



The *Great* Canadian  
Catholic Hospital History Project

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

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

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

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**The Grey Nuns of Montreal  
and the  
Red River Settlement  
1844-1984**

by  
**Estelle Mitchell, s.g.m.**

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Estelle Mitchell

The  
GREY NUNS  
OF MONTREAL  
and the  
RED RIVER  
SETTLEMENT  
1844-1984





The  
GREY NUNS  
OF MONTREAL  
and the  
RED RIVER  
SETTLEMENT  
1844 - 1984



By the same author:

- **Marguerite d'Youville**  
Palm Publisher, Montreal 1965  
Translated from:  
Elle a beaucoup aimé  
Fides, Montréal et Paris
- **Mère Jane Slocombe**  
Fides 1964, Montréal et Paris
- **Messire Pierre Boucher**  
Montréal, Librairie Beauchemin, 1967  
Vac Offset Inc. 1980
- **Le soleil brille à minuit**  
Montréal, Librairie Beauchemin, 1970
- **From the Fatherhood of God to the  
Brotherhood of Mankind**  
Vac Offset & Printing, Montreal 1977  
Translated by Joanna Kerwin from  
French edition,  
**Le Vrai Visage de Marguerite  
d'Youville**  
Montréal, Librairie Beauchemin,  
1973, 1974, 1978  
  
Japanese translation, October 1978  
Portuguese translation, 1980
- **Love Spans the Centuries, Vol. IV,  
1877-1910**  
Meridian Press 1987  
Translated by Antoinette Bezaire,  
s.g.m. from French edition,  
**Essor apostolique**  
Montréal, Tupo Graphica, 1981
- **Le curé Charles Youville-Dufrost et sa  
mère, 1729-1790**  
Éditions du Méridien, Montréal 1991



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the International Council on Archives

THE GREY NUNS  
OF MONTREAL  
AT THE  
RED RIVER,  
1844 - 1984

Preface by His Excellency Bishop Antoine Hacault  
Archbishop of Saint-Boniface



## ABBREVIATIONS

Ancien Journal	Anc. J.
Annals	Ann.
Archives Soeurs Grises de Montréal	ASGM
Article	Art.
Canadian	Can.
Centenary	Cent.
Circulaire mensuelle	Circ. mens.
Correspondance générale	Corr. gén.
Église catholique	Eg. cath.
History	Hist.
Hôpital général	Hôp. gén.
Director of Novices	M.N.
Notice Biographique	Not. biog.
Oblate of Mary Immaculate	O.M.I.
Rivière-Rouge	R.-R.
Society of Jesus (Jesuit)	S.J.
Soeurs Grises de Montréal	SGM
Superior	Sup.
Tome	T.
Volume	Vol.

Translated by  
Mr. Justice J.F. O'Sullivan  
and Sister Cécile Rioux, s.g.m.  
from the original French Edition  
**LES SOEURS GRISES DE MONTRÉAL**  
**A LA RIVIERE-ROUGE, 1844 - 1984**



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## PREFACE

"What a difficult task it is to pick out a few choice stones when one is confronted with a heap of them, all carefully shaped by expert artists." Yet, that is the kind of task that faces one who seeks in a few words to capture the essence of a story full of marvellous deeds extending over 140 years of apostolate.

In this 20th century of comfort and speed, it is indeed difficult to realize how much courage and heroism was required of four humble women, not only to attain the Red River, but also to make it their home and lay the stones of a lasting foundation. Yet, the evidence is there, drawn from the correspondence between our first Canadian missionaries and the Montreal convent and from their chronicles carefully recorded from day to day.

It is with deep emotion that we peruse these pages which relate the odyssey of the Grey Nuns who left their homeland in order to participate in the task of establishing the Kingdom of God in our regions which were then part of the North West Territories.

For a quarter of a century, Bishop Provencher, the "giant" of the West, had been waiting for these precious helpers. In vain he had searched in France and the United States. At last, in the fall of 1843, at the instigation of Bishop Bourget, he found them in Montreal.

We do not intend to describe the vicissitudes of their coming, nor the difficulties they had to surmount in order to adapt to their new country; the account which follows will do that adequately. We will simply quote some of our predecessors' words of praise which we fully endorse.

The Grey Nuns had just begun their ministry when Bishop Provencher wrote to his metropolitan, Monsignor Signay, Archbishop of Quebec: "The whole



country would change if only we could put the sisters everywhere."

As for Archbishop Taché, he confided to his mother: "The Grey Nuns are doing a great deal of good. We notice a marked improvement in the people since the sisters have arrived. Their schools are functioning perfectly. As for Sister Lagrave, it is her lot to cure all ills."

In 1889, the first Council of the Bishops of the West was held. Archbishop Taché wrote to the superior general: "The Council of Bishops has acknowledged the dedication and the services of the Grey Nuns. In the name of the venerable prelates of this assembly, I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

Bishop Langevin in 1906 affirmed that, "on the shore of the Red River, the worthy daughters of Mother d'Youville have erected a monument which will outlive marble and steel."

No less eloquent were Archbishop Béliveau's comments with regards to the generosity of the Grey Nuns: "There are some things in the presence of which only respectful silence is suitable."

Archbishop Yelle once wrote to His Eminence Cardinal Villeneuve and praised the sisters highly. As for Archbishop Cabana, who during the flood of 1950, became the servant of his people, he assures us that "heroism is required to announce the Good News in the Canadian West."

Closer to us, Archbishop Baudoux, our immediate predecessor, confided to Archbishop Panico, apostolic delegate, "I quote Bishop Provencher who said, 'I opened two more schools but they are far from being as valuable as those of the sisters.' The first bishop thus eulogized the work of the Grey Nuns. I must say that just as they were right-hand helpers to Bishop Provencher, so they have remained for their successors."

Today the present Archbishop of St. Boniface is happy to testify that the Grey Nuns are still invaluable collaborators in these troubled times. The adaptive process is still being pursued in all endeavours as the historical documents affirm: no one ever knocks at their door without receiving a favourable answer. Long ago they came "to do good" as the name Boniface implies, and they continue their good works which are eminently humanitarian and ecclesial.

A member of parliament in 1871 made the following comment: "The Grey Nuns do not ask whether the patient suffers from a Protestant pain or from a Catholic fever, they simply take care of anyone who comes to them." Ecumenism for them is not something new; it is a spiritual legacy they received from their saintly foundress, Marguerite d'Youville, Mother of Universal Charity.

To our worthy collaborators, we wish that they may be blessed with numerous vocations so that in these vast and relatively young provinces, the works begun in 1844 may be continued. We also make ours the words of Canon Groulx, "One of the beautiful qualities of our history lies in the fact that women have collaborated in all the great deeds that have been accomplished.

**ANTOINE HACAULT**  
Archbishop of St. Boniface

## PROLOGUE

In the past one hundred and forty years, many a renowned speaker has praised them. Persons in high places have ordered their names carved in marble and stone. So extraordinary is their heroic odyssey that historians have preserved it for future generations. This long adventure began with passengers and merchandise packed into canoes that seemed to float like sea-shells on turbulent waters.

It was such a canoe voyage that brought Sisters Valade, Lagrave, Coutlée-St. Joseph and Lafrance into an unknown land. The Territories had not yet been annexed to Canada, therefore, these sisters were the first Canadian women to leave their country for an apostolic mission. A few years earlier they had consecrated their lives to God, promising according to the accepted norm, "to spend the rest of their days serving the poor at the General Hospital of Montreal." But then, Bishop Provencher, that giant of the West, weary from a 25-year fruitless search, knocked at the door of the Grey Nuns. Bishop Bourget had assured him that he would be well received.

This initial "Veni" marked the beginning of the history introduced in this prologue. Many had long hoped for such a narrative. In a letter dated March 20, 1972, Sister Cécile Maurice, then provincial superior, requested Sister Elizabeth de Moissac to write the history of our congregation in Western Canada. She said, "The provincial council believes that you, as a historian, are best qualified for such a project." Sister de Moissac lost no time in undertaking this tremendous task. She accumulated a wealth of documentary material from historical documents, oral traditions and personal experiences gained during her long career as a teacher. Unfortunately, time ran out for her before she could complete her assignment.

Providentially, another Grey Nun was available. She had at her disposal some fifteen hundred historical index cards concerning the works of the Grey Nuns



in the North West Territories. The following pages give only a bird's-eye view of a history that covers close to one and a half centuries. Yet how eloquently they testify to the quality of the seed implanted in Manitoba soil by these heroic pioneering women of 1844!

These four humble women, worthy followers of Marguerite d'Youville, Foundress of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal, "Grey Nuns," were able to discern the needs of the times, adapt to changing circumstances and open new avenues of service to those who would succeed them. An occasional nostalgic remark was the only outward sign of their innermost sufferings, endured with great strength of soul, stamina and courage. They bravely put their hand to the plow and sowed the field entrusted to them by God. They opened schools for children, took care of the sick and the aged, extended a helping hand to all forms of distress uncovered in the tents of the Indians or in the urban centres. They were helped and sustained in their tasks by benefactors of different faiths and by countless volunteers whose friendship and interest never failed.

In a word, we can say that these Grey Nun pioneers, in collaboration with bishops and clergy, and the valiant Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, brought civilization to the Red River settlement and far beyond.

The volume is a tribute not only to our pioneer sisters, but also to all who assisted them at the outset and those who contributed their works of mercy throughout the years. This tribute also includes the numerous women and men who in this day and age collaborate to make it possible to manifest the compassionate love of the Father for his children of the great human family - thus perpetuating the spirituality bequeathed by Mother d'Youville to her religious congregation.

SISTER MARIE BONIN  
Provincial Superior  
June 21, 1986

## CHAPTER ONE - 1843

When Bishop Joseph-Norbert Provencher visited Montreal on September 9, 1843, it was not the first time that he had made the long and arduous journey from the West. On this occasion he went directly to the residence of Bishop Ignace Bourget.<sup>1</sup>

His visits back to Montreal had not been frequent on account of the distance and the unbelievable difficulties of the trip between the Red River and the metropolis. On the other hand, communication by writing had been maintained since as far back as 1822 when Father Bourget had become secretary of Montreal's Bishop Lartigue. Father Bourget soon shared in the admiration which the Bishop of Montreal had for his brother bishop who was called the Giant of the West. Bishop Provencher was well named "Giant" not only because of his height which reached six foot four, but also because of the truly gigantic achievement which he had accomplished since 1818 in the far-off Vicariate of Red River.

He had been sent there by Monsignor Joseph-Octave Plessis in answer to a request from Lord Selkirk, a principal shareholder of the Hudson Bay Company.<sup>2</sup> Once there he did not delay in beginning to work, assisted by Father Sévère Dumoulin and the seminarian, Edge.

Aware that the best preaching is by example, the missionary fully participated in all aspects of the work of the community. One observer has said that you could often see the Bishop in the fields with his cassock tucked up under his belt as he took part in sowing, reaping, cutting grain, making hay... What would Pope Gregory XVI have said had he seen him in the fields. It was this Pope who had declared Provencher the most handsome bishop in the world.<sup>3</sup> But in addition to these humble tasks, Bishop Provencher also functioned as a professor with two students learning Latin in his school.<sup>4</sup>

The generosity of Lord Selkirk resulted in the

grant of a parcel of land of 25 acres as a site for a church. It was a tract which extended five miles in length by four miles in width and it was destined to be used for works of charity.<sup>5</sup> However, the financial contribution available from the diocese of Quebec was not sufficient to cover the expenses incurred. Hence it was necessary for the missionary Provencher to undertake another tour of "la belle province" and to give an account of the state of the mission to his metropolitan in accordance with the agreement that had been made at the outset.<sup>6</sup>

To help him raise funds for this purpose, the Bishop of Quebec named him as acting curé of Yamachiche. It was during that first trip back to Quebec that he received notification of his being made titular Bishop of Juliopolis in Galatia. At the same time he was named an auxiliary bishop of Quebec for the North-West. Archbishop Plessis had arranged with Rome that the various districts of his diocese be administered by vicars general ordained as bishops and arranged that the archdiocese of Quebec not be divided into separate dioceses. This meant that the whole territory of Quebec would be governed by him with auxiliaries. At Montreal the Sulpician Father Jean-Jacques Lartigue was named as auxiliary and titular bishop of Telmesse (in partibus). The new Bishop Lartigue was consecrated at Notre Dame Church January 21, 1821 while Bishop Provencher was consecrated at Trois Rivières on May 12, 1822 with Archbishop Plessis being assisted by Bishops Panet and Lartigue.

Colleagues in the hierarchy, Lartigue and Provencher shared the same apostolic ambitions though each in his own milieu. They developed a deep friendship. The Bishop of the West gave moral support to Bishop Lartigue in the many administrative difficulties he encountered in his new situation while trying to function as a Montreal bishop subordinated to Quebec. For his part, Bishop Lartigue spared no efforts to obtain for the Apostle of the West the resources needed to implant there the works deemed imperative.



The coming of the priests to the West had produced good fruit. The deadly conflicts between fur traders ended with the merger of the Hudson Bay Company with the North West Company in 1821. Bishop Provencher did not witness the agreement to merge. Neither did Lord Selkirk who had died the year before while in France. On his return to his far-away vicariate, the new bishop took up again his heavy task, attempting to be all things to all, an ambassador of good will among the population which was already a mosaic, consisting of French Canadians, Scottish Orkneymen,<sup>7</sup> Irish, De Meurons soldiers and Swiss-Germans in addition to the native peoples. Due to the fact that the latter group were quite considerable, the missionary was inspired to dedicate his chapel to the apostle of Germany.<sup>8</sup>

By his leadership, his availability and the largeness of his vision, Father Provencher earned the approval not only of his flock but also that of Governor George Simpson who granted him credit at the store of the Bay and an annual donation of 50 pounds sterling. This contribution was to be increased, five years later, to 100 pounds a year and was accompanied by the recognition "that the influence of the mission directed by the very Reverend Bishop of Juliopolis has always been in favour of the best interests of the colony and of the country as a whole."<sup>9</sup>

In 1832 the building of the cathedral was begun, to be finished five years later. It was a monument immortalized by the poet Whittier who sang of the "turrets twain."<sup>10</sup> Bishop Provencher in 1836 had the satisfaction of having his work recognized by Rome when the Congregation of Propaganda, following a petition presented by Bishop Provencher in person,<sup>11</sup> decided to establish both Montreal and St. Boniface as dioceses in their own right, no longer forming part of the diocese of Quebec.

The event brought about the naming of Ignace Bourget as coadjutor of Montreal. He was consecrated July 25, 1837. He succeeded Bishop Lartigue in

April, 1840. From having been an agent and procurer for Red River, he had become friend and confidant of the bishop of that place and participated in the apostolic concerns of his brother bishop. He used to repeat, "The best way for a people to preserve the faith is to spread it to far away places."<sup>12</sup>

But Bishop Provencher did not experience only successes. For a quarter of a century, that is to say ever since his arrival in the West, he had tried to obtain the cooperation of sister teachers so as to assure Christian instruction to the next generations. The need for such sisters had been impressed on him both by Monsignor Plessis<sup>13</sup> in his original directions and also by his own experience in the distant mission land. For one thing, he found that most of the Canadians were not willing to be married in Church without resistance. One of them expressed the prevailing attitude: "We like the freedom to send away our wives."<sup>14</sup>

The only hope to change this attitude was the education of the young people. Miss Nolin, a half-breed, educated at the Congregation of Notre Dame at Montreal, kept school at St. Boniface from 1829 to 1834 when she moved to Baie St. Paul to teach the natives.

In 1838, Madame Lapalice and Miss Ursule Grenier, having come from Lower Canada, offered courses in weaving and other household arts. Alas, fire burned down their school in the following year.<sup>15</sup>

In April of 1843, the year of Bishop Provencher's famous visit to Montreal, Bishop Bourget recommended to Provencher that he should take Louis Riel, an ex-novice of the Oblates, as school master.<sup>16</sup> This suggestion was gratefully accepted, but that made only one teacher and already there was thought being given to a school way out in British Columbia.

Bishop Provencher made a number of appeals, approaching in turn the Sisters of the Congregation

of Notre Dame, the Franciscans, the Propagation of the Faith at Lyon, the diocese of Amiens, the Ursulines of Trois-Rivières, the "Amantes de la Croix" and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Lyon. Each approach seemed promising at the beginning but had no fruition. The bishop also approached American sources. He pursued his quest in Kentucky. He wrote to Bishop Loras of Dubuque, Iowa, to get his opinion about the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, the Sisters of Charity and the Amantes de la Croix. But Bishop Loras was discouraged. It appeared that the Sisters of Charity in the United States were fully occupied with the direction of hospitals and the Amantes de la Croix were not numerous enough. It would be better, he said, to seek help among the Sisters of St. Joseph of Lyon.

It was to follow up on all these leads that the Giant of the West left St. Boniface June 19, 1843, by caravan across the prairies of Minnesota to reach Dubuque August 4. Bishop Loras welcomed him with cordiality and offered the services of three sisters whom he himself had recruited from Baltimore. But these sisters did not speak French. With a determination so characteristic of him, Bishop Provencher went on to St. Louis and then to Louisville, Kentucky and finally to Cincinnati, Ohio, but without any greater success.

These successive failures were related by Bishop Provencher to Bishop Bourget at their 1843 meeting. Bishop Bourget set his mind to figuring out some practical way to assist. Then he recalled a confidence which had been given to him. More than one year prior to this meeting, one of the Grey Nuns had spoken to him of her desire to go as a missionary to the Red River. Could not this be a sign of Providence? Why had he not thought of this sooner? Bishop Bourget now did not hesitate to say: "It is the Grey Nuns whom you must obtain." Bishop Provencher was taken by surprise. He knew the Grey Nuns by reputation especially in his native Nicolet, but like so many others he had believed they were limited in their work to the care of the old and the infirm.

But he did not express any of his concerns he may have had since the suggestion of seeking the cooperation of the Grey Nuns had come from his colleague who was the ecclesiastical superior of the Congregation. Would it be necessary to continue to search far and wide for the necessary helpers when they were there, right at hand as it were? Who knows, perhaps the hour of God had come?...

On Wednesday, September 13, the two bishops, one from the West and the other from Montreal, went to la Pointe-à-Callières where stood 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 3600 feet surrounded the institution while a fine tree-lined avenue, admired by tourists, led to the gateway.<sup>17</sup>

The establishment sheltered more than 300 persons, including abandoned children who found asylum there. On one of the entrance gates there was written an excerpt from Psalm 26, verse 10: "If my father and my mother abandon me, the Lord will receive me."

Bishop Provencher had probably never visited the hospital but the tale of his apostolic accomplishments was well known. It was thus with feelings of confidence and hope that he crossed the threshold. As for Bishop Bourget, he became more and more sure of the success of their approach. Had he not encouraged, three years ago, the creation of a general hospital at St. Hyacinthe, the first branch detached from the primitive tree and which carried on in that little town the work formerly begun by the Foundress? The two distinguished visitors were welcomed by Mother Dorothee Trottier de Beaubien, the superior whose second and final term in office was drawing to an end.

It happened to be the eve not only of the feast of the Holy Cross, the patronal feast of the insti-

tute but as well it was the eve of the annual chapter at which there were to be the quinquennial elections. The coincidence of these two ensured an atmosphere of silence favouring reflection and a climate eminently suitable for being open to the great event which was being prepared.

The sisters gathered in the community room were at last able to look on the legendary hero who was introduced briefly by Bishop Bourget. Bishop Bourget was well aware that his colleague would be able to present a good case. Bishop Provencher did not boast about his achievements but spoke rather of his vain search, the fruitless steps that had been taken particularly on his last journey, a journey that had been so painful that - as recorded by an observant annalist - the Bishop arrived in Montreal with his cassock in tatters. To recount the failure for twenty-five years to meet the essential need of education and to admit the failure quite simply constituted a proof of humility. His audience listened raptly, especially when the Bishops spoke so feelingly of his dear "Bois-brûlés," so called because of their tanned skin colour. It was evident that he had a deep attachment for these descendants of the French-Canadian Voyageurs "men of trust, the aristocracy of the voyageur class, who distinguished themselves by their skill in the art of navigation as well as by their intelligence and their honesty."<sup>18</sup>

The total population under the jurisdiction of the Bishop had increased to about 6,000 people of whom two-thirds were Catholic;<sup>19</sup> all were not of French-Canadian descent however. There were a handful of priests, doing valiant work. They were Fathers Belcourt, Thibault, Mayrand and Darveau.<sup>20</sup> But the team was too small in number to be able to accomplish the extensive work to be done.

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." Turning toward the superior, he asked her, "How many sisters do you have?" "We are 38,



Monseigneur." "But surely you do not require such a large number. Would there not be a few who would sacrifice themselves for our mission?" The Bishop's words were met with a respectful silence.<sup>21</sup> The Bishop did not insist; he had sown the seed; he was confident it would be productive. The confidence was well-placed for, among the Grey Nuns, interest in what they called the "pays d'En Haut" (the "Up Country") had grown steadily right from the beginning of the congregation. It was recalled that, during the French regime, mother d'Youville, assisted by her companions, had carried out works to assist the Western explorers, including her uncle Pierre de La Verendrye, and her brother, Christophe Dufrost de La Jemmeraye whom La Verendrye called his second-in-command. It was well known that this group of brave men had encountered many misfortunes, particularly in 1736 when twenty victims of the Sioux had perished in the massacre of the Lake of the Woods.<sup>22</sup> That year had been doubly tragic since during the same month of June, La Jemmerais "worn out by deprivations and suffering had died at the fork of the Roseau River and had been carried back to Fort Maurepas by his cousins."<sup>23</sup>

There was a more recent memory which six of the present sisters recalled vividly. Sister Françoise Prud'homme, one of Mother d'Youville's contemporaries, had declared on more than one occasion: "It is not the present generation which will go into that country but the next one." That venerable old-timer had died while in office as assistant general on February 21, 1821. Short months before, she had predicted to an "imposing" candidate: "This good stout young lady will be a missionary to the Red River." Now, this good stout girl, Miss Eulalie Lagrave, had taken on the grey habit December 23, 1823 and was now 38 years of age; she was therefore eligible to take up the distant mission, more fortunate in that respect that three of the older ones who had already reached sixty.<sup>24</sup> One other sister was 53 years old but she was afflicted with frail health. There were six others who were over 40; twelve were in their 30's and eleven were still in their 20's.

Besides, the superior and her assistant could not leave Montreal and neither could the Mistress of Novices nor the five professed novices in her charge.

It can be imagined what discussions there were after the departure of the Bishop, when the period of silence was over. No decision of such importance could be taken right away; it was necessary to wait until the chapter had elected the twelve administrators to whom would be entrusted the responsibility of directing the congregation.<sup>25</sup>

There was no doubt as to what the answer would be. All the sisters were aware of the prescription which had been inserted in the constitutions by Mr. Montgolfier, the Sulpician: "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."<sup>26</sup>

The rules required, however, that before establishing a foundation there should be an official request presented in writing,<sup>27</sup> that there should be a visit to the site of the foundation by two sisters - an impossible requirement in this case - that those sisters who believed themselves suitable for the project should volunteer their cooperation to the superior, and that each new house be erected canonically, having the right to establish a novitiate. It goes without saying that the period of reflection was accompanied by an atmosphere of prayer. Many a general novena was offered.

For his part, Bishop Provencher looked to the future with serenity. On October 12, he was found writing to Monsignor Signay: "My negotiations with the Grey Nuns are going well." And he continued, "These sisters ask only a small revenue to enable them to buy their clothing and to have a fund of thirty pounds sterling to look after the needs of those who will be chosen."

On October 19 there arrived at the general hospital the official request from the Bishop of Red

River "soliciting three sisters to assure Christian teaching and the teaching of household arts to the young women."

The sisters were informed that the work of being a foundress would not be imposed on anyone. It would be left to the free choice of each one for the adventure would be a big one. Much hard labour and prolonged sacrifice would be required of those who would have the honour of becoming the first Canadian missionaries. They would be missionaries in every sense of the word since they would be leaving their own country to be evangelists in another one. The "pays d'En-Haut" as well as the North West Territories were not yet a part of the Dominion of Canada. It was up to those who felt themselves called to offer themselves of their own accord.

On October 22, the foundation of Red River was accepted.<sup>28</sup> It would be called by the name of the General Hospital and, imitating what was being done in Montreal, the work would include not only the teaching of young persons but also the care of the poor, the infirm and the ill. It had been thought best to provide four sisters instead of the three asked for by the Bishop. It was also decided that one of the four sisters should speak the English language.

The general councillors were happy to know that seventeen of the eligible twenty-five sisters had volunteered for the new work. There were three sisters who desired to sign up but did not so do. Three other names could be added to the list. Sister Marie Louise Valade, one of the administrators, at first anxious to volunteer, abstained. She preferred to wait for some manifestation of the will of God.<sup>29</sup>

Sister Julie Hainault-Deschamps, since pronouncing her vows September 10, 1838, had waited impatiently for the day when the Grey Nuns would have missions. It was only the promise that they would some day have missions that had been the deciding factor in her decision to make perpetual profession

with the sisters. In fact, it was her Director of Novices, Sister Thuot, who predicted the foundation of these missions. Sister Thuot herself founded the St. Hyacinthe mission in 1840. However, at this time Sister Deschamps had been advised not to offer herself for this mission.<sup>30</sup>

As for Sister Jane Slocombe, one of the professed novices, since she had not yet finished the two-year obligatory term of the novitiate, she had to delay her volunteering until later. As a matter of fact, her hope of being sent to the field of the mission apostolate was never going to be fulfilled. She was to die with the regret of "never having been deemed worthy" to become a messenger of Christ in the remote lands. It is interesting to note that both Sisters Deschamps and Slocombe later became superior generals of the Institute.

When the moment came to reveal the names of the chosen ones, emotion reached its highest pitch especially among those who had volunteered. It was announced that those named were Sisters Valade, Lagrave, Coutlée-St-Joseph and Lafrance.

The discreet way of dealing with Sister Valade by the superior, Mother McMullen, had been accepted by Sister Valade as a sign of God's will. The council had been influenced in their decision to name her by their knowledge of her vast experience acquired by her in the office of treasurer, her ability in the direction of souls; her devotion, her compassion, her deep sense of duty. Respect for her was also engendered by her tall and serious demeanour. She had one other quality as well: she was one-quarter Indian and would have an instinctive understanding of the young girls and women she could expect to be in charge of.<sup>31</sup> And so, on November 7, she was proclaimed superior-foundress of the Red River convent.

Sister Lagrave became her assistant. She had a keen and lively character, friendly and happy in her disposition. She was an ideal kind of companion who was not afraid of any kind of work. She excelled

in the art of delicate embroidery. She also possessed exquisite tact in visiting the sick and the poor. She had a magnificent voice which for twenty years sounded out during religious ceremonies.

As for Sister St-Joseph (Gertrude Coutlée),<sup>32</sup> she was to be assigned the role of novice director in spite of her youthful age - she was scarcely twenty-four - she possessed equanimity and a peaceful spirit. She was in control of herself. Whatever embarrassing circumstance might arise, she always had a good answer. She could cover up deep pain with a smile. It was with a smile that she concealed the grief of departure when the time came to leave for the West. While waiting for novices to come, Sister St-Joseph was put in charge of teaching little boys.

Sister Lafrance, named as councillor, was self-effacing. She had the ability to accomplish much without making a good deal of noise. She was shy and reserved. At first it surprised others that she had volunteered for the mission but, after thought, it was easy to recognize that despite her frail appearance she was energetic and determined. She had confidence in herself and she would be called to fulfil heavy responsibilities. Meanwhile, she was named teacher of the girls.

On the same day, November 7, the new missionaries signed a document by which they acknowledged the validity of their selection and undertook to fulfill their functions in conformity with the rules of the institute. This act, as was customary for religious foundations in the mid-nineteenth century, gave the new community a certain autonomy under the jurisdiction of Bishop Provencher.

If there had been some surprise at the naming of Sister Lafrance, there was even more surprise that Sister Deschamps had not been mentioned. There was also much teasing and she who was the object of this teasing, showed the strength of her character by not explaining her abstention.



Bishop Provencher was overjoyed. He wrote again to Monsignor Signay to tell him "that 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 Bay Company." And so now there was nothing to prevent his departure for Europe. There he would be representing the Canadian Bishops at the Holy See where he would try to have the North West Territories erected into a Vicariate Apostolic.<sup>33</sup>

His departure, scheduled for December 16, 1843, was put off to January 1 when the Bishop set off in the company of his colleague of 1818, Father Sévère Dumoulin.

This delay enabled him to have the honour of ordaining two priests in the Grey Nuns' chapel: Father Plamondon and Father Provençal. The ceremony took place December 23, the anniversary of the death of the Foundress and, in the course of the community visit which followed the ceremony, the Bishop of the West was able to recommend to his very own missionary sisters to take advantage of the first spring boats to make their journey to the Red River. The journey, he warned them, would be tough, lasting at least two months. The Red River giant did not hide his joy at the thought of seeing the sisters at work in his vast diocese as soon as possible.

- 1 Ann. Srs. Ch. Hôp. gén. St-Bon., 1st notebook No. 1, p.15. Unless stated otherwise, the details contained in this Chapter are derived from the same source.
- 2 Thomas Douglas, Lord Selkirk, wished to reward J.B. Lagimodiere for his exploit: the latter had travelled on foot for 5 months in order to deliver some important dispatches. Lord Selkirk asked his messenger what reward he desired. Lagimodiere answered: some priests. Father Tabeau and Father Crevier, nominated in 1816, had not been able to go any further west than Rainy Lake because of the conflict between Hudson's Bay Company and the Nor'Westers. But the powerful lord had persisted and this time had met with more success.
- 3 Dugré, A., S.J., quoted by Tessier-Biron, op.cit., p. 19.
- 4 Bernier, A., op.cit., p.9.
- 5 Frémont, "Mgr Provencher", pp. 38-39.
- 6 Ibid., pp. 76-77.
- 7 Orkney, British islands to the north of Scotland.
- 8 Morice, "Hist. abrégée, Ouest canadien" p. 163.
- 9 Frémont, "Mgr Provencher", pp. 104-105.
- 10 MacGregor, op.cit., p. 12
- 11 Pouliot, "Mgr Bourget la R.-R.", p. 21. It is probably in the course of this voyage that the modesty of Bishop Provencher was again put to the test. While in London, the bishop was taking a meal when he noticed that he was being stared at intently by one of the guests. The latter soon excused himself saying, "If I looked at you this way, it is because I have

- never seen such a handsome man before." (Frémont, p. 155).
- 12 Pouliot, "Mgr Bourget", t.III, p. 147.
- 13 Dugas, A., "Mgr Provencher...", p. 56.
- 14 Frémont, "Mgr Provencher", p. 64.
- 15 Dorge, op.cit., p. 53.
- 16 Jordan, op.cit., French version, p. 22.
- 17 Mitchell, Sr., Mère Slocombe, p. 26.
- 18 Brouillette, B., op.cit., p. 104.
- 19 Tessier-Biron, op.cit., p. 15 and 23.
- 20 Taché, "20 années de Mission", p. 4, note 1. The Fathers Destroismaisons, Harper, Boucher, Poiré and Demers, after serving for a few years, had returned to their native land.
- 21 Drouin, Sr.C., "Hôpital général", v.2, pp. 205-206.
- 22 Champagne, "Les La Vérendrye et le poste de l'ouest", pp. 183-184. Father Aulneau, S.J., and J.B., the eldest son of La Verendrye, were among the victims.
- 23 Ibid., p. 180.
- 24 The details concerning the sisters are extracted from their respective biographies.
- 25 When the Grey Nuns received civil incorporation from Louis XV, their numbers were limited to 12. With the exception of the order, it was the custom to elect 12 "full" sisters to administer the order as a council.
- 26 3rd part, 1781, p. 60, typewritten text.

16

27 Rules written by Bishop Bourget and given to the community on October 19, 1843. The original text is kept at the ASGM.

28 Primeau, "Le Centenaire des Soeurs Grises", p. 2.

29 Drouin, Sr. C., Hôpital Général, t. III, p. 88.

30 Mitchell, Sr., "Essor apostolique". The secret was revealed by Bishop Taché in 1880.

31 Mémoires, St. Boniface, 1843-61, p. XXIII. Sister Valade was born in Ste-Anne-des-Plaines, a little village very generous towards the Grey Nuns because Sisters Limoges, Guénette, Daunais, and Lapointe, who were well-known in the West and Far North, also came from Ste-Anne-des-Plaines.

32 Gertrude was Sister Rose Coutlée's sister and according to custom, had to adopt a name different from that of her sister.

33 Dugas, "Mgr Provencher et la R.-R.", p. 218.

## CHAPTER TWO - 1844

How swiftly time flies! How dear are familiar objects when one looks upon them for the last time! Especially, how moving it is to realize that in the hearts of the sisters reigns that true and most perfect union recommended by Mother d'Youville herself. Truth to tell, ever since the announcement of the departure, the four chosen ones felt keenly how difficult it would be to live separately from those companions whose affection and interest surrounded them. Certainly, everyone tended to the work at hand but with what eagerness and sense of special care each one took part in the necessary preparations for the journey! Those who had volunteered but were not chosen no doubt kept to themselves any sense of envy they might have in their heart. If they could foresee the future, they would know that two other missions are only five years away, namely those of Bytown (Ottawa) and Quebec.

The news of the heroic expedition spread outside the walls of the convent: it provoked admiration from both friends and relatives who could be excused for breaking the rules as to the times for visits in the parlour. In the course of these conversations, the visitors received what they had come to offer: encouragement and expressions of regard. Those who came to give consolation went away comforted.

At the beginning of January, the sisters received a message from Bishop Pierre-Flavien Turgeon, coadjutor of Quebec, congratulating Sister Valade and her companions called to found this first distant establishment and assuring the little community that the vacancies created by their leaving would soon be filled by excellent vocations.<sup>1</sup>

It was not yet spring, it being only March 9, when Bishop Bourget acting as a kind of official envoy of the missionaries produced a document entitled: "Permission to Sisters Valade, Lagrave, St-Joseph and Lafrance." "In accordance with the



request of His Excellency Bishop J. N. Provencher, Bishop of Juliopolis, in charge of the spiritual government of the episcopal district of the North-West, the Bishop of Montreal gives them formal permission to go to found one or more communities provided they conform in all things to the rules of the mother house." "Have only one heart and one spirit;... Daughters of the Cross, do not be discouraged in the hardships which will test your bold undertaking... May the Lord bless you and multiply you on the far-away land which you have adopted as your own country."<sup>2</sup>

These "daughters of the Cross" were indeed under no illusions regarding the difficulties of the trip. Many times they had heard the story of those legendary odysseys aboard canoes where there were piled together the oarsmen, the passengers the tents, trunks and packages.<sup>3</sup> The distance of 1800 miles included some 150 portages,<sup>4</sup> when tow-lines or walking would be necessary to bypass rapids.

