatchewan, four in Alberta and one in Zaïre. Grey Nuns have shared missionary fields with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (O.M.I.) in nearly all of their missions in this part of the country and have worked closely with several other religious communities in their common ministries. Although this is the Grey Nuns' history, it was important that members of these religious groups be referenced, especially the Oblates. The Index gives the complete names with initials for all religious sisters, priests or brothers listed; diocesan priests are listed as 'Father', without initials. Generally, initials are not used... names are given.

This Introduction would not be complete without mentioning that I consider my journey into our marvellous Grey Nuns history an unprecedented privilege, a retreat, a renewal in the original spirit of our admirable pioneers. To have followed the path of these heroic women since the founding of the Grey Nuns

in Montréal in 1737 by Marguerite d'Youville and then throughout the 140 years since our arrival at Lac Ste-Anne in 1859, was indeed an unparalleled privilege.

As a Prelude: **THE ORIGINS**

A history of the Grey Nuns canonical Province of Saint Albert, Alberta can only begin with a loving homage to an extraordinary woman who was the origin of the story in 1737, Saint Marguerite d'Youville. This history is filled with anecdotes and stories of unbelievable heroic actions of Marguerite's spiritual daughters, the Sisters of Charity of Montréal, 'Grey Nuns', who became the first non-native women to venture into the primitive regions of what is now Saskatchewan, Alberta and the Northwest Territories.

The Foundress

Marguerite d'Youville, who founded the Grey Nuns, was born Marguerite Dufrost de Lajemmerais in Varennes, Québec on October 15, 1701. She was the beloved great grand-daughter of Messire Pierre Boucher de Boucherville, the niece of Pierre de Varennes de la Verendrye, and the oldest sister of Christophe de Lajemmerais whose names appear among the discoverers and founders of many parts of Eastern and Western Canada.¹

A very brief, and obviously incomplete, sketch of Marguerite's life will rush us through the marvels of grace in *The Wizard of the baffled people*, as she was named by one of her numerous biographers.² Marguerite, daughter of Marie-Renée Gauthier de Varennes and Captain Christophe Dufrost de Lajemmerais,³ was born one year after the death of Marguerite Bourgeoys, foundress of the Congregation of Notre-Dame. Another Marguerite was being offered to New France; she would also magnificently continue Jesus' mission for the poor and the marginalized of her time.

The oldest of a family of six, Marguerite learned early to recognize God in her happy Christian family surroundings, as well as in the sorrows of losing her young beloved father when she was barely seven. Christophe Dufrost de Lajemmerais' death left all of Varennes grieving. His young family was destitute with no social security programs, as we now have in modern Canada. Such experiences of grief and suffering can often be identified as the turning point in a person's life and spirituality. When grace is not acknowledged and God's love is ignored, such family tragedy can lead a person to become discouraged and bitter. For Marguerite, sorrows and trials fortunately brought renewed faith in the main anchors of her life: the Eternal Father and Divine Providence.

Divine Providence came through her great-grandfather, Pierre Boucher, the former Governor of Trois-Rivières and lord of Boucherville, who took her into his home for a while.⁴

*During the time she spent there, Marguerite personally came to know a just man, an exceptional father, a man of faith formed by that giant of the early missions, Jean de Brébeuf, a Jesuit whose missionary perils he had shared in the Huron territory.*⁵

When Pierre Boucher left his post of Governor of Trois-Rivières, he explained:

*I am leaving Trois-Rivières and will henceforth reside at my estate at Boucherville, so there may be a place in this country consecrated to God...; to develop a beautiful land which I hold from God; and to help the poor.*⁶

It is in that ambiance of deep Christian spirit and charitable deeds that Marguerite spent some of her grieving young years.

The revered Pierre Boucher and other benefactors obtained for the orphaned Marguerite the benefit of a solid education at the Ursulines in Québec.⁷ During the two years spent in this convent sanctified by Marie de l'Incarnation, Marguerite had the privilege of coming to know Mère St-Pierre (Geneviève), the beloved daughter of Pierre Boucher. This was an exceptional opportunity for Marguerite to deepen the solid Christian principles that were already the core of her inner being.

When Marguerite returned home to her mother and her siblings in 1714, she was a young yet mature teenager of 13. Later, her son and first biographer, Father Charles d'Youville Dufrost wrote that she soon took the responsibility to help her mother earn the livelihood of her five brothers and sisters.⁸ How could any money be earned during these pioneer colonial times? Sewing and embroidery work were in great demand and included men's shoes, jackets, women's scarves and furbelows. People's vanity can be a strong incentive to buy the latest and the finest in this popular art of embroidery; this was to the advantage of the very modest de Lajemmerais family.⁹

Marguerite shone in the social circle of Varennes and soon attracted the attention of eligible charming princes; she was a beautiful, talented and devoted young lady. At the age of 18, she came close to marriage with 'a very advantageous and very honorable suitor', Louis-Hector de Langloiserie. Simultaneously, her mother suddenly decided to marry Timothy Sullivan, a man of questionable character and often in trouble with the courts. However, he could bring some financial security to his new, young struggling family. This marriage put an end to the interest of Louis-Hector and he vanished from Marguerite's life. Loyal to her mother, and setting her personal plans aside, the young Marguerite was able to deal with her very personal pain in a mature manner.

Wounded in her love and in her filial affection as well as in her pride, Marguerite saw her dream fade away. We can hardly doubt that she shuddered under this humiliating blow.¹⁰

Marguerite was not one to despair in the face of adversities. Her profound peace of heart always resulted from her growing faith in a loving God whose care never ceases. She carried on with her life, assured that Providence was watching over her destiny. She moved to Montréal. Soon Marguerite was seen in the company of François d'Youville whom she married on August 12, 1722. Her short married life was marred by unending days of deception and humiliation caused by the neglect of a husband

addicted to fur trafficking with liquor. This was coupled with the emotional abuse of a greedy and shrewd mother-in-law.¹¹ François was seldom home when their children were born and baptized, nor was he there when three of them died in infancy. When he became terminally ill with false pleurisy and returned home, Marguerite cared for him with all the courage of her unflinching love until his untimely death on July 4, 1730. The young widow,

*...far from rejoicing that the cross was lifted from her weary shoulders, sincerely grieved for the husband to whom she had vowed her young love and fidelity but who, alas, had proved himself so unworthy.*¹²

Marguerite was expecting their sixth child who died during his first year. Burdened with her deceased husband's numerous debts, she, a single parent, was left alone to raise her two surviving sons who later became priests.

At that time, wishing to deepen her spiritual life, Marguerite chose Father Jean Gabriel du Lescoat as her first spiritual director. He predicted to Marguerite that God had plans for her and she would "restore a great institution that has fallen to ruins".¹³

In fact, after ten years of charitable work along with her first companions of the Community she founded in 1737,¹⁴ Marguerite was granted the administration of the Hôpital Général de Montréal in 1747. This institution had been built and managed by the Charon Brothers since its first days in 1694. Their community had quickly declined because it lacked focus in its objectives. It ended in 1747. When she took over, the enterprising and courageous Marguerite succeeded in making extensive repairs to the building and repaying the debts left by the founders.

With more space and better facilities, Marguerite and her companions were able to accommodate an increasing number of disadvantaged people of all categories. She was the first to accept women at the Hôpital Général. In addition, the elderly, foundling babies, the prostitutes, the mentally ill, the neglected, the rejected, the economically poor, the sick, the injured and wounded

soldiers from both sides of the battle when Canada fell under British rule, could all enter with dignity and be served with compassion.

Gradually, Marguerite's heart and soul were being caught in the irresistible enticements of charitable works. Her son and first biographer granted her the title of Mother of Universal Charity.¹⁵ Her life became an uninterrupted succession of calls from a loving Father and a Provident God, calls always followed by her generous charitable responses. She was able to see a brother, a sister, in the poor she discovered everywhere. She would not allow herself any comfort, let alone luxury, when her 'brothers and sisters' were lacking the basic necessities of life. She was inventive in her support for the oppressed, she never stopped trusting in God's Divine Providence. This Mother of Universal Charity tirelessly created new works, discovered new ways of comforting the weary and supporting the poor. Twice major fires destroyed her house of charity which she rebuilt and reorganized in order to continue her service to 'her brothers and sisters' in need.

God called Marguerite to her eternal reward at the age of 70, on December 23, 1771. If we reflect on this supreme moment, we can easily hear Jesus' voice saying to Marguerite:

"Come, you that are blessed,...for I was hungry and you gave me food,...I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me..." (Mt 25:34-35).

The Church repeatedly proclaimed this homage over the years. On May 3, 1959, Pope John XXIII, sketching the spiritual portrait of Marguerite for her Beatification wrote:

Marguerite d'Youville gave herself entirely to God who infused into her soul especially the spirit of adoption which makes us cry out: 'Abba, Father!'. All her thoughts, all her desires she turned toward this all-loving heavenly Father and toward [God's] poor and unfortunate earthly children.¹⁶

At her Canonization on December 9, 1990, Pope John Paul II said:

[Marguerite] was characterized by an immense confidence

*in Providence with an unusual ability to find the resources and the means of helping the poor, even in the most desperate cases.*¹⁷

Given to the world as a model of 'Universal Charity', Marguerite lives on in the hearts of her spiritual daughters, the Sisters of Charity, 'Grey Nuns'. The acts of undaunted courage that we admire in her spiritual daughters over the last three centuries are sure proof of her universal and unending charity for all in need.

Marguerite's charism has spread over five continents, more than twenty countries and hundreds of ministries, in the more than 260 years of the Grey Nuns existence. Five autonomous branches were formed and one, Nicolet, was re-united to the main roots of the Grey Nuns of Montréal in 1941.¹⁸ The Grey Nuns were foundresses of most of the first hospitals in cities and towns of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, starting as early as 1871 with the founding of St. Boniface Hospital, later known as St. Boniface General Hospital. The Grey Nuns were leaders in the education of nurses, having opened the first French Canadian nursing degree program in Montréal in 1931 and the first Canadian hospital basic educational two-year program for nurses in Regina in 1962. The Grey Nuns were also first to venture into many works of charity, education and social work in the western and northern parts of Canada, as well as in eastern Canada, and several parts of the United States.

In 1844, the Grey Nuns answered God's call to head West and North. The adage dating back to Marguerite's time: "Go to the Grey Nuns, they never refuse to serve" was again to prove true.

The Spiritual Daughters Heading West

Recalling the heroism of their Mother, Saint Marguerite d'Youville, the Grey Nuns continued to respond in faith whenever a call to ministry was heard, regardless of the hardships envisioned. They, too, wrote pages of heroism and many times proved to the astonished world that the great indomitable courage of their Foundress was still alive. One cannot read, except

through tears, the unbelievable dangers and hardships faced by the Grey Nun pioneers when they first embarked, in 1844, for a 59-day voyage of 3,500 kilometers, in two-wheel carts drawn by oxen, in birch bark canoes, doing at least 78 portages when rapids had to be bypassed.

*the route they were to follow was the classic one, that is to say, the same one that had been followed by La Verendrye, Marguerite d'Youville's uncle and her own brother Christophe de Lajemmerais: rivers, small lakes, great lakes succeeding one another until at last the long-desired Red River would be reached.*¹⁹

To recount this first exodus of Grey Nuns towards the 'unknown' land is to evoke a leap in faith, a blind, loving response to God's call to seek and assist the needy of all kinds. Oddly enough, this herculean endeavor was first recommended, as early as 1811, by Lord Thomas Douglas Selkirk, Scottish philanthropist and colonizer,

*who invited Bishop Joseph-Octave Plessis of Québec to establish a permanent mission in his colony.*²⁰

In 1818, Fathers Joseph-Norbert Provencher and Sévère Dumoulin were sent to the Episcopal District of Red River. Father Sévère Dumoulin later settled in Pembina (North Dakota), while the future Bishop Provencher remained in Red River. This Giant of the West had truly accomplished 'gigantic' achievements since 1818 in the far-off land of Red River and beyond. Consecrated by Bishop Plessis in 1822, as his Auxiliary for the Northwest, the new Bishop Provencher was finally successful in recruiting Grey Nuns in 1844 and Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1845.²¹

Yes, Bishop Provencher was finally successful in obtaining Grey Nuns for his Red River missions. When he arrived in Montréal on September 9, 1843, he went directly to the residence of Bishop Ignace Bourget, his close friend and staunch supporter. Bishop Provencher went on relating his successive failures in his attempts to obtain Sisters for his missions, confident in the sympathy of his listener who did not hesitate to say:

It is the Grey Nuns whom you must obtain.

Immediately, they made arrangements to meet with the Grey Nuns.

On September 13, the two Bishops, one from the West and the other from Montréal, [arrived] at the General Hospital, which many people still called the Charon Hospital even though the building had almost doubled its physical dimensions since the Grey Nuns had taken it over from the Charon Brothers. A wall of [980 meters] surrounded the institution while a fine tree-lined avenue, admired by tourists, led to the gateway.²²

Bishop Bourget first introduced his friend to the Superior, Mother Dorothee Beaubien, soon to leave the helm to her successor, Mother McMullen (Elisabeth Forbes). The sisters, gathered in the community room, were eager to know the legendary hero who had for so long captivated their minds and hearts by his missionary achievements in the West. Rather than talking about these achievements, Bishop Provencher chose to elaborate on his 25 year search for sisters and his failures to date. The deployment of such humility won him the sympathy of all and a growing interest in his far away missions.

The total population under the jurisdiction of the Bishop had increased to about 6,000 people of whom two-thirds were Catholic; all were not of French-Canadian descent however.²³

The Bishop's love for his people was so evident in the way he spoke about them, his apostolic zeal was so contagious that, as was later discovered, 17 of the 25 eligible candidates had volunteered to the exile, the poverty and the hardships of their future mission. Before leaving the community, the Bishop told the sisters,

When I left Red River, I said, O God, you know that I need sisters for my mission. Please lead me to the community that I must have.²⁴

If the sisters were enraptured by the meeting, no commitment was heard at that time; they knew that prayer and

consultation were to follow and a decision was left with the Superior and her Administrators.²⁵

This time, Bishop Provencher exuded confidence; his written request arrived at the General Hospital on October 19, 1843.

*soliciting three sisters to assure Christian teaching and the teaching of household arts to young women.*²⁶

The foundation was accepted on October 22 and, to the delight of the Bishop, four sisters would go to Red River instead of the requested three. In addition, it was agreed that the work of the sisters would cover responsibility for the teaching of young women, and also the care of the poor, the infirm and the ill.²⁷ The sisters had known all along what the answer would be. They were well aware of a particular sentence in their Constitutions and Statutes:

*As servants of the poor, the sisters are always ready to undertake all good works which will be offered to them by Providence and which will be authorized by their superiors.*²⁸

The First Canadian Women Missionaries

When the names of the future 'missionaries' were announced, there was pride for those chosen, regrets for the others and a beginning of mourning for all. The emotions ran high. The names of Sisters Marie-Louise Valade, Marie-Eulalie Lagrave, St-Joseph (Marie-Anastasie Gertrude Coutlée) and Marie-Hedwidge Lafrance will remain forever the highly acclaimed foundresses of our western missions. These brave and courageous volunteers were surrounded by the affection and interest of the sisters, their families and their friends.

*Those who came to give consolation went away comforted.*²⁹

On November 7, these heroines acknowledged in writing the validity of their selection and agreed to remain faithful to the rules of the institute. Bishop Provencher was overjoyed at the success of his visit to Montréal. He wrote to one of his correspondents, Monsignor Joseph Signay, future Bishop of Québec,

...everything is going splendidly. The expenses of the trip for two priests and four sisters, at a reduced price, have been made available thanks to the generosity of Sir George Simpson, governor of the Hudson's Bay Company.³⁰

With a lightened heart, the elated Bishop Provencher left for Europe on January 1, 1844 where he would attempt to recruit more priests for his missions, including the ones for British Columbia where Father Francis Norbert Blanchet was recently named Apostolic Vicar. Returning to Montreal on March 25 of the same year, he was available for consultation to the future missionaries in their preparation for departure previously scheduled for April 23.

More emotions were in store for the pioneers when, on April 20, they attended Mass celebrated by Bishop Provencher and renewed their consecration to Mary. After confiding their generous resolve to Mary, their Mother, they turned to the many friends they were to leave behind. With Mother McMullen at the head, they left the cathedral and went to bid farewell to the Sisters of Providence who served them lunch; they also visited the Bishop's residence, the Sulpician seminary and finally the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame.³¹

Back at home, they continued their last minute preparations for the great adventure; much time was given for more farewells. They went to every room, paused for prayerful reflexion, remembered all meaningful events that happened within these walls and, while wiping their tears, renewed their faith in Divine Providence who, without fail, would wait for them in their future mission. The missionaries, always surrounded by the love of their sisters, their poor, their families and friends, were comforted more and more in the sobering joy of their approaching exile, their blind leap in faith. Farewells continued late that night, and after evening prayer, there came a great silence interrupted only by restrained sobs. Early in the morning of April 22, Bishop Bourget came to celebrate Mass with the sisters in the old sanctuary of the Charon Brothers.

*It was not easy to contain one's emotion in this chapel where one had seen so many fine ceremonies. How often had the sisters prayed together in the place where they had expected one day, following a Requiem Mass, to be buried in the crypt underneath the church.*³²

The beautiful voice of Sister Eulalie Lagrave held on in spite of the threat of frequent choking. Her singing was accompanied by the sound of the organ and the occasional outpouring of tears by those whose voice had been silenced by emotion.

After a short night of rest, and, perhaps a few minutes of much needed sleep, they had come to what they thought was their last day in their beloved Hôpital Général. The missionaries were soon awakened to another reality: their departure was delayed by one day due to Bishop Provencher's change of plans. In concern for his health, he had agreed to travel in swifter canoes with Sir George Simpson. The sisters left on Saturday, April 24, 1844. On that morning, the last farewells were repeated again and again. No one could eat at breakfast; they left the refectory in haste, went to change to their travelling garb, picked up bags and boxes and proceeded courageously between two lines of their beloved sick, old, infirm, orphans and companions. Kind friends offered their carriages and they embarked, accompanied by Mother McMullen and some other sisters, to Governor George Simpson's house at Lachine for a delicious lunch. By mid-afternoon, the Governor invited them to continue to Dorval Island, for final separation. Slowly leaving shore, they were suddenly struck by a storm of lightning, thunder and torrential rains. This was simply a mild foretaste of the many hardships still to come. The missionaries left behind many hearts filled with admiration and grief. A reporter wrote:

*Having been struck with admiration by what occurred on April 24, I hasten to tell my readers about the feelings I had as I witnessed four Sisters of Charity leaving their native land to carry into distant countries the knowledge of the Gospel and the benefits of civilization which would follow. This leave-taking constitutes a noteworthy date in the history of Canada.*³³

In Dorval, they went through a final embrace and mutual assurance of prayers after which they boarded their canoes in silence while the sisters who would remain in Montréal took the road back home. Another sleepless night near their beloved Ville-Marie,³⁴ and early in the morning, the flotilla was ready to depart from Dorval. The paddlers, who had promised to refrain from swearing in the presence of the sisters - although there were a few memory lapses - began to sing old songs as a compassionate distraction for the passengers. Needless to say only Sister Marie-Eulalie Lagrave was able to join in with her warm and melodious voice. The men gradually adjusted to the prayerful actions of the sisters; they would accompany them for the stations of the Cross in the forest, they would say the rosary, and even kneel down for the evening prayer.

Each night, all had to disembark their canoes and pitch tent, quite a new experience for the sisters! When Sister Saint Joseph (Gertrude Coutlée) said she found her bed 'quite comfortable', it meant that it was made of three blankets on wet grass! On a 59-day voyage, they must have pitched tent over 55 times; they were hosted in rectories along shores for a few nights. On Sunday, April 28, for example, the travellers were welcomed by Monsignor Joseph Désautels, the curé of Aylmer, in his church while his two sisters gave them warm and comfortable accommodation in the rectory. Why not stay here for several days? No. All were only too eager to reach their goal and there was no time for that kind of comfort.

While travelling, the group was constantly at the mercy of weather conditions: rain, cold, wind, scorching heat and, most of the time, wearing soaked clothing and footwear.

No white woman had yet ventured past Lake Superior. There were many rapids to pass, consequently many portages to endure. A portage necessitated all the trouble and hard work of emptying the canoes and carrying canoes, food supplies, tents and other baggage over land for several kilometers, in mud, through unfamiliar forests, over unchartered roads, and with the unwelcomed nuisance of mosquitoes and an assortment of other bugs, while fighting and killing snakes along the way.

During one of these portages, Sister Eulalie Lagrave, who was not featherweight, as she admitted herself, sprained an ankle as she walked off the canoe at Lake Huron³⁵ and found walking most excruciatingly painful. This was May 12. She had to be carried on the many portages ahead. Arriving at Sault Sainte Marie, deliberations were held on what to do with all these additional delays and 'inconveniences'. To the joy of the Sisters, a young employee of the Company pleaded their cause and it was decided to keep the injured Sister with them and to continue to transport her. Father Louis-François Laflèche built a make-shift stretcher; two Iroquois from Sault-St. Louis were hired to transport her to the end of the trip for the fabulous sum of nine dollars. These earnings in 1844 were considered fabulous indeed.

At the beginning of May, all rejoiced at the arrival of Bishop Provencher who was travelling from Montréal with Governor George Simpson. The kind Governor, aware of Bishop Provencher's recent illness, had obtained a faster and more comfortable means of transportation this time. These two fast travellers surprised the sisters as they had just finished their lunch off shore at Sault-Ste-Marie, the water course that joins Lake Huron to the majestic Lake Superior.³⁶ It was a brief encounter and the Governor was pleased to note "that the oarsmen were now singing hymns"! The Bishop had brought along a few letters from the city for the sisters; how thoughtful and how much appreciated! Reading these messages of prayers, wishes for a safe trip and successful mission was just 'what the doctor ordered' after four days of slow propelling toward exile.

After 59 days of endurance seasoned with humorous remarks in their Journal, the travellers finally arrived at the long hoped for Red River. It was Friday, June 21, 1844 at 0100 hours in the morning. The dream of Bishop Provencher and the Grey Nuns was finally a reality. Awakened at that hour, the Bishop, with his lantern, hastened to the bank of the River to welcome his new collaborators. The Sisters spent their first short night at the Bishop's residence. In the uncertainty of his recruitment efforts, there was no house ready to receive them.

A formal and public reception was reserved for the next Sunday Mass. Bishop Provencher, his clergy and the four Sisters, one on crutches, walked from his residence to the church accompanied by the sound of the church bells, a procession observed in awed silence by all the people gathered for this first look at these white women from the far away country. The impressions created by the newcomers was positive and the mutuality of admiration and love was to continue for centuries.

Meanwhile, the Bishop offered them his former house which he abandoned because it was shaky and freezing in winter. It had been built in 1826 with stones picked from the shores of the Red River, held together with improper mortar which liquified when it rained. The house was in a lamentable state of repair. Sister Lagrave wrote:

Our Bishop has given us his old house. It is really the stable of Bethlehem.

Working long, arduous hours, the Sisters completed the most urgent repairs and the areas were ready for classes in early July. As they entered their repaired home, they wholeheartedly repeated the blessed tradition of their foundress and her companions and knelt down before a small statue of Our Lady of Providence, a gift to the foundress by Romain Larré, p.s.s., and renewed their vows. Marguerite d'Youville had started this beautiful gesture when she and her first three companions began their life of charity together on October 31, 1737.

The house consisted of six rooms; one of them contained four small beds placed side by side with woollen blankets, a gift from the Bishop's housekeeper, Ursule Grenier. On July 11, a class for girls started in this stone house and twelve days later, another class started for boys on the ground floor of the Bishop's residence. When winter arrived, it brought another story for the stone house: glacial winds and snow infiltrating between the stones made the place just a little better than the outside climate. Every day, their hope for a new house was thwarted by either accidents, broken equipment, unavailable materials, thus multiplying delays and adding to the sisters' incredible acts of heroism.

Finally, on December 30, 1847, four rooms were sufficiently ready for the sisters to move in. It was their New Year's gift, their new tool for increased services to the people they already loved.

In 1845, Bishop Provencher's territory obtained the title of Apostolic Vicariate of the Northwest; in 1847, it became a suffragan diocese of Québec. Bishop Provencher died in Saint Boniface on June 6, 1853 at the age of 66 and after 35 years as a missionary of the Red River Settlement. The Giant of the West was no more, but his magnificent missionary successes lived on in the hearts of all who worked with him for the birth and growth of the Church in Western Canada.

Pages and pages have been written on the marvellous ministries of the Grey Nuns at the Red River Settlement. Only a few events of their trip found a place in this narration as a prelude to the following Chapters which describe the Grey Nuns going further West and North to bring the Good News. No doubt the readers will want to know more of the Grey Nuns' achievements for over 150 years in Saint Boniface and beyond. Such eager readers of history are referred to more extensive descriptions, especially in the book by Sister Estelle Mitchell widely quoted above. Readers will marvel at the multi-faceted ministries that continue to this day as well as the newer ways of responding to unmet needs. How have these pioneer Grey Nuns been able to thrive through such hardships? How did they muster the courage, the endurance, the strength to serve so selflessly and to love so faithfully under such trying circumstances? Always before their eyes and in their heart, lived the spirit of Marguerite d'Youville, her unlimited confidence in God's Providence, her universal love of the poor. Always Marguerite's tireless devotion and universal love remained their model and their trademark. An odyssey of this calibre must extend its boundaries. We are now invited to travel further west and further north to observe these heroic women responding to God's call in the footsteps of their admirable predecessors.

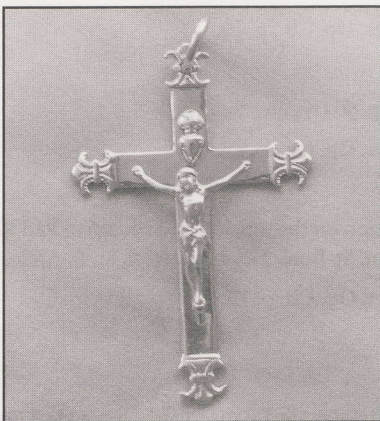
NOTES: Prelude

- 1 Fauteux, Sr. Albina, s.g.m., **Mère des Pauvres**, Montréal, Soeurs Grises de Montréal, 1929, pp. 2-3.
- 2 Racicot, Paul-Emile, S.J., **La Magicienne des Gens Mal Pris**, Ottawa, 1958, title.
- 3 Spelling varies from the writers and the periods reviewed. The spelling used by Marguerite after 1750 is used henceforth. (See: Albertine Ferland-Angers, **Mère d'Youville - Première Fondatrice Canadienne**, Montréal, Librairie Beauchemin, 1945, p. 343, note 1).
- 4 Mitchell, Estelle, s.g.m., **Messire Pierre Boucher**, Montréal, Librairie Beauchemin, Ltée, 1967, p. 310.
- 5 Mitchell, Estelle, s.g.m., **The Spiritual Portrait of Saint Marguerite d'Youville**, Montréal, The Grey Nuns of Montréal, 1993, pp. 11-12.
- 6 Mitchell, **Messire Pierre Boucher**, Op. Cit., pp. 156 ff.
- 7 Ferland-Angers, **Op.Cit.**, p. 27.
- 8 Dufrost D'Youville, Charles, **Maman Youville**, Lévis, 1930 (from a manuscript) p.7.
- 9 Ferland-Angers, **Op. Cit.**, p. 27.
- 10 Mitchell, **Spiritual Portrait**, Op. Cit., p. 18.
- 11 Duffin, Mother Mary G. **A Heroine of Charity - Venerable Mother d'Youville**, U.S.A., Benziger Brothers, 1938, p. 35.
- 12 **Ibid**, p. 36.
- 13 **Ibid.**, p. 37.
- 14 Providentially, 1737 is also the year when Clement XII canonized Saint Vincent de Paul, the indomitable apostle to the poor.
- 15 d'Youville-Dufrost, Abbé Charles, **Vie de Madame d'Youville**, Lévis, 1930, p.5. (Pope John XXIII, proclaiming the **Beatification of Marguerite**, May 3, 1959, repeated this title).
- 16 Pope John XXIII, **Apostolic Letter**, p. 2.
- 17 Pope John Paul II, **Decree of Canonization**, Rome, December 9, 1990.
- 18 Foundations are as follows: Grey Nuns of St-Hyacinthe in 1840; Grey Nuns of the Cross, (later named Sisters of Charity) Ottawa in 1845; Grey Nuns of Québec, (later named Sisters of Charity), in 1849; Grey Nuns of Nicolet (a branch from St-Hyacinthe) in 1886; Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart, Philadelphia (a branch from Ottawa), in 1921 and Grey Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, Pembroke (a branch from Ottawa), in 1926.
- 19 Mitchell, Estelle, s.g.m., **The Grey Nuns of Montréal and the Red River Settlement, 1844-1984**, (transl. by Justice J. F. O'Sullivan and Cécile Rioux, s.g.m.), St-Boniface, The Grey Nuns of Manitoba, 1987, p.22.

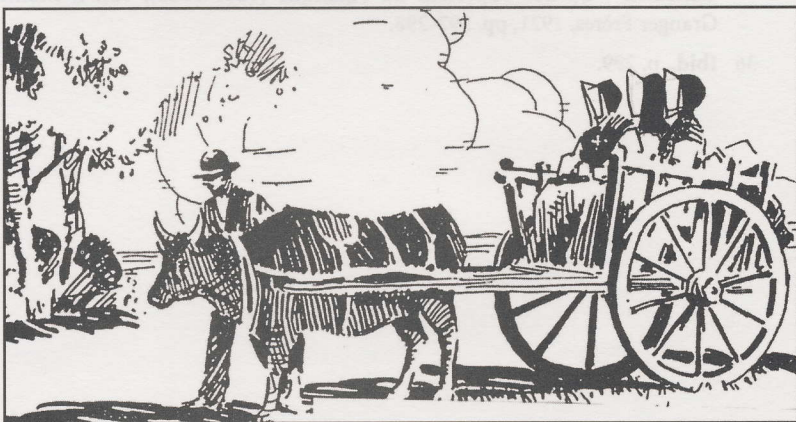
- 20 Huel, Raymond, J. A., **Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and Métis**, Edmonton, The University of Alberta Press and Western Canadian Publishers, 1996, p. 12.
- 21 Editorial Staff, The Catholic University of America, **New Catholic Encyclopedia**, Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America, 1967, pp. 913-914, (A. Champagne).
- 22 Mitchell, Estelle, s.g.m., **The Grey Nuns...Red River, Op. Cit.**, p. 6.
- 23 **Ibid.**, p. 7.
- 24 **Ibid.**, p.7.
- 25 Title given to a group of twelve sisters, a remnant of the earlier days when only twelve could be admitted in the community, by ordinance of the King of France, Louis XV, who gave the civic approval to the new community of sisters in 1755.
- 26 Mitchell, **The Grey Nuns...Red River, Op. Cit.**, p. 10.
- 27 **Ibid.**, p. 10.
- 28 **Constitutions of 1781**, Third Part, p. 60 (typewritten text).
- 29 Mitchell, **The Grey Nuns...Red River, Op. Cit.**, p. 17.
- 30 **Ibid.**, p. 13.
- 31 Unless otherwise noted, all information on the mission and voyage to Red River is taken from the **Annales, Hôp. Gén. St-Bon.**, No. 1, pp. 50 ff, St. B. Arch..
- 32 Mitchell, **The Grey Nuns...Red River, Op. Cit.**, p. 19.
- 33 **Ancien Journal**, v. II, pp. 454 ff.
- 34 Early name of Montréal.
- 35 Morice, Adrien-Gabriel, O.M.I., **Histoire de l'Eglise Catholique de l'Ouest Canadien - du Lac Supérieur au Pacifique (1659-1915)**, Vol. I, Montréal, Granger Frères, 1921, pp. 297-298.
- 36 **Ibid.**, p. 299.



Passing the rapids by portage - 1859.



Grey Nuns' cross - 1755.



Grey Nuns' voyage to Lac Sainte Anne - 1859.

CHAPTER ONE

1859 -

LAC STE-ANNE

Lac Ste-Anne Mission in present day Alberta welcomed the Grey Nuns on Saturday, September 24, 1859. This was a 3,700 kilometre leap further west and north of Saint Boniface, (in present Manitoba), another mighty endeavor for the Congregation. St. Boniface was but the threshold of an immense Vicariate spreading over some 3,000,000 square kilometers.

Grey Nuns are called further West and North

It is true, the Montréal Congregation had grown almost threefold since the first foundation in Saint Boniface 15 years earlier. The total self-giving displayed by the first missionaries became a powerful attraction for new recruits to Mother d'Youville's ranks. Even with recruitment restrictions originally required by France and later continued by England, the sisters now numbered over 200, excluding the 34 sisters who had died between 1844 and 1859. It was not rare in these times for people to die far too young, even in their early twenties.

In the summer of 1857, Bishop Alexandre Taché, O.M.I. visited the Grey Nuns' mother house in Montréal and asked the Superior General, Mother Julie Deschamps for more sisters for his missions in the Canadian West. A delightful dialogue, reminiscent of a biblical story (Gen 18:16-33), is recorded of this encounter in which the Bishop exposed the spiritual needs of thousands of natives, especially women and children, in this vast territory. Mother Deschamps, enthusiastically expressed her interest in helping bring the Good News to them. Right there she promised three sisters: the only condition was that the Oblates

would provide for their spiritual life and their daily bread. "Yes, for the spiritual nourishment," said the Bishop, "but for food, we are poor and we often have to go without". "I presume that you would not let our sisters suffer; they would expect only food and clothing," said the Mother. "And even if these were lacking on certain days...", came the reply. Mother Deschamps was disarmed and answered finally:

Well, they would fast with the priests and pray God to come and help them both.¹

So, on this unique condition of 'fasting together', they signed the foundation of the Grey Nuns missions in the far-west of Canada.

The foundresses

Mother Deschamps wasted no time in choosing the first three pioneers to this remote mission: Sister Emery (Zoé Leblanc), 31 years old, so humble, energetic and pious - her good health could cope with much deprivations, while her discretion and regularity would make her a good superior; Sister Adèle Lamy would be a marvellous companion, she was only 23, but she was very serious and very amiable; and Sister Alphonse (Marie Jacques), also 23, jovial and resourceful, a real sunshine for sombre days. Initially, the new missionaries were expected to go to Ile-à-la-Crosse, a destination which was later changed to Lac Ste-Anne. On this change of plans, Mother Julie Deschamps, Superior General, wrote to Bishop Alexandre Taché of Saint Boniface on December 15, 1858:

If you wish to establish a mission at Lac Ste-Anne before Ile-à-la-Crosse, I have no objection that the sisters destined for that mission be sent to Lac Ste-Anne, providing they are sure to find the spiritual assistance they need.²

The location

The name Lac Ste-Anne, previously *Manito Sakahigan* (Spirit Lake), was given to the mission by Father Jean-Baptiste Thibault on September 8, 1844. In a simple, but impressive ceremony, Father Thibault approached the lake, wearing his surplice and stole, blessed the lake and re-named it Lac Ste-Anne to honor his favorite heavenly protector. The previous name, however, was quite inoffensive; it was given to many bodies of water by Natives in the West. Some white people translated it Devil's Lake - *Machimanito Sakahigan* -because of its shape and surroundings which made it choppy and dangerous at a moment's notice. Its new 'Christian' identity was expected to change its behavior.³ Perhaps the Blessing of the Lake at the Annual Lac Ste-Anne Pilgrimage, begun in 1889 and continued still, is a faithful re-enactment of this 1844 event.

Getting ready

Since the great departure of the Grey Nuns, the first Canadian women missionaries⁴, for Saint Hyacinthe in 1840, Grey Nuns missionaries left for Saint Boniface in 1844, for Bytown (Ottawa) in 1845 and for Québec City in 1849. Of these four foundations, three would become autonomous Grey Nun branches, while St. Boniface succeeded to remain within the original trunk of the Grey Nuns of Montréal. In those days of slow and difficult communications between dioceses, it was considered quite an achievement that a Bishop would agree to a foundation in a new diocese while the Sisters would remain under direction from headquarters located under another Bishop. History shows that this privilege was not obtained without years of pain and efforts. Saint Boniface, for example, needed 14 years of negotiations between Bishops to arrive at a reunion with Montréal in 1858⁵.

Those preparing for exile to Lac Ste-Anne were sure to benefit from the experiences of earlier missionaries. During the winter of 1857, all details were carefully planned. On September 17,

1858, Mother Valade, Superior of Saint Boniface, having come to Montréal as a delegate to the General Chapter held in November, 1857, was ready to return to St. Boniface with her new recruits. Of these six new missionaries, three were destined to the future mission of Lac Ste-Anne. If tears were abundant for the missionaries and for those who remained behind, it was also evident that the chosen ones were happy to go and spread the Good News of God's love in these far-away lands.

The Journey

That September evening, Father Mathurin-Clair Bonnissant, superior and Father Victor Rousselot, both Sulpicians, joined the community for the Prayer of the Itinerary.⁶ The carriages were waiting at the front door of the General Hospital and so was the torrential rain. All embarked accompanied by Mother Deschamps, Sister Caron (M. Aglaé Lamy), novice, sister of Sister Adèle Lamy and a few other sisters. A novelty in travelling was experienced this time as it was now possible to travel by train to St. Paul, Minnesota. There they were met by eight Red River carts sent by Bishop Taché from St. Boniface. A luxury indeed!

Even if travel conditions had improved somewhat in the 15 years that elapsed since the first trip from Montréal to St. Boniface, it still took this group 42 days to reach their initial destination of Saint Boniface on October 29, 1858⁷. These travellers were to experience the same kinds of suffering as those sisters in earlier voyages: cold, rain, heat, mosquitoes, hunger, often unfriendly and untravelled roads and some 40 nights under the tent! After 15 days on this trip, they thought they had seen the worst until one night as they got ready to cross a river, one of their oxen took off in a crazy race with its cart containing altar ornaments, articles for liturgy, travel maps and many other precious articles. All of it was soiled, wet, or lost in the escapade. What a loss! But, these were only material things and their loss did not dampen the sisters' anticipation of the spiritual mission they were called to accomplish.

Saint Boniface

Can we imagine the joy felt by all as the travellers reached Saint Boniface! Bishop Taché had sent two Sisters and a few ladies, in lovely four-wheel carriages, to meet the new missionaries as they neared Saint Boniface. The tolling of the church bells, the solemnity in the air, all contributed to making this day a beautiful one to remember. As they approached their new temporary dwelling, they rejoiced at the view of all the sisters and orphans lined up in the garden to welcome them. After warm accolades, they entered the chapel all decorated as for special feastdays. There was a solemn celebration of the Blessed Sacrament followed by the Te Deum and prolonged conversations in the community room. One of the new missionaries wrote:

The Blessed Virgin above the altar seemed to extend her arms toward us and say: 'From now on, I will be your Mother'.⁸

The sisters remained in Saint Boniface for the winter. There they became 'novices of the West', learning about the culture and values of the people in their future missions. It was a sisterly joy for the newcomers to become acquainted with our great Grey Nun missionaries. This was their first encounter; records show that Sister Marie-Louise Valade and her companions had left Montréal before any of the new missionaries became Grey Nuns. An incredible challenge for these three young sisters was to know they were expected to walk in the footsteps of their valiant predecessors. They found out how much the sisters were appreciated by all, especially by their Bishop who wrote to Mr. S.J. Dawson on February 7, 1859:

It would be hard to exaggerate the work being done by this community of Grey Nuns. They have a boarding school for young ladies who receive an education quite the equal of that given to middle-class girls in the most advanced countries. They also have an orphanage with fifteen little orphans entirely dependent on these sisters who sacrifice

*themselves on behalf of their charges. Besides all that, they are busy helping the sick. During the year extending from October 1857 to October 1858 they have cared for 157 persons at home, they have treated 150 out-patients and admitted 21, all free of charge.*⁹

Similar praises came from civic and other Church officials, from the white communities as well as from the Métis and Natives. And the new sisters did not miss a word of these eulogious comments. Neither did they fail to translate them into strong invitations to emulate these actions in their future apostolate.

Resuming the trip

After these months of mission education, the time had come for more farewells and the three foundresses of Lac Ste Anne left Saint Boniface on August 3, 1859. Father René Rémas came from Lac Ste-Anne in order to guide them through the prairies. Bishop Alexandre Taché and three sisters from St-Boniface also accompanied them to their first stop at La-Prairie-du-Cheval-Blanc (now Saint François-Xavier, in Manitoba) where they were hosted by Father Jean-Baptiste Thibault. Early on the morning of August 5, those destined for Lac Ste-Anne again bade farewell to all and left for the remainder of their 52-day excursion. The caravan included also a Métis girl, Marie-Louise, as a Cree interpreter and four men.

*What an ordeal for women raised in Eastern towns! Through sloughs, muskegs, creeks and rivers, they cross; over interminable plains they plod along in the Red River Carts, always pestered by flies and mosquitoes, particularly when they retire for a much-needed sleep under their tent, once the simple evening meal has been dispatched and the prayers said.*¹⁰

When they crossed into what is now Alberta, the night of September 17 to 18, they knew that only two white women had ever ventured that far: Marie Lagimodière, who lived here with

her husband for two years while he worked for the Hudson's Bay Company and a Scottish woman who came to Fort Chipewyan to wed her fiancé, also an employee of the Company.¹¹ The sisters had no competition in popularity; their ability to inspire the respect of the Natives was perhaps due to the rarity of white women in this mission, or could it be the irresistible example of their selfless dedication?

As the caravan arrived at Fort Edmonton, the sisters were greeted warmly by Mr. Brazeau, agent at the Fort, who brought them to William Christie, Chief Factor of Fort Edmonton. Mr. Christie, a Catholic, spared no effort to ensure that the sisters would be given a comfortable place to refresh themselves, eat a delicious meal and sleep one good night. On September 22, the caravan was formed again for the last eighty kilometers of their journey, which included two more nights under the tent.

By 1000 hours on the morning of September 23, the sisters and their co-travellers were met a few kilometers from Lac Ste-Anne by Father Albert Lacombe, the legendary missionary of the far West. The sisters hastened to leave their cart to receive his blessing. The joy of the reunion with the priest they had learned to admire from accounts of his zeal in the difficult missions of Western Canada, helped the sisters forget about the hardships endured since they left Montréal. After a short time given to this joyful meeting, the sisters boarded their cart again and continued on the road until another stop for lunch. Since the road ahead offered the challenge of many steep hills, Father Lacombe invited the sisters to mount horses, which they did with mixed feelings! That evening, the tents were pitched only 10 kilometers from Lac Ste-Anne. One can imagine the many thoughts and emotions that occupied the minds and hearts of our three young missionaries during that last night before they reached their goal. Lac Ste-Anne was finally just a few hours away, after travelling 42 days to reach St-Boniface and 52 days to arrive at Lac Ste-Anne. Sister Alphonse (Marie Jacques) described the events of their arrival in her Daily Journal:

On the 24, [of September, 1859] we arose early. The thought

that this day would mark the end of our long journey instilled in us a new ardor. The Fathers went ahead to announce our arrival. As we approached the goal where henceforth, our days would be spent and where we most likely would be laid to rest in our graves, our pleasure abated and serious reflexions replaced it. However, our trust in God soon dissipated the clouds which the future seemed to hold in store for us....

After a ceremony of thanksgiving in the church decorated as on festive days, Father Lacombe led us to our house. Together we partook of a lunch then went over to the rectory to express our gratitude to Father Rémas for his great solicitude for us during the whole trip. Getting back to our abode we fell to our knees. We wanted the protection of the Blessed Virgin and of Mother d'Youville, our Foundress.¹²

Home at last!

Then and there, the gestures of faith and total surrender to God made by Mother d'Youville and her three companions on October 31, 1737 and by Mother Valade and her three companions on June 21, 1844 were repeated this September 24, 1859 by Sister Emery (Zoé Leblanc) and her two companions with no less faith and no less surrender. This was such an important and effective tradition that the fatigue of the trip was forgotten for that precious moment. That afternoon, about 30 people came out to meet the new sisters. Thirty persons, was the whole population left at Lac Ste-Anne when the workers were out on the Prairie! A few days later, the sisters visited every family, all Métis or Assiniboine. A sister noted in a letter that all appeared so pleased to see them.

Their house contained three bedrooms; the two small rooms were occupied by Sister Emery (Zoé Leblanc) and Marie Louise, a 'fille donnée'¹³ while the larger bedroom (about 2.5 square meters) was used by Sisters Alphonse (Marie Jacques) and Adèle

Lamy. It doubled as their community room and a small chapel. One more room was the refectory for priests and sisters while a larger one was the classroom used by Sister Alphonse. Father Rémas also used it everyday after school to teach catechism in Cree and on Sundays, Sister Alphonse held the Children of Mary's meetings in that same room. Behind the house there was a kitchen linked by a short hallway which, for the time being, was occupied by a family hosted by Father Lacombe. The Sisters were anxious to have the use of a properly installed kitchen.¹⁴ Continuing their visit of the house, the sisters could not retain their tears of joy as they noticed a picture of Mother d'Youville in this new abode.

The sisters heard later that their house had been built by Father Thibault in 1844 and had been occupied by the Oblate missionaries since their arrival in 1853; they had recently exchanged it for a smaller building. Earlier in the year the Natives and Métis of the region began to notice unusual activities around the mission. They were wondering why a new construction on that site. The mystery was cleared when the priests moved into the new smaller building and news started to emerge that three Sisters were coming to live among the people of Lac Ste-Anne.

Their ministries

Father Lacombe's Mémoires, which he wrote later in his life, often referred to the encouragement he received after the arrival of the Grey Nuns to his Mission. At one point, referring to the services of the Oblates to the Sisters, he wrote:

*If the Oblates helped the Sisters, they in turn have to proclaim having benefited greatly from the assistance given them by the Grey Nuns.... That community was simply admirable of generosity.*¹⁵

In a letter to Mother Deschamps (Julie Hainault), Superior General on January 1, 1862, Father Lacombe wrote further:

...your sisters here continue to edify us by their fraternal charity, punctuality, faithfulness to their rules and their

*readiness to help and serve.... Being superior of this mission, I will always attempt to facilitate their task and dissipate their loneliness. I can assure you that they have a high degree of courage...*¹⁶

There seemed to be confusion of roles in the above note from Father Lacombe and the mention of his title. It is true that Father Lacombe was the superior of Lac Ste-Anne Mission, but not of the Sisters' community. Clarification was sought from Mother Valade in Saint Boniface and Mother Deschamps in Montréal.¹⁷ The issue must have been resolved satisfactorily, as no other mention could be found in later correspondence.

Hardly two weeks after their arrival at Lac Ste-Anne, by October 10, 1859, Sister Alphonse (Marie Jacques) had already recruited some 20 Native and Métis children and adults and had begun classes. By the end of the year, her class had doubled. There was eagerness in these young and not so young beautiful people and their minds were open to new learnings, new discoveries. They were especially attentive when their teacher talked about Jesus' love for the children and for all humanity. Within two years, Sister Alphonse had completed a grammar in Cree for the use of children. This fact was amazing since the sisters began learning the Cree language only after they arrived at Lac Ste-Anne through daily one-hour classes by none other than Father Lacombe.

As for Sister Emery (Zoé Leblanc), 'the great doctor of the region', she hastened to open a dispensary and relentlessly travelled from one tent to the other graciously distributing her best care and her irresistible smile. People would send for her from far away or come to her dispensary at any hour, on any day just like our modern Emergency Rooms.

Sister Adèle Lamy was both sacristan and sexton; she also took care of the meals and upkeep of both the priests' and sisters' houses. She wrote that the sisters do everything from the sacristy to the stable, including the garden.¹⁸

All three sisters responded generously to the many needs that came to their attention. There were always the orphans and elderly to care for; there were many needs of spiritual assistance

requesting their presence as well as many emergencies to respond to. A litany of sufferings was continually presented: a child wounded by a buffalo, a woman covered with wounds, famished persons frozen to death in the woods and countless other afflictions. Each day brought people with new diseases to care for, new sorrows to console, new conversion to a Christian life to register and often moribunds to accompany to a peaceful death. And the three Grey Nun apostles, helpers of the Oblates Fathers, were ever grateful for every opportunity to light a candle of hope in every dark corner of this immense country.

New Year's Greetings

It was not unexpected then to see the whole population filing to the sisters residence on New Year's Day to bring their greetings to their friends and benefactors, the Grey Nuns. Christmas then was the Church feast; it included Midnight Mass followed by the 'réveillon' (refreshments) and prayerful remembrance, within the family, of the Christian meaning of Christmas. By tradition, New Year's Day was the day for family festivities, visits and greetings. This was also the day chosen by the people of Lac Ste-Anne for visits, wishes and also a time to show their gratitude to the sisters.

To bring God's love and care

More than a century later, historians continue to praise the initiative and the courage of these women who fearlessly faced isolation and all sorts of dangers to bring God's love, compassion and care to those in need:

Nursing in Alberta began in 1859....and the ladies who began nursing in Alberta were the Grey Nuns.¹⁹

In Alberta, the Grey Nuns brought with them their traditions of competence, independence, self-sufficiency, and determination. In that these women were the first non-native women to come to settle in the area, the example they

set for the community in terms of what women could do was a powerful one. Their independence and determination to control those areas which were rightfully theirs was not lost with the passage of time as these characteristics were applied in their day-to-day operations.²⁰

The little convent literally cracked at the seams. The sisters spared no effort, sometimes perhaps beyond their apparent strength and capacities, with amazing results. In her humble accounts, Sister Lamy wrote:

It is really embarrassing to hear Father Lacombe in the church citing us as models when we know we don't deserve such compliments.²¹

Yet, Father Lacombe himself wrote in his **Mémoires**:

Inspite of sufferings, constant struggles, all kinds of privations, never a word of complaint, never a regret, never a glance at the past security and comfort of their dear mother house...They never give up, they encourage each other, they support each other; it is like an uninterrupted contest as to who would do most for the glory of God and the salvation of their brothers and sisters.²²

Never a complaint...except a word here and there in their correspondence, words that revealed a very minimal part of the reality.

We have much privations to endure...famine is great...Many times we feel the pangs of hunger without anything to eat...²³

But the original contract went unbroken: priests and sisters were fasting together. In 1860, the chronicler related this well-known sentence of Marguerite d'Youville: "Always near total destitution, we never lack at least the essential". That summer, most people went to the woods and lakes to gather food for the winter. Cultivation of the land was almost totally unknown at that time, except for those missionaries who had a small garden and attempted to arouse the interest of the population in this new way of securing food.

Planning a move

Painfully aware of this lamentable situation, Father Lacombe made many visits to other available sites where more possibilities for finding food could be available, more gardening could make for healthier food, but mostly, more people to care for within shorter distances. His previous stays at Fort Edmonton, some 80 km Southeast of Lac Ste-Anne, his personal friendship with John Rowand of the Hudson's Bay Company and the closeness he had established with so many of the Fort population were ever present in his long range planning.

On December 20, 1860, relates the chronicler,

God gave us a great joy, that of welcoming our beloved Bishop Alexandre Taché. Joy was overflowing during his stay among us, but as all joys here below, it ended too soon when on January 10, 1861, came the leave-taking moment.²⁴

During his visit, Bishop Taché made the decision to open another mission near Fort Edmonton. One can surmise that he was well briefed by Father Lacombe while considering the pros and cons of such a move, as well as the possible location. Upon his return through Fort Edmonton, accompanied by Father Lacombe, the Bishop looked at several locations. Then, casually, Father Lacombe took the Bishop up the 'hill' about 15 kilometers north of Fort Edmonton. Looking all around in silence, they were mesmerized by the beauty of the site, the view from the hill, the extent of the land that could be cultivated, and the possibility of a large population to evangelize. Expectantly, Father Lacombe looked at the Bishop and waited. The answer surpassed Father Lacombe's expectations. Planting his walking stick in the snow, the Bishop pronounced:

You are right, this is a magnificent site. Here is the place of the church and I desire to name the mission Saint Albert in honor of your beloved patron saint.²⁵

Father Lacombe was ecstatic. He immediately made sure the work would proceed quickly to build this new mission. Included

in his plans, of course, was the need to ensure the services of the Grey Nuns in Saint Albert. This approval was easily obtained from the Grey Nuns in Montréal.

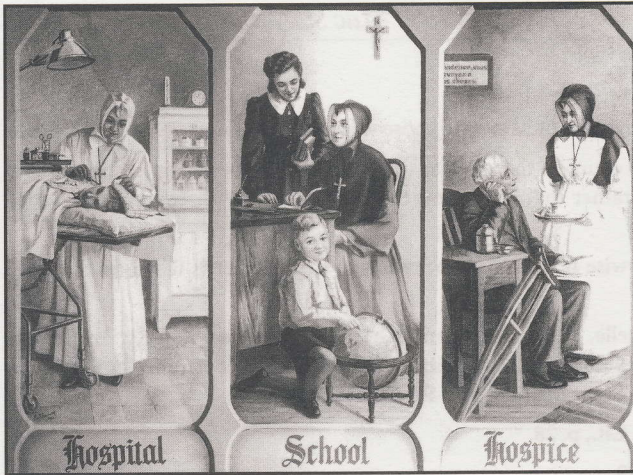
In the meantime, for two more years, the Sisters continued at Lac Ste-Anne, ministering to all people, responding to, or anticipating their needs for a caring gesture, a healing hand. They were also proficient in offering a listening ear, a prayer, lessons in the three "R's", or garden demonstrations, cooking, sewing, any of these surprising talents that these women from the East mastered so well. The thought of leaving these people whom they already loved dearly was made easier for the Sisters as many families had already followed Father Lacombe to Saint Albert to prepare the mission and many more would join them in the near future. The buildings coming up at that mission were proof of the many helpers Father Lacombe had already enticed to this new location. During these four years, the three foundresses of Lac Ste-Anne, had cumulated 12 years of dedication to the people of this mission and the 'fille donnée' had given four years.

On March 23, 1863, the three Grey Nuns, having packed all their meagre belongings and bade 'adieu' to their Cree and Métis friends at Lac Ste-Anne, took to the road that was to bring them to their 'promised land', the Saint Albert Mission. They brought with them seven orphaned children and travelled a very full day, at six kilometers an hour to reach Saint Albert. It is in that promised land that this History will now find the valiant pioneers.

NOTES: Chapter 1

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- 2 **Correspondence**, December 15, 1858, St. B. Arch.
- 3 Drouin, E. O., O.M.I., **Lac Ste-Anne- Sakahigan**, Edmonton, Editions de l'Ermitage, 1973, note #16, ch. I.
- 4 Ferland-Angers, Albertine, **Les Premières Missionnaires Canadiennes**, Montréal, Hôpital Général des Soeurs Grises, 1938, title of the booklet translates as: *The First Canadian Women Missionaries*.
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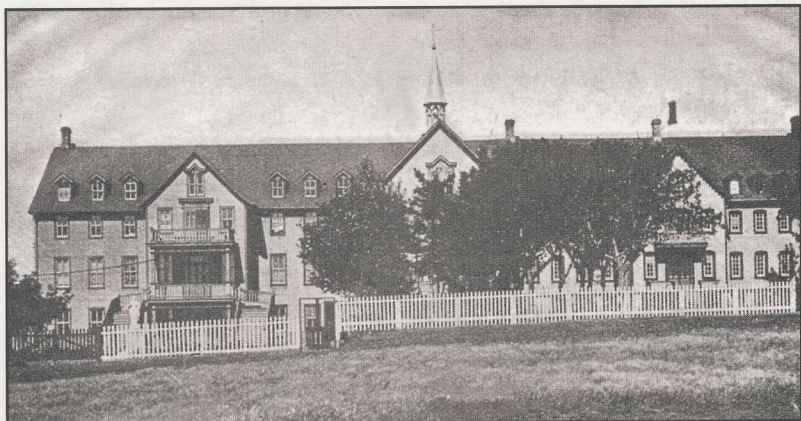
- 6 A special prayer for blessings on those who are travelling.
- 7 This author counted the days on the calendar between September 17 and October 29 rather than relying on the count of thirty-three days mentioned elsewhere.
- 8 Unless otherwise noted, all information in this chapter is taken from GNRC Arch.
- 9 Mitchell, Estelle, s.g.m., **Les Soeurs Grises de Montréal à la Rivière Rouge, 1844-1984**, 1987, Montréal, Editions du Méridien , p. 68. (transl. in English by Justice J.F. O'Sullivan and Cécile Rioux, s.g.m.).
- 10 Drouin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 28.
- 11 **Ibid**, p. 28, 29.
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- 13 A title given to volunteers or Associates of the Grey Nuns who helped in their missions.
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- 20 Ross-Kerr, Janet C., **Prepared to Care - Nurses and Nursing in Alberta**, The University of Alberta Press, 1998, p. 3.
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- 22 Emery, Sister (Zoé Leblanc), to Mother Julie Deschamps, **Letter**, Dec. 25, 1859, GNRC Arch.
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- 24 **Chroniques, Lac Ste-Anne**, 1860.
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The main ministries of the Grey Nuns (painted by Sister Flore Barrette, 1954).



Lac Ste-Anne Mission - constructions by Rev. J.-B, Thibault painted by Miss Onésime Dorval who taught with the Grey Nuns in the 1860's.



Youville Convent and Orphanage, St. Albert, Alberta.

CHAPTER TWO

1863 - MOVING INTO SAINT ALBERT MISSION

The walking stick planted in the snow by Bishop Taché in January, 1861 had given place to a burst of activities.

Several buildings were coming up when the three Grey Nuns arrived at Saint Albert late on March 23, 1863. Incessantly, they continued their mission of educating and healing begun at Lac Ste-Anne in 1859.

Temporary dwelling

For over a year, until September, 1864, they resided in a small log cabin at the Mission while their own house was being built. This temporary dwelling was cold and allowed bone-chilling drafts between the logs. An interesting note: when the sisters moved to their new house, this cottage was converted into a stable and fell apart shortly after.

Even in this limited space, the sisters admitted a 100-year old man rejected by his own, on November 22, 1863. So impressed was he with the kindness of the sisters that, learning all he could about the faith of these charitable women, he requested Baptism prior to his death.

