



The *Great* Canadian
Catholic Hospital History Project

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



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

Retracer l'héritage et la contribution des
congrégations de religieuses au Canada,
leur mission en matière de soins de santé ainsi que la fondation et l'exploitation des hôpitaux catholiques.

**The Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph Centennial:
Chatham, New Brunswick
1869-1969**

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1869 - 1969

The Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph
CENTENNIAL

Chatham, New Brunswick

**"The Old Order changeth, yielding place to new
And God fulfills Himself in many ways
Lest one good custom, should corrupt the world."**

Morte D'Arthur—Tennyson

It is one hundred years since, on July 16, 1869, Mother Louise Davignon, Sister St. Louis, Sister McGurty and Sister Vitaline stepped from the gang plank of the "Secret" and set foot on the soil of Chatham, the land of their adoption.

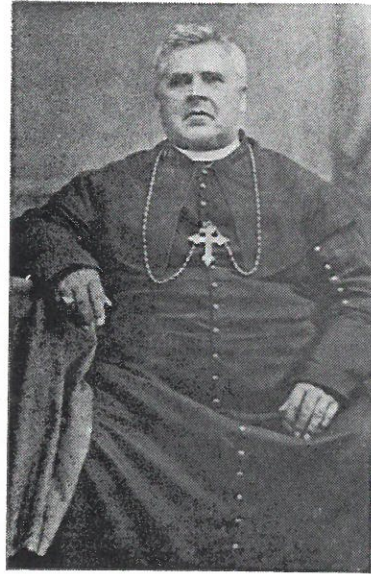
They had come to spend their dedicated lives in the relief of suffering humanity and in the education of youth.



The Foundresses — as shown in the "Pageant"

They had come in answer to the appeal of the Right Reverend James Rogers, First Bishop of Chatham, the great warm-hearted, impulsive, dynamic apostle of ecumenical christianity on the Miramichi.

They had come to meet challenge with challenge — the enthusiasm of the spiritual head of a newly formed diocese that comprised the northern half of New Brunswick — the Shepherd of a poor and scattered flock; yet one whose undertakings reached far into the future, whose vision saw the summits, for whom no obstacle barred the way to absolute fulfillment. That was Bishop Rogers.



Bishop Rogers

They, this mission band, had come to meet his challenge with its counterpart. They had brought with them the strong, indomitable purpose of valiant women; they had brought the spirit of whole-souled dedication, selflessness, a living faith, an enlightened piety, a trusting confidence in the overruling power of Divine Providence; and . . . within ten years, at a price measured only in the balance of Eternity; they had uncovered the rock-bottom, and laid thereon the foundations of the works essential to all apostolates: the care of the poor and suffering and the education of youth.

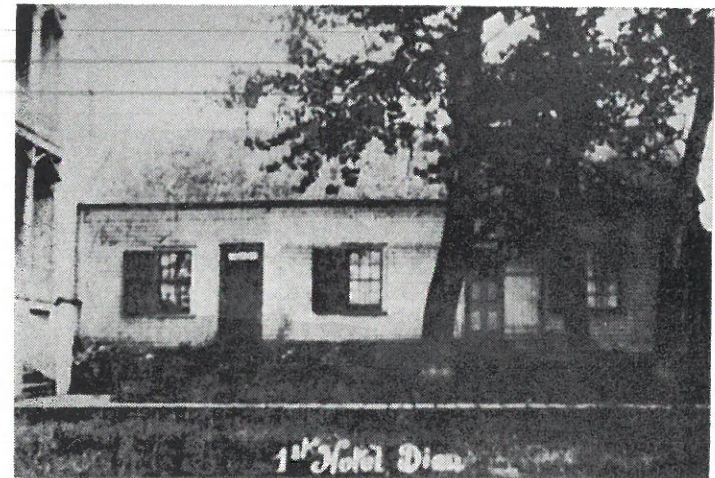
Three days and three nights they had spent on board the "Secret", the boat that week plying between the Gulf Ports. We do not know that these women read into the circumstance any symbolic meaning. No doubt for them the strength of human emotions kept them conscious of their homeland and their hearts must have felt something of the uncertainty that was before them.

They had embarked on the unknown future. What storms,

what calms, what threatened shipwreck awaited them would be known only when they had reached the port of eternity. In this symbolic sense their ship was the "Secret". They had launched out into the deep of Sacrifice—their bark, the secret designs of God—their compass the guiding light of the Holy spirit—their sails the ample folds of an all-wise Providence—and, at the helm was the Divine Pilot.