But why anticipate these difficulties when one needs the courage to put up a good front and cover up the pain which fills the heart at the prospect of separation? If the cross is the bearer of joy, it still implies a ransom that must be paid. The sisters were not surprised by that since they were well schooled in the Youvillian insight. The crucifix, with the fleur-de-lis which they wear, reminds them of this noble truth. Two of the soon-to-be travellers esteemed in a special way the cross of their profession. Sister Lagrave had been given the cross of profession of Sister Thaumur de la Source, the first companion of the foundress. Sister St-Joseph had been given that of her great aunt, Mother Thérèse-Geneviève Coutlée, Mother d'Youville's nurse.<sup>5</sup> It seemed to them that these crosses were a bit of the past which they would take with them, a past over which already a mysterious curtain was slowly falling. Never again would they see the place where they had spent the first years of their religious life, in fact the place where, according to the formula of the taking of the vows, the rest of their

days ought to have been spent.

Instead, they had to leave for far-off banks without any hope of return. And so the missionaries, filled with this prospect, began to prepare their travelling garb.

A time of joy was experienced by them on March 25 when Bishop Provencher returned from Europe.<sup>6</sup> It was he who on April 20 celebrated Mass following which pioneers renewed their consecration to Mary. Leaving the cathedral, the procession with Mother McMullen at its head took them to the Convent of the Sisters of Providence where lunch was served; then on to the Bishop's house, to the Sulpician seminary and finally to the Sisters of Notre Dame. These were their farewell visits for the departure was set for April 23.

The evening before the memorable day, goodbyes took place in the community room where, after evening prayer,<sup>7</sup> a great silence reigned interspersed with tears more eloquent than words. Very soon, on the following morning, Bishop Bourget offered the Holy Sacrifice in the old sanctuary of the Charon Brothers.<sup>8</sup> 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.

The voice of Sister Lagrave, accompanied by the organ, remained beautiful and sonorous to the end but soon she found herself singing alone for her companions could not continue on account of their tears of emotion.

No less touching was the signing of the document of faithfulness to the rules and customs of that house "which we look upon and cherish as our mother. And so that the distance of the places to which we are sent may never make us forget what we owe to the mother house, we undertake to unite ourselves to

those who live in it every single day at the time when we recite the litanies to Divine Providence."<sup>9</sup> This devotion would be easy for the sisters who, following Mother d'Youville, were imbued with the belief that "Divine Providence is our only salvation, our only hope, our refuge; it is the strength of the weak, the guide of the pilgrims and the consoler in our exile." These invocations and the practice of their daily recitation were introduced by Mother d'Youville herself on April 4, 1770.

As they were on the verge of embarking, it was learned that the departure was postponed until the following day. Thus the agony of leaving was prolonged, rendered even more painful by the news that a question of health had persuaded Bishop Provencher to accept an offer from Sir George Simpson and go on ahead with the governor in swifter canoes.

Everything had to be begun again; it was necessary to hide the effort to keep a good countenance and to put off until tomorrow the tears which could hardly be restrained.

Things were not made easier for the sisters when on the morning of April 24, after Mass, the sisters were bade goodbye by the Sulpicians Mr. Larre, Mr. Lafrance, the brother of Sister Hedwidge, and Mr. Morin, Mr. Porlier and Mr. J. Toupin. Their words were comforting but at the same time sharp reminders that their leaving was forever.

At breakfast no one could eat. Sister St-Joseph tried vainly to revive the sisters' appetite with joyful conversation. But there was no use. The meal was finished in haste and each one went to change into the costume prescribed for the voyage: a habit of common grey cloth, a widow's bonnet, a big brown knitted shawl, a grey woollen hat accompanied by a long green veil... "Thus attired, we were neither of this world nor of the other," one of the pioneers would say to the merriment of her companions.<sup>10</sup>

The most dreaded times of the departure were now things of the past. They had courageously left the old mother house proceeding between two lines of old persons, ill persons, orphans and companions masking their feelings with difficulty.

Two kind friends had placed their carriages at the disposal of the travellers; one carried to Lachine a group consisting of Mother McMullen with Sisters Beaubien, Rose Coutlée, Pinsonnault of St. Hyacinthe, while the other bore a group consisting of Honorable C.S. Rodier and his wife and daughter, and also Maurille Coutlée who was aiming to accompany his sister as far up river as possible.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, although he had booked passage on a boat as far as Carillon, the boat was delayed.

Having reached Lachine, the two groups were welcomed by Sir George Simpson in his stone house with its balcony.<sup>12</sup> This distinguished gentleman offered everyone a delicious lunch. About eleven o'clock the sisters and their companions, at the invitation of the governor, went to Ile Dorval, the place of embarkation. They had just left shore when a storm came up. There was lightning and thunder and torrential rains which meant that their grey costumes were soaking wet when they reached the island.

About four o'clock in the afternoon, there took place the final separation. Mother McMullen and her companions went back to the city with hearts deeply distressed yet full of admiration. Their admiration was shared by a reporter from *la Minerve*: "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."<sup>13</sup>

Very soon, on the morning of April 25, the flotilla got under way. The paddlers filled the air with old songs sung to the rhythm of the oars while

the sisters wrote down their impressions as well as they could.<sup>14</sup> One wrote, "At Dorval Island we were still close to Montreal but as we got farther and farther away, the following morning, my heart swelled up when I heard Sister Lagrave singing. Let us praise God forever. But as for me, I had only my tears with which to bless the Lord." This incident took place when the boats reach Ste. Anne de Bellevue where it was the custom to stop to invoke heavenly protection. This time master Doré had decided to make an exception since the wind became favourable for the passage of the lac des Deux Montagnes. From afar the cross of Mount Rigaud could be seen. It was then that Sister Lagrave intoned: "O crux, ave, spes unica."

Each evening the group pitched camp; it was a new experience for the sisters to sleep under a tent. Sisters St-Joseph and Lafrance found it easy to adjust to the new condition but the older two had to endure insomnia. On Sunday, April 28, Bishop Desautels, the curé of Aylmer, received the travellers in his church while his two sisters gave them cordial hospitality at the rectory. The stop was thoroughly enjoyable, but there could be no delay. The route they were to follow was the classic one, that is to say, the same one that had been followed by La Verendrye: rivers, small lakes and great lakes succeeding one another until at last the dear Red River would be reached. It was therefore not considered advisable to stop too many times. Maurille Coutlée had written to his sister, Rose, on April 26: "On lac des Deux-Montagnes, contrary winds held up the canoes. It was necessary to camp about two miles from there, that is to say, at Carillon. Sister St-Joseph found her 'soft' bed quite comfortable even though it consisted of three blankets on wet grass. Madame Montmarquet treated the sisters as if they had been her own children. The agent of the company (Mr. McPherson) who accompanied them seemed very courteous."

A week later, May 3, the feast of the founding of the Holy Cross by Ste Helena, the flotilla came to



a halt "at an island full of 'bois brûlés'," wrote Sister St-Joseph. "It had rained and we were cold. It was a good way for us to celebrate one of the greatest feast days of our community." Sister Lagrave responded to the wishes of everyone by singing two beautiful canticles in honour of the Cross. Two days later, since there was no priest to offer Mass, the sisters made the stations of the Cross in the midst of the forest. Mother Valade invited the boatmen to join with the sisters. They willingly agreed. These sea-wolves soon lost their shyness. "They knelt down near the tent for evening prayer; in the canoe they would say rosary." They accepted the admonitions of Sister Lagrave who "would not tolerate swearing or off-colour songs."

At the beginning of May, the sisters were joyously surprised by the arrival of Bishop Provencher and Governor Simpson<sup>15</sup> who joined them after they had taken their dinner on the shore. The stop was not of long duration but there was enough time for Governor Simpson to take note "that the oarsmen were now singing hymns." Something which amazed him and pleased him at the same time. As for Bishop Provencher, he encouraged the boatmen to keep up their kindnesses to the sisters and gave the latter some letters brought from Montreal.

Soon after, Fathers Laflèche and Bourassa, both recruited by Bishop Provencher, stopped for a short time. These unexpected joys were a prelude to a misfortune which would befall the sisters. Sister Lagrave wrote on March 12, when there was a stop at the rocks near Lake Huron: "If it were not that I find it hard to take the portages, I would be the happiest traveller in the world since I am afraid of nothing except snakes. We killed three of these today. Mr. Doré is very kind to me. Since he recognizes that I am not easily frightened, he allows me to stay in the canoe when we are shooting rapids that are not too dangerous. It is much more pleasant than walking. Sister Lafrance is not as daring as I am and I sometimes have to smile to see her shaking."

The remainder of this epistle was, however, by no means so light. On the 13th she wrote: "Yesterday I mentioned that I was dizzy but now it is my feet I am losing. I had an accident: I fell and sprained my left foot."

Now Sister Lagrave was not a "featherweight" as she used to say herself. She tried to keep walking just the same but ended up by having to admit defeat. A stop at Fort La Cloche gave her some rest. Mr. Cameron set the sisters up in a hut with a good fireplace which provided them with light and warmth.<sup>16</sup>

The crew was brought down to earth by this accident. No longer did they sing for fear of tiring the sister for whom they had come to have a high regard. She was carried with care to the various encampments. Despite everything, the injury got worse and when the flotilla reached Sault Ste. Marie there was serious question of what to do. Master Doré had to return to Montreal; he was replaced by Master Laramée who was every bit as kind as his predecessor. Doré brought the travellers' letters to the mother house. There he put an end to some rumours according to which Sister Lagrave, having fallen into the water, would have died from pneumonia and that the other three had drowned. But the route ahead was still long. Father Laflèche and Father Bourassa were still at the Sault when the sisters arrived and it was agreed that they would join the sisters on the onward journey. When Fort William was reached, it was decided that Sister Lagrave should remain there until she was completely recovered; otherwise she could go back to Montreal when the canoes went downstream. Mother Valade did not feel strong enough to convey this message; she asked Father Laflèche to do so. He did not have to speak to have the message understood. The paleness of his face betrayed him.

"I cannot express what came into my mind," wrote Sister Lagrave. "It took a great effort for me to place my heart near that of the Saviour as I

remembered that a Grey Nun must be really a Sister of the Cross."

It was not necessary in this case for her to do more than that. One of the employees of the company, a young Canadian named Laronde, pleaded the cause of the sisters so well that the decision was reversed. Mother Valade said, "We do not know how to thank him enough." Joy revived the lost appetite. And Sister St-Joseph, who was to stay with the injured sister and take care of her, was able to sleep again.

Father Laflèche built a make-shift stretcher to help her to be carried. Two Iroquois from Sault-St. Louis, Laurent and François-Xavier, were assigned the task of transporting the patient, and they did so right up to the end of the trip. For the supplementary work they each received "the fabulous sum" of nine dollars.

The rest of the way presented no special obstacle. On June 16, just after passing a point near Slave Falls, a canoe was met carrying in it Father Belcourt, the missionary. But he had time only to greet the sisters and other travellers.

At last the Red River was reached on Thursday morning, June 20, 1844, at 3:30. A few hours later they came to Lower Fort Garry where Governor Simpson had arrived May 31. The Governor wanted to keep the sisters at his fort long enough to allow Bishop Provencher to organize an official reception, but the travellers by this time had only one wish: to bring the journey to an end and to get on dry land again. Thus it was June 21 at 1:00 a.m. that the travellers got off the boats at St. Boniface. It was the shortest night of the year, the time of the summer solstice. Father Lafleche hurried to knock on the door of the Bishop's house. Bishop Provencher carrying out a lantern, soon appeared accompanied by Mr. Mayrand and welcomed to the bank of the river the ones who henceforth would be collaborators in his deserving work.

The sisters were invited to spend the night under the roof of the Bishop's house. A short night it was for Mass would be early. At last, having arrived at the site of their exile, the sisters could hardly sleep. No doubt they gave themselves up to deep thought, meditating on the following letter from Mother McMullen, a letter which the sisters have carefully preserved. Dated April 26, this letter had been delivered to the travellers of Bishop Provencher when he met them in early May.

"If it had been in my power, I would never have left you at Dorval Island. I would have gone on with you to take part in all your troubles. I have always had a great desire to go to the Red River missions. Two years ago I approached my bishop with a view to doing so. Two years before that I had been thinking of it... Since you are the fortunate ones who have been called to set your hand to this task for which I was found unworthy, please offer to God on my behalf some small part of your difficulties and imagine me saying to you: 'Courage; go forward always...' Tell the dear ones in your charge that I love them and that I carry them in my heart."

\* \* \*

When daylight came, the scene which presented itself to the Grey Nuns was very little like that which they used to see at Pointe-a-Callières.

Thatched-roof log cabins, almost all of one storey only, stretched out here and there along the banks of the Red and Assiniboine. The Catholic Church, a stone building in the form of a Latin cross, stood erect on the right bank of the Red; the "bishop's palace" was next to it.

At the forks of the Assiniboine there stood Fort Garry surrounded by high walls with bastions at the corners.<sup>17</sup> Beyond that was space, space stretching out of sight, out to the Western plains where

roamed the buffalo, the home of the hunters which so many people had become.

All, Métis and Whites, had promised to be there to welcome the sisters and to express their joy by gunshots, as was their custom. But the nocturnal arrival had spoiled that kind of welcome while intensifying their curiosity.

Bishop Provencher listened attentively to all that was told to him by the sisters of their misfortunes along the way, especially about what had befallen Sister Lagrave for whom crutches were hastily prepared so that she could move about a little.

The Bishop could not stop talking of his appreciation and his joy at seeing the safe arrival of the auxiliaries whom he had been seeking for a quarter of a century. He was so proud of them that he hastened to present them to the officials of the Hudson Bay Company. The four pioneers were glad to be able to speak the language of their hosts.<sup>18</sup> These gentlemen felt honoured by the visit of the sisters; they paid back the visit in the afternoon after expressing the hope that the sisters would be able to teach their children.

On Sunday, June 23, the sisters were presented formally to the people of Saint Boniface and its environs. The ceremony was very impressive. A procession made up of Bishop Provencher with his clergy and the sisters clad at last in their proper habits, left the Bishop's palace to the sound of the bell. The crowd looked on these women in silence; they had a favourable impression by reason of what they heard of the sisters. During the Mass, the celebrant spoke in praise of Mother d'Youville, the foundress of the deserving community, and congratulated the missionaries for their courage. He spoke to them of the joy of everyone at the thought that from now on children would be taught, the sick would be cared for and the poor would be assisted.

Following the ceremony, which concluded with the singing of the Te Deum, all went out of the church and the sisters were formally presented. They shook hands with everyone. This friendly gesture had not been expected but it won the people over and convinced them of the sisters' approachability.<sup>19</sup>

The first contact broke the ice and visits multiplied even while the sisters were still living in the Bishop's house. Sister Lagrave wrote: "I have finished only two lines and already I have been interrupted by visitors. As soon as they had left I took my pen up again but not my thoughts for still another visitor came to interrupt me."<sup>20</sup>

Dear Sister Lagrave! Her activities were limited, but she was able to manage to receive visits, write letters and to be in the sacristy to hear Mass. At the same time having seen the bad state of the linens both in the church and in the Bishop's house, she set out to repair them all. Furthermore, she could still sing and she noted with pleasure that "here there is an extraordinary love of singing. I think we will gain much by this means."<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, it was necessary to begin the work of the mission. Since no convent as yet existed, the sisters accepted a house of stone situated not far from the Bishop's house. It was a building which had been raised by Bishop Provencher two years before the fire of 1826. Its state of repair was lamentable. The stones had become out of place, not having had proper mortar applied in the first place. Sister Valade wrote: "Our bishop has given us his old house. It is truly the stable of Bethlehem. It had to be cleaned so we could move into it; but it was in accordance with the custom of the old country. The holy man was actually surprised when I told him that it would be necessary to repair everything. We have to clean it up for ourselves by fixing up the mud walls, patch up the place and repair the chinks."<sup>22</sup>

The sisters did not make a bad job of their work since by July 2 they were able to take possession of their new lodging. At this time they



followed a dearly beloved tradition. Their first act consisted of kneeling down before a small statue of the Blessed Virgin, a gift of Mr. Larré, and they renewed their religious profession.<sup>23</sup> Mother d'Youville had begun this custom when she first started her work in October, 1737. Then they hung up pictures of the foundress and of Father Normant just like the pictures in the mother house. These portraits had been entrusted to Father Laflèche who was able to surprise the missionaries when he presented the pictures to them.

The home consisted of six rooms laid out in such a way as to lead to one another. In the dormitory, which was more like a garret, there were four small beds side to side with woollen blankets that had been arranged by Ursule Grenier, the kindly housekeeper of the Bishop's house, and former teacher of domestic arts at the school for weaving.

As for daily food, the sisters had to depend on their Bishop, now also their chaplain. He used to come after Mass to take his breakfast at the convent. But it was well understood that daily bread was not to be had by idleness. As early as July 11, a class for girls was opened in the stone house and on the following July 23 another was begun for the boys on the ground floor of the Bishop's palace.

Sisters Lafrance and St-Joseph were placed in charge of these. To the former fell the task of dealing with the twenty-seven girls whose docility and intelligence were really remarkable.<sup>24</sup> As for the forty-four boys entrusted to Sister St-Joseph, they were more restless but the teacher succeeded - it was not easy - in holding the attention of these little Saulteaux, Métis and Sioux. The parents expressed great satisfaction and they did not begrudge the fees which were limited to twenty sols plus a cord of wood per pupil each year.<sup>25</sup> In short, Louis Riel, who had been recommended by Bishop Bourget, could now attend to his business interests and his job as a miller. The school was in good hands.<sup>26</sup> The natives used to call the sisters women

priests and were often seen looking in at the windows at all hours to admire the talents of the pedagogues.

The speed with which the sisters were able to adapt themselves to their new milieu gave the impression that they had lived in the place all their lives. Bishop Provencher deplored the fact that they were so few. He wrote to Monsignor Signay: "The whole country would be changed if we could put them everywhere."<sup>27</sup> When he learned of the death of Father Darveau, the Bishop again remarked on how few workers there were. Father Darveau had been drowned with two of his men on June 4. Sister Lagrave reported, "It was a Métis who has brought the news to the Bishop."<sup>28</sup>

The sisters took part in the most demanding work including the harvest. One day when a storm was threatening, mosquitoes redoubled their energy. The sisters were no longer wearing the "green veil" that might have protected them. One of the missionaries, on seeing the Bishop, asked him to chase away the scourge. But the giant of the West contented himself with saying the rosary; pretty soon the nuisances were chased away by the wind.<sup>29</sup>

This life of work and sacrifice was interrupted from time to time by unexpected joys. The trunks with personal effects and necessary material such as winter clothes were not to arrive until the following year, but in September the barges that replenished the stores of the Hudson Bay Company also delivered the precious baggage to the sisters. Furthermore, with the trunks came a magnificent grandfather's clock which had been made up similar to the one at the mother house.<sup>30</sup> Mr. Laflèche promptly set it up and it was a pleasure to hear the bells of this clock striking the hours, the half-hours and the quarter hours just like at Montreal in olden times.

The furniture was enriched by a cupboard which was a gift from Father Arsène Mayrand as an expression of his admiration for the brave women. A short time later, Father Mayrand showed up, asking the

sisters, "Do you want Nouvelle?" The question did not make much sense. Of course, new things, like news, were always welcome. But when the door opened the sisters were surprised to see a fine horse, whose name was Nouvelle, with features advertising the character of its breeding. The benefactor, however, disappeared before they were able to thank him.

Real joy was noted in the chronicles on September 21 when Sister Lagrave was able to throw away her crutches and regain her health completely. Twice a week, in the company of one of her pupils, she went to the Sale River (now Saint Norbert) to teach catechism to the adults and children of that neighbourhood. Bishop Provencher called her his "good vicar" for she also visited the sick and the poor.

If the sisters' apostolate was bearing fruit, the difficult winter threatened to compromise it. The house with its unfilled joints let in the cold. The thermometer outside registered forty degrees below zero. In her correspondence with the superior general, Mother Valade did not complain but she insisted on the necessity of obtaining warm cloth to make habits adapted to the weather and also shoes of good leather.<sup>31</sup>

Bishop Provencher, when he saw the situation, decided to move the girls' school to the bishop's residence "where perhaps it will be less cold."

During the evenings, the plan went forward for the future convent which would be entirely of wood except for the foundation because "stone is rare in these parts." Sister Valade explained: "The surface will cover 100 by 36 feet and will be on two floors with the chapel occupying the centre."<sup>32</sup>

When Christmas came, the "good vicar" kept a surprise for the Bishop and the whole parish. A choir had been formed which during Midnight Mass presented the old hymns, even those which awakened memories in the soul of white-haired voyageurs and made the new generation conscious of the hymnal

tradition. Everyone was delighted. Many had come from afar to be present at the Mass; now they had the impression of having gone on pilgrimage into the past while congratulating themselves on the presence of sisters. The children would benefit therefore from what had been handed down in former times along the banks of the St. Lawrence.

- 1 Letter dated December 30, 1843.
- 2 Copy from Archives, 1843-48, pp. 50-52.
- 3 The canots du maître (Montreal canoes) measured from 30 to 40 feet in length and were mounted by 14 men; they were utilized on the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes. The canots du nord, half the size of those from Montreal, mounted by 8 men, were utilized to the west of the Great Lakes. Brouillette, op.cit., pp. 17-18.
- 4 Tessier-Biron, op.cit., p. 51.
- 5 Annals, Hôp. gén. St-Bon., No. 1, p. 34.
- 6 Drouin, Sr. C., "Hôp. gén.", v. 2, pp. 211ff.
- 7 Copy from Archives, 1843-48, p. 56.
- 8 Dating from 1695 with two enlargements, in 1789 and 1832.
- 9 Ibid., p. 54.
- 10 Annals, Hôp. gén. St-Bon., No. 1, p. 44.
- 11 Ibid., pp. 44-45.
- 12 Moussette, op. cit., pp. 133-134.
- 13 Ancien journal, v.II, pp. 454ff.
- 14 Unless stated otherwise the details of this voyage are extracted from the Annals, Hôp. gén. St-Bon., No. 1, pp. 50ff.
- 15 Simpson owned the most beautiful canoe, which was perfectly elegant in form and in all its details. This light and very swift boat was most convenient for the governor who could not suffer the least delay when he travelled. Morice, "Église catholique Ouest canadien", v.I, pp. 297-298.

- 34
- 16 Tessier-Biron, *op.cit.*, p. 57.
- 17 DeMoissac, Sr., typewritten manuscript, p. 16. The details which follow are largely taken from this work.
- 18 Morice, "Église catholique Ouest canadien", v. I, p. 299. There was no shortage of English teachers at the General Hospital of Montreal, since seven of the sisters were English-speaking, one of whom was Sr. Jane Slocombe, born in England.
- 19 Sister Valade to Mother McMullen, June 1844.
- 20 Letter to Sr. Beaubien, June 25, 1844.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 Letter to Mother McMullen, July 5, 1844.
- 23 Drouin, Sr. C., *Hôp. gén.*, t. III, p. 89.
- 24 Sr. Lafrance to Mother McMullen, July 30, 1844.
- 25 Sr. Valade to Mother McMullen, July 1844.
- 26 Louis Riel married Julie Lagimodière. A son was born to them on October 22, 1844; he was named Louis. Champagne, "La famille de Louis Riel", p. 14.
- 27 Letter dated June 20, 1845.
- 28 Letter to Mr. Larré, July 31, 1844. At first people thought it was an accident. Then they discovered he had been assassinated by some non-Catholic Indians in retaliation because the priest had openly promoted temperance. Frémont, "Mgr Provencher", pp. 203-204.
- 29 Frémont, "Mgr Provencher", pp. 228-229.
- 30 Mother Valade herself, with the help of the



Sulpician priests, had ordered this clock from France.

31 Letter dated December 28, 1844.

32 Ibid.

## CHAPTER THREE - 1845-1853

The year 1845 gave birth to a tradition; the parishioners used to come to offer their best wishes to the sisters. Just as at their memorable arrival in June, 1844, the sisters would kiss the women and shake hands with the men. One day an amusing incident occurred. Wrapped in his blanket and trailing long black hair, an Indian gentleman slipped into the line; whether intentionally or not, we do not know. Thinking him to be a woman, Sister St-Joseph greeted him warmly. The gentleman was not slow to show off his pleasure at being kissed and the youngest of the sisters became the butt of teasing by the older ones who were happy to get back at Sister St-Joseph who was always quick to play a joke in community recreation.

Winter did not relax its grip and the sisters' house grew bitterly cold. In spite of Bishop Provencher's pleading, however, they were reluctant to accept his offer to have them move into his own residence, for they did not want to trouble him further. At last he told them that their house had to be demolished so that the stones could be re-used as a foundation for their new convent. The sisters had to give in. Five rooms, including two classrooms and two on the upper floor, became the domain of the sisters. Here Mother Valade and Sister Lagrave took up spinning.<sup>1</sup> The wheels that had been used so long ago were huge and noisy. Father Belcourt, whose inventive spirit never seemed to give out, developed for them a wheel of reduced size and much less noisy. The Bishop was pleased at this and placed an order for four of them with Mr. Matheson, a local carpenter.<sup>2</sup>

The growth of the works which already included teaching, the visiting of the sick and the poor as well as catechism on mission, persuaded Mother Valade and Bishop Provencher to seek further reinforcements. The superior wrote to the superior general on December 28, 1844: "Since we are the chosen ones who were preferred to you, as you say in your last letter, I

hope that you will not abandon us by withholding some recruits of which we have so much need."

The letter crossed with one sent by Mother McMullen three weeks prior. The contents had an eminently apostolic tone which gave assurance to the missionaries as to the help which they could count on receiving in the future. She wrote: "We have had a visit from a priest exiled from Santo Domingo by revolution. If he can return without danger, he will ask us to join him. If this event should come to pass I would be filled with joy. I pray God to expand our apostolate into the most abandoned places... How happy I would be to see a black person clad in our holy habit... Poor though I may be, my little heart is still big enough to embrace black, yellow, brown and red people... In my eyes, these colours become one, that of the Precious Blood of our Saviour who is the Saviour of all coloured people."

This letter probably reached Red River in March by the first of the two mail services which the colony enjoyed. The second mail would be delivered only at the end of the summer. Shortly thereafter there occurred an event of good omen. On April 5, 1845, the novitiate opened its doors to Miss Marguerite Connolly who was the daughter of Mr. William Connolly and of a Cree Indian mother by the name of Suzanne Miyo-Nipiy (Bellefeuille). Born in the Columbia River area, Marguerite was the grandniece of Mother d'Youville, the granddaughter of the Foundress's sister, Clemence. The young lady had spent some time in Montreal where she was educated by the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame. Her mother was unable to adapt to life in the big city; her husband offered to let her go to live with their eldest daughter who was residing in Columbia. Madame Connolly received baptism and left Montreal with her little Marguerite in 1840. On the way they had to stop at Norway House. Marguerite, on learning there was a bishop at St. Boniface, insisted on going there. That is where they were living when the sisters arrived from the East.<sup>3</sup> Marguerite took her place among the "middle class" pupils. There was no

distinction between blond, dark and brunette pupils for, in the eyes of the sisters, all colours merged into one. Of a lively and intelligent disposition, the candidate would have to adapt to the new rules and above all to develop the virtue of obedience. Mother Valade was to say to her: "She made good progress from day to day."<sup>4</sup>

The very simple ceremonies of entrance brought about tears of happiness. Bishop Provencher and Father Mayrand could not hide their emotion at seeing this young person preparing to give her total self.<sup>5</sup>

It had to be admitted, however, that the stay at the Bishop's residence did not favour the environment of recollection and of prayer so necessary for religious formation. The sisters could hardly wait until the day when they would be living in their own convent. However, since the contractor was not able to meet his deadlines, it was necessary to be resigned to a patient wait.<sup>6</sup> The daily routine engaged the energy of everyone. On February 12 the anniversary of the Bishop was celebrated; on June 6 his patronal feast. The school children from around joined with their parents in the gathering. Then there was First Communion on June 9 when this great spiritual step was taken by fourteen young girls clothed in Canadian style, twelve little boys in their best clothes as well as Madame Connolly who joined the group.

In the midst of so much activity, how could anyone be bored? And yet there was a nostalgia for places from which they had come. In her letter of July 7, Sister Lagrave could not help saying, "How long are the years in New Britain!"<sup>7</sup> The sisters did not realize that new recruits were actually on the way. On June 24 at Lachine, two postulants, Marie Withman and Cecile Cusson, set out on the long journey West. They were accompanied by Father C. Aubert and Brother Taché of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. It was while waiting for the canoes and after tasting pemmican that Sister Deschamps confided to the brother that she was not free to sign

up for the missions. Sister Marcelle Mallet was also present at the departure.

Their trip was the last one to be entirely by canoe - henceforth travel would be by steamboat and carts. The trip went well except for Sister Withman who was almost dead with fear. She was a bad traveller. However, being a cousin of Mother Valade, she quickly adapted to the heroic life as did Cécile Cusson. The newcomers were able to bring the latest news, notably the foundation that had been made by the Grey Nuns at Bytown (Ottawa). In fact they had stopped in at the convent there en route.

Bishop Provencher was now able to see his untiring efforts fulfilled. At last he was able to welcome into his corner of the world the Oblates who would give assurance of pastoral workers for the future. And yet he could not hide a little disappointment when he saw Brother Taché who was barely twenty-one years old and still a sub-deacon. The Giant of the West blurted out: "It is priests we need, and yet we see children sent out to us."<sup>8</sup>

But the Bishop soon found his disappointment unjustified. Brother Taché received the diaconate on August 31 and on the following October 12 he was ordained a priest. Bishop Provencher wrote to the Archbishop of Quebec: "You can send me a Taché or a Lafleche any time you can find one."<sup>9</sup>

For his part, the young priest Taché was full of praise for the apostolate of the Grey Nuns. "They are doing remarkable good work. People comment on what a change there has been in the population since they came. Their schools are perfect. As for Sister Lagrave, she seems to be able to cure all infirmities."<sup>10</sup> And this in the land she called New Britain!

In the first days of January 1846 the sisters inherited an Assiniboine woman, grandmother Dubois, who could not be lodged at the Bishop's residence but who was given accommodation close by. Sister St-

Joseph was placed in charge of her. She had quite a job to give her appropriate health care.

With spring time there came an epidemic of measles which was complicated by dysentery and which decimated children and adults. Bishop Provencher was left alone since Fathers Laflèche and Taché had gone to Ile-à-la-Crosse. The Bishop had to bury nine persons in a single day.<sup>11</sup> Sister Lagrave, who was already popular among the sick, now developed a reputation as a nurse of the highest quality. Doctor John Bunn, who was in the service of the Hudson Bay Company, was unflinching in his admiration for her devotion and her success in gaining the confidence of her patients.<sup>12</sup>

The reinforcement which disembarked at the Red River banks on September 5 was greeted with indescribable joy. There were six brave new workers for the vineyard: Father Bermond for the Oblates, Sister Gosselin, Sister Ouimet, Miss Lefebvre and Miss Sophie Messier for the Grey Nuns. Miss Messier, a "fille donnée," was eager to devote herself to whatever task would be confided to her, while Miss Lefebvre, wearing postulants' purple dress and white bonnet, was joyfully entering the apostolic life. Finally there was Stanislas Lestang, a former employee at Châteauguay, probably while Mother Valade had been treasurer, who was to help out very effectively especially with respect to the construction of the convent, still further delayed by the epidemic.

The travellers landed at 3:30 in the afternoon, received by Sister Lagrave with the young Sister Connolly. Their carriage was led by a fine blond horse called "Bob." Some gunshots were fired as a signal of their arrival. Sister Gosselin was so glad finally to reach firm land that she forgot to greet His Excellency.<sup>13</sup>

Sister Ouimet was to be assigned to teaching along with the novice Sister Connolly who showed great aptitude for the work. And so at far-off St. Boniface there could be counted six professed sisters



and three novices while at the mother house, following the departures for the West and for Bytown there remained thirty-three professed sisters.

The number of workers at Red River was thus increasing but the walls of the Bishop's house remained the same. It was getting to be just impossible to function without the convent. Bishop Provencher did whatever he could to hasten the building but he could not succeed. The men who went in search of suitable wood at Pembina returned empty-handed. It was then that Stanislas Lestang came to the rescue. He had seen on many occasions rafts used on Lake St. Louis to transport wood and he arranged to have the necessary material brought to St. Boniface by this means, to the joy of everyone.<sup>14</sup>

But the building was plagued by misfortunes. In July the sawn wood caught on fire causing Sister Valade to weep. She wrote East to acknowledge that she even felt like blaming St. Joseph for not helping more than he did. But as the work progressed they realized that there was enough wood left after all to complete the building. However, if it was not one thing, it was another. Three workers standing on an apparently solid scaffolding had a spectacular fall when the supports gave way. Two of them were seriously injured while the third was not hurt. This man had to carry on alone, but he did so well that he received congratulations from Messrs. Galarneau and Nault who, once they had got back on their feet, were amazed to see how much progress had been made.<sup>15</sup>

Father Belcourt, coming back from the East at the beginning of October, brought the sad news that typhus had spread in Montreal carried by the Irish driven out by the famine.<sup>16</sup> Seven Grey Nuns had died as a result of their zeal in tending to the needs of the sick. Only three of the sisters had escaped the disease. To the sister of St. Hyacinthe who offered to send help, Mother McMullen had replied: "If we are all to die, I want there to remain at least one seed of the Grey Nuns; that is why I cannot accept your offer."<sup>17</sup>

But other offers could not be refused. Mother Bruyère, the superior of the convent of Ottawa, sent two English-speaking sisters, namely Sisters Phelan and Curran, to the mother house to care for the exiles from Erin.<sup>18</sup>

The Grey missionaries of the Red River joined in the grief which prevailed at the heart of the institute. Distance seemed to increase so much when it was impossible to lend even a helping hand and news was so slow to come. Was the epidemic abating? Had it claimed new victims? And when would new recruits be able to come from Montreal? So many anguishing questions when the vineyard demanded more and more workers.

On November 21, this anxiety was relieved a little when Sisters Withman and Cusson took their perpetual vows. They had both passed the test of the novitiate and were sharing in the full work of the congregation. Little Sister Connolly requested time to reflect on her decision, which shows how serious her character was.<sup>19</sup>

At the end of the year, December 30, to be precise, a move was made to the new convent even though only four of the rooms were finished. It was extremely cold. Wind and snow penetrated the building through the unfinished part. In truth, the sisters, the novice and her mother, and Grandmother Dubois, were living in another stable of Bethlehem. Buffalo skins had to be hung up to serve as partitions for the rooms. In the basement, potatoes froze while water turned into ice not only on the upper floor but on the windows.<sup>20</sup> There was no open complaint, however, for it had been agreed that the Bishop should be kept in ignorance of the problems being encountered. But the Bishop could see himself what the situation was. He said one day to Sister Connolly, "What have you got to eat?" The novice did not say anything but she lifted up the cover of a pot in which could be seen an old ham bone almost stripped of meat. Without saying a word, the little novice had explained everything. The Bishop under-

stood and urged his housekeeper Ursule to send over the necessary foodstuff.

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Sister Connolly had reflected deeply on her vocation. She decided to accept the invitation of the Lord. The date for her profession was fixed for March 25, the anniversary of the day when Mary herself gave her "fiat" to the call of God announced by the angel.