The new convent - New ministries

Almost ready for occupancy, the new convent had an area cleared for a first Mass celebrated by Father Albert Lacombe on August 21, 1864. Father Lacombe, for ever attentive to the needs of the sisters, blessed the convent on September 18 and dedicated the chapel to Our Lady of Sorrows. The new building, a two-

storey house, 9 by 18 meters was officially called: Asile Youville (Youville Asylum). Poverty reigned in this building: the furniture consisted of one small table, two chairs and trunks to sit on, all this for eleven people¹.

Now that more space was available, on Monday, September 19, 1864, the sisters opened a school, an orphanage and a rudimentary hospital, where many sick people of various nationalities and faiths found care and healing. The sisters also travelled to surrounding houses and tents to visit Natives and Métis, bring medications and offer words of consolation to the poor and suffering people.²

The Mission of St. Albert is a complex one to describe as it encompassed such a variety of ministries. Since its beginnings it has also been the centre of all the missionary activities in the Northwest. With time, it was to become the official headquarters of the Grey Nuns Saint Albert Provincial Council; it has witnessed the birth of the Novitiate, the first locale of the Grey Nuns Archives and library, the first Infirmary and retirement home for the sisters, the place where all sisters would come for their annual retreats. In fact, it became the heart of the Grey Nuns Saint Albert Province. After 1964, St. Albert Mission transferred most of its activities, except its Nursing Home, to temporary locations and finally, to the new Grey Nuns Regional Centre in Edmonton when it opened on August 5, 1967.

Exceptional history

Throughout its exceptional history, Saint Albert was to register an impressive list of 'firsts' which will remain to the credit of our valiant pioneers: Oblates and Grey Nuns. To begin with, the Grey Nuns were the first school teachers in Saint Albert, in 1863³; the first bridge across a river in this area, the Northwest Territories, was constructed by Father Lacombe in Saint Albert in 1863; Saint Albert had the first horse-driven flour mill operating west of Fort Garry set up by Father Lacombe in 1863⁴; Grey Nuns opened the first hospital/orphanage/school west of the Red River,

in 1864⁵; Grey Nuns are listed as having operated the first hospital in Saint Albert, in 1870⁶; and, as noted earlier, Saint Albert was the first diocese created west of Saint Boniface, in the vast Northwest Territories, in 1871⁷.

The Grey Nuns always rejoiced when faith grew among the people they served. Sister Emery (Zoé Leblanc) had the consolation to be godmother at the baptism of a young Norwegian man in April, 1863. On December 15, 1864, five adults were baptized, including two from the Blackfoot. When Father Lacombe arrived in Saint Albert from his missions among the Cree on February 15, 1865, he could not conceal his satisfaction at their openness to the faith. Later, returning sick from a mission among the Blackfoot during a scarlet fever epidemic, he recorded at least 350 baptisms among members of that nation, many of whom succumbed to the disease. In spite of the good care he provided, it is reported that 1,200 died at that time⁸.

Witnesses of miseries of all kinds, the sisters were ever present to support the sick and the bereaved: a young girl of seven died after a few hours of horrible suffering on June 3, 1863. On October 9, 1863, a hunting accident cost the life of the young son of Edouard Valade, a good friend of the mission. One of the Assiniboine orphans raised at the mission, Hélène, died after a six-week illness⁹. Another six-year-old girl, daughter of William Christie, Chief Factor of Edmonton and the first benefactor of the Grey Nuns in Lac Ste-Anne, also succumbed to illness in 1865. On July 30, 1873, the sisters' compassionate care was displayed again when a four year old orphan girl was brought to the mission. She was saved from a sure death at the hand of starving members of the Cree nation from St. Paul des Crees¹⁰. At the same time, the sisters knew of the many dangers encountered by Father Lacombe on his trips among the Cree and Blackfoot; they feared for the safety of their beloved pastor. During one altercation, in December, 1865, he was struck on the head with a bullet which miraculously rolled down on his stole without causing any harm¹¹.

New Year's Greetings

A brief mention in the **Chroniques** of January 1, 1873 referred to a long standing custom of visiting and exchange of greetings on New Year's Day as was done earlier at Lac Ste-Anne. On that date, the entry reads:

According to the custom in this country, we have the visit of the whole parish; most of them are Métis¹².

This tradition could still be observed well into the 1950's in the west and the north of Canada.

Vital Grandin

The future Bishop of the large area that was to become the diocese of Saint Albert, Father Vital Grandin was renowned to serve with simplicity and courage in the missions he was given to shepherd. Arriving from France in 1854, to the immense vicariate of Saint Boniface just a few months after his ordination to the priesthood, he literally jumped into his new life of selfless dedication. On December 11, 1857, he was appointed suffragan to Bishop Alexandre Taché for the Northwest Territories. These were the most western and northern missions of Canada: present day Saskatchewan, Alberta and Northwest Territories. After October 24, 1868, Bishop Grandin's office was located in Saint Albert, not yet a diocese. The diocese of Saint Albert was created on September 22, 1871, and Bishop Vital Grandin became its first Bishop under the Archbishop of Saint Boniface. The Roman documents confirming this nomination, however, were delayed until Easter Sunday, April 7, 1872¹³. With great pomp, the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross was celebrated for the first time by the new Bishop, at the Cathedral of Saint Albert, on September 14, 1873. The precious relic was exposed for veneration all day¹⁴.

Poverty and creativity

Poverty was the only status in life known by the missionaries

in those years. Along with poverty came resourcefulness, invention, creativity and many skills to match. In September, 1880, a load of sheep arrived for sale, from Bow River, near Calgary. Upon hearing the news, the sisters' imagination immediately saw mounds of wool that could be theirs so they could knit warm mitts, tuques, scarves and stockings for the children of their Mission. The temptation was great and they purchased eleven sheep for the extravagant sum of \$100.00.¹⁵ In no time, there were more warm little toes and fingers and fewer running noses.

When a surprise box arrived early in 1881, there was joy and exclamations at the sight of tempting round items, each one decorated in several colors: red, yellow, green. And the smell!

*We have not seen or smelled anything like this for at least ten years. Could these be APPLES? And there are enough for a generous sharing with the whole family at the Youville Asylum! God of surprises, you know when we need this kind of novelty in our isolated life!*¹⁶

Celebrations and surprises

For Bishop Grandin's 25th Anniversary of Episcopate, September 15, 1883 (1857-1883), the sisters decided to design the first uniform for the girls. It was a black dress trimmed in light blue. The Bishop's admiration of this new creation was revealed through his many compliments for the seamstresses and the young models. Not unnoticed either were the patent leather shoes shining so brightly¹⁷.

The children and sisters often had delightful surprises in store, surprises they well knew how to reveal at special opportunities. Berry picking was an activity which children and sisters did together. One year the crop was especially plentiful and the picking lasted several days. When their beloved superior, Sister St-Roch (Aurélie Legault)'s feastday came, they were able to surprise her with the lovely sum of \$30.00 from the sale of their raspberries. Needless to say there was great delight experienced by both the donors and the recipient on that occasion.

A new house...

In 1885, a new home was being built for the sisters and intended also to house their many activities of ministry: care of the orphans, teaching and nursing. The building, planned for these services was 24 by 12 meters with a large entrance and a chapel of 9 by 7 meters. However, discussions between Father Hippolyte Leduc and Mother Julie Deschamps, Superior General, who was visiting the Mission, led to the conclusion that the sisters should exchange their new house for the present Bishop's residence. The deal was concluded easily as the sisters were well aware of their debts of gratitude to the saintly Bishop Vital Grandin. In exchange, the sisters' ministries were to relocate in the solid house built with wood and measuring 20 by 9 meters; it had been built in 1863 and enlarged by 6 meters in 1868.¹⁸ The new Bishop's residence was covered with bricks in 1922. At the end of this century, it is still used by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate as a residence and museum.

New accounting procedures

During her visit in Saint Albert, in 1885, Mother Julie Deschamps, Superior General, along with Bishop Vital Grandin, decided to arrange a complete separation of possessions between the Oblates and the Grey Nuns. Up to that point, the sisters did not have to manage any money, except that their constructions were paid by the mother house in Montréal. All their work was for the benefit of the Mission administered by the Oblates who, in turn provided food and clothing for the sisters.¹⁹

Major ministries : Teaching, Health Care

Apart from poverty and the consequent resourcefulness displayed by the sisters, life at the Asylum/boarding school/convent/hospital was never dull. The Grey Nuns' mission of evangelization took them especially into two major areas: teaching and

health care. Bishop Alexandre Taché's opinion of the Grey Nuns was captured by one of his biographers who wrote:

*He saw in the Grey Nuns the needed auxiliaries of the Bishop and the priests, the intelligent and devoted teachers who formed the youth to Christian and civilized life, the nurses who, while caring for the body, healed the soul and encouraged people in virtue and piety...*²⁰

Teaching and health care, these were to become the world in which the Grey Nuns would excel and lead the way for future generations. While these ministries are in themselves multi-faceted and contain countless activities, no attempt will be made in this Volume to describe the accomplishments of all the individual teachers and students, all nurses and patients throughout the nearly one and a half centuries since the Grey Nuns started these ministries in western and northern Canada. Some of the more obvious happenings, however, will find their place henceforth.

Teaching in Saint Albert was one of the priorities established by the sisters when they first set foot on this new location. As at Lac Ste-Anne, the first teacher was Sister Alphonse (Marie Jacques). She was most happy when a colleague, 27 year old Sister Sophronie Blanchette, arrived from Ile-à-la-Crosse, on October 17, 1871 to help with the education of the children. At that time, Sister Alphonse became the first Principal of the school while fulfilling her teaching responsibilities as well. August 13, 1872 was also a joyful day when Henriette Bruyère, a young Métis from Red River, came to Saint Albert to teach English, at the request of Sister Ursule Charlebois, Assistant General. This young lady would marry Johny Cunningham [sic] two years later on September 8, 1874²¹. The welcome mat was spread again on August 26, 1874, for the arrival of Sister Ste-Geneviève (Victoire Lemay) as a fourth teacher in this thriving community. On September 5, 1880, Onézime Dorval arrived from Winnipeg after a 76-day trip, to teach in Saint Albert. She was accompanied by Mary Giroux, an orphan girl whom she had educated. Onézime was the first person with a teaching certificate to arrive in this part of the world.

By that time the number of orphans had risen to 24, and day students were coming in large numbers from the Native, Métis and white populations. They were eager to learn.

The education provided by the Grey Nuns in this center [in the 1860's] was not a classical education designed to have pupils earn diplomas. Rather it was an education which sought to help the students become self-sufficient, responsible citizens. To this end, education was offered in basic workmanship. The boys learned to cultivate the land, work with wood and build a house while the girls learned to sew, wash and iron clothes, keep a garden and cook. On the academic side, the students were taught arithmetic, French, English and religion. And overall, the Sisters were relatively successful in their enterprises. Their successes were indeed admirable when one takes into account the conditions under which they worked²².

On August 5, 1872, the students of this first organized school in Alberta were already able to face an examination. Richard Hardisty from the Hudson's Bay Company and Patrick Burns, a rich man and a benefactor of Father Albert Lacombe's charities were present for this first registered examination. The **Chroniques** state that:

everyone appeared satisfied with the progress of the students.²³

On July 18, 1876, Bishop Vital Grandin presided at the 'classical examination' accompanied by Colonel Gervis [sic] and Captain Gagnon. Again on December 2, 1879, Bishop Grandin examined the students' progress in the unfinished upper floor of the Bishop's residence. On that occasion, the students presented dialogues in both French and English. Sister Ursule Charlebois, Assistant General, who was present for the visit of the mission, also attended this activity; she was pleasantly surprised at the ability of the students. Although no written comments were kept in those early years, the book of Inspectors Reports, begun in 1886, contained praising comments; some will be inserted later in this Chapter.

The valiant pioneer of education in Alberta, Sister Alphonse (Marie Jacques), was a born educator, and a persistent trail-blazer in her method of teaching and educating the youth. During her 20 years at Lac Ste-Anne and St. Albert, hundreds of children from every race, color and creed were beneficiaries of her talent and dedication. Then, illness set in. Her heart and circulation problems were of short duration. From June to October, 1879, she never ceased to edify those around her by her quiet acceptance of pain and discomfort. She died on October 7, 1879 at the age of 44. A very short life indeed, rich in benefits for many generations.

After the Board of Education was formed, with headquarters in Regina, two sisters passed the examinations of the Board and were granted a first class teaching certificate in 1888: Sisters Sarah Dillon and Marie-des-Anges (Victorine Béliveau)²⁴. It was not until 1907 that Sisters Savard (Elise Bélair) and Azélie Surprenant were able to attend the newly opened Normal School in Calgary where they obtained a Teaching Certificate. They were the first Grey Nuns to acquire such credentials in Alberta²⁵. Inspector J.A. Fife, who visited their two classes on March 26, 1909, wrote :

*Sister Savard's teaching is given conscientiously; students are making excellent progress. The order and conduct of the school are all we can desire and the students remarkably polite and well behaved. Sister Surprenant being sick that day, her classroom teaching was not inspected. The appearance of her classroom was very satisfactory, books meticulously neat, students like their work, they are very polite and punctual*²⁶.

Chief School Inspector, Count de Cazes came to the school in St. Albert in April, 1890 and commented:

*"This is just like in France. They learn everything here"*²⁷.

Later that year, on November 18, 1890, Inspector Albert Biturnay visited the school and left the following report:

My visit this year has been more than satisfactory and the progress of the pupil [sic], although I expected a good deal, far above my expectations. I will be very happy to report to

*the Indian Commissioner to what extent the Indian Department is in debt to the Reverend Sisters of Charity for their untiring efforts and for their success...When efforts of the same nature have proven too often to be almost a failure in other institutions at the same time it is gratifying to see that at one school at least success appears to be crowning the work*²⁸.

The students' eagerness to learn in the classroom was equalled by their well-developed skills in various arts. Frequent mentions are found in the **Chroniques** of displays and expositions of students' productions from garden produce to bakery items, knitting, sewing, drawing and painting. Many local and regional prizes were won over the years. On June 19, 1893, Sister Florestine Malchelosse went to the World's Fair in Chicago by train with two students, Eugénie Leduc and Caroline Ward. They brought samples of their fine works in shoemaking, sewing and knitting; even books of their home works entered the displays. When the chronicler acknowledged their return in October of the same year, she simply wrote: *they did us honor*. A delayed surprise was reserved for July, 1896. The Honor Diploma earned at the World's Fair held at Jackson Park, Chicago arrived three years late. The mystery surrounding such a delay remains unsolved to this day, but the honor due to the winners is a lasting tribute to the students, their school and their teacher²⁹.

From 1909 until 1940, the Institution grew into a progressive Indian Residential School. The close supervision and interest of the federal government ensured constant adherence to policies and standards. In addition, the sisters opened a kindergarten and an orphanage for the white children. It has been noted that, as the city of Edmonton grew, more and more parents wanted to have their daughters educated by the sisters; this increased the number of boarders. By 1936, only a few orphans remained, and these were accepted into Couvent du Sacré-Coeur in Legal along with the few young girls seeking to be educated by the sisters.

There was a custom established to have a Mass of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the school year. In addition to being a

special occasion to call on God's blessings, this celebration provided all with a clear transition from summer activities to the more serious and more demanding, arduous occupation of learning expected in the new term. After the parish school, the 'college', opened on July 27, 1874³⁰, many of the boarders at the Youville Asylum registered as extern students at the new school. Students from both schools were always invited for the annual Mass of the Holy Spirit and the annual retreat. The new school of 1874 experienced periods of growth and other schools opened over the years, such as a large two storey boys' school in 1880.

Several Grey Nuns taught in the 'college' from its beginning. The first principal was Sister Marie-des-Anges who remained in this position for 31 years while doing some classroom teaching. From 1884 to 1915, she had a marvellous, long career in the formation of youth. Another long-time teacher and historian was Sister Marguerite-Marie Côté. Her writings³¹ have contributed to piece together many significant events showing the course of life in Alberta, in education and in the Grey Nuns' ministry. She was never able, however, to produce proof of her own birth or baptism. The tragic Frank Slide in the Rockies, on April 29, 1903, all but wiped out the tiny settlement in the Crowsnest Pass. Scores were dead, buildings, including the church and its records were all destroyed. So was the record of little Marguerite-Marie's baptism.

The last Grey Nun who taught in St-Albert was Sister Marguerite Laforce who, in 1977 was elected as Provincial Secretary and resigned her employment with the Public School Board of Saint Albert after close to 20 years of professional services to the children of Saint Albert, Legal and Edmonton³². This event ended the Grey Nuns' 115 year mission of educating youth in St-Albert.

Health Care was by no means second in the life of the Grey Nuns. As Jesus came to teach and to heal, so did his followers, the Grey Nuns who devoted their life to their suffering brothers and sisters. At Lac Ste-Anne, and now at Saint Albert, Sister Emery (Zoé Leblanc) was recognized as the doctor and the nurse

throughout the vast territories. Being the first Public Health/Home Care nurse in Alberta, as she would be called later, Sister Emery spent most of her time visiting the sick in their homes or tents, but the demands always surpassed the time and resources available to her. When equipment, supplies and medication were scarce in the region, her caring, skills, knowledge and self-confidence worked marvels in relieving and healing all kinds of ailments. In August, 1865, Sister Adéline Lassiseraye came to assist her in making house calls as well as caring for the sick, using any space available in their small convent.

On January 7, 1870, a new frame building, attached to the mission, was completed and more patients could now be accommodated in what is still referred to as the first hospital in central Alberta³³. This hospital was actually the forerunner of the Edmonton General Hospital that was to open in 1895. Entirely paid by the sisters, the cost of the mission hospital amounted to \$10,000.00. This new facility proved very attractive when Doctor McDonald arrived to visit on December 31 of that year. He soon decided to offer his services to the population of St. Albert. A succession of epidemics in the following years found the new 'health care team' ready to assist those who were affected³⁴.

Caring for increased numbers of orphans and boarders and now, patients increased the demands on food and other supplies. Although, enlarged several times, the farm became insufficient to supply all requirements of food. At various intervals, more land was purchased, more workers were hired³⁵ and, when nature cooperated, the entire household benefitted from the generous produce of mother earth. There were, however, years of drought, or hail storms, early frost and snow in early fall or late spring. All such happenings were accepted with unfailing faith in Divine Providence who always heard the cry of the poor.

Meanwhile, the sisters continued their health care ministry, always making themselves available for home visiting and care in their hospital. This care consisted of activities such as setting broken bones, extracting teeth, attending to all kinds of injuries or ailments and caring for families struck by epidemics. It is report-

ed that during the 1870 smallpox epidemic, Sisters Emery (Zoé Leblanc) and Adéline Lassiseraye went to care for Father Hippolyte Leduc who was affected with the disease at Lac Ste-Anne. After five days of good care, their patient was well enough to make the trip to Saint Albert with his nurses, and to continue toward a full recovery³⁶.

Sister Emery (Zoé Leblanc)'s short life ended on August 5, 1885 at the age of 58. Cancer had claimed this generous 'great doctor', as she was called by many of her contemporaries. With her had begun health care in Alberta. Historians have never forgotten her pioneering role in what future generations would begin to take for granted, the 20th century health care system³⁷.

Surgical operations were not unusual occurrences in the burgeoning hospital. One of these was performed on Sister Delphine Brassard for cancer. In mid-May, 1895, having been encouraged to go to Saint Boniface for such a procedure, but on the other hand, fearing the delays and fatigue of the trip, she decided to stay in Saint Albert under the care of two surgeons from Edmonton, Doctors P. G. Royal and J. D. Harrison. By mid-June, Sister Brassard was fully recovered and ready to resume her job as provider or *économe*. She was the competent construction supervisor for the first hospital in Edmonton being built by the Grey Nuns. Once the new Edmonton General Hospital was completed in December, 1895, the mission hospital was transferred to this new site, 15 kilometres to the south. The development and construction of this institution will be reviewed in Chapter X.

Everyone reorganizes: Grey Nuns, Diocese, Country

Grey Nuns - The number of Grey Nuns' missions under the Vicariate of Saint Boniface was growing rapidly³⁸. For the Vicar, visiting those missions required travel for enormous distances, this in addition to the 10 houses already established in present day Saint Boniface Province. Soon this round-about way of communicating with Montréal, through a far away Superior Vicar,

caused regrettable delays which short-circuited the lines of communications. Members of the General Council, at the headquarters in Montréal, were acutely aware of these difficulties, while they were delighted that the Grey Nuns ministries were radiating so far into the still widely unknown world. Following the untimely death of Mother Julie Deschamps, Superior General on June 29, 1897, a General Chapter was called by Mother Praxède Filiatrault, Assistant General, for August 14 of that year. At the Chapter, Mother Filiatrault was elected Superior General. Other decisions recorded included the creation of the Vicariate of Saint Albert from the immense territories to date under Saint Boniface. The sisters were delighted to learn that Mother Eugénie Letellier became their new Superior Vicar for Saint Albert while another Eugénie, Mother Eugénie Dionne was Vicar for Saint Boniface. This division left 10 houses and 102 sisters in Saint Boniface while eight houses and 58 sisters formed the Saint Albert Vicariate which extended from Ile-à-la-Crosse, through Alberta and to the Northwest Territories³⁹. Mother Vicar Letellier chose to set her office at the Edmonton General Hospital so that communications with the 'outside world' would be facilitated. Her successor, Mother Vicar Léa Dandurand moved her headquarters to Saint Albert; this practice continued until 1928. Then, for the next 12 years, the headquarters were located again at the Edmonton General Hospital. When the Novitiate opened in Saint Albert in 1934, plans to return the Provincialate to that location began and by 1940, the reinstallation was done.

For Saint Albert, another division occurred in 1914, giving the Northwest Territories a new Vicariate named, Divine Providence with headquarters located in Fort Smith⁴⁰. The first Vicar was Mother Marie-Louise Léveillé who retained this responsibility until 1921. In 1980, this Province rejoined Saint Albert when the numbers of missions and sisters had decreased considerably. As most of the missions of Province Divine Providence existed before this new Province, they will be all included in Volume II of this history. After 1915, the name *Vicariate* was replaced by *Province* and the superior took the title of *Provincial Superior*.

Diocese - Alexandre Taché had been consecrated Bishop on November 23, 1851 at the age of 28 and appointed as Coadjutor to Bishop Norbert Provencher. On June 7, 1853, when Bishop Norbert Provencher died, Bishop Taché became the second Bishop of the immense diocese of St. Boniface; he was 30 years old. His diocese extended from the Great Lakes to the Rocky Mountains and from the United States border to the shores of the Arctic Ocean. For such a vast diocese, he needed a Coadjutor and his choice fell on Vital Grandin. The young Oblate was consecrated Bishop Coadjutor on November 13, 1859 at the age of 30. His episcopal seat was located at Ile-à-la-Crosse, in present day Saskatchewan. When Bishop Taché decided to divide his large diocese in 1867, he created the Vicariate of Saskatchewan. In 1868 Vital Grandin was named Vicar Apostolic of Saskatchewan and Bishop of Prince Albert which also included the missions around Edmonton. Bishop Vital Grandin was named first Bishop of the newly created diocese of Saint Albert on September 22, 1871. At the age of 72, after years of relentless work and total dedication, on June 17, 1897, he received the assistance of a Coadjutor in the person of Bishop Emile Legal. After having served 31 years as the beloved Bishop of Saint Albert Bishop Grandin died on June 3, 1902. He left to his successor, Bishop Emile Legal, the legacy of a growing faith among the people he had shepherded so kindly and respectfully. Bishop Legal saw the transfer of the episcopal seat to Edmonton on November 13, 1912 where he was appointed the first Archbishop. Upon his death, March 10, 1920, he was succeeded by Archbishop Henry Joseph O'Leary on September 7, 1920. Archbishop John Hugh MacDonald was at the helm of the Archdiocese from March 5, 1938 to August 11, 1964 and Archbishop Anthony Jordan, O.M.I., from August 11, 1964 to September 6, 1973 when he was replaced by Archbishop Joseph N. MacNeil, who registered the longest tenure at the seat of Edmonton, 26 years at the time of writing. In January 1999, Bishop Thomas Collins, formerly of Saint Paul Diocese, was appointed Coadjutor to Archbishop MacNeil, whom he replaced on June 7, 1999. He was installed at a magnificent celebration on September 13, 1999.

Country - In 1897, eight years before Alberta became a province, the Grey Nuns created Saint Albert Vicariate. Thirty years had passed since four eastern provinces: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Québec and Ontario had joined the Confederation of Canada, on July 1, 1867. The year 1905 was to add Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta to this growing country. Edmonton was chosen as Alberta's capital, a decision not entirely pleasing to Calgary, the other booming city to the south. Celebrating this event in Edmonton, on September, 8, 1906, the Honorable Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Prime Minister of Canada, was simply astounded to note the presence of 2,000 children at the Exhibition Grounds. At the sight, he was quick to exclaim:

*What need have we of immigrants in face of this growing generation?*⁴¹

Before leaving the city, several of the distinguished visitors decided to have a closer look at these little marvel students at Saint Albert Asylum. An interesting account of their unexpected visit is preserved in the Archives:

No wonder that this fall the sisters had the surprise of their life. The first Ford cars glided about but were still very much a novelty. What can be the matter, one, two, three and four cars? The unannounced visitors were distinguished dignitaries of our Government. The Governor General, Lord and Lady Gray, their sons and daughters, the new Premier of Alberta, Honorable [Alexander Cameron] Rutherford, [K.W. MacKenzie] Mayor of Edmonton, the Vice-President of the Canadian National Railways, Donald Mann and other ladies and gentlemen. What can be their purpose in coming out to see our sisters and their numerous family of children of every race, color and creed?...as they were unexpected, we can well imagine the consternation of the superior and her sisters. But of course by now the news had been telegraphed throughout the house and in a second the noted Band was heard sounding its most joyous 'Welcome'. Just a moment before, His Excellency had expressed the wish of hearing the Band again for he had heard it at the inaugu-

*ration. Little did they suspect the backstaging: the boys were in their overalls, playing baseball, the older boys in the Band were milking cows, the girls were preparing supper with the sisters... and here they are in their Sunday Best, wearing little bouquets of forget-me-nots, bowing gracefully before their royal visitors. Our 150 children were a real credit to us. In parting, the Governor General promised to announce his next visit, but he assured Sister Malvina Diquière, Superior, even if they had had the leisure to prepare he could never enjoy himself as he did that day. Have we not reason to be proud of the heritage that is ours today!*⁴²

Care of the Aged

Care of the elderly was nothing new for the sisters in Saint Albert. We recall that hardly two months after their arrival in St. Albert, in November, 1863, the sisters admitted an elderly man, almost 100 years old, into their already crowded facilities. Whenever a need was known, everything next to impossible was done to accommodate a person needing care and shelter. As early as 1941, space was provided to admit 41 retired persons under somewhat precarious and temporary conditions. With these limitations, the spectrum of care from birth to death was not quite complete in the mission of Saint Albert as too few elderly were being accommodated in the school/ orphanage/ hospital which was Youville Asylum. Providential circumstances presented under the guise of the Department of Indian Affairs' action when they decided to open schools for Natives on the Reserves, in the fall of 1948. Consequently, Native students were transferred to these schools on surrounding Reserves, while white and Métis students were accommodated at the Couvent du Sacré-Coeur in Legal, and space was freed up in the Youville Asylum⁴³. The sisters immediately proceeded to organize an enlarged service for the elderly population. The need for this service has been clearly documented; a year later, in December, 1949, Youville Home had over 90 residents⁴⁴.

During the late 1930s and 1940s, the Grey Nuns had to live through many painful discussions concerning the future of the Saint Albert mission. Finances were limited, repairs were needed, loans were due and there was no revenue in sight from the government or other sources, except some income from the farms. This proved insufficient to maintain this big house. In June, 1942, Mother Virginie Allaire, assistant general, was delegated to Saint Albert to meet with two representatives from the federal government who were interested in renting the building for members of the American army. After much prayer and reflection, the sisters finally received the blessings of Montréal to keep their beloved mission⁴⁵. This was during World War II.

At a General Council meeting, April 22, 1949, it was decided to re-name Youville Asylum to more accurately describe its new emphasis on care of the elderly persons. The name *Foyer Youville* was adopted⁴⁶. In June, 1949, new signs appeared on the front wall of what used to be Youville Asylum: to the left, *Maison Provinciale des Soeurs Grises*, and , to the right, *Foyer Youville Home*⁴⁷. At that time, Youville Home was not incorporated; there was no Board of Directors, the management was the responsibility of Provincial Council and the staff was almost entirely composed of sisters. It did not take long, however, for sweeping changes to arrive at Youville Home.

Soon after the hostilities were over, the question of finances at Youville Home surfaced again. This time members of the Alberta government approached the sisters to discuss selling their convent and other buildings for the care of psychiatric patients. After closer observation, these gentlemen decided to discontinue negotiations as the buildings were not found suitable for their purpose. Never were the sisters more thankful that their poor dwelling was considered *not satisfactory* to the prospective buyers⁴⁸.

For the next 20 years or so, Youville Home lived and witnessed memorable days, such as the opening of the French radio station CHFA in Edmonton, on Sunday, November 20, 1949, the result of 15 years of courage, heroism, pride and love⁴⁹. Often thereafter, the sisters listened to radio programs in French, for

many, the long-sacrificed maternal language.

Some activities, not related to Care of the Aged, were gradually passed on to other organizations. As an example, on January 5, 1950, the baking of hosts for many parishes in Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia for over 90 years was transferred to the Sisters of Precious Blood of Edmonton. The hot plate used for that purpose was passed on with the tradition⁵⁰.

During 1950, Sister Estelle Mitchell organized an updated library and the Saint Albert Province Archives. She later became the noted historian for the Grey Nuns congregation with her office at the mother house in Montréal. The year 1950 is also remembered as the year of Mother d'Youville retreats conducted by Father Clément Tourigny who went through all French speaking Grey Nuns provinces spreading the message of love and charity of 'Maman Youville'.

Youville Home and the Grey Nuns Provincial House continued to co-exist and co-habit. This is especially evident when national or international events are noted with singular emphasis. On February 6, 1952, for example, the death of King George VI and the rising of his daughter Elizabeth to the throne were remembered with patriotic respect. In the same manner, the erection of a small monument on November 11, 1954, in Saint Albert, in memory of soldiers who died during the last two wars, found its place in the **Chroniques**.

Educating future Grey Nuns

As early as June 2, 1898, a novitiate for Auxiliary Sisters⁵¹ was opened in Saint Albert with Sister Malvina Diquière as director. The first four Auxiliaries made their profession on May 27, 1905⁵²; they were followed by 21 more over the next 10 years. This novitiate was discontinued in 1915.

The regular novitiate in Saint Albert opened on August 5, 1934 with the return from Montréal of four western young ladies who had completed their postulancy at the mother house. Mother Ste-Clothilde (Maria Prince), the Director, assisted by Sister Thérèse Lefebvre had planned every step of the memorable

day to receive the first novices: Sisters Antoinette Bézaire, Berthe Dorais, Laura Rivard and Clara Sherry. In the afternoon of the same day, four postulants were officially admitted into the new novitiate: Mary Ashton, Simonne Lapointe, Jeannette Lepage and Verminia Violini⁵³. The first profession in Saint Albert, on August 15, 1936 celebrated the commitments of Sisters Antoinette Bézaire and Laura Rivard; for health reasons, Sister Berthe Dorais delayed her profession to February 15, 1937 while Clara Sherry returned to her family.

There was an attempt to open an English novitiate in Saint Albert, but with little success. Once the appeal to religious life seemed to dwindle among the youth, the novitiate was temporarily suspended in 1954. The postulancy continued in Saint Albert for another year, while the novitiate was completed in Montréal. Since 1934, close to 100 young women born in northern Saskatchewan, Alberta or the Northwest Territories became Grey Nuns and at least 15 westerners had previously attended the eastern novitiates.

Several Provincial Superiors are credited for much dedication in the opening and functioning of the novitiate in Saint Albert. Mother Eugénie Letellier, who opened the novitiate for the Auxiliary Sisters in 1898, Mother Rose-Anna Laberge who opened the regular novitiate in 1934, Mothers Berthe Dorais and Yvonne Prévost, who both made special attempts to re-establish the novitiate during their term of office, although with little success. In the next Chapter, we will discuss the new Grey Nuns Regional Centre, in Edmonton. At that time, more will be reported on this important ministry: the formation of the incoming generations of Grey Nuns.

Marguerite d'Youville honored in Rome

The joy of the sisters cannot be adequately described as news was received on May 3, 1955, of Pope Pius XII's declaration that Marguerite d'Youville had practiced virtues in a heroic fashion during her life. This event was strong encouragement for the success of the next steps toward the decree of sainthood of the sisters'

beloved foundress. It was also powerful encouragement for others to emulate her life of incomparable faith in God the Father and Divine Providence. In fact, four years later, on May 3, 1959, Pope John XXIII declared Marguerite d'Youville *Blessed* and *Mother of Universal Charity*. This was followed by the ultimate honor of her canonization by Pope John Paul II on December 9, 1990.

Alberta is 50

In July, 1955, the Grey Nuns participated in the rejoicing occasioned by the 50th anniversary of Alberta as a Province. As pioneers of education and health care in the province, the Grey Nuns were invited to contribute a float for the 160 car parade. The Grey Nuns' float brought home a generous third prize of \$75.00, a little fortune in 1955! The **Chroniques** list the designers and producers of this immense civic project: Sisters Léonie Ferland, provincial secretary, Thérèse Bonin and Simonne Lapointe received many accolades from their sisters⁵⁴.

A triple centennial

Saint Albert celebrated a triple centennial in 1961. It marked the 100th anniversary of the founding of the town of Saint Albert in 1861, the creation of the parish by the Oblates and the arrival of the Grey Nuns in Alberta. The latter was somewhat historically stretched: the Grey Nuns arrived in Lac Ste-Anne in 1859 and in Saint Albert in 1863. The joint decision to celebrate all three centennials at the same time indeed contributed to make the event grand and long-remembered. This three-fold event occurred from June 16 to 18, 1961. Among the many dignitaries attending the first day of the three-day celebrations were Archbishop of Edmonton, John Hugh MacDonald, his Coadjutor Bishop Anthony Jordan, O.M.I.; the Bishop of Saint Paul, Phillippe Lussier, C.Ss.R; and Father Léo Deschatelets, Superior General of the Oblates. The latter was invited to address the audience. He was particularly kind in his words of congratulations and gratitude for the Grey Nuns when he said:

... the conquest of the West and North was done by two powers - the Oblates and the Grey Nuns. In every path where the Oblates ventured, soon the Grey Nuns followed to support the work of evangelization... No, without the work of the Grey Nuns, the Church in the West and North of Canada would not be what it is today⁵⁵.

There was an Open House for the public who came in large numbers to meet the 164 residents, visit the many exhibits, enjoy the decorations and partake in refreshments. A point of attraction was the magnificent cake, surrounded by a fountain, flowers and colourful lights, a master piece of Sister Marie Fortin. The cake was a perfect replica of the 1884 convent, complete with doors, windows, balcony, belfry and miniature garden planted with trees and flowers.

Our pioneers were not forgotten at these celebrations. Sisters and priests took the short walk to the cemetery to pray, in grateful remembrance, for all the foremothers and forefathers whose dedication contributed to shape the Church in Saint Albert. The pilgrims were able to admire the beautiful cross elevated for the centennial year to the memory of the departed Grey Nuns. The cross was designed by Sister Antoinette Bézaire and made by Gérald Leblanc, Sister Rita Coulombe's brother-in-law⁵⁶. All these events were not missed by the media as the short excerpt from a local paper shows:

The celebration of the centennial of Saint Albert leaves three tangible souvenirs to the population and to future generations: the statue of Blessed Marguerite d'Youville in the garden of Youville Home, a splendid bronze Christ on a cross in wrought iron in the Grey Nuns cemetery and the new City Hall opened recently⁵⁷.

Throughout the celebrations, the sisters painfully noted the absence of their beloved superior general, Mother Beatrice Saint Louis and members of her council. After suffering with cancer for a few years, Mother Saint Louis had died on June 9, just days before the celebrations began. A solemn Mass took place in the Provincial House/Youville Home chapel on June 13. All remem-

bered with emotion the beloved Superior General who had led the Grey Nuns to the glorious day of the beatification of their Foundress, Marguerite d'Youville two years previously, in 1959.

A new building in sight

It is not without pride that the Provincial House/Youville Home continued to register major events within the Saint Albert Province and beyond. There were the opening of new missions or the closing of others, visits of dignitaries, changes in archdiocesan hierarchy, plans for new buildings throughout the Grey Nuns' province, and especially the very significant move to other sites of all sisters' activities not related to the care of the elderly at Youville Home. Such functions as the Provincial Council, Novitiate, Infirmary, Archives, central library, all began to move out of the Saint Albert convent in 1965. These moves, however, were all for a limited period of time, until the new provincial headquarters were completed. The largest local news paper, **The Edmonton Journal** was following all these changes very closely:

*Until their new house is built in Jasper Place, the Grey Nuns who lived at Youville Home are scattered throughout the province. The elderly and infirm sisters were moved to St. Theresa Hospital in St Paul, a hospital operated by the order... Sisters in training are occupying a former nursing home in Edmonton*⁵⁸.

The first ministry to move from Saint Albert, on May 10, 1965, was the Recruitment Office, staffed by Sister Antoinette Laramée. Its new location was a recently purchased house, a residence for sisters studying at the university or schools in Edmonton, at 10748-103A Street. Then, on July 29 of that year, as the new Hôpital Sainte Thérèse was completed in Saint Paul, Alberta, the sisters of the Infirmary and their caregivers were moved to the 1926 building just vacated. Sister Yvonne Prévost, Provincial Superior, members of her council and the newly hired Business Manager, John MacDonald permanently left the former Provincial House on Saturday, September 4, 1965, to set up their

temporary offices in the recently purchased La Salle Apartments in Edmonton while the planning and building of the future Grey Nuns Regional Centre continued.

In 1964, the Government of Alberta passed Bill 126 which authorized the formation of Districts for the construction and operation of senior citizen homes and nursing homes. As Youville Home became the recipient of government funding, plans were made for a new building to replace the 1883 structure, many times enlarged, repaired and renovated to accommodate changing ministries. During the construction, the staff continued to ensure a home-like atmosphere for all their 164 residents.

Construction of the new Youville Home began on November 1, 1964. Built in several stages to accommodate the smooth transfer of residents and services, the building was completed on December 23, 1966. Archbishop Anthony Jordan, accompanied by the chaplain, Father Joseph Serrurot, proceeded with the blessing of the chapel and the entire house at 1500 hours. Another celebration on April 9, 1967 marked the Official Opening of Youville Home⁵⁹.

More recently...

Over 30 years old, and at the beginning of the third millennium, Youville Home structure calls for replacement. It has witnessed countless acts of dedication among the sisters, their friends, their associates in ministry and their residents. It has seen the creation of the Association des Dames Auxiliaires in March, 1961: a group that is still very active after nearly 40 years, bearing the name of Ladies Auxiliaries. It has seen the selfless dedication of competent persons from the business community volunteering on the Lay Advisory Board. This Board, created during the negotiations concerning the formation of District Nursing Homes and the passing of Bill 126, mentioned earlier, had accomplished its task when the new building opened. Members were informed of its dissolution in a letter of gratitude from the Administrator, Sister Fernande Michaud, in November, 1970. Many members responded and noted their agreement with the decision and their

availability should there be any further need of their services⁶⁰.

Other significant happenings at Youville Home include: its first accreditation by the Canadian Council in Hospitals Accreditation received on May 25, 1971⁶¹. The chronicler noted that Youville Home was one of the first Nursing Homes in Canada to be granted this status⁶². It is noteworthy that every subsequent visit of the accreditation teams resulted in Youville Home receiving accreditation. In June, 1971, an Administrative Council for Youville Home was formed, the members being: Sisters Fernande Michaud, president, Madeleine Rho, secretary-treasurer, Marguerite Arseneau and Thérèse Bonin. This Administrative Council was the forerunner of the Board of Management organized in September, 1979. Founding members were: Colin Carter, chair, Sister Thérèse Castonguay, vice-chair, Sister Fernande Michaud, treasurer, John MacDonald, secretary, Roger Bourbonnais, Sister Lorraine Lafleur, Dr. Robert Lefebvre, Sister Marcia Wiley and Sister Aline Bohémier, administrator, ex-officio.

A major change occurred in the administration with Sister Ann Ell appointed administrator in 1980 while Sister Aline Bohémier continued as superior. The two functions were the responsibility of the same person in the past. It was not long until a lay administrator was appointed, making this another major break with long-established traditions. June 1, 1984 saw the arrival of Kenneth Pickard as the first lay administrator of Youville Home. Ken was also first to have a Missioning ceremony. This ceremony held on June 29 was led by the Provincial Superior, Sister Marguerite Laforce. When Ken Pickard was seconded to Alberta Health for two years, Dale Mitchell, who replaced Ken during that time, was beneficiary of the second Missioning ceremony led by Sister Faye Wylie, Provincial Superior, on November 18, 1992.

A new position as fundraiser in administration was filled by Marcel Podlosky, former Board chair, who was hired in 1992. This function was beneficial in raising the awareness of the community-at-large about Youville Home and its financial struggles. When Marcel chose to move to another fundraising position with Star

Ambulance in 1998, he was replaced by John Boucher, formerly from *Caritas* Foundation⁶³.

A yearly occurrence in the 1990s was a Mission Celebration, with the rededication of all staff, organized by the Pastoral Care Department and Mission Effectiveness Committee. Pastoral Care at Youville Home, no doubt, started the day the sisters arrived in Saint Albert in 1863! Pastoral Care, in the modern context, is a personal service supporting the spiritual needs of people: students, residents, staff to fully live each moment as a growth opportunity. Over a number of years, Pastoral Care, at Youville Home, has grown into an organized service. Since 1982, a sister has been designated as Director or Manager of Pastoral Care, starting with Sister Cécile Pedneault, and followed by Sisters Simonne Mageau in 1988, Hélène Desmarais in 1992 and Rose-Anna Gauvin in 1997.

With the new approach of having two persons to fill the roles of superior and administrator, started in 1980, the superior became available for other services within Youville Home, such as pastoral care or care of the chapel. Then, in 1991, Sister Cécile Gauthier became the superior, and remained involved in other functions unrelated to Youville Home, such as Director of Associates and Chair of Celebrations for Marguerite d'Youville's canonization. Likewise, when Sister Marie Rose Hurtubise became superior, in 1992, she kept a part-time function at the Archives, Grey Nuns Regional Centre. Later, Sister Rose-Anna Gauvin, superior, in 1998 kept her full-time position as Manager of Youville Home Pastoral Care. She was also president of the Council of Women Religious of the Archdiocese of Edmonton and Chair of the Grey Nuns Vocation Committee for the Province. Another notable event in 1998 was the move of three of the 11 sisters to a small residence, which would serve as a receiving home for young women in formation.

A Milestone to remember - 1863-1983

The people of Saint Albert decided to mark, with grandiose celebrations, the 120th anniversary of the Grey Nuns' arrival in

1863. Actually, there were two high level co-conspirators to spearhead such a magnificent series of events: Florence Lefebvre, noted historian of Saint Albert and Mayor Richard Fowler, both well-known friends of the Grey Nuns⁶⁴. With due approvals and the help of a competent planning committee, the whole city of Saint Albert set aside the week of March 6 to 13, 1883:

*to prove to the sisters that the Grey Nuns' contribution to their city would never be forgotten. After all, is not the history of Saint Albert very deeply rooted in the history of the Grey Nuns?*⁶⁵

At the Saturday, March 12 banquet, a number of meaningful presentations were made to the Grey Nuns and countless words of gratitude were offered which compelled Sister Germaine Héту, Provincial Superior, to exclaim:

I am overwhelmed by so much generosity... It has been one surprise after another, one presentation after another,...all this came unexpectedly and brought much joy to all the sisters...

*The number of sisters is decreasing these years and we often have to discern, to determine, in which localities we will be able to remain in the future. Tonight, in all confidence, I would like to assure you that the Grey Nuns intend to remain in Saint Albert for as long as there will be Grey Nuns...*⁶⁶.

Such a display of mutual love and gratitude was bound to have lasting repercussions: A new French Secondary school opened in Saint Albert on October 1, 1986 named: *Ecole Marguerite d'Youville*. Upon Marguerite d'Youville's canonization in December, 1990, the school was re-named: *Ecole Secondaire Sainte Marguerite d'Youville*.

The Grey Nuns' Saint Albert mission, started March 23, 1863 has carried God's message of compassion for 136 years through the ministries of teaching, caring and healing. During this time, a total of 400 sisters have missioned at Youville Asylum/Youville Home/Provincial House, giving a cumulated total of 3,128 years

of dedication and love to Saint Albert, through either visible service or self-sacrifice and prayer. May their essential ministry continue into the new Millenium.

NOTES: Chapter 2

- 1 They were eleven: Sisters Emery (Zoé Leblanc), Adèle Lamy, and Alphonse (Marie Jacques), one 'fille donnée' and seven orphans.
- 2 Lacombe, **Mémoires**, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 147-148.
- 3 **Chroniques**, **Saint Albert** p. 5. GNRC Arch.
- 4 Tetrault, Fr. Alexis, **The Morinville Journal**, "Historical St.Albert - Its Foundation 1861-1868, June 4, 1954.
- 5 **Ibid.**, May 21, 1954.
- 6 Ross-Kerr, **Op. Cit.**, p. 5.
- 7 The most western land was named British Columbia, it was not part of the N.W.T.
- 8 MacGregor, James G., **Father Lacombe**, Edmonton, Hurtig Publishers, 1975, pp. 139-140.
- 9 **Chroniques**, **Op. Cit.**, p. 10.
- 10 **Ibid**, p. 16.
- 11 **Ibid.**, pp. 3 ff.
- 12 **Ibid.**, p. 16.
- 13 **Ibid.**, pp. 14-16.
- 14 **Ibid.**, p. 17.
- 15 **Ibid.**, p. 38.
- 16 Verbal tradition!
- 17 **Chroniques**, **Op. Cit.**, p. 47.
- 18 **Ibid.**, p. 53.
- 19 **Ibid.**, p. 53.
- 20 Benoit, Dom Paul, **Vie de Monseigneur Taché**, Archevêque de St- Boniface, Montréal, Librairie Beauchemin, 1904., p. 296.
- 21 **Chroniques**, **Op. Cit.**, p. 17.
- 22 Tkach, Nicolas, **Alberta Catholic Schools... A Social History**, Edmonton, University of Alberta, 1983, p. 69.
- 23 **Chroniques**, **Op. Cit.**, p. 16.

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- 24 **Our Family Album in Saint Albert**, Anonymous script prepared for the Mission's 100th Anniversary, dated: 1960, GNRC Arch.
- 25 **Chroniques**, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 128-129.
- 26 **Inspectors Report Book**, p. 52, GNRC Arch.
- 27 Mitchell, **Red River**, *Op. Cit.*, p. 154
- 28 **Inspectors Report Book**, *Op. Cit.*, p. 9
- 29 **Chroniques**, *Op. Cit.*, p. 63 and 67. Also: Odilie Samwald, "World's Fair Certificate hid for years behind print" **Edmonton Journal**, September 27, 1998, p. G9.
- 30 *Op. Cit.*, p. 17.
- 31 Côté, Sister Marie-Marguerite, **St. Albert, Cradle of the Catholic Church in Alberta**, unpublished, 1960.
- 32 In Saint Albert, the *Public School Board*, being first established for Catholic Schools, the non-denominational schools are administered by the *Separate School Board*. The former Public School Board is now the *Greater Saint Albert Catholic Regional Division*, No. 29.
- 33 Ross-Kerr, *Op. Cit.*, p. 5.
- 34 Small Pox in 1870, Whooping cough in 1874, Typhoid in 1881 and 1884, and Measles in 1886.
- 35 A point of interest: sisters were doing all farming work themselves in the first years of their mission.
- 36 **Chroniques**, *Op. Cit.*, p. 12.
- 37 Cashman, Tony, **Heritage of Service** - and Ross-Kerr, Janet, **Prepared to Care**, *Op. Cit.*
- 38 It had reached almost 30 in 1897, extending over thousands of kilometres.
- 39 Source: Carole Boily, Archivist, St. Boniface Provincial House.
- 40 Province Divine Providence also included houses located within the geographical limits of Alberta: Fort Chipewyan and Fort McMurray. For the purpose of this history, these missions will be presented with the Northwest Territories.
- 41 **Family Events**, Unsigned manuscript, written around 1948.
- 42 **Ibid.**
- 43 Yearly Reports: **Personnel et Oeuvres**, 1949, GNRC Arch.
- 44 Yearly Reports: **Personnel et Oeuvres**, 1950.
- 45 **Historique**, doc., # 179-182, GNRC Arch.
- 46 **Historique**, doc. # 184.
- 47 **Chroniques**, *Op. Cit.*, p. 728.

- 48 **Historique**, doc., # 160, 161, 162.
- 49 First letters of the words in the French name of the Station: **Courage, Héroïsme, Fidélité, Amour.**
- 50 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, p. 752.
- 51 *Auxiliary Sisters* was a category of women who wished to serve in the Grey Nun works of charity without assuming leadership positions or permanent status in the congregation. This group combined with the Vocal Sisters in 1942.
- 52 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, p. 71 and 120.
- 53 Bézaire, Sister Antoinette, "Reminiscing over 50 years", **Family News**, July-August, 1984, pp. 35, 36.
- 54 **Chroniques**, p. 975.
- 55 **Ibid.**, p. 1494.
- 56 **Ibid.**, p. 1500.
- 57 **La Survivance**, June 21, 1961 (free translation).
- 58 **The Edmonton Journal**, January 29, 1966.
- 59 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, p. 1771.
- 60 **Historique**, doc. # 290, 291.
- 61 **Ibid.**, doc. # 296.
- 62 **Chroniques, 1971-1991**, p. 8
- 63 *Caritas* was a Health Group covering the three Catholic hospitals in Edmonton - to be presented later in Chapter 10.
- 64 Fowler, Richard, **Letter to Florence Lefebvre**, May 3, 1982, **Historique**, doc. #352 B, GNRC Arch..
- 65 Laforce, Sr. Marguerite, "Tribute to the Grey Nuns-1863-1983", in **Family News**, March, 1983, pp. 4 9.
- 66 Hétu, Sr. Germaine, Response at the banquet, in **Family News, Op. Cit.**, pp. 6-7.



Mission N-Dame des Victoires, Lac LaBiche, Alberta



Grey Nuns Regional Centre (front view) 1967.



Pope John Paul II, Archbishop Joseph MacNeil, Sister Marguerite Létourneau, Superior General - Grey Nuns regional Centre chapel - 1984.

CHAPTER THREE

1967 - MOVING TO GREY NUNS REGIONAL CENTRE

When several ministries temporarily left Youville Home during the construction both there and at the future headquarters in Edmonton, the sisters continued their various works in temporary facilities until a more permanent dwelling was completed.

Sisters in temporary exile were happy to move into their new abode, the Grey Nuns Regional Centre (GNRC) on Monday, June 26, 1967. Having set up a temporary chapel, a first Mass was celebrated by Father Jack Spicer, Provincial Assistant of the Redemptorists, on June 28, 1967.¹

Just before leaving for Rome, Archbishop Anthony Jordan, O.M.I. came to consecrate the altar in the chapel, on Wednesday, August 2, 1967. In signing the guest book, Archbishop Jordan wrote the following message:

In the eighth month of Canada's Centennial Year, the opening of the Grey Nuns Regional Centre, Edmonton, has seen the realization of the dreams, plans, and hopes of many, many Grey Nuns, a good number of whom are already with the Lord. My sincerest, most earnest prayer is that the sisters who live within the walls of the house may, every one, be sanctified. By their holy lives, they will cause the richest blessings of God to be showered down upon this Province of your worthy, and, by me, beloved Congregation...²

The blessing of the house was performed by Reverend E. F. Donahoe, V.G. on Saturday, August 5, following the Official Opening of the building.

The new Grey Nuns Regional Centre is a spacious beige brick building with a large chapel at its centre, a large gymnasium,

enriched by a majestic nature painting as a background for the stage. The painting was executed by Sisters Auréa, Annette and Simonne Mageau. It remained in that place for over 20 years until the 1991 renovations of the gymnasium. The GNRC has also the distinct advantage of an indoor swimming pool used by sisters from various congregations and clergy as well as by groups registered at the Conference and Retreat Centre.

Grey Nuns Provincial Leadership

One major ministry relocated into the new Grey Nuns Regional Centre was the Provincial Council. This level of Grey Nuns' government, created at the General Chapter of 1897, has been, since its beginning, the heart and mind of the Grey Nuns Saint Albert Province.

Looking at the enormous responsibilities shouldered by the Provincial Superior (or Superior Vicar), and her Council over the years, one could identify several important events during these past 102 years of existence. For each period, specific skills and charisma were required in the persons called to serve in positions of leadership. In retrospect, one realizes that God's providence has been at work in preparing the persons who were needed for the challenges presented.

Mother Vicar Eugénie Letellier, appointed in 1897, remained at the helm of the province until 1902. Her term was marked by the need to combine two functions: Mother Vicar and administrator of Edmonton General Hospital from 1898 to 1902. This double ministry forced her to direct her priorities to the immediate needs of the beginning hospital, thus having little time for the larger picture of the new Vicariate. At that time, the Saint Albert Vicariate contained 10 missions spreading from Ile-à-la-Crosse (in what is now Saskatchewan) to Fort Providence and Fort Chipewyan, in the Northwest Territories (NWT).

In her five year posting at the head of the Vicariate, *Mother Vicar Léa Dandurand* (1902-1907), saw to the opening of a mission at Fort Resolution in 1903 and Saint Paul's Hospital, Saskatoon in 1907. *Mother Vicar Agnes Carroll*, who had founded

the Holy Cross Hospital in Calgary in 1891, followed at the helm of the Vicariate from 1907 to 1910, when her untimely death, on August 24, 1910, cut short her term of office. Four years as Vicar allowed her to provide for the founding of Beauval Mission.

Mother Vicar Eloïse Pagé (1913-1915), the last to have the title *Vicar*,³ witnessed the foundation of Province Divine Providence in 1914. During her six-year term (1915-1921) *Mother Saint Augustin (Ada Leduc)*, accepted responsibility for the foundation of the mission at Legal, Alberta in 1920.

Mother Saint-Grégoire (Marie-Louisa Béliveau), Provincial Superior from 1922 to 1926, was responsible for the founding of Hôpital Sainte Thérèse at Saint Paul, Alberta in 1926. *Mother Mary-Ann Casey* (1937-1943) accepted, the transfer to Saint Albert Province, in 1942, of the missions located in Alberta and Saskatchewan which were founded by the Grey Nuns of Nicolet.⁴ It was in 1943 that *Mother Marguerite Mann*, Provincial Superior from 1943 to 1949, approved the foundation of Portage La Loche in Saskatchewan in 1943. In 1955, *Mother Marie-Berthe Dorais* approved the teaching positions offered in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. Her term (1955-1957) was interrupted by her election as General Treasurer in 1957.

From 1957 to 1964, *Mother Marie Laforce* approved sisters' teaching positions at Albertville, Saskatchewan in 1960. She also approved building the new Hôpital Ste-Thérèse at Saint Paul in 1962 to replace the inadequate 1926 building. During her tenure as Provincial Superior, *Mother Yvonne Prévost* (1964-1968) completed major construction projects: Lac Sainte-Anne in 1965, Youville Home in 1966 and Grey Nuns Regional Centre in 1967. She also established a mission at Buffalo Narrows, Saskatchewan in 1968.

Between 1971 and 1977, *Sister Florence Keegan*⁵ approved the foundations of Morinville, Alberta and Zénon Park, Saskatchewan, both in 1972. Sister Keegan also accepted sponsorship of the Grey Nuns mission in Dungu, Zaïre, Africa in 1973. *Sister Germaine Héту* (1977-1983) was instrumental in the amalgamation of Province Divine Providence with Saint Albert

Province in 1980, the re-opening of the novitiate in 1977 and the opening of a mission at Midnapore, Calgary in 1977. In 1984, *Sister Marguerite Laforce* (1983-1986) approved taking the ownership of the future Grey Nuns Hospital in Millwoods, south east Edmonton, which opened in 1988. The mission of Tuktoyaktuk, NWT was approved in 1987 by *Sister Faye Wylie* (1986-1995). She presided at the opening of the Grey Nuns Hospital in 1988. She approved the foundation of La Salle Residence in 1988 and was instrumental in the formation of Saint Joseph College Catholic Bioethics Centre in 1988 and of Caritas Health Group in Edmonton in 1992. *Sister Aurore Larkin* was Provincial leader for one short year and was elected Superior General in 1996. *Sister Marcia Wiley* (1998-) played a major role in *Passing on the Flame* of Caritas Health Group, Edmonton and Saint Paul's Hospital, Saskatoon in 1999.

Recruitment and Formation of Grey Nuns

Throughout the years, especially since the 1950s, Provincial Council and the sisters of Saint Albert Province focused more deliberately on recruitment of candidates to the Grey Nuns congregation. Sister Antoinette Laramée was committed full-time to this function, chairing a committee that included Sisters Marguerite-Marie Côté, directress of studies and Appolina Ste-Croix, directress of the School of Nursing at the Edmonton General Hospital. Together, they developed literature, planned visits, gatherings and retreats for young women. In the summer of 1967, Sister Laramée's office moved to the newly completed Grey Nuns Regional Centre. There, with the help of Sister Denise Piché, who entered the field of recruitment at that time, several activities were initiated, such as the ever popular Easter weekend retreats.