It is not the purpose of this booklet to detail the history of the past hundred years. A projected work on the Annals of the Sisters of Chatham is in process of writing. If anyone interested in by-gones desires to delve deeper, he may find thought-absorbing subjects while leafing through the projected annals.

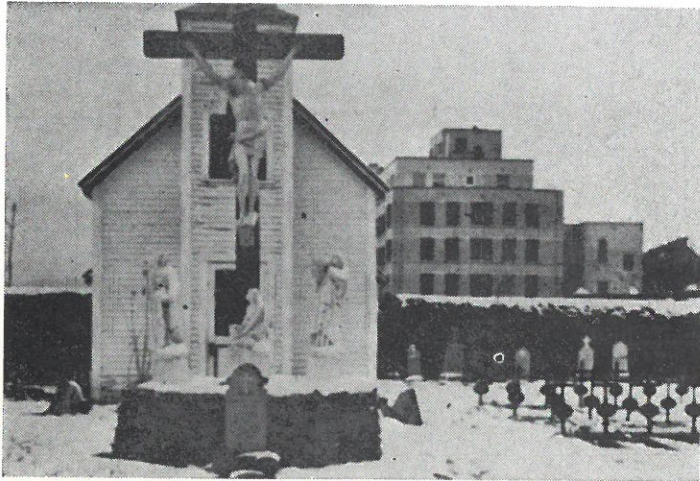
In 1869, "simple, warm-hearted and sincere was the welcome extended to the Sisters by the people of Chatham". Thus ran the first lines of the Chapter in the Annals, recounting the reception given the Sisters on their arrival in their new homeland.



The Sisters who came from their well-established Mother House in Montreal knew nothing of the privations, frustrations, sufferings; physical, mental and moral, that awaited them.

After four years of hardship, Mother Davignon's health broke under a severe illness. She was recalled to the Mother

House. There, rest and a long period of convalescence so far restored her strength and her energy of spirit, that in October of that year she eagerly grasped again the opportunity to serve. She knew then what she was facing when she came back to New Brunswick to establish the Hotel Dieu of Saint Basile, Madawaska. After four months of heroic labor she made the supreme gift of herself. She died on February 2nd, 1874. Her tomb is there.



Mother Davignon's Tomb, St. Basile, Madawaska

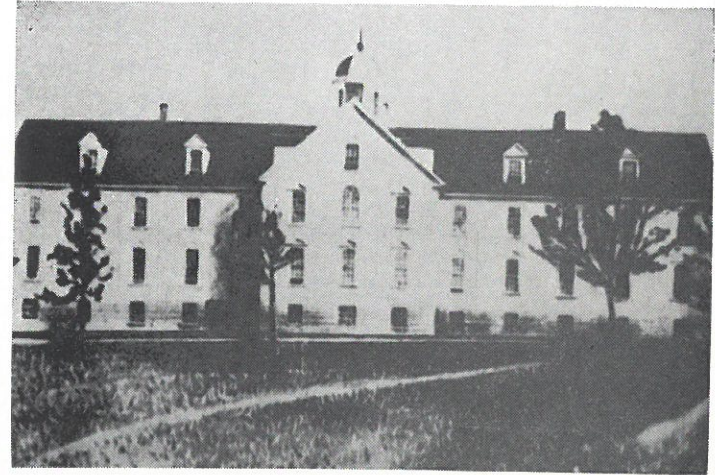
The next Superior, Mother Raymond, possessed a strong spirit of endurance within a frail delicately-nurtured body. She held the floundering boat above water through five disastrous years until a victim of her own self-giving, stricken with a lingering cancer, she too was recalled. "I leave my heart in Chatham", were her farewell words.

Then, Mother Sirois took the helm. She gathered up the labors of the hard years. Under her firm hand the ship would lift itself and breast the waves. The Sisters whom she had formed and trained would perpetuate the spirit of administration. The Mother House was assured that the works in school and hospital could safely be entrusted to capable young Sisters.

By the year 1880 all save three of the sixteen Montreal Sisters who gave their generous service to Chatham had re-

turned at the call of obedience. Without exception, they were physically exhausted, yet happy in knowing that their task was done.

For nine years longer Mother Sirois was the dominating spirit in the religious and apostolic life of the Chatham Community. Her outstanding personality projected itself into the life-stream of the institution.