The young sister, still not yet 18 (her birthday was July 26), gave herself irrevocably to God in the humble oratory of the community room. Two of her converts from the Saulteaux nation were there. A 16-year girl made her first Communion and a 14-year old boy received baptism. For the occasion, the choir sang the hymns in an Indian language.<sup>21</sup>

The ceremony would no doubt have taken place in the chapel<sup>22</sup> but the little sanctuary of the convent did not open its doors until July 7. By a happy coincidence, on that day Bishop Modeste Demers of Vancouver happened to be at Red River. He had the benefit of the nursing care given by Sister Lagrave. An excellent musician, he took part in the sisters' celebration.<sup>23</sup> Had these celebrations taken place a bit later, it would have been to the sound of a harmonium which was won in a lottery by Father Aubert and offered to the convent as a gift.<sup>24</sup>

Sister Lagrave, for her part, succeeded in preparing a "papier-maché" statue representing the Virgin.<sup>25</sup> Bishop Provencher had a bell installed in the humble belfry. This bell was to be used right up to 1890.<sup>26</sup> But the generosity of the Bishop did not stop there; he endowed the convent with a two-acre property as well as another parcel of land with five arpents for further development.<sup>27</sup> The Bishop foresaw that the people would soon be obliged to settle down and cultivate the productive land because of the imminent extinction of the bison and because of the serious difficulties plaguing the fur trade.

On June 18, Bishop Provencher was installed in his cathedral as Bishop of the North West. He was not particularly pleased with the name given to his diocese, for "North West" was a term associated with the North West Company. So, he asked whether it would not have been better to have called him Bishop of Hudson Bay. His preference would have been for designation as Bishop of St. Boniface or Bishop of Red River. This is what he suggested in a letter to Bishop Bourget.<sup>28</sup>

The installation was a great success, impressing Canadians and Métis alike. They manifested their respect and pride in their Bishop who took the occasion to recognize the Grey Nuns in their work of instructing both children and adults. Moreover, he recognized that the convent was more and more taking on the appearance of a hospital. The second floor was now completed with an oak staircase. An Indian of about 20 years of age, covered with sores, who presented himself was taken care of by Sister Connolly; Mr. and Mrs. Jean Baptiste Cyr, a retired couple, found board and room at the convent. In the vacant rooms on the first floor, young persons were received for the completion of their religious instruction.<sup>29</sup> Life went on from day to day in this convent where daily bread was provided by Providence among a people who were on the whole poor.<sup>30</sup> The schools did not produce much revenue, although the classes had no shortage of pupils. The sisters suffered the same privations as the rest of the people, sharing in the lot of the poor.

Mother Valade, elected for five more years by her companions as superior,<sup>31</sup> was anxious about the future of the schools and felt it was necessary at all costs to secure more teachers from the mother house. Twice during 1847 she expressed a wish to go back to Montreal so as to ensure a real union with headquarters. This desire was expressed not only by Mother Valade in her letter to the superior general<sup>32</sup>, but also by a letter to Bishop Bourget.<sup>33</sup> On May 25, 1848, however, she recognized that her duties would not allow her to attend a general chapter

scheduled for that year. She even suggested that the general chapter be postponed until 1849. But the rules required a general chapter every four years. Missions could be represented by delegates.

On July 17 she again spoke of her regret at not being able to go to Montreal. In the spring of 1849 news came that Mother Rose Coutlée was now superior general. A few months later, Mother Valade received an official invitation to attend the general chapter to be held in November.<sup>34</sup>

Mother Valade did not express the feelings which filled her at the prospect of once again seeing her native country. When she departed five years ago she thought she would never see it again. She was under no illusions about the difficulties of the journey which were still considerable despite the progress of recent times. Furthermore she was conscious of the advice given by Sister Lagrave that the fatigue of the trip would be very hard on her.<sup>35</sup> She decided the benefits of being present at the chapter outweighed any problems involved and, without hesitation, plunged forward with preparations for the journey. It was decided that Sister Ouimet, with her failing health and the trouble she had in adapting to the way of life in the West, would return to Montreal definitively at the same time.

The departure was set for August 30 and the travellers were slated to join Mr. Sinclair as far as St. Paul, Minnesota. The goodbyes were especially difficult because Mother Valade would not be able to return until after spring break-up next year. It would not be an easy journey what with oxcarts and rushing rivers.

After six weeks Montreal was reached October 15. One can imagine the welcome given to the Westerners whose news was received with intense interest. A new governor, Caldwell, had come to Red River with a hundred soldiers. Mother Valade reported there was much discontent among the people on account of the monopoly enjoyed by the Hudson Bay Company in the fur

trade.<sup>36</sup>

Father Laflèche had returned from Ile-à-la-Crosse, having been chosen by Bishop Provencher as his coadjutor. But the health of the young priest was poor. He developed a limp which would make it extremely difficult for him to travel through the West. So Bishop Provencher recommended that he be allowed to replace the name of Father Taché for that of Laflèche in the bulls which had already come from Rome. Bishop Provencher saw in this turn of events the hand of Providence for, as he said: "For a long time he had complained of not being able to recruit clergy and of not having the means to train them. With the diocese under the direction of an Oblate priest, the future should be assured."<sup>37</sup>

The same concern to keep up the number of missionaries was the chief reason why Mother Valade undertook the trip to the East. She had nothing to say against the new foundations at Bytown and at Quebec. At the latter the founders included Sisters Mallet, Pilon, Perrin, Thériault, Clement and a novice named Sister Dunn. They had gone there the previous August 21. But these foundations had much more chance of being self-sufficient and providing for their own expansion than that of St. Boniface which experienced such difficulties of recruitment.

As foreseen, the chapter opened on November 8 and continued until November 15. Resolutions were adopted in favour of the unity so much desired by Mother Valade. The autonomy of the foundations was repealed. Henceforth it would be possible for each of the different convents to send subjects to the others with the superior of Montreal serving as intermediary for this purpose; subjects sent to a mission would be able to return to their house of origin, and the superiors would have the right to recall them.<sup>38</sup>

The end of the year 1849 was marked by Father Faillons' finding of the remains of Mother d'Youville. An earlier attempt to locate these in the



crypt of the general hospital had been unsuccessful. There was a solemn ceremony on December 23 for the 78th anniversary of the death of the Foundress. Mother Valade had the honour of escorting the body in the company of Mother Coullée and Mother McMullen with Sister Forbes, the director of novices.<sup>39</sup>

The imposing ceremony left a lasting impression on Mother Valade who prayed with great ardor to the "Mother of universal charity" for the success of the Red River foundation.

Time went by very fast in the metropolis and Mother Valade would have to go back soon. She hoped to be able to bring a number of recruits. Several of the younger sisters volunteered. Among them were Sisters Slocombe, Caron, Blondin, Kollmyer and Moreau, but no decision was taken right away. In a letter to Bishop Bourget, she confided, "Because of ill-health, we are no longer able to work for our subsistence."<sup>40</sup>

Typhus had cut down the number of effective workers at the mother house. Even if the novitiate should attract enough to replace those lost it would still be necessary for Mother Valade to look for help among the sisters of St. Hyacinthe. That community offered to send with her Sister Justine Dupuy-Fisette, 20 years old, who was not alarmed by the sufferings and hardships Mother Valade led them to expect.<sup>41</sup>

Another young sister, not yet 18, was allowed to make her religious vows at the mother house on May 20, three months before the end of the period prescribed by canon law for the novitiate. Sister Laurent was burning with the desire to go on to the mission country, and competent authority read her thoughts.<sup>42</sup>

The rest of the contingent to go West would include Miss Christine Talon-Lesperance, a postulant, as well as Miss Ford and two "filles données," Marie Marchand and Emérance Payé. Miss Marchand and Miss

Payé later became auxiliary sisters: Sister Marie-Josephine and Sister Emérance. They would be accompanied by two men, Abraham Dufort and Joseph Pigeon, who were willing to cultivate the lands of the sisters, thus assuring them of a food supply.<sup>43</sup>

The departure from Montreal was fixed for June 19. This time the sisters decided they could wear their usual habit, since the trip was supposed to be not nearly so difficult as the first one had been in 1844. Unfortunately, the voyage back this time lasted three whole months filled with inconveniences, disappointments and delays which were inexplicable though in some cases providential.<sup>44</sup> Buffalo was reached June 22 ten minutes too late for the steamer which would cross Lake Erie. The sisters asked hospitality from a convent whose superior at first said they were too many to be put up but later changed her mind and found place for them here and there. The following day it was learned that the boat which the sisters were too late to catch had sunk with the loss of all its 300 passengers. The prayers for those who were drowned were naturally mixed with prayers of thanksgiving to God the Father who had protected the Grey Nuns.

On June 30, after the crossing of the lake, it was necessary to go by land to Galena and then by way of the Mississippi to St. Paul. Arriving there on July 3 the sisters were supposed to join Mr. Kitson's wagon train but he was not there.

They were supposed to stay in a tent but Father Ravoux, a missionary at that place, offered his rectory which was a wooden house, twenty feet square. Some had to stay in the attic among the fleas, mosquitoes and mice. The hired men had better luck. They were able to sleep in a tent. When it became evident the delay would be prolonged, Sister Lesperance and Sister Ford decided to make use of their time in preparation for their future apostolate: they taught catechism in French and in English while the other sisters repaired the altar linens and put the priest's poor house in order.

At last about the end of July, Kittson arrived. The wagon train he led to Red River had eighty vehicles in it. It was necessary in those days to travel together in a convoy because of the danger of meeting up with the Sioux. The overland journey began on August 8. With food in short supply it was necessary to have only two meals a day. By the time Pembina was reached the oxen and horses were all tired out. Finally on September 20, after three months of misery including four weeks of fasting, the group came to Red River which was crossed by canoe. Everyone was waiting on the St. Boniface side. The concerns which were felt at the long delay dissolved into happiness. Mother Valade had been gone almost thirteen months. Her absence weighed heavily on the eight sisters who really appreciated the administrative and human qualities of the soul of the group: Mother Valade.

The joy of welcome was prolonged by all the news which Mother Valade was able to recount. She told them of the beautiful ceremonies that accompanied the exhumation of the remains of Mother d'Youville<sup>45</sup> and also of the first religious profession which took place in the chapel on January 22, presided over by Mr. Faillon. She spoke of the wing added to the Montreal hospital in 1847 and above all she commented on the magnificent heroism displayed by the sisters at the time of the typhus outbreak.

With her baggage, Mother Valade brought the papal bull which had been entrusted to her by Bishop Bourget. This bull confirmed the nomination of Alexandre-Antonin Taché as coadjutor bishop with right of succession.<sup>46</sup>

Father Laflèche was still vicar general but had also taken on the duties of cure of St. François-Xavier at Prairie du Cheval Blanc (White Horse Plain) to which the Pembina Métis had migrated in 1824.<sup>47</sup> Father Laflèche did not delay in asking the Grey Nuns to take charge of the school there. Sisters Lagrave and Lafrance gladly accepted the invitation and began to live in the parish November 5, 1850. They soon

had twenty-four pupils in attendance.<sup>48</sup> St. François-Xavier was thus the first mission founded by the sisters of St. Boniface. This caused strains at the St. Boniface house where there was a multiplicity of things to do. Sister Fisetite took charge of the boarding pupils as well as playing the harmonium on feast days. Sister Laurent became a teacher and Sister St-Joseph was asked to be involved in the formation of new postulants and "filles données".

Bishop Provencher looked on with pleasure at the initiation of the two postulants to the missionary life. Seeing their white bonnet, he expressed the hope that they would become grey with all appropriate speed and would soon start to wear the black headgear, for, he said, "A white head at your age is not at all convincing."<sup>49</sup>

For his part, the Bishop was beginning to feel the weight of his passing years. He wanted to go to the council of bishops held at Quebec in May 1851 but he was persuaded not to go by his vicar general, Father Laflèche, with the argument: "If you go you are liable to die over there; it would be a shame not to be able to bury you here." So Bishop Provencher wrote to Bishop Bourget to tell him that neither he nor his coadjutor could attend.<sup>50</sup> He set to work to finish the cathedral, the monument presented by him to his diocese in 1832. The exterior had not yet been completed and already the interior needed repairs. For this purpose the talents of Sister Lagrave were enlisted and she threw herself into the work, climbing scaffolding as if she had never suffered an injury to her leg. Under her brush there soon appeared urns and flowered garlands which the enthusiastic Métis women admired and began to imitate in their own embroidery work. The artist began to worry that people would pay more attention to her decorations than to the Holy Sacrifice. She was led back to reality when she was told by someone, thinking to praise her, complimented her on being very artificial.<sup>51</sup>

Travelling between St. Boniface and St. Fran-

çois-Xavier was relatively easy with the use of horse and carriage but the Sioux were an ever-present danger. The Sioux mistrusted the Métis of White Horse Plains<sup>52</sup> but they had a positive hatred for the Saulteaux.

Sister Lagrave and her companion had the satisfaction of being present on September 7 for the blessing of the convent to which their two classes were transferred. The floor of the chapel had been painted in many colours with paint left over from the cathedral. One reads in the annals: "This pleased everyone."<sup>53</sup>

The apostolic work of the clergy and the Grey Nuns was appreciated not only by those who directly benefited from their charities, but also by citizens of other denominations. Eden Colville, the government official, wrote: "It is hard to understand why there is so much prejudice toward the Catholic missionaries. I must say they are better than the members of our Church in their disinterestedness and their ability to adapt to the special conditions of this country."<sup>54</sup>

"Special conditions of this country!" The sisters still had much to learn about them. In 1852 they experienced the ravages of the Red River when its banks overflowed. "Our community was beginning to be well settled in our big house," wrote Mother Valade, "when on April 27 disaster struck fear into all hearts."<sup>55</sup> Floodwaters carried away houses, barns, fences, bridges and firewood. The Bishop's residence sat in five feet of water.<sup>56</sup> On May 12 there took place the profession of Sister Lespérance under the name "Sister Youville."<sup>57</sup> During the ceremony, the sound of waves under the floor of the chapel could be heard. It was a fine occasion for the new sister to be reminded that time is a ship and not a resting place. The wind became so strong that the whole house shook. The sisters took refuge on the second floor where they welcomed the Galarneau, Neron and Latreille families. Mass was offered at the roof-loft by Father Bermond who had succeeded

Father Aubert as chaplain. It was necessary to make openings in the floor of the first storey in order to avoid damage.

The ravages of the flood were incalculable. People and animals had to flee to the prairies on whatever hills they could find. Fortunately, no loss of life was reported. The church and the Bishop's house served as public shelters until May 20 when the river receded. By the end of June it was possible to sow barley and potatoes. The Bishop noted that the damages were much greater than in 1826 because the population had grown so much. On June 1 the sisters were able to regain possession of their convent; five days later the land was almost dry.<sup>58</sup>

The colony was still recovering from this misfortune when Bishop Taché came back from the East after a journey just as bad as that endured by Mother Valade. To his metropolitan in Quebec,<sup>59</sup> the new Bishop remarked, "Never had anyone with a title as high as mine been so quickly sunk in the mud on that long trip." The young Bishop of only 28 years of age was experiencing the trials of a shepherd. It was not without anxiety that he returned to Ile-à-la-Crosse in the company of Father Grollier with Father Albert Lacombe was going on to Fort Edmonton.<sup>60</sup>

Before leaving St. Boniface, Bishop Taché had been greatly upset when he read Article VII of the sisters' new Constitutions for it excluded keeping boarding schools and day schools which charged tuition fees.<sup>61</sup> He wrote to Mother Coullée on July 4, 1852: "Your sisters here want to be totally united to you in one community, but you must understand that a boarding school is essential for their very existence in these parts."

Mother Valade dreaded the consequences this article could bring. Things were bad in general after the terrible flood. She wrote to the superior general to tell her of how this was to be a year without harvest. "The waters had swept everything away."<sup>62</sup> Was it necessary to extinguish the works of



the community in St. Boniface on account of Article VII of the Constitutions?

Bishop Provencher shared this anxiety. To tell the truth, this article seemed to strike a blow at all he held dear. After all, he had spend twenty-five years looking for sisters to operate a school system in his diocese. How could this apostolate be renounced in view of all the good being accomplished among the people?

This worry persisted during the last days of the Giant of the West. During May, after the anniversary of his departure from Lachine in 1818, the Bishop had to take to his bed. He rapidly got worse. To the priests who attended him he said: "See that the sisters do not lack anything unless the diocese itself runs out completely of resources."<sup>63</sup>

Sister Lagrave was assigned to be his bedside nurse. In her presence he expired at 11:00 p.m. on June 6, the feast of the patron saint of the bishop "who was not only a priest but also a giant; not just a symbol but a personification of our race in this milieu," as Father Dugré was to write.<sup>64</sup>

It was with deep feeling that the sisters agreed with the public praise given by Sir George Simpson: "During his public career Bishop Provencher showed himself a friend of order and of good government. He did everything in his power to promote the common good... As for his personal character, the widespread feelings of grief caused by his loss provide a touching proof of his goodness and his generosity... For myself personally, I say he was always my esteemed friend whose company I enjoyed so much."<sup>65</sup>

The sisters learned from Bishop Provencher how an authentic apostle keeps the faith and remains full of hope in the midst of the most trying circumstances and that an apostle expresses love by a total gift of self to the mission entrusted to him. Trials will prove that the sisters have learned to "walk in the

dark" without ever losing confidence in the light.

- 1 Tessier-Biron, op.cit., p. 73.
- 2 De Moissac, Sr. E., p. 19, sheep had been imported from Kentucky so that wool was abundant.
- 3 Sr. Connolly's obituary notice.
- 4 Letter to Mother McMullen, July 1845.
- 5 There were two other aspirants, Miss Nolin and Miss Marion, but they did not persevere.
- 6 These details as well as the following are from a letter dated July 1845 signed by Sr. Valade.
- 7 A group of islands in Melanesia (Oceania) formerly called New Britain Archipelago. Dict. universel des noms propres, Petit Robert 1974, p. 236.
- 8 Frémont, "Mgr Provencher", pp. 208-209.
- 9 Duchaussois, P. "Aux glaces polaires", pp. 164-165.
- 10 Benoit, "Mgr Taché", Vol. I, pp. 95-96.
- 11 ASGM, St. Boniface Chronicles, 1844-1857, Vol. I, p. 161.
- 12 De Moissac, Sr. E., op. cit., p. 49.
- 13 Sr. Gosselin to Mother McMullen, Sept. 13, 1846.
- 14 ASGM, St. Boniface Chronicles, Vol. I, p. 177.
- 15 Sr. Valade to Mother McMullen, July 16, 1847.
- 16 Tessier-Biron, op. cit., p. 84.
- 17 Mitchell, Sr., Mère Slocombe, p. 93. The sisters' heroic devotedness inspired so many

vocations that part of the wing added to the Montreal hospital in 1847 "for the service of the poor" had to be used for the candidates as well.

18 Letter dated September 29, 1847.

19 Sr. Connolly's obituary notice.

20 Ibid.

21 Primeau, "Pour le centenaire des Srs. Gr.", Cloches de St-Boniface, Vol. XLIII, No. 6, p. 128.

22 A custom which started at the mother house in 1850.

23 Annals, Hôp. gén. St. Boniface, Vol. I, p. 118.

24 Sr. Valade to Mother Coutlée, Oct. 1, 1848.

25 The "master-piece" is a success. The statue is now in the chapel in the St. Boniface Museum.

26 Annals, Srs Gr., 1944-45, p. 95. Article by Father Primeau.

27 Sr. Valade to Mother McMullen, July 16, 1848. The stable and the hen-house were also furnished by Bishop Provencher.

28 Tessier-Biron, op. cit., p. 89. The title "Bishop of St. Boniface" was substituted in 1854. Morton, op. cit., p. 514, note 97.

29 De Moissac, Sr., op. cit., p. 61.

30 Frémont, "Mgr Provencher", pp. 216-217.

31 Letter dated Oct. 1, 1848.

32 Letter dated June 15, 1847.

- 33 Letter dated July 26, 1847.
- 34 Tessier-Biron, op. cit., p. 94.
- 35 Sr. Lagrave to Sr. Chenier, June 7, 1849.
- 36 Letter dated May 27, 1848.
- 37 Frémont, "Mgr Provencher", pp. 266-267.
- 38 Chapitre général des Srs. Gr., 1849, p. 7ff.
- 39 Mitchell, Sr., Mère Slocombe, p. 109.
- 40 Chapitres de fondation, St-Boniface, 1843-1872, p. 42; letter dated Jan. 5, 1850.
- 41 No. biog., Sr. Fisette, ASGM.
- 42 Not. biog. Sr. Laurent.
- 43 Memoires, St-Boniface.
- 44 Annals, Hôp. gén. St-Boniface, Vol. I, p. 128ff.
- 45 Mother Valade's description of the ceremonies inspired Sister Connolly, grandniece of Mother d'Youville. As relics of the Grey Nun Foundress were being distributed, she asked, in favour of the St. Boniface mission, the heart of Mother d'Youville.
- 46 Annals, Hôp. gén. St-Bon., Vol. I, p. 144.
- 47 Morice, "Église catholique Ouest canadien", Vol. I, p. 100. Father Laflèche was also a member of the legislative council since Sept. 5.
- 48 Sr. Valade to Sr. Coutlée, Nov. 25, 1850.
- 49 Circ. mens. 1936-37, p. 24.

- 50 Annals, Hôp. gén. St-Bon., Vol. I, p. 144 and p. 218. Father Taché came back from Ile-à-la-Crosse and left for France in mid-summer in order to be ordained as a bishop at the hands of Mgr de Mazenod, founder of the Oblate Fathers.
- 51 Annals, Hôp. gén. St-Bon., Vol. I, p. 144.
- 52 Sr. Lagrave to Mother Coullée, Sept. 1, 1851.
- 53 Annals, Hôp. gén. St-Bon., Vol. I, p. 145.
- 54 MacGregor, op.cit., p. 57. Letter to Sir G. Simpson.
- 55 Duchaussois, "Femmes héroïques", p. 37.
- 56 Dugas, "Mgr Provencher", p. 270.
- 57 Sr. Ford left the novitiate on June 20, 1852.
- 58 Details concerning the flood are taken from letters by Mgr Provencher and by Mother Valade.
- 59 Dugas, "Mgr Provencher", p. 275.
- 60 Frémont, "Mgr Provencher et son temps", p. 276. Father Lacombe entered the Oblate Congregation a little later.
- 61 Chapitre des fondations, St-Boniface, 1843-1872, p. 51(a).
- 62 Letter dated Nov. 12, 1852.
- 63 Annals, Hôp. gén., St-Bon., Vol. I, p. 155.
- 64 Tessier-Biron, p. 106.
- 65 Dugas, "Mgr Provencher", p. 288.



## CHAPTER FOUR - 1854-1863

Article VII of the Constitutions, the one forbidding the operation of a boarding school or a school which charged fees,<sup>1</sup> did not cease to be the source of problems and difficulties. Had the sisters not come to St. Boniface precisely to give Christian education to children? It was bad enough that they had had to give up teaching English<sup>2</sup> since 1849; would it now be necessary to give up teaching French? The reason that English had to be given up was that Sister Lafrance had been required for St. François-Xavier and Sister St-Joseph had been assigned to novice formation. The recruits who came from Montreal could speak English but not well enough to teach in that language. Fortunately the coming of Sister Pepin from Montreal, of Sister Curran from Ottawa, and also of Miss Marguerite Dunn from Ottawa, allowed this problem to be solved for the time being. Having left Montreal July 6, 1852, they reached the Red River on September 11 of the same year.

On October 13 of the previous year, the sisters had proceeded to elect the members of the council. Mother Valade continued in her office, Sister St-Joseph became assistant superior, and Sister Lafrance took over the position of novice director.<sup>3</sup> On the first of September, 1851, Sister Lagrave had written that they now had postal service and that communication would be much more rapid. Nevertheless, it was not known until the beginning of 1854 who had replaced Mother Coullée at the helm of the grey ship. The sisters learned of the election of Mother Julie Deschamps as superior general when she had sent the life of Mother d'Youville written by Mr. M.-E. Faillon.<sup>4</sup> She addressed a letter at the same time to Bishop Taché and the sisters.

The interest that had in the past been shown by the new superior for the missions gave promise that there would be a speedy solution to the problem of schools. But a worse problem arose for the sisters of St. Boniface. It fell to the lot of Mother Deschamps to preside over the separation of the

theretofore united congregation. She entered office full of hope and had actually convened a second general chapter to be held in Montreal.<sup>5</sup> Invitations had gone out to St. Hyacinthe, to St. Boniface, to Ottawa and to Quebec. To her intense regret, the chapter had to be called off. This was as a result of a decision by the bishops in council that each bishop should have his own separate congregation of Grey Nuns subject to the individual bishop's supervision.

Mother Deschamps wrote: "I feel I must tell you that we are required to face the fact, as told to us by Bishop Bourget, that you will each be independent communities. It is a fait accompli. Although with deep regret we must submit to this new order of things... Whatever may be the designs of divine Providence, we will do everything in our power to ensure that the bonds of charity which unite us to one another will always be strengthened; that the relationship between us shall always be tender and affectionate as becomes daughters of the same Mother. We stand in readiness to render all possible service in good friendship. Those sisters who have made their profession in Montreal are free to return or to remain in their new community. The mother house reserves the right to recall them but without prejudice to the freedom of each sister."

This letter of September 4 filled Mother Valade with dismay. She decided not to tell the sisters of the news until she could discuss it with Bishop Taché who was coming to take possession of his diocese in the autumn. He arrived in St. Boniface on November 3 and, two days later, he was officially installed in his cathedral. It was Bishop Taché who had the distressful task of telling the sisters of the news. On November 10 he wrote to the Montreal superior general, "I admire the courage of your sisters."

The Bishop was surprised that Mr. Faillon in his book had not even mentioned the missions founded before the end of the period about which he wrote. He asked Mother Deschamps what she could make of

this, but the superior general assured him that the omission had not been planned and that certainly it was not made because of the events that were to follow. She told him that, according to Bishop Bourget as well as the other bishops of the province, any hope of a project of reunion would be doomed to failure.<sup>6</sup>

As for Mother Valade, strong and worthy as always, she did not mince words. She wrote: "If I had no other reason to do so, I would still acknowledge receipt of your last letter if only to be able to tell you that it produced in our hearts no sentiment other than regret."<sup>7</sup>

According to an old saying, "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," Providence, once again, intervened. The Brothers of the Christian Schools came to St. Boniface in the summer of 1854. The sisters therefore found themselves relieved of the need to maintain a school for boys. The newly arrived educators organized their classrooms in the Bishop's house and taught there until the construction of a college was completed. In the Bishop's house also lived Father Vital Grandin and Brother Bowes, both of whom were to have fruitful careers in the land of their adoption. On the other hand, Father Laflèche left for Lower Canada after having spent a dozen years in missionary work. He had not accepted to become coadjutor bishop in St. Boniface but in future he would be called to the episcopate as Bishop of Three Rivers.<sup>8</sup> When he left, the sisters, especially the pioneers, recalled the providential encounter with Father Laflèche in 1844 when the young priest had made a stretcher to carry Sister Lagrave after her injury. And they also recalled all the other services of the priest who had been of so much help at the time of the construction of their convent!

In the spring of 1855 Sister Pepin, who had arrived in the West less than two years before, returned to Montreal in accordance with the authorization contained in the letter of Mother Deschamps.<sup>9</sup>

This time again, Providence supplied the vacancy. Mother Bruyère of Bytown agreed to send some temporary help. The sisters would be "on loan" for three years after which they would have to return to Ottawa. This condition seemed to be fair enough and was readily accepted. Two very able sisters, Sisters Ste-Therese and Ste-Marie<sup>10</sup>, thus arrived in St. Boniface on October 2, 1855. Almost at once, the latter was sent as a teacher to St. François-Xavier and the former devoted herself to the care of the sick in the Red River Settlement.

But Providence did not stop there. March 10, 1854 marked the entry of Miss Marguerite Dunn, a teacher who had felt she was not suited to the religious life on account of a congenital deformity of her left arm. Having come West the year before with Sister Curran, Miss Dunn proved her talents as a teacher and found that she did have a religious vocation and assumed a large part of the works in the community. She took the name Sister Marie-Xavier when she made her final profession in the service of God on January 21, 1856.<sup>11</sup> In the novitiate she was replaced by Miss Alphée Toupin-Dussault, likewise a native of the East.<sup>12</sup>

Bishop Taché for some time now had formed the project of placing Grey Nuns in every post of his vast diocese. The pastor of St. Boniface, as his predecessor did, held the firm conviction that no lasting work could be accomplished without the Christian education of the younger generation. Moreover, he recognized that such a vast diocese needed a coadjutor. With this in mind, he went to Europe to present the candidate of his choice, Father Vital Grandin.<sup>13</sup> On his return trip he stopped at Montreal to plead with Mother Deschamps the cause of his very own Grey Nuns. The Bishop was greeted with a cordial welcome and an eagerness to do whatever possible to have the two communities come together. After fully discussing matters with Bishop Bourget, Mother Deschamps, who had been pained by the whole situation,<sup>14</sup> was able to tell Bishop Taché it would be possible to have the distant mission reunited to

the mother house. Armed with her promise, Bishop Taché confidently made the return trip to the West accompanied by his new recruits: Father LeFloch, Brother Clut, a scholastic, and the lay brothers Salasse and Péréard.<sup>15</sup> If he had his way he would have proceeded without any stops, but travelling takes time. Coming from St. Paul, he acquired a carriage for his grey daughters, a carriage without springs or seats but with a good buffalo skin which gave some comfort. Arriving home, he was surprised to cross the Red River on a ferry boat and he took note of the soldiers who had been installed at Fort Garry to ensure the peace of the country.<sup>16</sup>

News of the reunion with Montreal brought tears of joy to all the sisters. Mother Valade expressed their sentiments when she wrote on December 2 to Mr. Bonnissant: "The return of our Bishop has given us cause for joy and happiness as has the wonderful reply given to his request to have us rejoin the mother house. We have wished for this with as much intensity as formerly we felt grief at the first news of our separation." Mr. Bonnissant was the Sulpician who was assigned to the Grey Nuns as their spiritual director.

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Negotiations proceeded between the Bishop of St. Boniface and Mr. Bonnissant. The question of boarding schools was resolved by permitting their continuance until such time as there would arrive in the west a community devoted primarily to teaching. It was also agreed that St. Boniface would retain its novitiate so long as communications would remain difficult between Red River and the East.<sup>17</sup> Bishop Taché suggested the example of other institutes should be followed by having the congregation divided into canonical provinces.<sup>18</sup>

As for the question of the "filles données", those admirable workers who asked to serve only in the most humble of employments, the Bishop presented his point of view: "Calling them lay sisters might

be precise but is not satisfactory. The two we have here are fine girls who have been authorized to take simple vows so that the young men will be discouraged from showering them with proposals of marriage. We call them, simply, sisters."<sup>19</sup>

These points having been clarified, Bishop Taché authorized Mr. Bonnissant to draw up the act of union and announced that Mother Valade would be sent to Montreal during the summer to append her signature to the document.<sup>20</sup>

The St. Boniface Bishop made special mention in his correspondence of the generosity of the sisters of Bytown "who endured many sacrifices in order to come to our aid."<sup>21</sup> To Mother Bruyère, herself, he expressed his appreciation when he told her of the reunion of the convent at St. Boniface with "the cradle" of the institute where the mortal remains of the Foundress were kept. He said, "All the sisters here join me in a deep feeling of recognition of the services given by the Ottawa house."<sup>22</sup> Mother Bruyère displayed a wonderful spirit when she wrote to Mother Valade on March 5, saying: "I can never be jealous of the Montreal sisters. They are our mothers. I have always taken the position that I wanted union between your community and ours only to the extent that it is in your interests to have such union."

Poor Mother Valade! The prospect of yet another voyage to Montreal was daunting. It cost her a great deal to leave especially when Sister Lagrave was seriously ill.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore a new work had just begun. The classes occupied by the boys had been transformed into an orphanage to which Bishop Taché led four young proteges on February 18.<sup>24</sup> How could she forget all the misfortunes which had befallen her on her last trip in 1850? But courage prevailed and on June 1 she left her adopted land in the company of Sister François-Xavier and of three students whom Bishop Taché was sending East to study: Louis Riel, Daniel McDougall and Louis Schmidt.<sup>25</sup> The presence of these young people eager to see and to touch



everything was not particularly restful; the health of Mother Valade failed so badly that there was grave concern about her.<sup>26</sup> However, she rallied by the time they reached la Pointe-à-Callières on July 5 at 5:00 p.m. She was welcomed with open arms and she did not delay to take up the question of union with Mother Deschamps whom she had formerly initiated to her role as treasurer at Chateauguay.<sup>27</sup> Everything went so well that the missionary was able to visit the surrounding houses that had been established since she had gone West.

On September 8, 1858, the feast of the Nativity of Mary, there took place the signing of the concordat with Bishop Bourget presiding along with Mr. Bonnissant and another Sulpician, Mr. Rousselot. Following the ceremony, Mother Valade was surrounded by the sisters in fraternal greeting. Bishop Bourget, on his way to a sick call witnessed the scene and gave it his smiling approval.<sup>28</sup>

Seven sisters were commissioned to join Mother Valade and her dozen companions who would sign the concordat the following November.<sup>29</sup> On Friday, September 17, the St. Boniface superior set off for the distant realms with Sisters Dandurand, Royal, Lassisseraye, Emery, Lamy and Alphonse, together with four volunteers, Mathilde Tourangeau, Sara Galarneau, Julie Raby and Luce Fortier.<sup>30</sup> A young lady named McKenzie was proceeding to join her grandfather at Red River; she was so impressed with the spirit that she wanted to become a Catholic.<sup>31</sup>

This time, there was no question of Mother Valade waiting four weeks for the coming of the wagon-train. On order of Bishop Taché, eight carts had gone to St. Paul to bring back the contingent which arrived at St. Boniface October 29.<sup>32</sup> The ceremony of welcome at the general hospital was impressive as Bishop Taché, surrounded by members of his clergy sang the Te Deum as the sisters wiped away tears of joy.<sup>33</sup>

Both the convent and the Bishop's house were

bursting with people. There were sixty persons in the former and forty in the latter. Special care had to be taken to make sure there was enough for everybody to eat.<sup>34</sup>

Very soon, Mother Valade was able to announce to Mother Deschamps that yet another new work had been undertaken. She wrote: "You should have seen the procession that travelled up the Red River on the morning of December 30. It was led by a fine carriage with two horses driven by Bishop Taché accompanied by Father Mestre. Then there were ten carriages acting as escorts for two little Grey Nuns going to establish the mission of St. Norbert. These were Sisters Laurent and Dandurand. There were about thirty horsemen who shot off a salvo of gunfire when they reached St. Norbert, the parishioners of which expressed deep thanks to His Excellency for the gift which he granted them after so many solicitations by them."<sup>35</sup>

If there was one sister who was filled with joy at the return of Mother Valade and her new recruits, it was Sister Lagrave who suffered a stroke during the winter.<sup>36</sup> For long years because of the nature of her work as a nurse, she had many occasions to witness the onset of death. She could now recognize the symptoms in herself and so, without unduly alarming her companions, she prepared for the great departure. Seeing the new recruits, most of them in their twenties, she had good reason to hope that her work begun in 1844 would be prolonged and extended in the West. As a matter of fact, there was already talk of opening a new mission at Ile-à-la-Crosse where Bishop Grandin was vicar, but the Bishop of St. Boniface judged that this project should be deferred. He thought it best instead to direct the new foundations toward Lac Ste-Anne.<sup>37</sup>

For quite a few years now, people were discussing a projected annexation to Canada. The population was increasing; there was steamboat service on the Red River;<sup>38</sup> the Bishop was anxious to obtain for the new citizenry, especially for his

dear Amerindians, whatever advantages might come to St. Boniface. In a letter to Mr. S. J. Dawson dated February 7, 1859, Bishop Taché wrote, "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 twenty-one in-patients, all free of charge."