The Edmonton novitiate, or Formation Program, reopened in 1977, under the leadership of Sister Germaine Hétu, Provincial Superior. Located in the new Regional Centre, the program was directed by Sister Jeannine Coulombe until 1985, then by Sister Germaine Hétu, who, by that time, had completed her two terms

as Provincial Superior and obtained a Masters' degree in Religious Formation at the University of Saint Louis, Missouri. Over time, the Formation Centre occupied several locations in Edmonton, always in search of optimal conditions. In its 20 years of operation, the Grey Nuns Western Canada Formation Centre has provided solid religious education to more than 20 candidates who are now doing valuable ministries, a few of them as Grey Nuns. In 1998, the combined Novitiate for Western Canada was relocated in Saint Boniface, Manitoba.

A candidate to religious life, at the end of the 20th century is no longer the 18 year old, coming straight from a sheltered home environment, having grown up in a close-knit family, having experienced convent-school education and perhaps having had no experience in earning her own living. Instead, in the late 1970s and beyond, she was often about a decade older than her predecessors, possibly raised in a broken home, might have experienced drugs or other modern fads. Still, she was striving to develop a spirituality centered on God the Father and Divine Providence who always provides for the poor. The modern candidate, desiring to commit herself to a life of poverty, chastity and obedience, is a true product of today's society who wants to walk in the footsteps of Saint Marguerite d'Youville and, like her, be a beacon of hope in our broken world. In the late 1990s new Grey Nuns are indeed a new breed in ministry.

Continuing education has been stressed for many years by the Grey Nuns as educational institutions became more accessible, and more career choices became available to women. The major areas where sisters have moved up in the educational ladder are Theology, Nursing, Education and Social Work. Many have obtained advanced college and university levels in these fields. Many also have taken a sabbatical year for spiritual renewal and personal growth, then returned to their ministries enriched and refreshed. Personal, professional and spiritual growth are constantly encouraged by the Grey Nuns.

Care of elderly and sick sisters

There were 16 elderly and sick sisters, accompanied by their director, Sister Marie Nadeau, when they moved from Saint Albert to *Residence Sainte Thérèse* in Saint Paul, Alberta during the week of July 23 to 28, 1965. They were offered the red carpet welcome by the sisters in Hôpital Sainte Thérèse and Blue Quills Residential School, already established in Saint Paul. That was their abode for a little more than two years and their **Chroniques** indicate how much they appreciated the warmth and generosity of their hostesses. It is proverbial at the Grey Nuns' that those who have given their life in the service of others, often in difficult missions, have won forever the love and respect of their younger sisters. Caring for the elders has always been considered a privilege.

During the two years that they lived in Saint Paul, the retired sisters had the joy of welcoming the visits of many sisters from Saint Paul, Saint Albert and Edmonton. This way, they were kept abreast of news of other sisters and of the construction progress at Youville Home and the Grey Nuns Regional Centre. They had their annual retreat organized for them at the Residence and several other sisters joined them for these days of prayer.

On two occasions, they were given the services of Sister Annette Potvin who spent several days with them for biblical conferences. In addition, Sister Berthe Gamache went to spoil them a bit and spent two weeks refreshing and repairing their clothes.

When the sisters from Blue Quills invited them to visit their school and share refreshments, 10 of the 16 were sufficiently healthy and physically alert to respond to the invitation. They climbed stairs and walked through the long corridors, just as in their younger years, forgetting how many decades they had lived. Even in their retirement and with decreasing strength, they kept busy doing knitting and other handicrafts for the poor.

Some others shared a different fate. Three never returned to Edmonton as their earthly pilgrimage was completed in the summer of 1966: Sisters Maria Bellerive, Delvina Bélanger and Marie

Louise Pelland. Funeral and burial were held in Saint Albert for Sisters Bellerive and Bélanger, while the funeral for Sister Pelland was at Saint Joachim church in Edmonton. All were buried in the Grey Nuns' plot in Saint Albert.

It was finally on September 4, 1967 that the new Grey Nuns Regional Center was ready to welcome the remaining 13 sisters into their new Infirmary. In this new locale, the sisters found 19 new rooms above the main entrance with a balcony allowing entry to the upper part of the chapel. They peacefully prepared for the ultimate day when God would call them to their eternal home. On Friday, December 17, 1982, Sister Laurence Savidan died of cancer at the age of 63. When she was brought to the cemetery for burial on December 20, the sisters noticed a lovely white bird, probably a dove, resting on the edge of the grave during the singing of a hymn and quietly taking its return flight when the singing ended. This unusual occurrence left all observers speechless, remembering Sister Savidan's life of love and charity in our midst.⁶

The Infirmary gladly celebrated the 100th anniversary of Sister Eva Cousineau on November 25, 1988, three months before her death. In the late '90s, Infirmary expansions and renovations were carried out and the name *Infirmary* was changed to *Youville Health Unit* in 1999.

At all times the sisters residing at the Infirmary have been recognized as the lightning-rods for the apostolate of all those still active in God's vineyard. Their prayers and sufferings are recognized as equally valuable in God's plan of salvation as their years of active ministries.⁷

Conference and Retreat Centre

The northwest wing of the Grey Nuns Regional Centre houses the Conference and Retreat Centre. A beehive of incredible activity the Centre operates under Sister Denise Piché, its remarkable director, since its opening in 1967.

The Centre has hosted hundreds of groups of local, national,

and even international interests, such as business, education, health and social agencies, for retreats, workshops, conferences, or planning sessions. Invariably, these people leave with glowing evaluation comments. The Centre has received individuals for rests and retreats, with equal gentleness, equal efficiency and unequaled satisfaction. It has also hosted groups such as the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC), the Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB), and several Bishops of the world who accompanied Pope John Paul II when he resided at the Centre during his two visits in 1984 and 1987. The Conference and Retreat Centre indeed enjoys a marvellous reputation of 'service with a smile'.

Small residences

Over the years, the Grey Nuns have remained attentive to the signs of the time. One area that was carefully monitored was various experimentations in community living. In order to facilitate community building, prayer sharing and easier access to the workplace or study, small residences have been used over periods of time.

Résidence Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix: July, 1944 to May, 1946 - this small residence was located at 11206-100 Avenue in Edmonton. It was purchased mainly for the benefit of sisters studying at the University, Alberta College, the Faithful Companions of Jesus Convent or other institutions. The first director was Sister Ste-Flavie (Emérilda Bélanger). A first Mass was celebrated on August 3, 1944. Within two years, it was found that the building was too expensive to operate for a small number of sisters. It was sold in 1946. The last director was Sister Anna Beaupré and last student resident was Sister Marguerite-Marie Côté.

Résidence des Soeurs Grises: August, 1964 to June 1969 - This residence was located at 107 Avenue and 103 Street for the convenience of sisters studying at Saint Joseph's

Separate High School directed by the Brothers of Christian Instruction. The building was a former private Home for the Aged; it contained 14 rooms for students. The first director was Sister Alice Houle. A Blessing of the house was done on Sunday, September 6, 1964 by two Oblate priests: Father Stanley Wachowicz, accompanied by Father C. J. Krystkowicz. The same day, Archbishop Anthony Jordan paid a visit to the new occupants. Father Krystkowicz celebrated the first Mass on September 8, 1964. The original need for this residence decreased after a few years. It became available for visiting sisters from other missions and as a boarding home for sisters from other congregations. It was sold in 1969, the Regional Centre having been completed by that time. A last Mass was celebrated on June 18, 1969 and the last two sisters to leave on June 30, 1969 were Sisters Clara Garceau and Eva Plante. In total, 19 sisters lived and worked in that residence during these five years and 39 student sisters used the residence, mostly for periods of one year.

La Salle Apartments: An apartment block, located at 10015-111 Street, was purchased on August 14, 1962 by the Provincial Council. The building contained 16 two-bedroom suites and was initially rented out to the Edmonton General Hospital for the nursing students, the priest Chaplain and, at times for medical interns. From September 8, 1965 to September 1967, the west wing of that U-shape building was used for residence and offices for the Provincial Council while the other wings were rented out. On April 26, 1970, the sisters living on the 13th floor of the new School of Nursing moved to the La Salle Apartments until it closed for renovations and adaptation for a new women's ministry, in 1987 (see Chapter 17). The first superior was Sister Appolina Ste-Croix and the last one, Sister Blandine Roussel-Galle. During its 17 year existence, the La Salle Apartments hosted 35 sisters who were employed or did volunteer

work at the EGH as Director of Nursing, Coordinator of Volunteers and pastoral visitors of patients. Also living there was a Grey Nun working as Director of the Nursing Program at Grant MacEwan Community College. A total of 156 cumulated years of community life was registered during those years at La Salle Apartments.

Bethany: In 1973, a small residence was purchased at 11249-123 Street, Edmonton for three sisters who specifically wished to live in poverty, simplicity and prayer. They were Sisters Alice Romanchuk, superior, Rosella Bureau⁸ and Marcia Wiley, all employed at the Edmonton General Hospital. An Open House for the sisters on November 18, 1973 was attended by most of the Grey Nuns living in and around Edmonton. A first Mass was celebrated on December 13, 1973 by Saint Andrew's parish priest, Father John Hesse. This group grew and eventually included young women for a *Come and See*⁹ experience, postulants and also for evening prayer youth groups. The sisters of this residence contributed generously to the life of the parish: retreats, choir, members of parish council, readings at liturgy, eucharistic ministry and bazaars. They also became very involved in ministries with the poor: Operation Friendship,¹⁰ help to mentally handicapped adults, prison ministry. This, in addition to their full-time employment. On April 18, 1985, a new name was given to the residence: *Bethany* to replace the name used in 1975: Shalom Community, or 123rd Residence. That community was privileged to have spiritual guidance from two future Bishops: Fathers Adam Exner, O.M.I. and Gerry Weisner, O.M.I., both on Newman Theological College faculty at that time. The house was sold in 1988 when a new residence was needed in Millwoods, near the future Grey Nuns Hospital. In total, 12 sisters shared this residence over its 15 year life for a total of 48 years of cumulated service within Saint Andrew's Parish and in various full-time employments. Sisters Rita Coulombe and Marie

Rose Hurtubise were the last two sisters to live at Bethany. They left on Saturday, May 28, 1988. Approximately 15 *Come and See* women and five postulants were short-term members of the community during those years.

Trinity House: In 1976, a small house was purchased near the Edmonton General Hospital, at 9934-111 Street. Sister Yvonne Bézaire, superior, Sisters Lorraine Lafleur and Lise Chaloux formed the community they had planned in prayer and discernment.¹¹ The house was so located that religious services were available from three nearby locations: the French parish of Saint Joachim, the English parish of Saint Joseph's Cathedral (later Basilica) and the chapel of the Edmonton General Hospital. The three sisters entered their house on September 23, 1976. Father Gérard Lassonde, O.M.I., Saint Joachim's parish priest, was invited to bless the house on November 28, 1976. A first Mass was celebrated by Father Lassonde on March 24, 1977. The building was slated for demolition to make room for the Edmonton General Hospital parkade. At that time, a duplex in the Jasper Place area was chosen for replacement on February 9, 1979. The new address registered on March 7, 1979: 14708-103 Avenue. In that move, the sisters became members of Holy Spirit parish. On December 17, 1982, the house took the new name of Trinity House. As at Bethany, young women in the *Come and See* experience and postulants were always welcome at Trinity House, which on August 1, 1985, became the Formation Centre for novices. When the Formation Centre moved to Montréal in 1996, and later to Saint Boniface, the duplex was used as a small residence until its sale in 1998. The last sisters to reside at Trinity House were Sisters Aurore Larkin, Provincial Superior and Marcia Wiley, provincial treasurer. On December 30, 1997, both moved into a basement suite at La Salle Residence, previously used for visitors of very sick patients/residents at the Edmonton General Hospital.

Millwoods Residence: In Millwoods, Marguerite Residence was established at 8216 34A Avenue, Edmonton on November 1, 1985. Three sisters moved into this newly purchased house: they were Sisters Aline Bohémier, superior, Rose-Anne Gauvin and Marcia Wiley. The latter was to be appointed Director of Pastoral Care at the future Grey Nuns Hospital in Millwoods in May, 1988. In the meantime, both Sisters Gauvin and Wiley traveled to their Pastoral Care positions at the Edmonton General Hospital, while Sister Bohémier completed her last year as Provincial Treasurer at the Grey Nuns Regional Centre. On the day of their move, the sisters were surprised by Monsignor Donald MacDonald, parish priest and his vicar, Roger Keeler who arrived with dishes and food for a delicious supper. The following Sunday, Msgr MacDonald gave a warm welcome message to the sisters from the pulpit at Saint Theresa church.¹² On November 24, 38 Grey Nuns from Edmonton houses responded to an Open House invitation and enjoyed a joyful reunion. On January 1, 1986, a first Mass was celebrated by Monsignor Donald MacDonald and on February 8, Archbishop Joseph MacNeil came to bless the house. This house was used as a milieu to foster vocations and, Marguerite Residence soon received *Come and See* candidates and postulants. Prayer groups with young people were a frequent activity, as well as parish events. When the Grey Nuns Hospital opened, Sister Aline Bohémier became Eucharistic minister on a daily basis; she also took care of the sacristy, visited patients and people in need in a nearby Nursing Home and in the neighborhood. The residence closed on August 23, 1993 when a need arose to reduce the number of small residences. The last two sisters at Marguerite Residence were Sisters Marcia Wiley, superior and Michelle Worth. Before moving to Trinity House, they held a prayerful farewell ritual and all too soon the time came to close the door of Marguerite Residence at Millwoods.

Paroisse Sainte Anne Rectory: Since September, 1989, Sister Eveline Gagnon has resided at the rectory of the parish she administers. Along with another sister as her companion, who, at the time of writing is Sister Yvonne Thibert, they form a small community while participating in the activities of the nearby Grey Nuns Regional Centre.

Marguerite Residence, Saint Albert: The sisters who ministered at Youville Home in Saint Albert have always lived in a section of the building reserved for a sisters' residence. At the end of 1998, three of the 11 sisters decided to move into a small house in the vicinity, at 73 Lambert Crescent, with the blessing of the Provincial Council. Their wish was to eventually open their house for *Come and See* candidates and prayer gatherings. The three were Sisters Rose-Anna Gauvin, superior, Marie Rose Hurtubise and Emiline Peña. At the time of writing, only a few months have elapsed and wishes for a fruitful ministry are in order.

Individual ministries

Religious communities have experienced a major shift in their ministries in the final decades of the 20th century. Having ownership of fewer education or health care institutions, sisters have moved from congregational work to outside employment. Provincial Council favored individual ministries for sisters in order to continue their role in God's vineyard. Following are a few examples gleaned from the geographical province of Alberta:

Centennial Villa: From 1967 to 1969, five Grey Nuns have worked , each for short periods of time in this group home for girls in difficulty, aged 13 to 18 years. Sisters Blandine Roussel-Galle, Dolorès Coulombe, Dora Durand, Lillian Amyotte and Angéline Gobeil chose that ministry, but none remained over a year. This Home, operated by Catholic Social Services experienced several

security and discipline problems. It later changed its role and in the 1970s, became a home for mentally handicapped girls over 18 years old.

Sister Alice Toullelan: In 1971, Sister Toullelan moved to the Diocese of Saint Paul, Alberta, responding to a call from Bishop Edouard Gagnon for religious education in parishes and Catholic schools. In Fort Kent she taught from January, 1972 to August, 1973, then at Le Goff, from 1973 to 1974. During those years, she lived with les Soeurs de la Charité de Notre-Dame d'Evron in Bonnyville. She took employment with Medley Beggin Hill School, Canadian Force Base as Religious Education Consultant to organize and implement the new Canadian Catechism program in the French and English schools of the Military Base at Cold Lake from 1974 to 1975. Moving to Mallaig for the year 1975-1976, she taught Religion, Social Studies and French at the High School. Moving further north, Sister Toullelan became Religious Education Consultant with the Diocese of Grouard-McLennan under the leadership of Archbishop Henri Légaré, from August, 1976 to July, 1980. During that time, Sister Toullelan was responsible for religious education in Catholic Schools located in Grande Prairie, Beaverlodge and Sexsmith. She also became very involved with parish activities, prayer groups, youth Cursillo, youth retreats, vocation awareness, adult retreats and marriage encounter. Back to Edmonton in 1981, she became Pastoral Assistant at Holy Spirit Parish and Annunciation Parish. In the latter, she continues her involvement as a volunteer with retreats, spiritual direction and several parish committees.

Sister Thérèse Castonguay: In September 1971, Sister Castonguay was hired by Grant MacEwan Community College as Director of the Nursing Program and charged with the task of developing and implementing the program. When she was elected Provincial Assistant in 1977,

she resigned her position. On the 10th Anniversary of the College, in May 1981, she was granted a Honorary Diploma by this dynamic, progressive, young institution.

Nurses at Placid Place: When the Oblates opened Placid Place, in 1986, they recruited a Grey Nun, Sister Thérèse Plante to take responsibility for the nursing care of the sick and elderly priests and brothers. In 1988, Sister Carmen Marquis replaced her until a lay nurse was recruited for that service in 1989.

Sister Thérèse Arcand: headed an Apostolic Project at Ile-à-la-Crosse, in the Keewatin Diocese, in 1975-1976 with Native and Métis women to form a community of prayer, Bible studies, the practice of Life Skills and Communications. From August, 1976 to July, 1980, she became a member of the Saint Bernard Mission, the Kisemanito Centre in the Diocese of Grouard-McLennan. There, she volunteered her services at the Residence Kateri Tekakwitha, she visited homes, gave Sunday homilies in Cree, attended and participated in funerals, helped with Baptismal preparation and took care of the sacristy. She was an inspiring presence for Natives and Métis in the area and those living at the Kisemanito Centre.

Sister Eveline Gagnon: The Edmonton French parish Sainte Anne was in need of a dedicated Pastoral Administrator in September, 1989 and recruited Sister Eveline Gagnon for this position. Sister Gagnon's excellent administrative and communications skills contributed to make Paroisse Sainte Anne a model in spiritual growth and deepening involvement of parish members. Paroisse Sainte Anne have rented the GNRC chapel for Sunday masses since the opening of the GNRC, after their church burned down in 1966.

Sister Louise Fortin: Her long-time dedication with people in the Inner City incited Sister Fortin to seek the experience of living closer to the poor whom she was assisting daily. In 1997, she moved into a small apartment in the Inner City

and continues to be available for a number of tasks with the poor, the sick, the neglected in this part of Edmonton. Her functions range from driving people to medical or dental appointments or shopping, doing errands for the home-bound elderly, serving at several foot clinics to being available to help whenever a need arose. In 1998, Sister Fortin was nominated *Woman of the Year* and in April 1999, she received a *Volunteer of the Year Award* from the Boyle-McCauley Health Centre Society.

Sister Elisabeth Coulombe: In November, 1998, Sister Coulombe obtained a position as Chaplain for the Grande Cache Institution, a Federal medium security prison. Her ministry is one of presence, consultation and counselling, prayer with individuals or groups of inmates and liturgical celebrations. Among the staff, her presence is valued as one close to God, a prayerful and respectful person and one who can be counted upon when tensions, worries and crisis arise.

Pastoral volunteer activities

An amazing number of pastoral activities by sisters residing at the GNRC are registered in God's book; some are randomly selected for this history as a legacy to future generations:

Sister Louisa Dupuis faithfully witnessed to God's compassionate love to residents of Lynnwood Auxiliary Hospital and Jasper Place Lodge, on a weekly basis, during 27 years. During that time, she held a full-time function in the management of the GNRC Archives which was begun by Sister Estelle Mitchell in 1950. In 1998, Sister Dupuis was replaced in her ministry at Lynnwood by **Sister Hélène Desmarais**.

Sister Annette Potvin had, for many years worked for the Mackenzie-Fort Smith Diocese, especially at Uranium City. Later, she was employed by Bishop Raymond Roy for the Saint Paul Diocese to assist parishioners becoming

more familiar with the Word of God. During her time with the Saint Paul Diocese, she has helped almost all parishes. Later, as a volunteer, she began to develop Bible Study Guides in English and in French for study groups. The books, covering most of the New Testament, have been widely distributed and were a most valuable contribution in encouraging hundreds of people to know and love the Word of God. In the late '90s, she also worked with the Alberta Provincial Museum to identify and translate precious documents related to the early days of the Church in this part of Canada.

The Live-In movement in Alberta has been strongly supported and promoted by several Grey Nuns since its beginning. **Sister Bernadette Bézaire** is considered as a 'matriarch' in this religious renewal, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary in 1999. Others who also became involved throughout the years were: **Sisters Hélène Desmarais and Thérèse Pelletier**.

Sister Verminia Violini has designed and painted most crèches for outdoor Christmas displays in Grey Nun hospitals: Edmonton General Hospital, Saint Paul's in Saskatoon, Ile-à-la-Crosse and at the GNRC. In her 80s, she resumed her earlier pastoral role and began visiting residents at McQueen Lodge where she brought communion and organized religious services. Since 1998, she was assisted in this ministry by **Sister Hélène Desmarais**.

Changes in provincial boundaries

Initially, in 1897, the Saint Albert Vicariate covered what is now known as northern Saskatchewan, Alberta and the Northwest Territories. This continued until 1914 when the Province Divine Providence was created, covering all missions north of Fort McMurray, Alberta. Grey Nuns were present at Fort Providence, Fort Chipewyan, Fort Resolution and Fort Smith at that time. The latter became the headquarters of the new

Province. Ten missions remained under Saint Albert Province's responsibility. In 1980, the boundaries returned to their original location when the 10 missions of Province Divine Providence merged with Saint Albert Province, having already 19 missions. Sister Marie Lemire was the last Provincial Superior of Province Divine Providence, completing her term in 1977. For the next three years, until the amalgamation was completed, the northern Missions were represented on the Provincial Council by Sister Thérèse Pelletier, Regional Superior.

Closer to the poor

From the Grey Nuns Regional Centre, a multitude of ministries has radiated since its early beginnings in 1967. Ministry at Operation Friendship has been offered every Sunday by sisters, postulants and novices since 1977, and Associates after 1983; Adult Day Care, receiving three groups a week, has functioned since 1979; several students with disabilities from neighborhood schools - Saint Thomas Moore and Westlawn - have been coming daily with their mentor for a program of occupational therapy since the mid-1980s. Food Bank satellites were accommodated at the Centre in 1982-83, with Sisters Thérèse Pelletier and Marguerite-Marie Côté as coordinators and again since 1998, with Sister Irène Lefebvre as coordinator. Residents from McDougall House were hosted in a section of GNRC for several months during construction of their new building in 1999. Throughout the years, an astonishing amount of hand-sewn and knitted items and quilts were completed by skilled and creative sisters, in their spare moments or after their retirement, for distribution to parish bazaars. Sister Berthe Gamache has been extremely diligent in making baby and children useful clothes and toys as donations to Birthright; she has also contributed to a quilt with embroidered first names of victims, a special project of the AIDS Network (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). As well, Sister Louisa Dupuis must be mentioned for the hundreds of quilts she has made in her spare time, even in her 90s. In 1999,

she went to her province of origin, Saint Boniface to celebrate her 75th anniversary of profession at the age of 98 years and 10 months. Then, she hastened to return to her quilting.

Refugee ministry

Since 1981, Provincial Council has been involved with sponsoring refugees from war-stricken countries. The first families sponsored by the Grey Nuns through Catholic Social Services were from Vietnam. This sponsoring program was initiated by Sister Thérèse Castonguay, Provincial Assistant and was later continued by Sister Bernadette Bézaire, and still later, by Sister Rita Coulombe. Eventually, refugees from other countries were added, such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and India. In almost two decades, at least 40 persons have been assisted in various stages of their move into Canada: entering the country, adjusting to the Canadian culture, learning English and finding work appropriate to their skills. We thank God for one special Grey Nun vocation that flourished from this group, Sister Marie Nguyen.

Retired religious

In 1977, Archbishop Joseph MacNeil of Edmonton requested religious communities of women, with large houses, to provide suite rental for retired priests. The Grey Nuns happily responded, renovating a section of the GNRC to provide an area near the chapel for two suites which have been used since that time.

Priests from the Redemptorist community have rented one floor of the newly renovated south wing as a permanent residence in 1999. Sisters of Saint Joseph of Peterborough, likewise rented one other floor of the same wing in 1999 for their retired sisters. Both groups arrived on June 1, 1999 and were given official welcome on June 8, 1999.

Olive Grove

For a long time, members of small religious communities and retired priests in Alberta have been concerned over the need to provide care for their aging and sick members. An opportunity came to develop a residential program in a space vacated at the Edmonton General site during government health care budget cuts. Sister Wilda Wedgerfield, director of the program, admitted the first four residents on April 1, 1995; the number eventually grew to six. The residence, called *Olive Grove*, derived its name from the biblical reference to the Mount of Olives. Early in 1996, it became evident that increasing space rental cost was contributing to excessive hikes in residents' costs. It was reluctantly decided to close Olive Grove. All residents were assisted in finding other suitable accommodation and on September 30, 1996, Olive Grove closed its door.

Renovations

As new and elegant as the Grey Nuns Regional Centre appeared when it opened in 1967, several areas began to call for renovations and repairs in the late 1980s. The cafeteria received a complete face-lift in 1989, followed by the Conference and Retreat Centre in 1991, the provincialate quarters, administration wing and chapel in 1993, the east wing in 1995 and the south wing in 1999. When the chapel renovations were completed, a beautiful Way of the Cross, in wood sculpture by a local artist, Bruno Stasiak, was installed on the walls of the chapel. It is a tribute to the talents of the artist and an inspiration for all those who visit the chapel over the days, weeks and months ahead.

Precious collaborators

From the first day of operation at the Grey Nuns Regional Centre, the sisters have always recognized that the success and smooth operation of this large institution was, mostly due to the

excellent collaboration received from a number of lay personnel. People of the quality of the first chef, Fred Murray, first maintenance managers, Joseph Pavlik and Henry McCann, first office manager, John MacDonald, first secretaries, Béatrice Lacoursière and Cécile Ferguson have served for many years with dedication and loyalty; they left a mark in the organization and are remembered with lasting gratitude. At the time of writing, Gerry Archibald, Executive Director, Lucy Heemeryck, Administrator of operations and personnel, Lynn Blanchette, office manager, Rémi Girard, manager of maintenance, Fred Betton, manager of food services, Larry Hanson, housekeeping manager, and the staff in all those departments are considered to have the same loyalty and same dedication so essential to help the Grey Nuns as they continue Marguerite d'Youville's mission into the new century.

Grey Nuns Associates

The new Grey Nuns' Constitutions, approved at the 1981 General Chapter, brought a strong incentive to the provinces to develop programs for Associates. In Saint Albert Province, Sister Thérèse Castonguay, Provincial Assistant, was given the task of developing the program and recruiting candidates. A first meeting in Edmonton was held on October 17, 1982 with some 18 interested candidates. The first group to celebrate their commitment was in Edmonton. On March 13, 1983, 14 candidates, ages 17 to 63 committed themselves to deepen their faith in God the Father and in Divine Providence and participate in the works of charity of the Grey Nuns. Several other nuclei of Associates soon appeared: Saskatoon, Fort Smith and Calgary. At the time of writing, there were over 40 Associates in Edmonton and Saskatoon. This development in organizations brought new hope for the Grey Nuns to reach more needy persons and respond with love and compassion to their cry for help in Saint Albert Province. After 1983, the functions of Director of the Associates were filled successively by Sisters Faye Wylie, Antoinette Cyre, Pauline Drolet, Marilyn Sandmaier, Dolores Blanchard and Cécile Gauthier.

Focus on Mission

Hospitals operated by the Grey Nuns have, for many years, promoted the importance of all employees knowing and living the mission of the institution that employed them. Inspired by that modern practice, the 1991 General Chapter developed a new Statement of Mission and Values for the Grey Nun Congregation. The sisters were thus invited to rekindle the original flame in their ministries, remembering the main values contained in the Youvillian spirit and in their Grey Nun vocation as: Genuine love of the poor, Courageous faith, Contemplative stance and Sacredness of life. In so doing, a heightened awareness of these values became more evident in decision-making and in daily activities.

Over the 1980s and 1990s, specific events promoting the mission of Grey Nuns institutions were planned for Board members and senior staff in Grey Nuns organizations. A Forum Committee chaired by Sister Alice Romanchuk planned the first western forum in 1988. September 30 to October 2, 1988, this Grey Nun Mission Effectiveness Trustee Forum was held in Saskatoon for Grey Nun institutions in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. An International Forum held in Saint Boniface in 1990 also included representatives from Saint Albert Province. Another International Mission Effectiveness Forum held in Edmonton, from June 3 to 5, 1992 was also planned by Sister Alice Romanchuk and her committee. For that forum, all Grey Nuns' missions in Canada and the United States were invited. In 1995, an international event in Montréal was the Grey Nuns and their Collaborators Colloquium held from June 2 to 4 and again included representatives from Grey Nuns' organizations in Canada and the United States. In 1997, Sister Lucille Dampousse, Provincial Councillor, co-chaired a committee with Sister Thérèse Vachon, Provincial Assistant and Secretary, Saint Boniface Province, to plan a Western SGM Mission Forum, jointly sponsored by the Grey Nun Western Provinces and held at the Grey Nuns Regional Centre, October 16-19, 1997, with the

theme: *Strong Roots - New Shoots*. These major events, held at fairly frequent intervals, have been a strong influence in deepening the awareness of Grey Nun values and beliefs among those who carry the mission in their daily responsibility. It was evident that these values were becoming more pervasive in the boardrooms as well as in the work of the people who served in all Grey Nun organizations.

Mother d'Youville

The Foundress of the Grey Nuns, Marguerite d'Youville was beatified in Rome by Pope John XXIII on May 3, 1959 with a wonderful ripple effect of thanksgiving and rejoicing throughout the Congregation. In Saint Albert Province, parishes and Grey Nun institutions celebrated in joy this newly acclaimed Mother of Universal Charity. Twenty-five years later, Sister Marguerite Létourneau, Superior General, declared the *Year of Mother d'Youville* to be celebrated throughout the Congregation from December 23, 1983 to October 15, 1984. The year 1987-88 was dedicated to the 250th anniversary of the founding of the Grey Nuns on December 31, 1737. Special celebrations marked that year throughout all houses of Saint Albert Province. With the theme: *A Past to Celebrate - A Future to Fashion*, the Grey Nuns became better known in their respective localities of service and popular devotion to their Foundress grew even higher. Again, all local churches where Grey Nuns ministered at that time, rallied with pride and joy in celebrating the Mother of Universal Charity. On December 9, 1990, Pope John Paul II proclaimed her Saint Marguerite d'Youville. Several hundred Grey Nuns from all branches claiming Marguerite d'Youville as their Foundress went to Rome for this once-in-a-life time experience. Unprecedented exuberance acclaimed the event in Rome and throughout the world where her spiritual daughters are found among the poor and the needy. This was evidenced with a full year of festivities throughout Saint Albert Province. Later, a Youvillian retreat was designed and developed by a team including Sisters Jeannine

Coulombe, Aurore Larkin and Thérèse Pelletier. During 1994, all sisters were blessed with the moving experience of a spiritual journey with their beloved Foundress, Saint Marguerite.

The Pope is here

Pope John Paul II wrote a beautiful page of the Grey Nun history when he agreed to stay at the GNRC during his visit in Edmonton, September 14-17, 1984. Months of preparation in all details of security for accommodation, food and travel were to result in a flawless hosting experience for the Grey Nuns and their many helpers. Another short visit by John Paul II in September 1987 was simply a stop over for the night on his way to Fort Simpson, a visit cancelled in 1984 due to heavy fog in that area of the NWT.

Passing on the flame

In the 32 years since the opening of the Grey Nuns Regional Centre, there has been a total of 263 sisters who lived at the Centre for various periods of time. Together, they represented a cumulated total of 2,072 years of life being educated as postulants or novices, working in the many areas of activity at the Centre, praying and for many, suffering and completing their life cycle when the God they have served throughout their life called them to their eternal reward. In total, 78 sisters died in Saint Albert Province since the opening of the Grey Nuns Regional Centre in 1967.

Nineteen hundred and ninety-nine was the year when, in view of decreasing members in active ministries, Grey Nuns completed the transfer of their major institutions to the respective dioceses. The Edmonton General site, the Grey Nuns Hospital and the Misericordia Hospital, known as the Caritas Health Group were officially transferred to a Catholic Bishops organization, the Alberta Catholic Health Corporation on June 14, 1999. The Autumn of 1999 was to see the same event occurring for

Saint Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, on October 12. Remaining under the direct responsibility of the Grey Nuns in Alberta are Youville Home in Saint Albert, Youville Women's Residence in Calgary and La Salle Residence in Edmonton. The Grey Nuns praise God for a past full of memories and a future built on hope.

NOTES: Chapter 3

- 1 **Chroniques:** 1966-1967, p. 130, GNRC Arch.
- 2 **Ibid.**, p. 133.
- 3 Title *Vicar* changed to *Provincial* at the General Chapter of 1914 when *Vicariate* became *Province*.
- 4 The Nicolet fusion to Montréal occurred in 1941.
- 5 Title changed from *Mother Provincial* to *Sister Provincial* in 1967.
- 6 From eyewitnesses' comments.
- 7 **Grey Nuns Constitutions**, 1981, Art. 33.
- 8 Sister Rosella Bureau would enter the Carmelite Order in Trois-Rivières, Québec in 1978.
- 9 Christian life experience for women desiring to know the Grey Nun's life. A preliminary step toward later commitment.
- 10 A Soup Kitchen located in the Edmonton's Inner City.
- 11 **Historique**, doc. # 5A.
- 12 **Chroniques**, p. 1, GNRC Arch.

CHAPTER FOUR

1862 -

LAC LA BICHE

Lac La Biche, located about 200 km northeast of Edmonton, is a magnificent site. Bordered by a lake at the most 50 kilometers wide, interspersed with several islands of various shapes and sizes, it is a great attraction to the surrounding populations. It is said that every autumn, Natives would come in large numbers to Lac La Biche, looking for their winter provision of fish. Being one of the oldest settlements in Alberta, its origin can be traced back to 1798 when David Thompson, of the Northwest Company came to establish a fur trade post. Its French name came from the Cree language: *Wasaskisiw Sagahegan*, which means Elk Lake.

Lac LaBiche earned the title of *Warehouse of the North* because of its strategic location connecting the Churchill/Saskatchewan river system with the Athabasca/Mackenzie River system thus facilitating transportation. Among its historical highlights, we note the arrival of the first printing press in Alberta in 1877. The press was brought from France by Father Emile Grouard who had acquired the necessary skills to operate this useful tool.

Father Jean-Baptiste Thibault, a diocesan priest under Bishop Norbert Provencher of Saint Boniface, came to Lac La Biche for the first time in 1844. He returned occasionally until 1853 to offer his services. A number of baptisms, first communions and marriages were recorded during these early years of the future Notre-Dame-des-Victoires Mission.

The Oblates open a Mission

In 1852, Bishop Taché, accompanied by Father Albert Lacombe (not yet an Oblate), visited the settlement to assess the readiness of its people before opening a permanent Mission. Having opted for the affirmative, the decision was made to send Father René Rémas, O.M.I. in the Spring of 1853 as the first resident missionary at Lac La Biche. The Bishop again returned to the Mission in 1854 and named it Notre-Dame-des-Victoires. It was not long after the opening of the Mission that Bishop Taché re-enacted his earlier successful plea to Mother Julie Deschamps, Superior General, to obtain Grey Nuns "to teach the Metis and Natives of this distant land and, as much as possible, to carry on their other works of charity"¹. It was agreed between the Bishop and the Superior General that the missionary sisters would share equally with the Oblates both the fortunes and the privations. Confident in the success of his request, he arranged for Brother Patrick Bowes, skillful in building and carpentry, to begin constructing a house and a school in the winter of 1857 in preparation for the arrival of the sisters.

The foundresses

It was 1862² when Mother Deschamps selected the future missionaries: Sisters Delphine Guénette, 27 years old, superior, Adélaïde Daunais, 29, and Marie Tisseur, 22. These young sisters were not unaware of the life of isolation, poverty and hard work that awaited them in this venture, but obedience and the love of Jesus Christ prevailed. After months of preparation, they tearfully, but generously left the mother house on May 20, 1862, accompanied to the train by Mother Deschamps and the novice director, Mother Jane Slocombe. Travelling along with them were a volunteer, Marie Lalonde and two priests: Fathers Joseph-Noël Ritchot and Auspice Germain, neither of whom were Oblates. Once they arrived in St. Paul, Minnesota, the travelers boarded an omnibus to Georgetown and after a three-day wait, they finally

could embark a steamer which brought them directly to Saint Boniface on June 7, 1862. These Lac La Biche missionaries were the first ones to travel by steamer; this saved them weeks of hardships. Earlier trips across the prairies necessitated the use of large caravans with all the inherent dangers, delays and discomforts experienced in previous voyages.

Learning in Saint Boniface

A one month crash course in mission life and ministries was taken in Saint Boniface while the eager learners observed the incredible advances of the Church at the Red River settlement since the arrival of the first Grey Nuns 18 years earlier. There were now three schools functioning in Saint François-Xavier, Saint Norbert and Saint Vital and a boarding school in Saint Boniface. There was also a *hospital* in St Boniface, using the sisters residence as temporary facility. Each house kept chronicles of events so helpful for the edification of future generations. Of major importance also to the young Church was the arrival of the Oblate Missionaries of Mary Immaculate from Montréal in 1845, one year after the Grey Nuns.

Observations were not the sole learning tools. Learning was enhanced by lengthy and inspiring conversations with sisters and priests, with the adults and the young who were benefiting from the growth of the Church in the West: the Natives, the Métis and the Whites. No less inspiring were the memories, kept in the hearts, conversations and **Chroniques**, of the heroic life and death of Mother Marie-Louise Valade, first superior of the mission who had died on May 13, 1861 and Sister Marie-Eulalie Lagrave, also one of the four foundresses of Saint Boniface who had died on August 4, 1859.

Resuming the trip

Well briefed on mission life, the undaunted missionaries began the last leg of the long trip from Montréal to Lac La Biche.

On July 8, 1862, they left Saint Boniface accompanied to Saint François-Xavier by Sister Marie-Hedwidge Lafrance, Vicar Superior and Sister Marie-Scholastique Gosselin. There, Father Augustin Maisonneuve, who had come from Lac La Biche was awaiting them with all the equipment for the trip.

Leaving behind the experience of the rapidity of the train, the swiftness of the steamer, they now confidently embarked on oxcarts, each sister having her own: the dream of every city girl! The oxen had unusual names, such as: Brandy, Corbeau, Caille, Wapouce. The goal for the sister-driver was to develop a trusting relationship with her rider. Sleeping under a tent was also a novelty for the sisters, but a rather unpleasant and uncomfortable one! After the first few nights, however, they all attained a reasonable sleep pattern. Brave and courageous, they also had a refreshing sense of humor. This is noted in the chronicler's recounting of their trip. Sister Delphine Guénette wrote that one day, Brandy was stubbornly determined to drink from the rapids in a river while its driver was sure she would be engulfed in the cascade - but she was spared the ordeal. Another day, Wapouce fell in the mud and the frightened sister had to be transported to safety - on a man's back. And there was Corbeau, tired of carrying its load, who threw everything on the ground, including its passenger who had to endure the laughter of her co-travelers!

The arrival

Finally, after 49 days of nomadic life across the vast prairies, the sisters arrived at their destination on August 26, 1862 at 2200 hours. This late in the evening, their attentive protector, Father Augustin Maisonneuve, brought them to the Oblates residence where Father Jean Tissot, superior, received them with joy and Brothers Patrick Bowes and Joseph Salasse prepared them a frugal meal. After moments of conversation, the sisters hastened to take possession of their house about 10 meters away. Jesus was already there in the tabernacle, waiting for them. Their first action was to fall on their knees at the foot of the altar and silent-

ly offer their lives to their God and the people they had come to serve. Moving at once to their community area, they spread their straw mattresses on the floor and rested for a few hours. The early risers prepared for Mass which Father Maisonneuve came to celebrate in their chapel and, with renewed joy and courage, they received holy communion.

Their dwelling

After heartfelt thanksgivings, and a meagre breakfast, they visited their house and took an inventory of its contents. It was a two-story stone house, measuring 10 by 17 meters. Half of the main floor was the chapel for the sisters and the public; opposite were the kitchen, the dining rooms, one for the sisters and one for the priests and a few small rooms. On the second floor, were a temporary workshop used to complete the building, a community room, the sisters' dormitory, a room for the superior and some yet unassigned spaces.

As spacious as the rooms appeared, they were bare and lacking of any useful furniture, instruments or decorations. Fortunately, the sisters had brought a kitchen stove with all necessary utensils; it was soon assembled by the Oblate Brothers. A coffer served as a table around which the sisters knelt for their meals for several weeks. By Christmas, Brother Patrick Bowes, their talented carpenter, surprised each of them with the gift of a chair: four posts covered with a plank to sit on. The total lack of commodities seemed to have increased their courage and their sense of humor. While good Brother Bowes hastened to construct a table, benches and beds, the sisters busied themselves for a thorough cleaning of the house.

Food managers

As a means to economize on the food, the sisters were assigned the storing and preparation of the food for the personnel of the whole Mission so that the priests, brothers and employ-

ees effectively became their boarders. In addition, the sisters were responsible for the chapel, sacristy, the missionaries' clothes and teaching at the school. As much as possible, they also helped on the farm. But above all, they dedicated the best of themselves to the education and teaching of children.

Trials in educating

Many trials were part of the first twenty years. The sisters suffered delays in recruiting students. Natives and Metis showed little interest in separating from their children and, left no doubt that education was not their priority in life. In May, 1863, the sisters opened a school for externs with the hope of recruiting students from around the Mission, but with poor results. It was not until the visit of Bishop Taché, who took great pain in explaining to parents the importance of education for their children, that in the fall of 1864, some forty students were registered in the school. This success was short-lived as most of these children soon found their way home, resulting in empty classrooms. Despite this setback the sisters, faithful to their mission, continued to teach religion, reading and writing even amidst hardships and extremely minimal support. Between 1865 and 1870, there were between two and six students registered at any one time. So busy were the priests that the task of coaxing and encouraging parents and students in their educational needs, so well begun by the Bishop, was left entirely to the already overworked sisters.³

Warehouse of the North

Lac La Biche, having become the *warehouse of the Mackenzie* and an almost official 'stop over' for all who traveled north, had at the same time, increased the services required of the sisters. They saw more and more demands placed on their time to wash and mend the pitiful clothes of passing missionaries; their portable liturgical articles and vestments were forever in need of repair, shining or replacing. Added to these demands was the

arrival of Bishop Henri Faraud, O.M.I. on February 28, 1870 who took residence at this mission. To facilitate the administration of the Mackenzie Vicariate, Bishop Grandin had temporarily ceded the mission of Lac LaBiche to the new Mackenzie Bishop.

The newcomer expanded great energy in making this mission an oasis for travelling missionaries and he assured a generously supplied storage for the north - often taken from the sisters' reserves. He also planned the construction of a road to transport supplies to the northern missions, a project which he had to abandon after several unsuccessful attempts. For two of these attempts, carts of provisions were loaded from the sisters reserves of food to provide for the workers of that excursion. The Bishop was probably unaware that the sisters and children at the mission were left destitute. While the men were gone for the project, the sisters had to look after the farm chores and the whole Mission. It is not surprising to find in the *Mémoire* the long list of additional duties that they undertook: feed the animals, milk the cows, fatten the calves, do the laundry on the shore of the lake in all kinds of weather, help with the harvest, gather the hay and this, in addition to all their daily occupations for the education of children, the upkeep of the chapel and the mission. They became night owls to fulfill all these tasks.⁴

Heavy burdens

When epidemics of fever in 1865 and smallpox in 1870 struck the mission, this added more to the services required of the sisters: care for the sick and assist the bereaved. Any free time and energy which the sisters might have had for teaching were soon non-existent. In the summer of 1870, they again were forced to abandon teaching, the main purpose of their coming to Lac LaBiche. This decision brought more tears and regrets than comfort in this complex dilemma. The situation became almost intolerable. The sisters could only find some hope in prayer.

A sigh of relief

Help finally came! Mother Jane Slocombe, Superior General, ever attentive to the needs of her beloved missionaries, decided to send them additional help, in the persons of Sister St-Michel (Rose-de-Lima Provost) and two girls, in the near future. Even more she delegated her assistant, Sister Ursule Charlebois for a visit of the western and northern missions, including Lac LaBiche. This encouraging news restored hope in the sisters' life. These eagerly expected newcomers arrived on August 12, 1871; their presence was the source of such strong emotions, hope and gratitude that it produced a refreshing mix of tears and laughter for many hours. This was a much appreciated healing elixir for their pain! It was reported that Bishop Faraud showed strong displeasure at the sight of the tired and frail-looking newcomers. His plans to have them share in heavy farm chores were thwarted and he made sure that they knew his disappointment. A very sombre cloud covered the joy of the moment!

A new superior

In exchange for Sister St-Michel, the sisters at the Mission were to lose their beloved superior, Sister Delphine Guénette, who had dedicated nine years in this office. She was called to serve again as superior at the Saint Albert Mission. On September 9, 1871, Sister Marie-Adèle Lamy arrived from Saint Albert as the new superior for Lac LaBiche. What a heartache for Sister Guénette to leave the companions who had been such an intimate part of her life and ministry for nine years.

Welcomed visit

In the evening of October 11, the sisters experienced the immense joy of welcoming Sister Ursule Charlebois, Assistant General, from Montréal. She was the angel whose comforting presence brought so much hope to the isolated missionaries. This

joy was short lived, however, as her itinerary called for continuing her visit to other missions as early as November 16. On her trip to Saint Albert, she was accompanied by Bishop Faraud. Sister Charlebois' visit at Lac LaBiche had, however, produced encouraging results. The sisters were re-energized and communications with the Bishop improved. A new era was hoped for. They reopened the school and a hospice⁵ which Sister Ursule Charlebois named *Hospice Saint-Joseph*. They received about 15 children in tight quarters. Nevertheless, the sisters rejoiced to be able at last to live the intended goal of their missionary life.

Sister Charlebois made a special detour before returning to Montréal and came again to Lac LaBiche from April 21 to 26, 1872. What a wonderful surprise for the sisters and how quickly these six days vanished! The kind visitor was pleased to note that the hospice and school now registered 16 resident students and five externs. By the end of 1872, the school again closed for lack of students. The parents were so intent on keeping their children away from school that new parental strategies were invented to succeed.

Bishop Faraud's departure

In the summer of 1872, Bishop Faraud left for France for a prolonged rest. News came later that he would not return to his Missions in Canada. His short stay in the northern Missions was marked by great progress. Thanks to his foresight and his boundless energy, the Northwest Territories have been blessed with many active Oblate and Grey Nun Missions. After the departure of Bishop Faraud, Bishop Grandin was happy to resume his kind, generous pastoral concern for his missionaries of Lac LaBiche.

Typhoid struck

In May, 1873, typhoid fever struck Father Valentin Végréville and later Sister Adélaïde Daunais. Both were under the constant surveillance and care of the two remaining workers: Sisters Marie

Tisseur and St-Michel (Rose-de-Lima Provost). Their own superior, Sister Adèle Lamy had become seriously sick and was recalled to Saint Boniface; she was replaced by Sister Youville (M.-Hélène Beaubien).

Across the prairies

On June 27, 1873, Sister Youville, Julia Rivest, a volunteer from Saint Boniface Orphanage and two missionaries, Sisters Angèle Langelier and Denise Senay, named for Ile-à-la-Crosse, left Saint Boniface. They were delighted that Sister Ursule Charlebois, Assistant General, who was still on her visit of the missions and Mother Mathilde Hamel, Superior Vicar of Saint Boniface were able to accompany them to Saint François-Xavier, the first stop on their long trip. Sister Charlebois and Mother Hamel left the missionaries with the vibrant community of Saint François-Xavier and returned to Saint Boniface the following day. One more day to enjoy each other's presence and the four generous women would then join the Red River carts at Baie Saint Paul for what they all knew would be an extremely long trip across the prairies.

The usual travel incidents of previous missionaries were experienced during this trip. These seemed to have become so customary that they were as a matter of fact, expected happenings and, only their absence was mentioned. At Fort Carlton, the two sisters destined for Ile-à-la-Crosse, headed north while the Lac LaBiche group continued west, along with Father Dominique Collignon returning to his mission of Lac La Biche. It was 2200 hours in the evening on August 14, 1873, when the sisters and the volunteers came out of their deep sleep to the sound of loud knocks on the door at the Mission. They recognized Father Collignon's voice and his announcement of the visitors. They rushed to meet their new superior and her companion Julia Rivest. The renewed courage enjoyed that night was well worth the long wait of these last 10 years. It was then with new energy that the sisters decided to re-open the school in September, 1873. Sixteen students were recruited, but few persevered very long.

More trials

In August, 1874, Bishop Faraud's coadjutor, Bishop Isidore Clut came to the mission where new recruits from France were waiting for an opportunity to reach the Mackenzie missions. Through deplorable misunderstandings, when he left Lac LaBiche, he took with him all commodities, tools, food, articles of liturgy and church vestments. There was not even a ciborium left to keep the Divine Presence so ardently needed in these difficult circumstances. The sisters' tradition of unquestioned respect for the clergy and Bishops had so far inhibited them from confronting the issue through normal recourse to clarify and solve the dilemma. This time, wisdom prevailed. A message was sent to their beloved Bishop Grandin in Saint Albert which soon was echoed by a most sympathetic response on September 9, 1874. In his letter, Bishop Grandin showed his deep sorrow and his strong determination to come to their rescue as soon as possible.⁶

This incident is included here with much hesitation, and was chosen among many others, simply as a random example of the impact of the life of isolation and poverty, cultural challenges and status differences on well-meaning, dedicated women and men, working side by side for the kingdom of God. This narrative also serves to highlight the compassion of Bishop Grandin as God's Providence for the sisters. The arrival of Father Hippolyte Leduc as director of the mission on October 3, 1874 was one of the many blessings provided by Bishop Grandin. Assistance came abundantly and from many avenues. Within a few months, life at the mission took great strides toward a more normal level of activities. By 1875, there was joy and hope, there was a resurgence of energy and finally, additional educational endeavors were made possible.

Bishop Faraud returns - Brother Raynard Alexis

Suddenly and unexpectedly, Bishop Faraud returned on July 28, 1875. When the sisters offered their greetings and welcome, he showed them warmth and kindness. His return, however, was soon clouded with a tragedy at the Mission.

Bishop Faraud mentioned his surprise that Brother Alexis had not yet returned from his trip in the Mackenzie. After searching throughout the forests and roads for several days, remains of bones were found and brought back to the mission; the brave Brother had been killed and eaten by his hired guide. A second victim, an orphan girl who accompanied them back to Lac LaBiche must have met the same misfortune, but her bones were never found, neither was there ever any news of the hired guide. The sadness and consternation of all at the Mission was great and their grief was sincere. Brother Alexis had always been a staunch support for the sisters; he had on many occasions, worked long and arduous hours to build chairs, tables, closets and other essential pieces of furniture for them. He was a friend to everyone at the many Missions where he served. In the deep grief caused by this tragic death, the Mission celebrated a solemn funeral on September 5, 1875 for the devoted martyr so cruelly removed from their midst.⁷

'Filles données'

The quiet, unaffected and dedicated life of the *filles données*, deserves a large place in the missionaries' memories and gratitude. Their self-given name could be translated: *volunteer*. On June 8, 1878, we recorded the passing of Marie-Luce after 12 years at Lac LaBiche, included in a total of 19 years of service alongside the Grey Nuns in Ile-à-la-Crosse and Saint Albert as well. Marie-Luce was 59 years of age.

Purchasing/selling land

Six years had elapsed since the consoling and comforting visit of Sister Ursule Charlebois, in 1871; six years of struggles and despair but always of renewed hope. The untiring Assistant General closely followed every aspect of their lives from a great distance. She would occasionally surprise them with boxes of useful items, and at times with 'goodies' from the mother house. She remained their beloved Guardian Angel!

One of her 1872 recommendations to Bishop Faraud and Father Végréville remained unresolved in her mind. She had heard nothing of its follow-up. In an 1877 letter to Sister Adèle Lamy, superior, Sister Charlebois referred to the agreement and authorized the sisters that in view of a separation of temporal goods, they should purchase a piece of land in order to produce enough barley, potatoes, etc., to sustain yourselves and feed your orphans.⁸

It is recorded that, thanks to the help of Father Joly [sic] and Brother Bowes, the sisters were able to purchase land for \$150.00 on January 9, 1878. Records of the next many years, however, testify to the complex and lengthy negotiations required to confirm the transactions between the sisters and William Pearce, Superintendent of Mines, located in Calgary; the Commissioner of Dominion Land in Winnipeg; Mr. J. R. Hall, Secretary, Department of Interior in Ottawa; Archbishop Alexandre Taché in Saint Boniface; Mr. Edouard Deville, Surveyor General in Ottawa; Father Albert Lacombe in his hermitage in Pincher Creek, and Bishop Vital Grandin in Saint Albert.⁹ When the deal was finally completed in January, 1908, the sisters had been transferred 10 years earlier to Lac La Selle (Saddle Lake). Almost immediately, negotiations took the reverse direction and a sale was concluded in December, 1928.

Grey Nuns Constitutions

The Grey Nuns were all in jubilation throughout the congre-

gation when their Constitutions were approved by Pope Leo XIII on July 30, 1880. All were invited to sing the hymn *Te Deum* in the chapel in a spirit of gratitude! The Congregation was thus given the status of a pontifical congregation, that is, under Vatican jurisdiction. From then on, new foundations in various regions would have no difficulty preserving their link with the main branch located in Montréal. On that occasion, Mother Deschamps, superior general, wrote:

I see as a great blessing for our community to have 72 of its sisters working in the Northwest missions.¹⁰

Charity continues

A great many of our missionaries' charitable actions could be recounted in this History; all would be worth mentioning. Gleaning at random, we find in a letter to Mother Julie Deschamps from Sister Youville on March 31, 1884:

We are accommodating young people 14 to 20 years old in our house so that the priests - who know their language - could teach them to prepare for their first communion. On the Eternal Father's account, we hosted five young Cree girls, one Métis woman and seven Cree and Métis boys. The boys stay with the priests, but take all their meals with us. ..We always remember that these poor people have souls for whom our God died...¹¹

The Northwest rebellion

Life continued with its shared hopes and trials, and its moments of faith in darkness. The Northwest Rebellion of 1885 was one of these major events that saddened and frightened the people of Lac LaBiche in a very special way. Danger came so close to the isolated settlement that Bishop Faraud decided to evacuate everyone from the convent onto a small nearby island. On the night of April 28-29, 1885, all eight sisters, two volunteers and 10 orphans were transported to safety by sled. They remained there

until May 12 when the situation was considered safe to return home. Sister Youville wrote on that occasion:

"It is near our beloved Jesus that we look for refuge and protection. With broken hearts, we tell him that we accept in advance all his plans for us. Then we take refuge under the protection of our good Mother in heaven".¹²

The Mission received threats from members of the Rebellion on a few occasions, but no harm was actually done. At Lac des Grenouilles (Frog Lake), however, there were massacres. Lives were lost, including two Oblates: Fathers Félix Marchand and Léon Fafard. This was a great loss for both the Missions where these two priests had ministered, and for the Oblate community who knew and loved these fellow workers.

The Northwest rebellion, headed by Louis Riel, took on national importance and had such lasting consequences that more than a century later, Riel is credited with the founding of Manitoba and there is serious talk of naming him: a Father of Confederation. His motives and actions, seen with the passage of time, have won him many supporters and his ignominious death by hanging in Regina, has turned large numbers of people against his judges. Controversial in death as in life, Louis Riel lives on in the appreciation of many among his Métis nation.

News at the School

Once peace had returned to Lac LaBiche, the school and hospice continued to function with rather unstable enrolments until 1893. Then on February 26, 1893, the mission was granted the status of an Industrial School by the federal government. The sisters received \$70.00 a year per student to a maximum of twenty students. There was no building provided for this school; accommodation was found in the former Bishop Faraud's residence for the next five years.

When School Inspectors began visiting the school in 1891, their comments were invariably very positive:

To witness the more than ordinary progress of the pupils of

this institution in such a short time, the result of the careful training of the Reverend Sisters entrusted with its direction, it is well worth coming to this remote area of our large country, where such results could hardly be expected unless at the hands of the devoted ladies who have chosen this for their share of human achievement.¹³

The sisters' ministry of teaching and educating the youth was highly praised and the success of the students often judged as 'remarkable' by successive visitors. It is heartening to discover how Mother Marie Praxède Filiatrault, Superior General, assessed the role of the sisters and their motivation in their educational task when she wrote in 1898:

For those of you who are dedicated to the formation of children in this mission, the task is often difficult and thankless, but let us endeavor to find support in reflecting on the love and compassion of our Lord for the children. Let us also remember the value of these children whose eternal future perhaps depends on the formation they will receive in this house... Be for them like true mothers.¹⁴

True mothers

'True mothers', our missionaries proved to be highly worthy of such a title. Their efforts were relentless. Not only were the 'Three R's' faithfully taught, other life skills were a regular part of the education given with love and respect. Students learned the principles of brotherly/sisterly love, they soon became fond of personal neatness and attractive clothing; they knew the main skills needed to face their future life as parents, housekeepers and breadwinners. The sisters were committed to the development of well rounded persons, including the teaching of music which began in 1885. As well, in 1893, Sister Florestine Marchelosse took two girls to the Chicago World Fair to exhibit their crafts. They won highly coveted prizes for their weaving and spinning. In 1896, these two girls, Eugénie Leduc and Caroline Ward obtained

Honor Diplomas as did students in other schools in this vast country. It was marvellous to note in the students, the healthy pride for themselves, their talents and their cultural arts, as they marched to the stages to obtain all these rewards.

Brother Anthony Kowalczyk

A tragedy occurred at the mission on July 15, 1896. Brother Anthony Kowalczyk was carrying out his blacksmith duties when his right hand and arm got caught and badly mangled in a motor. Taken to the Edmonton General Hospital, Brother Kowalczyk's arm had to be amputated. He continued a life that was a model of piety and of charity for all those who knew him. This holy man died July 10, 1947 and within five short years, the Diocesan Process toward his canonization was initiated.