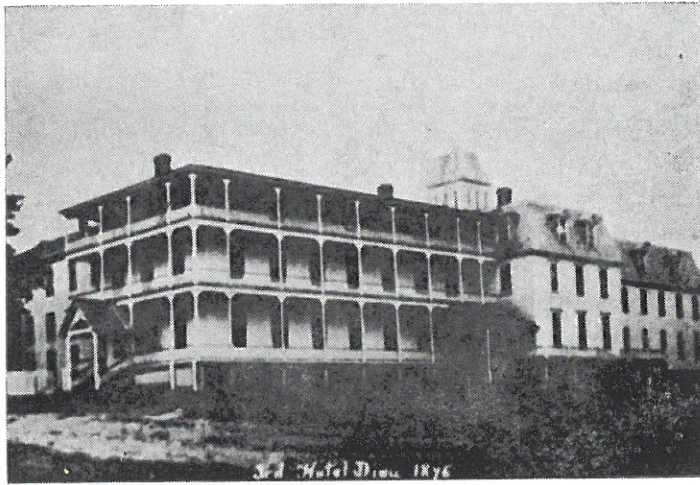


Second Hotel Dieu

Previous to her nomination as Superior in 1879, Sister Sirois directed the Novitiate. In that capacity, she had formed and trained the young Sisters to the duties of religious and professional life; she had initiated them into the management of the domestic and external offices. They were now ready to test their ability.

Mother Sirois died in 1889. She alone of the founding Sisters is buried in the Convent Cemetery in Chatham. Two years after her death, the loving and lovable Mother Renaud and Sister Delphine were recalled to Montreal.

The first ten years forecast the ninety that were to follow. In 1891 the whole responsibility of administration fell on Sisters native to Chatham diocese. They were all young, but the inspiration of the "Secret" was strong within them; and they went forward in confidence and hope, now over calm waters, again facing storms. There were hours of threatened



Third Hotel Dieu

shipwreck, when Christ seemed asleep in the boat. Then at the cry, "Lord, save us", His word "Peace" was followed by a "great calm".

So through years of earnest endeavor, flecked with the shadows of human limitations, the hundred years have passed through the reefs and shoals of time into the harbor of Eternity.

Today the Boat is docked for repairs for new outfittings before weighing anchor on the turbulent waters of another century.

Tennyson wrote in the mid-nineteenth century, yet his Morte D'Arthur has meaning for the psychologist of the mid-twentieth. Communications media of 1969 are dominated by one theme: "The old order changeth, yielding place to new". No one living in this age will gainsay that fact. Only some few, grounded in faith, assent to the next: "and God fulfill Himself in many ways".

God does fulfill Himself in many ways. He is doing so now, in ways unknown to human intelligence, the mystery-shrouded ways of Divine Wisdom. Small wonder the sincere, the earnest-souled, question the last line: "Lest one good custom should corrupt the world".

A new century opens in restlessness and feverish activity.

The rock foundations, the firm structures of the past are obscured by conflicting theories. There is almost a felt sense of eagerness to forget the past. Nevertheless, all man really knows is past; the present slips from him as he grasps it; then, it too is past; the future is the absolute unknown. Only in the NOW is man capable of action.

It is even human prudence to wait moral certainty that a craft is sea-worthy before weighing anchor—the charts and compass true, the crew fit, the unerring pilot at the helm.

Physical and intellectual forces have multiplied and continue to search for new channels of activity, new goals. Today's trend is to create new opportunities, new avenues of research and achievement. Challenges are legion, yet there will not be wanting in the perennial youth of humanity the call to dedicated life. The gift of self will still be projected into the unknown seas of God's eternal love for mankind, past, present, and future.

Has the symbolism of the "Secret" lost its significance? NO! Accidentals have changed. The Past has gone down, beautiful, as an autumn sunset on the Miramichi.

Here and now is the challenge. A new challenge? NO! Only a new phase of the age-old challenge: the cry of humanity crushed under the weight of pain; physical, mental, and



St. Michael's Convent

moral; the cry of youth, craving fulfillment; the mystery of human life in its search for knowledge, for peace and truth.

The clarion call for action is heard, above the warning of the fog horn. The craft is still feeling its way through zero visibility in the fog—wrapped hours of a second century. Its watchmen scan the unseen horizon for the first streaks of dawn. The here and now is real. The beacon light shines clear—the "Path to Duty is the way to Glory".

The Present Duty is to stand prepared; to be alert to face whatever task the sunrise of a new day may bring. The Future is God's "Secret".

The Sisters who came in 1869 held within themselves the secret of achievement. They had strong faith and hope. They gave themselves to God and to humanity. And because it was gift, not loan, they drew from Christ the courage to go on and not look back.

Now and here is the challenge: an invitation, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draft".

The response: "Master, we have toiled all night and have caught nothing, but at Thy word, we will let down the nets".

The "Secret" waits the weighing of the anchor.