Bishop Taché was not the only one to sing the praises of the sisters. Count Southesk wrote in his journal: "We had the great pleasure of being present while some of Sister Curran's pupils played on the piano. It was surprising to me to see such talented piano playing in so remote a country."<sup>39</sup> The Count may also have heard the pupils play on the accordion, an instrument well seen by Mother Valade who said, "proficiency at the accordion confirms among the people our reputation for being able to do everything and being ignorant of nothing."<sup>40</sup>

M. de Salaberry joined in the chorus of praise of the sisters when on August 1, at the examinations which terminated the school year, he expressed "his surprise and even astonishment to see such a demonstration of learning at Red River," as Mother Valade reported in a letter to Montreal.<sup>41</sup> To read these lines one would never think that at the convent and in the diocese there existed a climate of anxiety. As Sister Lagrave's career came to an end, she suffered extremely. Mother Valade wrote, "No one has dry eyes today. And yet it is truly consoling to see how resigned this dear sister is to death. She does not want us to feel sorry for her."<sup>42</sup> Five days earlier, July 28, Mother Valade announced in a letter to Mother Deschamps that she herself "was taken with cancer, expressed the wish of being replaced in her

position so as to be able to go to Montreal in search of a cure," but she had soon changed her mind, saying she was going to resign herself to whatever God would be pleased to do with her whether she should live or die.

These were heroic times for the convent. On August 3 Sisters Emery, Lamy and Alphonse were to leave the colony for Lac Saint-Anne. At the request of Sister Lagrave, they bade her adieu in her room since she said she would not have the strength next day to see them off. The very day after they left, August 4, Sister Lagrave died at 4:40 a.m. "in deep peace with entire submission to and confidence in the will of God. Even if we ourselves had never seen her charity in action, the tears of so many who have received her love would be proof in themselves of the extent of her immense services."<sup>43</sup>

The pain of this leave-taking, although foreseen, was intensified by the recall to Ottawa of Sisters Ste-Thérèse and Ste-Marie. Everyone would have been enthusiastic if they could but stay, but it was felt necessary to respect the term of the loan by Ottawa. The three years had in fact expired the year before. So the two sisters began their journey back to the East with Bishop Grandin. However, the people of the colony were not in agreement with this recall of their "Doctor", Sister Ste-Thérèse. Mother Valade and a companion proceeded to St. Norbert to bid them goodbye, completely unaware of the plot that was being implemented by a determined group. Led by Louis Riël, Senior, some of the Métis ambushed Sister Ste-Thérèse and forced her into a cart where Miss Céleste Lagimodiere brought her back to St. Boniface as a "prisoner". For the sisters, they were so surprised at this turn of events, they asked if it could be a sign of the end of the world!<sup>44</sup>

The disturbing news about Sister Lagrave persuaded Mother Deschamps to send to St. Boniface Sister Ethier and Sister Pepin, the latter resuming missionary work in the field of her first vineyard.

These two embarked on their journey on September 15 just eight days before the news reached Montreal that Mother Valade had cancer. This thunderbolt, as Mother Deschamps called it, brought about a quick decision. Mother Deschamps decided to send off to her distant sisters her own assistant superior, Sister McMullen, together with the bursar, Sister Clapin.<sup>45</sup> The latter was out doing some shopping. Immediately, two messengers were dispatched to look for her to bring her back to the mother house as quickly as possible. In less than two hours, the two delegates were ready and set out in haste, hoping to catch up to those who had already left. They did catch up to Sisters Ethier and Pepin just outside St. Paul on October 1 just as they were preparing to go on to Red River by cart. As Sister Ethier caught sight of Sister McMullen and her companion, she turned to Sister Pepin and said, "I just saw a Grey Nun going by!" The other said, "You must be seeing things. It cannot be." Both were so surprised when they reached St. Cloud to see the Assistant General there. All four joined together for the final lap of the journey.

Mother McMullen, who had often thought of going to Red River ever since 1840, experienced on her trip unforgettable difficulties. They had as guides men who were not sure what route to take; they ran into mudholes from which the oxen could scarcely be extracted. Fear of the Sioux inspired Mother McMullen to acquire two guns even though one of the conductors assured her: "Do not be afraid, Sister. We will defend you. We will be dead before you." Which, as Mother McMullen wrote, was some consolation indeed! The food supply was defective; they had sometimes to go without dinner. To top it all off, they ran into a forest fire. The sisters had to cover themselves with heavy blankets for fear of the sparks which were blowing about. They met up with a good Métis, Mr. Hamelin, who "reassured" them, telling them they were very brave to proceed where a longer wagon-train had just recently refused to go on.

The forest fire at least had the advantage of encouraging the wagon drivers to speed up. At the town of Saint-Vincent, a poor little hamlet, rain and snow were encountered. At Pembina they were received by some Métis whom Mother McMullen said were fine people who were being appreciated more and more. On November 2 the Bishop's messenger arrived, very surprised to see four sisters instead of two. His report soon reached St. Boniface where there was incredulity, but Bishop Taché said: "Four or twenty-four, I will be happy to receive each one of them."

At last on November 3, in a horse-drawn vehicle, they found the Bishop and Sister Dandurand waiting for them in St. Norbert. When they reached St. Boniface, the Bishop was announcing that it was really true, there were four of them. He had the bells peal out a welcome. There had been time to gather together the pupils, the orphans, the poor and the boarders all to join in a very joyous welcome. If Mother Valade thought the state of her health must be serious indeed to warrant the arrival of the Assistant General and a member of the general council, she said nothing. Her courage had reached the heroic degree.

Sister McMullen has recorded her impressions of the West. She found the convent at St. Norbert very fine with a good house built there. She also found St. Boniface in good shape although she said the scarcity of resources hampered the work that could be done. She remarked that "if our sisters could enlarge their house, how many children they could receive within it!" She was extremely edified by the respectful demeanour of the faithful at church and described the population as being affable and well-mannered.

Mother McMullen was especially impressed with the joy and happiness which reigned in the convent despite extreme poverty. In fact it was this spirit of joy and happiness that encouraged Sister Fisette in her letter dated December 3, 1859, to ask the favour of being assigned forever to this mission.



The Assistant General easily adapted to the austere regime of Red River. In her turn she inspired respect and admiration by her charity, her piety and her good example. Mother Valade wrote: "We will all be so sorry to see her leave."<sup>46</sup> It was proposed that Mother McMullen should take with her a little Sioux Indian girl whose godmother she became. This was Adèle Nebraska. Her mother, however, would not allow her daughter to go into what she felt would be exile. Mother Valade commented: "The roads are good and the waters are low so I am sure the trip back will be much easier than the one they experienced in coming." As a matter of fact, the journey back was much easier. As they were proceeding, Mother McMullen met Bishop Grandin<sup>47</sup> at Crowing on his way back from Montreal with a group of missionaries destined for Ile-à-la-Crosse. Three Grey Nuns were part of the group, Sisters Agnes, Boucher and Roche. Sister Roche would yield her place in the group to Sister Pepin. These missionaries left for the North on July 30 with the two volunteers, Marie Gascon and Philomène Belisle.

In spite of the precariousness of the conditions of living, of the difficulties of travel and the long distance involved, the Grey Nuns of Red River did not hesitate to push forward the frontiers of their work. During that same autumn, on September 15, they opened a mission at a post then named Rogaton (now St. Vital). Sister Labrèche wrote to say this place, about a mile and a half from St. Boniface, was expected to have a large number of poor and children to teach.<sup>48</sup>

At the end of September, on the 26, Mother Valade, who had no illusions about the malignity of her cancer, deemed it best to bid goodbye to the superior general, writing: "The hour is fast approaching when I will not be able to take my pen in my hand. I have put myself in the hands of God and am willing to do His will."<sup>49</sup>

Mother Valade had been edified at the peaceful death of Sister Lagrave. Her turn had now come to show her companions an example of a strong soul waiting for the end with serenity. She refused all preferential treatment and when she had to take to her bed she took place in the common dormitory in a spot where it was possible to have a view of the chapel.

There she was visited by Sister Lafrance, named as acting superior in her place.<sup>50</sup> There she reminisced about the past and all that had been accomplished since the poor beginnings in 1844. There were now five other houses of which three were devoted to education: St. François-Xavier, St. Norbert and St. Vital. At Lac Sainte-Anne and at Ile-à-la-Crosse there was both teaching and caring for the sick. The boarding school in St. Boniface was flourishing. The public examinations of July 26 had received favourable notice from the Nor'Wester, a newspaper which had recently been begun by some Protestant editors.<sup>51</sup>

In accordance with the directives given by Bishop Bourget during the chapter of 1849, chronicles were faithfully maintained of the events that occurred from day to day.<sup>52</sup> These chronicles are precious sources for knowing the life of the congregation in the West. So in them we can read how the foundresses who left St. Boniface for Lac Sainte-Anne departed August 3 and arrived at their destination on September 24. That was the year before this one when sisters left for Ile-à-la-Crosse on July 30 and reached the "Capital of Solitude" on October 4. The bare facts set out in the journals surpass anything that could be imagined.

The chronicles do not record only triumphs. There is regret in St. Boniface at the loss of the Brothers of Christian Schools who were replaced at the College by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.<sup>53</sup> The sisters who had been excused from farm work since 1858 now had to make hay again, because there were no farm hands. This heavy task

was taken up by Sister Clapin and Sister Curran. Sister Cusson, the official weaver, had fallen victim to an accident. She was on her way to St. Vital where lived the miller of the Seine, Louis Riel. This kind gentlemen would connect her spinning-wheel to his windmill and so expedite the work of preparing the yarn. On crossing the bridge, her horse broke down and she was thrown about twelve feet, receiving a blow to her head. She fully expected the carriage to fall down on her too but, fortunately, the horse got himself upright. She found that her knitting, which had been placed beside her, had not even budged.<sup>54</sup>

The same letter, extracted from the chronicles, has also a few lines of grave import: "Bishop Tache must go to visit the northern missions. We are afraid that Mother Valade may die in his absence."

But Mother Valade had still to experience more sacrifice of the kind that makes people raise questions that only faith can answer.

On December 3, Father Joseph Goiffon, a French missionary priest at Pembina, was rushed to the hospital. En route to his post he had had to fight against a fierce storm which lasted four days and five nights. He had been saved from certain death by Mr. John Pritchard Matheson, the brother of the Anglican Archbishop.<sup>55</sup> His right foot was amputated. Ten days later, his case was deemed hopeless. His sick bed was placed in the Bishop's residence. There, on the morning of December 14, he heard the cries of fire. Two girls, whose names have charitably been omitted from the record, were making candles. The caldron of molten wax left unattended on the stove had boiled over and the wax falling on the red-hot stove had been set on fire which spread like lightning.

At the first alarm, Father Mestre rushed into Father Goiffon's room to save him, but he said, "No, no. Leave me. I am useless. Go and save those who can still be of service." The rescue attempt pro

ceeded nonetheless; amazingly the cold outside had the effect of stopping a haemorrhage that had been threatening Father Goiffon's life.<sup>56</sup> But there was no way that the life of poor Ducharme could be saved. He died on the spot. The fire soon spread to the cathedral. Michel Morin alerted the people. Laymen saved the Blessed Sacrament, the harmonium, the master altar and the statue of the Blessed Virgin. Sister Gosselin, at the risk of her life, was able to save some of the sacred ornaments. As for Mother Valade, she had the courage to place herself near the window where she witnessed the destruction of the church with its twin turrets which since 1832 had guided travellers on the Red River. Gone was this monument built for the glory of God by Bishop Provencher, this church in which the whole population had so often gathered, this temple which Sister Lagrave had embellished with decorations. How mysterious the ways of Providence are. Mother Valade, forgetful of self to the end, offered Father Goiffon and the Oblate Fathers the hospitality of the convent. The Fathers took only their meals there while they slept in the cold attic of their college. Mr. McTavish, manager of the Hudson Bay Company, gave the Oblates twelve woollen blankets to help them in their place of refuge. He rendered other services as well, while his wife, a Catholic, gave 300 dollars to the sisters whom she credited with having saved her life in the past. Protestants and Catholics alike expressed sympathy for those who had lost so much in the fire.

When Bishop Taché returned from the North on February 23, 1861, he had to look on the ruins of so much. He had just spent forty-four nights under the stars in the most rigorous of seasons. Now, without saying a word, he went to kneel in silence at the tomb of his predecessor, praying for courage. He was surrounded by a great number who joined their tears to his.

To Mother Valade who tried to express her sympathy to him, he said: "I am happier to see you alive than I would be if I could see my cathedral

again."<sup>57</sup> Why is it that disasters so rarely strike alone? In the spring another flood came to damage houses, barns, crops, once again carrying away bridges with pitiless waves of floodwater.<sup>58</sup> St. Vital school had to close its doors temporarily.

At the beginning of May, despite the upheaval, there was a reception for two Hudson Bay post factors. Mr. Christie had been a great benefactor of the sisters of Lac Sainte-Anne. He was factor at Edmonton. Mr. Campbell, from Athabaska, had been also a great friend of the missionaries.

A few days later, on May 13, at 5:05 a.m. Mother Valade expired. She was 52 years of age, having spent 34 years in religious life.<sup>59</sup> It was 17 years since she had come to St. Boniface. On May 16, she was buried among the ruins of the cathedral. Four citizens were pallbearers: Riel, Thibault, Galarneau and Daunais. Bishop Taché put on his only pair of boots, the gift of a Protestant, to go to the place of burial followed by his priests. The sisters looked on the mournful scene from a window of the convent.<sup>60</sup> Bishop Taché later spoke of the great services Mother Valade had rendered in a country of adoption.<sup>61</sup> As if it was necessary to drink of the chalice of suffering right up to the end, fire broke out again on May 30, reducing the outbuildings to ashes. The convent barely escaped disaster. Doctor John Bunn, who had been looking after both Sister Lagrave and Mother Valade, was so shocked by this latest fire that he died suddenly after having inquired about the safety of the sisters.<sup>62</sup>

The remains of Mother Valade were withdrawn from their temporary place of burial the following October 11 and they were placed near the tomb of Sister Lagrave in the basement of the convent.<sup>63</sup>

To fill the void left by these sisters there came from Montreal shortly thereafter Sister Sobien-sky and Sister Meilleur. Bishop Taché went down East to make an appeal for help from the people of his

native province and also to seek a coadjutor. His diocese was once again going to be subdivided and it was expected that in 1862 there would be a need for a convent at Lac La Biche.<sup>64</sup>

This foundation was established during 1862, the year when the Sioux, driven out by the Americans, caused much alarm over the frontier. On July 8, Sisters Delphine Guenette, Marie Tisseur and Adelaide Daunais, together with a "fille donnée" Marie Lalonde, left Red River for the mission of the Nativity (also known as Our Lady of Victories), reaching there August 26. In this new post at Lac La Biche the same daily heroism awaited them as that characterized at St. Albert to which the house at Lac Sainte-Anne was transferred March 23, 1863.<sup>65</sup>

That year marked a great forward step for the Grey Nuns. The general chapter took place in October at which were to be elected the superior general, her councillors and the administrators according to the directives from Rome. Taking part in the chapter were eleven sisters designated by the mother house and twelve chosen by members of the whole congregation.<sup>66</sup> Sister Fiset and Sister Lafrance were chosen to go from St. Boniface and they arrived at Montreal, with Sister Roche, on September 25 after a journey of one month. On the following October 5, Sister Jane Slocombe was elected superior general to her great dismay for her election put an end to all her dreams of going to live in a mission country.

Sister Lafrance experienced the joy of seeing once again a house which she thought she had left forever. She did not know many of the sisters who lived there now, but she was well aware of the merits of the new Mother General. To this great woman of God, accustomed to offer herself completely for the Gospel, Sister Lafrance was able to bring news of vocations in the West and she spoke especially of two natives who had decided to offer themselves too. She spoke of Sister Mary-Jane McDougall, a Scottish half-breed, who had been brought to the boarding school by



Father J. Thibault when she was only nine years of age. She was of a lively and independent disposition which was proved by her running away from the school. But when she had been brought back to the convent, after learning what it was about, she had become a model pupil and then expressed her wish to join the "women of prayer," a favour which was granted to her in 1862.

The other native girl was Sister Annie Goulet who had been born and brought up in St. Boniface. She was proof that the sisters had not been working in vain. In 1845, when she was only three years old, she had been attracted to the little waxen Jesus figure in the crib and had brought him some candy.<sup>67</sup> On December 23, 1863, following the example of her companion, she offered herself to the Lord who had called her to love and serve Him under the grey habit.

- 1 Mr. M.-C. Bonnissant, Sulpician, 1851.
- 2 Archives, 1848-1853, p. 86.
- 3 They left Montreal on July 6, 1852 and reached the Red River September 11 of the same year.
- 4 Printed in Tours, France, and received in Montreal Nov. 1853.
- 5 Letter dated May 23, 1854. The date for the opening of the Chapter was to be decided upon the arrival of Mother Valade.
- 6 Letter dated Jan. 7, 1855.
- 7 Letter dated Nov. 11, 1844.
- 8 In 1867, Father Laflèche was consecrated as bishop of Trois-Rivières.
- 9 De Moissac, Sr., op.cit., p. 89.
- 10 Paul-Émile, Sr., "Aux sources", p. 71.
- 11 In 1844, the Dunn family was living in Aylmer where the founding sisters had to stop over on their way to the Red River. Marguerite, who was then seven years old, had tiptoed on the seat of her pew at church in order to better examine the missionaries. Her vocation to religious life probably dated to this memorable day. Annals, Hôp. gen. St-Bon., Vol., I, pp. 162-163.
- 12 Ibid, p. 183. Alphée arrived with Mr. Thibault.
- 13 Father Grandin became coadjutor Dec. 11, 1857.
- 14 Letter to Bishop Bourget, April 1857.
- 15 Benoit, op.cit., Vol. I, p. 348.
- 16 Annals, Hôp. gèn. St-Bon., Vol, pp. 191-192.

- 17 Chapitre des fondations, St-Bon., 1843-1872. Art. VIII & IX de l'Acte d'Union.
- 18 Letter dated Jan. 11, 1858.
- 19 Ibid. In a letter dated Nov. 25, 1850, Mother Valade had called them "soeurs converses" or auxiliary sisters. This question was to be resolved in 1863.
- 20 Letter dated March 22, 1858.
- 21 Letter dated Jan. 11, 1858.
- 22 Letter dated Jan. 12, 1858.
- 23 Letter by Sr. Labrèche, Toledo, April 11, 1858.
- 24 Annals, 1944-45, p. 90. An article by Father L. Primeau.
- 25 Benoit, op.cit., Vol. I, pp. 375-376. Sr. St. François-Xavier must not be mistaken for Sr. Marie-Xavier who, for a time, it seems, was the superior of a pious group of Métis girls "of the Propagation of the Faith" founded in 1853 by Father M. Belcourt in Pembina. Three members of this group were in training for a short period with the Grey Nuns of Montreal. Rior-don, op.cit., p. 150. This community group was dissolved by Bishop Taché in the spring of 1859. Letter dated June 22, 1859.
- 26 Letter by Bishop Taché, June 23, 1858.
- 27 Mother Deschamps to Bishop Taché, July 10, 1858.
- 28 Chapitre des fondations, St-Bon., 1843-1872, p. 117. The St. Boniface sisters were encouraged by Bishop Taché to sign the agreement.
- 29 The foundations had the right to recall the sisters who had been "lent"; that is why Sis

ters Fisette, Ste-Therese and Ste-Marie did not sign the concordat.

30 Archives, 1853-58, p. 371.

31 Sr. Valade to Bishop Bourget, Nov. 8, 1858.

32 Benoit, op.cit., Vol. I, pp. 376-377.

33 Chapitre des fondations, St-Bon. 1843-1872, pp. 136-142.

34 Benoit, op.cit., Vol. I, pp. 376-378.

35 Letter dated Jan. 27, 1859. Archives, 1858-63, p. 11.

36 Sr. Labrèche to Toledo, April 11, 1858.

37 Letter to Mother Deschamps, Nov. 9, 1858.

38 The Anson Northup Steamboat which marked the beginning of a new era in transportation and commerce. It was reported that some horses were lost as they panicked and fled when they heard the boat whistle "thinking they were being pursued by a beast bigger than themselves." Benoit, op.cit., Vol. I, pp. 413-414.

39 Morice, "Église catholique Ouest canadien", Vol. II, pp. 85-86. The piano which came from England had been received by Bishop Provencher.

40 Letter to Mother Deschamps, March 10, 1859. The young sisters also improved their knowledge of English.

41 Letter dated August 2, 1859.

42 Ibid.

43 Sr. Valade to Mother Deschamps, Aug. 4, 1859.

44 Correspondance générale, Oct. 10, 1859. Sr.

Ste-Marie continued on her journey accompanied by a woman hired by Bishop Grandin. Sr. Curran, having opted to remain in St. Boniface, signed her affiliation early in 1859. Sr. Therese did the same thing in 1860.

- 45 The following details are excerpts from a letter dated Sept. 23, 1859, to the Red River sisters and from Sr. McMullen's diary on Nov. 11, 1859.
- 46 Letter dated May 4, 1860.
- 47 Consecrated as a bishop at Marseille by Bishop de Mazenod December 11, 1859.
- 48 Archives, 1858-1863, p. 83.
- 49 Letter to Sr. Labrèche, Oct. 10, 1860.
- 50 Mother Deschamps to the sisters, Oct. 15, 1860.
- 51 Sr. Valade to Mother Deschamps, Aug. 13, 1860.
- 52 Chapitre des fondations, St-Bon., 1843-1872, p. 40.
- 53 Primeau, L., "Centenaire des Srs. Gr.", p. 7.
- 54 Sr. Curran to the Mother House, Sept. 27, 1860.
- 55 Benoit, "Vie de Mgr Taché", pp. 443-445.
- 56 The details concerning the fire are extracted from the letters written by Sr. Curran Dec. 19, 1860 and Jan. 21, 1861.
- 57 Sr. Labrèche to the missions, April 9, 1861.
- 58 Montreal also was flooded. The annual retreat which was in progress had to be cut short. Animals had to be lodged in the attic of the hospital.

82

59 Mémoires, Part I, pp. 157-158.

60 Sr. Curran to the Mother House, June 13, 1861.

61 Letter to Bishop Bourget, Oct. 12, 1861.

62 Archives, 1853-1863, p. 213.

63 De Moissac, Sr., op.cit., p. 118. In 1888, the remains of the missionaries were transported to the cemetery in front of the cathedral.

64 Mother Deschamps to Mr. D. Granet, July 26, 1861.

65 Mitchell, Sr. E., Mère Slocombe, p. 245.

66 Mother Deschamps to Mr. Faillon, May 11, 1863. The directives as to procedure to be followed were probably received from Rome in March 1862 with the approval of the Constitutions.

67 These details are extracted from the biographies of Sr. McDougall and Sr. Goulet.



## CHAPTER FIVE - 1864-1873

Sister Lafrance and Sister Fisetite had to wait until the spring of 1864 to return from their participation in the general chapter. The day was fast approaching when it would be possible to travel during the winter between Montreal and Red River, but that time had not yet come.

Sister Lafrance was very impressed with the changes that had occurred at the general hospital which she had last seen twenty years before and which she had left, as she thought, forever. She was present on October 28, 1863 and again on January 23, 1864 at the profession of five novices of whom one, Sister Céline Allard, was destined to go to St. Boniface. The step which brought her greatest consolation was the decision taken with respect to the "filles données," often called "Maries," the girls who had volunteered to do general work for the sisters. On December 23, 1863 Bishop Bourget admitted as members of the Third Order of St. Francis thirty-eight generous girls who wanted to give themselves up entirely to the work of the Grey Nuns. As signs of distinction, they would wear, on Sundays and feast days, a black dress with a large cape, a modest cap, a widow's bonnet and a little white collar. Apart from feast days and Sundays, they would wear ordinary clothing.<sup>1</sup> Sister Lafrance had seen these volunteers at work in the missions; she found them to be precious and indispensable. The missionary agreed with all her heart with the directive issued by Mother Slocombe calling on all the sisters to be very good to these "poor girls". "Be sure to support them and to encourage them, for theirs is a difficult life and it is vital to lighten it as much as possible."<sup>2</sup>

Sister Lafrance no doubt apprised the superior general of the reasons she had for not wanting to continue as substitute-superior of the convent at St. Boniface. She was prevailed on, however, to be assistant to the new superior, Sister Clapin. Sister Marguerite Limoges was to be director of novices

while Sister St-Joseph and Sister Fisetite would be councillors.

Sister Fisetite busied herself with seeking alms under the auspices of Bishop Bourget. At St. Boniface there was practically no harvest in the fall of 1863. Bishop Taché described the situation in a letter to his mother, February 25, 1864: "We are surrounded everyday by crowds of hungry people." At the convent in St. Hyacinthe, Sister Fisetite received a contribution of \$10.00, the minutes of the meeting which voted this amount noting that it was "impossible to give more on account of the poverty of the house."<sup>3</sup> Sister Clapin, in a letter to Mother McMullen, acknowledged how wretched things were and asked for a monetary offering.<sup>4</sup>

But the prospects of being poor and lacking food in no way frightened those to whom fell the honour of being chosen for the missions. These were Sister Limoges, Sister O'Brien, Sister Blanchet and Sister Allard, with one tertiary and two novices.<sup>5</sup> The day of leaving was set as closely as possible to the day of leaving of the first pioneers twenty years before. The trip was made in the company of Father Vandenberghe who had been delegated by the superior general of the Oblates as a canonical visitor.<sup>6</sup> Despite the presence of this distinguished priest, mother Slocombe could not help being afraid that the sisters might fall into the hands of the Sioux. However, she expressed confidence in Providence, saying that God would surely give protection to those who had consecrated their lives to the spread of the Gospel.<sup>7</sup> Her confidence in Providence was to be maintained to the end of her relatively brief life during which she did not cease to wish she had been chosen as a missionary. She did not hesitate to praise those who went forward to far off places. Of Sister Limoges, she once wrote: "She is as good as she is tall."<sup>8</sup> This was in a letter to Bishop Tache. In a previous letter she sent an authorization from Rome approving of a novitiate to be maintained in St. Boniface.<sup>9</sup>

The voyage from Montreal was now reduced to twenty-eight days, one of which was spent in Detroit with Mother Deschamps.<sup>10</sup> Red River was reached May 22 and in a letter of the 29 Sister Fiset was able to remark on the new cathedral which had been built by Bishop Taché and which was to be blessed on November 1, 1865.<sup>11</sup>

The sisters found that the new land was being tested by famine. Sister Lafrance wrote: "I do not recall ever having had to eat such black bread before."<sup>12</sup> Misfortunes multiplied as an order of clothing sent from Montreal was seized by the Indians while other goods that were imported from Europe were held up as a result of a ship being ice-bound off Newfoundland.<sup>13</sup> Sister Cusson and Sister Connolly, with the help of Sister St-Joseph and her orphans, had to work overtime at the loom to be able to supply clothing for the missionaries dispersed in so many different posts.

Things got no better when grasshoppers came to complete the work of destruction they had commenced the previous year; whatever was left by them was destroyed by drought. It was necessary to resign oneself to kill the domestic animals or to send them far off to pass the winter.

In spite of this sombre scene, a decision was made to establish yet another work, this time at the request of Bishop Faraud, the Vicar Apostolic of Athabaska-MacKenzie. The Bishop was happy to announce this news to the Grey Nuns of Red River when he went there on May 24.<sup>14</sup> He met Bishop Taché and Father Vandenberghe both of whom had returned from a visit to the North three months ago. Father Vandenberghe was full of praise for the Grey Nuns whom he described as being indispensable auxiliaries of the Oblate Fathers.<sup>15</sup> These words were encouraging to the Grey Missionaries who in this year of 1865 recorded two professions, that of Sister McDougall on May 3 and of Sister Goulet on September 14. Sara Riel, the youngest sister of Louis Riel, joined the novitiate on September 2 and she was followed by the

volunteer, Marie Gascon, on December 10.<sup>16</sup>

Happiness at seeing these two become novices was tempered by the failure of health of Sister Limoges. But a source of joy par excellence came with Mother Slocombe's message that the Holy See had given formal approval to the Constitutions which Bishop Bourget brought back from Rome, dated July 21, 1865.<sup>17</sup> A few days later it was learned that five Grey Nuns designated for a convent on the banks of the Mackenzie River, in the land of snow, would be staying in St. Boniface for some time in order to familiarize themselves with the different works of the mission. Embarking for the West were Sisters Lapointe, Brunelle, Michon, St. Michel-des-Saints, Ward and Brazeau, together with four volunteers. In the wagon-train with the sisters there were Bishop Taché and seven priests, one of whom was the brother of Sister Allard, already a missionary at Red River. Mother Slocombe wrote of these sisters: "I cannot say how much the Sisters are admired by one and all here for their courage and generosity. They left here as if they were on their way home rather than on their way to exile."<sup>18</sup>

With what affection these companions were greeted on October 13. One of them, Sister Brazeau, remained behind in St. Boniface to replace Sister Blanchet who was being sent to Ile-à-la-Crosse. It was a matter of regret that her sister, Sister St-Michel-des-Saints, had not had the opportunity to visit with her before her departure.

These apostolic women met the challenges of their new life not only with good grace but also with joy. Sister Lafrance wrote: "How much good they will do in their new work."<sup>19</sup>

The stop at Red River was extended until the beginning of June so that the Mackenzie River missionaries could be present at the moving encounter of Bishop Taché with Bishop Grandin on May 22. The latter had come to seek advice from the metropolitan. Fire had destroyed the Bishop's house at Ile-à-la-

Crosse on March 1. "By 9 o'clock everything was destroyed. Nothing was spared, not even a blanket to keep us warm in face of 20 and 30 degree cold. The fire had melted the snow, soaking our feet; not one of us had shoes we could change into. The day following, I was without breviary and without any prayer book; we had nothing, not even a handkerchief to wipe away our tears."<sup>20</sup> This is how Bishop Grandin described the disaster that had struck. On May 25 the two Bishops left for Europe to seek assistance.

The sisters assigned to the polar ice field made their way to their destination June 8. They encountered incredible experiences: bad weather, the risk of meeting the Saukteaux Indians who had just killed a number of Métis, burning heat which brought crowds of mosquitoes which bit the untanned white skin of the travellers without hesitation; there were hail storms. There was almost a tragic death when a fire, which had been lit to chase away the mosquitoes, set fire to the dress of the tertiary, Marie Domithilde, and nearly burned her to death. On July 30 while crossing a wood, they noticed a piece of birch bark pegged to a tree: it was a message of welcome placed there by the missionaries of Lac La Biche where they spent a pleasant three days at the outpost of civilization. When they set out again on August 5, it was really miserable. They had to walk with difficulty in the path of the Bishop who was cutting through the wood with his axe. When they reached water, they found it was so low that the barge had to be pulled away from the bank. The sisters were called on to take part in this operation, and they gladly collaborated.

On August 28, after eighty-one days of unbelievable adventures, they found themselves navigating on the magnificent MacKenzie River. The sisters hailed this strange land which "had become our native land, our home and our final resting place."<sup>21</sup>

At St. Boniface the accounts of these travels

were read with eagerness amid the sorrow felt at the death of the well-beloved Sister Limoges who finished her short life at the age of thirty following three years in the first Grey Nuns mission of the West.

At the end of this year 1867 the statistics of the vicariate were reviewed.<sup>22</sup> It was found there were thirty Grey Nuns spread over seven posts in these regions which were still not part of Canada, although since the Confederation of July 1, 1867 many Canadians were looking toward the West with covetousness.

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Sister Clapin and Sister Emery had gone East the previous August 9.<sup>23</sup> They returned to the West on June 9, 1869 after a stay of more than eight months in Montreal. In spite of the new railway by which they could travel to St. Paul, the journey as a whole still took them 43 days.<sup>24</sup> It was being said that the Dawson trail was going to improve travelling conditions but the "colonials" scarcely knew whom to believe as far as promises of this kind were concerned.<sup>25</sup>

There was unemployment at Red River which Bishop Taché relieved by hiring "the poor workers" to build a new convent. This would enable the work to expand.<sup>26</sup>

Sister Clapin brought two recruits, Sister Hamel and Sister Colette, who came to work at Red River despite the reports of its famine which actually drove some families to feed on acorns covered by snow.<sup>27</sup> There had been a tornado during the summer which was an added misfortune. Sister Clapin begged alms from Madame Taché and Madame Masson, the seigneuresse of Terrebonne and benefactor of Bishop Taché.<sup>28</sup>

Mother Slocombe placed her trust in the two new missionaries. Without the least hesitation she recommended them to the spiritual head of the dioc



ese, saying, "I am sure they will meet all difficulties with generosity."<sup>29</sup> Sister Hamel took on the post of bursar, an arduous task in this time of poverty, while Sister Colette became a teacher at the new boarding school. The new building, 60 by 25 feet, with two floors, was going to be opened in the autumn. Sister Marie-Xavier was the headmistress assisted by Sister Allard. This boarding school was to be a source of many vocations but it was feeling the effects of the general poverty. On June 16, Bishop Taché had to recognize that it was necessary to send the children home "because we have nothing to feed them with even if they pay."<sup>30</sup> But the storm clouds could dissipate over time and the work would flourish while the orphanage would be able to take many more orphans. Mother Slocombe was correct when she told Mr. Forget, a Zouave, that, "If no one died from hunger at St. Boniface it was only because Bishop Taché had put himself out so much to meet the needs of his people."<sup>31</sup>

This beloved Zouave, known in the convent as "the good Adolphe," had earned the confidence of Mother General. In a letter to him, she spoke of the happiness she experienced in anticipating the arrival of Sister Clapin and Sister Emery after absences of nine and ten years respectively. The missionaries would become interested in this protégé of the Grey Nuns who became a Zouave and entered the priesthood after a long wait. Later he was to serve the Church of St. Boniface.

Also serving the Church, but under the grey habit, would be Sister Sara Riel who made profession on March 6, 1868 and Sister Marie Gascon who followed October 12.<sup>32</sup> It was a joy to see the family growing for the needs were great. In fact, the missions were increasing despite poverty. Bishop Taché decided that an urgent task was to open a school on the other side of Red River, at Fort Garry.<sup>33</sup> In the absence of Sister Clapin, then at Montreal, he took up this question with the assistant, Sister Fisette.

A house was rented, with the assistance of Mr.