A new Vicariate

Mother Praxède Filiatrault, superior general, came to Lac LaBiche for her pastoral visit in May, 1898. She was accompanied by Mother Eugénie Letellier, Mother Vicar of the newly-established Vicariate of Saint Albert. The sisters of Lac LaBiche were delighted to welcome them both.¹⁵

Leaving Lac LaBiche

In 1898, the Department of Indian Affairs announced its decision to move the school to the Reserve of Lac La Selle (now Saddle Lake). The people of Lac LaBiche sincerely grieved at the news that the sisters were leaving, but the decision was irrevocable. Mother Filiatrault approved the transfer of the sisters, saying,

*This change is necessitated by the present circumstances and will turn, I expect, to the glory of God because establishing ourselves in the center of the reserve, we should be able to provide Christian teaching to a greater number of children.*¹⁶

After 36 years of perseverance, courage, untold difficulties and heroism, the sisters left Lac LaBiche on Tuesday, July 19, 1898. Over time, 20 sisters had given a cumulated total of 198 years of loving and steadfast service to the Métis and Cree population of Lac LaBiche. They also had the privilege of working alongside 12 special volunteers who, together gave some 50 cumulated years of dedicated service to this northwestern mission of Lac LaBiche.

NOTES: Chapter 4

- 1 Hospice St-Joseph, Lac LaBiche, **Mémoire sur les 20 premières années de son histoire - 1862-1882**, p. 3 (Anonymous, undated manuscript, GNRC Arch.).
- 2 **Chroniques**, Lac La Biche, unless otherwise indicated, GNRC Arch.
- 3 **Mémoire**, Op. Cit., p. 6.
- 4 **Ibid.**, p. 7.
- 5 The term 'hospice' was used for a boarding house, the equivalent of a residence for students - the forerunner of 'residential schools'.
- 6 **Mémoire**, Op. cit., p. 21.
- 7 **Chroniques**, August, 1875.
- 8 **Mémoire**, Op. Cit., p. 39.
- 9 **Documents 1 to 27**, Lac LaBiche, 1877-1928, GNRC Arch.
- 10 **Chroniques**, July, 1880, p. 10 MMY Arch.
- 11 **Correspondance**, MMY Arch.
- 12 **Origine de la Mission du Lac LaBiche**, Historique, 3.B, GNRC Arch.
- 13 Albert Betournay, Inspector of Indian Schools, Northwest Territories, Handwritten Report, in **Report Book**, November 11, 1891, GNRC Arch.
- 14 Filiatrault, Mother Marie-Praxède, **Report of Canonical Visit**, May 15-19, 1898, GNRC Arch.
- 15 The creation of this new Vicariate was covered in Chapter Two.
- 16 **Lac LaBiche - Lac La Selle - Chroniques 1862-1935**, p. 48, GNRC Arch.

CHAPTER FIVE

1898 - MOVING TO LAC LA SELLE (SADDLE LAKE)

*A*fter a three-day journey, moving 100 kilometres to the south, the missionaries arrived at Lac La Selle on July 22, 1898. In addition to the five sisters in the caravan,¹ there were also a few Native children whose parents lived at Lac La Selle. All found a place in the carriages together with lumber, agricultural implements, grist mill and livestock. They were greeted with joy by two companions, Sisters St-Placide (Agnès Provost), superior and Béliveau (Louise Arsenault) who had arrived the previous months to examine the building and complete the final preparations for the arrival of the last contingent. The school was built during the summer by four Oblate Brothers and was almost ready for occupancy. It was a two-story structure with a French roof and a balcony. Much work remained to be done, however, before the opening of the school for 48 children on August 1, 1898.

The population on this new reserve was Cree and Chipewyan. They were visibly happy to welcome the sisters and seemed positive about the educational needs of their children. In less than two weeks, the place burgeoned with the life of 48 girls and boys eager to learn, mischievous and happy. A new era had begun. There was optimism in the air.

The School

By 1900, the enrolment at St. Joseph's Residential School had surpassed 50. At that time, the Department of Indian Affairs gave notice that they would limit their per capita grant to a maximum of 45 students. The principal, Father Henri Grandin and the sis-

ters decided to continue to accept all applicants and absorb the extra cost using revenues from marketing the farm produce.¹²¹ Once more, the few weeks of summer vacation for the sisters were spent in the garden, tending poultry, swine and cattle, canning fruit and vegetables for the long winter months so that all could be reasonably well fed. The Residential School continued to record encouraging results to which the Inspector's reports testified abundantly as seen following W. J. Chisholm's visit on March 27, 1899:

*I have today had the pleasure for the first time of visiting the Saddle Lake Boarding School...The pupils acquitted themselves very creditably of the various subjects of their studies, and their conduct in and out of the classroom was admirable. The school material and the pupils' clothing are in perfect order and nothing is overlooked that could contribute to the comfort and well-being of the children....*³

Again on January 15, 1902, we read in W.J. Chisholm's report: *My visit at Saddle Lake Boarding School afforded me great pleasure and satisfaction. The pupils' conduct is excellent. In the classroom, they are intelligent and attentive. The youngest ones in particular passed their examination very successfully. The program of songs, dialogues and military exercises played last night by the pupils is a great credit to them and to the sisters.*⁴

The same Inspector returned several times, always reporting his surprise and amazement at the progress observed. On his April 18, 1905 report, we read:

*Yesterday and today I made my regular inspection of this institution. I find the buildings and premises in a state of perfect order, the attendance much improved, and the children healthy and happy. The debt which is due to the Reverend Principal and the Reverend Sisters for their self-sacrifice on behalf of these children is one which I do not attempt to estimate and which can never be paid in this life.*⁵

Everyday Life

As usual in real life, there are moments of recognition and glory. These are the gifts of a Provident God who lovingly allows silver linings among dark clouds of trials or casual events. A sure sign that the modern era had arrived at Lac La Selle was the installation of electricity throughout the house in 1917. This innovation was duly requested of the Provincial and General Councils and approved on September 28, 1917. It can be assumed that electricity was used to provide light, not as power activating dozens of gadgets as we experience at the end of the century. Nevertheless, what an improvement from the use of gas lamps!

An example of the contagious laughter in a happy group of friends can easily find its place in this narrative. On Tuesday, April 1, 1919, the students, being fascinated with the April Fool jokes, tried their new-found tricks on as many persons as they could reach: students, teachers and sisters alike. Soon the walls echoed with mischievous laughter and much-enjoyed victories long remembered.

Fires

It was only a few weeks later, on April 24, that a call was heard: 'Fire at the barn'. Almost all their grain stored in the barn was destroyed. The hen-roost and the stable were no more; only the school building was spared. There was no insurance. The total loss was to be borne by the sisters. This was a hard but beneficial lesson to learn when the finances were so tight. Within a year, the buildings were insured for a total value of \$51,000.00 for three years at a cost of \$1,188.00. Immediate needs were also considered. Sister Nantel (Marie-Anna Beauchamp) had to set aside her nursing functions and become the official beggar to ensure that enough grain would be available for seed. She went to surrounding areas such as Cork, St. Paul and Brosseau. Very little grain was received as it was rare that spring. People were generous in other ways and her collections included about \$150.00 in cash plus a

few 'useful things' such as housewares and classroom articles.

Another conflagration occurred on September 18, 1928 around 2315 hours. When Sister Albertine saw fire coming out of the barn, all sisters, employees, students and priests were alerted. All six horses died, but when a picture of Mother d'Youville was placed on a pillar near the piggery, the fire stopped and no further damage occurred. The sisters reflected with gratitude: yes, Mother d'Youville really has a special power over fire. Again at mid-day on April 25, 1929, a fire started some distance from the Mission buildings; with a strong wind blowing toward the Mission, several cords of cut wood near the barn burned. At this frightening sight, Sister Arthemise Gosselin, superior, tossed several pictures of Mother d'Youville on the dangerous spots. Immediately the wind turned in the opposite direction, leaving everyone speechless, filled with awe and prayerful gratitude. Some of the little girls stayed a long time near the still crackling cut wood, holding the pictures high and continually calling on the protection of the saintly Foundress. How sincerely humble and grateful their prayer, after such tangible proof of God's mighty power.⁶

Epidemics

Lac La Selle, so often struck by fire, was not spared illnesses and epidemics either. Life is not that easy. As early as July 15, 1919, two cases of typhoid were discovered on the Reserve and by October 15, it had reached epidemic proportions. Sister Nantel became a nurse again and spared no efforts to care for all those afflicted at the school as well as in their homes. All the children became victims of the disease. In spite of the good care received, six children and two sisters died during that epidemic: Sister Céline Lépine, Auxiliary,⁷ who asked to remain at Lac La Selle and Sister St-Brynolf (Adéline Dupuis), who was taken to the Edmonton General Hospital. Both died on December 14, 1919. Sister Céline was buried in the cemetery of Lac La Selle, but on October 22, 1922, Mother St-Grégoire (Louisa Béliveau),

Provincial Superior, after visiting the mission, brought back the body of Sister Céline for burial in the Grey Nuns cemetery in Saint Albert.

During the 1919 typhoid epidemic, Sister Nantel was recognized as the nurse, the physician and the Agent. It is related that people were dying of hunger as much as of illness. Upon her representations to the Agent, she obtained an ample supply of food to distribute to those in need. She traveled throughout the Reserve, accompanied by a girl from the convent. For 19 long days, they cared for the sick, gave them medication, advice and food. Her reputation spread over the neighboring country and the Sisters of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin in Saint Paul claimed her services in that town for themselves and for other people who were afflicted. She remained there for one week as the angel of mercy whose presence and care were so comforting. A few kilometres away, her own family, struck by the disease, also received her care.

These weeks of untiring service took a toll on Sister Nantel's own health. She became seriously ill and, on November 15, was taken to St. Joseph's Hospital in Vegreville where the Sisters of Charity of Evron helped her on the road to recovery. By January 23, 1920, she was able to continue on to Edmonton for a well-earned period of convalescence.

Another epidemic struck Lac La Selle. On August 30, 1922, Doctor Hardy declared a Scarlet Fever Quarantine at the school. By September 15, the school was declared out of danger.

For all their courage and steadfastness, the sisters earned the increased admiration of the children and their parents. On February 21, 1918, Chief Thomas Makokis was obviously honored to repay the sisters in granting them the use of a piece of land. He wrote:

This is to certify that the undersigned Thomas Makokis and his counsellors have decided at the meeting held today to allow the Blue Quills Boarding School the use of a half section of our land for pasture.⁸

A few years later, on October 13, 1921, the same benevolent Chief wrote again:⁹

*We the undersigned, chief and Counsellors of the Saddle Lake Reserve, hereby give our consent in the name of the Band we represent that the Reverend Sisters of the Blue Quills School be allowed the free use of the land (about one hundred acres [450 kilometres]) adjacent to [the one already in use].*¹⁰

Sisterly comfort

In all the struggles for survival, the education of the students remained a priority not easily relegated to better times. More and more, the students enjoyed using and displaying their talents and many artistic skills. Their attractive pieces of work were frequently taken to expositions; they were at the St. Paul Exposition in August, 1927 when the students won nine *first prizes* and six *second prizes*. Again, in 1929, they won 15 *first prizes*, seven *second prizes* and eight *third prizes* at the Regina Exposition, a total of 45 prizes in two years!

There is occasional mention of their new neighbors, the Grey Nuns established at Hôpital Sainte Thérèse in St. Paul in 1926. Many comforting visits were made by Sister Marie-du-Carmel (Claudia Landry), superior of the hospital and some of her companions. How heartwarming and joyful were these meetings. This new-found closeness was a taste of heaven after having been so isolated since 1862 in Lac LaBiche and now in Lac La Selle!

And there were the occasional joys of surprise boxes sent from the mother house, from our sisters in Cambridge, Massachusetts, from a Toronto Catholic Women's group, from Saint Albert and Saint Boniface - boxes containing clothes, toys and candies! Unexpected kindnesses creating so much joy, so much gratitude! The sisters took time to record these events, recounting in delightful detail the surprise, the exclamations caused by these gestures of thoughtful, generous people.¹¹

Administration changes

After years of negotiations, further to the Grey Nuns Superior General's request for the Oblates Provincial Superior to take the administration of Saint Joseph Residential School, the deal was finally reached on May 8, 1929. Since their arrival at Lac La Selle, the position of Principal had been held by an Oblate, but ownership and administration of the school was left to the Grey Nuns. This situation was now rectified to the satisfaction of both parties.

Leaving Lac La Selle

Two years later, the Blue Quills Residential School moved for the last time; this time to a site near the town of St. Paul. Unlike the move from Lac LaBiche, the decision was heartily agreeable to the Native population who happily offered their help with the move.

December 6, 1931, the last Sunday spent at Lac La Selle, the house was filled with Natives who came to bid farewell and to organize the transportation of students, employees and sisters. They had moved most of the furniture, trunks and boxes the previous week by horse-driven wagons, trucks and cars, a total of 27 trips.

The Grey Nuns ministry at Lac La Selle covered a span of 33 years. Sixty-two sisters, including seven Auxiliary Sisters are recorded as having served a cumulated total of 290 years for the people they loved at Lac La Selle.

NOTES: Chapter 5

- 1 These include: Sisters Olivine Beauchemin, Olivine Briault, Cecilia Dougherty, Margaret Gannon and St-Augustin (Ada Leduc).
- 2 **Lac LaBiche - La Selle - Chroniques**, p. 55, GNRC Arch..

- 3 W. J. Chisholm, Inspector, Handwritten Report, in **Report Book**, GNRC Arch.
- 4 **Ibid.**
- 5 **Ibid.**
- 6 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, p. 228.
- 7 A new category of members in the Congregation established in 1864. Having born several titles, such as Tertiaires Franciscaines, Soeurs de Sainte Marthe, Petites Soeurs Auxiliaires, the name Soeurs Auxiliaires was approved in 1905. In 1946, their status was changed giving them the full title of Sisters. Prior to 1864, the 'filles données' were the forerunners of the Auxiliaires.
- 8 Lac La Selle **Historique**, doc. 39, GNRC Arch.
- 9 Note in these instances the name 'Blue Quills', a former Native Chief, is given to the school. This name became official at the transfer to the last location near St. Paul in 1931.
- 10 **Historique, Op. Cit.**, doc. # 39.
- 11 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, pp. 115, 256, 323, etc.

CHAPTER SIX

1931 - MOVING AGAIN - BLUE QUILLS

*M*onday, December 7, 1931 was a joy-filled day, the date chosen for the move five kilometres east of the town of St. Paul to the brand new Blue Quills School. On that day, this attractive building became the new abode for seven sisters, four employees and 64 students¹. In addition to having transported all furniture and other baggage the previous week, the Natives of Lac La Selle Reserve now offered to transport the students in horse-driven carriages. So eager were they to move to the new school that by 0500 hours, they were waiting at the door. It took nine trips to accommodate them all. The sisters did not leave until the last group had gone in order to ensure that all had taken their lunch bags with them and were safely on their way. Some of the students had the joy of stopping home for lunch, if they happened to live nearby.

Staying behind for a last survey of the empty building, the sisters had a further opportunity for private farewells to this house of many blessings, trials and hopes. No doubt their last visit to the chapel, empty classrooms, dining rooms, even the silent corridors provided precious occasions for emotional and spiritual reminiscences, for thanksgiving, for hopes and promises. Another era was just beginning for the intrepid missionaries².

A new home

By 1330 hours, on December 7, 1931, it was the sisters' turn to make the journey. They embarked the truck driven by Father Joseph Angin and after a 30 minute and 40 kilometre ride south, they entered the new Blue Quills Residential School. Immediately

they proceeded to prepare refreshments for all who had arrived earlier. Then, all joined in for a rapid visit of the building. Many opportunities were provided for all to voice their satisfaction with this new gift. This federal government construction was rated as an attractive three-storey building, well furnished and spacious, as compared to previous accommodation in Lac LaBiche in 1862 and Lac La Selle in 1898. The only drawback was the concrete floors, source of dust and difficult upkeep, a situation which was partly corrected three years later when new linoleum for the corridors was received. Because of the rapid growth of the school, it had to be enlarged several times. New staff had to be added and new educational methods were studied and implemented over the years.

Celebrations

Celebrating the anniversary of the opening of the new school became a cherished yearly tradition at Blue Quills. Celebrating often meant a well rehearsed play by the students, songs, new clothes and food surprises always relished by all. In the 1930s and 1940s, there were no televisions, no invited actors, very few silent black and white 16 mm films, so it was expected that the students would demonstrate their remarkable talents and produce plays and programs for all occasions. Be it the feast-day of the Principal, a visit of the Provincial or General Superior of the Grey Nuns, or of the Oblates, or a Bishop, a visit of the School Inspector, there was always a surprise presentation in store to the delight of the guests.

The main purpose of these concerts, however, was for the benefit of the students themselves. Appearing on the stage before a choice audience was conducive to personal growth. The three-act plays, put on once a year to honor the Principal, especially in the '50s were effective means for the students to gain not only familiarity with drama, but to develop poise, self-assurance, responsibility and an excellent way to practice special public speaking skills.

Among the rich memories found in the Archives, much more could be related here, such as: the monthly letters that the students wrote to their parents to keep alive their attachment to their roots, the students performing a Native dance at the Jubilee Auditorium in Edmonton and on television, the special projects of Grades 7 and 8 students to learn about the Treaties and the arts of different tribes.

This new school experienced none of the poverty suffered at Lac LaBiche and Lac La Selle. Government subsidies were mostly reasonable and student enrolment was on the increase. Teachers' Conventions were organized. Blue Quills students were always ranked high on the lists for prizes at crafts expositions, sport games and oratory and drama contests at local, regional, inter-provincial or international levels.

...And Learning...

In 1949, the Blue Quills Education Week was initiated. On those occasions, parents and visitors came to the school *to view the amazing displays of fine work performed by the [students]*³.

A group of Native researchers explain the purposes of the Education Week as follows:

*... to give a chance to the parents to realize the worth of their sacrifices in being separated from their children, to see the progress they are making in learning and to encourage both teachers and pupils in their worthy endeavors. Another purpose is to make the pupils aware of the importance given to their welfare, and to urge them on to higher learning. It also reminds the teachers of their responsibility and secures the support of all towards a complete education of the youth entrusted to their care*⁴.

In another statement, the unpublished paper mentioned the 25th Anniversary of Blue Quills with the following comments:

Missionaries [priests and sisters], Indian Chiefs, parents,

*children and guests joined to celebrate this anniversary on May 26, 1957. Twenty-five years of patient, gentle understanding on the part of the staff along with the cooperation of a few chiefs and parents has seen a great change in the outlook of the Native.... In 1957, the first time a student (Frank Large) gave a recitation in the Talent Show on television and he won first prize*⁵.

Education at the school was not all theoretical learning. Much emphasis and time were placed on the art of home economics for girls, and wood and farm work for boys. In order to practice these skills, students would spend half-days helping in these various areas. This was the program until the Spring of 1949. At that time, the Grades 7 and 8 teacher⁶ raised questions on the balance of the students' time, leaving insufficient hours for classroom work. A decision was then reached and confirmed by the Department of Indian Affairs, that students entire days would be spent in the classroom. It then became possible to cover a regular curriculum, thus ensuring the students' education equality with their non-native counterparts. This change made it more feasible for the students to attend integrated programs in the High School in Saint Paul.

On the lighter side, there was the occasional 'Donut Day' organized by the head cook, Sister Maria Lapierre with the help of Sister Chevretils (Angéline Reid), superior, such as on November 26, 1934. Can anyone guess how many donuts were made for the occasion? Nine hundred and twenty! No matter how often such an event was repeated, it was invariably received with the same surprise and enjoyed with the same enthusiasm.

There was a day not so joyful when 12 year old Linda Shirt was locked in the deep freezer by mischievous friends. Linda was found and saved by Sister Marie Hurtubise for whom she will keep a long loving memory: "she saved my life" the grateful lady keeps repeating many years later.⁷

High Standards

Throughout its history, Blue Quills at all times maintained high standards of achievement; this is confirmed in praiseful reports by visitors and Inspectors. As one example, a Air Mail letter from L.G.P. Walker, Inspector of Indian Schools sent to the Superintendent of Education, Indian Affairs Branch, Ottawa and copied to Fr. E. Bernet-Rollande, Principal stated:

In view of the excellent efforts being made in this school, the confidence of the Indians in the school and the consequent popularity of the school in the area, I would strongly recommend to your consideration the financial aid required to complete the new wing so that it can be put to use as soon as possible and the congestion in the classroom relieved⁸.

Archival searches revealed, among a multitude of other things, an interesting testimonial made in 1963 concerning residential schools:

The leaders of our Reserves, the families that are stable and progressive, the ones in positions of authority or confidence, are almost all products of the residential school system⁹.

Such observations were as much a compliment to the students as they were to the school. Both have shared the labors and both now reap the results. A 1980 doctoral thesis from the University of Alberta, relating a report received in 1964, has these affirming words:

When Roy Piepenburg, Supervising Principal of the Saddle Lake Agency, carried out an overall study of the administration, academic program and facilities of the Blue Quills School, the evaluation of the School operation was favorable. In the area of school-parent relations it was noted that parents frequently took their children home for the weekend, and that the administration has developed co-operative relations with parents¹⁰.

Changes ahead...

In spite of these encouraging reports in the 1960s, the Grey Nuns could see the day drawing near when they would have to limit their involvement in some areas of ministry due to a reduction of available members. The Provincial Superior, Mother Yvonne Prévost wrote to her counterpart, the Provincial Superior of the Oblates, Father Maurice Lafrance, on August 15, 1964:

In order to concentrate our resources, we are obliged to discontinue our services at Blue Quills by June 1965. It is with regret that we have come to this decision and we count on your collaboration... in this difficult period¹¹.

The local superiors of the time, Sister Léda Belley until September, 1965 and then Sister Bernadette Dumoulin were made aware of this decision and although their hearts ached at the thought of leaving their beloved students and school, their assent was unconditional. Along with their sisters, they had considered alternatives in prayer and discernment. They could not ignore reality: the number of sisters was decreasing rapidly, as individuals were aging or transferred to other ministries or leaving the Congregation. Despite smaller numbers, the Grey Nuns accepted to postpone the target date which was moved ahead one year, and later five years until 1970.

As the year 1970 approached, plans were starting for the sisters to rent the former rectory near the cathedral at St. Paul so that they could continue serving in the parish once they left Blue Quills. Members of Provincial Council, Sisters Aline Bohémier and Yvette Poissant, came from Edmonton on January 28, 1970 to look at possible arrangements. Sister Bohémier came again, this time with the Provincial, Sister Fernande Dussault, on March 3. At that time, plans were finalized. Ten days later, Sister Bernadette Dumoulin, superior and Sister Marie-Anna Vachon went to Edmonton to gather some pieces of furniture for their future dwelling. On Holy Thursday, March 26, 1970, the sisters began to move some of their belongings to St. Paul during the students' Easter vacation¹². The date of the sisters' departure from Blue

Quills was to be in late summer, but there again, some unforeseen events were to play a significant part in the already painful move.

Through all archival materials available, one can distinctly identify the 'rise and fall' of the Residential School system of education privileged during over a century in Western Canada.

As we look back in history several constants stand out clearly, especially the remarkable achievements of students and graduates of Blue Quills Residential School and the enduring friendship of many sisters and former students. Noteworthy throughout the history is the evidence that in light of the standards and methods of family and school education of that time, the missionaries constantly focussed their attention on the educational and spiritual benefits of the students while being faithful to the values and methods prevailing at the time. They placed their heroic missionary lives generously under God's benevolent guidance and always operated dutifully. Always respectful to the Principal, the sisters trusted that his directives were in tune with the regulations of the sponsoring body, the Department of Indian Affairs¹³.

Discontent

Seemingly unidentified by the sisters, discontent and unrest was brewing among the Natives. Having come to a point of greater intellectual independence, more ability for expression and increased self-determination, they could envisage an alternative to white-dominated residential schools. Was not self-determination a desired result of all educational endeavors on their behalf? Was this not a sign that a reasonable degree of self-sufficiency had been reached? As in any loving family, the relationship between the Natives and their white educators was at a turning point, a painful 'passage' as the succeeding events will show.

On July 14, 1970, a sit-in began in the Blue Quills School gymnasium with about 60 people¹⁴. At some point, there were as many as 300 people, mostly older men from the reserve. Some out-of-province as well as non-Native supporters joined in and

about 45 students from various schools in the Saddle Lake-Athabasca District picketed the regional Indian Affairs office in Edmonton. The Natives wanted to have their rights recognized in the education of their children. The end result would be the establishment of educational institutions totally under Native administration and leadership. To achieve that goal, they insisted that the Minister of Indian Affairs, Jean Chrétien, come and meet with them at Blue Quills. The Minister responded that representatives of the department would come on July 14. This first encounter was inconclusive and the request for the presence of the Minister was repeated.

Finally, a meeting was held on July 27 between department officials, including the Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs, his Assistant and Natives representatives. A further meeting in Ottawa with the Minister was finally arranged for Monday, August 3, 1970. Results of that meeting were a clear affirmation by Ottawa that Natives have a right to establish their own educational system.

The Minister agreed to the preparation of agreements covering the transfer of the operation of the residence and classrooms of the school to the Council. The target dates for the implementation of the agreements was January 1, 1971 for the residence and July 1, 1971 for the school ¹⁵.

On August 5, 1970, the 23 day sit-in ended. Peace returned among the Natives. They proudly set out to use their newly-acquired freedom and were even ready for an earlier complete take-over of the education of their children.

Leaving Blue Quills

The sisters held their first community reunion in their new residence in Saint Paul, on July 4, 1970. The **Chroniques**, still silent on the emanating difficulties included on Tuesday, July 15:

Last day of work in our mission of Blue Quills ¹⁶.

No mention was made of the sit-in already in progress. On July 20, the same chronicler entered a last paragraph:

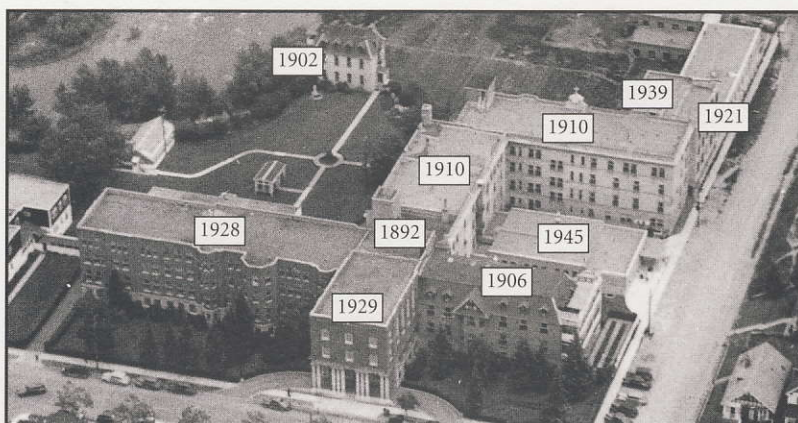
This is a final trip to Blue Quills to ensure for the last time that everything is in good order. We note that the Natives are invading the school, it is no longer possible to remain there. With tears in our eyes, we say a last ADIEU¹⁷

A huge amount of information is available on the Blue Quills story: several dissertations and theses, large sections in many books, newspaper articles, unpublished manuscripts from students, including **The Moccasin Telegram**¹⁸ and almost 900 pages in the **Chroniques** kept by the Grey Nuns over the years¹⁹.

There were six sisters remaining at Blue Quills on their last day in this mission, July 15, 1970: Sister Bernadette Dumoulin, superior, Sisters Béatrice Bourget, Mary Hagan, Annette Mageau, Eveline Smith and Marie-Anna Vachon. During 39 years the Grey Nuns ministered at Blue Quills, a total of 120 sisters have given a cumulated total of 495 years of zealous service to the people who had won their hearts. It is hoped the many friendships developed over the years will remain a constant reminder of their selfless commitment.

NOTES: Chapter 6

- 1 A choice was made to determine the number of sisters and students as these varied in given sources. **The Chronicles**, which seemed to be the most reliable account, was followed.
- 2 The Grey Nuns foundresses of Blue Quills are: Sisters Arthémise Gosselin, superior, Léonie Beaulieu, Catherine Breske, Aldéa Gagnon, Maria Lapierre, Clara Ménard, and Ida Thibert.
- 3 Blue Quills Native Education Council, **The Blue Quills Story**. Researched by Cécile Makokis, Adrien Redcrow, Eric Moyah and Evelyn Redcrow, 1972, unpublished, p. 13.
- 4 **Op. Cit.** , p. 13.
- 5 **Op. Cit.** p. 14.
- 6 The teacher was Sister Annette Potvin.
- 7 Verbal comment by her niece, Sister Marie-Rose Hurtubise.
- 8 **Correspondence**, November 5, 1951, GNRC Archives
- 9 Provincial Archives of Alberta, Oblate Accession 71, 220, B-VIII-500, box 60, August 12, 1963.
- 10 Persson, Diane Iona, **Blue Quills: A Case Study of Indian Residential Schooling**, Edmonton, University of Alberta, Ph. D. Thesis, p. 188.
- 11 **Correspondence**, August 15, 1964, GNRC Arch., **Historique**, doc. # 110.
- 12 **Chroniques**, March 26, 1970, GNRC Arch.
- 13 This is strongly evidenced in **Correspondence** and **Chroniques**, especially since 1930 when the position of Principal was established before the move to Lac La Selle.
- 14 All information about the sit-in relied on the account given in Diane Persson's thesis, pp. 234-244.
- 15 Persson, **Op. Cit.**, p. 243.
- 16 **Chroniques**, July 15, 1970, GNRC Arch.
- 17 **Ibid**, July 20, 1970.
- 18 The **Moccasin Telegram**, a little quarterly journal published by the Blue Quills students between 1937 and 1959. It began under the guidance of Sister Catherine Costello and continued with Sister Annette Potvin.
- 19 Several of these references are listed under Bibliography.



Holy Cross Hospital - buiding stages.



St. Mary's R.C. School - Cardston - 1921



A Grey Nun with a
Chief on the Blood
Reserve - 1947

CHAPTER SEVEN

1884 - DUNBOW - ST. JOSEPH INDIAN INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL

Being once again successful in obtaining Grey Nuns for his missions, Father Albert Lacombe was delighted that he could now open St. Joseph Industrial School in Dunbow (near today's High River). In 1883, Bishop Vital Grandin had requested of Mother Julie Deschamps, Superior General of the Grey Nuns, to come to Dunbow and open an Industrial School for Native people. The request was accepted on August 24, 1883. The foundresses, selected in the winter of 1884, arrived at Dunbow on October 17, 1884.¹

*The Grey Nuns accepted the charges of Matron, nurse, cook, seamstress and teacher for the girls. The Oblate Fathers were ready to provide, according to their means, the main instructors.*²

Government agenda

Backtracking for a moment, it was noted that the Federal Government had an agenda to assist the Native nations in adapting to the European way of living and becoming more self-sufficient. This resulted in years of negotiations between the Federal Government and the missionaries of the West, especially Bishop Vital Grandin and Father Albert Lacombe:

*As early as 1872 Bishop Grandin in a letter to Father Lacombe had expressed a wish that residential schools be established for young [Natives]. What he had in mind was quite similar to what the sociologists were suggesting almost a century later: that kindergartens and day care be established... so that social patterns might be changed and poverty cycles broken through the training of children.*³

Closer to the opening of the first Residential School in Alberta, at Dunbow, on July 19, 1883, approval was confirmed:

...The minister recommends that a Roman Catholic Industrial School be established at some point in Treaty 7, and the selection of the principal be left to the Bishop of St. Albert, Right Reverend Vital J. Grandin, O.M.I.⁴

On December 6, 1883, Father Lacombe was actively working on the plans for the school with officials in Ottawa. The school was ready to open in October, 1884.

Dunbow was located 40 kilometers south of today's Calgary. Some teasers have called it the *tub* because of its location in the middle of high mountains; others, admiring the mountains and the High River nearby have qualified it of *beautiful solitude for the contemplative* and a *gorgeous site*.⁵

The foundresses

The three foundresses of Dunbow planned to meet at the Oblates residence at Calgary. Sister Delphine Guénette, superior, and Sister Ste-Geneviève (Victoire Lemay), already experienced missionaries of the West, arrived from Saint Albert on August 24. Sister Victoire Thiffault, coming from Montréal, was welcomed at Saint Boniface on September 1, 1884 where she was to rest for a short while. Travelling by train, she arrived at Calgary on September 8.⁶ Their gathering at Calgary was longer than anticipated. Since the house at Dunbow was not ready to receive them, the three sisters remained in a small room of 2.5 square meters, next to the kitchen, at the Oblates residence in Calgary. They were there until October 17.

Service being their trademark, the sisters found much to do during these two months: visiting the sick in their homes, refreshing the sacristy and its contents, and keeping their eyes open for any other help they could give the missionaries. In addition to offering these highly appreciated services, the sisters found the activity essential for their own survival and a healthy escape from

their cramped accommodation.

Building completed

Finally, they were informed that Saint Joseph Industrial School was ready to receive them! They wasted no time and soon embarked on the 90- minute horse and buggy ride to Dunbow on October 17, 1884. Leaving Calgary at 1330 hours, they arrived by mid-afternoon, ready for the great adventure: opening the first Industrial School for Natives in Alberta.

Their new house had been built and furnished by the government: a two storey brick building 18 by 36 meters, with a chapel at the centre. It was found well supplied with food, beddings and other useful items for at least a 60 student occupancy.

Their ministries

At Dunbow, the sisters were to teach and care for children of the Blackfoot Reserve. Along with that major task, they were given responsibility for the upkeep of the church, the sacristy and the priests' residence. This, was of course, in addition to food services for the whole population at the school and the care of clothing and vestments.⁷

Once the school was ready to open, recruitment began. It was found at the outset that Native parents were more than reluctant to let go of their young children. None could be recruited for the first year. In order to use the new facilities, a chance was taken with the 15 to 17 year old boys. That, unfortunately, proved quite unsuccessful. The Blackfoot were slow in understanding the value of education. Other means were attempted:

Father Lacombe went north and obtained some boys from the Cree Reserves. By degree the Blackfoot elders allowed a few of the younger children to go to the school - a few girls as well as boys.

The Grey Nuns of Montreal came as teachers in September 1884 and quickly secured control of the younger children and gained their affection. Little by little a regular school

*routine was formed, the children lending themselves more readily to manual training than to books after the first novelty wore off.*⁸

The School did not have the benefit of a peaceful climate to get well started. By 1885, the Northwest Rebellion was in full swing. Hardly six months after the first group of students arrived, April 7, 1885, Father Lacombe, principal, was asked by the Government:

*to remain in Calgary until the trouble with the halfbreeds got settled, even at the risk of the school suffering during his absence. He was replaced by Father Charles Claude, as acting principal on May 25, 1885. There were only three Blackfoot boys left in the school; two of them had to be expelled on account of their rebellious character and frequent desertions from the school. Cree, halfbreed and white boarders were exceptionally allowed to fill the vacancies.*⁹

Many students needed special care from the sisters when they caught a cold, the flu, or some epidemic, sprained an ankle, bruised a knee, or suffered other maladies. The Archives contain volumes of Infirmary notes which reveal the treatments and medications given by the sisters on those occasions. Very touching proof of their tenderness and loving care.¹⁰

By 1890, recruitment became more productive and the school began to make significant progress. Dunbow was seen as a *reform school* by some observers, in the sense that some very difficult students were transferred from other schools in order to learn more acceptable behaviors. It was highly regarded by some former teachers of other Residential Schools.¹¹ A visit from a Regina Commissioner, Heather Reed, on November 27, 1888 won a few lines of praise:

*One cannot be more than pleased at what one has seen; and it is hoped that the Blackfeet are awakening to the benefits of this institution so ably managed by Father Claude.*¹²

On January 11, 1891, Inspector McGibbons was able to testify:

This is my fifth annual inspection, and I noticed great progress each year. The work so efficiently carried on by Reverend Father Claude, seems to be continued with equal energy and zeal by Father Naessens, the acting principal. The Reverend Sister Superior continues her great work in looking after the pupils and Mr. Dennehy seems to have good control over the boys.¹³

With these encouraging results, the school enrolment peaked at 132 in 1902. However, few of them were Blackfoot which negated the reason for locating the school at Dunbow.

Nevertheless, visitors were impressed and left some comments of praise for the record. One example is the report of Sister Elizabeth Ward from the Northwest Territories, following her visit in 1892:

I was charmed with all I have observed at the Industrial School: children of Blackfoot and Cree nations speaking English correctly and skillful in all kinds of works. The last evening I was with them, the boys, under the direction of their orchestra director, played the most beautiful pieces of their repertoire.¹⁴

An outstanding event was the boys' success in a football competition in Calgary in 1898 as reported in the **Annales**:

To mention only the games, when it comes to savoir-faire, these youngsters of the school are becoming celebrities: just lately, at a football competition in Calgary, they bore away the palm; 10 or 12 were decorated as champions of the Northwest and Columbia; it is a highlight for them.¹⁵

25th Anniversary

In November, 1909, the School celebrated its 25th Anniversary with enthusiasm and pride. The Blood, Sarcee, Piegan and Blackfoot joined in the festivities. Others present were Bishop Emile Legal of Saint Albert, Father Henri Grandin, provincial of the Oblates, Father Albert Lacombe, at 92 years of age, several other Oblate priests and brothers, two Daughters of

Jesus from Calgary and seven Grey Nuns.

There was a lovely banquet served by the boys of the School. This was followed by the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and a concert.

*There were songs, presentation of the arms, military exercises, music, comedy, monologue, drill pantomime and a live display.*¹⁶

*Father Lacombe could not contain his happiness and surprise to see all the changes that had occurred over the 25-year period. He remarked that even many white children could not have given a more interesting performance.*¹⁷

Hardly six years after this celebration, in 1914, the enrolment at Dunbow Industrial School began decreasing because there were fewer Blackfoot students available in the area, half of the 25 students were from other Reserves. It was thought that a reunion of former students would help see through the situation. Such a reunion was organized for December 30, 1913. It brought together 26 former students. The newly appointed Bishop of Calgary was also present. Follow-up to this gathering seemed to have fallen into oblivion because of ensuing events and, especially the onset of World War II (WWII), which channelled all energies and resources into this most unsettling conflict.

First Bishop of Calgary

In 1913, John Thomas McNally was appointed as the first Bishop of Calgary. He was also the first English-speaking Catholic Bishop in western Canada. Unfortunately, the new Bishop:

*soon became embroiled in controversies with French religious orders in his diocese including the Oblates whom he deprived of their parish in Calgary... In January 1919, Deputy Superintendent General Duncan Campbell Scott advised McNally that there were only 36 students at Dunbow and a staff of 11...*¹⁸

The days are numbered...

Active communications continued between the two leaders, Bishop McNally and Duncan Scott. Meanwhile, Father Henri Grandin, Provincial Superior, was also in contact with the Bishop of Calgary to clarify the situation at the school. On April 7, 1920, he sent a letter,

*asking for a clear and prompt answer on the status of Dunbow: were the Oblates to close the school, continue its operation or transfer control to the diocese?*¹⁹

The following year, in view of obvious procrastinations, Father Grandin decided to make an official request to the Department on behalf of the Oblates to close the school immediately. The reasons listed in his letter of May 16, 1922 were: recruitment difficulties and extensive repairs being essential if the school was to remain open.²⁰

Closure of the School

The request to close the school was accepted by Duncan Scott, Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa, on May 29, 1922.²¹ Plans began immediately for the closure, which happened on December 19, 1922. All furniture and supplies belonging to the Oblates were given to the other Residential schools conducted by their community: Brocket, Standoff and Qu'Appelle.

Over the years, the Grey Nuns had left the comfort of the mother house in Montréal or the provincial house in St. Albert to offer their ministry to the people of Dunbow. During the span of 38 years, they gave themselves wholeheartedly despite the trials and difficulties in teaching the Blackfoot children. Nevertheless, the years they spent at Dunbow left a mark on the future of education and religion for the people they helped. In total, 43 Grey Nuns had labored during 38 years for a cumulated total of 179 years of dedicated service to the Native children and the people of Dunbow.

NOTES: Chapter 7

- 1 **Dunbow Historique**, doc. #2, GNRC Arch.
- 2 Jules Le Chevallier, O.M.I., **St. Joseph Indian Industrial School at Dunbow**, manuscript, 1946, Collection Oblate 71.220/3378.
- 3 M.B.Venini Byrne, **From the Buffalo to the Cross - A History of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Calgary**, Calgary, Calgary Archives and Historical Publishers, 1973, pp. 55, 56.
- 4 Le Chevallier, **Op. Cit.**, p. 1.
- 5 St-Jean-Baptiste (Ada Lefebvre) Sister, to Mother Anna Piché, Superior General, letter of September 1, 1916, **Circulaire Bimestrielle, 1915-1916**, GNRC Arch.
- 6 **Annales, 1884-1887**, p. 116, GNRC Arch.
- 7 Agreement, **Dunbow Historique**, doc. #3, GNRC Arch.
- 8 Byrne, **Op. Cit.**, p. 57.
- 9 Le Chevallier, **Op. Cit.**, p. 2.
- 10 Collection Oblate, APA.
- 11 Verbal comments: a former teacher, Blue Quills School.
- 12 Le Chevallier, **Op. Cit.**, p. 2.
- 13 **Ibid.**, p. 2.
- 14 **Circulaire Mensuelle 1887-92**, p. 805, GNRC Arch.
- 15 **Annales, 1899**, p. 651, GNRC Arch.
- 16 **Annales, 1909**, p. 316, GNRC Arch.
- 17 **Ibid.**, p. 318, GNRC Arch.
- 18 Raymond J.A. Huel, **Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis**, (Edmonton, The University of Alberta Press, 1996, p. 132.
- 19 **Ibid.**, p. 134.
- 20 **Ibid.**, p. 134.
- 21 Collection Oblate 71.220/3378, APA.

CHAPTER EIGHT

1891 -

CALGARY - HOLY CROSS HOSPITAL

When the four Grey Nun missionaries set foot in the deep snow off the train upon arriving at Calgary, there was no one awaiting them at 0200 hours in the silent, dark night, no street and no street lights to lead them to a warm place for a few hours of rest, but there were 3,500 people in the town who needed them. That was enough motivation to move on. Father Hippolyte Leduc, who had travelled with them between Saint Boniface and Calgary, showed them the way to their temporary dwelling. This was January 30, 1891.

The location

What was that place named Calgary? The first Canadian Pacific Railway train had arrived from Montréal in 1886; Calgary's first telephone had been installed in 1887 and electric lights turned on in the town in 1889. Calgary was to become a city in 1894. It was then, and still is, the *Gateway to the Rocky Mountains*. It was later to be hailed as the Stampede City.

This thriving town of Calgary was to call forth a significant leap in faith for the Grey Nuns. They were coming to Calgary to open a hospital at the request of Bishop Vital Grandin of Saint Albert and Father Hippolyte Leduc, the Oblate missionary in Calgary. They came with a total fortune of \$73.75 remaining after having paid \$120.00 for their four train tickets and \$16.00 for their berths, thanks to a discount obtained for them by Sister Marguerite Devins. All their possessions were obtained through charitable donations received from families and friends and from

a collection taken at St. Patrick's church in Montréal.¹

The foundresses

The request to open a hospital in Calgary was presented to Mother Praxède Filiatrault, Superior General, and her Council who accepted on the condition that the greatest poverty be the cornerstone and God's Providence, the only source of all hope. The Oblates in Calgary promised a temporary dwelling and all food needed for one month to allow the foundresses to get established and provide their own sustenance.² Soon, four sisters were selected: Sister Agnes Carroll, superior, Sisters Olivine Dulcina Beauchemin, Valiquette (Marie Horise Dumoulin) and Gertrude (Beemer), auxiliary. When hearing the call, they were moved with a mixture of pride, anticipation and some anxiety, but from their heart came the unanimous: *Yes*. This one word was to carry them long into the history of the future Holy Cross Hospital.

They were unwanted...

Not everyone residing in Calgary was happy to hear that the Grey Nuns were coming! In 1888, a group of people had decided to rent a house and use it as a hospital. This is when Father Leduc suggested that the Grey Nuns be asked to undertake that venture. Unanimously, the group refused. Soon after, their hospital opened. Following a clash of opinions, the Committee of Directors dismissed two members, who were Catholic.

Another time, Father Leduc was refused entrance to the hospital to give the Sacrament of the Sick to a patient. This insult brought him to again ask the Grey Nuns to come to Calgary and open a hospital where all Catholic patients could be respected in their need of religious assistance.³

The trip to Calgary

January 21, 1891, was the date chosen for the departure from

Montréal. At 1600 hours, Mother Praxède Filiatrault, Superior General, went to the chapel with all the sisters for the Prayers of Itinerary, as was the custom for a new foundation. Then, after a quick meal, the foundresses, accompanied again by Mother Filiatrault and a few other sisters, left for the railway station. They boarded the train at 1900 hours for the first leg of their trip. Their itinerary included a stop at Saint Boniface for a few days of rest and to meet Father Hippolyte Leduc, who had come to travel with them to Calgary.⁴

Arriving in the early hours, on this Friday morning, they blessed Divine Providence who had inspired the kindly Father Leduc to be with them for the trip. When they saw no one at the station, bravely, the travellers picked up their luggage, and decided to walk, in the darkness and knee-deep snow, the four kilometers leading to the residence of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, where they had hoped to remain until the completion of their hospital. These Sisters, who had come to Calgary in 1883, were conducting a successful, but rather small girls' boarding school. Unable to offer lodging to the travellers, they, however, kindly offered their chapel for a mass by Father Leduc, a light snack, and a quiet area for a few hours of rest.⁵

The first building

After thanking their kind hostesses, the four Grey Nuns walked to the unfinished building which was to serve as their hospital. Immediately, Sister Carroll and her sisters placed this institution in the hands of Saint Joseph, their heavenly protector and treasurer.⁶ They could not have chosen a more powerful assurance of success, as will be seen throughout the life of the hospital.

The building they had just taken over was a poor two-storey brick building of 6 square meters. It proved to be the perfect home for snow and cold wind to enter at will. There was a small stove at the centre of the first floor, which was rather inadequate; it was insufficient even to warm the carpenters and other workers. Providence came to their rescue in the person of Sister Marie

de la Croix (Margaret Cleary) from Dunbow who offered them hospitality until their hospital was completed. Sisters Carroll, Valiquette and Gertrude convinced Sister Beauchemin, of frail health, to accept the invitation, while the others would see to the completion and organization of the hospital.⁷

The first patient...and others

In the first few months, going to auctions and sales, they obtained another stove and many other essential items. Saint Joseph was already at work as the sisters began to receive various donations, even from people of different religious beliefs. On April 10, 1891, the sisters admitted Mr. Cudlip, their first patient. By the end of 1891, 64 patients, from several religious denominations, had been admitted in the four-room hospital. Initially, most patients were able to pay their board. This greatly helped the new institution.⁸ Work quickly increased to a point where additional help was needed. What a comfort for all, in 1899, to welcome Sister Duckett (Albertine Pépin), one of the first graduates from *l'Hôpital Notre-Dame* in Montréal, an institution in which Nursing was directed by the Grey Nuns. Sister Duckett was only seven generations away from one of her ancestors, Clémence de la Jemmerais, a sister of Marguerite d'Youville.⁹

Not only was additional help needed, there was also a crucial need for space. Several times the sisters chose to give up their own beds to accommodate one more patient. On these occasions, they would either sleep on the floor, or move to the attic which afforded little comfort. Eighteen months after their arrival, plans were in the making to collect funds, find a suitable site and work on the design of the future Holy Cross Hospital. Sister Margaret Devins, who was from a wealthy family, obtained substantial donations for the sisters in Calgary. Other gifts were received from the railway workers, from other settlements, such as Edmonton and Saint Albert and, also from generous local friends. One group of donors needs mention: the Calgary Dramatic Society, directed by a young lawyer, P.J. Nolan, held a concert for the benefit of the

hospital and provided the nice sum of \$247.00.¹⁰

Other outstanding donors, who came later, included Patrick Burns and J. C. Duggan. The latter is especially remembered for his gift, in 1929, of three superb marble altars for the chapel with the installation costs. How often did he come *just for a visit*, leaving along the way, cheques of one to three thousand dollars as he casually said *good bye*. This noted benefactor must have received precious rewards for his generosity when he knocked at heaven's door in February 1937, at the ripe age of 91!

In April, 1892, Mother Mathilde Hamel, Assistant General came from Montréal to assist in the selection of land for the future building. The site chosen was on the banks of the Elbow River where the Holy Cross Hospital still stands at the close of the 20th century. It was donated by the Oblates, who also gave 25,000 bricks for the building.¹¹ More funds were needed. So, Sister Agnes Carroll, Superior, went to Edmonton and Saint Albert to collect donations of money and goods for the construction. She was pleased to return home with a gift of 135 kilograms of fine wool from Bishop Vital Grandin and a \$115.00 collection. Little did she suspect that Divine Providence was watching her return to Calgary in the person of Calgary mayor, Alexander Lucas, as we will see later.

Epidemic

When a measles epidemic broke out in Calgary in the summer of 1892, Calgary Town Council arranged for tents and barracks to be set up on the outskirts of the town to quarantine the victims thus afflicted. Now, where could they find someone to care for these patients? They thought only the Grey Nuns might accept the isolation, discomfort, fatigue and danger related to being caregivers for the epidemic-stricken patients. So this was the reason for Mayor Lucas to be at the CPR station for the arrival of Sister Carroll! Would the Grey Nuns accept the challenge? That same evening, Sisters Beauchemin and Valiquette were on their way to a five-week quarantine. A physician from Calgary offered

his services for \$10.00 a day.

*Upon arrival at the tents, the sisters found the patients in a pitiful state of abandonment. They set out immediately to improve their deplorable condition. It should be mentioned, to the praise of the mayor and councillors, that the sisters were treated with much kindness and respect during that time.*¹²

On July 19, 1892, Sister Carroll offered as a spiritual bouquet to Mother Praxède Filiatrault, Superior General: *the heroic charity of her two companions who went in quarantine*. For five weeks, they remained isolated, except for the time when Father Leduc celebrated Mass for them. His solicitude about their own health and needs touched them deeply. At the specific request of Mother General, they did not present a bill for their services, but the Town Council gave them \$250.00 - a much appreciated help for the hospital under construction!

The new hospital

The new hospital was blessed by Bishop Vital Grandin on November 13, 1892, during a visit to Calgary. Many hours of work were still needed to make the building ready for occupancy. By November 20, the sisters moved to their living quarters within the hospital; they also prepared accommodation for two new recruits: Sisters Marie-Anna Sansoucy and Céline Lépine who were welcomed with open arms.

A long and most interesting article appeared in the Calgary Herald:

The lovely and vast edifice, just constructed by the Sisters of Charity on the Mission ground, and known as Holy Cross Hospital adds a great value to the list of public buildings in Calgary.

Few sites would have been more appropriate for the location than the one chosen. Between Doucet and Rouleau Streets, Elbow River and Hamilton Avenue, 40 lots of land have

been donated to the Sisters of Charity by the Reverend Oblate Fathers.

... The charge to patients is one dollar per day for those who can pay. As for those who cannot pay, they are treated at no charge... Up to this day, only 44 patients have been able to pay [out of 123]. In spite of these meagre revenues, plus the minimal amount of sewing that they have time to do and the assistance of charitable ladies, the sisters do not at least lack the essential...With all this help and above all, an unshakeable faith in Divine Providence, the sisters were able to give the contract to J. G. McCallum last May...

*The building has three storeys, only two are completed and furnished. The sisters will be able to admit 25 patients and in emergencies, 10 to 12 more. The house will be heated with hot water and lighted by electricity. Bathtubs are connected for hot and cold water and the telephone will keep the hospital in contact with the exterior...*¹³

Such high praises were due in part to generous contributions that were acknowledged: the electricity was installed by Mr. Prince at no charge; he also gave free use of this service for one year. The Bell Telephone Company gave free use of the telephone in the hospital.¹⁴

The financial situation of the hospital improved greatly when, in 1893, the Northwest Territories Government decided to compensate the hospital for the patients of the Territory. From this date, the hospital was to receive 40 cents per day for patients who are unable to pay, and for those who could pay, the grant was to be 10 cents per day.¹⁵

Other epidemics

One year after the measles epidemic struck Calgary, there came a diphtheria epidemic in August, 1893. Improvising was the style of the day. When all beds were occupied, the sisters organized space to accommodate patients on the unfinished third floor.

The epidemic continued until the end of the year, requiring around the clock care for as many as 22 patients at a time. Having to work long and arduous hours, the sisters became quite exhausted. They requested help from Montréal and two young Auxiliary sisters came and were a tremendous encouragement to all. Recognizing the valuable services rendered by the sisters during this epidemic, Calgary municipality gave them \$141.00 as a token of appreciation.¹⁶

Again, in 1894, another diphtheria epidemic forced the sisters to give up their own beds and move up to the attic. This happened on several other occasions. When space was unavailable, the sisters slept on the floor.¹⁷

In 1901, a quarantine was ordered because of a typhoid epidemic. There were so many people affected and needing hospital care that the sisters had to refuse as many as 15 patients daily for lack of space. Even the corridors were packed with cots and stretchers.

Again the sisters were called upon to help in 1908 for another typhoid epidemic, followed in the same year by a smallpox epidemic. In 1917, the sisters again responded when another diphtheria epidemic broke out and in 1918 for an epidemic of Spanish Influenza.

The sisters always responded to the call of desperate families stricken by epidemics during the first 30 years of the hospital's history. At times, they themselves were also stricken by the diseases. Back on their feet, they were again at the bedside of their patients, relentless in their care and compassion.

Clouds and Silver linings

In 1894, along with the epidemics, more clouds gathered over the sisters and their fledgling hospital. The sisters lived through months of controversy when Calgary Town Council expressed the wish to amalgamate the two hospitals under the administration of the General Hospital. The firm response of the sisters prevented this from happening and their dedication continued as the

Chroniques mention:

*In addition to the good number of patients at the hospital, we can still visit, assist and console other people in the city who need our care.*¹⁸

Silver linings appeared when the tireless Catholic women of the town organized an evening of entertainment for the hospital and gave the fabulous return of \$415.00. Divine Providence was always at work to encourage and support her valiant missionaries.¹⁹

Mother Praxède Filiatrault, Superior General, who was at the helm of the Grey Nuns Congregation in 1891, when Holy Cross Hospital opened, was again elected to the same post in 1897. She came to visit the sisters and the hospital the following year. No one was more happy to visit this now flourishing 25-bed hospital after all the anguish of its humble beginnings! On the other hand, the encouragement brought to the sisters by the Mother's visit could hardly be measured.

The sisters lived constantly in admiration of the action of Divine Providence in their life and ministry:

*I notice everyday that we are right in blessing Divine Providence for such maternal care on our behalf. We have the consolation of seeing our patients, non-Catholic as well as Catholic, leave us satisfied of our modest care. All of them praise our holy religion and, as one of them said: we find really divine a religion that makes a Sister of Charity and inspires her with so much dedication.*²⁰

On August 21, 1911, the beloved foundress-superior of the Holy Cross Hospital, Sister Agnes Carroll, then Superior Vicar, died of cancer at the age of 57 in Montréal. Calgary was united in praising her as a woman who had contributed so much to the high status that the city had reached. Seventeen years of her life were spent at the Holy Cross, years of extraordinary dedication and lasting accomplishments.

Feeding the poor

Occasionally, the chronicler indicated some interesting statistics concerning the number of poor who knocked at the hospital's door to obtain a free meal. Even with meagre revenues, the sisters managed to feed a surprising number of people. As examples, in 1924, 165 meals were served in March and 440 in December. Similarly, a few entries in the 1925 **Chroniques** show that between 250 and 466 meals a month were served to the needy.²¹ At that rate, it is assumed that millions of meals were served to the poor during the 80 years of the Grey Nuns' presence at the Holy Cross.

Growth and Achievements

In 1917, the superior of Holy Cross Hospital, Sister Duckett (Albertine Pépin), was the main organizer of the first Catholic Hospitals convention for sisters, held in Edmonton in July. She was a woman of experience since she had been often delegated to attend the American Hospital Conventions in Chicago, St. Paul, Minnesota and other sites, in the years 1919 to 1921. These were preludes to the equivalent organizations in Alberta and Canada.

In June, 1940, the Holy Cross hosted the first Convention of the Prairie Provinces Conference of the Catholic Hospital Association of the United States and Canada with an attendance of over 100 persons from Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. During the meeting, they elected their first officers: Sister Beatrice, a Sister of Saint Martha in Lethbridge, as president, Sister Alice Herman, superior and administrator of Holy Cross Hospital, as vice-president and Mother Marguerite Mann, Provincial Superior of the Grey Nuns as treasurer.²²

When the Catholic Hospital Conference of Alberta was incorporated in 1943, Holy Cross received its certificate as a charter member. On that occasion, Sister Alice Herman was elected the first president. In 1946, she was granted membership in the College of Hospital Administrators of Canada and the United

States. The next superior and administrator, Sister Lydia Noël, was granted the same recognition in 1950. That same year, Sister Rita Fortier, accountant, received her diploma from the International Accountants Society, Incorporated in Chicago.²³

Amongst the world of secular health organizations, the Holy Cross was often a leader. In 1919, it was recognized by the American College of Surgeons, duly standardized and classified in Group 'A' as a hospital of 200 beds, having all the required modern appliances. In 1940, it received its Accreditation by the Canadian Hospital Association, thus having the privilege to admit medical interns.

In 1944, the Holy Cross became a member of the American Hospital Association. In that same year, it was the first hospital in Alberta to have its Laboratory technicians' course recognized by the Canadian Medical Association. In July, 1945, the Blood Bank was organized by Sister Marie Nadeau. It is recorded that at that time, all materials required by the Red Cross Blood Donor Clinics was sterilized at the Holy Cross.²⁴

The hospital had its first full-time pathologist, Dr. R.C. Riley, in April, 1938. A School of Medical Technology was approved by the Canadian Medical Association for the Holy Cross. They graduated their first group of five students in 1945. Four hundred soldiers had their blood group done at the Holy Cross laboratory in 1940. All sterilization for the military hospital was done at the Holy Cross free of charge, during the Second World War.

Holy Cross Hospital lists as a special honor to have had Dr. Allan McEachern on its medical staff in the 1920's. After leaving Calgary, and in the midst of his colorful career with the Canadian Hospital Association, he often returned to the Holy Cross, visibly happy to notice the rapid progress of the hospital.

By 1957, Holy Cross Hospital had become the centre for cancer treatment in Southern Alberta. Cardio-vascular surgery began at Holy Cross in 1958. Doctor George Miller, a 1945 intern of the hospital performed that first operation. Also in 1958, the Cardiac Unit opened. In 1960, a heart-lung machine was donated by the Calgary Associate Clinic. This piece of equipment paved the way

for open heart surgery. The Holy Cross surgeons were the first in Canada to replace a severed arm, the result of a freak accident at the Stampede midway in 1962²⁵. In the early 1970s, Holy Cross was designed as the Cardio-vascular Centre for Southern Alberta.

A Golden Jubilee

In 1941, the hospital celebrated its 50th Anniversary of continuous progress. Bishop Francis Carroll of Calgary, Mother Saint Jean-de-l'Eucharistie (Maria Geoffrion), Assistant General, Dr. Allan McEachern and Sister Madeline Beemer, one of the four foundresses still living, were among the guests of honor. It was noted at that time that, during its first 50 years, the hospital had served 96,410 patients for a total of 1,370,372 days. A proud record indeed, especially when one remembers the humble four room hospital of 1891.²⁶

The World around the Holy

The *Holy*, as the hospital was affectionately known in Calgary, witnessed many societal events. Some examples are listed as references: In September, 1912, the first Stampede day was held under the direction of American Cowboys; World War I from 1914 to 1919 shattered many families by the death or wounding of their young members; in 1922, a radio was heard in Calgary for the first time; the Calgary Cancer Clinic opened by Dr. Alexander McNab, in 1941, within the Holy Cross; the 1939-45 World War II was ushered into people's lives with no less fury than the earlier war; the *Holy* admitted army officers in private rooms and charged five dollars a day.

The succession of Popes and Calgary Bishops were also events that the *Holy* lived with interest and prayer. During the 79 years and 11 months that the sisters were at the Holy Cross, there were nine Popes, from Leo XIII to John Paul II and after John Thomas McNally in 1913, as the first Bishop of Calgary, there have been seven Bishops, including present day, Bishop Frederick Henry,

who was appointed January 16, 1998.

Administration changes

One of the changes in hospital administration which became prevalent in the 1950s was for sisterhood hospitals to hire lay administrators. Holy Cross was privileged to find a competent replacement for Sister Délia Clermont, who completed her term as superior/administrator in 1957.

Dr. Irial Gogan, formerly Deputy Minister of Health in Saskatchewan, was selected as the first lay administrator, with the title of Executive Director. He began his new function on September 2, 1957. Being known in the medical world, he was respected by his confreres and by the community at large. During his 12 years in this position, he was appointed a Fellow of the American Hospital Association, served on the Canadian team for hospital accreditation and was often requested for consultative services both within and outside the province. His influence within the hospital was positive and productive.

With the appointment of Dr. Gogan, Sister Délia Clermont was the last Grey Nun in the function of superior and administrator, a function she had held from 1951 to 1957. The position of superior, being a requirement for a community of sisters, was continued after Doctor Gogan's appointment as Executive Director. Sister Rita Coulombe filled that position from 1957 until the sisters left the hospital. She was at the same time Director of Nursing Service.

Nursing Education

The opening of a School of Nursing was to be expected in this era claiming professional status for nurses. Sister Marie-du-Saint-Sacrament (Eloïse Marchand), responsible for students in nursing²⁷ in this hospital since 1905, was named first director of the Holy Cross Hospital School of Nursing when it opened, in 1907. Five students were admitted and they graduated in 1910.

As history will later show, a hospital without a School of Nursing, in the late 1800s and the early 1900s, was doomed to critical staff shortages. Two reasons were used to favor the opening of a School of nursing: recruitment of graduate nurses came easily from the hospital's own school and it was acknowledged that the students themselves, during their three-year course, were the major contributors to inexpensive service for the hospital. Under these circumstances, no financial administrator could resist the enticement of such savings. Initially, women were the only source of recruitment to nursing. In the 1950s, when, enrolment began to diminish, residence requirements became less appealing, choices of other careers became more varied and there were also serious doubts regarding the North American system of Nursing Education.

The Holy Cross Hospital School of Nursing was first in Alberta to implement the Block System²⁸ in their curriculum in September, 1947.^{29,30} This noted improvement, under the leadership of Sister Lucienne Lapierre, her assistant, Sister Adèle Levasseur and their competent faculty, appears to have benefited the level of learning and the health of the students. It was, however a small step in improving Nursing Education altogether.

Holy Cross was fortunate to attract competent and caring nursing instructors throughout its existence. Over the years, the School aimed at high standards of education. It benefited from visits and inspections by competent educators. For example, in June, 1949, a team made up of Dr. Sommerville, Jean Charles and Helen Penhale carefully examined the operation and teaching of the School. The chronicler wrote that they left an excellent report.⁵² The Holy Cross was also among the first in Western Canada to create a position of Student Health Nurse in October, 1947.

Sister Denise Lefebvre, Director of l'Institut Marguerite d'Youville in Montréal, published a report entitled: *Evaluation of Schools of Nursing*, in 1950. This initiated a series of activities in the domain of Nursing Education in Canada. Another significant area of discussions was the possibility of creating Central Schools of Nursing in Alberta. After thorough scrutiny and inspection,

this idea was rejected by all Catholic Schools of Nursing in Alberta, including Holy Cross. It was feared that a central system of education would not include religious and ethical principles in its program. Catholic schools had always recognized that the basic principles of respect of the individual, contained in Ethics, are essential in the education of health care professionals.

In January, 1956, Sister Denise Lefebvre gave a two-day seminar for all directors of Catholic Schools of Nursing in Alberta and their hospital administrators. The seminar was a prelude to the visit of each School conducted by Sister Lefebvre herself during the following months. These visits resulted in a *Report of a Survey of the Catholic Schools of Nursing in Alberta*, by Sister Denise Lefebvre published in April, 1957.³²

The first 13 years of operation of the School and residence of the students occurred within the confines of the hospital building. Enrolment being very small in those years, there was always room for every student. In 1920, the hospital purchased the Waterloo Apartments and the Forbes Home, located in close proximity to the hospital. After extensive renovations, complete with a tunnel to the hospital, these buildings became the School of Nursing and Residence over the next 40 years. Later, in 1947, another building, the original Holy Cross Hospital, was used for the increasing enrolment of students. It was named the St. Gertrude Residence.³³

It was not until 1957 that the School of Nursing was in possession of its own beautiful, spacious Nurses' Residence. In order to accommodate all students learning, playing and sleeping in the same building, a new 8-storey tower was built. It opened on February 7, 1957 when the School celebrated its 50th anniversary. This building was spacious enough for 256 students and was acclaimed as a very elegant structure. After its opening, it hosted all Medical Staff meetings and dinners. Many outside groups also benefited from the spacious assembly room for their gatherings. But, mostly, it was a delight for students, families and friends on many and diverse occasions. This 1957 residence was named *Grey Nuns Building*, in 1982.

The first Director, Sister Marie-du-Saint-Sacrement, remained in her position from 1907 to 1910. This appeared to be the longest tenure until 1932, when Sister Loretta Mansfield remained at the helm until 1943, an 11-year stint of significant progress. Long tenure could also apply to Sister Cécile Leclerc, from 1954 to 1963 and Sister Marguerite Létourneau, from 1963 to 1968. The latter combined the office of Provincial Councillor in Edmonton along with her position of Director of the School of Nursing for three years. When she left the School for studies in Rome, in 1968, she was replaced by the first lay Director, Doris Stevenson, a Calgary General Hospital graduate.

These were years of major changes in Nursing Education. The Holy Cross Hospital School of Nursing contributed much of its experience and advanced knowledge in this field. When the Grey Nuns left the Holy Cross, in 1970, the last sister employed at the School of Nursing was Sister Alice Romanchuk.

The Holy Cross Alumnae Association began on May 7, 1931 when 85 nurses gathered at a first meeting. The first president was Lucille de Stage; Margaret Brown, a 1910 graduate became the first honorary member. In 1941, the Golden Jubilee of the Hospital, 600 graduate nurses of the Holy Cross came to celebrate at the Home-Coming. Very impressive proof of the love and pride they had for their Alma Mater. One member of the Alumnae, Claudia Tennant, graduate of 1939 is remembered as having contributed her talents widely, especially while holding a post with the World Health Organization (WHO) in the 1940s. In the 1990s, she was vice-chair and later chair of a Grey Nuns' Board, Youville Women Residence in Calgary, a home for women in need of assistance. In that post she was a tremendous support to this women's ministry.

The School of Nursing closed in 1979. During its 72 years of existence it graduated 2,409 nurses. The Holy Cross School of Nursing has always been proud of its rich contribution to health care in the province of Alberta, in Canada and beyond. Sweeping changes in the education of nurses in the 1960s and 1970s were promoting college and university nursing education as opposed

to hospital programs. Therefore, Hospital Schools of Nursing gradually made room for this new approach.

Relinquishing Ownership

After six major additions to the 1892 building, Holy Cross Hospital had reached a capacity of 596 beds by 1970. It stood proudly among the best health care institutions in Alberta. It was staffed by competent, caring personnel, finances were fairly stable and many medical and surgical specialties had been established, such as cardio-vascular surgery and neuro-surgery. The Provincial Cancer Clinic was located within the hospital since it was established in Alberta. The Holy Cross Hospital was enjoying a healthy reputation.

There was, however, another major problem looming in the picture: the decreasing number of sisters in the Congregation, which resulted in a reduction in the areas of their involvement. In 1969, the prevalent thought in Catholic hospitals was that ownership of a hospital was directly related to an adequate number of sisters holding key positions. The Grey Nuns Provincial Council, reluctantly, began to initiate negotiations with the Provincial Government for the sale of the hospital. As the news leaked in the media, Sister Fernande Dussault, Provincial Superior, sent a memo to all staff on May 15, 1969, assuring them that no conclusions had as yet been reached on the matter. She also assured them that all possible measures would be taken to honor previous agreements with various categories of employees.

The sale was concluded by the end of December, 1970. A proposal from the Calgary Rural and Metro Hospital District No. 93 to assume full responsibility for Holy Cross Hospital was accepted by the Minister of Health, James Henderson. There was one condition, namely that the chief executive officer be chosen by the District No. 93 Board. This condition was reluctantly agreed to by the Board of the Holy Cross Hospital. Consequently, Dr. Irial Gogan's appointment was terminated on October 31, 1969.

In recognition of his years of service, he was given a substan-

tial termination package by the hospital. Subsequently, Dr. Gogan went on to a post with the World Health Organization. A testimonial dinner was held at the Glencoe Club in Calgary, on February 8, 1970. Colleagues and close friends, including several Grey Nuns, were present to recognize the many years of professional service rendered by Dr. Gogan to the Holy Cross during his tenure as Chief Executive Officer. In a letter to Dr. Gogan, Sister Fernande Dussault wrote:

*the warmest appreciation of our Sisters who have been closely associated with you at Holy Cross, and who have come to recognize and appreciate how much your services have meant to them and to the hospital.*³⁴

The sale of the hospital was concluded with clear expressions of regrets by all parties involved. Even the Minister of Health, James Henderson, reported to **The Albertan**:

*[the government] most sincerely regrets that the sisters, for good reasons of their own, have seen fit to withdraw their ownership.*³⁵

However, the financial return to the Grey Nuns permitted them to make a substantial contribution to Bishop Paul O'Byrne of Calgary for the diocese's pastoral needs, which, at that time included the possibility to establish a Chair of Theology at the University of Calgary.³⁶

On September 2, 1969, the sisters moved out of their quarters on the top floor of the Nurses Residence to a residence on Elbow Drive to pursue other ministries within Calgary. The last Grey Nun employed was Sister Rita Coulombe as Director of Nursing, who left on May 1, 1971, eighty years and four months after the arrival of the Grey Nuns on January 30, 1891.

On June 16, 1971, a delightful Testimonial Dinner was held to recognize the Grey Nuns 80 years of service to the people of Calgary. It had been planned jointly by the Council of Social Affairs, an Interfaith Group of Calgary, the Ladies Auxiliary of the Holy Cross and the Sisters' Council of the Diocese of Calgary.

A lively, grateful crowd of some 300 people filled the banquet

hall for the occasion. Among them were senior representatives from the Church, city and province. All took a turn praising the Grey Nuns' health care ministry during close to a century. Records show that 237 sisters had ministered at Holy Cross Hospital during the period of Grey Nuns' ownership. These sisters served with love a cumulated total of 1,680 years of unfailing dedicated service to the people of Calgary.

NOTES: Chapter 8

- 1 **Calgary Chronicles - 1891-1942**, pp. 1-4, GNRC Arch.
- 2 **Ibid.** p 3.
- 3 **Ibid.**, pp. 2, 3.
- 4 **Ibid.** p. 5.
- 5 **Ibid.**, p. 6.
- 6 **Ibid.**, p. 12.
- 7 **Ibid.**, p. 7.
- 8 **Ibid.**, p. 11.
- 9 Notice Biographique, May 28, 1948, GNRC Arch.
- 10 **Calgary Chronicles, Op. Cit.**, p. 14.
- 11 **Calgary Historique**, # 18, GNRC Arch.
- 12 **Chroniques Op. Cit.**, p. 15-17.
- 13 **Calgary Herald**, November 12, 1892.
- 14 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, p. 27.
- 15 **Ibid.**, p.24.
- 16 **Ibid.**, p. 27.
- 17 **Ibid.**, pp. 39-41.
- 18 **Ibid.**, p. 44.
- 19 **Ibid.**, p. 44.
- 20 **Ibid.**, pp. 47, 48.
- 21 **Ibid.**, pp. 165, 166.
- 22 **Calgary Historique**, doc. #54.

- 23 **Ibid.**, doc.# 15A.
- 24 **Ibid.**, doc. # 21.
- 25 **Nuns and Nightingales**, Barbara Kwasny, ed., Calgary, The Alumnae Association of the Holy Cross School of Nursing, 1982, p. 21.
- 26 **Historique**, doc. #16.
- 27 A grandfather clause of the emerging nursing profession allowed practicing 'nurses' to take a series of classes, write examinations and obtain a diploma. The first sisters receiving a diploma at Holy Cross were Sisters Cecilia Dougherty, Alice Prono and Marie-Anna Sansoucy.
- 28 The Block System consisted in the organization of a schedule whereby students were given full time classes for a number of weeks, followed by full time clinical experience, hopefully related to the subjects just learned.
- 29 **Chroniques 1947-1959**, p. 412.
- 30 Janet Ross-Kerr, **Prepared to Care - Nurses and Nursing in Alberta**, Edmonton, The University of Alberta Press, 1998, p. 14.
- 31 **Historique**, doc. # 15A.
- 32 Castonguay, Thérèse, s.g.m., **A Mission of Caring - Catholic Health Association of Alberta, A Chronicle of the First Fifty Years**, Edmonton, The Catholic Health Association of Alberta, 1991, p. 50.
- 33 Named in honor of Sister Gertrude (Madeline Beemer), one of the hospital's foundresses.
- 34 Letter, May 18, 1970, GNRC Arch.
- 35 **The Albertan**, Calgary, October 28, 1969, p. 8.
- 36 Provincial Council Minutes, March 26, 1970, GNRC Arch.

CHAPTER NINE

1893 - STANDOFF / CARDSTON - HOSPITALS, SCHOOLS

The title of this chapter might raise questions. Therefore, a few notes at the outset are in order. Both these settlements, Standoff and Cardston, are located on the same Blood Reserve in Southern Alberta. An offshoot of the widespread Algonkian race, the Blackfoot nation in Alberta, was made up of three groups, one of which was the Blood tribe.¹

The activities of the missionaries, hospitals and schools, began at Standoff. They later moved to Cardston and the sisters returned again to Standoff in 1969. For the purpose of this history, both locations and their varied ministries will be described jointly.

Requesting Grey Nuns

An Oblate mission was established on the Blood Reserve in southern Alberta in 1881. Its location, present day Standoff, had been chosen by Bishop Vital Grandin of Saint Albert. The Blood Reserve is situated 200 kilometers south of present day Calgary. It is the largest Reserve in Canada, covering close to 1,000 square kilometers.

From his hermitage in Pincher Creek, the untiring, 66 year old Father Albert Lacombe approached the Grey Nuns mother house in Montréal, in a steady stream of visits and/or letters since his first successful request of Grey Nuns for Lac Ste-Anne in 1859. Records show that he had always been successful in his requests for more Grey Nuns. This time, in 1893, Standoff was on his mind. He knew that Father Emile Legal, who had been in Standoff for 10 years, had recognized the need for a hospital for the Blood population.

Father Lacombe had written many desperate letters to Mother Julie Deschamps, Superior General to obtain more Grey Nuns for this new mission. Unable to honor his request at that time, Mother Deschamps' answers conveyed her deep regret, without closing the door for later needs.² It was hard for him to take such an unexpected refusal until, on the advice of Bishop Vital Grandin, Father Lacombe, paid a visit to Bishop Elphège Gravel of Nicolet on February 22, 1893. He presented his need very eloquently and passionately, concluding with tears. The same day, the foundation of the hospital Our Lady of Seven Sorrows on the Blood Reserve was decided between the Bishop of Nicolet and the Superior General of a young branch of Grey Nuns, the Sisters of Charity of the Hotel-Dieu of Nicolet.³

When Father Lacombe, who had returned to Montréal, received the news that four Nicolet Grey Nuns would be going to the Blood Reserve, he was jubilant! Such joy was all he needed to forget the difficulties leading to this glorious moment:

*For 43 years that I have lived the missionary life, amidst sorrows and hard work, I was blessed with many consolations, but none was as great as the one I experienced when I was told that the Sisters of Charity of Nicolet had accepted the challenge of devotedness and zeal that we offer in the name of the Catholic Church and the poor Natives of the prairies.*⁴

The Sisters of Charity of the Hotel-Dieu of Nicolet, Québec, emanating from Saint Hyacinthe⁵ was founded by Mother Youville (Aurélie Crépeau) and three companions, in 1886. At this time, the sisters from the original root, the Sisters of Charity of Montréal, Grey Nuns, had already been in Alberta since 1859: 34 years of devoted missionary service.

The history of Standoff and Cardston would not have found its place in this volume, had it not been for the providential fusion of the Nicolet Branch with the main root of the Grey Nuns of Montréal in 1941.

All Grey Nun Branches claim the same saintly foundress: Marguerite d'Youville. All share the same unfailing faith in Divine

Providence and the same missionary spirit. It was therefore no surprise to see the Grey Nuns of Nicolet experience this *leap in faith* when their ministries were requested for Standoff, even if their young foundation numbered only 18 sisters at that time.

The foundresses

Father Emile Legal was filled with renewed hope and energy at the news that the sisters had accepted to come to the Blood Reserve. He immediately started building the hospital. In his enthusiasm, he wrote to Mother Youville (Aurélie Crépeau):

...As the missionary residing on the Blood Reserve, I will be first to benefit from the influence the sisters cannot fail to have on the people through their prayer and edifying examples...I would not dare to suggest that there will be no trials. Where in the world could we find a place without trial? Is it not the ordinary condition of Christian life?...In any case, these trials will be the source of our merits, we would then have to embrace them with joy...

Construction of the hospital is moving fast...I will send you a plan of the suggested divisions of the building. You could then send me the changes that seem necessary...⁶

Faith motivated the General Council of Nicolet to accept this first mission. It was the same faith that filled the four sisters destined for the challenge. Chosen by God, through their Superior General, were the following: Mother St-Eusèbe (Zéphirine Brodeur), one of the four foundresses of Nicolet in 1886, Sisters Rachel St-Germain, St-Joseph (Anna Gélinas) and St-Louis-de-France (Zelpha Deshaies). With their nomination, came the special blessings of acceptance and generosity so essential to the future missionaries.

En Route...

At 0830 hours, Sunday, June 25, 1893, Father Irénée Douville celebrated the Prayer of the Itinerary with the sisters. At the conclusion, all went to the community room for farewells. Tears were abundant at the thought that these dear sisters were perhaps leaving never to return. For one of them that fear was soon to become reality as will be noted later.⁷

As Mass was celebrated at 1000 hours, the missionaries had already begun their historic journey. They took the boat at Port St-François, accompanied by the Superior General, Mother Youville (Aurélié Crépeau), Mother Sacré-Coeur (Octavie Beaulieu) and Father Irénée Douville. A short stop at Sorel along the Saint Lawrence River was planned to allow some rest and exercise, while Mother St-Eusèbe revisited the place of her early ministry from 1877 to 1880.

Back on the water, they were afloat until the wee hours of Monday morning. Upon arrival at Montréal, they attended Mass at Notre-Dame-de-Bonsecours church. Spirits were high with anticipation and excitement when they met Father Albert Lacombe, waiting for them at the exit of the church. The welcome they received from the cradle of the Congregation, the Grey Nuns of Montréal, both at the mother house and *l'Hôpital Notre-Dame*, helped them to forget about the imminence of the separation. Mother Julie Deschamps, the Montréal Superior General, had her sisters prepare two generously filled baskets of provisions for the train ride. That gesture was highly appreciated by the sisters, Father Lacombe and all his missionary travellers, who enjoyed a share of the food.

Canadian Pacific Railways had once again provided Father Lacombe with free transportation for himself and his 18 co-travellers, including his *Princesses*⁸, the four Grey Nuns of Nicolet. On Tuesday, June 27, all were on board at 1700 hours. Following dinner, Father Lacombe suggested the group get ready for a concert to fight off loneliness. The future Bishop Adélard Langevin from Saint Boniface was elected director of the performance. With a

light spirit, all joined in the songs. Mother St-Eusèbe, however, was conscious of words in the songs that did not sound realistic! In a French song that said...*happiness is awaiting me over there...*, she reflected aloud: *I wonder!*

By Saturday, July 1, they were in Saint Boniface. As in Montréal, they were thrilled with the same warm reception by the Grey Nuns already established in that part of the country for 49 years. Another delightful surprise was awaiting them at Calgary's Holy Cross Hospital, where the Grey Nuns of Montréal had preceded them by two and a half years. A few Grey Nuns of Montréal were also missioning in Dunbow, near Calgary for the last nine years.

On the train ride from Calgary to Fort McLeod, a full scale feast was organized to mark the recent Confederation Day, July 1. Decorations, surprises, a concert, all contributed to lighten some heavy hearts. Travelling through the night, they were at McLeod in early morning; a torrential rain was their welcome mat. Father Elisée Gravel, parish priest, a nephew of the Bishop of Nicolet, graciously placed part of his house at their disposal for several days.

The hospital

Being now acclimatized to the West, the sisters were ready for the last part of their journey *home*: Standoff. In a letter to Mother Youville, Father Gravel described this event:

Yesterday [July 10], Father Lacombe and I escorted Mother St-Eusèbe and her companions to their hospital of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows in the Blood Reserve. We had four of the Mounted Police carriages for people and baggage. Ahead of us, there was a Native man on horseback to guide us through rivers and roads. At 1430 hours, after a three and a half hour voyage, we were at Father Legal's residence...[in Standoff]⁹

Father Legal's reception of his new associates in ministry was undoubtedly marked by unrestrained joy and gratitude. Lunch was ready for all of them and by 1430 hours, they partook in late,

but enjoyable refreshments. After lunch, they eagerly walked to the new house/hospital a short distance away. At the door, ceremoniously, Father Lacombe took each sister by the hand and introduced them one by one to their home. Tearfully, he said:

Sisters, I took you out of Nicolet and brought you here. I now leave you in your home, under Father Legal's care.¹⁰

After a brief tour of the building, Father Lacombe put on surplice and stole; he began to bless the building room by room, including the chapel. Father Legal then told them with emotion that their house was all furnished. The truth was: there was a crucifix in each room, but nothing else. When by 1830 hours, the three priests had left, the sisters were alone and somewhat tearful. Seeing this, Mother St-Eusèbe reminded herself and her companions that the time was for dedication, not for self-pity. Picking up their courage, they gathered blankets and mattresses and settled down for a few hours of much needed sleep.

Thus was founded Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows Hospital and on that day, July 10, 1893, the seven-year-old Hôtel-Dieu of Nicolet became a mother house.

Early the following morning, the sisters chose one box that would be their table, and a few smaller ones that could be used as chairs. As they unpacked their limited amount of luggage, they began to organize their empty building. As a date was decided upon for the inauguration of the hospital, August 7, 1893, the sisters zealously prepared for the event. During the first few days, an endless stream of visitors was welcomed to the hospital. Welcome was the word, as these visits provided the sisters with the assurance of support on the part of many: from the Band Chief, families, adults and children to the government officials, and many others.

August 7 came and all were ready for the celebration. An estimated 800 people attended.¹¹ The program included an address by Father Lacombe to the Honorable Daly, Minister of the Interior, who responded with words of congratulations and encouragement. Several speeches by Native Chiefs followed during the next three hours. At the end, there was a wonderful sur-

prise: the Band from Dunbow Residential School, directed by Father Albert Naessens, performed with great success.¹²

Painful grief

Saturday, April 14, 1896, will long remain imprinted in the memoirs of the little mission of Standoff. One of the four foundresses, Sister St-Joseph (Anna Gélinas), suddenly became ill with peritonitis on Holy Thursday and died after two days of terrible pain. She was only 29 - a wonderful companion and a zealous missionary. Soon, came from all parts of the Reserve people who, by culture, were afraid of the dead. Nevertheless, they all wanted to see the holy white woman who had died. Some stayed long to pray aloud or silently and reverently. Sister St-Joseph's funeral was held on Easter Monday, April 16, in the church she herself had started to decorate for Easter. She was buried in the Natives plot until this site was later abandoned, at which time, her remains were brought back to Nicolet in 1927 when Mother Florida Doucet returned from a visit of the mission.

*The community of the Sisters of Charity of the Hotel-Dieu of Nicolet had just lost a person for whom the hopes were high and so, it began to form its own family in heaven.*¹³

More people come to the hospital

The sisters had admitted their first patients on August 29, 1893 in the small Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows Hospital. After a few years of adjustment to the sisters and acknowledging their compassionate care, members of the Reserve were making more frequent use of the facility. By February, 1894, there were 15 patients receiving care day and night. Fearing for the health of the sisters, Father Legal took his turn on night duty.

The original small building could no longer meet the demands. Urgent requests were presented to the Department of Indian Affairs to obtain expansion of present buildings or a new construction to respond to all these needs. By 1901, Dr. William

Frederick Edwards became the resident physician on the Reserve. This, naturally, increased the hospital's credibility in the eyes of the Natives.

Epidemics of smallpox, measles and whooping cough, followed by the Spanish Flu of 1918-1919, were battled with remarkable devotion. When the patients were too numerous for the small hospital, tents were set up around the building to admit the overflow of stricken patients. Tuberculosis, always rampant in those years, necessitated a new building which was added to better control the spread of the disease by isolating these patients.

A department of obstetrics was opened in 1918 to care for new mothers and babies. Space was limited. Much deliberation at the government level resulted in approval of the construction of a new hospital at Cardston, 40 kilometers south of Standoff.

Who would take charge of this new hospital? It could have been assumed that the sisters would continue in this function. Strong opposition existed, on the part of clergymen from other religious denominations, to have members of the Roman Catholic faith in charge of the future hospital. Aware of these regrettable controversies, the Government presented conditions to the sisters, which they accepted. One of these conditions was that the sisters be employed by the Government under the direction of Dr. J. K. Mulloy.

After 36 years of health care in Standoff, Friday, March 15, 1929 marked the transfer of patients and staff from Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows Hospital at Standoff to the new Blood Indian Hospital at Cardston. This was a three-storey, 48-bed modern hospital, resplendent with a red brick exterior. From its site on a hill, overlooking the town of Cardston, it provided a very pleasant view. In this new hospital, good progress was made in caring for more patients, in a more comfortable environment.

Nicolet-Montréal Fusion

On March 1, 1941, the 55 year old Branch of the Sisters of Charity of the Hotel Dieu of Nicolet achieved their fusion with

the main root of the Sisters of Charity, Grey Nuns of Montréal. Hence, Nicolet became a Province in the Grey Nuns' Congregation. As many of the Nicolet missions were established in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, the fusion meant rallying under another Province, such as Saint Albert. From then on, Standoff and Cardston were added to Saint Albert Province.

A Jubilee

On June 9, 1943, there was a Thanksgiving Celebration to mark the Golden Jubilee of the foundation of the hospital. Thanks were offered to the Lord for the many blessings received during these past 50 years. Representatives of the federal government were present at this festivity. These officials expressed their thanks to the Grey Nuns for the good services rendered to the Natives of this Reserve over the last 50 years.¹⁴

Difficulties experienced

An undercurrent situation of stress, rampant over several years, reached a point where the government had forbidden crosses on the walls, religious literature in the patients' rooms or waiting rooms, visits of the priests, except certain hours of the day, all conditions which the sisters found hard to accept⁷².

With much regret, the General and Provincial Councils decided that it was time for the sisters to leave Cardston Blood Indian Hospital and attend to much needed ministries in other areas. Bishop James Carroll of Calgary was informed of the decision. He contacted another congregation of sisters who were willing to come and replace the Grey Nuns, but the Government declined the offer.

Chief Shot on Both Sides and members of his Council sent the following message to the Sisters of the hospital on September 14, 1954:

At our Council meeting today, most of us have just learned that you are leaving us. We have unanimously passed and recorded a Resolution of deep appreciation for the devoted

*and untiring efforts of the Sisters of the Order of the Grey Nuns in our Hospital for the past 61 years. Now that the time comes that we must part, through no request of ours, we wish you to know that our people will miss you greatly and all our prayers and good wishes go with you always.*¹⁶

Of their last day at the hospital, September 15, 1954, the chronicler wrote:

*Last day of work at the hospital. The expected nurses have not arrived yet. We remain with our patients until 1530 hours; at that time, we leave our patients with the newcomers... Needless to say that we give warm handshakes to everyone, with promises to remain faithful to them in prayer. The pain of separation is great on both sides...After Mass, Father I. Leaver, asks us to sing Salve Regina. He too feels the sadness of the occasion. Ted Brown, the new administrator also comes to say farewell with tears in his eyes. Is it sincere? We think so, because his task will be demanding.*¹⁷

After a day of so many emotions, the sisters were in great need of privacy, which they found in their own rooms. There were still six sisters at the hospital on the last day, September 15, 1954. Soon, all had been assigned to their new missions, serving with the same faith and love. The Grey Nuns had given 61 years of service in health care, years of dedication and love to the people of the Blood Reserve.

Schools

The year they arrived at Standoff, the sisters opened two day schools. Teaching began on September 13, 1893, claiming Sister Rachel St-Germain for one school and, for the other school, a new recruit from Nicolet, Sister St-Georges (Albertine Gouin). In an unusual move, the Bishop of Nicolet had announced this new aspect of the sisters' ministry in Standoff in his Sunday homily, adding the name of the additional missionary whom he had chosen! Much commotion ensued among the sisters; the superior was especially surprised! The Bishop's decision, however, was

obediently honored!

The **Chroniques** show how much the sisters' life was immersed in that of the people of the Reserve. There is frequent reference to caring for patients within the hospital as well as visiting patients in their camps, attending weddings, being present for Wakes when a member of the Reserve had died. In these lines, one can also identify the joy of the sisters at the news of yet one more conversion, one more family who feels at home with the sisters, one more child attending school.

The two buildings used as schools soon became inadequate. In addition, it was found that the day school system was inefficient to encourage reasonable attendance. It was decided to request a boarding school from the Department of Indian Affairs. Such permission was obtained from Ottawa in 1897 and construction, paid by the sisters, began on October 7, 1897. Three sisters were named foundresses of the school under the direction of Mother St-Eusèbe, superior of the hospital.¹⁸ On opening day, October 31, 1898,

*only three students present themselves to the astonished three sisters: Rachel St-Germain, Heloise Proulx and Auréa Trudel.*¹⁹

At the news of such low registration, Bishop Emile Legal²⁰ visited the people, early in 1899, and encouraged them to send their children to the boarding school. He also placed the school under the protection of the Immaculate Conception. Several Chiefs also spoke in favour of placing their children at the boarding school.

For each child registered, the government paid \$72.00 a year to the institution. In the first year therefore, a very meagre total of \$216.00 was made available for room and board, maintenance and supplies! No one was talking about salaries in those years, of course. This Immaculate Conception School was built to accommodate 50 students. It had to cope with frequent floods; one especially serious occurred in 1902. From May 17 to 21, the school building was flooded. Sisters and students escaped to the hospital on horseback. Several floods occurred in subsequent years.

As time went by, the school enrolment increased. By 1905, the first reliable records show that there might have been 45 students in the boarding school. In 1922, the school adopted the program of the Public Schools of Alberta. That year, there were 72 students registered.²¹ Soon after that date, urgent claims were made to the Department of Indian Affairs to build a larger school.

A Silver Jubilee

Although 26 years old, the school celebrated its 25th Anniversary on March 23, 1924. On that occasion, the sisters stated that during these 26 years, they had admitted 161 boys and 107 girls to the school. The size of this 1898 building at that time clearly indicated the crowded conditions of this mission, conditions soon to be totally improved.

A new building - New administration

In 1925, construction began on a new school to be located at Cardston, 18 kilometers south of Standoff, still within the territory of the Reserve. The three-storey red brick building was completed in April, 1926. On its opening, April 5, 1926, its name was changed from Immaculate Conception School to Saint Mary's School. At the Inauguration of St. Mary's School, on April 26, 1926, there was a solemn Mass celebrated by Father Albert Naessens with a homily by Bishop John Kidd, the new Bishop of Calgary. The Bishop told the congregation that nothing was to be neglected to develop the beautiful, the good in young children.²² In 1929, the sisters left Standoff after 33 years of teaching and moved to Cardston. They were to return to Standoff in 1969 for parish ministry.

Soon after the new school opened, the General Council of Nicolet requested the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to take ownership and administration of the school. This transfer was concluded in 1927. While the Grey Nuns continued the internal administration, they were now freed from all the political and financial struggles of external accountability and they could be more totally dedicated to their students.²³

The growth in student enrolment necessitated plans for expansion of the building. In 1948, four new classrooms and two large meeting rooms were added. Registrations reached 1,189 students in 1951. Later, in 1963, in order to add more spacious classrooms, as well as more offices and workshops, two more wings were added.

In 1958, all of Sister Alice Houle's 30 Grade 9 students successfully passed the Departmental Examinations. An unusual happening in many schools.

*Messages of congratulations for this success are received from Mr. Frame, regional inspector of Edmonton, Mr. Merkley, provincial inspector of schools and Mr. Brown, superintendent of the Reserve. This success ought to be our strongest argument to convince the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa as to the necessity of a High School on the Reserve.*²⁴

Throughout their stay at St. Mary's School, students learned more than the compulsory academic subjects. Prizes were won in large numbers in sewing, knitting and other crafts, whenever the School took part in expositions in Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, or other locations. Music was also important among students:

*One must add that, among all arts cultivated at the school, music shines with much honor. Many girls, in spite of their young age, play the piano with remarkable skill. A good number of boys and girls belong to the Rhythm Band, playing violins, mandolins, and other instruments. There is no feast where we don't have the distinct pleasure to hear and applaud selected pieces from these musicians...*²⁵

On April 1, 1969, as a result of a federal government policy, all employees at the school became civil servants, receiving their salaries directly from Ottawa. The following year, May, 1970, the superior of the school, Sister Cléopée Beaudoin, received a new title: Matron. She kept this position until she returned to her teaching position in 1976. In 1983, upon being appointed Provincial Secretary of the Grey Nuns Provincial Council in Edmonton, she resigned at St. Mary's. The March appointment

required her to leave for her new function on May 30, 1983.

In February, 1973, ten years before leaving Cardston, Sister Beaudoin had completed the translation in English of a Blackfoot Grammar written in French by Father Jules Levern. This work was part of a course she was taking at the University of Saskatchewan: *History of Indian Education*.

Natives' wish to educate their own

The level of education now reached by many Native people had gradually increased their ability to provide their own system of education for the children of their nation. By September, 1976, most sisters teaching at St. Mary's had terminated their employment to make room for more Blood Native teachers. Some non-Native lay teachers remained until 1998. Upon leaving Cardston, in 1974, Sister Lucille Gamache travelled to Standoff where she taught at the Sarpaye School (Blood Indian Elementary) until 1983.

In August, 1974, sisters employed at the school, were advised that they could no longer reside within the school. They rented a residence nearby which they occupied from September, 1974 to July, 1983.

Most of the sisters employed as child care workers gradually left the school within that same period. The last to leave were Sisters Madeleine Therrien and Laurette Thibert. A lovely farewell evening was held on June 25, 1975 to reminisce and thank them for their dedication.

This ended a glorious page of Grey Nun history on the Blood Reserve. Another page had just opened in Religious Education in Standoff.

Religious Education

Backtracking a few years, in February, 1969, we note that Sister Jeannine Coulombe had several meetings with Bishop Paul O'Byrne of Calgary and Father Eugene Cooney, who was respon-

sible for religious education for the diocese of Calgary. The purpose was to develop a program to meet the religious needs of people of the Blood Nation. Final plans were agreed upon on May 21, 1969, at a meeting in Calgary with Father Cooney, members of the Edmonton Grey Nuns Provincial Council and Sister Jeannine Coulombe.

Around that time, the **Chroniques** included a most interesting comment. Quoting from the entry dated Tuesday, March 4, 1969:

*Tonight, we are pleased to welcome for dinner, the Anglican minister, Reverend Allan McQuaig along with Father Denis Chatain and Philip Aberdeen. Following dinner, dialogue began on the possibility of a project in catechetics, organized jointly by Catholics and Anglicans.*²⁶

This was a major step in ecumenical dialogue as compared to the silence and tensions of earlier years. This event spoke loudly in favor of the parties involved and opened the door to respond effectively to Vatican II recommendations.

When the project of religious education was about to begin, Sister Dora Durand arrived to work with Sister Jeannine Coulombe. A series of meetings, matched by the hard work of these two Grey Nuns, resulted in a well-planned program. In July, 1970, one of the planners wrote:

*The experiments that we have attempted in the past months were centered on establishing relationships which helped us to gain a better knowledge of the people with whom we are living. Home and hospital visitations, social activities, sacramental initiation, adult discussion groups, liturgy preparation, Live-Ins, and family celebrations have opened our minds to many possibilities of involvement for the people in the formation of a program of religious education.*²⁷

The three-part report of the team clearly emphasized the need for *reciprocal acceptance* if success is sought in religious education as in any other ministry or service. Through their dedication, the two sisters succeeded in fostering a small evangelical nucleus where much healing occurred.

*Guided by... principles of action, we have tried to understand the people with whom we are working. Our activities have therefore been centered on establishing relationships with people and meeting with them on a very human level. Consequently home visiting has taken a major part of our time. By now, all areas of the Reserve have been covered by either one of us...Through dialogue, we have urged many parents to teach the basics of their beliefs to their children, be it only by answering their simple questions about God, Jesus, prayer, etc...*²⁸

Sisters Jeannine Coulombe and Dora Durand remained in their ministry six and 10 years respectively. The benefits of their presence at Standoff is still felt after 30 years, and hopefully will continue beyond that time. The other sisters who followed in their footsteps have, likewise, and according to their personal gifts, brought the presence of God with respect and love to the people of the Reserve. Altogether, there have been Grey Nuns at Standoff for a total of 62 years.

Happy memories

Over the span of a century, the sisters have registered a number of remarkable events in the Blood community which had adopted them so warmly. They lived intensely each of these events with *their people*. The birth of the Blackfoot Radio, CJOC, in 1969, the Indian News Media in 1970, the Red Crow Development Housing Project, Kanai, in 1971, along with the opening of the Bank of Nova Scotia on the Reserve, the opening of the magnificent *Shot on Both Sides Building* in 1973, the initiation of Peter Lougheed, Premier of Alberta to the title of *Chief Copeared Wolf* on July 20, 1974. All are part of a litany of successes and happy memories.

Other memorable events were added to a beautiful mural of souvenirs: the celebration with the Daughters of Jesus when they marked the 70th Anniversary of their arrival at Pincher Creek, on October 27, 1974; the 75th Anniversary of the arrival of the

Sisters of Providence on the Blackfoot Reserve on December 27, 1974; the thrilling participation of the Grey Nuns as French-speaking hostesses at the Winter Games in Calgary, in February, 1975; the celebration of St. Mary's School's 50th Anniversary, in 1976; the honor awarded to David Suzuki, renowned biologist and broadcaster, named as Honorary Chief, at the 100th anniversary of Treaty #7 in 1977. The visit of Prince Charles on July 7, 1977 left pleasant memories, especially with the sisters and Oblates who were given special places at the organized tour. It was noted that the Prince jokingly asked Father Antonio Duhaime if he would let an Anglican enter his chapel.²⁹

At the Treaty #7 Centennial on June 12, 1977, a meaningful religious celebration took place at which a bronze plaque fixed to the Grotto was unveiled by Bishop Paul O'Byrne and Chief Shot on Both Sides after the Liturgy of the Word, during the Eucharistic Celebration. The plaque read:

Dedication of the Oblate Fathers and Brothers who ministered to the Blood Tribe since 1842 and the Grey Nuns for their devoted work in Hospitals, Schools and Community since 1893.

Unveiled by Bishop Paul O'Byrne (SPOHTSIITOPI) and Head Chief Jim Shot on Both Sides on the occasion of the Centennial of Treaty No. 7. Feast of Corpus Christi, June 12, 1977.³⁰

The names of all Grey Nuns, priests and Brothers, who worked on the Blood Reserve were written on panels fixed at the entrance wall of the Immaculate Conception church.

The celebration was attended by Sister Germaine Hétu, Provincial Superior, Sister Rose-Anne Gauvin, Provincial Councillor and many sisters who had worked on the Blood Reserve.

A great honor was bestowed upon Sisters Cléophee Beaudoin and Lucille Gamache when Annie Bare Shin Bones gave them Indian names, on September 27, 1998. Sister Beaudoin's name was NA'TOKIAYAKI, which means *Holy Bear Woman*, while

Sister Gamache's name was KSIKKAWA' TA ANNAKI, which means *White Shield Woman*. Undoubtedly, many more joyful events were recorded in the hearts of missionaries and Natives over the years.

A Glorious Centennial

The Grey Nuns were especially honored in 1993 when the Natives organized a splendid feast to mark the 100th anniversary of their arrival on the Reserve. This particular event was filled with enthusiasm and pride. The Blood Natives and the Grey Nuns were as one in this celebration of enduring friendship.

The Grey Nuns General Council delegated Sister Jacqueline Lacroix, Provincial Assistant of Nicolet to represent them and the Grey Nuns Province of Nicolet, who founded the mission, were represented by Sister Alice Rivard at the festivities. Saint Albert Provincial Council was represented by the Provincial Superior, Sister Faye Wylie, her assistant, Sister Thérèse Pelletier and about 10 other sisters from Edmonton.

Leaving the Blood Reserve

At a Provincial Congress of the Grey Nuns held in Edmonton, Sister Marcia Wiley, Provincial Superior, announced, on April 19, 1998, the imminent closure of our 105 year-old mission of Stand-off, due to the shortage of sisters.

When the news reached the Reserve, the people were devastated at the prospect of losing their sisters. Two months later, a petition was received by Sister Wiley requesting reconsideration of the decision. The people had easily collected 966 signatures in a short time. Since the decision could not be rescinded, the two sisters were to leave in early October.

The Grey Nuns' ministry at Standoff was marked by exceptional dedication throughout more than a century. This dedication resulted in enduring friendship between sisters and students, co-workers, neighbors and people of the Blood Reserve. The sis-

ters were well known and respected. It was not surprising to see tears in many eyes when the time came for final farewells.

October 2, 1998 was the day of departure. The last two sisters engaged in ministry on the Blood Reserve were Sisters Cléopée Beaudoin and Lucille Gamache. Long after leaving Standoff, both know their hearts are still in Cardston and Standoff with the Blood people.

Two hundred and four³¹ Grey Nuns served in that Reserve during 105 years. A cumulated total of 1,118 years of ministry are written in a glorious past and will be present in the enduring history of both the Blood Reserve Natives and the Grey Nuns.

Upon leaving the Reserve, the Grey Nuns donated to the Diocese of Calgary the mobile home they had purchased from the Kanai Industries 14 years earlier. It will be used for pastoral activities on the Reserve and as the pastor's residence.

NOTES: Chapter 9

- 1 Annette Potvin, s.g.m., **The Sundance Liturgy of the Blackfoot Nation**, Master of Arts Thesis, University of Ottawa, 1966, p. 3, GNRC Arch.
- 2 **Correspondance**, MMY Arch.
- 3 **Standoff Historique**, doc. #5, GNRC Arch.
- 4 René, Sister M.-Carmen, **Soeurs Grises Nicolétaines**, Trois-Rivières, Editions du Bien Public, 1949, p. 167.
- 5 In 1840, three sisters left the Montréal original Grey Nuns mother house to found in Saint Hyacinthe, the Sisters of Charity of the Hôtel-Dieu of Saint-Hyacinthe, an autonomous branch.
- 6 René, **Op. Cit.**, p. 168.
- 7 René, **Op. Cit.**, p. 174. Details of the trip are largely taken from the same source.
- 8 In his joy of having obtained more missionaries, Father Lacombe called them *his princesses*.
- 9 **Letter**, July 11, 1893, Nic. Arch.
- 10 René, **Op. Cit.**, p. 178.

- 11 From other sources, we find 200.
- 12 **Cardston Chroniques**, 1893-1941, p. 3., Nic. Arch.
- 13 René, O. Cit., p. 195.
- 14 **Historique de l'Hôpital de Cardston**, unsigned document, 1979, GNRC Arch.
- 15 **Letter**: Sister Odélia Lamontagne, superior, to Mother Rose Vincent, Provincial Superior, April 8, 1952, MMY Arch.
- 16 **Historique**, L049, p. 5, MMY Arch.
- 17 **Cardston Chroniques**, 1942-1954, p. 191, GNRC Arch.
- 18 **Chroniques**, Op. Cit., 1893-1942, p. 1.
- 19 Beaudoin, Sister Cléopée, **Pamphlet for Centennial Celebration**, 1993, GNRC Arch.
- 20 Appointed Bishop Coadjutor of Saint Albert on May 10, 1897. He became Bishop on June 2, 1902, at the death of Bishop Vital Grandin.
- 21 Beauchamp, Adélard, O.M.I., **Les Soeurs Grises chez les "Gens du Sang" à l'Ecole Ste-Marie**, Manuscript, 1946, GNRC Arch.
- 22 **Chroniques**, Op. Cit., 1897-1941, pp. 250-251.
- 23 **Historique**, L059, p. 2, MMY Arch.
- 24 **Chroniques**, 1943-1959, August 15, 1958, no page number indicated.
- 25 Beauchamp, Adélard, O.M.I., **L'Education**, manuscript, 1946, p. 45, GNRC Arch.
- 26 **Chroniques**, Cardston, 1960-1970, p. 171.
- 27 Coulombe, Sister Jeannine, **Operation-Incarnation, A Research in Religious Education among Blood Indians**, Standoff, July, 1970, mimeographed material, p. 31, GNRC Arch.
- 28 Coulombe, Op. Cit., Part III.
- 29 **Chroniques**, Op. Cit., pp. 88-89.
- 30 **Ibid.**, 1977, p. 85.
- 31 List on panel affixed at the back of Saint Mary's Church, Cardston.

CHAPTER TEN

1895 -

EDMONTON GENERAL HOSPITAL / GREY NUNS HOSPITAL

There were 1,600 people living in Fort Edmonton in 1894 when the Grey Nuns accepted the responsibility to build the first hospital in this location. Adding the population of surrounding areas, this number rose to 15,000 residents. Located 15 kilometers south of Saint Albert, Fort Edmonton was the site of a major centre of activity for the Hudson's Bay Company established there since 1795. The future capital of Alberta also enjoyed a recent link with Fort Calgary through the Canadian Pacific Railway, completed in 1891.

A Catholic church had been built in 1882 by Father Hippolyte Leduc, on a piece of land close to the Fort, purchased from the Hudson's Bay Company. The following year, Father Henri Grandin, nephew of Bishop Vital Grandin, became its first resident pastor. The original building was replaced by the present Saint Joachim church in 1898.

The Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJ), women religious from France, had been teaching at Fort Edmonton since 1886. Upon their arrival in the settlement, and while their building was being completed, they had been hosted by the Grey Nuns established in Saint Albert in 1863. They would now be close neighbors in Fort Edmonton.

Health Care in Edmonton

Health care at that time consisted of the availability of six physicians making home visits across the large populated area within and around Fort Edmonton. Since 1870, there was a small hospital built by the Grey Nuns at Saint Albert Mission. That is

where the physicians visited their patients who could be accommodated in this small frame building. These physicians were sure that the sisters would conscientiously report on their patients' progress, follow-up on medical prescriptions, and ensure a comforting presence to their patients at all times. Visits to Saint Albert necessitated a 15 kilometers horseback or horse and buggy ride from Edmonton, a very demanding and time-consuming activity for the physicians.

Why not move this facility to Fort Edmonton? The first such inspiration was soon followed by action. On April 25, 1894, the six physicians wrote a request to Bishop Vital Grandin:

We, the undersigned Medical Practitioners of the town of Edmonton do hereby agree that we will do all that is in our power to support a general hospital to be built by the Grey Nuns in the town of Edmonton; and that we will agree to support it to the exclusion of any other hospital, provided that it be built this year with accommodation in proportion to the size of the town, and that it be run as a general hospital under the management of the Sisters without a resident Doctor. (Signed: H.G. Wilson, P.L. Roy, J.D. Harrison, H.L. McInnis, J.H. Tofield, E.A. Braithwaite).¹

To this supplication, Bishop Grandin, so respectful of the sisters' autonomy, replied three days later, on April 28, 1894:

Although I have no direct authority upon the temporal administration of the Reverend Sisters of Charity, I must take your kind letter into serious consideration. I will write at once to the Reverend Mother General of the Sisters and urge her to authorize the establishment of Edmonton General Hospital and to procure the sisters required for that purpose. The proposed hospital must necessarily be something grand and a credit for Edmonton: large building, stone foundation, etc. The new hospital ought to be at a short distance of the R.C. [Roman Catholic] church and have a supply of good water. A whole block also is required.²

Bishop Grandin's response leaves no doubt as to his whole-hearted support of the physicians' request. Although he was well aware of the difficulties experienced at the Calgary Holy Cross Hospital, the firm commitment of the six Edmonton physicians reassured him of their lasting loyalty. He sent their letter to Mother Julie Deschamps, Superior General, and assured her that he was giving his full support to the project.

The hospital

There was no hesitation at the General Council meeting of October 8, 1894 in granting the requested approval.³ Mother Deschamps instructed Sister Delphine Brassard, superior of Youville Convent in Saint Albert, to purchase a piece of land. After searching for a suitable site, she opted for a visit to C.C. Chipman, manager of the Hudson's Bay Company and bought the site for the Edmonton General Hospital for \$2,300.00 on February 1, 1895⁴.

Construction plans were contracted with I. A. Sénécal from Saint Boniface. His past experience as architect with Saint Boniface Hospital and Holy Cross Hospital in Calgary made him the perfect choice. Under Sister Brassard's competent supervision, construction began in the Spring of 1895.

Perhaps, the medical community in Edmonton was already aware of the significance of the year 1895 for health care. Let us point out a few major happenings: William Roentgen discovered X-Ray that year in Germany; Louis Pasteur, who invented pasteurization died in France that year; also in France, Joseph Lister developed the principles of antisepsis in the course of the same year; Pierre and Marie Curie were just three years away from discovering radium, on December 26, 1898. One of the Edmonton General Hospital (EGH)'s first physicians, Dr E. A. Braithwaite had studied under Joseph Lister at King's College Hospital, in England.

The foundresses

Meanwhile, active planning was going on at Montréal's Grey Nuns headquarters. Mother Deschamps and her Council named four sisters for the proposed foundation. The superior, Sister Marie-Xavier (Marguerite Dunn), born in St. John, Newfoundland⁵ on June 10, 1837, moved to Saint Boniface, in September, 1853, to minister with the Grey Nuns in the education of the youth, she decided to join the Congregation the following year and made her profession in 1856. Her five years experience at Saint Boniface Hospital prepared her well for the field of health care in which, at 58, she was to become a courageous pioneer. Although her stay at the EGH lasted only two years, she remains in history as the caring, competent and far-sighted foundress and first superior of this new institution. She became very ill in July, 1898, in the mission of Lestock, Saskatchewan, a mission she was called to found in 1897. She was admitted to the Holy Cross Hospital in Calgary where she died of a cerebro-vascular accident on October 18, 1898, at the age of 61. Her funeral was celebrated by Father Joachim Allard, Vicar General to Archbishop Adélarde Langevin of Saint Boniface, present in the sanctuary with Father Albert Lacombe. Sister Marie-Xavier's remains were buried in Calgary, but on September 25, 1916, 18 years after her death, Sister Fafard (Mathilda Toupin) brought her back for burial in the Grey Nuns' plot in Saint Albert.⁶

The other foundresses were: Sisters Coursol (Emma Labelle), Gosselin (Arthemise Bergeron) and Euphémie Sanders. These three young sisters left Montréal shortly after their profession which occurred on July 5, 1895 for Sister Gosselin and November 27 for the two others.

Sisters Marie-Xavier and Gosselin were the first to arrive in Edmonton. Late in the evening of July 28, 1895, they were welcomed with kindness by Fathers Léon Fouquet and Alphonse Lemarchand. Dinner was served to the travellers and conversation continued about their immediate plans. One of the priests went to the convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus to

request one night's accommodation for the two Grey Nuns and they had a good night of rest at their new neighbors' convent. The following morning, Sister Delphine Brassard sent a carriage from Saint Albert, inviting the sisters to come and live at Youville Convent. They accepted gratefully. Soon they found out that travelling the 15 kilometers every day to see to the progress of the building and obtain furnishings and equipment, was becoming very tiring and time consuming. Aware of this difficulty, Father Fouquet had his shack transported to the hospital grounds for use by the sisters. It was a one-room shed of 4 by 4.5 meters, containing a stove, two field beds and two shaky chairs. This was really generous on the part of Father Fouquet, since he had to beg elsewhere for his own accommodation. Visiting them after three weeks, Father Lacombe was broken-hearted to see his *princesses*⁷ so poorly lodged. He arranged for them to have a place at the Oblate Mission of Saint Joachim.

By November 1, there were four rooms finished on the third floor of the hospital and the sisters decided to move there after profusely thanking their generous hosts of the last six to eight weeks. Seeing that a few rooms were ready, thanks to his own diligence, the architect requested space and meals for himself in another area of the building. This was accepted by the sisters in gratitude for his efficient service.

The two sisters who were receiving their orientation in Saint Boniface: Sisters Coursol for the kitchen and Sanders for nursing care, arrived in Edmonton on November 5, 1895. It is reported that Sister Coursol was very new to kitchen work, but nothing was beyond her willingness to try her best. Baking bread was one task that she tried valiantly. Placing a huge dish on the table to knead the dough, she discovered that, in order to reach the bottom, she would have to climb onto a coffer. She thought that she had solved the problem until an unexpected visitor, Father Michel Mérier arrived. Was that almost enough to make her lose her balance? No. She stayed on her feet. The kind visitor suggested that perhaps she could place the dish on the coffer and her feet on the floor! Soon after that event, she received a kneading-

trough of a size proportioned to her own dimensions! She had no difficulty guessing who the donor was.⁸

First Mass

By Sunday, November 17, 1895, the chapel was completed to the delight of all. The first Mass was celebrated by Bishop Vital Grandin and his Grand Vicar, Father Hippolyte Leduc. Consecrated hosts were left in the tabernacle, resulting in tears of consolation and joy among the sisters. That morning, all food for breakfast was brought in by two generous ladies: Eliza Helen Roy and A.C. Boyer. This was a sample of a long series of generosityes toward the sisters and the hospital.

Among these kind benefactors, there was Henry McKenney who gave a lovely lamp for the sanctuary, complete with a supply of lamp oil; Dan McNamara who supplied all furnishings for a room on the women's floor; the Oblates who gave loads of food as well as 35 kilograms of wool to make mattresses; the sisters from Saint Albert convent who supplied the food needed for their first months and Sister Marguerite Devins who sent them many pieces of clothing from Montréal, for themselves, their *future* patients and other people in need. From the mother house,

*about fifty boxes were sent on August 31, 1895 containing all items needed to open a hospital. Nothing is missing, even little things like dish-mops, feather-brooms, pot-holders. Also included were linen, liturgy items, a statue of the Sacred Heart and one of the Blessed Virgin.*⁹

The sisters often repeated the refrain dear to daughters of Marguerite d'Youville: *Always close to lacking everything, we never lack at least of the essential.*

On November 18, 1895, Father Leduc went with the sisters to visit the Mayor, Herbert Charles Wilson. After words of encouragement and the promise of his support, the Mayor gave them a cheque of \$25.00. Meanwhile, the work on the building continued with surprising rapidity.

Blessing of the hospital

By December 15, 1895, the hospital was ready for the blessing ceremony by Archbishop Adélard Langevin of Saint Boniface. Also present were: Bishop Vital Grandin of Saint Albert, Bishop Emile Grouard, Apostolic Vicar of Athabasca, Fathers Léon Fouquet, Albert Lacombe, Hippolyte Leduc, Alphonse Lemarchand, Michel Méreer, and Christophe Tissier, four sisters of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, seven Grey Nuns from Saint Albert and several supporters from Edmonton.