Kennedy, from a man named Mr. Denver. The latter did not know the purpose of the lease and he was upset by it, even though Mrs. McTavish, wife of the governor, was assisting the sisters.<sup>34</sup> Bishop Taché ended his complaints by buying the property outright. He was assisted in this by Mr. Deschambault. The first mass was celebrated on June 15 to the great satisfaction of the Catholics of Winnipeg. Sister Ste-Thérèse and Sister McDougall took over the functions of teaching as well as of visiting the sick and the poor. Everything was provisional; Bishop Taché said he would submit the matter for the approval of the general council when he went to Montreal.<sup>35</sup>

The Bishop was answering the call of Pope Pius IX to attend the first Vatican Council.<sup>36</sup> He stopped at Montreal July 6 and remained there until October 13 when he left for Rome. His departure occurred at the very time he was most needed at Red River. The proposals for the annexation of the colony by Canada were now materializing. The foreigners of the East were very happy at this prospect, but the people of Red River were upset at the attempt to dispose of their country without consulting them.<sup>37</sup> The Métis were opposed to the surveying of their lands by the square mile allotments being carried out by Captain Weber and they were also opposed to the entrance of Lieutenant-Governor McDougall who was proposing to take over the government without the people's consent. The one who led a band of men to force Weber to stop his work was Louis Riel.<sup>38</sup>

They did not stop at that. They set up a barricade guarded day and night. It was at St. Norbert near the convent where lived Sister Dussault and Sister Riel.<sup>39</sup> Events moved quickly and there was much concern at the mother house when newspaper reports were published describing the troubles. Father Thibault, vicar general, left for Red River in the company of Mr. de Salaberry who was sent as conciliator. Sister Labrèche wrote to the sisters of Toledo: "They have not yet arrived there. I cannot give you any details of the conflict other than what has appeared in the newspapers December 14, 1869.

The young Riel seems to be regarded as the saviour of his people. We must hope that peace will triumph in the end." This was a vain hope for things became quite embroiled. Mother Slocombe wrote to Bishop Taché: "War has nearly broken out in Manitoba."<sup>40</sup> This letter was probably not received by the Bishop in Rome since he came back to Canada on February 3, requested by Ottawa to serve as an intermediary between the Canadian government and the rebels.<sup>41</sup>

The task of the Grey Nuns was not easy during these tormented times. The works had to be kept going no matter what happened. The greatest discretion was required of the sisters who had learned long ago not to mix up in politics. Communication with the mother house was extremely difficult since it was widely believed the letters were intercepted.<sup>42</sup> That was certainly the belief of Sister Labrèche<sup>43</sup> who said, "The sisters have only one right, that of shaking with fear, and only one privilege, that of praying for peace to come."

It was many months before peace reigned and it was followed by tragic events at the beginning of the history of the new province of Manitoba. In addition to difficulties at home, there was sad news from abroad where word came of the invasion of France.<sup>44</sup> Help from the Society of Propagation of the Faith in Lyon was cut off. At home a plague of grasshoppers descended to devastate the meagre crops, the civil disturbances had not made farming easy to attend to. Then in the month of August an epidemic of smallpox broke out. The sisters had to care on the one hand for their favoured Métis and on the other for the soldiers of Wolseley. Sister Meilleur vaccinated 3,323 people.<sup>45</sup>

In the midst of all the turmoil, Sister Sara Delorme, a native of St. Norbert, joined the convent February 23, 1870 while Sister Dalila Desautels took her vows the following June 7.<sup>46</sup> These two young sisters had lived through trying times which confirmed them in their choice of the lasting realities of faith. Sister Delorme was to live but a short

life, dying in 1882, but Sister Desautels would reach the 62nd anniversary of her profession. Endowed with many talents and a beautiful voice, she used to sing the praises of the Lord and, at St. Norbert Convent, she exercised her profession as a teacher with consummate skill. Thanks to an excellent memory she was able to recall memories of two of the pioneers of 1844, Sister St-Joseph and Sister Lafrance. She was able to charm audiences with delightful stories about them.<sup>47</sup> But she retained especially the memory of the tumultuous years when she had seen two of her contemporaries, Sister Goulet and Sister Riel, weep over the fate of their dear brothers.<sup>48</sup>

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The statute signed May 12, 1870 gave satisfaction to the demands of rights that had been formulated by the provisional government. It constituted the new province of Manitoba and established peace in the rest of the Northwest Territories.<sup>49</sup> The question of amnesty remained high on the list of issues which Bishop Taché had to pay attention to. Because he had to make frequent trips to the East, some matters had to be deferred, such as the question of St. Mary's School in Winnipeg. Mother Slocombe had had discussions with Bishop Taché about his project of bringing into the West a strictly teaching order to take over the work. One of her dominant characteristics was consideration for others, and so she did not want to comment on the plan before consulting the sisters in St. Boniface. Sister Clapin did not hesitate to give a favourable opinion to the idea. She wrote to the general superior that the Grey Nuns recognized they alone could not meet all the needs of a population which was visibly growing before their eyes. Mother Slocombe replied, "I bless the Lord who is arranging matters in such a way that we will be able to devote ourselves ever more fully to our role as sisters of charity."<sup>50</sup>

The Bishop was informed that the Grey Nuns would support his plan to bring in new congregations. It was also suggested to him that there was a need

for a new hospital for all the patients who were turning to the Grey Nuns for aid.<sup>51</sup>

In the spring of 1870 construction began on what was called the "men's house". The second floor was to serve as a drying-room. Sister Clapin wrote, "Since there are many foreigners now in this country, great care must be given to security."<sup>52</sup> The house for men was finished by December and it soon became apparent the whole of it would be devoted to the care and cure of sick people. In a session of the Legislature, it was decided to make a grant of \$500 to the new St. Boniface Hospital. Some members complained that it was not good to give public money to an institution which was not owned by the public. But Attorney-General Clarke replied, "The Grey Nuns do not ask whether the patient suffers from a Protestant pain or from a Catholic fever, they simply take care of whomever come to them."<sup>53</sup> Mr. Girard, the provincial treasurer, forwarded the grant to Sister Clapin on May 3, 1871.<sup>54</sup>

An official visit was now made by the assistant general superior, Sister Ursule Cécile Charlebois,<sup>55</sup> who was sent by Mother Slocombe to the West. Mother Slocombe had devoutly hoped to make the visit herself, but she was fully taken up with the construction of the new mother house on Guy Street in Montreal.

Bishop Bourget, who had always maintained a lively interest in the works of his beloved Bishop Taché,<sup>56</sup> assumed the expenses of the sisters' trip and authorized a collection to be taken up on behalf of the missions which were now deprived of the usual subsidies from Lyon on account of the war in France.<sup>57</sup> The collection was very disappointing, however, and Bishop Bourget suggested that the number of sisters travelling might be cut down.

There was even widespread concern that it might be necessary to reduce the missions in the West. Mother Slocombe was very disappointed with these suggestions. She felt it was, on the contrary,

necessary to strengthen the far-off missions and, overcoming many difficulties, she was able to send three sisters with Sister Charlebois. These were Sister Boire, Sister Langelier and Sister St-Michel. They were joined by three tertiaries, Marcelline Sauv , Georgianna Hudon and Marie Landry. They left April 24 and were able to reach Red River as early as May 12! The official visitor applied herself immediately to her task for she was able to report to Mother Slocombe the day after her arrival that she had been already engaged in packing up butter and lard for the northern posts. She noted that the Bishop and the sisters were sustaining themselves literally on dry meat with black bread and potatoes. It was no wonder, she wrote, that some of the sisters took sick, in particular Sister Clapin.

Sister Charlebois was full of praise for the spirit of work which the missionaries had as well as the success of it. She decided to send Sister Riel to Ile- -la-Crosse instead of Sister Boire.<sup>58</sup> Mother General had advised that Sister Riel might be better off away from the scene of the upheaval.<sup>59</sup> Sister Riel willingly accepted this advice and joined the wagon-train which set off July 16. Sister Charlebois was now able to have the experience of sleeping under the starry sky and of sharing in the real difficulties of a journey through the forest. She was to visit in succession the mission of Ile- -la-Crosse where she arrived August 25, then Notre-Dame-des Victoires at Lac La Biche and finally St. Albert which had suffered from scarcity and smallpox.

The assistant general was not able to be present for the opening of St. Boniface Hospital which consisted of four beds attended by "our doctor" Sister Ste-Th r se and Sister Laurent. The first patient to be admitted on August 5, 1871, was Louis Thibault, brother of the vicar general. He left the hospital after 209 days of free hospitalization.<sup>60</sup> Thus began in a very modest way an institution which was later to be hailed as "one of the glories of the Province of Manitoba".



Red River was no longer a "New Britain" where the monotony of daily life could be grating. Almost every day there was an arrival of a new immigrant or a traveller on his way West. They came from Ontario for the most part; some came from Quebec with the encouragement of bishops who were concerned with southward migration to the United States. The ex-Zouave Mr. Forget, who let himself be convinced that the climate in the West would be beneficial to his health, arrived at St. Boniface at the end of the summer in the company of Mr. Dugas.<sup>61</sup>

The assistant general was surprised when she saw Sister Lapointe passing through Red River on her way to Montreal from the land of white silence. Conditions at McKenzie River were so terrible that Sister Lapointe was going to plead with the major superiors for the needed assistance. She had the honour of proceeding to Montreal with Bishop Taché along with Sister Boucher.

The question of amnesty was still uppermost in the Bishop's mind. That was the reason for his journey east. Had he gone a few months earlier he would have been there in time to see his mother before her death. Bishop Laflèche had celebrated her Requiem Mass shortly after her death, July 23. He also pronounced the funeral eulogy. This kindness of his former colleague in the West profoundly touched the heart of Bishop Taché.<sup>62</sup>

As for Sister Lapointe, she arrived just in time to see the Charon Brothers' hospital for the last time. The transfer to the new mother house was fixed for October 6. Bishop Bourget presided over the blessing of the monastery at Guy Street and Bishop Taché was able to be present. The dimensions of the new mother house were truly imposing.<sup>63</sup>

It was while Bishop Taché was in Quebec that he learned that the Holy See had just constituted St. Boniface an archdiocese while Bishop Grandin was named Bishop of St. Albert.<sup>64</sup>

During November, the Fenians planned to make an invasion of Red River. The Fenians were favoured by Mr. O'Donoghue who was in favour of annexation to the United States, but they were deterred by a force of 300 men gathered by Riel with the assistance of Lepine.<sup>65</sup> However, in spite of this proof of loyalty, the question of amnesty still remained unsettled.

At the beginning of January 1872 Bishop Taché returned to his field of action, this time with the title of Archbishop. St. Boniface gave him a magnificent reception worthy of the honour he had received. Mr. Royal delivered a special address at the ceremonies in the Cathedral; at the Grey Nuns' boarding school the pupils put on a play which reviewed his illustrious career.<sup>66</sup>

The Archbishop noted with great satisfaction that the little hospital was succeeding despite a chronic shortage of funds. The sisters had to go around begging to obtain money to provide for the care of two in-patients. Besides that, 631 house visits were made, 179 sick people were treated on an out-patient basis, 586 wounds had been attended to. Shelter was given to twenty-nine orphans and twenty-five older women.<sup>67</sup> This was the busy beehive that Sister Charlebois found on her return from the North, just as Sister Lapointe was proceeding up to her snow-covered country with two new recruits, Sister Gauthier and Sister Daigle. This was in the spring of 1872.

The visit of the assistant general was to be prolonged at the request of the bishops and sisters. The request was willingly granted by Mother Slocombe in spite of her failing health. The heavy burden of her office of superior general, together with the establishment of the new mother house, overtaxed her strength. On June 22, the news was sent out to all the Grey Nuns of the loss which they had just suffered: Mother Slocombe had died at 8:00 p.m. in her 52nd year. Consternation was general. Mother Slocombe had won the esteem, admiration and affection of everyone around her. The sisters had found in her

a superior eminently intelligent and understanding, an authentic missionary who died with the regret of "never having been judged worthy of being sent to distant places." In a word, she was a true religious, a mother in every sense of the word. As for the friends of the Institute, they all appreciated her rich personality, her sense of Church, and her exquisite courtesy. Mr. André Nercam, p.s.s., pronounced a funeral oration which included a sentiment subscribed to by all: "Just as there is only one Mother d'Youville, so there is only one Mother Slocombe."<sup>68</sup>

Sister Charlebois, in spite of haste, was not able to get to Montreal in time for the funeral. She came back July 8, accompanied by Sister Hamel who was a delegate from the province of Manitoba. Both went to the new general house which seemed so vast without the presence of the superior general who had been its soul.

The general chapter, convoked for August 26, conferred the office of superior general on Mother Elizabeth Dupuis and, a few weeks later, Sister Hamel was given responsibility for the missions of Red River.<sup>69</sup>

The new Mother General would continue the missionary interest which had been shown by her predecessor. Two recruits joined Sister Hamel. These were Sister St-Stanislas and Sister Desnoyers. In 1873 two additional sisters would leave Montreal April 22: Sister Senay and Sister Leblanc. Sister Lamy, who had gone to Montreal to recover her health, returned to Red River with Sister McCulloch and Sister St-Placide. These newcomers replaced two well-deserving workers, Sister Clapin and Sister Allard who returned home after so many years of sacrifice. They had passed the test of missionary work and returned to work generously in other fields.

- 1 Sr. Labrèche to the sisters, Dec. 26, 1863.
- 2 Letter to the sisters of Ile-à-la-Crosse, April 23, 1864.
- 3 Archives, 1863-1872, p. 18.
- 4 Letter dated April 25, 1864.
- 5 Mémoires, Part I, p. 202.
- 6 Benoit, op.cit., Vol.I, p. 482.
- 7 Letter dated April 21, 1864.
- 8 Letter dated March 31, 1864.
- 9 Letter dated March 24, 1864.
- 10 Mother Deschamps, ex-sup. gen., now sup. at Toledo, Ohio, mission founded by the Grey Nuns in 1855, planned the meeting. Mother Slocombe to the sisters, May 23, 1864.
- 11 Sr. Curran to Sr. Labrèche, Feb. 16, 1864.
- 12 Letter to Mother Slocombe, May 30, 1864.
- 13 Sr. Labrèche to the sisters of Toledo, March 13, 1864.
- 14 Benoit, op.cit., Vol.I, p. 505.
- 15 Sr. Marie to the sisters of Toledo, March 13, 1864.
- 16 Marie Gascon left Montreal with the sisters going to Ile-à-la-Crosse in 1860.

- 17 Letter dated Jan. 30, 1866. The decree did not approve of dividing the Institute into provinces; instead, it recommended the establishment of vicariates to be visited by a superior designated for that purpose.
- 18 Letter to Sr. Agnes, Oct. 8, 1866.
- 19 Letter dated Dec. 2, 1866.
- 20 Benoit, op.cit., Vol.I, p. 548.
- 21 Sister Ward's journal, 1867.
- 22 Corr. gen., letter No. 310.
- 23 Corr. gen., Aug. 9, 1869. Mother Slocombe had been re-elected as sup. gen.
- 24 Benoit, op.cit., Vol.I, p. 576.
- 25 Osler, op.cit., p. 20.
- 26 Benoit, op.cit., Vol.I, pp. 584-585. The Bishop was also influential in obtaining that the highway be displaced and that a bridge be built on the Seine River.
- 27 Mother Slocombe to Sr. M. de Bonsecours, Jan. 1, 1868.
- 28 Corr. gen., Sept. 14, 1868.
- 29 Letter dated April 23, 1869.
- 30 Letter to Father P. Aubert, o.m.i., Jan. 16, 1869.
- 31 Letter dated May 17, 1868.

- 32     Registre des soeurs. In a letter to the sup. gen. on May 15, 1868, Sr. Riel expressed great joy at having "inherited" Sr. Limoges' crucifix and ring. Sr. Limoges, Director of Novices, was succeeded by Sr. Fisette and then by Sr. Lafrance.
- 33     ASGM documents pertaining to St. Mary's School, Winnipeg.
- 34     Mrs. McTavish retired to the convent during the temporary absence of her husband who had been called to England. There were prospects of selling the North-West Territories to Canada. Letter by Sr. Peltier, March 21, 1869.
- 35     Tessier-Biron, op.cit., p. 149.
- 36     Sr. Peltier to the sisters in Toledo, July 13, 1869. On Aug. 17, 1869, the sisters at the mother house were greatly honoured by the presence of Bishop Taché and Bishop Clut at the vestiture and profession ceremonies. Letter of Sept. 1, 1869.
- 37     Morice, "Hist. abrégée, Ouest canadien", pp. 79-80.
- 38     Osler, op.cit., p.22.
- 39     De Moissac, Sr., op.cit., p. 137.
- 40     Letter dated Dec. 1869.
- 41     Anc.J., Vol.III, p. 122.
- 42     Letter dated Feb. 7, 1870.
- 43     Letter dated March 16, 1870.
- 44     Grouard, Mgr E., op.cit., pp. 141-142.
- 45     De Moissac, Sr., op.cit., p. 141. At Lower Fort Garry, the sisters took care of some



soldiers who had contracted smallpox.

46 Registre des soeurs. Sr. Desautels, born in Assomption; later she lived in the United States.

47 Not.biog., Sr. Desautels.

48 Elzéar Goulet, Sr. Goulet's brother, was killed as he was swimming across the Red River, Sept. 13, 1870. That summer, Riel had fled to the United States.

49 Morice, "Égl. cath., Ouest canadien", Vol.II, p. 301.

50 One recalls that the Constitutions of 1851 did not approve "middle-class" boarding schools.

51 A mental patient who had no one to take care of him had to be hospitalized in a corner of the shed.

52 These details are extracted from letters written by Sr. Clapin to Mother McMullen dated Sept. 19, 1870, and Feb. 25, 1871.

53 Le Métis, Aug. 24, 1872.

54 Corr. gen., June 3, 1871.

55 Sr. Charlebois was named assistant general on Aug. 18, 1869. Sr. Deschamps who had been elected assistant general at the 1868 chapter had to resign on account of ill health.

56 Bishop Bourget had granted permission to Alexandre Taché, young seminarian, to enter the congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Letter dated Sept. 17, 1844.

57 Mandements de Mgr Bourget, Montreal, 4th Vol., p. 162.

- 58 Letter dated July 9, 1871.
- 59 The Riel home, as well as the convent in St. Norbert, were relentlessly searched by Riel's adversaries.
- 60 First register kept at Hôp. gén. St. Bon., Sr. Fisette replaces Sr. Ste-Thérèse at École Ste-Marie.
- 61 Sr. Peltier to the sisters in St. Bon., Aug. 18, 1871.
- 62 Sr. Roy to the sisters of Lac La Biche, Aug. 4, 1871.
- 63 Mitchell, Sr. E., "Mère Slocombe", p. 443.
- 64 Papal bull dated Sept. 22, 1871. In 1868, the Council of the bishops of Canada had recommended the establishment of ecclesiastical provinces in Toronto and in St. Boniface.
- 65 Osler, op. cit., pp. 135-136.
- 66 Play written by Sr. Collette and published in "Le Métis", newspaper founded by Mr. Royal. Anc. J., Vol.III, p. 181.
- 67 De Moissac, Sr. E., op.cit., p. 146.
- 68 ASGM, Mother Slocombe, Post Mortem, letter dated June 24, 1872.
- 69 The gen. chap. of 1872 added a third general assistant to the council, Sr. Pinsonneault.

## CHAPTER SIX - 1874-1883

Sister Mathilde Hamel had taken over the position of superior of St. Boniface for two years. She had been treasurer during the difficult years of 1869-70 and then she had been directress of the boarding school, which had to be made larger in 1871. Her biographer would write of her: "She really does not have the hands of a teacher; the lines and marks on her hands give witness of the diversity of her labours."<sup>1</sup> But she was an educator in every sense of the word. "We have to bring up these children," she would say to her colleagues when she had been given the responsibility of the boarding school. In her opinion, it was a work of charity par excellence to spread knowledge of God, to initiate young people to learning and to those values which could better their quality of life. Nor did she confine her educational activities to those of the classroom. She felt formation was much more effective when accompanied by charity, by the tremendous assistance extended to the needy, the sick, to all those men and women whom she was called to serve as a Grey Nun.<sup>2</sup>

This outstanding educator had the difficult duty of closing a school during 1874. St. Mary's Academy in Winnipeg had been accepted only on a provisional basis. Archbishop Taché now had the collaboration of a young and deserving Congregation, that of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. The missionaries sent by this Canadian foundation went to visit the general council of the Grey Nuns before leaving Montreal;<sup>3</sup> in the capital of Manitoba they received a warm welcome from the pioneers of 1869 who had opened the school. Their task had not been easy since, in addition to teaching, they had had "to serve dinner to ministers; care for the sick of the military hospital; make clothing for officers and police agents."<sup>4</sup>

There was a saying among the sisters that one work is not left except to the profit of another. The objective of the Grey Nuns was always a preference for the most abandoned places in accordance

with the letter Mother McMullen had given them December 4, 1844.

That is why during 1874 three more convents were born, one of which without the knowledge of either provincial or general councils. In far off Mackenzie, Bishop Isidore Clut, in the absence of Bishop Faraud, asked Sister Lapointe of the Providence Convent to open a school at Fort Chipewyan, in the mission of La Nativité. He took full responsibility for the initiative and he said he would have Father Grouard get the approval of the mother house when he passed through Montreal on his way to France. Thus it was that on June 30, Sister Lapointe and Sister Michel-des-Saints, with the tertiary Domithilde, left Providence and reached their new post on July 19. They had to live in a hovel which was open to the wind, rain and snow. It was patched up and, with the help of Providence, was soon attracting pupils whose successes would be a source of pride.<sup>5</sup> The new pioneers were sent a letter from the mother house, telling them they must abandon the unauthorized project but the letter did not reach the northern snow-land until winter had set in. By this time, Father Grouard had explained everything and the general council decided to give the necessary approbation which was notified to the sisters in February of 1875.

This foundation was to survive and to develop in an astonishing fashion, but the experience proved once again how inconvenient it was to have such poor means of communication with the North. That was a good reason for the tendency to create additional vicariates. The superior at St. Boniface was simply unable physically to visit such far away places. So, when on August 10 there was opened at Ile-à-la-Crosse St. Joseph's Hospital, built by Brother Bowes, the celebration was very intimate as was the case when the former priest's house became a school called Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.<sup>6</sup> This new school was soon attracting many pupils whose parents demonstrated their confidence in the sisters.

The troubles of 1869-70 had not been favourable to recruiting of Grey Nuns. There was only one St. Boniface novice, Sister Dudemaine, a native of St. Cuthbert, in Quebec.<sup>7</sup> Voids were beginning to appear as a result of deaths. Sister McCulloch died April 13, hardly twenty-four years old; Sister Withman died October 22, age sixty-eight.<sup>8</sup> These irrevocable departures were made up in part by those sent from Montreal to the West and the North, but a new source of vocations opened up in Europe. The bishops and missionary Oblates who visited France stirred up great interest in the mission by their reports and they succeeded in attracting vocations not only for themselves but also for the Grey Nuns. Brittany showed itself particularly responsive. On August 24, 1874 a native of Evron arrived at the mother house. Miss Marie-Anne Heurtebize was a niece of Bishop Grandin. She was still only seventeen years of age when she came; on June 2, 1877 she made her profession under the name of Sister Grandin. She had to wait until she was twenty-three years of age before becoming a missionary in the West,<sup>9</sup> by which time others of her compatriots had preceded her into the country of snowy silence.

On September 24, 1874, a group of Grey Nuns left Red River neither for the Far North nor for the West but southward to the United States. There were four Grey Nuns and a volunteer who went to establish a work which would involve evangelizing the once-dreaded Sioux. The project had been discussed for a number of years. In fact, when Sister Charlebois was at Red River she had written to Mother Slocombe: "Bishop Grace of St. Paul seems very serious in his request for Grey Nuns. He may have already written to you about it. Bishop Taché favours the foundation but is unable to send a priest there. Father Genin who goes from time to time to the mission of 'Devil's Lake' has exorcised it by renaming it St. Michael."<sup>10</sup>

Sister Charlebois had stopped for a visit with Bishop Grace who, without delay, pointed out on a map of North Dakota the place where a construction was already in progress not far from Fort Totten. The

house was being built at the expense of the American government and the bishop of St. Paul had requested the sisters to go to teach the young people and also to carry on works of charity.<sup>11</sup> Discussions were interrupted by the death of Mother Slocombe, but Major Forbes started them up again. The Sioux had taken advantage of the American Civil War to claim their rights. The government calmed their unrest by treaties which were subsequently not fully respected. Hence there arose the massacres of 1868 and the stern reprisals. Several Indians were executed and others were reprieved on condition that they would remain in a reserve set aside for them by the American authorities.<sup>12</sup> Asked who they wanted to have as teachers, the Sioux had replied, "The black robes." Major Forbes, after vain attempts to obtain the services of American congregations, wrote to his cousin, Mother McMullen,<sup>13</sup> who put the matter before the general council.<sup>13</sup> This proposal coincided with the announcement that a new post had been opened at Chipewyan where reinforcements were needed. Mother Dupuis, the superior general, consulted with Bishop Bourget as to which possible apostolate should be preferred. He said without hesitation, "Take the Sioux, since they are the most abandoned and in need of instruction." He undertook for his part to assist in this work by naming Father Bonin as a missionary for the new post.<sup>14</sup>

Sister Clapin and Sister Allard had been called away from St. Boniface. With them were Sister Lajemmerais and Sister Drapeau and a fine associate by the name of Rose Labelle.<sup>15</sup> They left for North Dakota on September 24, the feast of Our Lady of Mercy. Their itinerary led them first to Chicago and then to St. Paul and on to Jamestown. That left ninety miles to be travelled by cart to Fort Totten. One would think that the journey could be made in a short time, according to the American reputation for speed. But Providence ordained otherwise. At St. Paul, Minnesota, the travellers stayed at the convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph and remained there four weeks. But like true Grey Nuns they knew how to make use of their time. They had a missionary priest



teach them the alphabet and the pronunciation of the Sioux language. Their professor gave them a little catechism in Sioux, and they learned the prayers and hymns.

At Jamestown, according to Sister Allard's journal, the sisters had to spend two days and three nights in an inn already filled to capacity. The innkeeper had built a kind of add-on outbuilding over a frozen surface with sacks taking the place of rugs. They spend two sleepless night on piles of hay covered by horse blankets. The manageress of the hotel took pity on them and offered her own bed for the next night. The sisters took turns resting in the bed. Thus were the sisters being well prepared for the many nights they would be passing on the prairies, so often having to eat frozen provisions and shivering with cold.

Finally, on November 2, they reached Fort Totten to learn that their house was not yet finished. The sisters had to accept the hospitality of Major Forbes who was happy to receive them. The sisters soon began their work of evangelization. The Sioux had asked for black robes; they were perhaps taken aback to find themselves with "grey robes." When finally the convent was ready to enter, it was still necessary to gather lime, mortar and wood shavings. Sister Drapeau improvised a table with two planks over an empty barrel. On May 8, the chapel was ready and was dedicated to Our Lady of Seven Sorrows, a title which no doubt helped the sisters to accept their new environment. They had to sleep on the floor for three weeks; for their food they had only a barrel of flour, some eggs and a case of tea. There was no milk, but in summer there would be vegetables because the superior, Sister Clapin, foresaw the need for a garden. The sisters set right to work. Sister Allard was able to tend Joseph, a poor fellow near death. He accepted baptism just a few days before he died. To Sister Drapeau fell the task of visiting the poor in their tents. There was plenty of "work to do, but the general attitude attributed to the Sioux was that work was only for

slaves; the kings of nature, as they regarded themselves, were hunters."

The new mission depended on the vicariate of St. Boniface. The Red River sisters followed its beginnings with great interest. They were no doubt astonished that in the United States a foundation could be as difficult as in the polar circle. They did not doubt that the Sioux missionaries only partially revealed the hardships they encountered. Each person in the novitiate was taught that taking up the cross is a necessary part of following the Master.

If there was one person who would vouch for this truth it was Father Adolphe Forget who had been a protégé of the Grey Nuns since 1849. There had been so many difficulties in the pursuit of his vocation, but finally, after twenty years of waiting, he was ordained in St. Boniface Cathedral on January 6, 1875.<sup>16</sup> He was profuse in this thanks to the sisters. He wrote to Mother Dupuis: "I have had the happiness of offering my second mass at the Sisters'. I had always hoped to say my first Mass in the Grey Nuns' chapel but I had to forego that happiness. It goes without saying that the Mass I offered here was exclusively for the Grey Nuns and the intentions of their Superior General... I continue to recall to Our Lord all that has been done for me... How happy I am to have this powerful and efficacious means of expressing my appreciation for all the benefits I have received in this dear, well-loved house."<sup>17</sup>

This was decidedly a year of thanksgiving. On February 22, Sister McMullen celebrated her golden jubilee as a religious. Testimonials poured in from many including the missionaries of the West who remembered how she had been the mainspring of works undertaken out West such as St. Boniface General Hospital and the other posts which followed.<sup>18</sup> The period of rejoicing was not a prolonged one, however, for Sister McMullen, the ex-Mother General, died April 7 at the age of 69. The missions had been uppermost in her mind right up to the time of her

death; Archbishop Taché, in homage of her services, offered a funeral Mass for the repose of her soul on April 10.<sup>19</sup>

The Archbishop himself was honoured on June 24 on the 25th anniversary of his being a bishop. It was also his 30th year in the mission field. This double anniversary was celebrated by clergy, laity, religious communities and civic leaders. The St. Jean-Baptiste Society escorted him into the cathedral and Canon Hicks, a representative of Bishop Bourget, presented him with a magnificent organ as a gift from the diocese of Montreal. The thought was expressed that the sound of music coming from the pipe organ would always commemorate the harmony that existed between the brother bishops who had worked together so long.<sup>20</sup> The president of the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Joseph Dubuc, expressed the feelings of everyone when he said: "For twenty-five years your solicitude has extended to everyone of us. Whenever a calamity befell us, you were always there, indefatigable as a pastor, encouraging some, assisting others, bringing our distress to the attention of our brothers in Lower Canada, asking for help which was never refused."<sup>21</sup>

Such joys are often followed by sorrows. So, a short while later, it was learned that Major Forbes, protector of the mission of Fort Totten, had died.<sup>22</sup> Then there came the awful news that the "holy" brother Alexis had been shot by an Indian. The northern missions were plunged into grief, especially the convent of the Holy Angels at Fort Chipewyan, for Brother Alexis had spared no effort in protecting the mission against the snow and the cold. The new missionaries, Sister Brochu and Sister Fournier, with the auxiliary Eugénie Bernier, reached Chipewyan on August 13 to hear the praises of the humble artisan. They were able to see for themselves the furniture he had built with so much ingeniousness.<sup>23</sup> The humble Brother had given the greatest proof of love in the same way as many of those who, day by day, step by step, live their lives in difficult labour so often unrecognized.

Mother Elisabeth Dupuis made her first official visit to the West as superior-general in 1876 in the spring. She needed no convincing that her daughters were heroic. She was not able to visit the far northern posts but she was able to see for herself that her concerns for the foundation of Chipewyan had been legitimate since even at Red River, after 32 years of incredible labours, there were still many privations to be undergone. At Ile-à-la-Crosse the menu consisted of boiled fish; at St. Albert there was a famine which caused people to die of hunger; sometimes the sisters were reduced to eating bannock for the noon meal; the mill had been destroyed in the flood. Bishop Grandin appealed in vain for government aid; no one could escape the frightful storm in which hail, the size of eggs, had damaged the fields. At Lac La Biche progress was so slow that there were thoughts of abandoning it.

Happily, there also existed real successes. The sisters of the convent of St. Norbert were now lodged in a new house which remained modest. Scholarly progress there, as at St. François-Xavier and St. Vital, was notable as mentioned in the official reports of the inspectors. The dear provincial house was filled to capacity while the little hospital, which was never without patients, proved it was too small.<sup>24</sup>

St. Boniface, in 1876, consisted of thirty-five houses grouping forty-five families with a population of 300 persons. Neighbouring Winnipeg had now 5,000 inhabitants. Communication had improved so much across Canada that it was now possible to go from Red River to Montreal in six days.<sup>25</sup>

Mother General arrived June 8 with missionary Sisters Carroll and Janson. They were greeted with joy. The two companions were assigned to Lac La Biche, but Sister Janson's health was already arousing anxiety.<sup>26</sup>

Mother Dupuis went down to Fort Totten, one of the principal reasons for her coming West. There, a

certain gentleman unacceptable to the Sioux, had been appointed successor to Major Forbes but he had to resign and give place to Mr. McLaughlin. Mother General was able to see for herself the poverty of the house which was not really fit to receive pupils. As for the sick, they used to call Sister Lajemmerais "Sergeant" so astonished were they at her competence in the field of remedies. Sister Drapeau added to her duties as cook those of visiting the sick while the admirable Rose Labelle, a jack-of-all-trades, made bread, looked after the laundry and tended to the garden. Above all, the pupils kept coming and provided hope for the transformation which must result from Christian education. Mother Dupuis returned from her journey on August 24, 1876, her heart filled with gratitude.

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It was becoming more and more evident that the second floor of the "men's house", better known as St. Boniface Hospital, was no longer sufficient. In the first year of its foundation, 179 sick persons had been cared for there. Since then, even though every inch of space was used to accommodate two more beds to the original four, the demand for admissions could not be satisfied.<sup>27</sup> That is one reason why it was necessary to extend the program of home visits. Dear Sister Flavie Laurent, humblest of the humble, without suspecting her own abilities took on this ministry in which she was to excel. A journalist was to write in *La Liberté*: "No better choice could ever have been made for this work. She went about clad in a habit which she wore with dignity, goodness and devotion inspiring trust and encouraging confidence as she went everywhere, discerning every need, finding remedies for so many diverse ailments, upholding the weak and failing, bringing consolation to those in grief, bringing food even to those poor people too proud to ask for help."<sup>28</sup> Sister Laurent followed so well the example of Marguerite d'Youville in bringing bread and hope to all of the poor. The little servant of the poor went wherever there was sorrow to assuage and in doing so she gained a

wonderful reputation which she did not seek but which was spontaneously accorded to her by the people.

Meanwhile, it was necessary to give service to the people who went to the hospital where "our Sister Doctor" enlisted the support of the most competent doctors of the capital. Sister Ste-Thérèse was finally able to realize her ambition when in June 1877 the provincial administration acquired the house of Mrs. Hynes Clark at a place across from the mouth of the Assiniboine River. It was a fine residence of 30 by 25 feet, built in 1861 for Louis Thibault, the brother of the vicar general of the diocese. The property was linked to that of the Grey Nuns by a little bridge across Plouffe creek, now Despins Street.<sup>29</sup>

After some repairs and redecorations, the establishment was blessed by Archbishop Taché on July 29 and ten patients were transported there on August 8. Now there was room for ten in-patients, instead of the six in the old place. They occupied the whole of the place, the sisters having to return to the provincial house every evening. During the night their care was left in the hands of a trusted gentleman who was himself infirm in that he had had all his fingers and a part of his hand cut off. These details are set out in a letter from Sister Curran to Mother Dupuis dated September 16.

Such conditions could not prevail for long and soon, in 1878, there was built an adjacent house for the sisters, easing their task but weighing down the budget. Happily the debt contracted with Mrs. Clark required payments of only \$59.00 twice a month.