More sisters - and first patient

On the evening of this memorable day, the sisters had retired early, comforted by the good wishes received on that day and spiritually uplifted by the celebration of the Mass. In what seemed to be the middle of the night, although only around 2300 hours, Sister Gosselin became aware of prolonged knocking at the door. Looking through a window, she could not believe the sight: three Grey Nuns standing at the door.

Sisters, she cried, we were not expecting you this evening. Open just the same, came the reply. The sisters came down to open wide the door, their arms and their heart: it is so good to see you after such a long wait.¹⁰

The three newcomers were Sisters Desmarais, (Priscille Forest) Ste-Dosithée (R.D.Mary Arseneault) and St-Léon (Sophonie Sansoucy). They were soon followed by the first patient, Mr. S. Vankonghuet who was admitted by Dr. E. A. Braithwaite, on December 17, 1895. By the end of December, 31 patients had been cared for in the hospital which was not totally completed. On December 19, the editors of the local newspaper the **Edmonton Bulletin**, toured the hospital, accompanied by three of the physicians: Drs H.G. Wilson, J.D. Harrison and E.A. Braithwaite, a visit which resulted in a lovely and enthusiastic article in this weekly newspaper a few days later. After giving great and lengthy details of the size, color and divisions of the building,

the author concluded:

*The General Hospital of Edmonton is actually the largest, most lovely and most expensive building of Edmonton. It is an honor for the town and for the devoted sisters who have undertaken this philanthropic work. With its sincere congratulations, the Bulletin offers its best wishes of prosperity...*¹¹

This was a three-storey, red brick hospital built for a 35-bed capacity. It was the pride of the city, especially the physicians. Unfortunately, on the day of the visit, it was still mostly unfurnished as a result of delays in delivery.

A group of women came together to form the *Hospital Aid Society* to assist the hospital in raising greatly needed funds. In the December 29 **Edmonton Bulletin**, the sisters thanked all those who had contributed to raising \$322.75 at an evening event organized by the *Hospital Aid Society*. The Society was active for approximately 10 years, until the membership decreased significantly and they disbanded. Later, in 1949, another *Ladies Auxiliary* organization emerged. They were again a group of committed women who greatly assisted the hospital in fund raising activities. They also hosted social events for the School of Nursing. The last president, Edith Pettigrew, assisted the hospital in yet another transformation. In late 1980s, this group became the *Voluntary Organization*.

New Year's Greetings

The first New Year's Day surprised the sisters when all parishioners of Saint Joachim came to present their greetings and to sign a guest book after Mass. The chronicler adds that this custom continued. It was also a custom for the physicians to come and present their greetings. Some 40 years later, a new sister who had not yet learned English decided that she would not attend the greeting event on her first year. A mischievous friend told her:

Don't worry. It is very simple. When a physician says Happy New Year, Sister, you just answer with a smile: Never mind,

*Doctor! This story, passed on for generations, said nothing about the continuing friendship of these two sisters!*¹²

Hospital officially opened

Several parts of the hospital had been in use since mid-November, 1895, but the arrival of some furniture was delayed, including beds. Regrettably, the whole hospital could not be put to use soon enough for the wishes of the physicians, patients and sisters. An announcement appeared in the **Bulletin** on January 2, 1896 to inform people that the hospital would fully open on February 5, 1896. The article added that Drs. Wilson and McInnis would be charged with the admission of patients during this month.¹³ A rotating duty between physicians consisted in treating patients who could not pay, each taking turn for one month. This practice was common in other hospitals administered by the Grey Nuns.

In February, Father V.F. Desmarais, uncle of Sister Desmarais (Priscille Forest) sent the sisters a lovely carriage, complete with fur blankets, from Saint Louis, Québec; this was a highly appreciated gift this cold winter. Again in a vein of generosity, the *Hospital Aid Society* organized a Charity Ball for the hospital. Unfortunately, the income never reached the sisters' empty hands! Upon hearing that a ball had been held, Bishop Grandin requested the superior not to accept money earned through this unapproved activity. Balls were forbidden by the Church in those years. The ladies assured the superior that the \$300.00 raised would be used to help poor families.

Administrative Issues

Peace is never a long-lasting phenomenon! A regrettable chain of events led to open conflict between some of the physicians and the sisters. Although the physicians' request to have the Grey Nuns build and administer a hospital in Edmonton had seemed very clear and sincere, and they were well informed of the

administrative practices of the sisters, especially concerning the tradition of caring for the poor, things went sour in late 1899. Almost a century later, a 1994 doctoral dissertation by Dr. Pauline Paul documents the problem well as noted:

The most significant administrative issue of the period began in 1899 when a conflict arose between the physicians and the Grey Nuns. However, analysis of the data related to the case demonstrates that part of its seeds could be found in the initial regulations that had been established in 1896. In January of that year, the hospital's admitting policies had been printed in the Edmonton Bulletin.¹⁴

Be it well understood that the hospital has nothing to do with paying the medical men; all patients who have not the means of paying a Doctor, will be under the care of the Physician of the month; all who pay can have any Doctor they may choose[...] To them [the Grey Nuns] alone belongs the right to determine the different offices to be filled by the Sisters and employees, to engage the necessary help and to watch over the perfect running of the Hospital. The Hospital is open to all patients without distinction of belief, religion or nationality.¹⁵

The rule had thus been clearly set. However, on January 30, 1899, it was reported in the **Edmonton Bulletin** that Doctors Wilson, Harrison, Braithwaite and McInnis had resigned from the EGH. The same day, the **Edmonton Bulletin** announced that a committee had been established to consider the creation of a civic hospital and that population support would be sought.¹⁶ On February 2, 1899, the Grey Nuns published in the same newspaper that:

The fact is that the medical directors have resigned the obligations which they had voluntarily and kindly taken upon themselves to attend pauper patients for the space of a month alternatively. Such being the case, the hospital authorities will see that pauper patients are not neglected, but rather received and cared for in the hospital as before; at

*least as long as the Sisters of Charity have the means to do so.*¹⁷

A meeting was held on February 2, 1899, at the house of Reverend H. A. Gray, in which the town council approved the establishment of the Edmonton Public Hospital (EPH)¹⁸ as a non-sectarian institution. EGH was thus left with two of the original physicians, plus two more who had joined the staff in 1896: Dr. Philippe Roy and Dr. Thomas Whitelaw. It is important, without belaboring the issue, to note the religious and racial overtones of the conflict. There had been countless articles in the **Edmonton Bulletin** and **l'Ouest Canadien** concerning this major issue, including responses from the Grey Nuns and a superb article by Father Hippolyte Leduc.

At that time, the town council withdrew its customary per diem grant to the hospital and its usual tax exemption. It also began a long drawn out series of complaints regarding the disposal of waste, drainage and cesspool. Could one be led to believe that a sudden change of heart from the town council was coincidental and not related to the on-going sectarian conflict?

In the midst of so many controversies, the sisters were always comforted by the sincere support of a large number of citizens from the town of Edmonton. Their faith in the power of Divine Providence was unfaltering; their prayer was unceasing. During a visit by Mother Praxède Filiatrault in the spring of 1901, and upon her pious inspiration, the sisters made a commitment, on April 12, 1901 to renew their fervor and their prayer in order to obtain a cessation of these difficulties.

*Indeed, faith was almost all what they could count on. Ironically, it took a smallpox epidemic to bring back the sisters into the "good book" of the town council.*¹⁹

In the winter of 1901, a smallpox epidemic began to spread among the residents of Edmonton and surrounding areas. One case was found at the EGH and the hospital was placed under quarantine. The sisters informed the public through the **Edmonton Bulletin** that they would not admit suspected small-

pox cases, but they would willingly and without charge care for these patients if a proper place was organized for them. Welcoming this message, the municipalities of Edmonton and Strathcona rented a three-storey building from the Hudson's Bay Company, made some hasty repairs and accepted the offer of the Grey Nuns to give free care to the isolated patients. Likewise, Dr. Philippe Roy offered his services for a \$20.00 daily fee. Four Grey Nuns entered the temporary Civic Hospital on February 21, 1901 and remained in continuous service until May 20, 1901. During that time, Father Hippolyte Leduc also remained under quarantine and was a great help to the sisters.²⁰

The Town Council recognized the sisters' generosity and dedication in a letter of profound gratitude and a cheque of \$100.00.²¹ In addition, they invited the Grey Nuns to take charge of a hospital for patients in isolation which they planned to build in the near future. The General Council did not approve the request and the Isolation Hospital, built with taxpayers money in 1905 was staffed by civil servants, employed by the town.

The sisters were delighted to have a respite from their worries when they welcomed the Sisters of Miséricorde who arrived on May 29, 1900, to begin a Maternity Hospital in Edmonton. Their hospital was built a short distance from the EGH. In 1902, the Filles de Jésus, the Sister Servants of Mary Immaculate and the Sisters of Providence of Montréal, were also welcomed with joy. The two Sisters of Providence stayed with the Grey Nuns several weeks while they were awaiting the return of good travelling weather and road conditions. During that time, they graciously helped with the work in the hospital and became acclimatized to the West.²²

Growth and achievements

Peace returned to the hospital situation, to the undaunted Grey Nuns and their supporters. Life took on a new focus when, in 1903, tens of thousands of immigrants of every race, color and creed, attracted by advertisements, flocked into Western Canada.

Edmonton received a large number of them and it soon became evident that the EGH was too small to respond to the health care needs of this growing population. Thus ensued a series of expansions to the 35-bed hospital of 1895. A 1907 building was soon followed by another addition in 1911. Of special note was the installation of a telephone inside the hospital on June 1, 1911, 16 years after its foundation.²³

On May 18, 1911 Sister Georgianna Rousseau died following several months of severe suffering. Her funeral and burial occurred in Saint Albert. On that occasion, Connelly McKinley offered transportation at no charge to the sisters who wished to go to Saint Albert for a final homage to their beloved companion. The Connelly McKinley Funeral Home continues its long history and relationship with the Grey Nuns. In fact, they have provided free funeral services for members of all religious communities in Edmonton since their beginnings in the early years of the twentieth century.²⁴

The **Chroniques** devoted significant space to a good friend, Bob, who died in June, 1913. He had served the sisters faithfully for 17 years, through all kinds of weather and road conditions. When old age and infirmities came, the sisters never thought of the possibility of letting him go. Instead, they cared for him with all the attention warranted by his age and in gratitude for the services he had given for so many years. Without elaborating too much on the sad event, one recalls here that a city officer came one morning, at the request of Sister Alphonsine Bissonnette, superior, to deliver four shots into Bob's head. In seconds, the faithful horse had died. The evening issue of the **Edmonton Bulletin** had a special article on Bob, bringing out, at great length, all his qualities and faithful services.²⁵

When the rumbling of World War I (WWI) became a reality, it touched everyone in the province, but the sisters continued with yet another expansion plan, a construction that began in 1913 and raised the capacity of the hospital to 100 beds.²⁶ The hospital grew, not only in size, but in efficiency and popularity during WWI. In 1916, with the hospital *becoming of age*, the sis-

ters reflected on its tumultuous first 21 years. Throughout these waves of acceptance, rejection and acceptance by the population, it was encouraging to realize that 18,506 patients had been cared for, many of whom were also supported in their desire to return to God.

Edmonton hosted an International Medical Convention in 1916. On that occasion, 15 physicians, from other parts of the world, came to tour the EGH. Upon leaving, they wrote that the EGH was one of the best in the Dominion.²⁷ After a laborious beginning, the EGH reached an enviable status within Canada: later achievements were worthy of the same kind of recognition.

WWI, in spite of all its terror, brought some benefits to the hospital. Soldiers were admitted in large numbers in preparation for travel overseas and later, upon their return for treatments or convalescence. At certain periods, there were 170 patients in the 100-bed facility.²⁸ This increase of patients proved beneficial to the hospital, as the federal government was prompt in paying the bills. After 1916, a special camp was set up in Calgary to receive returning soldiers. This service was therefore no longer required of other institutions in the province.

When the Spanish influenza outbreak began in 1918, the sisters cared for a large number of those affected by this frightening disease. By October of that year, the hospital had treated 192 patients with this disease, including 10 who succumbed to it.

Once the war and the epidemics were over, the sisters needed some kind of healthy distraction. One was provided on August 1, 1926:

Today, a comical incident occurred in our garden, but with some damage to our fence. Five elephants escaped from the circus and came to taste our cabbages. Fortunately, the alarm was given and those responsible for the circus came to claim the runaways and pay the damages.²⁹

The hospital's financial situation, along with that of the country and the world, has often showed signs of hope and despair alternatively. The post WWI period of prosperity allowed a number of improvements in programs and equipment at the EGH.

But, no one was prepared for the impact of the October 29, 1929 crash of the stock market on Wall Street. With that, also came the dawning of a severe depression. The hospital was in dire need of money for repairs in several areas.

The financial situation is trying everywhere... The future of the hospital worries us. However, like our holy Foundress, we place our trust in Divine Providence.

To make matters worse, in August, 1931, the Government condemned the third and fourth floors of the original building... the floors were declared insufficiently fireproof.³⁰

EGH cared for tuberculosis patients from 1936 to 1952 in a separate area of the building. A surprising turn of events occurred on May 26, 1938 when Inspector M. Moore visited the hospital and paid special attention to the floors condemned in 1931. Three days later, the Government approved re-opening the areas and requested that arrangements be made for the admission of 25 more tuberculosis patients. In all this turmoil, the chronicler simply registered the event as providential.³¹

When the epidemic of poliomyelitis arrived in Edmonton, patients were initially treated at the Royal Alexandra Hospital³² during the acute stage. Subsequently, they were transferred to the General for several months of further treatments. This occurred from 1952 to 1957. A cough machine was generously donated to the Hospital Administrator, Sister Bernadette Bézaire, by Jim Hope, a friend of the hospital who had married a 1931 EGH graduate, Lillian Lund. This machine was the first such piece of equipment on the market during the polio crisis. This very substantial gift was valued at \$450.00.

The creation of the University of Alberta in 1906 soon contributed to raising standards in hospitals while facilitating further education of personnel. In 1924, the EGH received its first accreditation and was approved for medical education. The first medical intern was admitted that same year. A few years later, in 1935, Sister Marie de l'Eucharistie (Blondine Clément), superior, announced that the hospital was becoming affiliated with the University of Alberta for medical education.³³

A new laboratory department opened on December 14, 1920 under the direction of Sister Nantel (Anna Beauchamp). On February 26, 1947, Dr. Samuel Hanson, Director of Laboratory Services received approval from the Canadian Medical Association for a School of Laboratory Technology.³⁴

Sister Nantel also supervised the inauguration of the X-Ray department on January 13, 1921. The first X-Ray taken was of the broken foot of Sister St-François-de-Sales (Zéphirine Beaulne).³⁵ An approved course for X-Ray technicians was organized in 1940, with the administrative support of Sister Marie Laforce. In 1951, Doctor Rupert Clare was appointed the first full-time radiologist.

A Medical Records Librarians School was approved for the EGH on October 18, 1954 and courses began on January 25, 1955 under the leadership of Sister Marie-Paule Rheault.

These technical programs were gradually transferred to the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) in the 1970s and 1980s.

By 1982, the hospital, built for 35 patients in 1895 had grown, with the increasing population, to a total bed capacity of 800. Always responsive to the needs of the people, the EGH continued to serve with care and compassion and remained faithful to its original philosophy recognizing the dignity of each individual.

Among the 15 superior/administrators who were actively involved with the progress of the hospital, a few of their achievements were retained in the **Chroniques**. One cannot ignore the merit of the foundress and first superior, Sister Marie-Xavier from 1895 to 1897, with all the early struggles of the EGH. She was followed by Sister Eugénie Letellier, who combined the responsibilities of the first Superior Vicar of the newly created Grey Nuns Saint Albert Province with that of administrator of the EGH until 1902.

From 1916 to 1921, one of the foundresses, Sister Bergeron (Arthémise Gosselin), was at the helm of the EGH. Her presence was a reminder of the heroism displayed in the early years of the hospital. Sister Bergeron's tenure coincided with part of WWI and the Spanish influenza, and included the re-location of the

Laboratory and X-Ray departments in a new wing, provision of space in that same wing for nursing students' living quarters, hiring of the first pathologist in the person of Dr. J.J. Ower, revision of the constitutions and by-laws of the medical staff, and a reduction of the debt of the hospital from \$108,000.00 to \$88,000.00 within a five-year period.

The 40th Anniversary was a special feast organized on May 21, 1935 under the leadership of Sister Marie-de-l'Eucharistie (Blandine Clément), who administered the hospital from 1932 to 1936. She also planned the admission of tuberculosis patients with Dr. George A. Davidson in June, 1936.

Sister Clarilda Fortin's two terms of office as superior/administrator from 1930 to 1932 and from 1936 to 1940, were marked with care of tuberculosis patients beginning in 1936, construction of a new wing at the hospital between August 18, 1939 and July 12, 1940, and the chaotic circumstances brought on by the onset of WWII.

Sister Margaret O'Grady, 1940-1946 had the distinct privilege of being a Charter Member of the new Catholic Hospital Conference of Alberta in 1943. She organized the admission and care of soldiers returning from the battlefields of WWII. On October 1, 1944, Sister O'Grady was received as Member of the American College of Hospital Administrators. The reception took place during a Convention at Cleveland, Ohio.

Sister Alice Herman, superior/administrator from 1946 to 1953 had recently completed her term in the same administrative position at the Calgary Holy Cross Hospital. Sister Herman initiated the first recorded recognition of long service for five employees; phased out the admission of tuberculosis patients; added an extension to the hospital increasing the bed capacity by 60 and had the new "B" wing blessed in July, 1953; participated in the creation of the Blue Cross hospitalization insurance which was approved by the Alberta Legislature in April, 1948; saw Year Two of the internship program approved; facilitated the formation of a union for employees of Catholic institutions, and congratulated the president of the EGH Advisory Committee, Milton

Martin, on the honor of being named a Chevalier of Saint Sylvester by Pope Pius XII in December, 1949 and on his 80th birthday in June, 1952. Sister Herman also was credited with hiring the first full-time radiologist, Dr. Rupert Clare, in June, 1951.

Her successor, Sister Bernadette Bézaire, from 1953 to 1955, finished the organization of the new wing, oversaw the care of polio patients during the epidemic; saw to the revision of the Medical Executive by-laws; began plans to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the hospital, and was elected president of the Catholic Hospital Conference of Alberta in 1954. In addition, she supported Dr. Rupert Clare in the organization of the Catholic Physicians Guild in 1954.

From 1955 to 1962, Sister Alice Gauthier led the celebration of the EGH 60th Anniversary in 1955, rejoiced when a lady gave birth to twins on October 15, 1958 and their third sibling 24 days later, making triplets. She welcomed Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip in July, 1959.

Sister Thérèse Chaloux, from 1962 to 1968 was present to grieve the death of Dr. Philippe Mousseau on December 17, 1962, to whom the hospital and physicians owed so much. Dr. Mousseau was Head of surgery for a number of years, his competence and dedication made him a role model for young and older physicians alike and earned him the esteem of many among Edmonton physicians. Sister Chaloux witnessed the inauguration of the Mousseau Memorial Lecture in November, 1963. She welcomed Cardinal Paul-Emile Léger for a visit in March, 1967; saw to the building of the School of Nursing which opened in 1968, and assisted in the decision and planning to pass the administration of the hospital to a lay administrator in 1968.

The Nursing Service Department had been administered by Grey Nuns until 1972, when Sister Aurore Marien moved to Saskatoon. She was replaced by Nicole Préfontaine whose title changed to *Vice-President, Nursing* 11 years later, in 1983. Nicole remained at the head of the department until 1987, just prior to the move of acute care to the Grey Nuns Hospital in Millwoods. Mary Pat Skene was the new Vice-President, Nursing from 1987

to 1990 when she became Administrator for the Grey Nuns Hospital. Mary Pat moved to Saskatoon as President of Saint Paul's Hospital in 1995 and in 1998, became executive director of the Saskatchewan Catholic Health Corporation.

A Volunteer Department was organized by Sister Fernande Michaud in 1975. Recruitment, orientation and recognition of services were an integral part of this vital source of new life within the hospital. When Sister Fernande Michaud was elected Provincial Treasurer in 1977, she was replaced as Director of the Volunteer Department by Sister Georgianna Michaud. In 1980, the Department continued under a lay coordinator, Trish Dawson and later, Kathy Tam.

Administration change

A trend becoming more prevalent in the 1960s was the increased complexities of hospital administration, accompanied by the need to seek lay personnel for top administrative posts in sisterhood hospitals. At the EGH, the creator of Canada Pension Plan, a well-known supporter of Grey Nuns hospitals in Western Canada, a man who fully respected the values and ethical principles espoused by Grey Nuns institutions, Gordon Pickering, was appointed the first lay Chief Executive Officer of the Edmonton General Hospital in August, 1968. His career at the General was marked by the healthy turn around of the EGH's fiscal situation. During his term of almost 19 years, he created services such as the Intensive Care Unit, followed by the Coronary Care Unit in the 1970s. Under his leadership, the new Youville Wing was designed and built specifically for its clinical purpose: Geriatric Assessment and Rehabilitation; it opened in 1982.

The Edmonton General Hospital has always been at the forefront of progress. It can rightly claim having been a first for several health care initiatives: the first in Alberta, and second in Canada to open a Diabetic and Metabolic Clinic in 1968 with Dr. Gordon Brown and Dr. Rod Eidem; the first Alberta Palliative Care Unit with Dr. Helen Hayes as first Director and a Geriatric

Assessment and Rehabilitation Program unique in North America with Dr. David Skelton as first Director. The latter three programs began operation in 1982, when the new Youville Wing opened.

Gordon Pickering retired in August, 1982 and was replaced by David Hart, formerly Executive Director of the Grey Nuns Saint Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon. The title for the position became *President* as in emerging corporate organizations. Upon David's appointment, active planning began for yet another expansion of the EGH, which had already 800 patients. These plans were mainly to replace outdated structures and improve clinical services. They included no increase in bed capacity. With financial backing from the Alberta Health Services Commission (AHS), plans were finalized and presented to AHS for final approval in February, 1984.

At the same time, the Metro Edmonton Hospitals Committee had produced a report to Government on hospital bed distribution in the city, indicating that no more new construction be approved in downtown Edmonton in view of the concentration of acute care hospitals in the area. This was undoubtedly a harsh blow for the whole EGH family! In compensation, a proposal was made by Honorable Dave Russell, Minister of Health, in March, 1984, for the Grey Nuns to leave the downtown site as it was and instead to accept the administration of a new hospital to be built in southeast Edmonton. The proposal was accepted and the name of this new hospital was approved as *Grey Nuns Hospital* (GNH).

The first patient to be admitted at the new GNH on May 5, 1988, was the President, David Hart, who was recovering from surgery.³⁶ All EGH acute care was moved to GNH. The EGH immediately proceeded to adapt and renovate the vacated areas to accommodate long term care residents. This Auxiliary Hospital type of care helped reduce lengthy waiting lists for long term care in Edmonton. Long term residents were moved to the new Youville Wing following the transfer of the Geriatric program to Glenrose Hospital in 1996. This was unquestionably a great loss to the pioneer EGH! David was also at the helm of EGH during

the year-long celebration of the hospital's 90th Anniversary in 1985-86 with the theme: *Service, our Tradition, our Future*.

When a new President was recruited, in 1991, the choice was Gerry Hiebert, formerly President of the Misericordia Hospital. His was the task of forming a partnership of the three Catholic hospitals in Edmonton: the Edmonton General Hospital, the Grey Nuns Hospital and the Misericordia Hospital in 1992. Thus was created the Caritas Health Group, an organization which aimed at strengthening the Catholic identity in the three institutions, providing a more powerful voice to each of the three parties and becoming more fiscally efficient.

Succeeding Gerry was Dr. Doug Perry from 1996 to 1999. Doug was instrumental in planning the 100th Anniversary of EGH in 1995-96. The theme: *Celebrating a Century of Compassionate Caring* called for a joint celebration of the whole Caritas family. Dr. Perry was succeeded by Carl Roy in May, 1999. His leadership team include Bev Rachwalski, administrator of Grey Nuns Hospital, Shelly Murphy, administrator of Misericordia Hospital and Ken Pickard, administrator of the General site, along with his responsibility for Youville Home.

The 1990s were critical times for the three consecutive Presidents, being the time of major downsizing and budget cuts in health care. The casualties in personnel were enormous and the quality of patient care decreased considerably throughout the province. The future will tell whether there was a recovery of a healthier morale.

Doctor Rupert Clare was the first Medical Director of EGH in 1960 and remained in that position until his retirement in 1974. He was succeeded by Doctor John Lipinski, whose title, in 1982, became Vice-President, Medical.

The Foundation

Beginning in the early '80s, government subsidies to hospitals were decreasing substantially, making it essential to raise other funds in order to maintain an acceptable level of service to

patients. This was the time of foundations development in hospitals. The EGH was no exception. In 1985, Sandra Sereda, Director of Development Office began establishing the legal and corporate guidelines for a Foundation. She remained Acting Executive Director of the Foundation until 1990 when Gordon Agopsowicz was hired. The first Board chair was the Edmonton lawyer and friend of the General Hospital, Louis Desrochers from 1985 until 1995.

With the formation of Caritas Health Group, amalgamation of the Misericordia Hospital Foundation with that of the Edmonton General (Grey Nuns) Hospital Foundation began to develop. Since 1998, the Board chair of the amalgamated Foundation has been Peter D. Watson and the Executive Director, Marcus Schwabe.

Major fund raising events of the Foundation are: Everyone's A Winner Golf Tournament, Longest Day Of Golf (LDOG) golf extravaganza, Home lottery, Staff Lottery, Jasper Banff Relay, plus numerous smaller fundraising events throughout the year.

Beneficiaries of the Foundation are various programs of the three Caritas hospitals: Palliative Care Program, Health Resources Centre, Women's Health and Wellness Initiatives and Emergency Department at the Grey Nuns Hospital; Wound Care Centre, C.O.M.P.R.U Unit³⁷ and Cardiac Care at the Misericordia Hospital, and Continuing Care and Endowment Fund at the General Site.

Pastoral Care

Sister Alice Romanchuk was credited with the founding of a new department. She resigned her position of assistant director of Nursing Service and assumed her new position of Coordinator of Pastoral Care on Monday, March 8, 1976.³⁸ For Edmonton General Hospital, religious services were a long-standing tradition, as in all Grey Nun hospitals. The EGH always had a resident priest for sacramental services. At the EGH, the last full-time priest chaplain kept a remarkable tenure of service, Father John

Nowakowski who remained in that position for 25 years, from 1968 to 1993. Father John was replaced on a part-time basis by Oblate Father André Boyer. Until the 1960s, all nursing units were headed by a sister whose nursing supervision was accompanied with a responsibility for prayer, support of patients and families in their struggles with illnesses, and patients' advocacy, when needed.

There was, however a new approach prevalent in the 1970s. In contrast to patients' visiting by *sisters hostesses* and sacramental services by priests, Pastoral Care became a profession by the level of specialized education required of its practitioners and the carefully guided practice of chaplains.³⁹ For the chaplains, more emphasis was placed on knowing oneself and listening to the other, while devising with the patient a pastoral care plan, covering emotional and spiritual needs. These skills were to be acquired through education and practice in the areas of behavioral sciences, theology and ethics.

With the support of Gordon Pickering as Executive Director, Sister Romanchuk courageously began the major tasks of planning and organizing the new department, recruiting qualified people and informing nursing and medical staff of the new, enhanced role of Pastoral Care. With the help of several retired sisters, working on a part-time basis, she developed policies, gave a series of lectures on ethical subjects, such as life/death decisions, recruited more full-time qualified personnel; began sending sympathy cards to bereaved families, and successfully passed the first accreditation survey of Pastoral Care in 1979. Within this awesome agenda, Sister Romanchuk took a three-month Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) course in Springfield, Illinois in 1977; took courses and seminars in Ethics, Death and Dying and other related topics and kept herself informed and involved with the rapid progress of the emerging profession through her involvement with the Alberta Pastoral Care Association at the executive level.

In 1981, she moved to other less strenuous occupations and the following year was replaced by Sister Marcia Wiley. Sister

Wiley, also a nurse had been Head Nurse in a medical unit since 1973 and had recently taken a Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) course at the Grey Nuns' St. Vincent's Hospital in Toledo, Ohio. She is credited with having developed, in collaboration with her staff, a special pattern for monthly Memorial Services which began in April, 1983. These continue to this date, although with varying frequency. The number of patients dying at EGH had significantly increased with the opening of the Palliative Care Unit in 1982. These celebrations of life with the families of the deceased have inspired enormous support for Pastoral Care at EGH.

Sister Marcia Wiley left her position in 1983, and went to study in Ottawa. She was replaced by Sister Thérèse Castonguay in September, 1983. A nurse also, she had recently completed a CPE in Peterborough, Ontario.

With the support of the new President, David Hart and the Grey Nuns Corporation, Sister Castonguay recruited Reverend Hal Paulson as CPE supervisor in October, 1985. Thereafter, and until 1997, CPE programs were offered at the EGH. The first group included a Grey Nun as student, Sister Hélène Desmarais.

A new and larger chapel was built in the former library which also made room for five new offices. When the new 280-bed Youville Wing opened in 1982, the number of chaplains increased significantly and several of the newcomers were, or, through further studies, became Specialists in Institutional Ministry.

In 1988, the new GNH opened. Five of the EGH Chaplains transferred with the acute care services to GNH, including Sister Marcia Wiley as Director. Sister Wiley had completed her Masters' degree in Pastoral ministry and obtained her certification as Specialist in Institutional Ministry. In January, 1994, her position was extended to include Pastoral Care responsibility for the three sites and Sister Thérèse Castonguay moved to another function within Caritas, covering Bioethics and Mission celebration.

Sister Marcia Wiley was appointed Provincial Treasurer of the Grey Nuns' Provincial Council in 1995 and resigned from her

position at Caritas in July of that year.

Caritas was fortunate to finalize the new appointment of Rita Sandmaier in the position of Director of Mission and Pastoral Care in December 1995. She was the first lay person in that position. Rita is a Specialist in Institutional Ministry and had been responsible for Pastoral Care in the Palliative Care Unit at the EGH and later when it moved to GNH. In 1993, she co-led a research project in Pastoral Care and co-authored its results in an excellent article, showing the importance of spiritual counselling as a therapeutic modality in health care.⁴⁰

Nursing Education

General background information on changes in Nursing Education has been included in relation to the first School of Nursing opened by the Grey Nuns in Alberta, Holy Cross Hospital School of Nursing in Calgary. Details more specific to EGH will be included in this section.

Sister Mary Ann Casey, responding to the need for more nurses to care for patients, founded the Edmonton General Hospital School of Nursing in September, 1908. This purpose was legitimate in 1908 and it was universally, proudly acknowledged. Six students were admitted for the first two-and-half year course which earned them graduation on April 19, 1911.

Sister Casey was assuredly a *sweetheart* to her students. One incident pointed out how much she was admired. One new graduate, before leaving the school, told her that she admired her so much during her nursing course, she would like to take her along as she was leaving! This being impossible, she decided that when she married, if she has a boy, she would call him *Casey*. She did! The little boy, Casey was born in California in the late 1920s. Another 'Casey' for this proud EGH graduate to love!

In her doctoral dissertation, cited previously, Dr. Pauline Paul made some interesting remarks that command attention:

A symbiotic relationship between the school of nursing and the nursing service of the hospital existed to such degree that

it often blurred and diminished the educational mission of the nursing school.

*...this type of relationship existed at the EGH. Illustrative of this relationship is that the students were often referred to as 'the nurses' as opposed to 'the students' and that much of the data pertaining to nursing in general was found in the archival material related to the school.*⁴¹

Such situation was equally true of all Schools of Nursing in North America. In all fairness, one must look at nursing education of 1908 in light of known educational principles in that era. In that light, EGH deserved high marks in its school of nursing performance. The first director, Sister Casey, remained in her position until 1912. She returned to the same post from 1914 to 1921. This remarkable stability proved to be very valuable to the success both of the school and of the students.

*The first candidates were interviewed, given a uniform and sent directly to the nursing unit to learn as they served... Undaunted by long hours, hard work and relatively meagre leisure, the first class secured even more 'first laurels' for the sisters. These included the first graduation pin or medal, and the first graduation for a school of nursing in Edmonton. This class, with the assistance of Sister Casey, was responsible for the School Motto, Estote Fideles, which literally translates to Always be Faithful.*⁴²

Several factors might have contributed to a rather slow growth in enrolment at the EGH School of Nursing. Having a ward for tuberculosis patients from 1936 to 1952 might have influenced negatively some students who were afraid to contract the disease; having no obstetrics unit during that period, thus necessitating students going to Holy Cross in Calgary for that experience, might have been another deterrent; the fact that some other hospitals had begun giving a stipend, however small it was, before the EGH did, may have been another factor; and for a number of years, the school had no building of its own. No comparison of enrolment in other schools, however, was made for the

purpose of this abbreviated history of the EGH.

In spite of these few shortcomings, the EGH School of Nursing has a proud history of successes. The competent and caring faculty members recruited over the years accounted for the many generations of equally caring and competent EGH graduates. Continuous upgrading of the curriculum kept the school in favorable standing among its peers in the education of nurses.

On Saturday, May 1, 1948, there was a record number of graduates since the first graduation in 1911: 47 in total. This number would be surpassed many times in subsequent years. When the Block System became known, the EGH faculty observed its value in other programs and in 1953, were ready to implement it with their own adaptations.

On April 14, 1955, a contest of choirs was held in Edmonton. The EGH *Glee Club* participated under the direction of Father Leo Green and brought home the first prize. They were given a note of 86.1% in that particular contest. Another laurel was won by the students a few years later, on May 12, 1963, when they presented : *The Sound of Music* at the auditorium of St. Joseph School. Their performance was rated as outstanding.

Sister Alice Bonin was the first director who had a Baccalaureate degree in Nursing. Her courses were completed at l'Institut Marguerite d'Youville in Montréal in the summer of 1937 and her parchment was received in the mail on May 25, 1938. Sister Bonin was director of the EGH School and of Nursing Service from 1937 to 1940 as were her predecessors. When she assumed a new position as Nursing Service Director at EGH, her successor at the School, Sister Marie Laramée was able to be more totally involved with Nursing Education.⁴³

The topic of Central School surfaced in Edmonton, as it did in Calgary. A special meeting, at the University of Alberta, on Wednesday, August 10, 1949 was attended by Sister Alice Herman, superior and Sister Florence Keegan, Director of the School of Nursing. The information received was studied carefully by the EGH faculty and the hospital administration. It was found unacceptable for Catholic Schools of Nursing to support

the proposal as it could not guarantee the inclusion in the curriculum of moral and ethical principles. Eventually, the project was dropped on a provincial basis.

At long last, the students of EGH obtained their own building, the Centennial School of Nursing which opened in 1967. It was located on the southeast corner of the hospital property. The 13th floor was reserved for the Sisters' residence until April, 1970, when they moved to the La Salle Apartments across 111th street. The new school contained all educational and residential facilities for 250 persons, including a lovely reception room. As well, a large auditorium in the hospital was available for larger group gatherings.

Always with an eye out for ways to improve and enrich the education of nurses, the faculty worked for years to prepare a memorable event: the beginning of a new curriculum for nursing. On Tuesday, September 10, 1968, a two-year program began, jointly offered by the EGH School of Nursing and Collège Saint-Jean. Students received general education in French or in English at the Collège while the nursing content was totally given at the EGH School of Nursing. How did such a project come about?

In February, 1965, having almost completed a 10-year tenure as director, Sister Apollina Ste-Croix sent a memo to the superior/administrator, Sister Thérèse Chaloux, recommending a complete change in the School of Nursing curriculum.⁴⁴ Upon leaving her position in August, 1965, Sister Ste-Croix passed the torch to her successor, Sister Cécile Leclerc, who had recently obtained her Masters' degree in Nursing Education at the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.. Planning continued along with the Misericordia School of Nursing faculty, who later resigned from the committee. The main purpose was to have a completely educational nursing program, free from service obligations. Financing became a hot issue at the provincial government level when the Health and Education Departments attempted to determine who would finance this new creature that belonged fully to neither of those Departments. It seems that the newly appointed EGH Executive Director, Gordon Pickering, had negotiated an

acceptable solution which was not recorded in the material perused for this item.

The program started, as planned, but it was not long until another hurdle appeared. On August 5, 1970, Collège St-Jean became part of the University of Alberta. This new status no longer permitted their association with professional programs, such as, the EGH Nursing program. Time was at a premium and alternative approaches had to be considered. Providence was at work in this dilemma, preparing the way as far back as 1965, when talks of opening a College in Edmonton began to surface. To make a long story short, one remembers that the Edmonton College was approved by the Lieutenant Governor, Grant MacEwan, on May 4, 1970. The Edmonton College was re-named Grant MacEwan Community College (GMCC).⁴⁵

*In response to the request from the Edmonton General Hospital to assist in the development of a two-year nursing program, the Executive Director of the Hospital, Gordon Pickering, and the School of Nursing Director, Sister Cécile Leclerc, met with GMCC representatives, Board Chair, Barry Moore, President John Haar, and Director of Applied Science, Clark Tingley to discuss the transfer of the EGH nursing program to the College... A Chair for the new program was appointed by the College in September, 1971...[Sister Thérèse Castonguay]...*⁴⁶

Immediately, the College became responsible fiscally and administratively for the continuation of the EGH program until the last enrolled student graduated in the fall of 1973. The College continued thereafter to offer the total program. The whole EGH faculty were offered positions at the College, ensuring competent and dedicated teachers. Classes in Ethics, as prevalent at EGH were included in the new curriculum.

Sister Cécile Leclerc was elected Provincial Assistant for the Grey Nuns Province of Saint Albert in April, 1971 and resigned from her position at the School at that time. The EGH hired a new Director for the transition, Sister Ellen Martin, Daughter of Jesus, in June, 1971. On August 19, 1973, the last class of EGH

School of Nursing graduated and the School closed its doors. EGH continued to contribute highly and efficiently to Nursing Education through a contract with GMCC by providing clinical experience for GMCC students. The *role model* pattern so well established in the practice of EGH nurses has always been a significant factor in the quality of nurses completing the nursing program at GMCC over the past decades. When it closed the School of Nursing, EGH had graduated close to 2,000 nurses, the joy and pride of the Edmonton General Hospital.

Living the Mission at EGH and GNH

Marguerite d'Youville's mission of *Universal Charity* continued through the years at the EGH. It was manifested in various activities and events. Likewise, Bioethics and its special emphasis on respect for the person acquired an early preeminence in the functions of the hospital. A few examples will illustrate these points:

- Always led and supported by value-oriented Board members and advisors, the EGH and GNH have registered with gratitude the names of those who have been the eyes, the heart and the backbone of the hospital throughout its proud history.
- An outside crèche for Christmas decoration was painted by Sister Verminia Violini in 1980. It replaced the previous one painted by Sister Auréa Mageau in 1954 which was placed on the second floor balcony above the main entrance.
- All Grey Nuns and their friends rejoiced when Pope John XXIII declared Marguerite d'Youville *Blessed* on May 3, 1959, giving her the official title of Mother of Universal Charity.
- A Medico-Moral Committee, later called Bioethics Committee, was established in 1973 with the leadership of Doctor Rupert Clare and strongly supported by Gordon Pickering, Executive Director. This was one of the first such committees in the country. Others, whose contribution to Bioethics was priceless, were Doctors John Lipinski, Joseph O'Brien, Fred MacDonald,

Jim McCaffery, Zbigniew Chrzanowski, Fr. John Nowakowski, Nicole Préfontaine, Mary Pat Skene, Camille Wolfe, and members of Pastoral Care. Ethics consultants included: Fr. Camille Dozois, Fr. Richard Wolak, O.M.I., Fr. Tom Dailey and Sister Mary Lou Cranston, C.N.D..

- Celebrations of Long Service Awards became a major event in the 1980s. The **Chroniques** had made mention of such recognition events as early as 1947 when Sister Alice Herman, superior and administrator gave a turkey dinner for 61 women to celebrate the five year tenure of five of their co-workers. The yearly event of later years celebrated as much as 45 years of service for a few individuals. Still later, when Caritas Health Group was formed in 1992, the Long Service recognition Awards became a tri-site celebration.
- There were several nurses' strikes, and near-strikes in Edmonton: in 1977, 1980 and 1982, 1988 and 1999 always leaving strained relationships between employees and employers, necessitating special efforts to re-establish mutual trust and friendship. Pastoral Care staff were often the needed listeners and quiet peace-bearers in these circumstances.
- The Sod Turning ceremony for an extension was held on June 26, 1978 for the Youville Wing that opened on April 2, 1982. It was especially designed for an innovative program of Assessment and Rehabilitation for Geriatric Patients. With all the downsizing of health care facilities, starting in 1994, this unique and highly envied program was transferred to Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital in March, 1996.
- On May 31, 1984, the EGH celebrated the 25th priesthood anniversary of Father John Nowakowski, chaplain at the hospital since 1968. A special Mass was organized by Pastoral Care, with the leadership of Chaplain Paul Preston, followed by a lovely reception in the auditorium. Many donations were made to Father John, especially from members of the medical staff. This was truly a day to remember.

- The EGH took an active part in celebrating the Year of Marguerite d'Youville in 1983-84, marking the 25th anniversary of Marguerite d'Youville's beatification. Marguerite's feastday was highlighted by special displays and distribution of appropriate literature. This practice became a yearly occurrence thereafter.
- A one-year celebration was held in 1985-86 for the 90th Anniversary of the EGH. For the occasion, a hospital choir was organized by Oblate Father John Malazdrewich, on Pastoral Care staff. The year-long program included a solemn Mass on December 2, 1985, in the EGH Auditorium; an Interfaith Service on February 2, 1986, at St. Joseph's Basilica, organized by Sister Rose-Anne Gauvin; a gala dinner on March 14, 1986, at the Westin Hotel and another gala dinner when the physicians invited the Grey Nuns to the Derrick Club on April 10, 1986.
- On December 8, 1986, EGH launched its new Mission Statement in a very meaningful ceremony in the auditorium. A large attendance, standing room only, viewed the re-enactment of the foundation of the EGH in 1895: six physicians signing a letter to Bishop Grandin and promising to support a hospital to be built and administered by the Grey Nuns, a very touching event.
- A *Spirit Run*, a 20 kilometers run, the distance between the EGH and the new Grey Nuns Hospital, was held on June 2, 1988. In Olympic fashion, the flame was carried by several members of the EGH family, beginning with Dr. P. Petrick, director of Laboratory, who received it at a chapel ceremony in EGH and Chaplain Dennis Van der Wecken who received it at the entrance of the new hospital; a very significant gesture for the hundreds of staff participating in it or witnessing it.
- In the late 1980s and into the 1990s, some of the EGH members were elected presidents of their respective associations: David Hart for the Alberta Hospitals Association, Mary Pat Skene for the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, Sister Thérèse Castonguay for the Catholic Health Association of Alberta and Gerry Hiebert for the Catholic Health Association of Canada.

- The 250th Anniversary of the foundation of the Grey Nuns in 1887-88 was an occasion of thanksgiving for the EGH/GNH family and was marked with a grandiose Eucharistic celebration at Saint Joseph's Basilica. Over 1,200 people attended to celebrate the event.
- The unforgettable glory of Marguerite d'Youville's canonization on December 9, 1990 was a magnificent occasion of thanksgiving and rejoicing for all Grey Nuns and their friends. Again a Mass was celebrated by Archbishop Joseph MacNeil at the Basilica with a large attendance.
- The EGH Acute Palliative Care Unit was transferred to GNH in September, 1995 to facilitate access to acute care services and continue Saint Marguerite's special mission to the dying and their families. The EGH retained a Long Term Palliative Care Unit.
- Another one-year celebration marked the 100th Anniversary of the EGH in 1995-96 in which the whole Caritas family participated. Major events of the year were named *Centennial*, such as Centennial Long Service Awards, Centennial Golf Tournament, and others. There was a Centennial Eucharistic celebration, with Archbishop Joseph N. MacNeil as the main celebrant at St. Joseph's Basilica on November 17, 1995, followed by a Centennial Gala dinner at the Hilton Hotel on November 18, 1995. A Centennial History room was set up for tours by school children; approximately 5,000 elementary school children visited the historical and educational displays between October, 1995 and April, 1996.

Passing on the Flame

The Alberta Catholic Hospitals Foundation (ACHF) was created by the Bishops of Alberta, in 1976 for the purpose of operating the Misericordia Hospital as a Catholic hospital following its sale to the Provincial Government.⁴⁷ This new organization became heavily involved with similar situations across Alberta

when religious congregations, who owned Catholic hospitals, were no longer able to operate their institutions. It was also part of the ownership scheme developed to enable the creation of Caritas Health Group in 1992.

In the late 1990s, serious discussions began between the Grey Nuns and the ACHF, now named Alberta Catholic Health Corporation (ACHC) as the Grey Nuns found it necessary to withdraw from the Caritas Health Group.

A formal agreement was reached and the Passing of the Flame occurred in a meaningful ceremony on June 14, 1999. This agreement ensured that the three Catholic hospitals in Edmonton: the EGH, GNH and the Misericordia Hospital would continue to operate as Catholic institutions.

The Grey Nuns have operated the Edmonton General Hospital since 1895 and the Grey Nuns Hospital since it opened in 1988. They had been active members of the Caritas Health Group Corporation, which included the Misericordia Hospital since 1992. It is planned that some Grey Nun representation will continue as long as feasible and possible on the Alberta Catholic Health Corporation which will operate Caritas Health Group.

During the 104 years of the Grey Nuns involvement with EGH and the GNH, 299 Grey Nuns actively contributed 1,728 years of work, while valiantly upholding the values and traditions of their Foundress, Saint Marguerite d'Youville.

Sister Marcia Wiley was the last of the Grey Nuns to leave employment at the GNH in July, 1995. At the EGH site, Sister Thérèse Castonguay was the last employee, leaving in January, 1996. As a volunteer, Sister Yvonne Bézaire continues her work to maintain the chapel and communion services at the EGH, work she began in 1994.

It was a bittersweet moment to witness the last page of the Grey Nuns' contributions as the EGH/GNH pass into history. Yet, there was satisfaction in remembering the dedication and courage of the Grey Nuns during these 104 years of struggles and successes. This proud history will remain as a memorial of love for all who have lived and witnessed it and a powerful beacon for all who are to follow in its promising future.

NOTES: Chapter 10

- 1 **Historique**, Doc. # 6, GNRC Arch.
- 2 **Ibid.**, Doc. # 8,
- 3 Source: Sister Gaëtane Chevrier, MMY Arch.
- 4 **Historique**, Doc. # 18,
- 5 Other sources indicate Aylmer, in Gatineau, Québec as her birth place.
- 6 **Edmonton Hôpital Chroniques**, p. 74, GNRC Arch.
- 7 In his jubilation to have found sisters for a mission, Father Lacombe would give them this title.
- 8 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, p. 15.
- 9 **Circulaire Bimensuelle, 1892-1895**, p. 751, GNRC Arch.
- 10 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, p. 18.
- 11 **Ibid.**, p. 23.
- 12 A story passed on verbally.
- 13 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, p 25.
- 14 Pauline Paul, Ph. D., **A History of the Edmonton General Hospital - 1895-1970**, Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Alberta, Edmonton, 1994, pp. 62, ff.
- 15 **Edmonton Bulletin**, January 10, 1896. Also included was the fact that ministers of other denominations were welcome to visit the patients of the same faith, GNRC Arch.
- 16 **Historique**, Doc. #58, **Edmonton Bulletin**, January 30, 1899.
- 17 Newspaper file, **Edmonton Bulletin**, February 2, 1899, GNRC Arch.
- 18 The forerunner to the Royal Alexandra Hospital.
- 19 Paul, **Op. Cit.**, p. 69.
- 20 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, p. 54.
- 21 Letter: Geo. Kinnard, sec. Tres.[sic.] to Sister Superior [E. Letellier], June 28, 1901, GNRC Arch.
- 22 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, p. 60
- 23 **Ibid.**, p. 64.
- 24 **Ibid.**, p. 64.
- 25 **Ibid.**, pp. 67, 68.
- 26 Ell, Sister Ann, **Research for the 90th Anniversary**, Unpublished, 1985, p. 28, GNRC Arch..

- 27 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, p. 71.
- 28 **Ibid.**, p. 72.
- 29 **Ibid.**, pp. 149-150.
- 30 Ell, **Op. Cit.**, p. 39.
- 31 **Ibid.**, p. 39.
- 32 Formerly the Edmonton Public Hospital (EPH).
- 33 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, pp. 133 and 300.
- 34 **Ibid.**, pp. 91 and 587.
- 35 **Ibid.**, p. 93.
- 36 He soon returned to work and continued his dedicated services until his retirement in 1991.
- 37 Facial reconstruction surgical Unit.
- 38 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, p. 36.
- 39 Term used for all qualified Pastoral Care practitioners, with or without ordination. This title is widely accepted in modern Pastoral Care.
- 40 Susan M. Macdonald, Rita Sandmaier and Robin L. Fainsinger, *Objective Evaluation of Spiritual Care: a Case Report*, **Journal of Palliative Care**, 9:2/1993, pp. 47-49.
- 41 Paul, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 251, 252.
- 42 Ell, Sister Ann, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 29, 30.
- 43 On February 8, 1999, Sister Bonin had the distinct privilege of reaching the coveted 100 years of life at the Grey Nuns mother house in Montréal.
- 44 **Annual Report**, School of Nursing, July 12, 1965, GNRC Arch.
- 45 Ruhl, Glenn David, **Grant MacEwan Community College: The First Two Decades-A Retrospective**, Edmonton, Grant MacEwan Community College, 1995, p. 39.
- 46 **Ibid.**
- 47 Castonguay, **Op. Cit.**, p. 111.



Edmonton General - 1895



Edmonton General
Hospital -
Youville Wing -
1982



Grey Nuns
Hospital - 1988



A typical room at the first EGH - 1895
(re-created by Dr. John Lipinski, 1985)

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1896 - BROCKET - SACRED HEART SCHOOL

On May 16, 1896, three Grey Nuns of Nicolet arrived at Brocket with the mission of establishing a school for the children of the Piegan Reserve. Brocket was the site of a small Reserve of 20 by 28 kilometers, located between Fort McLeod and Pincher Creek in southern Alberta. The Piegans are one of the four tribes of the Blackfoot nation.

In the earlier description of the mission of Standoff/Cardston, which opened in 1893, the Grey Nuns of Nicolet were introduced to the reader. Their numbers had slightly increased since the opening of their first mission. They were now 28 professed sisters, an increase of 10 since 1893, and they had six novices and six postulants. Their future was promising, but they had 145 elderly people to care for at their mother house, the Hotel-Dieu of Nicolet.

Grey Nuns required at Brocket

On January 6, 1896, Bishop Vital Grandin of Saint Albert, having carefully listened to his missionaries, Father Donat Foisy of Brocket and Father Emile Legal of Standoff, decided to write Mother Youville (Aurélien Cr peau), Superior General of the Grey Nuns of Nicolet, and request three sisters to open a school at Brocket. Letter in hand, Mother Youville went to present her dilemma to Bishop Elph ge Gravel of Nicolet on January 17. After explaining, at length, the reasons why she could not grant this request, she heard the unbelievable answer from the Bishop:

You have only one thing to do: choose three sisters and send them to this new mission.¹

Calling a meeting of her councillors, she informed them of the Bishop's decision. Although stunned with this approach, they submitted and immediately selected three sisters for the mission of Brocket. Again, as for Cardston, the choice fell on one of Mother Youville's co-foundresses as superior of this new group: Mother Saint-Jean-de-Dieu (Hermine Bernard). Her companions were Sisters Sainte-Anne (Marie-Anne Roy) and Joséphine Julien, who was at the Mission of Standoff since two years.

The **Chroniques** gave some details about their trip from Nicolet. It is known that Mother Saint- Jean-de-Dieu and Sister Sainte-Anne left Nicolet on Sunday, May 3, 1896, sailed on the Saint Lawrence River from Nicolet to Montréal, then rode the train, with the usual stopovers in Saint Boniface and Fort Calgary, before arriving at Fort McLeod, on Saturday, May 16, 1896. Here, they were met by Fathers Donat Foisy and Emile Legal, Sister Joséphine Julien, their new companion for Brocket, accompanied by two other sisters from Standoff: Mother Saint-Eusèbe (Zéphirine Brodeur), a co-foundress of Nicolet, and Sister Rachel Saint-Germain. This was a beautiful, sunny day! In a comfortable carriage, they rode to Brocket and were all welcomed in the Oblates' house. The house had been subdivided to make room for the three sisters and their classroom on one side of the chapel, while the Oblates were lodged in cramped quarters on the other side. Fortunately, this was only temporary.

Immediately, the sisters went to the chapel to call upon God's special blessings for their new mission. The sisters from Standoff remained with them until the following Thursday and helped in setting up the new missionaries' dwelling. Heavy rains had come just on time to make the roads treacherous and prevent travelling back to Standoff earlier. What a blessing for all the sisters to be together for these few days! During these days, many Natives came to meet the sisters. Some even offered to leave their children to attend school. A very pleasant relationship was thus established.²

Leaving the mother house of Nicolet was not easy for the new missionaries, as Sister Saint-Jean-de-Dieu wrote to Mother

Youville and the sisters on May 26:

*The sacrifice of our departure, renewed while on the boat, was very painful, but recalling the feast of the day: the Holy Cross, we prayed and regained our calm once more.*³

As usual, Grey Nuns missionaries showed determination and courage when the Kingdom of God was at stake, no price was too high. Their initial generosity did not falter in subsequent years.

On Pentecost Sunday, May 24, Father Foisy invited the sisters to sing at the solemn Mass. They were surprised to see some 40 Natives, respond to the church bell, arriving to worship the Lord. After the homily, Father Foisy officially welcomed the sisters, encouraging them to place all their trust in the All-Powerful One.

The admission of children to the school on June 1, brought consolation to the sisters as they welcomed three girls on that first day. These children soon were joined by others and, by Christmas, there were 10 beautiful little girls at the Brocket Sacred Heart Boarding School, including Rose, the adopted daughter of the Chief.

Only one thing missing...

In a letter sent to Mother Youville on July 26, 1896, Father Foisy unveiled the admiration he had for the sisters and he added his one concern:

*It is two months already since your dear daughter missionaries arrived in this mission... For me, I would like to say that their arrival was like the resurrection of this mission...The sisters seem happy with their situation; they are filled with courage...They have much to do, perhaps too much at first...A fourth sister would not be extra...in fact, she would be indispensable...I am happy with the excellent qualities of our sisters, but I must say that there is one great quality that they all lack: none of them can speak English... Let us pray Saint Antony so that he can find at least one for us...*⁴

Finding a bilingual sister in Nicolet in 1896 was impossible. It was only in March, 1899 that Miss Hunt, from Saint Boniface, arrived to teach English. This lady was to remain in her teaching position until November, 1900.

Father Foisy could now take better care of himself. The demands on his time and energy were becoming more reasonable and he could sit back and observe the progress being made after the arrival of the three Grey Nuns. Sitting back, for him, meant becoming a monk at the Trappist Abbaye in Oka, Québec. This young Oblate, had been ordained by Bishop Vital Grandin in Calgary, in October, 1885. Having prayed and discerned over his decision, he was ready to leave the Peigans on September 30, 1896, barely four months after the arrival of the sisters. Father Louis-Janvier Danis returned for a second time to Brocket to replace Father Donat Foisy.⁵

The year 1897 brought its share of difficulties and hopes: a cow froze to death during the night in March, 1897; in July, strong winds broke window panes in the school and torrential rains damaged roads and railways, making travel difficult. On a more positive note, this was the year when construction of a new Church and school began on August 18; in less than four months the church was completed for a first Mass on December 5, 1897. As for the school, sisters and students were able to move into this new, more spacious facility on Ash Wednesday, February 23, 1898. The move meant a long working day, as the **Chroniques** noted:

Tonight, after having tucked all the children in bed, we eat supper at 2100 hours.⁶

Jubilee Year : 1900

In the isolation of the mission of Brocket, it was heartwarming to find a special mention of the Jubilee, the beginning of year 1900. For this little mission, the Jubilee began at midnight with a solemn Mass in the chapel and the proclamation and prayers of Pope Leo XIII.

On March 9, 1900, what modern vocabulary would call a tornado, took the church from its foundations. The shock broke into pieces three lovely statues of the Sacred Heart, the Virgin Mary, and Saint Joseph.

This area of southern Alberta has always experienced chinook⁷ winds throughout the year. These winds bring extreme ranges of temperature within hours, melting large amounts of fresh snow, almost as soon as it covered the land. These chinooks, felt slightly as far north as Edmonton, have inspired the legendary advice to newcomers: *If you don't like the weather, just wait a minute, it will change.*

Marguerite d'Youville at work

Among other unusual things happening in the Jubilee Year was the sudden cure of Sister Edouardina Gélinas on October 13, 1900, from serious damage to a knee. Having been impaired in her regular activities for a long time, she suddenly started to walk, kneel and genuflect, all things she had not done for at least two years. The sisters had made one novena⁸ of prayers to Marguerite d'Youville to obtain, for their companion, a relief or a cure from this painful discomfort. A second novena was started, which became a novena of thanksgiving, when the desired cure left no doubt. All went to the chapel to sing a *Te Deum*, a hymn of thanksgiving to God for this wonderful blessing.

Epidemics

The Spanish influenza started to choose its victims in early October, 1918. At Sacred Heart School, Sister Amélia Lamontagne was the first one to show signs of severe fever; she was placed in isolation. Her experience was shared by many others, including children, some other sisters and the principal, Father Louis Levern. At one time, during this epidemic, all students and one sister were bed-ridden and required care from those who had recovered. What a chore to serve so many people in all their

needs, having to climb two storeys to carry food, water, linen, medications for the many patients, pails of coal to stoke the stove to warm the upper floor and many other items needed for the care of the sick. By the end of October, Sister Lamontagne had recovered sufficiently to be the caregiver for the boys. In early November, 1918, the chronicler wrote:

...Four girls died in 12 days. We are heartbroken....Our little Eagle Crow (Charlie) dies in the arms of Sister Lamontagne. Father Levern makes a coffin and brings little Charlie to the cemetery. Two sisters help him; this good Father is almost at the end of the rope himself...⁹

It was a general relief for all patients and caregivers when the chronicler could write:

Our trials seem to disappear. The children look better and can get up. Many thanks to good Brother Jean who helped us so much during these hard days. The Armistice. The war is over.¹⁰

The school registered other epidemics in subsequent years. A smallpox quarantine was ordered on December 27, 1931 and lasted until January 30, 1932. One little girl died and was grieved by the priest and sisters as much as by her own family. From November 24, 1935 to December 24, a measles quarantine was ordered, fortunately there were no casualties this time.

A new school - new administration

After two major expansions of the school building in 1907 and 1912, and in response to growing enrolment of boarders and day students, the government decided in 1926, to build another school. Its location would be 8 kilometers west of Brocket, on the south shore of the Old Man River. A wooden structure like the first one built in 1898, it could accommodate 50 students. On March 14, 1927 all moved from the old school to the new one with great enthusiasm. The people of the Reserve were very generous with their time and equipment to help in transferring people and materials.

On March 27, Bishop John Kidd of Calgary blessed the school in the morning and the chapel in the afternoon, followed by Mass. There were over 100 Natives present.

June 13 was the date of the Official Opening. For that event, only Natives were invited to prevent criticism over who was getting the best place, food first, and so on. The exceptions, however, were a few officials, such as the Agent, Mr. Arthur and his wife, the Secretary of the Agency, Mr. Lancaster and his wife. This school was constructed for the Natives and they were to occupy the places of honor.¹¹

On October 1, 1927, a new contract between the Grey Nuns and the Oblates became effective. The document, was signed by Mother F. Doucet, Superior General of the Grey Nuns of Nicolet and her council and Father J. B. Beys, Provincial Superior of the Oblates and his Provincial Treasurer, Father Albert Naessens, and approved by J. S. Herman Brunault, Bishop of Nicolet.

In this new contract, the Oblates assumed the entire administration of the school and named the Principal to direct all activities according to the policies of the Department of Indian Affairs. The sisters, however, maintained responsibility for the internal functioning of the school and remained under the direction of their Superior General.

These arrangements, requested by the sisters, relieved them of earlier responsibilities, but their load of work still seemed overwhelming, when read three-quarters of a century later:

*The sisters are committed to the following work: teaching boys and girls and total supervision of the children when out of the classroom, at play and at work: milking cows, table service, kitchen, dairy-farm, bake-house, hen-roost, housekeeping of all areas of the Mission, washing and mending of all clothes at the Mission, care of the chapel and sacristy, etc...*¹²

Prizes! Prizes!

At the exhibitions in Edmonton and Calgary, on August 10,

1937, an amazing total of 52 prizes were awarded to Brocket students' works and crafts. The monetary amount of these awards was valued at \$32.50.¹³

Again, on July 29, 1950, the students' displays won them 42 awards, all first and second place standings at the exhibitions in Lethbridge and Edmonton.

That same year, on September 10, a student, Catherine Plain Eagle, participated in a catechism contest with students from all other schools of the district. Catherine was the happy winner of the first prize. Father B. Forestier, principal, drove her to Pincher Creek to receive her reward, which was presented by Bishop Francis Carroll of Calgary.¹⁴

Our Lady of the Rockies

Father Eugène Ruaux, principal, who had built a grotto to the Blessed Virgin Mary on May 6, 1942, gave the Natives the opportunity to name the grotto. They choose *Our Lady of the Rockies*, a title remembered with pride in Brocket. Later that summer, Father Eugène Ruaux wanted another occasion to share his great devotion to Mary. He decided to organize a pilgrimage to the grotto on August 16, 1942. The site at the top of the hill was breathtaking, the weather splendid. Only one thing was missing: the main speaker, Father Donald Gillen had not arrived from Ottawa. Storming heaven to find him, Father Ruaux proceeded to dress for Mass when, to everyone's delight, Father Gillen appeared after many regrettable setbacks in his travel plans. But he was there and on time!¹⁵ The piety during the day-long ceremony was remarkable and contagious.

The year 1942 was also the time when the mission of Brocket began operating under the Saint Albert Province as a result of the fusion of the mother house of Nicolet with Montréal the previous year. Nicolet then became a province of the Grey Nuns of Montréal.

In order to bring it closer to the people, the church building was transported to the village on October 4, 1948. Built 21 years earlier, its move created mixed emotions.¹⁶

A car accident

On Thursday, June 19, 1947, Father Maurice Lafrance left at 0630 hours with Sisters Laurence Désilets and Eva Camiré for dental appointments in Lethbridge. A terrible car accident happened on their return trip to Bocket, resulting in the admission of the three travellers to Saint Michael's Hospital in Lethbridge with injuries of varying nature. Two of them, Father Lafrance and Sister Désilets, recovered physically, but the fateful day remained indelible in their memory. Sister Camiré did not survive the tragedy. She died on June 22, at the age of 42.

Consternation reigned at the Mission and the Reserve. Dear Sister Camiré would no longer be around to love and spoil the young boys in her charge, she would no longer be available to help with sewing, to entertain her companions, to plan surprises for the children, she would no longer prepare appetizing meals for the whole Bocket family. Father E. Ruaux, who came to Bocket during the convalescence of Father Lafrance, celebrated a Mass for the repose of the soul of Sister Camiré on June 24. The following day, he accompanied her remains to Saint Albert, along with two sisters: Sisters Eva Morissette, superior, en route for her retreat, and Laurence Désilets, going to Edmonton General Hospital for further treatments.

The funeral was held on Wednesday, June 25 in the chapel of Youville Convent in Saint Albert, with Father Clément Tourigny, as main celebrant, assisted by Fathers J.B. Cabana, superior of Saint Albert Mission, Antonio Duhaime and Philippe Poulin. A large attendance, including many Oblates and Grey Nuns, who were in Saint Albert for their annual retreats, accompanied Sister Camiré on this last part of her earthly pilgrimage. Sister Eva Camiré was buried in the Grey Nuns' plot in Saint Albert cemetery, the last earthly home of so many Grey Nuns missionaries.¹⁷

Grey Nuns leaving Bocket

As early as June 8, 1952, Mother Rose Vincent, Provincial Superior of Saint Albert, sent a letter to Sister Marie-Anne Fréchette, saying that the Provincial Council was considering withdrawing sisters from Bocket, the main reason being lack of a sufficient number of sisters.

A reaction of sadness was sensed in correspondence when Sister Fréchette wrote to Mother Vincent on October 16, 1954:

*The Natives feel more than ever the importance to have sisters to help their children. They feel forced to centralize their children at the village.*¹⁸

On May 2, 1961 the Department of Indian Affairs closed the boarding school at Bocket and opened a day school in the village. After consultation with Saint Albert Provincial Council and Montréal General Council, the Grey Nuns continued their teaching at the new school and moved to live in a 'teacherage' nearby.

*In February, 1964, Mrs. T. Yellow Horne sent a letter to Mother Georgette Leduc, Superior General, asking on behalf of Catholic parents of the Peigan reserve, to please leave the sisters in Bocket in order to prevent the government to close their school. She complimented the work of the sisters at the school.*¹⁹

The feeling of loss expressed in these words was certainly weighing as heavy on the hearts of all former and present missionaries, as it was on those charged with making a decision. Postponement of a final word attested to this emotion. On August 15, 1964, Mother Yvonne Prévost, now Provincial Superior of Saint Albert, informed Father Maurice Lafrance, Oblates Provincial Superior, that the time had come to follow-up on the unavoidable withdrawal of the sisters from Bocket. Her letter indicated that they would be leaving on June 30, 1965.

There were only four sisters left at Bocket when the last day arrived: Sister Alida Gamache, superior, Sisters Germaine Laforest, Simone René and Marie-Anna Vachon. On the evening of Monday, June 28, the Catholic Indian Women's League offered

a farewell gathering for the sisters. They had Bingo and other games. A touching address was read by a lady, whose name regrettably, is not available. The Peigan women also offered personal gifts to each sister and reiterated their sorrow in seeing them leave Brocket.

On the early morning of July 1, 1965, the four Grey Nuns cast a last emotional look around the little village; their personal items had left the preceding day. Brokenhearted, they left Brocket at 0830 hours for the eight hour trip to Saint Albert. During the 69 years that Grey Nuns were at Brocket, a total of 98 sisters had missioned to the Piegan children and their families. They had given their very best and were rewarded by the love and gratitude evident in all those who came for a last Good Bye. Together, the sisters had given a cumulated total of 537 years of dedicated service to the Peigan Reserve at Brocket.

NOTES: Chapter 11

- 1 Brocket **Historique**, doc. 11, p. 1, GNRC Arch.
- 2 Sister Blandine Levesque, *Il y a cinquante ans...En feuilletant les Chroniques*, Summary for the Golden Jubilee of Sacred Heart School, April, 1946. Unpublished, GNRC Arch.
- 3 **Ibid.**
- 4 **Ibid.**
- 5 **Brocket Chroniques**, 1896-1942, p. 5, GNRC Arch.
- 6 **Ibid.**, p. 12.
- 7 A warm dry wind blowing down the east slopes of the Rockies.
- 8 A prayer repeated on nine consecutive days.
- 9 **Chroniques**, p. 125.
- 10 **Ibid.**, p. 125.
- 11 **Ibid.**, p.219.
- 12 Excerpts from the **Contract, Historique**, doc. # 71.
- 13 **Chroniques, 1896-1942**, p. 315.
- 14 **Ibid.**, 1943-1955, p. 89-90.

- 15 **Ibid.**, pp. 363-366.
- 16 **Ibid.**, p. 64.
- 17 **Chroniques** 1943-1955, pp. 50-51.
- 18 **Brocket, Alberta**, Summary, p. 3, L055, MMY Arch.
- 19 **Ibid.**, p. 3.

CHAPTER TWELVE

1920 - *LEGAL - COUVENT DU SACRÉ-COEUR*

Legal, a French Canadian settlement, located 55 km north of Edmonton, was still fairly young when the Grey Nuns were asked to teach in the area in 1920. The first settler, Théodore Gellot, came from France in 1894, via California. For some two-and-a-half years, he shared this vast land with Eugène Maynard, carving their own property, planning their future, unimpaired by laws and politics.

Life was unusually isolated and monotonous with so few people with whom to share news. That was enough to lose track of the calendar. One Monday morning, these two settlers arrived at the Roman Catholic church of Morinville, 25 km south of Legal, all dressed up in their Sunday suits for Mass. That remained a standing story among their neighbors of Morinville!¹

By 1896, others joined them, mostly from Québec or the eastern United States; there was also one man from Germany. The first parish priest was Father Samuel Bouchard. He was introduced by Bishop Emile Legal of Saint-Albert, who placed the church under the protection of his own patron, Saint Emile in 1899.²

Early records show that three lay teachers had been hired by the School District #1738 in 1919. By 1920, there were 320 families in Legal. The parishioners, through their parish priest, Father Rémi Guertin, a diocesan priest,³ asked Mother Saint-Augustin (Ada Leduc), Provincial Superior of Saint Albert, to send sisters to take charge of their school, indicating that from Legal religious vocations could be expected to flourish. Permission from Mother Anna Piché, Superior General, was easily obtained on October 6, 1920.⁴ No new Grey Nuns' missions had opened in Alberta since

the Brocket school in 1896. The Provincial Council, however, had been kept very busy opening other missions in Saskatoon and Beauval in Saskatchewan and in the Northwest Territories during these years.⁵

The foundresses

Three Grey Nuns arrived at Legal by train, from Saint Albert, on August 23, 1920 to begin a magnificent adventure of education, parish work and enduring friendship. Sister Azélie Surprenant was named school principal and superior of the sisters. At 41 years of age, she had already accumulated 11 years of teaching experience at Saint Albert since 1909. Her companions were Sisters Saint-Polycarpe (Albertine Vincent), 27 years old, and Séphora (Séphora Fouquette). Both Sisters Surprenant and Saint-Polycarpe were bilingual teachers while Sister Séphora contributed support services in housekeeping and cooking. Mother St-Augustin (Ada Leduc) accompanied them and remained until the following day to assist with unpacking and organizing their new abode.

A first responsibility, to which all Grey Nuns showed the same reverence, was a prayer of thanksgiving and supplication to obtain God's blessings on their ministry. The sisters at Legal, faithful to the tradition, assembled in the chapel of the new rectory, following their first lunch graciously offered by Father Guertin.

The foundresses were given temporary lodging in the *old rectory*, near the school building, until a more permanent residence became available for them. The first couple of days, they were hosted by Father Guertin for meals. This devoted priest, ever attentive to the needs of the sisters, found numerous ways to ensure their easy adaptation to Legal.

Benefactors

Along with Father Guertin, others also earned the title of benefactors of the mission from its early beginnings: Mr. Lavergne, Cécile Coulombe-Pelletier, Mr. and Mrs. Alphonse Néron, Irène Lamer-Pelletier and Philomène Demers. Benefactors were needed when the abandoned school was in need of a thorough cleaning, when teaching equipment needed to be gathered and repaired, when supplies were to be purchased. Time was at a premium because, hardly 10 days after their arrival, the sisters were to begin teaching.⁶

*Wednesday, September 1, 1920, is the memorable day of school opening! Children arrive eager, happy, and in large numbers! Seventy-one make the morning class of the little tots, and 23 for the older children. To accommodate them all, they had to sit four on benches made for two. They are good and want to learn, but they are not highly disciplined!*⁷

That same evening, members of the school board assembled, amazed at the large enrolment. They knew it was their responsibility to find more space and more teachers. A decision was made to repair the adjacent old school building and hire a third teacher.

Thursday, September 2, same number of students, same happy dispositions for learning! Father Guertin, quietly disappeared for the day to visit Mother Saint-Augustin in Saint Albert. By 1830 hours, he returned jubilant. The sisters could not believe their eyes when they discovered a Grey Nun in his car. He had obtained another teacher: Sister Victoria Corriveau, the fourth foundress! One could well imagine the joy of the sisters. It was equalled only by the curiosity of the children, the following day, when they saw a third sister, already in the classroom eager to help the other teachers. Her arrival was providential as Sister Surprenant would have to miss several weeks of class in October to care for an eye problem. By November 16, the third classroom was ready to open and Sister Surprenant had her own kingdom with 38 Grades II and III students.⁸

An unusual event attracted the whole population's attention on Friday, September 16, 1921 when an airplane landed near the village. The more fortunate were given their first plane ride if they could afford the \$1.00 per minute fee.

New Convent

In July, 1923, construction of the new Couvent du Sacré-Coeur began. Forty-six generous men contributed to the transportation of the materials needed for the construction. As a gesture of gratitude, their names were placed in the tabernacle with a prayer for God's special blessings upon them.

Faith was always in the decisions and actions of the sisters and people of Legal. One example was the many attempts to dig a well for drinking-water, beginning in May, 1923. During a visit of Mother St-Grégoire, (Marie-Louisa Béliveau), Provincial Superior, on June 2, the sisters were encouraged by the faith she displayed and began praying to Saint Joseph to obtain the much needed element: water. Faith sees everything as coming from God's Providence. At the fourth major attempt, they finally obtained a sample of water to send for analysis. The chronicler reflected in her notes on Friday, August 3, 1923:

It was the first Friday of July when we started the fourth well, and it is now the first Friday of August when we can begin to use the water. Thank you to the Sacred Heart and to Saint Joseph.⁹

The building completed, the sisters were able to enter their new convent on October 26, 1923. Trials were not far from the contented group: the first night, the dynamo ceased to function, cutting both water and heating on a cold October night. The following day, the skillful Léon Blais repaired the dynamo, returning it to its useful purpose. The first Mass in the new convent was celebrated by Father Paul Simard on Friday, November 2, 1923. A few days later, on Monday, November 5, the first boarders arrived: Blanche Jalbert, 13 years old, niece of the rectory's housekeeper. She was joined by Léda Belley, 14 years old, and Marie Laforce, 15

years old, the latter two would later become Grey Nuns. During the first year, nine other girls came, ranging in ages from five to sixteen.

Blessing of Couvent du Sacré-Coeur

Dozens of generous persons came to help the sisters prepare for the blessing of the convent on Sunday, November 11, 1923. It was a day of significant accomplishment for the young, thriving parish.

The success of the celebration was the result of generosity of material gifts and time from the whole village: setting up tables for the banquet, preparing food, contributing flowers and decorations. Nothing was overlooked.

Monsignor M. Pilon, P.D., pastor of the Morinville Catholic Church, presided at the ceremony with the whole parish in attendance. Guests were also welcomed to an evening of entertainment presented by students from both the new Couvent du Sacré-Coeur and from Saint Albert. The **Chroniques** added on November 12:

Today, the ladies who organized the banquet return to put everything back in order. How to thank them for all their zeal. May God do it for us.¹⁰

Sunday, October 30, 1924 was chosen for Archbishop Henry Joseph O'Leary of Edmonton to ordain the first priest raised in Legal, Father Emile Coulombe. This young priest would soon find out that he was replacing in number the one who guided him toward priesthood, the late Father Emile Guertin, who died of cancer on August 29 of the following year.¹¹

Residents of a larger convent, the sisters could now accept boarders and teach more students. In September, 1924, there were 120 students, including 11 boarders.¹² These numbers grew over the years to reach 25 boarders in 1944. In 1948, there was a large influx of students: 400 registered. School buildings from surrounding settlements were transported to the village and buses were provided to bring students to and from school. Following

that change, the number of boarders decreased.¹³ Legal offered Grade XII since 1935; it thus became very attractive to the youth in the village and from the countryside.

On Saturday, October 23, 1954, Couvent du Sacré-Coeur held the official opening of the program of Domestic Economy placed under the care of Sister Auréa Mageau. This program remained in operation until 1959.

Music ministry at the church was provided by Grey Nuns from 1927 to 1975. In addition, the Grey Nuns promoted the love of music during their years of ministry at Legal. For a number of years, music and singing courses were given at the school as well as to individual students. There were remarkable musical talents in that little town. One voice, that was hard to miss, at the televised hockey games of the Edmonton Oilers, well into the 1990s, was that of a former student of Sister Yvonne Morin, Lucien Lorieau, singing our National Anthem: *O Canada*.

Celebrating with the parish

Saint Emile parish of Legal celebrated its 50th Anniversary on Wednesday, August 6, 1953, a day of rejoicing in which the Grey Nuns took an active part. The parish church, rebuilt in 1950 after a fire, received a solemn blessing by Archbishop John Hugh MacDonald from Edmonton. This was followed by a grandiose celebration of the Mass by a former parish priest, Monsignor Emile Tessier, P. D.. Sister Annette Désilets, superior played the organ while the Oblate Father Edmond Douziech directed the choir. Kind words of welcome were expressed by Father Albert Langevin, the parish priest, while the second resident priest in 1903, in Legal, Father J. Aldéric Normandeau presented a meaningful talk in which he recalled the faith and courage of the pioneers and the powerful example they set for their followers. The ladies of the parish used all their savoir-faire to prepare and serve a festive dinner. In the evening, all participated in a *soirée du bon vieux temps* (old timers gala) for which this French Canadian population was renowned.¹⁴

Change of Diocese

The recently created diocese of Saint Paul, in 1948, was to be enriched by the addition of Legal within its jurisdiction. The transfer became official on February 8, 1956. Letters of congratulations were addressed to Bishop Philippe Lussier, C.Ss.R., by Mother Berthe Dorais, Provincial Superior and Sister Odélia Lamontagne, local superior of Couvent du Sacré-Coeur

Future of Couvent du Sacré-Coeur

Since the centralization of rural schools at Legal, in 1947, the number of boarders had continued to decrease considerably and, on May 23, 1956, the Provincial Council decided to discontinue admitting boarders to the convent, on a trial basis. The decision was in part motivated by lack of space in the convent, which also housed classrooms. Trial it was indeed, as the following year, boarders were admitted again, responding to demands, until final closure of the convent in 1968.

In the spring of 1968, a study of the convent's future was found necessary by the Provincial Council. Sisters Marguerite-Marie Côté and Yvette Poissant were mandated to conduct the study. They presented their report on April 17, 1968. The cost of repairing the building for proper use was considered too high, when only four sisters lived at the convent at that time. Renting a smaller house, and further attempts to sell the convent were encouraged.¹⁵ The sisters moved into a smaller residence in September, 1968. While at Couvent du Sacré-Coeur, between 1923 and 1968, they had received as boarders 836 girls and 38 boys.

A buyer was found on November 23, 1971, with the effective date for new occupancy being December 1, 1971. Mary O'Meara was ready to make all necessary repairs and adjustments to convert the building to a residence for elderly persons: the O'Meara Lodge.¹⁶

Upon leaving Couvent du Sacré-Coeur, the Grey Nuns donated all the chapel furniture and other articles to Saint Vincent's Parish in Saint Paul's diocese. A grateful former vicar from Legal, Father Jean-Luc Pigeon, posted at Saint Vincent, sent a lovely *Thank You* letter to the Grey Nuns Provincial Superior, Sister Florence Keegan, along with his Christmas wishes on December 10, 1971.¹⁷

Recognition of service

Legal parishioners have always showed high appreciation to the sisters who lived and ministered in their midst. Their spirit of faith was remarkable, their gratitude was unequalled. Twenty-five years of teaching in Legal for Sisters Aurore Blanchette and Dorilla Simard were celebrated with unique exuberance on November 24, 1971. The evening was attended by Bishop Raymond Roy of Saint Paul, members of the Provincial Council, several priests from surrounding parishes, representatives from the parish and town, and invited guests. Compliments were generously given and expressed with love, simplicity and sincerity. The students delighted the audience with joyful songs and dances. Father Rolland Bissonnette, parish priest, spoke eloquently on behalf of the parish and concluded:

*Your presence at Legal is indispensable, and I have the support of parents to say so.*¹⁸

Five years later, on June 13, 1976, Sister Blanchette died of cancer, at the age of 66, leaving the profession she loved and the people of Legal whom she had served generously over 29 years.

Another feast of gratitude was given on June 25, 1980 for Sister Dorilla Simard in recognition of her 32 years of teaching the children of Legal. The program, planned simply for distribution of certificates and medals to children of kindergarten to Grade IX, concluded with a surprise, at least for Sister Simard. After all prizes had been distributed, Raymond Tremblay, principal, addressed the assembly to thank and congratulate the heroine, Sister Dorilla Simard, who was retiring from her teaching responsibilities in Legal.

*He thanked her profusely for all her years of devotedness at the Executive Committee level, for the immense work she accomplished in all aspects of the school, and for her support and encouragement for all those who came to her for support and advice. He then wished her success in her new career of pastoral work and asked God to bless her and to grant her good health so that she can continue for many years her work at Legal.*¹⁹

One year later, there was consternation in Legal when Sister Dorilla Simard, suddenly became critically ill during an evening meeting with the *Femmes Chrétiennes* (Christian Women) of Legal on Monday, October 5, 1981. Once diagnosed with a cerebral aneurysm, she underwent surgery, recovered slowly, but surprisingly well and lived to reach 86 years of age. She died on January 14, 1998.

The year 1983 was memorable for Sister Eva Sauka, who was at Legal for a short time. She celebrated her 50th Anniversary as a Grey Nun. On Tuesday, April 12, 1983, an intimate celebration at the sisters' residence made her day: Sister Germaine Hétu, Provincial Superior and her council arrived for a gala dinner prepared by Legal community's cordon bleu chef, Sister Berthe Gamache. This joyful gathering was a nice prelude to the more elaborate Golden Jubilee celebration to be held later in the year at the Grey Nuns Regional Centre.²⁰

Last years at Legal

Following Sister Dorilla Simard's retirement from teaching, and her departure in October, 1981, the Grey Nuns' ministry at Legal continued to be one of presence: in pastoral visiting and taking care of the church and sacristy. It was often recognized that the Grey Nuns contributed a great deal to make and maintain Legal as perhaps the strongest French Canadian centre in Alberta, a centre of faith and commitment to religious traditions. This long-standing culture continues.

The town of Legal and the surrounding districts gave the

Church an impressive number of priests and religious: 27 Grey Nuns, 11 sisters in other religious congregations and five priests, for a total of 43. Among the 27 Grey Nuns from Legal, two became Provincial Superiors of Saint Albert Province: Sisters Marie Laforce from 1957 to 1964 and Marguerite Laforce from 1983 to 1986. In 1987, the Provincial Council decided to close the mission of Legal, because of shortage of sisters. The decision did not come easily; so many bonds had been created between the population of Legal and the Grey Nuns during the past 67 years, so much had been learned and shared, so much remained forever in memories. During these years, 130 Grey Nuns worked in Legal, accumulating a total of 500 years of dedication and service.

The last two Grey Nuns residing at Legal were Sisters Berthe Gamache, from 1982 to 1987, and Léda Belley, from 1985 to 1987. They left on August 12, 1987, after warm and tearful farewells to all their friends of Legal. The news of their departure brought a sense of loss to the people of Legal. Most of them had been students at the Grey Nuns' school, had worked with them in church and liturgy activities, had found a listening ear in their need. For the sisters, it was also a painful experience, but the ties were not severed, only the distance had increased.

For the 100th Anniversary of Saint Emile Parish, at Legal, in 1995, the people decided to write a history of their parish, of their ancestors and their noble beginnings. Again, they called upon a Grey Nun, Sister Annette Potvin, raised in Legal, to participate in the challenging task of writing 100 years of lived faith, Christian charity and endless hope exemplified in the people of Legal. The book entitled **Vision, Courage, Héritage** was launched on Sunday, June 25, 1995, following a Mass at Saint Emile church of Legal. Sister Annette Potvin was invited to take part in the Offertory Procession, carrying copies of the book. Sister Faye Wylie, Provincial Superior and her future successor, Sister Aurore Larkin were also present for the event.

The old convent served as a lodge for 26 years. In 1997, because of provincial health care budget cuts, Mary O'Meara could not continue to operate the lodge. She sold it to the

Regional School Council of North Centre No. 4. Extensive renovations were made and the old convent became *l'Ecole Citadelle*, a French School from kindergarten to Grade IX. The new school opened on February 28, 1998. The Christian Women's League of Legal presented a large picture of Saint Marguerite d'Youville thus ensuring her continuing protection of the school.

The year 1999 saw another series of events in the Legal community. A group of Church- and history-lovers decided to display the history of the Church and the French culture in western Canada. Sister Annette Potvin was consulted to advise on the content of the mural concerning the Grey Nuns ministries; artists were contracted to paint the large murals and the project was completed in 1999. A wall was built at the new Ecole Citadelle for the mural where the Grey Nuns are shown, thus perpetuating the presence of Grey Nuns at the former Couvent du Sacré-Coeur long after the name had changed and the Grey Nuns had left Legal. A future full of memories!

NOTES: Chapter 12

- 1 **Legal Couvent - Chroniques, 1920-1940**, p. 1, GNRC Arch.
- 2 **Ibid.**, p. 1.
- 3 Legal was the first Alberta Grey Nuns mission served by diocesan priests, not Oblates.
- 4 **Historique**, doc. # 6, GNRC Arch.
- 5 These missions will be reviewed in Volume II.
- 6 Annette Potvin, s.g.m., **Sacred Heart Convent, Legal**, manuscript, p. 1.
- 7 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, p. 3.
- 8 **Ibid.**, p. 9.
- 9 **Ibid.**, p. 38.
- 10 **Ibid.**, p. 42.
- 11 **Chroniques**, 1920-1940, p. 61.
- 12 **Ibid.**, pp. 51 and 53.

- 13 **Chroniques**, 1941-1960, p. 112.
- 14 **Ibid.**, pp. 181, 182.
- 15 **Ibid.**, doc. # 191.
- 16 **Ibid.**, doc. # 202.
- 17 **Historique**, doc. #202.
- 18 Léonie Poirier, s.g.m., **Nouvelles de Famille**, November, 1971, pp. 5, 6.
- 19 Léonie Poirier, s.g.m., **Ibid.**, July-August, 1980.
- 20 **Historique**, doc. # 217.




Couvent du Sacré-Coeur, Legal - 1929



Grade One students at Legal - 1950

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



1926 - SAINT PAUL - HÔPITAL SAINTE-THÉRÈSE

Saint Paul was the next village chosen for a Grey Nuns' foundation in Alberta in 1926. A French Métis colony, located 210 kilometers northeast of Edmonton, the district spread from the North Saskatchewan River on the south to Cold Lake on the north, a territory of 190 by 110 kilometers. When Father Albert Lacombe visited this large settlement, in 1896, the section which is now Brosseau was called *Saint Paul des Cris*. It was found later that the Cree nation was no longer gathering in this area. It became *Saint Paul des Métis*, in 1909, and the name changed later to *Saint Paul*. In 1909, the Oblate Father Adéodat Thérien had obtained this area for a white settlement and had recruited settlers from Eastern Canada. The population of the whole district in 1924 was about 15,000 people. It was calculated that 7,500 were French Canadians and 10,000 were Catholics. Included in that district were the municipalities of: Laurier, Saint Vincent, Saint Lina, Champlain, Ashmont and Saint Paul.¹

Need for a hospital

In 1916, the residents of that town began searching for a way to establish a hospital in their area. Father Adéodat Thérien, parish priest, who knew the Grey Nuns from Saint Albert, invited them to Saint Paul to meet that need, in February of that year. In 1918, the Spanish influenza increased the anxiety of those who had no place to care for their sick. Later correspondence between Father Joseph Tessier, then parish priest, and Mother M.L. Octavie Dugas, Superior General of the Grey Nuns, showed that, in 1922, the Grey Nuns were ready to accept the responsibility for a hospital at Saint Paul, providing that a temporary building with ade-

quate drainage be available; that the physicians agree to use the operating room as emergency room and case room temporarily; that they supply surgical instruments; that they are in favor of having the first year of a nursing program, and that the municipality agree to cover half of the construction costs for a new hospital.²

Nothing followed this response and the people from Saint Paul were becoming more impatient about obtaining a suitable health care facility. In May, 1925, a group of women requested that the municipalities involved rent a large house and they began using it as a hospital. They hired three nurses, Emérencienne Lafond as matron, I. Maurier and Priscilla Délisle. The new hospital was called *Dr. Charlebois' Memorial Hospital* in memory of the pioneer doctor who had just passed away in the spring of 1925. This was a six-bed hospital, which became a very busy place. It was soon realized that three nurses for 24-hour coverage was overtaxing.³

The foundresses

The Grey Nuns were approached again and a positive decision was reached. Mother Evangéline Gallant, Provincial Superior and Sister Robichaud (Emma Paquette), provincial assistant, came from Saint Albert on Friday, September 10, 1926, to examine the situation. When they arrived, at 2300 hours, there was a delegation to welcome them at the train station.

Here are the Grey Nuns, would cry the ladies, all exuberant with happiness. Others would touch their dress, saying: These are lovely grey dresses!⁴

Father Ludovic Larose, brought the two Grey Nuns to the Sisters of Assumption convent for another joyful welcome. In spite of the late hour, the hostesses were all at the door, awaiting them. Again, a gesture of faith was observed, in a true Grey Nun tradition. After greeting their hostesses, they went to the chapel to offer a prayer of thanksgiving and ask the Holy Spirit's assistance for the success of their visit. Then the Sisters of Assumption

served them a lovely dinner and all went for a short night of sleep.⁵

The Town Council offered the house of Dr. Gagnon to be set up as a hospital. The first visit was to that building in which they found many inconveniences, including lack of water and electricity. They reached the conclusion that a new structure was needed. In the meantime, the mission of Saint Paul was approved by the General Council with the understanding that the present temporary facility would be used until a new permanent building was ready.

The three foundresses selected were: Sisters Marie-du-Carmel (Claudia Landry), superior, 40 years of age, who graduated as a nurse at Holy Cross Hospital, in Calgary in 1914, Jeanne Longtin, 45 years old, who graduated as a nurse at Saint Vincent's Hospital in Toledo, Ohio, and Olympe (Mélaurée Lamirande), an Auxiliary sister, also 45, who worked mainly in service areas such as: cooking, sewing; when she retired, she made communion hosts at the provincial house for 18 years.

They left Edmonton on Friday, September 24, 1926, at 1600 hours, and arrived at the station in Saint Paul at 2145 hours. Accompanying them were Mother Evangéline Gallant, Provincial Superior and her assistant, Sister Robichaud (Emma Paquette), who had also volunteered their help during the next several weeks for the organization of the hospital.⁶

Father Ludovic Larose was at the station to welcome the new missionaries, who again, were hosted by the Sisters of Assumption. They remained there until space was organized for them on the upper floor of Dr. Charlebois' Memorial Hospital, the following Tuesday.

Sunday morning, September 26, 1926, after Mass and a brief tour of the hospital, they went to visit Father Larose and mentioned that they were starting at the hospital the following day. That was not in Father Larose's plans: he had a surprise for the sisters. And the secret came out: they were going to visit their sisters established at Lac La Selle since 1898 and always so eager for visitors. Their first Monday was thus all planned for them and it

was with much joy that they accepted. The **Chroniques** relate that this visit was delightful for all, and a beginning of happy neighbourliness.⁷

The hospital

On Tuesday, September 28, 1926, the sisters began their tasks at the hospital. The former matron, Emérencienne Lafond was happy to pass on her responsibilities to Sister Marie-du-Carmel who, in turn was delighted that Emérencienne was able to remain on staff. And she stayed for 40 years, a faithful, committed nurse who was very precious since the beginning of the institution. On that day, the hospital's name was changed to *Hôpital Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus*, placing it under the protection of the new Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, a Carmelite who had been canonized on May 17, 1925 by Pope Pius XI.⁸

Sunday, October 10, 1926, Father Ludovic Larose celebrated the first Mass in the hospital. The comfort and strength brought to the sisters on that occasion was evident in their silent tears. November 6, 1926, another surprise from Father Larose fulfilled a secret desire of the sisters. He arrived, carrying in his arms, a magnificent statue of little Saint Thérèse. Sister Marie du-Carmel, in her delight, sacrificed her place in the chapel for this welcomed guest and protector. The gift came from E. Meunier who was praying to the little Saint for the cure of her daughter. Now the sisters joined this generous lady in prayer, knowing that faith and hope do obtain miracles.⁹ Mother Pauline de Jésus, a Carmelite from Lisieux, France, and a blood sister of Saint Thérèse, sent a special relic of Saint Thérèse to the hospital that honored her little sister. Another significant point was that the first baby born at the hospital on October 25, 1926, was a girl and she was given the name Thérèse.¹⁰

Father Larose was kept very busy ensuring the interest and financial support of the six municipalities expected to contribute to building a new hospital in Saint Paul. He spared no effort to visit those municipalities, reminding them of the hope that each

municipality would contribute \$1,000.00 toward the building and of their right to competent health care in this future institution. On October 26, 1926, the contract for the new hospital was given to Charles Gordon of Vegreville, at a meeting held at the rectory. The Oblates donated the land and the parish organized a bazaar that produced \$3,225.00 in revenues for the hospital. On October 27, work started on the new structure measuring 20 by 13 meters with a capacity of 25 beds. Less than a year later, on Tuesday, August 16, 1927, the sisters took possession of their hospital.¹¹ There were nine patients to transport from the temporary eight-bed hospital into the new building that day.

A private ceremony to bless the hospital was led by Father Larose while the sisters joined in with their prayer and their hope for a successful ministry in Hôpital Sainte Thérèse. August 17, 1927, saw the first Mass celebrated in the new hospital. The ladies of the village sang joyfully. Many eyes were teary, but the hearts were jubilant.

Meanwhile, people of Saint Paul and district showed much generosity. Their eagerness to see their hospital well supplied was rewarding. Generous donations also arrived from the Provincial House in Saint Albert, Saint Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon, Holy Cross Hospital in Calgary, Edmonton General Hospital and Holy Ghost Hospital in Cambridge, Massachusetts, all were Grey Nuns health care institutions. Through them, many urgent needs were met, the chapel was well furnished and items for bazaars were numerous.

The hospital family

Saint Paul had been fortunate with the quality of medical services provided over the years. Dr. J. P. Charlebois practiced medicine from 1907 to 1925, the year he died from food poisoning. He gave of himself valiantly during an 18 year span, traveling daily, by horse and buggy or on foot, throughout the large district extending from Saint Paul to Cold Lake. He was joined by Dr. Gagnon in 1910 who, after five years decided to build a large

house for private nursing care. Dr. Joseph Phoenix Décosse arrived in 1919 and cared for the people of the region for 34 years, until he retired. During that time, he was assisted by Dr. Nickiforuk for a few years until he joined the army. In August, 1946, Dr. J. P. Décosse was delighted to receive his son, Dr. Roland Décosse with whom he worked until his retirement in 1953. The new Auxiliary Hospital opened in 1988 was named after Dr. J. P. Décosse as a fitting homage to his memory.

Dr. Roland Décosse's career lasted over 40 years. During that time, he received assistance from Dr. Léon Trottier for about 30 years, and several others who came for shorter periods. Doctors Décosse and Trottier were instrumental in obtaining a new 75 bed hospital in 1962 and several expansions until the 1988 wing was built for extended care.

Nursing care was carried out mostly by Grey Nuns until the mid-1950s. When the number of sisters began to decline, more lay nurses and nurses aides were recruited. With the offering of Year One of the Edmonton General Hospital Nursing program, the recruitment of graduate nurses was made easier and, as for all other hospitals in those years, nursing students were undoubtedly a source of regular and consistent service to patients. That program began in 1927 and was continued for a brief period only, due to changes in the education of nurses and the difficulty of recruiting students in Saint Paul.

In addition to Emérencienne Lafond, there are other members of the nursing personnel who deserve a special mention for their long tenure, their dedication, loyalty and sincere interest in their patients. Céline Berlinguette from 1926 to 1969 and Irène Lajoie-Leclair from 1937 to 1983.

People of Saint Paul will long remember *the little sister* who served them at the hospital for almost 40 years and left, for health reasons in June 1983, Sister Hilda Kraft. Most of her time in Saint Paul was at the service of babies and children, even occasionally baby sitting at homes. While she was a good friend of babies and young children, she was the *sweetheart* of parents whom she knew well. Dr. Roland Décosse's comment to the **Journal** upon Sister Kraft's departure was:

*She was a good friend and a good worker. She is taking a well-deserved rest.*¹²

The Church in Saint Paul

In addition to Father Ludovic Larose, who helped create the hospital and remained as parish priest until 1941, Saint Paul's parish had Fathers Ovila Meunier, Gérard Lassonde and Guy Michaud as Oblate parish priests until the departure of the Oblates from the new Saint Paul diocese in 1951.

There was also one Oblate priest whose memory left an indelible mark in the district in general, and the hospital in particular. Father Jean-Marie LeClainche served the region from 1907 until 1941. Forced to retire on January 12, 1942, due to illness, he was hospitalized at Hôpital Sainte Thérèse and continued to minister to the patients, fulfilling his life-long dedication to humanity. He died on October 15, 1942. Newcomers to Saint Paul have often been introduced to the memory of this saintly priest, who has kept a special place in the hearts of those who knew him.¹³

The new diocese of Saint Paul was established in 1948, with Bishop Maurice Beaudoux as the first Bishop. When he was transferred as Archbishop of Saint Boniface, in 1952, Bishop Philippe Lussier, C.Ss.R. replaced him until 1968. Occupying the episcopal seat of Saint Paul, at the sale of Hôpital Sainte Thérèse in 1970, was Bishop Edouard Gagnon, PSS. Bishop Gagnon left in 1972; he was elevated to the Cardinalate in Rome, in 1985. Bishop Raymond Roy was in Saint Paul from 1972 to 1997 while Grey Nuns were still ministering in that town. He was replaced by Bishop Thomas Collins on June 30, 1997.

Advisors and benefactors

In 1933, the first Advisory Board was formed. It was chaired by Father Larose with M. F. McMahon as vice-chair, J. A. Gallant as secretary, D. B. McKenje and Louis Belland as members. Financial and administrative matters were ably dealt with by

these competent advisors. Many local residents volunteered their services to serve on this Board until the need for a Board of Management was created in 1945 when the Sainte Thérèse became a Municipal Hospital.

On April 6, 1949, the Ladies Hospital Auxiliary was formed. The officers elected were W. Guthrie, president, T. Skitch, vice-president and A. C. Jonhson, secretary. A large group of women belonged to this new organization. With their keen interest and hard work, they helped to furnish the children's ward located in the hospital basement since 1945. A gift shop, operated by them, was a source of sizable revenues for the hospital. Actually, there were always projects in their minds for the benefit of the patients. Their loyalty and devotion over the years has not faltered. It is no secret that their services have often been a valuable lifeline to the hospital to this day.

Expansions and rebuilding

After about 30 years of service, it was found that the eight-bed hospital of 1926, having been replaced in 1928 by a 25-bed institution, was again showing dire need for expansion. There were often 35 patients, crowded in rooms and hallways. In 1959, the Grey Nuns decided to build and finance a new wing to bring the hospital's capacity to 64 beds and 16 bassinets.¹⁴ With the administrator, Sister Irène Papineau, the Board became very busy in obtaining necessary approvals and planning for this new construction. Members of the Board during the planning were: Lucien Drouin, chair, Dr. L. G. Mandin, secretary, John Bagan, Michael Panylyk, A. Douglas, Hon. Ray Rierison, M.L.A., Henry Trottier, Doctors Roland Décosse, Léon Trottier and E. Wilson.¹⁵ Ready to open on August 15, 1962, the 75-bed hospital provided modern and larger facilities. This new facility was to be the last legacy of the Grey Nuns to the town of Saint Paul, as far as health care was concerned.

Relinquishing ownership

In 1970, Lucien Maynard, legal advisor for the Grey Nuns Provincial Council, officially informed the Minister of Health, James Henderson of the Grey Nuns' intention to relinquish ownership of Saint Thérèse Hospital:

I am writing to advise you of the decision of the Sisters to relinquish their equity in the St. Theresa Hospital in Saint Paul.¹⁶

On October 21, 1970, **Saint Paul Journal** announced:

It is the intention of the Sisters of Charity (Grey Nuns) to make known to the public their intention to relinquish the ownership, and eventually the administration of Saint Thérèse Hospital in Saint Paul, Alberta. The main reason for such a decision is the decrease in human resources, the lack of religious personnel, impelling the Order to limit the number of its commitments and institutions. It should not be interpreted as a sign of dissatisfaction with the Health Department or the local authorities, which have been most cooperative with the present administration of the hospital.¹⁷

This news came as a bombshell to Saint Paul community, even though rumours had circulated earlier. Letters had been directed to the Superior General, Sister Georgette Leduc, by the Bishop and the Town Council:

The news that a possible departure [of the sisters] having transpired, I receive requests from all sides that the sisters don't leave. The citizens of Saint Paul and the region are not indifferent to the dedication of the sisters and their profound influence in the milieu.¹⁸

My council wishes me to inform you that in spite of the difficult times your Order may find itself, every confidence and moral support is being extended to you. You may rest assured that this council recognizes in sincere appreciation the efforts of the Order, and wishes you continued success...¹⁹

Along the same line, a response from the Executive Director of the Alberta Hospital Association did point out the vacuum that was created when a voluntary hospital discontinues its involvement in health care institutions:

*We all regret, of course, that the order has found it necessary to withdraw from another of its hospitals in the province and thus to continue the "exodus" of voluntary organizations from the hospital field in Alberta.*²⁰

It was with a great deal of hesitation and pain that the sisters had to continue negotiating with the Health Department towards the unavoidable results. The regrets expressed by so many people did not make the process easier, but they were a source of comfort to all those who were concerned with the impact of the event.

The people of Saint Paul and the sisters continued to express their mutual sadness and their thanks. On Wednesday, December 30, 1970, the Grey Nuns gave a dinner of appreciation to their advisors and collaborators at Saint Thérèse Hospital. Present were: Bishop Edouard Gagnon of Saint Paul; Sisters Aline Bohémier, assistant provincial and Yvette Poissant, provincial treasurer; Lucien Drouin, president of the Board; Mike Panylyk, mayor; H. D. Bawden, vice president of the Board; Honorable Raymond Reiersen, Minister of Work; Dr. L.G. Mandin, René Foisy, Aline O'Driscoll, John Bagan, John Labant and the nine sisters still working at Saint Paul. Sister Lucienne Garneau, superior and administrator, conveyed the sincere gratitude of the sisters towards the advisors and collaborators, for their support and assistance throughout the 44 years that the Grey Nuns were at the hospital.²¹

In turn, a *Testimonial Banquet in honor of Grey Nuns* was offered on May 20, 1971, by the Town of Saint Paul, the Parish Council and the Medical Staff who all wanted to show their appreciation to the Grey Nuns.²² The Provincial Council members, the Grey Nuns who were working at the hospital on December 31, 1970 and all past missionaries who spent at least five years at Saint Thérèse Hospital were invited. This was indeed a monumental *Thank You*.

In the 44 years that Grey Nuns operated the hospital, 146 sisters worked there for various periods of time. Together, they had given an accumulated total of 420 years of dedicated service to the people of Saint Paul and district. On December 31, 1970, the last superior at Saint Thérèse Hospital was Sister Lucienne Garneau. The other sisters were: Sisters Ovilia Bédard, Marguerite Bourgeois, Marguerite Comeau, Mary Fruhstuk, Hilda Kraft, Simonne Mageau, Julia Richard and Yvonne Thibert.

Sisters Marguerite Bourgeois, Hilda Kraft and Julia Richard remained on staff after the hospital was turned over to the Government on December 31, 1970. The last Grey Nun to leave was Sister Hilda Kraft, in June, 1983.

Remembering with love

Reminiscing lovingly over these 44 years of the Grey Nuns' presence at Hôpital Sainte Thérèse, brings back memories of happiness and sorrow enriching mutual bonds that will last into the future.

The night of January 14-15, 1948, a fire at a neighbouring store, propelled by a violent wind, brought 15 burn victims to the hospital. All sisters sleeping in the residence were called to help the night sister, and good care was provided to everyone. In addition, as the conflagration, carried by the wind, threatened to engulf the hospital, Mother d'Youville was called to the rescue and soon, the wind calmed down.

January 23, 1951, water that had been hoped for since the opening of the hospital, in 1926, finally arrived in abundance from the last well to be dug! No more hard water, no more pails to carry up and down, and no more severe restrictions of this essential element. Alleluia!

January 9, 1955, a date remembered with grief. Father Alfred Quirion, parish priest of Saint Edouard parish, was assassinated in his car by three hitchhikers. He was on his way back from a trip to Saint Boniface. He had been ordained on June 11, 1938. A very dedicated priest.

June 22, 1955, a float representing a children's nursing unit at the hospital took part in the Saint John the Baptist parade, a French Canadian tradition.

December, 1957, Hôpital Sainte Thérèse was accredited by the Canadian-U.S. Medical Association. This distinction was an important one, reflecting highly on the hospital.

A first in Saint Paul, and most likely in medical history: a 0.4 kilogram baby girl was born at the hospital on November 16, 1958. She survived and was bundled up for her first trip home on February 5, 1959, weighting the whole of 2.25 kilograms. A treasured memory for the medical, nursing staff and sisters of that time!

January 7, 1960, a fire during the evening was discovered by Sister Jennie O'Harro, who sounded the alarm. Forty patients were evacuated in record time. Mother d'Youville was again praised for her protection.

July 22, 1962, Hôpital Sainte Thérèse got its own coat of arms. It was a dream come-true for Sister Irène Papineau, superior, who had this work designed by a heraldist from Montréal, André Genest .

Saint Paul's Chamber of Commerce Centennial Committee held a Grey Nuns Night, in April, 1966 to honor the Sisters of Charity, Grey Nuns. A special tribute and a centennial award were presented to Mother Yvonne Prévost, then Provincial Superior, who received it on behalf of the Grey Nuns pioneers.

A special page in the history of the old building, recently replaced: from July 12, 1962 to September, 1967, the 16 sisters from the infirmary in Saint Albert were given hospitality during the construction of their future home, the Grey Nuns Regional Centre in Edmonton.

Saint Thérèse Hospital registered the birth of its first triplets on February 28, 1964.

The new position of assistant administrator, was initiated on April 4, 1967, when Benno Muench was appointed to fill that position. He would later succeed the administrator when Sister Lucienne Garneau left on January 7, 1971.

November 9, 1970, the new hospital received its accreditation from the Canadian Council of Hospital Accreditation.

The people of Saint Paul and surroundings were very generous in giving 23 of their daughters to the Grey Nuns Congregation during the years 1927 to 1956. Among them, was a future Superior General from 1981 to 1991, Sister Marguerite Létourneau.

Individual ministries

For 27 years, following the Grey Nuns relinquishing of administration at Hôpital Sainte Thérèse, several sisters remained in Saint Paul for individual ministries. They resided in the former rectory until 1997. Some of their work was: nursing at the hospital, visiting residents at the Sunnyside and Blunt's Nursing Homes, teaching and guiding Bible studies in all parishes of Saint Paul diocese, administering the Diocesan Renewal Centre, doing special secretarial work for the Bishop, ministry to prisoners, activities with Development and Peace, and cooking for the Bishop and priests.

Reminiscing

April 27, 1975, the Sisters of Assumption celebrated their 75th Anniversary of arrival in Saint Paul; a celebration that was shared with the Grey Nuns.

October 8, 1975, Sister Hilda Kraft was named Saint Paul Woman of the Year at a social seminar and award night, along with seven other women, including Marie-Louise Létourneau, mother of Sister Marguerite Létourneau.

Friday, July 29, 1977, the people of Saint Paul took advantage of the presence of Sister Marguerite Létourneau, Assistant General, visiting her family in Saint Paul, to have a special celebration at the Mass. At the Offertory, she renewed her religious vows, followed by a presentation of roses. The occasion was her 25th Anniversary as a Grey Nun.

- January 6, 1982, blessing of the new Diocesan Renewal Center, which was under the direction of Sister Bernadette Bézaire. The Centre was located in Saint Edouard.
- June 8, 1982, Sister Hilda Kraft was proclaimed *Personality of the Week* in Saint Paul. She was known as the *Little Sister with a Very Big Heart*.
- June 26, 1982, Saint Paul welcomed Mother Teresa of Calcutta in a day filled with prayer and thanksgiving.
- November 8, 1983, the old rectory, where the sisters lived, was declared a historic building by Alberta Culture. The promulgation occurred during Saint Paul's 75th Anniversary celebrations in 1984 (1909-1984).
- On February 6, 1985, Alexandre Janvier, a former student from Blue Quills, now an artist of international acclaim, was invited in Saint Paul to speak on problems of discrimination towards Natives.
- On September 19, 1987, a retirement party for Dr. Roland Décosse gathered 500 guests. Five Grey Nuns attended, including one from Edmonton and another from Lac Ste-Anne.

Leaving Saint Paul

The last sisters who worked in Saint Paul were Sisters Irène Lefebvre and Françoise Gamache. They left on May 7, 1997. In 27 years, 22 sisters missioned in individual ministries in Saint Paul. Together, they served for a cumulated total of 109 years with dedication and joy. When the numbers of years of service at the hospital are added, the totals become 71 years in Saint Paul, 168 sisters for a total cumulated years of 529.

On Saturday, April 26, 1997, Bishop Raymond Roy and the people of Saint Paul held a special celebration to mark the 70 years of the presence of Grey Nuns in Saint Paul and 135 years in the diocese, including the work done in the missions of Lac LaBiche from 1862 to 1898, Lac La Selle from 1898 to 1931 and Blue Quills from 1931 to 1970.

After a friendly gathering at the sisters' residence, all walked to the cathedral for the celebration of Mass by Bishop Raymond Roy, assisted by Fathers Rhéal Levasseur and Jean-Luc Pigeon. Many groups came forward to thank the sisters and say unanimously how much their presence will be missed. This was followed by a lovely reception at the Centre de l'Âge d'Or where people again came to thank the Grey Nuns personally for all those many years of service to the population.

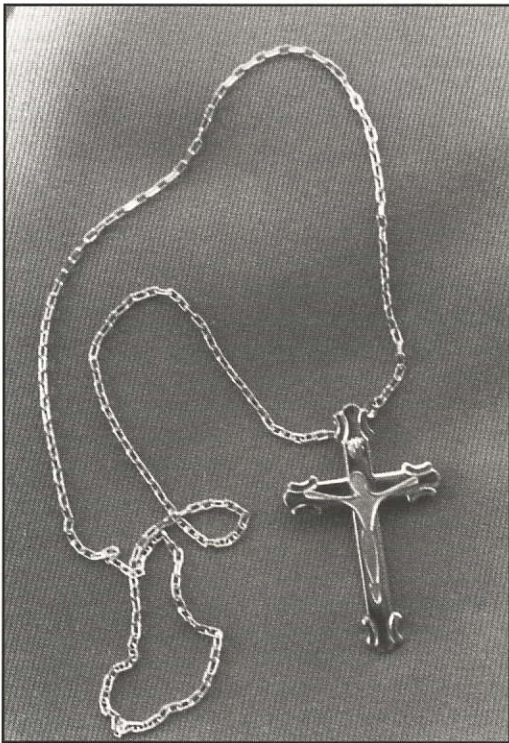
NOTES: Chapter 13

- 1 **Saint Paul, Chroniques**, p. 92, GNRC Arch.
- 2 **Saint Paul, Historique**, doc. # 7, GNRC Arch.
- 3 **St. Therese Hospital, Official Opening** booklet, June 3, 1988, p. 2, GNRC Arch.
- 4 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, 1926-1945, p. 1
- 5 **Ibid.**, p. 1.
- 6 **Ibid.**, pp. 3,4.
- 7 **Ibid.**, p. 3.
- 8 **Official Opening booklet, Op. Cit.**, p. 2.
- 9 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, p. 5.
- 10 **Ibid.**, p. 4.
- 11 **Official Opening booklet, Op. Cit.**, p. 3.
- 12 **St. Paul's Journal**, June 10, 1983.
- 13 **Official Opening booklet, Op. Cit.**, p. 3.
- 14 **Ibid.**, p. 3.
- 15 Olivier Noel, **Saint Paul des Métis 1909 to Saint Paul 1979**, Inter-Collegiate Press, 1979, pp. 78-82.
- 16 Lucien Maynard to James Henderson, October 9, 1970.
- 17 **Saint Paul Journal**, October 21, 1970.
- 18 Bishop Edouard Gagnon to Sister Georgette Leduc, Superior General, May 2, 1970, GNRC Arch.

- 19 Laurent Richard, sec. treas., Town of Saint Paul, to Sister Georgette Leduc, June 18, 1970, GNRC Arch.
- 20 Murray Ross, Executive Director, A.H.A., to Sister Lucienne Garneau, Administrator, Saint Thérèse Hospital, November 3, 1970, GNRC Arch.
- 21 **Chroniques**, p. 152.
- 22 **Historique**, doc. #393.



Hôpital Ste-Thérèse, St. Paul - 1929



Grey Nuns' cross - 1981

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



1965 - RETURNING TO LAC STE-ANNE

One hundred and two years had elapsed since the Grey Nuns left Lac Ste-Anne, in 1863. In 1965, they returned to establish a multi-purpose mission. The location was ideal for the sisters' private or small group retreats, vacation, short periods of rest and intensive work.

Building a house

Land was purchased on July 15, 1964 and a contract for building was signed with H.D.C. Construction Co.. The house was built to accommodate up to 15 persons in small single rooms; there was also a chapel, a spacious living room with large windows facing the lake, a kitchen and a dining area. It was announced by the Provincial Superior, Sister Yvonne Prévost that this new place would be called: "Châteauguay au Lac Ste-Anne" as a reminder of the place of rest purchased by Marguerite d'Youville in 1765 in Châteauguay, Québec, exactly 200 years before the opening of this new 'Châteauguay'.

The Official Opening of the house occurred on October 8, 1965. As part of the event, a Mass was celebrated by Father Maurice Joly, O.M.I., parish priest of Lac Ste-Anne. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate have continued their ministry with the Crees and the Métis of the region throughout this past century and were delighted to see the return of the Grey Nuns as confirmed with enthusiasm by Father Joly in his greetings and homily.

Changes have occurred

When returning to Lac Ste-Anne, the Grey Nuns were to notice many changes in the population and the buildings as it was known by their predecessors 102 years prior. There was now a lovely church transported to the site and remodelled in 1950 and a rectory; the nearby Alexis Reserve was well laid out and well organized with a new church in the planning; there were other religious communities building their own cottages, and most importantly, Lac Ste-Anne was now a widely known place of Pilgrimage to Saint Anne. The Annual Pilgrimage started in 1889 when a heavy rain ended a prolonged drought after prayers were said at the Mission. Native people and others have returned each year in ever larger crowds until 110 years later the Annual Pilgrimage was attracting close to 40,000 people coming from all western Canadian provinces, the NWT and the USA. The one week Pilgrimage always coincides with the feast of Saint Anne, July 26. Pilgrims come several days in advance, and pitch their tents, now largely replaced by more modern vans, campers and motor homes. It is an occasion to pray, return to the Sacraments of the Church, renew acquaintances with far away friends and always participate in the impressive Blessing of the Lake by the Bishops present.

Fence up... and down

A somewhat unsettling situation arose one day when Henri Chamberland and Gus Hubscher, employees at the Grey Nuns Regional Centre in Edmonton went to Lac Ste-Anne to repair a fence which had been knocked down. That fence had been erected near the main gate of the neighbors, the Sisters of Atonement. On October 20, 1970, around 1000 hours, one of the Natives' son approached our employees and advised:

*this is my dad's property and you can't fence it. If
you do, tomorrow it will be down.*

Although this property had been acquired partly from the parish through the Archdiocese, and partly from a Mr. Letendre, and the Grey Nuns had the necessary title to the land, they none-the-less, graciously granted the Natives free access to the lake and peace was restored. Sister Berthe Gamache, who was directress of the house at the time, relates that the Natives were very appreciative of this gesture and often shared their fishing gains with the sisters on their return from the lake.