Mother Dupuis, when she had been in St. Boniface two years ago, had given her approval to the expansions. Now the one who succeeded her at the helm of the Grey ship, Mother Deschamps also gave her full support.<sup>30</sup> The new superior general had already given proof of her prudent audacity during the ten years when she had served in the government of the community from 1853 to 1863. Knowing how the mis



sions were growing both in Canada and the United States, Mother Deschamps wanted to make sure that all the sisters, and especially those in distant places, would be able to take part in the life of the community, in its activities, its joys, its sorrows, its difficulties, its successes. For this purpose she decided that henceforth there would be circular letters<sup>31</sup> sent by means of the improved mail services, to all places where there were Grey Nuns, even in the Far North. This news bulletin was read everywhere with great eagerness, thus reinforcing the bonds of most perfect union recommended by the Foundress.

One of the manuscript letters dated June 28, 1877 brought news of the death of Sister Janson on the preceding 16. The sisters mourned the premature death of this young sister who had been assigned to the mission of Notre Dame des Victoires at Lac La Biche but who would be a missionary only in spirit.

The first circular letter had a report that Lord and Lady Dufferin had visited the St. Boniface orphanage on October 10. No doubt having heard of this establishment, the governor-general made a point to see it. He and his wife were received with pomp. It was Josephine "Petite-Aurore" Nebraska who was chosen to read the address of welcome while wearing a costume of her nation.<sup>32</sup> She said: "I have the honour to speak on behalf of my thirty-nine companions. I am of the Sioux nation. At my right you will see a Saulteaux; on my left a daughter of a Maskegon. Members of eight other nations share in our happiness. You will find in this asylum of peace children of eleven different nationalities." The address was read in perfect French. The distinguished visitor replied in the same language.

At the boarding school, the governor-general listened to a speech in English delivered by Miss Thomas while two pupils presented flowers to Lady and Miss Dufferin.

On October 16th, Mother Hamel left Montreal

where she had attended another general chapter. Along with her came Sister Nolin bound for Ile-a-la-Crosse. They arrived at St. Boniface October 24. As for Sister Clapin, she returned to Fort Totten with Sister Franklin, a new missionary for North Dakota.

The information in the monthly circulars from 1877 to 1880 bore the signature of Sister Malvina Colette who had returned to Montreal from the West October 27, 1875.<sup>33</sup> The choice of this chronicler was wise one for she had worked many years at Red River. She herself had experienced how pleasant it was to read about what was being done not only at the mother house but in whatever latitude Grey Nuns found themselves.

The Grey Nuns, like the other citizens of the west, rejoiced at the completion of the railway between Red River and the United States while they looked forward to the coming of the Canadian Pacific which would stretch from sea to sea. The first locomotive was sent on the steamship, Selkirk, and "everyone at the provincial house" was talking about it.<sup>34</sup> One sister spoke of the immigration the railway would bring but expressed concern that the coming of "civilization" might complicate life.

At the boarding school the first Americans began to arrive. In 1878 the institution was named Taché Academy,<sup>35</sup> a prestigious name for a work which was now able to be self-sufficient financially, thus enabling the Archbishop to devote his resources to the construction of a fine new college which would cost \$51,000.00<sup>36</sup>

The monthly bulletins note from time to time the nomination of priests to various parishes. Father Chevrier became a curé; Mr. Forget was the director of the college, Father Dugas became school inspector and Father Gladu served both as secretary to the Archbishop and chaplain of the hospital.<sup>37</sup>

The hospital was popular but not prosperous; it needed help. Fortunately, benefactors assisted with

collections, one of which was taken among railway workers by Mrs. Houtman who insisted on being accompanied by a Grey Nun. The lot fell to Sister Curran.<sup>38</sup> The alms collected were shared between the hospital and the orphanage which had no independent source of revenue. Here an epidemic of typhoid fever broke out with the loss of one 13-year-old orphan. Those not affected by it were placed in homes while the building was transformed into an infirmary. Sister Boire herself contracted the illness and it was dear Sister St-Joseph who nursed her back to health. It was said that Sister St-Joseph regained her youth while lavishing care on her beloved orphans.<sup>39</sup>

While the epidemic was running its course, and while "our sister-doctor" was laid up by reason of an attack of erysipelas,<sup>40</sup> the news came that Sister Charlebois was coming for a visitation of the missions in the West. This time she intended to include in her visit a trip even to the Far North. She came, accompanied by Sister Derome, who was assigned to St. Boniface. The unaccustomed swiftness of travel caused inconveniences because now sometimes people arrived sooner than expected. Sister Charlebois found everything locked up when she knocked at the doors of the provincial house at midnight between August 29 and 30. Sister Hamel called out, "Who is there?" "Grey Nuns from Montreal." "It can't be. The bishop says they are not coming until tomorrow." "Never mind what the bishop said. Since we are here, open the doors." This incident caused merriment to everyone except perhaps poor Sister Hamel who had prepared a grand reception for the visitors."<sup>41</sup>

Sister Hamel spared no effort when it came to receiving the worthy visitor whose coming was announced for the spring of 1880. Mother Deschamps left Montreal May 24 in the company of Sister Arsenault and Sister Giquello, these last two bringing to seventy-two the number of Grey Nuns spread out in institutions as far away as the United States and in what would one day become Alberta.

It was the valiant Bretonne, Sister Giquello, who kept the journal of this trip. She had been recruited by Bishop Faraud in one of his visits to France and greatly desired to become a missionary in the Canadian Far North. The sisters reached Fort Totten May 30 after the obligatory stop at Jamestown. The chronicler noted, "Nothing disturbs the silence of the vast prairies, not even the singing of little birds." When finally they saw a white house which Mr. McLaughlin said was the convent, Sister Giquello wrote it was impossible to express the feelings "in our hearts."

They were surprised to see the military bearing of thirty-three little Indian boys and as many fine Indian girls. The Sioux had come in great numbers to see "the mother of all sisters." Mother General placed on the altar a little statue of Our Lady of Providence before whom the first Grey Nuns had vowed themselves to the Lord. They greeted Father Claude of the Benedictine of Meinard who replaced Father Bonin at Totten on account of the latter's ill health. At 4:30 p.m. there was Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, preceded by an unplanned wedding ceremony. A young man who wished to marry one of the pupils had been told by Major McLaughlin the wedding could take place as soon as he had built a suitable shelter for himself and his bride. Now his cabin had been finished and it was necessary to fulfil the promise made to him.

The work in North Dakota had overcome the first difficulties, especially the lack of trust and the indiscipline of the children of the woods. By this time, the level of learning was a source of pride for the sisters. Two wings had been added to the school and one of these served as a hospital which enabled the sisters to work more directly with the adults. All these details were eagerly observed by Sister Giquello and Sister Arsenault for their journey from Montreal ended at Totten where the former was to serve ten years and the latter for thirty-five years.<sup>42</sup>

Mother General wrote: "I am filled with astonishment to see the changes that have been brought about in the woods of Dakota. My heart is full of happiness when I look at the good which has been done by our sisters. In six years they have received almost three hundred pupils who have been baptized and given the principles of primary instruction. The Sioux child is no different from others, except for colour. They tell me they are delighted to learn, especially of things of the spirit."<sup>43</sup>

Mother Deschamps left June 15 with Sister Lajemmerais who needed a rest. "With tears the sisters separated; the first miles separating Totten from St. Boniface were travelled in silence." This time, Sister Hamel was careful to be at the station on June 16 but, as luck would have it, the train did not arrive until the 18th. Fortunately the station was not far since it occupied some of the land of the archdiocese near the sisters' convent.<sup>44</sup> The evening of the arrival was magnificent with all the children and adults gathered at the entrance to the garden, all on their best behaviour, with Archbishop Tache there to hail the arrival of Mother General.

Celebrations continued the next day for the orphans and the boarding school pupils as well as those in all the institutions visited: the schools at St. François-Xavier, St. Norbert and St. Vital; the hospital where Sister Cleary had replaced Sister Ste-Thérèse. A telegram caused a commotion since it arrived on the anniversary of the dispatch received in 1872 announcing the death of Mother Slocombe. This time news came that the Constitutions of the Grey Nuns had received the formal approval of Rome. The Grey Nuns of Montreal were now definitively a Pontifical congregation. Everyone recalled all the encouragement that had been given by Bishop Bourget who had resigned his functions on June 22, 1876<sup>45</sup> and who was now living in retirement at Sault-au-Récollet. A message of gratitude was forwarded to him.

It was at one of the ceremonies of rejoicing

that Archbishop Taché revealed to the sisters the secret about Mother Deschamps: as a young sister she had wanted to volunteer to be among the heroic women of the West but had been advised not to do so.

Mother General herself shared her impressions at St. Boniface and its works: "St. Boniface is very much like Ile Saint-Bernard at Chateauguy, especially the places around the mission lands. The cathedral is only a few steps away; its interior decoration is pleasant and appropriate. The provincial house is of white wood with a very pleasing exterior.<sup>46</sup> I never expected to see the Archbishop and our sisters in such well-built houses, while a fine new college is in the process of being completed."

If Mother Deschamps showed some surprise at the development of the works, she was not surprised at the devotion of the sisters among whom reigned simplicity, order and regularity. Two of the pioneers, Sister St-Joseph and Sister Lafrance, were still living; Mother General had not seen the former for twenty-six years; as for the latter, seventeen years had gone by since they had met together at the general chapter of 1863. How many souvenirs were evoked at the happy meetings which Divine Providence had arranged after so many years of separation.

The happy days passed by quickly. Soon, on July 28, Father Forget was celebrating Mass asking the Lord to grant a safe return journey to the most honoured Grey Nun. On the way back to Montreal Mother General stopped at Toledo where Sister Sobien-sky was working after twenty-six years in Manitoba.<sup>47</sup>

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The novitiate, which was closed for five years, reopened its doors on August 25, 1880. Now there were three novices in St. Boniface: Miss Brabant, Miss Samson and Miss Parent. Sister Lamy was the novice director assisted by Sister O'Brien. Two other postulants soon joined. There was thus good hope for the future but much time would have to



elapse until the candidates were ready to be ranked among the missionaries. Meanwhile, reinforcements came from Montreal, Sisters Trudeau and Deneau who arrived on January 28, 1881 followed by Sisters Fontaine-Maugras and Beaudoin-Despins in the autumn.

Mother Deschamps, during her visit the previous year, had written: "I thought of Sister Charlebois and her two companions, of Sister Lemay and Sister Massé on the road to Lake Athabaska and Sister Diquière and Sister Lavoie who went to St. Albert. Seven Grey Nuns were travelling at the same time not in search of gold but to do something for the glory of God whom they wished to serve in His poor, His uninstructed and His most disadvantaged."<sup>48</sup>

Sister Charlebois was faithful to give a full account of what she saw during the two years of her visitation of the Far North. She had no hesitation in praising what was being done in those remote corners of the world.<sup>49</sup> "The Kingdom of God advances," she wrote in her diary, excerpts from which were sent regularly to the mother house. She expressed surprise at how well the pupils were doing both at Saint-Albert School and the one at Lac La Biche. "I wish that the benefactors of our missions could see them." As for the post of Chipewyan, the visitor thought the situation was beyond her hopes. "The agent, Mr. MacFarlane, does much for our sisters. It is good to have a former pupil employed by the powerful Hudson Bay Company."

It was August 28, 1880, the thirteenth anniversary of its foundation, that she herself went down the MacKenzie River to see the Far North. Mother General had informed Bishop Faraud and Bishop Clut that the general council would have to reconsider the position of its northern posts depending on the findings of Sister Charlebois as visitor. She passed on her impressions to the general council: "Our sisters have many privations to endure and much weariness to put up with. There are times when they have hardly the barest of essentials and sometimes their food is lacking in nourishment, but I do not

think we are at the point where this work should be abandoned." Recognizing the failing health of Sister Lapointe, she thought it prudent to substitute Sister Ward in her place as superior, and she also obtained agreement that the sisters would no longer be involved in fishing or harvesting or haying. She said these young women had been doing physical work beyond their strength.

For his part, Bishop Faraud who deplored the absence of help from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith decided to give up the work at Providence. The missionaries were told they should leave with Sister Charlebois and take advantage of the spring boats. But the letter from the Bishop came three days after the departure of Sister Charlebois. So it was that Divine Providence took care of earthly Providence. The difficulties were resolved with the help of Archbishop Taché and no doubt by the prayers of the missionaries. One of them wrote, "We have been begging all the saints in heaven to intercede so that our death sentence will be revoked." Her letter confirmed the opinion of Sister Charlebois who told Mother General: "You have really admirable daughters there. They are willing to undergo whatever hardships come their way."

Sister Charlebois returned to St. Boniface October 10, stopping at Ile-à-la-Crosse August 4 after a seven-week trip. It is probably while there that she decided to recommend that the northern missions should be attached to the provincial administration of St. Albert.

At St. Boniface, she noted that Sister St-Joseph, Sister Lafrance and Sister Cusson were failing badly but still holding on valiantly. Following the example of Mother General, she was delighted at the sight of the magnificent edifice in the little village. St. Boniface now had its own college.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, Father Forget, the Grey Nuns' protégé, was unable to carry on the function of director as had been anticipated, since he died the previous June 9.<sup>51</sup>

When Sister Charlebois returned to Montreal on October 29, 1881, she had been away for two years. As a member of the General Council, she strongly supported the project proposed by Archbishop Taché to the superior general to build a boarding school separate from the provincial house<sup>52</sup> on the site of the 1868 structure.<sup>53</sup> This latter building would be moved near the dear "white house" to become the orphanage, known as the "yellow house". Eventually, this building would be transformed into a novitiate to accommodate the increasing number of recruits to the religious life.<sup>54</sup> At this time there were three new novices, Louise Couture, Josephine Deschambault and Héloïse Prince who would in the near future take on the torch from retiring sisters.

One of those who died was eulogized January 16. She was the "fille donnée" Marie-Anne Payé who had given thirty-two years of her life to the work at St. Boniface. "Strong, robust, big in stature, this pious woman had devoted herself to the most difficult tasks whether indoors or outside. She was as skillful with the axe and the scythe as in growing flowers. And everyone saw in her an angelic piety." Her death was gentle and peaceful. The Archbishop celebrated a funeral Mass for this soul who was completely dedicated to the service of the poor.<sup>55</sup>

Another courageous worker followed soon after her. It was Sister Hedwige Lafrance who had acquired the art of doing good without making a big fuss. On the morning of March 20, during Mass which she was following from the chapel balcony, the dear sister expired gently "like a child who goes to sleep in the arms of the best of Fathers." For this humble soul, the Lord reserved a great triumph. The funeral Mass offered by Father McCarthy had eleven priests present in the sanctuary while a large crowd rendered a tribute of admiration. She would be the first to be buried at the cemetery near the cathedral.<sup>56</sup> Had she died a month later, her body might have sustained the same complications that Mother Valade had, for the Red River once again flooded over violently, carrying away a third of the bridge.

The water rose so rapidly that it was thought best to move the five patients from the hospital to the dear old house. The poor patients, absolutely incapacitated, showed their astonishment when they saw that their stretcher-bearers were Archbishop Taché and Father Dufresne. Sister Cleary and Sister Ste-Anne took the last boat to leave the hospital. Hearing cries of alarm, they asked the boatmen to go to the help of two people who appeared to be drowning. From the landing it was impossible to say for sure what was happening; some thought the sisters themselves had fallen overboard. But no, they escaped misfortune and were able to save those who needed rescue after risking overloading the boat. The Protestant newspapers spoke of this act as heroic although the sisters were conscious only of doing their duty.<sup>57</sup>

The flood waters receded in time to allow construction to proceed as scheduled on the new boarding school. The foundations were begun May 1 and the first stone placed on July 16 in the presence of Sister Lapointe who had returned from the Far North two weeks earlier. At the sight of the dimensions of the new building, 100 feet by 50, with running water, central heat and four stories high,<sup>58</sup> she undoubtedly contrasted it with the tiny convent at Providence where she had left her hard-working companions. She was given charge of St. Vital School on an interim basis. This woman, whom Mother Slocombe had called a real treasure, readily adapted to her new situation. She was thus a typical Grey Nun who learns to serve in the limelight equally as well as in the shadows. This was the message given December 24 to the new recruits, Sister Brabant, Sister Samson and Sister Parent, as they consecrated themselves to the Lord. Following the established rule, these three young sisters started out their religious work at the provincial house assisting at the neighbouring houses, among others at the orphanage which celebrated its 25th anniversary to the great joy of Sister Saint-Joseph who had been in charge of the work since 1858.<sup>59</sup> This was the last celebration at the old building for in September the

new boarding school was occupied. The Grey Nuns now established what was officially entitled a normal school<sup>60</sup> as recommended by Mr. J. Royal, the superintendent for Catholic schools. The new normal school was given formal approval by the Board of Education and Sister Royal was named principal with five worthy teachers of outstanding reputation. There were sixty boarders and two hundred and fifty day students. Sister Reid, the treasurer general, admired this vast convent on a visit to St. Boniface; she also recognized the important role played by the small hospital as well as by the adjoining section devoted to contagious diseases.<sup>61</sup> The patients had recently had the pleasure of a visit from a very famous person, Madame Albani, of international repute, who had sung just for them; for the moment, they were able to imagine themselves in heaven, as one patient put it.<sup>62</sup>

Certainly the works planned for 1883 left no place for inaction. However, yet another work was to be undertaken. At Pointe-au-Chêne, renamed Ste-Anne-des-Chênes, there were requests for the Grey Nuns ever since 1864.<sup>63</sup> Father Le Floch, a native of Brittany, had built a chapel there dedicated to Ste. Anne; hence the new name of the settlement. In 1870, Father Louis-Raymond Giroux, a young priest ordained by Bishop Grandin two years earlier, took over responsibility for the parish along with serving the village of St. Vital. He had also replaced Father Forget on an interim basis as director of St. Boniface College.

At the request of Archbishop Taché, Sister Charlebois had visited the projected establishment in 1873.<sup>64</sup> She gave a favourable report. The federal government had built a house for emigrants, a big place on the Pele hill, moved then to a place near the Hudson Bay Company store. When the railways were built, the Dawson Road became practically useless and the house was given over to vandalism. The situation was clarified thanks to the intervention of Mr. Joseph Royal. Government leaders were under the impression that the sisters had already occupied the



house under oral permission given about fifteen months prior. A formal contract now confirmed this understanding. Father Giroux then decided to transport the house once again, this time to a place near the parish chapel.

The anxious parishioners organized a bee to ensure that the sisters were able to move in as soon as possible in the spring of 1882. At Ste-Anne-des-Chênes, the services of the first teachers were very much appreciated (Miss J.B. Gauthier succeeded by Mr. Théophile Paré), but the coming of the Grey Nuns seemed to give assurance for the future. Since it was impossible to supply sisters that fall of 1882, it was decided to hire Mr. Arthur Lacerte who moved into the house with his family and organized a class in one of its big rooms.

It was August 22 of the following year before the arrival of the long-awaited teachers. The parish bell was rung and a parade was organized for the welcoming of Sister Lapointe, Sister O'Brien and Sister Lagarde who were escorted by Sister Lamy, by Sister Reid representing Mother Deschamps and by the Ste-Anne-des-Chênes recruit, Sister Desautels. After benediction the sisters moved in and set immediately to work. In the early days they had to take their meals at the priest's house but they were all settled in by August 26. The numbers of pupils were so great that it was necessary to have a fourth teacher. Sister Brouillet joined the team.<sup>65</sup>

Another boarding school had thus been set up giving promise of apostolic and pedagogical success. The pupils were studious and the parents cooperated fully in the work of education.

In another school far away, where the seeds of faith had been sown in tears in a new land at Ile-à-la-Crosse, there died at the end of 1883, on December 27, the beloved Sister Marguerite-Marie, the name taken by little Sister Sara Riel in 1872 when she had been cured of a seemingly mortal illness through the intercession of Blessed Marguerite-Marie, the apostle



of the Sacred Heart. She had prayed to this saint on the advice of Father Legeard, saying that she wanted to give everything of herself in the service of God. She was cured instantaneously. There were many witnesses. She herself explained her new name in a letter to her mother and to her brother, Louis Riel: "Now I have something to tell you. I hope you will understand and that you will not be upset by the promise I have made. I have promised to give up my name as well as my life to work in the land of cold snows. Sister Riel will no longer live by that name except in the thoughts of a mother, a brother and a family who love her tenderly. I have promised Blessed Marguerite-Marie to take her name. The next time you write me, do so in the name of Sister Marguerite-Marie. Do not be concerned; I will never be ashamed of my name. God knows how dear it is to me, but the time has come when I must sacrifice everything to Him."<sup>66</sup>

The dying sister had indeed given up everything to God, even to the extent of foregoing listening to the last letters which her family sent her so that she could devote her last days entirely to God while praying to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.<sup>67</sup>

Mother Deschamps in a letter to Bishop Faraud on the following February 19 wrote: "I understand the grief of her companions and I share in it fully. But for this good child there is a homecoming into heaven. Her last moments were very edifying as were all the days of her life so full of sacrifice." This was an opinion shared by both Catholics and Protestants at Ile-à-la-Crosse who joined together to show their respect, esteem and veneration. All participated in a Requiem Mass and escorted her remains to the cemetery despite an intense cold. Archbishop Taché, on his way through Montreal, offered Mass at the mother house on February 23 for the repose of the soul of this young sister who had died at the age of 35.

Two years later, in 1885, an anonymous pen wrote in the chronicles: "God was so good to call

poor Sister Sara Riel to be with Him and thus spared her the anguish and torture which would have filled her heart at the sad end reserved for her brother, Louis."

- 1       Chronicles, St. Bon., Vol.II, p. 484.
- 2       Biography of Mother Hamel.
- 3       Letters from St. Bon. 1861-1877, p. 234(1).
- 4       Chronicles ASGM at St. Bon., Vol. III, p. 55.  
The capital was soon to have hotels and res-  
taurants to accommodate the ministers.
- 5       Details extracted from documents of Couvent des  
Saints Anges, Chipewyan.
- 6       Lesage, op.cit., pp. 117-118. Devotion to the  
Sacred Heart was strong in the Canadian North.
- 7       Biography of Sr. Dudemaine. She reached St.  
Bon. in 1871. At first she taught in St.  
François-Xavier, then entered the novitiate and  
made her profession March 19, 1875.
- 8       These deaths occurred in 1874 and 1875.
- 9       Sr. Grandin was first sent to Alberta. She had  
the privilege of assisting her saintly uncle  
Bishop Grandin, who passed away June 3, 1902.  
In 1909, she went to Mackenzie. In 1912,  
having returned to Montreal, she was assigned  
to the role of treasurer for the northern  
missions.
- 10      Concerning Devil's Lake, Sr. Slocombe remarked,  
"This name is not very appealing!"
- 11      Sr. Charlebois' journal, April 29, 1871.  
Bishop Grace had ceded this part of his diocese  
to Bishop Taché because it was very close to  
Manitoba.
- 12      Guichon, Sr. M., op.cit., pp. 44-45.
- 13      Mother E. McMullen was the daughter of John  
Forbes. As it was customary in the community,  
she had to adopt another name because two of

her sisters had preceded her in the novitiate.

14 These details and the following, unless it is stated otherwise, are extracted from Sr. Drapeau's biographical note.

15 The last two had been with the first group of the tertiary order of St. Francis, Dec. 23, 1863. Sr. P. Drapeau entered the Grey Nuns' novitiate and pronounced her vows on April 2, 1868. Sr. Rose Labelle, for her part, joined as an auxiliary sister under the name of Sr. Pacifique.

16 The notes concerning A. Forget are taken from the ASGM documents.

17 Letter dated Jan. 19, 1875. Letters to St. Boniface, 1861-1877, p. 235.

18 Anc. J., Vol.III, p. 383.

19 Ibid., p. 387.

20 Pouliot, L. Mgr. Bourget et la mission de la R.-R., pp. 27-28. The year before, Bishop Bourget had invited the Catholic population of Montreal to offer this gift to the archbishop of St. Boniface "in order to congratulate him for his role during the troubled times in Manitoba."

21 Chronicles, ASGM, St. Bon., 1869-1883, Vol. III, p. 172.

22 Anc. J. Vol. III, p. 398. The major died four months after his cousin, Mother McMullen.

23 Mitchell, Sr. E., Le Soleil brille à minuit, p. 83.

24 Details from documents pertaining to the different missions.

- 25 Benoit, op.cit., Vol. II, p. 300 and p. 304.
- 26 Biographical note on Sr. Janson.
- 27 Chronicles, ASGM, St. Bon., 1869-1883, Vol. III, p. 107.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 The details concerning the hospital are extracted from that institution's file at the ASGM.
- 30 At the Chapter of Oct. 1877, Mother Dupuis had let the capitulants know that her health was failing and had asked them not to think of her for a second term of office.
- 31 The monthly newsletters were called "circulaires mensuelles" until 1917. After that date, they were called annals.
- 32 Josephine was Adèle Nebraska's younger sister. When Mother McMullen visited the Red River in 1859-1860, she accepted to be Adèle's godmother. In 1877, both godmother and goddaughter were dead.
- 33 Letters from St. Bon., 1861-1877, p. 224(2).
- 34 Morice, "Église catholique Ouest canadien", Vol. II, p. 416.
- 35 Primeau, "Centenaire des srs gr.", p. 6. Some of the Protestant families in Winnipeg did not hesitate to send their daughters to the academy.
- 36 Bernier, A., S.J., op.cit., pp. 15-16. The funds to pay for this construction were obtained by selling some of the land belonging to the church.
- 37 Chronicles, ASGM, St. Boniface, Vol. II, p.582.

- 38 Ibid., pp. 583-584. The employees constructing the new railway also benefitted from the hospital when they needed health care.
- 39 Circ. mens., 1877-1880, pp. 458-459.
- 40 Contracted when taking care of a patient. De Moissac, Sr. E., op.cit., p. 150.
- 41 Circ. mens., 1877-1880, pp. 416-417.
- 42 ASGM, sisters' files.
- 43 Letter dated June 1880, partially quoted in Circ. mens., 1877-1880, pp. 574-575.
- 44 Letter dated June 1880.
- 45 Anc. J., Vol. III, p. 427.
- 46 The house was later covered with planks and attic windows built in.
- 47 Sr. Curran to mother house, July 28, 1880.
- 48 Letter, June 1880, quoted in Circ. mens., 1877-1880, p. 577. The seven travelling sisters included the sup. gen. and her companion.
- 49 The facts concerning the northern establishments were taken from Mitchell, Sr. E., "Le Soleil brille à minuit", pp. 85ff.
- 50 Circ. mens., 1881-1884, p. 176.
- 51 For a time after his arrival in the west, it was thought that Father Adolphe Forget had been cured of epilepsy, however, he died after several seizures.
- 52 Many improvements had been made to provide more room; the stone fireplaces and chimneys had been demolished and replaced by smaller ones, made of brick, but still the sisters ran out of



- space for all the activities in progress.  
Circ. mens., 1881-1884, p. 120.
- 53 Letter by Mgr. Taché to Mother Deschamps, Sept.  
28, 1881.
- 54 Sr. Charlebois to Mother Deschamps, Oct. 12,  
1881.
- 55 Circ. mens., 1881-1884, pp. 316-317.
- 56 ASGM, Sisters' files. The remains of the other  
sisters who had been buried in the basement  
vault were later to be translated to the ceme-  
tery.
- 57 Sr. Curran to the mother house, April 25,  
1882.
- 58 De Moissac, Sr. E., op.cit., p. 177.
- 59 Circ. mens., 1881-1883, p. 543. In the old  
hospital or "men's house", some senior ladies  
were lodged.
- 60 Tessier-Biron, op.cit., p. 169. The Manitoba  
government granted scholarships equivalent to  
the amount needed for board and room, or for  
half that amount.
- 61 Circ. mens., 1881-1883, p. 551.
- 62 Maurault, O., "Marges d'Histoire", Vol. II, pp.  
191-192.
- 63 Benoit, op.cit., Vol. I, pp. 366-367.
- 64 This had been a very brief visit after the  
election of Mother Dupuis.
- 65 Sr. Lapointe left Ste. Anne in 1884 and was  
replaced as superior by Sr. O'Brien.
- 66 Letter reproduced in Mrs. Mary Jordan's volume,

"To Louis from Your Sister..." pp. 148-151.

67 Chronicles, Ile-à-la-Crosse Convent, p. 16.

## CHAPTER SEVEN - 1884-1893

A great occurrence at the mother house in January 1884 intensified the missionary spirit of all the Grey Nuns. Prompted by providential circumstances, the general council decided to submit to Rome the cause of the beatification of Mother d'Youville.<sup>1</sup> The hand of Providence is easily seen in this step since it was suggested to the sisters by the distinguished visitor, Bishop Henri Smeulders, who had come from Rome. Who would have thought that this Papal delegate, who was sent to resolve the difficulties in establishing a branch of Laval University in Montreal, would introduce the subject of Mother d'Youville's possible beatification?

The apostolic Commissioner visited the general hospital at Montreal on December 23, 1883. The annalist recorded: "He was persuaded by all he heard to praise very highly the works that owed their origin to Mother d'Youville and advised us to present the cause of our venerated mother to Rome. His words made a deep impression on all our hearts."

Bishop Bourget had many times talked of this possibility as did Bishop Fabre and the members of his council. Father Harel, the chancellor, gave assurance that the cause was good and would have a strong chance of success.<sup>2</sup>

Mother Deschamps consulted with the Archbishop of St. Boniface on this subject. Mother d'Youville was a distant relative to Mgr Taché who was in full accord with the project. Mr. M.C. Bonnissant, Sulpician, was entrusted with the cause as postulator in Canada. The Roman canon lawyer in charge of the cause of Mother Bourgeoys, Mr. Minetti, suggested to Father Harel that the body of Mother d'Youville be placed in a vault constructed for this purpose.

So it was that on January 17, 1884 the remains of reverend Mother d'Youville were deposited in the crypt of the chapel.<sup>3</sup> During the prayerful service, there were many eloquent speeches about the virtues

of the foundress. The speakers stressed that she was a mother of universal charity, charity extended to all without regard to race, colour or creed. She had not left her native city during her life, but all those who were in need found a welcome wherever she and her daughters were.

What a wonderful example to stimulate and encourage all those among her daughters who had the privilege of going to make God known in distant places! An assignment to these missions was regarded in this way by the twelve sisters who were named for this work on March 4, 1884, and whose departure, except for one, was set for May 21.<sup>4</sup> They journeyed with Father Lacombe and Father Desroches as well as the former vicar of Chambly, Father M.G. Dugas.<sup>5</sup> Among these eleven Grey Nuns there was only one who was over forty years of age; the rest were between twenty-one and thirty. Six had only one year of service in the congregation but all had the conviction that the cross is inseparable from apostolic labour. They had all read of the heroic actions in the North, in the West and in Dakota. The Sioux mission, ravaged by fire, had risen from its ruins slowly. The fire was March 16, 1883. The sisters had had to submit to many privations, even sleeping on the floor and having to stand in line for food since there was only one refectory and utensils were rare. The sisters were allowed to stay at the priests' house while the priests temporarily returned to their old shack in which they had lived. These conditions were destined to last for three whole years. The disaster produced some good results however. Some of the Sioux who had been stand-offish showed themselves very sympathetic. They gave Sister Page the nickname, "Iron Heart." Another, seeing Sister Allard shivering, told her to take shelter and he would assume personally the work she had been doing.<sup>6</sup> Others expressed their concern in picturesque language: "It is just as if our own house had burned down." One said, "This head with its strong voice (he was speaking of the bell) has become silent. It used to lift spirits but now it has gone to sleep without any life left."<sup>7</sup>

The attitude of the Sioux was commented on by Major Cramsie in a report to Mr. Price, head of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. "In their misfortune, the sisters can take consolation from the way in which the Indians have hastened from all parts to give witness to their sympathy while the parents show great anxiety at the possibility that the sisters will go away."<sup>8</sup>

As they proceeded on their way, each sister was able to imagine for herself what things would be like once her destination was reached. But sometimes expectations were not met. In particular, tragic ends were rarely foreseeable. The sisters would see that for themselves in the near future. Sister Columbine and Sister Boursier set out for the Far North while Sister St-Charles and Sister St-Pierre went toward Chipewyan. The convent at St. Albert was to receive Sister Marie-des-Anges and Sister Marie-du-Crucifix. Sister Hearn accompanied the new superior of Ile-à-la-Crosse, Sister Brassard. They were to discover that a timetable for travel purposes had not yet been stabilized.

The new posts were now established with the participation of Sisters Lalumière, Bergeron, St-Arnaud and Thiffault, as well as Sisters Guénette and Ste-Genevieve who came from St. Albert. One of these posts was at High River or Dunbow (in what is Alberta); the other was at Qu'Appelle (now in Saskatchewan).

For some years now Archbishop Taché and Bishop Grandin, as well as the tireless Father Lacombe, had planned to set up industrial schools for young natives. They came to the conclusion that the only effective way of preparing them for life would be to group pupils together in a residential school where it would be possible to give them a solid education while teaching them also skills and trades for the future. Lieutenant-Governor Dewdney gave authorization for this new kind of work and the federal government at Ottawa provided a yearly grant proportional to the number of pupils.<sup>9</sup>

Archbishop Taché had suggested that the schools should start out with girls since it was very important to train them in domestic skills so as to assist farmers in their cultivation of the land.<sup>10</sup> However, the boys were given precedence.

Sister Guénette and Sister Ste-Geneviève went to Fort Calgary on August 24 and were joined two weeks later by Sister Thiffault and the fille donnée, Josephine Dubé. The school at High River (Dunbow) was not yet ready and the Archbishop offered to give them a tour to the Rocky Mountains. The provincial chronicler complains they did not send back any description of the indescribable scenery.

This was an unexpected holiday but a beneficial one since it was over the sisters rarely had rest. Work was finally completed and the school was able to open October 17. It was called St. Joseph of Dunbow and was devoted to the Blackfoot Indians.<sup>11</sup> It was not easy to accustom these little Blackfeet, eager for freedom, to the discipline of a residential school, but no effort was spared in the expectation that one day a transformation would be achieved. The beauty of the site compensated for its distance from Calgary. One could not suspect that this distance would prove to be a real advantage in the near future.

As to the post at Qu'Appelle, it had long had the attention of Archbishop Taché since 1864. Having seen the beauty of the site in that year, he recognized as a result of information from the Crees that he was standing on the bank of a river where formerly his granduncles, the sons of La Verendrye, had built a fort. This experience inspired him to establish there the new mission he had in mind. Father Ritchot was sent there first followed by Father Decorby and by Father Hugonard who in 1884 was still presiding over it. Mr. Preston, the son of an English lord, assisted the missionary.

The school at Qu'Appelle, like its "neighbour" of Dunbow, had not yet been completed when Sisters



Lalumière, Bergeron and St-Arnaud arrived October 23. They moved into the school in December but they did not receive their first pupil until spring. No one had any idea of the events that were going to occur in the near future.

Yet since 1883 there were many signs of dissatisfaction in the West. In January the people of St. Albert sent Father Leduc, O.M.I. and Mr. Dan Mahoney to Ottawa to discuss the grievances they felt. The Métis were anxious to obtain title to the lands which they occupied.<sup>12</sup> A few months later Bishop Grandin tried to warn the authorities of the possibility of an uprising similar to that of 1870.<sup>13</sup> The Bishop of St. Albert spoke of the likelihood of a coalition between Métis and Indians. Riel was by now exercising considerable influence among them. He had returned to his native land.<sup>14</sup>

The most sombre predictions were realized at the beginning of March, on the 4th. The telegraph which now stretched from Pacific to Atlantic<sup>15</sup> announced to the Métis they would have their titles, but it was too late. Rebellion spread like wild fire. On April 2, the 65th battalion with three hundred soldiers was despatched from Montreal.<sup>16</sup> Frog Lake was the scene of the killing of several whites including Father Fafard and Father Marchand.

The newspapers of Montreal were filled with information, much of it contradictory. The news filled the Grey Nuns with alarm and anguish.<sup>17</sup> Sister Shanessy and Sister Tobin, with the Franciscan tertiary, Druais, had just left for the West. Mother Deschamps was worried about what might happen to them. She inquired of Bishop Taché whether they could be intercepted and kept at St. Boniface and whether the sisters could be withdrawn from Dunbow and Qu'Appelle; she received a reassuring answer by wire; the danger had passed.

But Bishop Grandin was able to give first-hand news and it was not reassuring. On April 8 he wrote: "Our poor country is in the midst of a civil war...I

am very disturbed about what may happen to the missions and missionaries in the districts of Assiniboia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. The telegraph lines have been cut... I am not fearful of the loss of our lives, but there is a real danger to our properties. The Indian school at Calgary (Dunbow) is vulnerable and people tell me that the school at Battleford has already been destroyed."

News of this kind persuaded Mother Deschamps to make immediate preparations to go West herself. But Sister Curran reported, "Here in St. Boniface we have no knowledge whatsoever either of war or rebellion other than what we learn from dispatches published in Montreal! We have no worries about the safety of the sisters in the North-West."

This feeling of assurance faded when news came at the end of May of the tragedy of Frog Lake and especially when a letter was received from Sister Youville, superior of the mission at Lac La Biche. She wrote, "Frog Lake is only a three-day walk from here. If the chief of the Crees of White Fish Lake had joined with the barbarians, it is likely we would be captives if not corpses... We do not know what will happen next... Bishop Faraud has been thinking of sending us away from the mission but, unfortunately, he has no idea where he could hide us."

This appalling news would have put an end to any doubts Mother General had about going West, but Archbishop Taché himself appeared at Montreal and visited the mother house while he attended the funeral Mass of his dear old friend, Bishop Bourget, whose career had come to an end on June 8.<sup>18</sup> The deceased bishop had always been a benefactor of the Riel family; Archbishop Taché himself had sent Louis East to get a college education. Mother Deschamps had met Louis and had been responsible for having him live at the old mother house while pursuing his studies.<sup>19</sup> Bishop Bourget, like Louis' dear sister Marguerite-Marie, died before learning of the sad end of his protégé.

Archbishop Taché was very upset and concerned at the troubles overwhelming his vast Archdiocese. For her part, Mother Deschamps repeated the recommendation always placed before Grey Nuns: "We must not mix up in questions of justice, of civil right and civil wrong. Our hearts as Sisters of Charity must be inclined to relieve whatever suffering we come across and, if we have any preference or choice of whom to serve, we must be open to the most unfortunate, the ones least favoured."

To encourage the sisters of the West in their difficulties, Mother Deschamps finally made up her mind that she must go there herself and she set out for Red River on June 15. She had not thought she would go back there so soon after her trip of 1880. Since there was reason to believe that the crisis on the North Saskatchewan River had now passed, Mother Deschamps took the opportunity of her trip to visit other missions as well as Red River. She was accompanied by Sister Mongrain, assigned to Dunbow, and Sister Drapeau who was returning to her dear Sioux. They stopped at Totten where the superior general was able to see the fine house being built. On July 8 at St. Boniface there were thirty-seven professed sisters and eleven novices to meet her in joy. Among these was the first Sioux sister, Josephine Nebraska, who had joined the novitiate on October 25 of the preceding year.

During her journey Mother General learned, as did those of the mother house, of the events that took place at Lac La Biche and at Ile-à-la-Crosse. The sisters had had to flee these missions. The sisters of Lac La Biche took refuge on an unnamed island during the night of April 28-29. Sister Youville had insisted on having a rope tied around her waist because of the thinness of the ice. She said, "At least they will be able to fish me out if I should fall in." The exodus from Ile-à-la-Crosse took place the same day. They went to Ile-aux-Anglais (English Island) which they renamed for the occasion "Ile-à-la-Sainte-Croix" (Island of the Holy Cross). There they lived like the natives until the

end of May.

On their return from exile, they found that all the fields had been sown and the gardens planted by the faithful which was good proof that their twenty-five years of apostolic ministry had not been wasted.

Before leaving their refuge, a cross was planted there with this inscription in the Montagnais language: "Here on this island the Fathers, Sisters, Brothers and company agents, threatened by the approach of rebel Crees, came to seek refuge in the midst of their allies the Montagnais. In memory of this stay with them this cross has been erected with thanksgiving to God."<sup>20</sup>

Mother General did not delay her journey to St. Albert except to stop briefly at Dunbow on July 27. The humble convent had served as a refuge for people from Edmonton, Lamoureux and Namao. Since there had not been room for all, tents had been put up on the grounds.<sup>21</sup> The people were saying that only one man had been able to quell the storm, Bishop Grandin. The arrival of the troops re-established order. Corpus Christi, the feast of the Body of Christ, was celebrated that year with unequalled fanfare: "At the head of the procession rode the Métis on horseback, then the cross, banners, little angels clad in white, finally the Monstrance escorted by soldiers, the officers having swords drawn."<sup>22</sup>

These recent memories were recounted to Mother Deschamps who listened to them with great attention. On July 29 she had the pleasure to receive three sisters from Lac La Biche: Sisters Youville, Sicard and Carroll. Sister Youville was later to write that it was the greatest happiness of her mission life to find herself rejoined with her sisters in the presence of their mother general whom they had never expected to see again. Their only sorrow was that they could not share that event with the sisters from Ile-à-la-Crosse and even the Far North.

These sunny days had their shadows. Sister

Emery, the foundress of the Albertan convent, was at the end of her career. She had ardently looked forward to the visit of Mother General, now she chanted her Nunc dimittis. On August 5, at dawn, she peacefully entered into eternal life at the age of 58, having been a sister 36 years. Sister Emery's bodily remains now rested near those of Sister Alphonse who, having completed her mission, had preceded her in death.

On August 11, the sisters went back to Lac La Biche except for Sister Sicard who was replaced by Sister Blanchet.

Bishop Grandin took advantage of the presence of Mother General to bring about a noteworthy change; he gave up his bishop's residence to the sisters and received their convent in exchange. It was in company with this holy bishop that Mother Deschamps left "the enchanting hill." They went to Dunbow which had been deserted at the first hints of war. The Blackfeet demonstrated they had agile feet. They fled at the first din of war. In their eagerness for freedom, they no longer wanted to endure the restraints of a residential school; they were replaced by pupils who were Métis or white.<sup>23</sup>

At Qu'Appelle which, it was thought, was also threatened during the uprising, Mother Deschamps marvelled at the beautiful landscape. With her ready adaptability, she threw herself into the preparations which were being made for a visit to the school by the Governor-General, the Marquis of Lansdowne. In contrast to the school at Dunbow, this residential school had no trouble having its thirty-five little Indian boys adapt to a new way of life, thus answering the hopes of those responsible for the initiative. Soon Indian girls as well would receive an education; five had already been admitted.

Mother Deschamps returned to St. Boniface at the end of September. She was able to admire the transformation of the chapel of the provincial house and the progress made at the boarding school and the

other surrounding convents, as well as at the hospital.

The superior general renewed acquaintance with Father Azarie Dugas who had given up the direction of the college to the Jesuit Fathers and who had become parish priest of the cathedral.<sup>24</sup> He prepared a celebration for the 40th anniversary of the coming to Red River of the scholastic, Taché, and the postulant, Sister Cusson. The feast was fine but subdued since it was known that the Archbishop was preoccupied with trying to intervene, in concert with Bishop Grandin, to save the life of Louis Riel.<sup>25</sup> In vain. Riel was executed in Regina on November 16. Father Dugas was sent to bring condolences from the Archbishop to the Riel family while Father Cloutier was sent to bring the mortal remains of the Métis leader, first to St. Vital and later to the Cathedral where they were interred December 12. "The funeral procession was more than a mile long. The coffin was borne by compatriots of the deceased. The funeral service at the Cathedral was solemn with Archbishop Taché presiding. Father Ritchot was there too. Everything went on in calm and with dignity."<sup>26</sup>

The events of the turbulent year 1885 had been filled with blood and tears. They awakened in the heart of the Archbishop forebodings as to the future of his beloved people. Everyone shared in the grief of the Oblates at the death of three of their generous workers, Fathers Fafard and Marchand and Brother Picquet. God weighs carefully the burdens he places on each shoulder. At the end of the momentous year came news which made everyone feel good. Mother d'Youville's intercession had effected a cure! The cure was described by Father Rapet from Ile-à-la-Crosse in a letter to Sister Charlebois: "You must have heard of the illness with which I have been afflicted. In spite of all the nursing care of the Sisters, the abscess I had took a turn for the worse which was very worrying. Many successive novenas seemed to do no good. Not only was there no improvement but it seemed I would have to prepare for death. Then God inspired us to make a novena to your holy



Foundress. From the very first prayers, I felt a clear improvement. Hope returned. Before the novena's end, I had the happiness of being able to offer Mass, on December 8. On the last day I was completely cured. Your foundress does not do things by halves. I had been able to take part in all the offices of Christmas and next day I was able to go on a trip of eighty miles without experiencing the least unease."<sup>27</sup>

The miracle was interpreted as a sign of the favour of Divine Providence on the Indian missions; this favour was felt to be a renewal of strength to continue the good fight on behalf of the Lord.

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The Amerindians were surprised to see Oblate Fathers and Grey Nuns not only provide replacements for those who left but also expand their works. One Sioux of Qu'Appelle asked Father Campeau, "Where do they come from, these men and women of prayer who come, some young and some old, but all so good and kind?" The children of the wilds would be still more astonished if they could see all the works multiplying not only on the reserves but also in Canadian and American cities and towns. But the Grey Nuns always had a special preference for the West and the Far North.

The year 1885 had proved difficult for Bishops Taché, Grandin and Clut so far as their health was concerned. Each one had to spend some time at one or another of the hospitals and convalesce at the mother house. This situation undoubtedly influenced Archbishop Taché to turn his attention to the question of enlarging St. Boniface Hospital.

The sequel to the rebellion made it necessary for the Archbishop to multiply his trips to Ottawa. His visit in July had another purpose, however. He was to participate in the ceremony at which the pallium was received from Rome for Monsignor Fabre now promoted to be an Archbishop. Archbishop Taché

had not been able to attend, however, because he had to be admitted to Notre Dame Hospital and afterward stayed at the mother house on Guy Street where former Manitoban sisters lavished nursing care on him. Miss Adèle and Miss Blanche Taché were also there and the latter, Bishop Taché's niece, stayed with him until his departure on August 3.<sup>28</sup> Miss Adèle went back to St. Boniface a few days before that.

Miss Adèle took to heart her position as president of what she called "L'ouvroir," a workshop which had been established at the provincial house on February 6. There, altar linens and vestments and clothing for the poor were prepared. Every Thursday many of the leading women of the city came to help the sisters. It was their highly appreciated collaboration.<sup>29</sup> It was recalled that not so long ago the teaching sisters had to do all this work in addition to their teaching jobs.<sup>30</sup>

But the teaching sisters still had their days filled with work. Following the Jesuits' take-over of the college, the primary school for boys was left without teachers. Archbishop Taché transported to the former college the institution which later became Provencher Academy. The members of the municipal council asked the Grey Nuns to take charge of this school.<sup>31</sup> Sister St-Placide and Sister Couture came to their aid and took charge of one hundred and fifty pupils. This increased to two hundred by the time of the visit of Governor-General Aberdeen, accompanied by Lieutenant-Governor Schultz. This temporary employment lasted until 1899 when the Marist Brothers provided relief.<sup>32</sup>

Sisters proved their ability to teach; those who had an aptitude for different dialects were sent to Indian missions. The result of Dunbow was that the Blackfeet were finally won over. Nineteen pupils of this nation joined together with Cree and Assiniboine pupils.

At Fort Totten there were now ninety-one students of whom fifty-two were girls. Bishop Marty,

the Vicar Apostolic, asked if the sisters could provide for three more missions he wanted to establish. It was unfortunately impossible to give an affirmative response. On the other hand, since the new school was in the fort itself, it was possible to transform the old building into a four-bed hospital.<sup>33</sup>

Many successes were recorded at the boarding school in St. Boniface. Four students graduated from normal school<sup>34</sup> and Mr. Bernier, the inspector, was able to bestow a diploma from the Royal Commission of London for proficiency. Similar honours were received by the convents at St. François-Xavier, St. Norbert, St. Vital and Ste-Anne-des-Chênes.<sup>35</sup> The population of the West had now increased to 48,362 people.<sup>36</sup> It was not surprising there was a demand for new convents and additions to old ones.

The lengthy reports to the mother house in 1886 also brought news of sorrows. The poor widow of Louis Riel died May 24; the sisters had been with her to the end. Two orphans had been adopted by their uncle. Sister Senay of Ile-à-la-Crosse ended her earthly life October on 23 at the age of 46. It was thought her premature death owed much to the misery of the flight to Ile-aux-Anglais during the uprising. At Qu'Appelle, the sisters worried about the superior who was on the verge of becoming blind and to think her name was Lalumière (the light)!

As for the Far North, the news came that at last there was a steamboat on the MacKenzie River. The northern sisters said they were so sorry it had not been in operation when Mother Deschamps had been "so near and yet so far." At the convent of Providence, they complained of drought; on the other hand the fishing was good. At Chipewyan, there were quite a few foreigners being attracted by the fur trade.

At the beginning of 1887, the bishops of the West, all of them Oblates, were called to attend the general chapter of their order in Rome. Archbishop Taché was disappointed he could not go on account of

the state of his health which did not allow him to cross the ocean. It was from the Grey Nuns' mother house that he watched the affairs of his archdiocese. On May 15 there took place the blessing of the corner stone of a wing added to the hospital, a wing which would be bigger than the old building. Collections were going well. At one of the subscription concerts, the featured singer was Miss Flore Cossette-Martel, a future postulant.

News which was specially pleasing to Archbishop Taché, Bishop Laflèche and all the Grey Nuns was the announcement of the profession of Sister Nebraska. Father Dugas wrote: "Two years ago she asked to join the novitiate. Her old mother who lived in the convent had never dreamed that her own daughter would take such a great step." After Mass on May 31 the mother said, "I am now a great lady." Chief Maskegon was there accompanied by his assistant. He said, "What has happened today is an honour for all of us; it is a proof that we have not been deceived and in the eyes of religion all men are truly equal. Today I am indeed happy."<sup>37</sup>

Archbishop Taché had left the mother house<sup>38</sup> when, on August 7, Sister Ursule Charlebois died. She had visited the Manitoba missions twice and had even gone to the Far North. Sisters Youville and Tisseur returned from Lac La Biche the day after the funeral of the one who had encouraged and comforted them during her sojourn at their poor mission.<sup>39</sup>

Near the beginning of October a new general chapter of the Grey Nuns elected as superior general Sister Praxède Filiatrault; Sister Hamel was reappointed provincial superior; Sister Primeau was named assistant and Sister Letellier, mistress of novices.

The torch had changed hands but the spirit remained the same as ever; the time for new beginnings had not yet ended. Mother Deschamps, over a ten-year period, had presided over ten new posts. Sister Filiatrault had had the happiness of being initiated into religious life by Mother Slocombe,

that eminently missionary soul.<sup>40</sup> The young sister had distinguished herself and soon occupied many high positions, having served since 1882 as assistant general, being well trained in the school of that exceptional woman, Mother Deschamps.

One of the characteristic qualities of Grey Nuns in those days was one which they inherited from Mother d'Youville, that of thankfulness to benefactors. At evening prayers it was custom to add one Our Father and one Hail Mary for benefactors; in the case of very special ones a Mass was offered on the anniversary of their death. This was the case for Father M.C. Bonnissant on November 16, 1887.<sup>41</sup> He had been replaced in his role of vice-postulator of the cause of Marguerite d'Youville by the Sulpician, Mr. Pierre Rousseau.

Gratitude found expression even if the benefactor of the Grey Nuns tried to efface himself. So on April 15, 1888 there was tendered to Stanislas Lestang an appreciation reception. He had devoted himself to the service of the Grey Nuns for fifty years, starting out at the mother house in Old Montreal and continuing at Chateauguay and then at St. Boniface. It was recalled how helpful he had been during the building of the little "white house." An orphan expressed the sentiments of all: "Many things have changed in a half century. But there has been no change in all that time in your love and devotion to this little place of refuge. Another thing that has not changed at all is the esteem, the respect and the gratitude of all those whom you have helped in so many ways, both here at home and far away." There was a program of songs and the offering of gifts and even flowers to "Father Stanislas" as he was affectionately called.<sup>42</sup>

Another jubilee was being prepared at St. Boniface, this time that of Sister St-Joseph, the only one of the pioneers to survive. Born November 15, 1819 in the little village of les Cèdres, she entered the novitiate on May 28, 1836 and two years later, on June 1, she bound herself to God forever.

Placed in charge of the kitchen, she served with great competence in this exacting task. Naturally optimistic, she had the faith to move mountains. No matter how unexpected the situation, she was never phased by it. This was one of the reasons she was chosen in 1843. Sister St-Joseph had lived up to the highest expectations. She held in turn the positions of director of novices, assistant superior, teacher, sacristan, orphans' nurse, always a true servant of the poor. Her special predilection was for the orphans and even today, nothing pleased her more than to replace the head mistress.

Archbishop Taché invited Mother Filiatrault to this jubilee and, since she had an obligation of visiting the missions, she decided to accept the invitation. She left Montreal May 23 accompanied by Sister Devins and Sister Bissonnette. Sister Devins had come from a rich family and applied her patrimony generously in support of the missions.<sup>43</sup>

Sister Devins, writing as secretary, has left her impressions of her visit May 26: "A beautiful residence like a country house situated in the midst of beautiful lawns and little gardens! All the residents of the house were outside to await our coming: our dear sisters, the pupils of the boarding school and the orphans. Several Indian residents were sitting at the entrance door, their eyes gleaming with curiosity. Archbishop Taché came to bid us welcome to his diocese."<sup>44</sup>

Mother General became acquainted with Sister St-Joseph whom she had never met except by correspondence which made her aware of the heroism required by a founder of a convent. Mother General was also happy to renew her friendship with other sisters of merit, some of whom had been her companions in the novitiate. Like her predecessor, she was full of admiration for the buildings which now surrounded the "white house," the cathedral which had been consecrated last year by Archbishop Fabre and the hospital almost finished and the orphanage and other buildings which made an ensemble.



The great jubilee of Sister St-Joseph began in the intimacy of the religious family, so to speak, at the boarding school where Miss Marion, a pupil, offered congratulations to venerated jubilarian. Bishops Tache and Grandin joined together in repeating these congratulations. Next day, May 29, a large crowd filled the cathedral where the Archbishop presided. Joining in the festivities were her own Grey family in the choir loft. There were Oblates and Jesuits and the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, as well as judges and senators, ministers and members of parliament, the U.S. consul, the town mayor, who had been a pupil of Sister St-Joseph. Also there were the members of the Coutlée family and many friends. Near the altar rail the humble Grey Nun knelt with Mother Filiatrault and Mother Hamel on either side.

Archbishop Taché gave a speech recalling the history of the Grey Nuns and the circumstances surrounding their coming to the vast territories of the West in 1844. He said, "At that time there were only thirty-eight members of the community. Today there are four hundred and six Grey Nuns in the service of humanity with fifty-seven novices and ten postulants... When Sister St-Joseph left Montreal with her three companions, she could not foresee that there would come a time when she would see sixteen foundations situated in Manitoba and the North-West served by one hundred and four professed sisters with seven novices and two postulants... Sister St-Joseph, Red River missionary for forty-four years of your fifty years as a Grey Nun, accept my expression of gratitude and recognition as bishop of this diocese for all that you have accomplished."

Sister St-Joseph, in the secrecy of her heart, undoubtedly remembered the sacrifice she made at the age of seventeen in leaving her family to which she always remained attached.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, she could still see the sight of her native village of les Cèdres as she had passed by in the canoe going West in 1844. Mother Dupuis and Mother Deschamps had both offered to invite her for a visit, but she had

resisted the temptation to go, knowing that it had taken every ounce of her courage to leave in the first place.

In a voice shaking with emotion, she renewed her vows and during the Mass celebrated by Bishop Grandin she regained the calm which had underlain all the joys, thorns and difficulties she had met along the way.

The feast was prolonged since Archbishop Taché wanted to celebrate with very special display this memorable anniversary. All were invited in the evening to attend a play which the orphans put on, reviewing the past. Sister St-Joseph was very proud of her favoured orphans; everyone pronounced the day a perfect success.

Fine days always have aftermaths. At the beginning of June, Mother General went to Totten where the foundress of that mission, Sister Clapin, had had a stroke which paralyzed her. Both Sisters Clapin and St-Roch, who had come back from St. Albert for health reasons as well, left with Mother General for Montreal.<sup>46</sup>

The missions of Calgary, Qu'Appelle and St-Albert also figured on Mother General's program as well as the new foundation at Minneapolis, Minnesota. Mother Filiatrault led the foundresses to that place. These were Sister Tassé, Sister Derome, Sister Bissonnette and Sister St-Thomas. Father Daignault had issued an appeal to the Grey Nuns to operate a school named Our Lady of Lourdes. The school was ready at the end of summer, but the teachers' residence was not. However, Grey Nuns were used to that kind of situation... The population was very cooperative and soon there were two hundred and eighty children, requiring another teacher, Sister Geof-frion.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the sisters visited the sick according the custom of the Grey Nuns wherever they went. Mother Filiatrault had observed Sister Laurent at work in St. Boniface where she had been given a companion, Sister Bernier. Sister Laurent became a

real symbol of charity. So much so that one day at Provencher Academy, when a little boy was asked, "What is charity?" he replied, "My daddy says charity is Sister Laurent."

When Mother Filiatrault went back to Montreal she had been away three months. She expressed great praise for the work being done saying the devotion she saw made the inevitable fatigue of travelling a real pleasure.<sup>48</sup> Henceforth, when she read news in the community bulletins, she would always be able to picture to herself the sisters in their various work settings.

Such news was always received with great interest at the mother house especially by those who had retired there after having worked in the West or in the North. Sister Curran and Sister Lapointe were thus able to follow from Montreal the events happening so far away.<sup>49</sup> In September, Sister Marie-Xavier and Sister Lassisseraye went to Selkirk to tend to three families who were prey to diphtheria which carried off five children and made the others gravely ill.

Work on the chapel at the provincial house proceeded apace as central heat was installed and the oil lamps were replaced by electric bulbs.<sup>50</sup>

Sister Lapointe, for her part, kept her heart turned always to that corner of the world, so cold and with such a difficult life, where a small people was proving difficult to win over by evangelization. How she wished that the same kind of progress could be made there as was being reported from Dunbow, Qu'appelle and Totten.

In March, the sisters of the mother house welcomed Father George Dugas who presented to Mother Filiatrault one of the first copies of his book on Bishop Provencher and the Red River Missions. Many were the Grey Nuns who had had the privilege of knowing this Giant of the West, so the biography became very popular among them. At the Guy Street

convent, the author met up with his Archbishop, Taché, who himself was in the course of re-editing his first book: "Twenty Years of Mission in the North-West of America."<sup>51</sup> The Archbishop thought the new land, though still young, had a story that was worth repeating on account of the exceptional courage and stamina shown by the early missionaries. These had overcome the severe hardships caused by extremes of temperature especially in the North and the general harshness of the environment.

Meanwhile, a new chapter in this history was begun, so to speak, in 1889 when on May 30 the Archbishop of St. Boniface convened his priests for a general retreat followed by a general synod of the Archdiocese. The sittings opened Sunday, July 14, with the Metropolitan surrounded by Bishops Grandin, Durieu, Clut and Faraud.<sup>52</sup> Bishop d'Herbomez, vicar apostolic for British Columbia, was represented in his absence by Father C. Augier, the provincial of the Oblates in Canada.<sup>53</sup> The meetings lasted until July 24. Among the resolutions adopted was one asking Rome to raise the vicariate of British Columbia to a diocese, and the subdivision of the diocese of St. Albert. Another recognized the need for a representative of the Western missions in Ottawa; the Oblate provincial was asked to name someone from his congregation for this position.<sup>54</sup>

These long sittings were very fatiguing for the Archbishop, according to Bishop Grandin. That no doubt explains why he was a little late in forwarding to Mother Filiatrault on August 6 the good wishes of the assembled bishops who had called on him to express their thanks to the Grey Nuns for all their dedication and services.

There was no question of a synod for the Grey Nuns of Montreal but a special general chapter opened on August 19. The question for discussion was whether to establish an association of auxiliary sisters. The association would be made up of the "volunteer assistants," who had sometimes been called "filles données," sometimes "Maries," and sometimes

"Tertiaries of St. Francis." Their precious collaboration had been indispensable not only in the North and in the West but also in the metropolis and in the United States. All the capitulants, including Sister Deschamps who came from Toledo, and Mother Hamel and Sister Royal from St. Boniface, were favourable to the creation of such an association. It was to be called the Sisters of Saint Martha. Sister Giquello, the valiant Bretonne who had been present at the beginnings of Totten school, was named first director of the new association which soon attracted twelve vocations. Although their rule was mitigated, the volunteers would be able to have the advantages of community life so important in distant places.

It was to this elite group that Miss Nathalie Brabant, a native of Hooghlede, Belgium was attracted.<sup>55</sup> She came to St. Boniface May 22 knowing neither French nor English and with an independence of character which made adaptation to a rule difficult. However, she triumphed and served the Grey Nuns as a shoemaker and gardener, joining the functions of Martha with the vocation of Mary faithful to the call of God.

It may be noted that in 1891 Archbishop Fabre insisted that the name of the Association should be changed from that of St. Martha. For a time they were called Little Sisters Auxiliary. In 1905 an indult from Rome permitted them to be joined together in the Association of Auxiliary Sisters. On December 23, 1946 there was a fusion of the two groups and all became known simply as sisters.

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"News like that I am happy to get anytime," said Archbishop Taché when a telegram announced that on March 27, 1890 the cause of Marguerite d'Youville had been introduced into the Roman curia.<sup>56</sup> But this joy which he shared with the Grey Nuns was counter-balanced by crushing news which was to have terrible consequences. He wrote to Mother Filiatrault on

April 1: "Yesterday the Lieutenant Governor has given his sanction to the atrocious laws that have been adopted by the legislators. Beginning May 1, everything that is Christian in our schools must disappear under penalty of losing government grants." The Archbishop with his colleagues in the hierarchy, especially Bishop Grandin, immediately prepared to fight; they knew they could count on the support of the Oblate and Jesuit orders as well as the Faithful Companions of Jesus and the Grey Nuns who had been involved in the work for forty-five years.

Courageous laymen like Judge J. Dubuc and Senator Bernier, to name only two, came forward with promises of support. Mr. Bernier had one day written: "The best lay teachers in this province are those who have been formed by the Grey Nuns at the boarding school.<sup>57</sup> Even if it should be necessary to forego the title, 'Normal school,' the work would go on just the same and the reputation of the institution would be maintained."

Soon, Archbishop Taché offered the opportunity to his collaborators to establish in 1890, as a gift on the feast of the superior general, the creation of an industrial school at Saint Boniface itself. The school would be built on land belonging to the Grey Nuns at the expense of the government which would not interfere in the details of the work; it would be necessary to render an account of the number of children, of their progress and their success at examinations each year under the supervision of an inspector. He added, "It seems this is a work of charity which Divine Providence is inviting us to accept... The fact that you have this year had eleven postulants offering themselves to join you at one time is a great consolation to a bishop and a tremendous triumph for your congregation."<sup>58</sup>

The chief inspector of these schools was Count de Cazes who in April went to the convent at St. Albert and commented: "This is just like in France. They learn everything here." Great was his surprise at such well-behaved children.<sup>59</sup> The sisters, for



their part, were happy at the installation of pupils in their new orphanage.

Out there the missionaries were beginning to reap the fruits of their austere labours. Bishop Grandin ordained the first Métis priest, E. Cunningham,<sup>60</sup> on the feast of St-Jean-Baptiste while on July 22 Archbishop Taché raised to the priesthood Elie Rocan and Alphonse Larivière, both of whom were graduates of the classical course of St. Boniface College.<sup>61</sup>

The industrial school was opened without delay in the modest "white house" where twenty-one little Indian girls were welcomed under the direction of Sister Clermont. When the house was finished boys too would be admitted. Construction went on rapidly, according to the chronicles, so that by December 28 the Archbishop was able to bless it. Sister Lassiseraye and Sister Deschambault were assigned to this work under the direction of Father Lavigne. On the same day sixteen boys made their noisy entrance.<sup>62</sup> The institution became so popular that it was soon necessary to limit admissions.

While the industrial school was filling up, at Calgary the sisters began a hospital at the request of Bishop Grandin. Sister Carroll, Sister Beauchemin and Sister St-Marc went there as well as a humble postulant, the future auxiliary Sister Gertrude Beemer. They proceeded to Calgary on January 21, 1891 with a total capital sum of \$209.75 as a result of collections. After they paid the expenses of their trip they were left with \$73.75 and merchandise worth about \$150.00.

On their way to Calgary from the mother house, they spent a few days at St. Boniface. They arrived at Calgary on January 30 at two o'clock in the morning. Father Leduc was waiting for them at the station. He had no carriage, so they "had to go on foot in the cold and in the dark the long journey to the convent of the Faithful Companions of Jesus." The distance was really only a quarter of a mile but

with heavy baggage the road seemed without end. The sisters were welcomed cordially at the convent. After hearing Mass and taking a light breakfast, the sisters made their way to the hospital which was a little two-storey house of twenty feet square, heated by a little stove which had a hard time keeping out the cold. Using some old mattresses and covers, they set up four beds. But after a few weeks things got much better. But then an epidemic of smallpox broke out and the sisters had to attend the sick. It was a blessing in disguise for the sick were quick to sing the praises of the nurses with the result there were soon patients enough to fill the hospital to overflowing necessitating a more spacious building.<sup>63</sup>

The hospital would be called Holy Cross and, from progress to progress, would become a modern institution with the capacity to respond to the needs of the city of Calgary, the chief city of southern Alberta.

The West was no longer a remote inaccessible region. Immigrants were flooding in, cities were expanding and new towns were being created. The vast St. Boniface Archdiocese had already been subdivided. Now it was the turn of the diocese of St. Albert which ceded its eastern part to Bishop Albert Pascal, a former missionary at Lake Athabaska.<sup>64</sup>

Bishop Faraud who had retired to St. Boniface following the 1889 council of bishops, died there on September 26 of the following year. Father Emile Grouard was named vicar apostolic of Athabaska-Mackenzie on June 5, 1891. Having been ordained a priest at Boucherville by Bishop Taché, he now asked him to consecrate him as bishop. The ceremony was scheduled for August 1. Mother Filiatrault would be able to attend since she left for St. Boniface the previous July 21 bringing with her Sister St-Alfred who was assigned to the mission at Qu'Appelle.

Mother Filiatrault arrived on the 24 and was followed by Bishop Grandin who no doubt shared with her his concerns about the health of Archbishop

Taché. "I was disturbed when I saw how frail he looks. I even wonder if he will be able to stand the ceremonies of Saturday."<sup>65</sup> But the imposing rite of consecration took place as planned with Archbishop Taché being assisted by Bishop Grandin and Bishop Shanley from North Dakota. Many clergy and the leading figures in society were present and had dinner afterwards in the boarding school.

Ten days later there was a Triduum (three days) of thanksgiving on the occasion of the introduction at Rome of the cause of Mother d'Youville.<sup>66</sup> The first day, Mass was celebrated by the new Bishop Grouard; the following two days had Father Allard and Father Giroux presiding. There were many eulogies of Mother d'Youville and her daughters.

Bishop Grouard did not return right away to his glacial country but instead went to France. Meanwhile, Sister Hamel was officially delegated to make a visit of the Western posts. She could not go to the Far North because of a general chapter being held at Montreal in the autumn.

One of the "heroic women" of the North, Sister Ward, had lived for twenty-five years in the residence which she had once called "our native land, our house and our tomb." She was invited to the general chapter. At first she could not believe her eyes when she received the letter of summons. She replied to Mother Filiatrault that this was beyond her wildest dreams.<sup>67</sup> She had known other sisters called back to the mother house but had never thought she would be one of them.<sup>68</sup>

Yet her dream came true. On June 27 Sister Ward embarked, not on the steamboat Wrigley, but on one of the barges of the Hudson Bay Company. The manager was her former pupil and he promised himself that Sister Ward would have a comfortable trip. Her itinerary involved brief stops at Chipewyan, at Lac La Biche,<sup>69</sup> at St. Albert, then at Dunbow where she was able to see again dear Domithilde Letendre, the auxiliary who had been part of the famous expedition

to the North in 1867.<sup>70</sup>

At Winnipeg Sister Ward was able to visit with the two surviving members of her family; she then crossed over the Red River to the place where she and her companions of 1866 had stopped for eight months. The little village of former times was now a prosperous city. Sister Ward did not cease to admire the fine buildings and especially the hospital which was steadily growing, there now being planned an additional annex. Sister Dugas wrote that this was demanded by the doctors as well as by the people. It was the competence of the doctors that accounted mostly for the great popularity of the hospital.<sup>71</sup> As for the nurses, they were very pleased when a Mrs. Lloyd offered to join them in the service of the sick.<sup>72</sup>

The traveller from the Far North finally reached the monastery at Guy Street in Montreal at the end of August, and at the beginning of October took part in the general chapter whose members elected once again Mother Deschamps for a fifth term as superior general. To her astonished surprise Sister Ward was chosen as director of novices. But she was the only one to be astonished. She proved to be an excellent educator of Grey Nuns. An accomplished woman, she was able to prepare a whole generation of dedicated sisters. Mother Deschamps, whose apostolic vigor increased with age, would be able to rely on their generosity and send them to continue with zeal the missionary work not only in the country of the northern lights, but also in every place they could find noble work to do.