Ministries

Initially, Sister Alida Gamache was responsible for this new Mission while Sisters Catherine Frohlich, Marie-Anne Lavoie and Délia Bourque came for short periods and assisted her with various tasks, including teaching and cooking. By the end of 1965, hardly three months after the opening, the house had received 22 sisters for a total of 159 days of rest. It had been visited by over 100 priests, sisters from several religious communities and Grey Nuns of Saint Albert Province. All were served with a grand tour of the house, a look at the beautiful lake and a meal or refreshments.

The 1966 **Chroniques** reveal an increase in pastoral activities by the sisters, especially catechism at the Alexis Reserve and at Wabamum. Additional help was required to respond to more requests and even more so when Sister Alida Gamache was admitted to the hospital where she remained for several weeks. At that time, her niece, Sister Berthe Gamache came to replace her and help; she remained there 10 years and became the first sister to hold the title of Directress. After 1975, the person responsible of the mission was given the title of Superior.

In addition to teaching catechism, the sisters were responsible for the preparation of children and adults of the Indian Reserves for the sacraments from Baptism to marriage and the Anointing of the Sick, then referred to as "the Last Rites". They also assumed responsibility for preparing the altar for Mass, and ensuring the upkeep of linens and other items of liturgy for the three churches: Lac Ste-Anne, Alberta Beach and Alexis Reserve.

A study of Grey Nuns' ministries at Lac Ste-Anne was commissioned by Sister Florence Keegan, Provincial Superior, and undertaken by Sister Dora Durand in 1975. In a Communiqué dated 1976, Sister Keegan summarized the resulting recommendations: (1) there is one apostolic need identified: catechesis; and (2) the house can become a place to accommodate sisters from other communities as well as Grey Nuns. Both recommendations were carried out to a great extent. Concerning catechesis, Sister Simonne Forest, who arrived in September, 1975, wrote about her ministry in *Family News* ¹ of July-August, 1976. She named the populations she was teaching: White and Métis from Lac Ste Anne; Stony Indians from Alexis and Duffield Reserves. She also gave an interesting description of her work as follows:

My entire work consists mainly in preparing the children to receive the Sacraments, preparing the parents for the baptism of their children, giving spiritual preparation to couples who are contemplating marriage or having their marriage blessed, visiting White, Métis and Indian families. In addition, I strive to encourage people in all their organizations such as the program for Alcoholic Anonymous and various workshops which take place.²

When Sister Forest left Lac Ste-Anne on January 4, 1979, there were regrets expressed by the people to whom she dedicated so much of her love and talents. Up to the last minute, they were hoping that plans would change, however, being called back to her province of origin, Saint Boniface, the obedient little Sister was soon on her way to her new ministry.

Sister Aurise Normandeau was missionned to Lac Ste-Anne from 1982 to 1984 to continue the pastoral work so well established. In addition, she was able to encourage several Native women to the new Associate Program being established by Provincial Council. Although, these ladies could not officially join the Associates because of the distance to come to meetings in Edmonton, they nevertheless were committed to continue their ministry to the elderly and the handicapped whom they visited in their homes in the spirit of Marguerite d'Youville.

Helping neighbors... and others

The sisters at Lac Ste Anne are known for their readiness to help their neighbors. For example, there is the story of the pilgrim to the famous Pilgrimage to Sainte Anne who arrived walking from Hay River, Northwest Territories: he had been bitten by a dog during his trip. Upon arrival, he soon found out that there was a nurse, Sister Marie-Ange Charlebois, at the sisters' residence. And, Sister got a job! The wound was dressed and the dressings were carefully changed daily. By the end of the pilgrimage, the wound was healed. Was it due to Saint Ann or to Sister Charlebois? Or both? There was also a Native woman from Beauval who had to be visited daily in her tent on the grounds of the Pilgrimage until her malaise had disappeared. The devoted nurse, who was also the 'cordon bleu' at the sisters residence, "adopted" an elderly lady for many years. There were numerous times when the lady feasted on a tasty meal, lovingly delivered by Sister Charlebois to her home nearby, in addition to the daily generous serving of her favorite barley soup. This Native lady was also hosted at the sisters' residence several days while repairs were made in her house.

Some memories contain an element of anxiety. In 1977, while the sisters were absent for a few hours in Edmonton, there was a break-in at their house. Fortunately, only a small amount of money was taken, but, as a result, security became a new priority. A few years later, a young Native man knocked at the door and asked to be taken home with his mother who was unable to walk and his car was stalled. The only driver at the time, Sister Charlebois was at the lake, fishing; he was asked to go and talk to her. While he was away, two women and a man came and asked for food. Sandwiches, cookies and tea were served 'with a smile' as usual. Upon his return from the lake shore, the young man identified his mother sitting at the table. She was now able to walk!

There were also people from the Peigans nation who arrived to visit Sister Laurence Désilets, superior, their former teacher of

some 40 years ago in Brocket. She was happy to host them for a few days and reminisce on the 'good old days'.

A new wing

In 1981, the Provincial Council approved the addition of a wing to the original building to provide a meeting room spacious enough for group meetings, directed retreats and work sessions, as well as, a suite for more privacy. The meeting room also offers the warmth of a fire place. This building resulted in a significant increase of activities at Lac Ste-Anne over the years.

A Mission lived

The hostesses of Lac Ste-Anne have fulfilled their main mission of hospitality with the utmost generosity during the 34 years since the re-opening of the Mission. On many occasions, they have hosted the Western Bishops for meetings, the Alberta Bishops under the presidency of the Archbishop of Edmonton, groups of Seminarians, novices from several communities, Pastoral Care workers from the three Catholic hospitals of Caritas Health Group and other Edmonton hospitals, business and professional groups for working sessions, countless days of work for the Grey Nuns Provincial Council and for individual Sisters working on projects, and not the least, days of rest, prayer and vacation for the sisters. Perhaps it would be accurate to say that this 'Châteauguay' has been a 'life saver' after heavy projects, illness or fatigue, or simply when the sisters felt a need to refresh their souls in the beauties of nature.

To date, 32 Grey Nuns have devoted a cumulated 130 years of service to their sisters and brothers, to their Natives and Métis friends. To them we extend a heartfelt thank you. May this gentle, caring mission continue for a long time.

NOTES: Chapter 14

- 1 **Family News** is the official newsletter of St. Albert Province since 1968.
- 2 Forest, Sr. Simonne, **Family News**, July-August, 1976, pp. 23-25, GNRC Arch.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



1972 -
MORINVILLE

Morinville, a lovely little town, 34 kilometers north of Edmonton, received its name from a priest colonizer, Father Jean-Baptiste Morin from Montréal. This priest came west, in 1891, at the request of Bishop Vital Grandin, to bring settlers of French Canadian origin for this new colony.

In 1904, Morinville was fortunate to receive the Daughters of Jesus, sisters arriving from France during the religious persecution. They came as educators and directed a boarding school in Morinville for 68 years until their departure in 1972. Morinville had a population of 1,800 at that time and it was predicted to grow to 20,000 in the next 15 years as this village was becoming an attractive dormitory town for Edmonton workers.

First Grey Nuns in Morinville

When the Daughters of Jesus decided to leave Morinville in 1972, teaching positions became vacant and sisters from other congregations were approached to continue this ministry to the youth. Sister Annette Mageau was one of them and her application was accepted to teach at Ecole Thibeault. She was accompanied by Sister Léda Belley as a volunteer parish worker.

On August 24, 1972, the two sisters held an open house at their little apartment. This consisted in a blessing of the residence by Father Georges Primeau, parish priest, a prayerful celebration of hymns and a consecration to Mary. It was followed by refreshments and many wishes of success.¹ The gathering was attended by some 30 Grey Nuns from Edmonton, Legal and Saint Albert who came to rejoice and pray with their two companions. A first

Mass was celebrated on January 28, 1975 by Bishop Raymond Roy of Saint Paul.

Classes began on August 28, 1972 for Sister Mageau with her 27 French Grade 2 students. In no time, she was able to accomplish marvels in guiding the singing talents of these youngsters in addition to regular classroom work. There were times when these crystal voices were transported to Edmonton to sing at a Mass at the Grey Nuns Regional Centre, such as in October, 1974, or at the CFRN TV studio, installed at Morinville for auditions of *Search for Talents* where trophies were earned on a few occasions². And, much could be said about the marvellous Christmas Concerts given by these students!

In July, 1976, Sister Antoinette Cyre arrived to teach Grade 1, while Sister Annette Mageau moved to Grade 5. The addition of one sister was made possible, thanks to their move into a house with more spacious quarters in April, 1976. Sister Antoinette Bézaire had replaced Sister Léda Belley in September, 1975 and continued the ministries initiated by her predecessor, as well as becoming involved in new areas.

An impressive list of ministries carried on at Morinville, in addition to teaching was traced throughout the **Chroniques**. These included: attending meetings and activities of the *Femmes Chrétiennes*, taking turns for one week services to the church and sacristy throughout the year, orientation of altar boys and girls, singing in church choir, organization of a group, the *churchettes*,³ visiting elderly persons, families, with special attention to the parents of students in the sisters' classrooms, distribution of food hampers at Christmas time, support of Alcoholic Anonymous programs and individuals, telephone ministry, support of the *Association Canadienne-Française de l'Alberta* (ACFA).

On the occasion of the sisters' move into a house, in April, 1976, a blessing celebration was held on the evening of Friday, June 4, 1976. Again their devoted pastor, Father Georges Primeau provided his ministry for this event. Also present were members of the Provincial Council and some 20 other sisters from Edmonton and Saint Albert. In March, 1977, the chapel was com-

pleted with, as its main focus, a beautiful tabernacle and a kneeler, built by Pat Short, a neighbor who continued his kindness to the sisters. Pat died suddenly on May 15, 1978; one more benefactor was in heaven, always attentive to the needs of the small community.

A first Mass in this new residence was celebrated on Tuesday, March 22, 1977 by Father Georges Primeau, parish priest and his vicar, Father Victor Bureau. This young priest had carved a large crucifix for Morinville cemetery which was erected on September 28, 1975. His artistic talents, combined with a contemplative spirituality, would later lead him to join the Order of Carmelites in France. This Order's feminine branch, the Carmelite Sisters of Trois-Rivières, Québec, had already claimed his sister Rosella from the Grey Nuns' congregation in 1982.

The house inhabited by the sisters, being larger than their former apartment, allowed them to receive young women for an experience of religious life. The first one was Odile Mahé, from Saint Lina, who later became a Grey Nun, a life she favored for several years.

Biblical study groups have been organized in Morinville with the help of Sister Annette Potvin, who was Saint Paul's Diocese coordinator for Bible groups. Sister Potvin had her 'pied-à-terre' at the Grey Nuns residence in Morinville from August, 1979 until July, 1980. During that time, she had several of her Study Guides translated into French to the delight of people from Morinville and Legal.

Celebrating with the people

On November 19, 1972, the people of Morinville held a Mass of thanksgiving to honor the Daughters of Jesus who had given 68 years of education services to generations of Morinville children. The ceremony was grandiose and the reception that followed in the *Centre Récréatif* was friendly, touching and tearful. So much dedication on the part of these sisters had not gone unnoticed.

There was pride and honor in the small community when, on November 17, 1974, the church became a historical monument. Built in 1893, it had just gone through major renovations to restore the antique value of the building and its furniture. A solemn Mass was celebrated by Bishop Raymond Roy of Saint Paul, assisted by Father Georges Primeau and his vicar, Father Louis Viel. Sisters Cécile Leclerc, Provincial Assistant and Germaine Héту, Provincial Secretary represented the Grey Nuns for the event. Honorable Horst Schmidt, Alberta Minister of Culture brought greetings and congratulations from the Government of Alberta. The reception held in the parish hall following Mass provided time for reminiscing and thanksgiving.

A new school officially opened on October 11, 1977: Ecole Notre-Dame de Morinville. This replacement of the old building, Ecole Thibeault was considered an essential enrichment for the education of a growing number of students in the town of Morinville.

Leaving Morinville

Sister Annette Mageau, who was the first Grey Nun employed for teaching at Morinville, was ready for a sabbatical year when she completed the 1978-79 school year. She left on July 12, 1979, first for a trip to the Holy Land with Sister Dorilla Simard, and then for a year of religious study at Spokane. For her part, Sister Antoinette Cyre, having given over 30 years to her teaching profession, decided to obtain preparation for parish pastoral work. Consequently, her last year at Morinville was completed in June, 1980. She took courses at Newman College and obtained a position in Saskatoon's Holy Spirit Parish as a Pastoral Assistant.

Eight years of teaching and pastoral ministries at Morinville have come to an end. Five sisters shared in these ministries, giving a cumulated total of 14 years of dedication and love to the people of Morinville. The house purchased in 1976 was rented for a few years before being sold in 1983. Many memories remain in the hearts of those who became friends: sisters, students and families of Morinville.

NOTES: Chapter 15

- 1 **Historique**, doc. # 5A, GNRC Arch.
- 2 Two are reported in the **Chroniques** in 1975 and 1976, pp. 24 and 45, GNRC Arch.
- 3 *Churchettes*, a group composed of girls, 10 to 12 years old who took pride in maintaining good order and cleanliness in the church.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

1978 - MIDNAPORE / CALGARY

People of Calgary have not forgotten the pioneer Grey Nuns who arrived in 1891, built Holy Cross Hospital and operated it until 1970, serving tirelessly, lovingly during almost 80 years in this renowned health care institution. As soon as the hospital was sold, in 1970, most sisters left Calgary to offer their ministry in other Grey Nuns' hospitals in western Canada. Then, diocesan committees began discussing the possibility of a suitable *memorial* to the Grey Nuns who were missed by so many in the city of Calgary.

It was then that a *prophet* rose among them. Father Patrick O'Byrne, director of the Council of Social Action (COSA), suggested:

Why not have a live monument and that the Grey Nuns return in the diocese to undertake some Church work among the poor?'

This hope was soon passed on to Sister Florence Keegan, Provincial Superior, and her Council who, in the Spring of 1977, looked upon it favorably, but more information was needed and a decision was reserved for the incoming Provincial Council. A new Council was in place a few months later with Sister Germaine Héту as Provincial Superior. Further discussions were held with the two prospective foundresses: Sisters Rita Coulombe, former director of Nursing Service at Calgary's Holy Cross Hospital, and Madeleine Therrien, who had now completed her diploma in Social Work at Grant MacEwan Community College in Edmonton.

The foundresses

The co-administrators of the project, Sisters Rita Coulombe and Madeleine Therrien were assured of prayers and good wishes on October 16, 1977. On this feast day of Marguerite d'Youville, a large number of sisters were present at the Grey Nuns Regional Centre and all gathered in the chapel for the meaningful *Sending Forth* celebration of the two courageous foundresses.

Not unlike the pioneers of 1859 arriving at Lac Ste-Anne, these modern foundresses were sent to a largely unknown world of unmet needs in the city of Calgary. Their initial tasks were to discover to which categories of people, for what sort of needs, and in what area of Calgary they were called to minister. The Provincial Council had accepted the challenge and obtained approval from the Grey Nuns General Council to develop an apostolic project within the Interfaith Lacombe Centre² as requested by Bishop Paul O'Byrne of Calgary. All unanswered questions were now in the hands of the foundresses.

Sisters Coulombe and Therrien arrived at Calgary on October 20, 1977, wholeheartedly open to the plans of Providence, but totally unaware of details of those plans. They were received with open arms at their temporary residence with the Sisters of Providence who owned and operated the new Lacombe Nursing Home. The two Grey Nuns were to continue the blessed tradition of their predecessors to call on God's light and blessings for their new mission. They immediately planned a three day retreat at Mount Saint Francis Retreat House, Cochrane to reflect and pray. Three days alone with the Lord bolstered their energy and rekindled their faith in God's presence among them. They were ready for the challenge to create their ministry.

Planning their ministry

When they returned from their retreat on October 26, Sisters Rita Coulombe and Madeleine Therrien began immediately to

visit various agencies, consult key persons and investigate on the most urgent, unmet need they could plan to respond to. It did not take them long to discover the dire lack of facilities in Calgary for women in difficulty. Then followed a longer stage of choosing a suitable location in the large empty building of the Interfaith Lacombe Centre, planning the necessary renovations, developing a budget, defining a program for residents, enlisting useful social agency contacts and referral persons or groups and looking into whatever other tasks that were needed.

It was decided right at the outset that the sisters would not live within the same building as the residents who would be occupying the whole fifth floor of the Lacombe Interfaith Centre. Upon a suggestion that the sisters purchase a mobile home, permission was obtained to install this home near Lacombe Interfaith Centre. On June 7, 1978, Sisters Coulombe and Therrien were able to move into their new home after profusely thanking their kind hostesses, the Sisters of Providence.³

Celebrations

A first Mass was celebrated in the sisters' residence on July 9, 1978 by a visiting priest from Québec, Gilles Lapointe, p.s.s. This long desired event brought a new infusion of comfort and the spiritual energy to carry on. The following day, the sisters rejoiced with the Faithful Companions of Jesus, a sisterhood established in Calgary, who were celebrating the 100th anniversary of their arrival in what was then a very small settlement.

Ready to begin

Youville Memorial Residence, a meaningful name given to the new agency located in Midnapore, Calgary! This name brought to mind the work accomplished by Mother d'Youville for the neglected and battered women of Montréal in the 1700s. From her eternal home, Marguerite was thus elected *patron 'future' saint* of this new work of charity. After several months of careful plan-

ning, on March 1, 1978, the first employee, a social worker was recruited. June 14, 1978, saw the admission of a first resident who was to be followed by many! By the end of December, 1978, 60 admissions had been recorded into a facility for 13 residents. The length of stay being between one and six months, it can be assumed that very few rooms were unoccupied even from the beginning. A point of interest, the residents' ages varied between 18 and 55.⁴

Women in difficulty coming to Youville Memorial Residence found a home staffed with caring persons and attentive listeners who developed with them an individualized program which included counselling, therapy, exercises, classes, occupational therapy, recreation and spirituality as appropriate. The residence was their home and pied-à-terre, their safe and comforting haven, their healing milieu.

Moving on

The sisters and staff worked hard to make this agency thrive. Thrive, it did, but at the cost of coping with many difficulties. After eight years, it was found that the location continued to have many inconveniences, being too far from downtown Calgary where most residents received their therapy or other appointments. The facility gave a picture of a big, impersonal institution which was not very appealing to women in search of a cozy, family atmosphere. And, to top it all, rental costs were becoming prohibitive as no other Agency had been recruited, as was expected at the beginning.

In the meantime, the Grey Nuns' Agency had been incorporated and a Board of Directors had been formed on March 17, 1984. Supported by efficient and interested Board members, Sisters Rita Coulombe and Délia Bourque⁵ embarked on a house hunt.

The search ended at 3210 29 Street, S. W., Calgary. Here we found the ideal house for our purposes, allowing for the integration of our needs as sisters with the needs of the five

or six women, who could also be accommodated and would enable us to provide a more relaxed family atmosphere. January 15, 1985, saw us welcoming our first guest 'Rachel'.⁶

On October 30, 1984, Youville Memorial Residence (YMR) moved from 14502 McLeod Trail into its new dwelling at 3210 29 St. S.W.. A major move for a young agency, a move made easier by the sisters' eagerness to provide enhanced rehabilitation services to their clientele. Reorganization of physical space and revision of programs were completed during a closure period lasting until January 13, 1985.

God's blessings were needed in this renewed venture. A special ceremony, on January 31, 1985, brought God's presence in a blessing of the house by Father Joseph Rigby, pastor of YMR's former parish, Saint Patrick, Midnapore. Bishop Paul O'Byrne, unable to be present, could not have found a more suitable substitute. Accompanying Father Rigby were Fathers H. Delisle and Deningo Celo, both from the sisters' new parish, Holy Name.

The blessing ceremony was followed by several Open House invitations when visitors freely commented on the improved accommodations of Youville Women Residence.⁷ Other Social Service agencies were invited again for a Christmas party on December 11, 1985 and on many other occasions thereafter. Relationships established with other persons involved in similar work were always nurtured and resulted in many mutual benefits.

In August, 1985, a vibrant and enthusiastic executive director⁸ was appointed, Sister Aurore Larkin. Seven years later, in July, 1992, Sister Larkin was appointed Provincial Councillor in Edmonton. She was replaced at YWR by Sister Wilda Wedgerfield until 1994. The first lay executive director, Roni Nisenson took charge of YWR from 1994 to 1998. It would be fitting to note here that Sister Aurore Larkin was appointed Provincial Superior in 1995 and elected to the position of Superior General in 1996, always keeping a 'soft spot' in her heart for YWR.

The therapy component [of YWR] now incorporates self-growth issues, self-management elements, communication and interpersonal skills enhancement, conflict resolution

techniques, budgeting and money management, nutrition planning, shopping and food preparation as well as positive leisure pursuits. Involvement with community based services are required, so that connections to the community are established and promoted.⁹

Sometimes residents, individually or in groups, would request guidance for Bible study and these requests were always honored. As examples are the several sessions organized by Sister Jeannine Coulombe during the years she was posted at YWR. Former residents obtained the formation of Youville Women's Support Group in 1992 as a follow-up to the help they received at the residence.

Once the new place became better known and the clientele arrived in steady streams, the sisters began plans to acquire a second building as Phase II, on March 4, 1988, then a third building as Phase III on December 1, 1992. A residence for sisters was in one side of a duplex purchased for Phase II, thus allowing space and privacy for the sisters when off duty. These enlarged facilities could now provide accommodation for 23 women and six children at a time.

Some statements included in the 20th Anniversary Report booklet reveal the high ratings obtained by the Youville Women Residence:

In the true spirit of giving of themselves, the people of Youville Residence have lovingly promoted the spiritual and emotional growth of the residents to help them once again become contributing members of society.¹⁰

Funding struggles

Youville Memorial Residence has been totally subsidized by the Grey Nuns of Alberta since its inception in 1977. Occasionally, donations were received from benefactors, friends and benevolent organizations, but the costs of capital and operating expenditures could never come close to being met without

huge subsidy from the Grey Nuns. Since the Board of Directors was established in 1984, several attempts were made to obtain grants from the province, but always unsuccessfully. On the other hand, the Interfaith Food Bank has contributed generously to YWR since 1983, and the Calgary United Way since the late '80s. Charitable organizations, such as the Soroptimist International of Calgary, on March 8, 1990, having heard about the need of women in difficulty, made a significant donation of \$12,714.91, just enough for Sister Aurore Larkin, director, to dispose of the hot mortgage!¹¹

In the 1990s, fund raising activities and public promotions of the program became more prevalent in the life of Youville Women Residence. Board Chair John Pashniak was particularly helpful in finding ways of promoting YWR with sometimes encouraging results. As a few examples, on August 13, 1990, a donation of \$5,000.00 was received from the Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Calgary and on January 10, 1996, \$1,000.00 arrived from Saint Mary's Parish. At the death of a former dedicated Board member, in 1997, a total of 80 names appeared on the John Stein Memorial Fund. In addition, an impressive list of 69 names of Patrons, Benefactors, Chairman's Circle, Honourary Builders, Contributors and Friends were given in the 1997 Report.¹² Every penny was received with gratitude.

Outside involvement

The chroniclers make frequent mention of the Grey Nuns' contribution to the life of the Church in Calgary. In January, 1983, Father Joseph Rigby, parish priest, needed an artist to refresh the stations of a *Way of the Cross*. He went to the Grey Nuns who happened to know that Sister Annette Mageau was very skilled at that type of artistic work. She was only a phone call away, in Saint Paul, and responded with enthusiasm to the request. Soon, Sister Laurette Thibert from Standoff decided to join in and help in this project, as well as Sister Rita Coulombe on the staff at the Residence. The stations of the Cross were rejuve-

nated in no time, to the delight of the devoted pastor.

Being part of prayer groups, attending parish retreats, being Eucharistic ministers and sacristans at certain periods, were all activities in which the Grey Nuns became involved. Also, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) at Holy Name Parish listed several Grey Nuns as resource persons in this special service to neophytes. Some names mentioned were Sisters Rita Coulombe, Jeannine Coulombe and Laurette Doiron.

Other diocesan or parish events often found a Grey Nun as an eager participant. The 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Brothers of Our Lady of Lourdes, coinciding with the 25th anniversary of their arrival in Canada was celebrated on November 15, 1980 in Calgary. Grey Nuns were present for the gathering. Grey Nuns also contributed on a planning committee to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the diocese of Calgary in 1988. On August 29, 1993, Sisters Rose-Anne Gauvin and Wilda Wedgerfield represented the Grey Nuns at the celebration of the Sisters of Providence's 150th anniversary of their service to the needy of Calgary.

Days of recollection and prayer were considered an infallible recipe to heal tension, prepare for a new activity and simply to refuel for the months ahead. Thus, frequent mention was made of a retreat at Martha Retreat Centre in Lethbridge and Mount Saint Francis Retreat House in Cochrane or simply in the beauty of nature in the Rocky Mountains nearby.

On September 18, 1988, Sister Rita Coulombe returned to Calgary, on invitation, to receive a special diocesan Award of Merit. The event took place at the new Saint Patrick's Church and recognized her 27 years of service in the diocese of Calgary.

A promising future

In 1999, the Provincial Council appointed another Grey Nun as executive director for the Residence to replace Roni Nisenson. Sister Germaine Hétu was selected for the challenge. She began her functions with the good wishes and prayers of the sisters and

staff, calling upon God's loving guidance and special blessings on the new executive director of this institution.

To date, a total of 16 Grey Nuns have worked at YWR for various periods of time in its first 21 years of existence. Together, the sisters have given a cumulated total of 55 years to assist in the recovery and promotion of women in difficulty. May God continue to bless people involved in this essential service, this work of unconditional love for women who most need it.

NOTES: Chapter 16

- 1 **Chroniques** 1971-1992, p. 64, GNRC Arch.
- 2 The former Lacombe Nursing Home located in Midnapore, a suburb of Calgary.
- 3 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, p. 80.
- 4 **Historique**, doc. #20, GNRC Arch..
- 5 Temporarily replacing Sister Madeleine Therrien on a sabbatical leave.
- 6 Coulombe, Sister Rita, *Youville Memorial residence Relocated*, **Family News**, February, 1985, p. 12, GNRC Arch.
- 7 Name was changed from *Youville Memorial Residence* to *Youville Women Residence* in 1985.
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- 10 Greg Rodych, chair, Board of Directors, **20th Anniversary Report, Op. Cit.**, p. 2.
- 11 Terry Gilbert, *Good turn at Grey Nuns*, **Calgary Herald**, March 8, 1990, p. E12.
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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



1988 - LA SALLE RESIDENCE

They did it again! Ten years after founding the Youville Women Residence in Calgary, Sisters Madeleine Therrien and Rita Coulombe were laying the foundations of another agency to assist women in difficulty, this time, in Edmonton. The foundresses had a former apartment building at their disposal for this new work of compassion and love. La Salle Apartments, re-named La Salle Residence after major renovations was found to be a lovely, safe and comfortable home.

The first steps

Sisters Rita Coulombe and Madeleine Therrien arrived at La Salle Residence on June 27, 1988. They immediately began to replay their experience of creating a home for women in need of some assistance, an experience lived in Calgary in 1977-1978 and well engraved in their memory. A blank page of history was placed again before these courageous foundresses.

Proud of the elegant home at their disposal, Sisters Coulombe and Therrien, announced an Open House for the Grey Nuns on Sunday, July 24, 1988. A joyful crowd of 59 sisters visited the renovated La Salle, partook in delicious refreshments and shared with their hostesses their hope for a successful future for La Salle Residence. A third hostess was present, Sister Marie-Anne Lavoie who, while living at La Salle, continued her full-time position as accountant at the Grey Nuns Regional Centre.

A first Mass was celebrated in the Residence's chapel by Father Robert Choquette, c.s.c. on September 2, 1988. The sisters were delighted to have Jesus' presence in their home.

It was September 19, 1988 when the first resident was admitted. In the following months, many more came knocking at the door of this new facility, where care and love were assured. In the January, 1989 issue of *Family News*, Sister Rita Coulombe wrote:

Eight of our nine suites are occupied - six with expectant mothers and two with young infants. Some young women are involved in part-time work, another is scheduled to start classes at Alberta Vocational College.¹

Sailing free

At the onset, the Residence was planned to provide low-rental furnished two bedroom suites for single expectant women, single women with their children, abused women in transition and women in need of support and direction in their attempt to independent living.² In real life, this plan called for active and close cooperation with existing services and agencies, cooperation that was enriching and essential to both providers and clientele.

An Open House was planned for November 25, 1988, with special invitations to other social agencies in the Edmonton area. Thirty five persons responded with eagerness to the invitation.

Social workers, nurses, psychologists, volunteers who toured the apartments were unanimous in recognizing the need for such accommodation.³

No less praise was gathered from Father William Irwin, President, Catholic Social Services, in his letter to Sister Faye Wylie, Provincial Superior:

The Grey Nuns of Alberta have always taken initiative in areas of social need in our Province. You have again taken initiative in renovating and providing accommodation for expectant women, single women with their children, abused women in transition.

Since 1859, the Grey Nuns have always reached out to seek community concerns and problems and then struggled to meet them. Congratulations. We are certainly fortunate to have you in our Archdiocese.⁴

In 1991, the La Salle Residence project was incorporated as Saint Thérèse Project (Grey Nuns) of Edmonton. A first Board meeting was held on April 4, 1991 with Chair Marie MacDonald, former Director of the General Hospital and Grey Nuns Hospital Social Service Department. Through this new avenue, more publicity was achieved and more donations began to arrive in support of the project.⁵

In the intervening 11 years since its foundation, La Salle Residence's work of compassionate love has produced extraordinary results in women who were experiencing painful passages in their life. Former residents keep in touch and often return to share their experiences with the Executive Director, Sister Madeleine Therrien and the other sisters. They often write of their joy at becoming whole again after months of brokenness, being self-sufficient after a life of dependency, being happy with themselves after crushing relationships. Some of their comments follow:

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Sisters and La Salle Residence for being there for me at one of the most lowest points in my life. The warmth, safety and security that I felt while I stayed there seemed to be just what I needed at the time. With the Sisters' warmth, strength, kindness and listening, I was guided to move to a place of my own and from there seek the help that I needed. It is people and places like this that are really making a difference in Edmonton today. (Renée, 1996)

I was six months pregnant when I came to La Salle and leaving an abusive relationship. During my stay, Sister Madeleine taught me to learn to value myself and not let others walk all over me. Her listening ear, good advice and encouragement taught me to put the past behind me and move ahead in my life. (Melanie, 1997)

At La Salle Residence, Sister Madeleine, the other Sisters, students and residents provided a caring, comfortable and cozy, safe environment to be in while we sorted out what to do and where to go next in life. It takes time and energy to

work out decisions that will help us to grow, but we have a wonderful home here that has enabled us to do just that. There is always someone here when you need them. (Barb and Becky, 1998)

Not only residents shower words of admiration for the work accomplished at La Salle Residence. A former Board member wrote in the La Salle Newsletter:

La Salle is about an environment that strives to respect the dignity of each person, but which cherishes and nurtures the unique and wonderful gifts that each resident brings to the community. It is about guidance and support, education and training. And it is about the compassion and tenderness of God that is delivered through the extraordinary leadership of Sister Madeleine, Sister Rita and Sister Delia.⁶

Reward and appreciation

Headlines like: *Women bloom at La Salle: Home provides a haven for women in transition; A Safe Haven: Desperate women find shelter with caring nuns⁷* confirmed eloquently the high praises received from residents, Board members and the community at large. La Salle Residence's reputation was no longer required to be made; it had become a given. By 1991, people's generosity started to equal their words of praise and significant contributions arrived from the Rotary Club, the Knights of Columbus, the Wild Rose Foundation, from individuals and anonymous donors. A Fund Raising committee of the Board planned Silent Auctions on a yearly basis in the 1990s and organized a magnificent 10th Anniversary Gala and Silent Auction in 1998. On that occasion, 56 major donors and 134 Gala sponsors helped raise close to \$30,000. Events like these were powerful morale boosters and a source of lasting gratitude from the sisters, the Board and especially the residents who were the final beneficiaries of such tangible support.

In its 11 years of operation, La Salle Residence has provided caring and support to approximately 145 residents and 105 children for a length of stay of between one month and 30 months, with an average of 7 and a half months. Every report indicated the pain in having to refuse twice as many women requesting help due to limited space and resources. To serve that clientele, a total of nine sisters lived at La Salle for various periods of time, giving a cumulated total of 45 years dedicated to caring for women in transition. Two of the sisters, the foundresses, are still at the helm of La Salle Residence at the end of the 11th year, at the time of this writing. May the God who inspired the beginnings of that marvellous work of charity continue to shower many blessings on the sisters, Board members, residents and benefactors through the new Millennium.

NOTES: Chapter 17

- 1 Coulombe, Sister Rita, *La Salle Residence Update*, **Family News**, January, 1989, p. 5, GNRC Arch.
- 2 **Historique**, Doc. #1, GNRC Arch.
- 3 Coulombe, Sister Rita, *Edmonton Social Service Agencies and Hospital Social Service Departments Visit La Salle Residence*, **Family News**, November, 1988, p. 17.
- 4 Irwin, Father Bill, President, C. S. S., letter to Sister Faye Wylie, Provincial Superior, November 28, 1988, GNRC Arch..
- 5 **Chroniques, Op. Cit.**, p. 86, GNRC Arch..
- 6 Smith, Father George, csb, *La Salle Serving the Community*, **La Salle Newsletter**, April, 1997, p. 1.
- 7 Patience Akpan, in **Western Catholic Reporter**, December 23, 1996, p. 10; Dave Finlayson, in **The Edmonton Journal**, September 26, 1998, p. F6.

EPILOGUE



The astonishing acts of heroism of the first Canadian women missionaries, the Grey Nuns, made the writing of their story a most fascinating adventure. Many times was I brought to tears, to laughter, to untold admiration and sisterly pride during this marvellous, faith-filled journey with our generous, youthful and deeply dedicated Grey Nuns in their ministries in the Far West and North of Canada.

The hardships of their travels, their often inadequate housing, frequent famines, dire poverty, and labor beyond their physical strength, the isolation and loneliness, and sometimes the communications problems with the Bishops and clergy are found at every page of their **Chroniques**. There are also countless moving descriptions of their friendship with the people they served: the Natives of many nations, the Métis and the White. War at their doorsteps, epidemics, floods and storms, illness and deaths among themselves were no deterrent to their dedication, their joy.

Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, William Horan, when invited to speak at the Corner Stone Ceremony of the Grey Nuns Regional Centre, on May 3, 1966, touched the hearts of all Grey Nuns when he said:

Today is but another page in Alberta's glorious history. And again this history is being written by our beloved Grey Nuns. It is doubtful if any other organization, religious or otherwise, has made a greater contribution to the West and the Northwest than these - Canada's favorite daughters. They have a glorious past and their future is well assured.

On December 9, 1990, when Pope John Paul II canonized Marguerite d'Youville, he said:

She [Marguerite d'Youville] was characterized by an immense confidence in Providence with an unusual ability to find the resources and the means of helping the poor, even in the most desperate cases. Love and service of the Church was her rule of life...

The first Canadian women missionaries, the Grey Nuns, have proved themselves worthy of these words of praise. Not that they were ever acting for ephemeral rewards, but with their eyes constantly fixed on God, resting in the protection of Divine Providence, they went about their daily menial tasks, single-minded, trusting and always selflessly. In a word, they were true to their *Mother and Model*.

Saint Marguerite d'Youville, Mother of Universal Charity, how proud you must be of these missionaries, your spiritual daughters, who have faithfully followed in your footsteps of trusting and loving obedience to God's call, total dedication to the Church and universal charity!

Throughout these years, you have followed them in every detail of their lives and have so many times used your power with God to save them from danger of imminent fires, to cure illnesses and soothe their fears. Because of you as their model, they have highly deserved their beautiful title of heroic women throughout the centuries.

How proud we are of you, our Mother and Model, to have shown the way in the life of heroism that our predecessors have embraced and lived so generously. May you continue to guide many Grey Nuns in the future to live for God and to live for others now and in the Third Millennium.

APPENDICES



APPENDIX I

SAINT ALBERT PROVINCE - PROVINCIAL LEADERSHIP

1897-1902	Mother Eugénie Letellier (Vicar) no councillor
1902-1907	Mother Léa Dandurand (Vicar) Sister Malvina Diquière, assistant
1907-1911	Mother Agnes Carroll (Vicar) (died August 24, 1911) Sister Malvina Diquière, assistant
1911-1912	Mother Alphonsine Archambault, pro. temp. (Vicar) Sister Malvina Diquière, assistant
1913-1915	Mother Eloïse Pagé (Vicar) Sister Cordélia Schetté, assistant
1915-1921	Mother Saint-Augustin (Ada Leduc) (Provincial) Sister Cordélia Schetté, assistant Sister Grandin (Marie Hurtebise), councillor and secretary
1921-1922	Mother Mary Deegan, pro. temp. Sister Cordélia Schetté, assistant Sister Grandin (Marie Hurtebise), councillor and secretary
1922-1926	Mother Saint Grégoire (Marie-Louisa Béliveau) Sister Ludovica Ritchot, assistant Sister Grandin (Marie Hurtebise), councillor and secretary
1926-1930	Mother Evangéline Gallant Sister Robichaud (Emma Paquette), assistant Sister Grandin (Marie Hurtebise), councillor and secretary
1930-1935	Mother Rose-Anna Laberge Sister Robichaud (Emma Paquette), assistant Sister Grandin (Marie Hurtebise), councillor and secretary
1935-1936	Mother Sainte Emilienne (Aurore Cadieux) Sister Gosselin (Arthémise Bergeron), assistant Sister Anna Beaupré, councillor

1937-1943	Mother Mary-Ann Casey Sister Gosselin (Arthémise Bergeron), assistant Sister Anna Beaupré, councillor
1943-1949	Mother Marguerite Mann Sister Marie-Louise Turenne, assistant Sister Valérie Métivier, secretary Sister Anna Beaupré, treasurer
1949-1955	Mother Rose Vincent Sister Louisa Dupuis, assistant Sister Angéline Letarte, councillor Sister Alice Lagarde, secretary and treasurer
1955-1957	Mother Marie-Berthe Dorais Sister Eva Morissette, assistant Sister Angéline Letarte, councillor Sister Léonie Ferland, secretary Sister Annette Désilets, treasurer
1957-1961	Mother Marie Laforce Sister Eva Morissette, assistant Sister Angéline Letarte, councillor Sister Marie-Ange Burque, councillor Sister Léonie Ferland, secretary Sister Jeanne Laporte, treasurer
1961-1964	Mother Marie Laforce Sister Marie Laramée, assistant Sister Anna Trottier, assistant Sister Marie-Ange Burque, councillor Sister Maria Schmidt, secretary Sister Jeanne Laporte, treasurer
1964-1968	Mother Yvonne Prévost Sister Anna Trottier, assistant Sister Marie St-Pierre, secretary Sister Thérèse Chaloux, councillor Sister Jeanne Laporte, treasurer
1968-1969	Mother Thérèse Chaloux Sister Fernande Dussault, assistant Sister Marguerite-Marie Côté, councillor Sister Aline Bohémier, councillor Sister Yvette Poissant, treasurer Sister Antoinette Laramée, secretary

1969-1971	Sister Fernande Dussault, pro. temp. Sister Aline Bohémier, assistant Sister Marguerite-Marie Côté, councillor Sister Marguerite Létourneau, councillor Sister Marie-Paule Rheault, secretary Sister Yvette Poissant, treasurer
1971-1974	Sister Florence Keegan Sister Marguerite-Marie Côté, assistant and local superior Sister Marie-Paule Rheault, councillor and secretary Sister Cécile Leclerc, councillor Sister Yvette Poissant, councillor and treasurer
1974-1977	Sister Florence Keegan Sister Cécile Leclerc, assistant Sister Germaine Hétu, councillor and secretary Sister Madeleine Rho, councillor and treasurer Sister Denise Piché, councillor
1977-1980	Sister Germaine Hétu Sister Thérèse Castonguay, assistant and local superior Sister Marguerite Laforce, councillor and secretary Sister Fernande Michaud, councillor and treasurer Sister Rose-Anna Gauvin, councillor
1980-1983	Sister Germaine Hétu Sister Thérèse Castonguay, assistant Sister Marguerite Laforce, councillor and secretary Sister Fernande Michaud, councillor and treasurer Sister Thérèse Pelletier, councillor
1983-1986	Sister Marguerite Laforce Sister Eveline Gagnon, assistant Sister Cléophee Beaudoin, councillor and secretary Sister Aline Bohémier, councillor and treasurer Sister Faye Wylie, councillor

1986-1986	Sister Marguerite Laforce (March to November) Sister Eveline Gagnon, assistant Sister Cléopée Beaudoin, councillor and secretary Sister Cécile Gauthier, councillor and treasurer Sister Faye Wylie, councillor
1986-1989	Sister Faye Wylie (to complete term) Sister Rita Coulombe, assistant Sister Eveline Gagnon, councillor Sister Cléopée Beaudoin, councillor and secretary Sister Cécile Gauthier, councillor and treasurer
1989-1992	Sister Faye Wylie Sister Rita Coulombe, assistant Sister Thérèse Pelletier, councillor and secretary Sister Juliette Thévenot, councillor and treasurer
1992-1995	Sister Faye Wylie Sister Thérèse Pelletier, assistant and secretary Sister Juliette Thévenot, councillor and treasurer Sister Aurore Larkin, councillor
1995-1996	Sister Aurore Larkin Sister Marguerite Laforce, assistant and secretary Sister Cécile Gauthier, councillor Sister Marcia Wiley, councillor and treasurer
1996-1998	Sister Marcia Wiley (to complete term) Sister Marguerite Laforce, assistant and secretary Sister Cécile Gauthier, councillor and treasurer Sister Lucille Damphousse, councillor
1998	Sister Marcia Wiley Sister Marguerite Laforce, assistant and secretary Sister Bernadette Poirier, councillor Sister Lucille Damphousse, councillor and treasurer

APPENDIX II

**TABLE OF MISSIONS
IN SAINT ALBERT PROVINCE
LOCATED IN ALBERTA**

MISSION	year opened	year closed	transfer to	# of years	still open*
Lac Ste Anne	1859	1863	St. Albert	4	
Saint Albert - Youville Home	1863			136	yes
Grey Nuns Regional Centre**	1967			32	yes
Lac LaBiche	1862	1898	L L Selle	36	
Lac La Selle (Saddle Lake)	1898	1931	B Quills	33	
Blue Quills	1931	1970		39	
Dunbow	1884	1922		38	
Calgary Holy Cross Hospital	1891	1971		80	
Standoff/Cardston	1893	1998		105	
Edmonton General Hospital/ Grey Nuns Hospital***	1895	1999		105	
Brocket - Sacred Heart School	1896	1965		69	
Legal - Couvent du Sacré-Coeur et Ecole	1920	1987		67	
Saint Paul - Hôpital Sainte Thérèse	1926	1970		36	
Lac Ste-Anne (returning)	1965			34	yes
Morinville	1972	1980		8	
Midnapore / Calgary - Youville Women Residence	1978			21	yes
La Salle Residence	1988			11	yes

* means that Grey Nuns are still operating the institution.

** Provincial Headquarters transferred from Saint Albert to Grey Nuns Regional Centre in 1967.

*** Edmonton General Hospital opened in 1895. It transferred its acute care services to Grey Nuns Hospital when it opened in 1988. Transfer of ownership to the Alberta Catholic Health Corporation occurred in 1999.

APPENDIX III

MAP OF GREY NUNS MISSIONS LOCATED IN ALBERTA

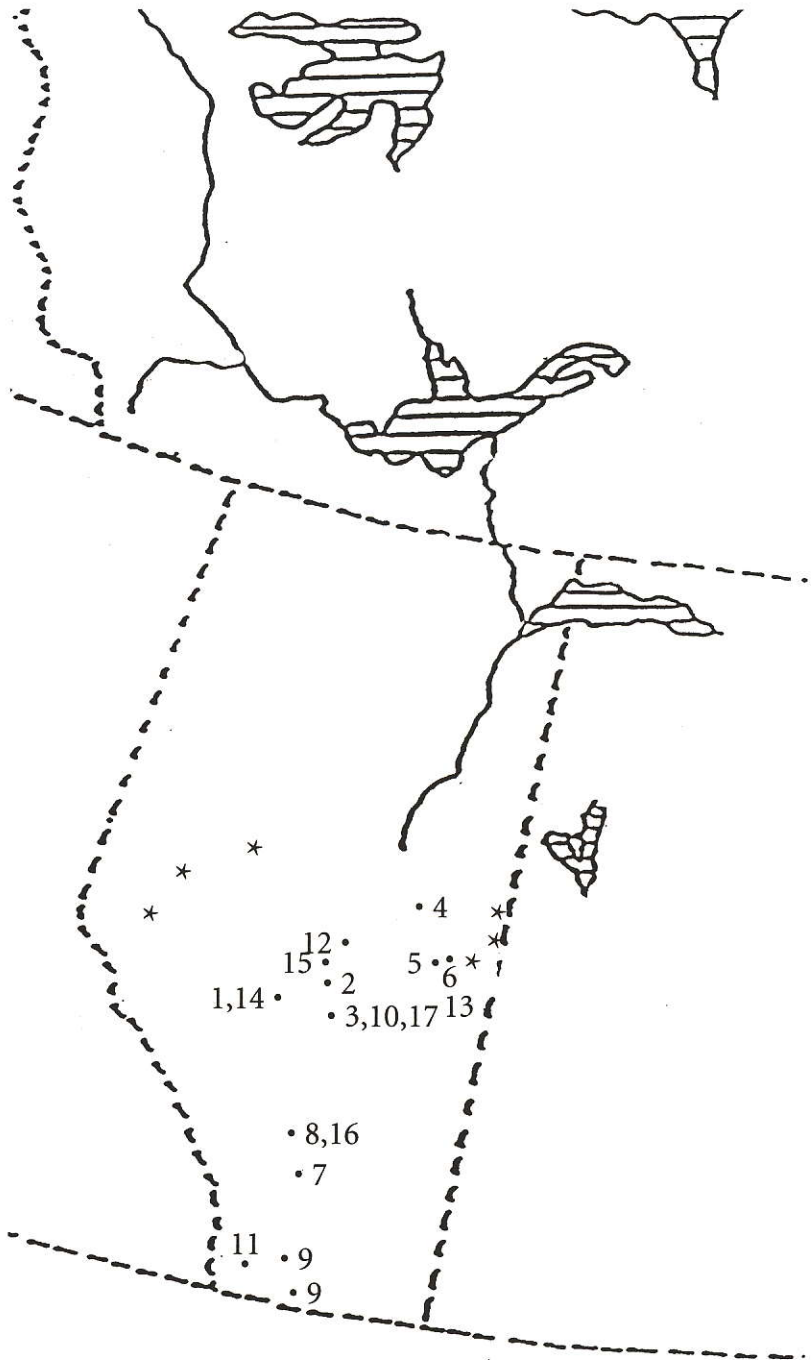
Identification of missions:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lac Ste-Anne
1859 Mission (moving) 2. Saint Albert
1863 Youville
Asylum/Home 3. Edmonton (moving)
1967 Grey Nuns
Regional Centre 4. Lac LaBiche (moving)
1862 Hospice Saint
Joseph/School 5. Lac La Selle (moving)
1898 Saint Joseph
Residential School 6. Blue Quills
1931 Blue Quills Residential
School 7. Dunbow
1884 Saint Joseph Indian
Industrial School 8. Calgary
1891 Holy Cross Hospital 9. Standoff / Cardston
1893 School and hospitals 10. Edmonton
1895 Edmonton General
Hospital
1988 Grey Nuns Hospital | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Brocket
1896 Sacred Heart School 12. Legal
1920 Sacred Heart Convent 13. Saint Paul
1926 Hôpital Sainte Thérèse 14. Lac Ste-Anne
1965 Rest and Retreat House 15. Morinville
1972 Teaching 16. Calgary
1978 Youville Women Residence 17. Edmonton
1988 La Salle Residence |
|--|--|

* Individual ministries

Fort Kent	1972-74
Cold Lake	1973-76
Le Goff	1976-77
Grande Prairie	1976-80
Grouard	1981-85
Grande Cache	1998-

Other northern Alberta missions:
described with the North West
Territories, Volume II



APPENDIX IV

LIST OF FOUNDRESSES FOR MISSIONS IN ALBERTA

MISSION & YEAR	FOUNDRESSES
Lac Ste-Anne, 1859	Sisters Emery (Zoé Leblanc), sup., Adèle Lamy, Alphonse (Marie Jacques) and <i>Marie- Louise</i> .
Saint Albert, 1863	as above.
Grey Nuns Regional Centre, 1967	Provincial Council: Sisters Yvonne Prévost, Anna Trottier, Marie St-Pierre, Thérèse Chaloux, Jeanne Laporte and some twenty sisters initially.
Lac LaBiche, 1862	Sisters Delphine Guénette, sup., Adélaïde Daunais, Marie Tisseur and <i>Marie Lalonde</i>
Lac La Selle, 1898	Sisters St-Placide (Agnès Prévost), sup., Olivine Beauchemin, Béliveau (Louise Arsenault), Olivine Briault, Cecilia Dougherty, Margaret Gannon, St-Augustin (Ada Leduc).
Blue Quills, 1931	Sisters Arthémise Gosselin, sup., Léonie Beaulieu, Catherine Breske, Aldéa Gagnon, Maria Lapierre, Clara Ménard, Ida Thibert.
Dunbow, 1884	Sisters Delphine Guénette, sup., Ste-Geneviève (Victoire Lemay), Victoire Thiffault.
Calgary, Holy Cross Hospital, 1891	Sisters Agnes Carroll, sup., Olivine D. Beauchemin, Valiquette (M.H. Dumoulin), Gertrude Beemer.
Standoff/Cardston, 1893	Sisters St-Eusèbe (Zéphirine Brodeur), Rachel St-Germain, St-Joseph (Anna Gélinas), St- Louis-de-France (Zelpha Deshaies).
Edmonton General / Grey Nuns Hospitals, 1895	Sisters Marie-Xavier (Marguerite Dunn), sup., Coursol (Emma Labelle), Gosselin (Arthémise Bergeron) and Euphémie Sanders.
Brocket, Sacred Heart School, 1896	Sisters St-Jean-de-Dieu (Hermine Bernard), Ste-Anne (Marie-Anne Roy), Joséphine Julien.
Legal, Couvent Sacré-Coeur, 1920	Sisters Azélie Surprenant, St-Polycarpe (Albertine Vincent), Victoria Corriveau. Séphora Fouquette.
Saint Paul, Hôpital Sainte Thérèse, 1926	Sisters Marie-du-Carmel (Claudia Landry), sup., Jeanne Longtin, Mélauré Lamirande.

Lac Ste-Anne (returning), 1965	Sisters Alida Gamache, Catherine Frohlich, Marie-Anne Lavoie, Délia Bourque.
Morinville, 1972	Sisters Annette Mageau, Léda Belley.
Midnapore, Youville Women Residence, 1978	Sisters Madeleine Therrien, Rita Coulombe.
La Salle Residence, 1988	Sisters Madeleine Therrien, Rita Coulombe.

Filles données or volunteers are in italic.

APPENDIX V

**NUMBER OF YEARS AND SISTERS IN EACH MISSION
AND TOTAL - DURING 140 YEARS IN ALBERTA**

NAME OF MISSIONS	# OF SISTERS	# OF YEARS MISSION WAS OPENED	CUMULATED TOTAL OF YEARS
Lac Ste-Anne	3	4	12
Saint Albert	400	136	3,128
Grey Nuns Regional Centre	263	32	2,072
Lac LaBiche	20	36	198
Lac La Selle	62	33	290
Blue Quills	120	39	495
Dunbow	43	38	179
Calgary - Holy Cross Hospital	237	80	1,680
Standoff/Cardston	204	105	1,118
Edmonton General Hospital/ Grey Nuns Hospital	299	104	1,728
Brocket - Sacred Heart School	98	69	537
Legal - Couvent du Sacré-Coeur et Ecole	130	67	500
Saint Paul - Hôpital Sainte Thérèse	168	71	529
Lac Ste-Anne (returning)	32	34	130
Morinville	8	8	14
Midnapore/Calgary Youville Women Residence	16	21	55
La Salle Residence	9	11	45
TOTAL	1,989	888	12,710

Cumulated total of years is the addition of the years each sister spent in the Mission

APPENDIX VI

BISHOPS AND DIOCESES
WHERE GREY NUNS WORKED IN ALBERTA**Apostolic Vicariate: Hudson's Bay and James Bay - Diocese: Saint Boniface - 1820-**

Bishop Alexandre **Taché** of Saint Boniface, O.M.I., 1851- Archbishop, 1872

Diocese of Saint Albert - 1871-1912 (Originally: Apostolic Vicariate)

Bishop Coadjutor (to Arch. Taché) Vital **Grandin**, O.M.I., 1859-1902

Bishop Emile **Legal**, O.M.I., 1902-1912

Archdiocese of Edmonton - 1912-

Archbishop Emile **Legal**, 1912-1920

Archbishop Joseph **O'Leary**, 1920-1938

Archbishop John Hugh **MacDonald**, 1938-1964

Archbishop Anthony **Jordan**, O.M.I., 1964-1973

Archbishop Joseph N. **MacNeil**, 1973-1999

Archbishop Thomas **Collins**, 1999-

Diocese of Calgary - 1913-

Bishop John Thomas **McNally**, 1913-1924

Bishop John **Kidd**, 1925-1931

Bishop Peter J. **Monahan**, 1932-1935

Bishop Francis P. **Carroll**, 1935-1967

Bishop Francis Joseph **Klein**, 1967-1968

Bishop Paul **O'Byrne**, 1968-1998

Bishop Frederick **Henry**, 1998-

Diocese of Grouard-McLennan - 1862-1998

Apostolic Vicar Henri **Faraud**, O.M.I., 1862-1890

Apostolic Vicar Emile **Grouard**, O.M.I., 1890-1929

Apostolic Vicar Joseph **Guy**, O.M.I., 1930-1937

Apostolic Vicar Ubald **Langlois**, O.M.I., 1938-1953

Apostolic Vicar Henri **Routhier**, O.M.I., 1953-1967 - Archbishop, 1967-1972

Archbishop Henri **Légaré**, O.M.I., 1972-1996

Archbishop Henri **Goudreault**, O.M.I., 1996-1998

Diocese of Saint Paul - 1948-1999

Bishop Maurice **Beaudoux**, 1948-1952

Bishop Philippe **Lussier**, C.Ss.R., 1952-1968

Bishop Edouard **Gagnon**, PSS, 1969-1972

Bishop Raymond **Roy**, 1972-1997

Bishop Thomas **Collins**, 1997-1999

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Many Archives were consulted and researched in writing this Volume:

Grey Nuns General Administration

138, rue St-Pierre, Montréal

- early correspondence and documentation
- documents of foundation of several Grey Nuns western missions
- Historique of missions closed at the time of writing a summary
- frequent telephone calls, fax and e-mail communications
- one-week on site visit and gathering of information

Grey Nuns of Nicolet

55, rue Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Nicolet

- documents concerning western missions founded by the Sisters of Nicolet, an autonomous Grey Nun Branch from 1886 to 1941
- one-day on site visit and gathering of information

Grey Nuns of Saint-Boniface

151, rue Despins, Saint-Boniface

- documentation re: founding of western and northern missions before the Saint-Albert Vicariate (later Province) was established in 1898
- documentation re: the first Grey Nun western mission in 1844
- one-week on site visit and gathering of information
- frequent e-mail communications and short visits

Grey Nuns of Saint-Albert

9810 165 Street, Edmonton

- all detailed primary sources for each mission covered: **Chroniques**, correspondence, reports
- considerable daily assistance from Archivist

Alberta Provincial Archives

Edmonton

- perusal of an abundance of information in the Oblates Archives located at the APA
- frequent assistance of personnel, mostly to obtain first names of Oblates priests and Brothers

City of Edmonton Archives**Edmonton**

- assistance in obtaining names and locating early data

Edmonton Public Library**Edmonton**

- very useful source of information re: style, titles and names

Alberta College of Physicians and Surgeons**Edmonton**

- assistance in finding names of physicians mentioned in this history

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GLOSSARY / DEFINITIONS



Asylum: In the 1800s, asylum meant a shelter for the sick, the elderly, the orphans, etc.

Constitutions: Rule of conduct of a religious institution; its plural form is used by the Grey Nuns

Chief factor: A person who exercises control over workers; term used mostly in the 1700's and 1800's

Equity: The ownership interest of shareholders in a corporation

Foundation: In this context, it is used as "origin", the starting point of a mission. In financial terms, it is also used in regard as endowment, capital that produces income

Monsignor: An ecclesiastical title of honor bestowed on some priests

Prayers of the Itinerary: Prayer designed to call upon God's blessings for travellers, for a trip

Province: Geographical vs Grey Nuns - The Grey Nuns Congregation is divided into regions, called Province

Sexton: An officer of the church who is in charge of sacred objects

Suffragan: An assistant or subordinate bishop of a diocese

Vicariate: A religious institution, region, diocese under the authority of a Vicar

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Preface by Marcia Wiley, s.g.m.
Provincial Leader



What is so remarkable in this history is the singular reason for the Grey Nuns coming to western and northern Canada in 1859: their love of God and willingness to sacrifice all for the advancement of His kingdom.

Their history adds significantly to the volumes already written. Their history speaks the voice of love and peace; of self-sacrifice in service.

It is in reading this volume that one comes to appreciate the tremendous debt owing the Grey Nuns for having courageously contributed to all that is good in Alberta.

Eileen Fedor
Sunday, August 22, 1999.

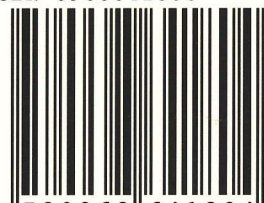


The astonishing acts of heroism of the first Canadian women missionaries, the Grey Nuns, made the writing of their story a most fascinating adventure. Many times was I brought to tears, to laughter, to untold admiration and sisterly pride during this marvelous, faith filled journey with our generous, youthful and deeply dedicated Grey Nuns in their ministries in the far west and north of Canada.

Epilogue.

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