From the beginning of 1893 a diphtheria outbreak at St. Boniface forced the closing of the college and of the boarding school, although happily there were no deaths. The hospital sheltered the sick patients in the annex for contagious diseases.<sup>73</sup>

Everything was restored to normal by the time Sister Stubinger, a member of the general council, came to St. Boniface in April. She had been named as

official visitor of the northern missions. She was by no means the only one to make St. Boniface a port of call. All the travellers to and from the North made St. Boniface a stopping place as did all the new missionaries on their way to devote themselves to God's work in the immense Territories. The Sisters of the Assumption of Nicolet had responded to the appeal of Bishop Pascal of Prince Albert, and the Grey Nuns of Nicolet accepted Father Lacombe's invitation to establish at MacLeod a hospital for the Blood Indians.<sup>74</sup>

A very special visitor that year who came on July 1 was Father Adelard Langevin, the special delegate of the superior general of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. He came to visit all the workers in the diocese of St. Boniface. Archbishop Taché said to him: "It is two years since I called on your superior to send you." He had in mind that this worthy priest should be the one to be his successor and thus carry on the work which had been commenced by the Giant of the West in 1818.<sup>75</sup>

When the future bishop visited the Grey Nuns he learned that the sisters had just set up novitiate for the Little Auxiliary Sisters in the provincial house where there were already twelve aspirants under the direction of Sister Royal.<sup>76</sup> The Grey Nuns had also accepted charge of the school at St. Jean-Baptiste. Sister St-Placide, Sister Marcotte, Sister Marion and Sister Valade were assigned there.<sup>77</sup>

The event which eclipsed all others in the minds of many during 1893 was the international exhibition at Chicago. A World Fair was given the name "Columbian Exhibition" in honour of the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. From the beginning of the year the pupils of the industrial schools set to work preparing material for different booths, and in June some of them were sent to Chicago to show off the talents of the children of the woods. Sister Malchelosse with two boys from Saint-Albert and Sister Clement with two girls and a boy from St. Boniface

were part of the first contingent.<sup>78</sup> One wrote back, "Our little children are much in demand; people love to see them and talk to them." Count Cazes, in his letter of July 9 to Archbishop Taché, said: "The children of our industrial schools are opening the eyes of people of all countries to what can be accomplished by the Christianization of the people. Sometimes two hundred persons at a time crowded around these children of the woods who behave in a very civilized way. Many others, who have heard of the Sisters of Charity but have never seen any of them, are full of questions... I am sure, Your Excellency, that by allowing the sisters to come with their pupils from the industrial schools, you have contributed much to making known what the Canadian government is doing to civilize the Indians and also how much the Catholic Church with the participation of the Grey Nuns has accomplished for the Indians of the West and North."<sup>79</sup>



- 1 Circ. mens., 1881-1884.
- 2 Ibid., p. 729.
- 3 In 1849, Mother d'Youville's body had been removed from the vault of the old General Hospital and was now entombed in a special unit at the new mother house.
- 4 Sr. Thiffault was on her way a few days later. Father Lecorre left Montreal with a group of six Faithful Companions of Jesus, several Oblate brothers and five brave girls from Brittany. Mathurine Legal who arrived in 1882, replaced Miss Legoff who had entered the novitiate. The Faithful Companions of Jesus had an establishment in Brandon since October 1883.
- 5 Circ. mens. 1884-1887. Father M.G. Dugas, a former vicar in Chambly, had offered his services to Archbishop Taché. He is not to be mistaken for Father M.A. Dugas who was already an active missionary in the West.
- 6 Sr. Allard to Mother Deschamps, March 17, 1883.
- 7 Sr. Lajemmerais to Mother Deschamps, March 20, 1883.
- 8 Letter dated March 20, 1883. Attitudes had greatly improved since the time when one of the Sioux magicians had threatened Sister Drapeau. Her life had been saved by some white men who had restrained the would-be assassin.
- 9 MacGregor, op.cit., pp. 253ff. A Protestant school was opened in Battleford.
- 10 P. de M., op.cit., pp. 113-114.
- 11 The details for this foundation are to be found in ASGM documents. The school is referred to as that of Dunbow.

- 12 P. de M., op.cit., pp. 109-110.
- 13 Breton, op.cit., p. 295.
- 14 Ibid., p. 296.
- 15 Morice, "Hist. abrégée de l'Ouest can.", p. 116.
- 16 Rumilly, op.cit., Vol. 5, p.21.
- 17 Unless stated otherwise, details here are extracted from Circ. mens., 1884-1887, pp.215ff.
- 18 On June 13, Sr. Bourget and Sr. Boudrias, nieces of the deceased, as well as Mother Deschamps, assisted at his funeral in the cathedral.
- 19 The details concerning the Riel family are from the Riel documents, ASGM.
- 20 Sr. Langelier to the mother house, May 19 - June 1, 1885.
- 21 St. Albert Historical document No. 3.
- 22 Sr. M.-des-Anges to the mother house. Circ. mens., 1884-1887, pp. 289-290.
- 23 The franciscan Josephine Dubé died in early 1885, a victim of "galloping consumption," (tuberculosis).
- 24 Bernier, A., S.J., op.cit., pp. 17-18.
- 25 Benoit, op.cit., Vol. I, pp. 484-490. Archbishop Taché worked hard also to obtain the liberation of the prisoners.
- 26 Ibid., p.485. A letter from Father Louis Cochin, of Ste-Angèle, dated April 28, refers to a message sent by Louis Riel to his allies,

asking them to respect the priests, to abstain from maltreating prisoners and from slaughtering the inhabitants. *Circ. mens.*, 1884-1887, No. 10, (after p. 325).

- 27 *Circ. mens.*, 1884-1887, pp. 389-390.
- 28 These details are taken from *Circ. mens.*, 1884-1887, unless otherwise stated.
- 29 Tessier-Biron, *op.cit.*, p. 171.
- 30 De Moissac, Sr., *op.cit.*, p. 185.
- 31 Manuscript, *Missions de l'Ouest*, p.43. It was not the first time that the sisters accepted a temporary role in an educational enterprise. In 1867 they had thus opened a school in St. Charles where they remained in charge until 1871.
- 32 Tessier-Biron, *op.cit.*, pp. 171-172. Sisters Samson, Naughton, St-Julien, Joyal, St-Joachim, McDougall, Ste-Louise, Clément, Dudemaine, Nantel and Marcotte devoted themselves in that school. Alexandre Lambert, a former pupil of Provencher School, became a priest and curé of the Ste-Croix parish. Documents, Provencher Academy.
- 33 The Fort Totten Hospital was closed four years later. The American government, having decided to move the boys to the Protestant boarding school, the sisters could no longer count on this source of revenue.
- 34 De Moissac, Sr., *op.cit.*, p. 183.
- 35 This information was given to Archbishop Taché in a letter from Sr. Royal on March 11, 1887. These honours had been granted for classroom projects completed in 1886.
- 36 Benoit, *op.cit.*, Vol.II, p. 630.

- 37 Letter to Bishop Laflèche, May 31, 1887.
- 38 Mgr Taché left on July 5.
- 39 Sr. Youville took back her family name Lespérance to distinguish her from another Sr. Youville who resided at the mother house.
- 40 Sr. Filiatrault, who entered August 30, 1862, had been under the direction of Mother Slocombe, who had been Mistress of Novices, until the 1863 elections.
- 41 Correspondence between Archbishop Taché and Mr. Bonnissant in 1857-1858.
- 42 Circ. mens., 1887-1892, pp. 81-83.
- 43 Her sister, Mrs. Tiffin, was also a generous benefactor of the Grey Nuns.
- 44 Letter written in June 1889 giving the details concerning the visit. Circ. mens., 1887-1892, pp. 164ff.
- 45 The details concerning Sr. St-Joseph are extracted from her biography.
- 46 Sr. St. Roch died Nov. 8, 1888.
- 47 Documents, Minneapolis, ASGM.
- 48 Circ. mens., 1887-1892, p. 157. The details that follow were taken from the same source.
- 49 In May 1888, Sr. Curran became a resident at the mother house.
- 50 De Moissac, Sr., op.cit., 2nd part, p. 34.
- 51 The first edition appeared in 1866. This work could be the reason for St. Curran's presence at the mother house. In St. Boniface, she was the bishop's secretary.

- 52 Bishop Faraud took up residence in St. Boniface. He had resigned from his post on account of his health.
- 53 Benoit, *op.cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 614.
- 54 Morice, "Hist. abrégée, Ouest can.", pp. 119-120.
- 55 De Moissac, *op.cit.*, 2nd part, p. 42. Sr. Natalie pronounced her vows on June 23, 1895. She made a pair of shoes for Archbishop Béliveau who wore them "with great pride."
- 56 *Circ. mens.* 1887-1892, p. 388.
- 57 Primeau, "Centenaire des Soeurs Grises," pp. 6-7.
- 58 Letter to Mother Filiatrault, July 26, 1892.
- 59 Letter from Sr. Brassard.
- 60 Letter from Father Leduc, o.m.i., March 11, 1890.
- 61 Bernier, A., S.J., *op.cit.*, p. 18.
- 62 Manuscript, "Missions de l'Ouest", pp. 53-54.
- 63 ASGM, documents, Sr. Beauchemin, *Annals* 1942-43, pp. 663-665. Not only do patients speak highly of the Grey Nuns, but a Protestant doctor also expresses admiration when he sees the nurses who take such good care of a poor man covered with ulcers.
- 64 Morice, "Hist. abrégée, Ouest Can.", p. 120.
- 65 Benoit, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 712.
- 66 This Triduum was postponed because of repairs which were being effected in the chapel at the mother house.

- 67 Letter dated April 2, 1892.
- 68 That same year, 1892, Sr. Agnes who founded Ile-à-la-Crosse, and Sr. Mercier of the same mission, also returned to Montreal.
- 69 At Lac La Biche, they were soon to have an industrial school. In the meantime, the students found a shelter in the former residence of Bishop Faraud. *Circ. mens.*, 1892-1895, pp. 140-141.
- 70 Details from "Le Soleil brille à minuit", pp. 118-123.
- 71 Doctors whose names deserve to be remembered are Fafard, J.H.O. Lambert, A.F. Dame, A.M. McDiarmid, M. McArthur, J.O. Todd, R.M. Simpson, G.G. Orton, E.S. Poham, A.J. McDonnell, W.A.B. Bulton, W.E. and N.A. Montgomery, M.G. Inglis, and A.H. Simpson. Dr. Conklin was to become the first intern. A new addition to the hospital would be built that summer by J.A. Senecal.
- 72 De Moissac, Sr., *op.cit.*, p. 22, 2nd part.
- 73 *Annals*, 1919-1920, p. 652. Since 1881, at the outset of the epidemic, Mr. Mager had lent his home for the sick. In 1885, a former ice-house was transformed into an isolation unit.
- 74 A branch of the St. Hyacinthe Grey Nuns, the Nicolet sisters have eighteen professed members and twenty-four novices and postulants. *Circ. mens.*, 1892-1895, p. 176.
- 75 Morice, *Vie de Mgr Langevin*, pp. 102-103. Two weeks later, the 75th anniversary of the arrival of Bishop Provencher in the West was joyfully celebrated.
- 76 *Ibid*, p. 178, Sr. Royal was assisted in her task by Sr. Ethier.



- 77 This school was also successful, but had to be abandoned two years later, due to a shortage of vocations. ASGM, St-Jean-Baptiste documents.
- 78 Sr. Lassisseraye and two students from Qu'apelle arrived in Chicago on Sept. 14.
- 79 Circ. mens. 1892-1895, pp. 119, 177, 195, 196, 233.

## CHAPTER EIGHT - 1894-1903

Preparations began for the golden jubilee of the arrival of the Grey Nuns at Red River.<sup>1</sup> Manitobans looked forward to the celebrations which were scheduled for June 21 to June 24, the feast of St-Jean-Baptiste. This would be the 49th anniversary of the day when Archbishop Taché left Montreal. Then only twenty-two, the youth of "Brother Taché" disconcerted Bishop Provencher when he first saw him, but Bishop Provencher was soon delighted at the new recruit whom he ordained as a priest October 12, 1845. Six years later Father Taché had been consecrated by Bishop de Mazenod, the founder of the Oblates, in the cathedral of Viviers, France.

Archbishop Taché had achieved so much in his lifetime that he gained a reputation as being "the most eminent man in the Canadian West, an experienced missionary, a statesman of sure judgment, a notable writer and a gentleman full of good heart."<sup>2</sup> A tireless fighter, he spared no effort to safeguard Catholic schools to the very end of his life. When his brother Joseph-Charles died on April 15, he wrote of him, "I have lost my brother and the Grey Nuns have lost a devoted friend. I think the schools' question is responsible for hastening his death."<sup>3</sup> Only weeks later, the same would be said of the Archbishop himself.

One last joy on this earth was accorded him when, on April 28, the new superior general of the Oblates, Father Soullier, stopped at St. Boniface<sup>4</sup> en route to the distant missions. Archbishop Taché proved himself the perfect host.

For the last fifteen years, Archbishop Taché had become accustomed to suffering, but an intense weariness induced him to withdraw to his own particular hospital, the boarding school. Since May 2, Sister Parent and Sister Maugras attended to him as nurses. It was in his sick room that he welcomed Mother Filiatrault, now the assistant general delegated by Mother Deschamps. She was accompanied by

Sister Curran, Sister Devins and Sister Ste-Mechtilde, the latter being destined for Ile-à-la-Crosse. The Archbishop congratulated her on being thought worthy to go to this mission.

On June 18, the doctors decided to make a medical intervention which seemed to make the Archbishop somewhat better. Some suggested that the celebrations should be postponed but the Archbishop would not hear of it. The triumphal arches were set up practically everywhere in the streets of St. Boniface. On the evening of June 20, the pupils of Provencher Academy put on a pageant depicting the voyage of the four original Grey Nuns. The old boat songs were interspersed with hymns sung by Sister Lagrave for the voyageurs. The venerable patient asked two of his priests to make a full report to him on the evening and they came back full of praise. This was a last consolation for Archbishop Taché.

On June 21 there was a pontifical High Mass by Bishop Grandin, with a moving homily by Bishop Grandin, followed in the evening by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and the singing of the Te Deum at the provincial house. A few hours later, Archbishop Taché's doctors recognized the signs of fast approaching death. Bishop Grandin, Fathers Langevin, Allard and Messier with many members of the clergy and a few Grey Nuns gathered at his death bed from which Archbishop Tache blessed Oblates and Grey Nuns in a special way, thanked his doctors, and died at 6:15 a.m., June 22.

"The Church has lost one of its greatest defenders; his people have lost a father; your poor daughters have lost a protector, a counsellor and a firm support," wrote Sister Royal to Mother Deschamps. For her part, Mother General said to the sisters: "You may be waiting for words of consolation from me. I share your grief and I can only say one word, inspired by faith, Let us pray together."

Consternation reigned among the people; the

triumphal arches were transformed into funeral monuments. "Even those who had their disagreements with the Archbishop were unanimous in recognizing his merits,"<sup>5</sup> so that crowds came from Winnipeg to fill the cathedral to overflowing on the day of the funeral, June 27. The evening before Bishop Duhamel of Ottawa pronounced the funeral eulogy in English after the Office of the Dead. Bishop Grandin celebrated the Requiem with the assistance of Bishop Pascal and Bishop Lafleche who had the honour of pronouncing the final eulogy of his dear friend and collaborator with whom he had worked so closely between 1845 and 1857.<sup>6</sup> The remembrances of the past inspired the orator to such an extent that it was said his talk was "one of the finest pieces of eloquence ever given to an audience of both Catholics and Protestants in the whole country."

The presence of Mother Filiatrault brought comfort to the one hundred and one sisters who were working in the St. Boniface Province. Mother General had sent her not only for the anticipated jubilee but also to be her alter ego. The visitor congratulated the sisters on all that was being done and said she was surprised at the progress made ever since her last visit in 1891. There were extensions to the convents at St. François-Xavier, St. Norbert and Ste-Anne-des-Chênes, while the hospital had been completely transformed. The industrial school, the orphanage and the Provencher Academy were all being carried on.

When she had a chat with Sister St-Joseph, the old pioneer, "who recaptures the past with evident pleasure," the interview ended with a prayer of thanksgiving for all the works that followed from the first accomplishments of the first Grey Nuns.

To Sisters Curran and Devins was granted the privilege of visiting the missions of Qu'Appelle, Calgary and Dunbow. At these different places, work and success were linked.

The travellers returned to Montreal August 17

and reported on the generosity, dedication and fraternity which reigned among the sisters in Manitoba. To this concert of praise was added the testimony of Father Soullier who stopped at the mother house on August 30. He said, "We can never thank God enough for the collaboration of the Grey Nuns in all our missions where we work with you. I have told our colleagues at Qu'Appelle, Calgary and wherever else I went, that without the Grey Nuns we would be helpless. You complement our works. I have seen for myself how the presence of Sisters raises the prestige of religion among the Indians."

Of course the sisters did not work just for the natives. Bishop Grandin had been planning for several years to have a hospital in Edmonton. He spoke about it to the Bishop-elect of St. Boniface, Father Adelard Langevin.<sup>7</sup> The consecration of the new Archbishop took place March 19, 1895 in the cathedral built by his venerable predecessor thirty-three years before. The consecrating bishop was Archbishop Fabre of Montreal along with Bishops Bégin, Duhamel, Laflèche, Gravel, Decelles, Emard and Gabriels of Ogdensburg, N.Y.<sup>8</sup> Also present was Canon Racicot, maternal uncle of Bishop Langevin.

The new Archbishop of St. Boniface approved the project of his colleague, the Bishop of St. Albert and the general council of the Grey Nuns gave their approval in spite of their anxiety at the deaths that were occurring in their ranks. In 1894 four deaths were recorded among the young sisters of St. Boniface. These were Sister Vincent, Sister Nebraska, Sister Marion and Sister Laurin. The last two died on the same day within hours of each other.<sup>9</sup> The Grey Nuns, however, placed their trust in Providence. On August 1, Sister Marie-Xavier and Sister Gosselin arrived in the future capital of Alberta to become foundresses of the new work which was already under construction.<sup>10</sup> The doctors of Edmonton, anxious to see the new institution open, promised to staff it.

Sister Marie-Xavier had been working in the province of Manitoba since 1853. Many generations of

pupils had benefitted from her proficiency as a teacher including the wife of Lieutenant-Governor Schultz. She had been considered as one of the precious recruits from the Grey Nuns of Ottawa; she had come with Sister Curran to the aid of the then new mission at Red River. She was not able to join in the fiftieth anniversary of the Grey Nuns of the Cross, as the Ottawa sisters called themselves.<sup>11</sup> She went instead where duty called. Having gained five years experience at St. Boniface Hospital in the service of the sick, she was thought suitable to open the hospital at Edmonton.

The two foundresses travelled with the governor-general and their wives and received best wishes for the success of their work. They started to work as soon as they got to St. Albert which was nine miles from Edmonton. The hospital was dependent on the convent at St. Albert. Work went ahead so fast that on December 14 Archbishop Langevin was able to proceed with the blessing of the new building. The following day reinforcements arrived in the persons of Sisters Desmarais, Sanders and Coursol who added themselves to Sisters St-Dosithée and St-Léon who had come a few months earlier. The institution was to open its doors the next February.

The new hospital was in a certain way the continuation of the work started at Lake Ste-Anne in 1859 and carried on at St. Albert since 1863. Despite all the hardship encountered, charity won out in the end.

This year 1895 also saw the beginning of the work at Montreal known as the Patronage Youville. There was no danger of unemployment among Grey Nuns. On May 2, Archbishop Langevin presided at the mother house over the profession of Sister Beaupré, Lessard, Côté and Roussin.<sup>12</sup> This did not fill the gaps caused by the deaths that were recorded, but on May 12, Father Lecorre, returning from France, brought six generous Bretonne young women to join in the battalion of heroic women. Two of the six remained at Montreal, one to go right into the novitiate and



the other to further studies since she was below age. All six persevered and they were to prove themselves in fruitful careers but it was still necessary to wait for their formation. The requests for new foundations kept multiplying. Archbishop Langevin pleaded for more sisters for two new industrial schools, one at Thunder Mountain (otherwise known as Touchwood Hills at Lestock) and one at Rat Portage, now called Kenora.

He shared the belief that the Grey Nuns' vocation was to go to the most abandoned places, to use Mother McMullen's words.<sup>13</sup> Mother Deschamps and the members of the general council were in accord with this view. However, in order to realize this objective they felt it would be necessary to give up one of the works which they most cherished, the operation of a boarding school in St. Boniface. Mother Deschamps had herself been one of the signatories of the agreement in 1858 between mother house and St. Boniface when it was decided to carry on a boarding school there. It had been recognized then that "the maintenance of a first-class boarding school," while a praiseworthy apostolate was not within the charism of the Grey Nuns. In order to carry on it would be necessary to obtain an indult from the Holy See. Mr. Colin, provincial superior of the Sulpicians, was asked for his advice and he agreed with this opinion which had previously been given by Mr. Bonnissant among others.<sup>14</sup> It was therefore decided to confide the boarding school in St. Boniface to another religious community. As it turned out, this was to be the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. To facilitate the transition, the boarding school was first changed for a limited time to a day school. Archbishop Langevin accepted with regret this solution to a long outstanding issue while he thanked God for allowing the Grey Nuns to continue their convents at St. François-Xavier, St. Norbert and Ste-Anne-des-Chênes.<sup>15</sup>

The delicate question had been given much thought by Mother Deschamps. She recognized that the carrying on of hospitals, clearly within the scope of

the Sisters' calling, would in the future require qualified workers. Mother was not at all unaware of how difficult it was to abandon a work which was the result of fifty years of sacrifice, but she also knew she could count on the generosity of her fellow workers. To these could be applied the words uttered by Father Antoine, the assistant general of the Oblates, who spoke of the missionaries of the Far North where he had just visited: "There, they give without receiving, expecting nothing in return; they give themselves up with an entire forgetfulness of self, extending even to heroism."

In March 1896 a creche was opened at the provincial house with eight newborns confided to the care of Sister Baulne. This was a seemingly new work but actually went back to 1754 when Mother d'Youville had commenced a similar service.<sup>16</sup> On the following April 23 Mother Hamel announced to the sisters that the former boarding school would become a place of refuge for the homeless. This perspective contributed to diminish the regrets over the closing of the boarding school. Mother Deschamps had relied on the generous spirit of her Manitoba daughters; she would not be disappointed.

When Mr. J.A. Captier, superior general of the Sulpicians, visited the Grey Nuns during the summer, Mother General suggested he stop at St. Boniface on his way to San Francisco. She knew how her sisters there would be happy to meet the primary postulator of the cause of Mother d'Youville.

He reached Red River on July 18 and was accorded a reception with all the honour which was his due. Although it was vacation time, a group of seven hundred pupils gathered for it along with all the orphans.

An unprecedented occasion was celebrated at the end of summer. Eight sisters were sent from St. Boniface to Montreal to take part in the diamond jubilee of the superior general.<sup>17</sup> Sisters Ethier, Ste-Geneviève, Lavoie and Diquière returned to the

mother house after absences of fifteen to thirty-seven years, while Sisters Goulet, Deschambault and McDougall saw it for the first time.

How good it would have been to have Sister St-Joseph present at this feast. She had been a companion of the superior general in the novitiate. Both had had the privilege of being acquainted with some of the first generation of Grey Nuns. Both had common memories of the days when it had been decided to send missionaries to the West. There was still inscrutable silence on the part of Mother Deschamps at her decision not to place her own name on the list of volunteers. Archbishop Taché had thrown some light on her motives during her visit to St. Boniface in 1880. The two septuagenarian sisters had been inspired by the same Youvillian ideals, but their paths had been markedly different. Mother Deschamps had presided at the creation of thirty-two new convents. Sister St-Joseph had served as assistant, as director of novices, as a nurse and as a teacher, working especially with orphans. Living example of the rule, she had always been faithful to community exercises and she delighted everyone with her tales of far-off years.

On Monday, February 1, 1897 this venerable old nun died peacefully, seventy-seven years old, in the 59th year of her religious life. A large crowd gave honour to the valiant Grey Nun, the last survivor of the pioneers who had started the difficult work which was now flourishing on the banks of the Red.

The separation of these two companions of the novitiate was not to be long for at 12:05 a.m. on June 29, 1897 Mother Deschamps saw the end of her earthly career. Her last words were, "Take good care of the poor, our dear poor!" The funeral service was held July 2, and a moving detail, it was the faithful servant Stanislas Lestang who fulfilled his promise to Mother Deschamps to be the one to close her coffin. He did this with emotion since he shared the attitude of so many others who venerated this lady, who was a strong woman, an authentic religious, a

soul totally dedicated to the Lord whom she served without flinching in spite of difficulties which she overcame with a perspective of faith in a climate of hope.

Mother Deschamps no longer lived, but her spirit remained very much alive. The last days of her earthly pilgrimage have been recorded in detail. Bishop Merry Del Val, the Papal delegate who came from Rome, had visited her on the morning of June 28 while Canon Bruchési, newly elected as Archbishop of Montreal had come to bless the venerable patient who, despite her weakness, was able to say to him: "The cause of our Venerable Mother is in good hands with you." The Archbishop was a member of the diocesan tribunal to consider the cause.<sup>18</sup>

Shortly before her death, Mother Deschamps had acceded to the request of Archbishop Langevin to open a new mission at Touchwood Hills or Lestock in what is now Saskatchewan. They were to take over the operation of an industrial school from lay persons under the direction of the Oblates.

This time once again the devotion of Sister Marie-Xavier was called upon. She left St. Boniface on July 12 with Sister St-Alexandre and Sister Valade. It was less than two weeks after the death of Mother Deschamps and all were conscious they were carrying out her last missionary ambition.

The sisters stopped at Qu'Appelle-Lebret,<sup>19</sup> fifty miles from their destination, but they did not delay because they wanted to get to Lestock for the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, July 16. The day before, about five o'clock in the morning, they proceeded with Sisters Goulet, Bergeron and Brabant and reached the school about twelve hours later. Father Magnan, who was their guide, intoned the Salve Regina. He sang it solo while Sister Marie-Xavier hid a few tears. The foundress showed what was on her mind when she suggested the school be titled "Our Lady of Hope." It was noted with some surprise that the building was in good shape and was rather spa

cious and well lit, but there was a marked contrast in the behaviour of these children of the woods compared to those of Lebret, Dunbow and St. Boniface. Sister Goulet remarked, "We will not be long in civilizing them."<sup>20</sup>

As a matter of fact, there was soon a noticeable transformation among the children of this distant prairie. Sister Boulanger called it a prairie dotted with clumps of trees, but without so much as a hill or body of water.<sup>21</sup> Touchwood Hills and Lake La Selle,<sup>22</sup> she continued, have this in common: the first hasn't any hills and the latter has no lakes!

There, as in the other schools, the sisters soon gained the praises of the inspectors who were surprised at how much could be accomplished despite obstacles of a new kind. The lay persons whom the sisters replaced were opposed to the takeover by the sisters. In Lestock, hope continued to prevail and the work of God to be accomplished by the Grey Nuns until it became necessary for them to enter yet other fields while leaving the School of Our Lady of Hope to the Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart and of Mary Immaculate.<sup>23</sup>

The year 1897 was fertile of emotions of every kind, especially for the provincial superior, Mother Hamel, who took part on August 14 in the general chapter which had to be called to choose a successor to Mother Deschamps. Mother Filiatrault was elected while Mother Hamel became assistant-general.<sup>24</sup> Up to this time St. Boniface was properly called a vicariate rather than a province; the chapter decided to establish formal provinces. St. Boniface was placed under the direction of Sister Eugenie Dionne assisted by Sister St-Placide. It would have twelve missions including two in the United States.<sup>25</sup>

Another province was established with a centre in St. Albert. The new province of St. Albert took over responsibility for the northern Missions.

During the new provincial administration there was established a kindergarten for boys aged six to twelve; the orphanage was moved to the old boarding school while the place left free became a home for aged women;<sup>26</sup> the boarding school became a day school under Sister Duffin as superior. Sister Parent, one of the valiant teachers, was requested by Sister Dugas, superior at the hospital, to assist her in this rapidly growing situation.<sup>27</sup>

For some years thought had been given to a school of nursing. Mrs. Lloyd had offered her services as well as Miss Annie Roberts and Mary Brown. It was now a question of organizing theoretical and clinical formation. Sister Parent, who had nursed Archbishop Taché, had gained precious experience and she became the first director of St. Boniface Hospital School of Nursing.<sup>28</sup> Archbishop Langevin, in his visit to the mother house February 8, 1898, underlined the importance of having sisters of charity caring for the sick in their hospitals,<sup>29</sup> overpopulated as they were. The Yukon Gold rush gave rise to many new admissions on account of the accidents that occurred on the way. Soon the seven student nurses became an indispensable source of assistance.

The Archbishop had not relaxed the Church's efforts to keep the Catholic schools going. He arranged for the Grey Nuns to take over at St. Vital (in what is now Fort Garry). Sister Owens and Sister Berthiaume were sent there. The apostolate of teaching was not easy in this time of crisis but it was very fruitful in recruits. There were three novices from the one convent of Ste-Anne-des-Chênes.<sup>30</sup> Many of the existing generation of sisters had found their vocations when they saw the devotion of these religious teachers. It was with immense regret that they saw the closing of St. Boniface Pensionnat (Boarding School) on June 27, 1898 after fifty-four years of operation. The chronicler of the time exclaimed, "What an unforgettable day this is! For the last time, the magnificent reception room was the scene of a distribution of prizes."<sup>31</sup> Judge J.



Prud'homme expressed the feelings of the citizenry when he spoke of "these great sisters with their big hearts full of love. They have done remarkable things. You can see their works when you look at all the good mothers of families formed by them as well as all the wise teachers who are bringing to the people the heritage of Christian and Catholic education in this country."<sup>32</sup>

"It is not by becoming a charitable place of refuge that the old boarding house will lose its value," said our Sister Boulanger. During the summer the future residents were transported there: aged women, the kindergarten, the orphans, all came to join the babies of the creche which had already been established there.<sup>33</sup> Now, the academy has become, under the name of Hospice Taché, an asylum for those with a special place in the heart of our foundress," wrote Sister Dudemaine, superior of the institution. "On September 9 we will be opening our doors to those disadvantaged by nature or by fortune... Recently we invited the sisters to a very modest evening but I am afraid the musicians of the kindergarten had their music drowned out by the crying of the babies."<sup>34</sup>

To their programme for 1898 there was added, for the sisters of the province of St. Boniface, the foundation of an industrial school at Rat Portage, now Kenora. The post had been in the mind of Archbishop Taché as far back as 1845. When a few years later, he had sent a priest to the Saulteaux there, they refused to accept him. Father P.H. Cahill tried a supreme assault in 1889: he rented the residence of Charles Laverdière to use as a school and obtained the help of two former pupils of St. Boniface, Mr. and Mrs. Kipling as teachers. He undertook at the same time the building of a larger school. Things seemed promising but it was necessary to have a stable group of teachers. So Archbishop Langevin wrote to Mother Filiatrault February 3, 1898: "I offer this school to you as proof of my confidence and in recognition of the incomparable services your congregation has given to our young country for over fifty years. The worthy daughters of venerable

Mother d'Youville have erected on the banks of the Red River a monument more lasting than marble or steel."<sup>35</sup>

This was the first establishment of the Grey Nuns in Ontario, not far from the Lake of the Woods of which there was reference in biographies of Mother d'Youville. Her uncle, La Verendrye, had stopped by this lake more than two hundred years earlier. Sister Duffin and Sister Ste-Lucie went there with one of the good auxiliary sisters from the novitiate. During the fall, news came of the death of Sister Marie-Xavier on October 17 at Calgary and that of Sister Clapin on October 29 at Montreal.<sup>36</sup> The lives of these two were often cited as models for those who were called on to strike out for the unknown. Sister Duffin gave her own impressions to Mother Filia-trault: "What thoughts and emotions fill my heart as I write from St-Antoine's school. We have been transplanted to a little corner of the earth lost in the midst of hundreds of islands in Lake of the Woods. We came here in a canoe with Mother Dionne who accompanied us to our mission. The house has good lighting and is heated by hot air. The site is magnificent even when the trees lose their leaves in autumn. Father Cahill received us very well. He broke down into tears at the chapel, and so did I. It is hard to imagine that it is I who am called to take part in such a vast undertaking. Of forty children, only ten are baptized. The parents of the others seem to be attached to their 'ancestral' traditions." Sister Duffin would take great pleasure, as had Sister Lagrave in olden times, from the singing of the children during religious services. Soon these docile little Indians were transformed. Sister Pagé wrote, "The people seem very pleased at the happy change which our sisters have been able to bring about among the children. For their part, the children seem so proud to be under the direction of the sisters."<sup>37</sup>

There, as in the other posts, the missionaries collaborated in evangelization in isolation certainly, but amidst natural beauties, at picturesque sites

where one could feel close to heaven.<sup>38</sup>

St. Anthony's School, like those at Qu'Appelle-Lebret, Minneapolis, Ste-Anne-des-Chênes, St. Norbert as well as Hospice Taché, did not escape the epidemics which raged during the winter of 1899. There was measles and also diphtheria, scarlet fever and chicken pox. It became necessary to reopen the old wing for contagious diseases and Sister Phaneuf treated twenty sick people at a time. It became evident that there must be established a specialized hospital for cases requiring isolation. There was much suffering that winter, and Archbishop Langevin authorized special collections in different parishes.

From distant Montreal unexpected help arrived for the schools which the Archbishop was struggling to keep alive. Mr. Louis Colin, Sulpician superior of the seminary, to whom Bishop Langevin "owed his vocation," visited St. Boniface and brought a \$1,000.00 donation for the schools.<sup>39</sup>

The Archbishop was in favour of proceeding to have a pavilion for infectious diseases and in the autumn there was purchased a house near the hospital and it was enlarged. The house had formerly been occupied by Bishop Faraud and it had been temporarily used by the Misericordia Sisters on their arrival in St. Boniface. It became known as St. Roch Hospital.

The twenty-five sisters who were working at St. Boniface Hospital took over this new work with the able assistance of the first five registered nurses graduated from the School of Nursing. These were Mrs. Blanchard, Mrs. Spencer, Mrs. Stambaugh, Miss William and Miss Suttle. They had passed the required examinations under the supervision of the doctors and received certificates which recognized them as the first graduate nurses born in the Canadian West.

\* \* \*

During 1899 work proceeded on the pavilion for

infectious diseases and also on a laundry. On the second floor of the laundry building there was a study room and a recreation room for student nurses. Miss Riordon, a future novice, took preliminary courses there and remarked "what a great grace it was for her to be able to become aware of real suffering and to be able to make herself a help and servant of the poor."<sup>40</sup>

The "house for infectious diseases" was blessed by Archbishop Langevin on April 22, 1900. This date marked an important transition in the service of the sick. It meant an end to the wing which had been nicknamed "the old ice-house" used for these purposes since 1885. The sisters assigned to working with those with contagious diseases felt they were following in the footsteps of Mother d'Youville who had, when she adopted the grey habit in 1755, taken care of the victims of smallpox at Sault-Saint-Louis. Her heroism in this regard had recently been written up in a biography of the foundress just published by Madame Berthe Jetté.<sup>41</sup> Events soon proved the necessity of this pavilion. The hospital at Winnipeg, being placed under quarantine, the city council proposed to house poor patients at St. Roch, a proposal readily agreed to by the Grey Nuns.<sup>42</sup>

It was not only at St. Roch that people with contagious diseases were looked after. There was a group of "flying nurses" who attended to sick persons wherever they were. Sister Eviston and Sister Bernier thus went to Fort Ellice to assist during an outbreak of smallpox. They stayed there forty-six days. Two months later Sister Phaneuf and the same Sister Bernier went to Russell some 252 miles from Winnipeg to deal with an outbreak there. They lived in cabins, sharing the food of the stricken and even assuming the job of grave-digging when there were deaths. They returned after sixty days of confinement.<sup>43</sup>

With the discretion which characterized her, the golden jubilarian, Sister Laurent, continued her house visits just as she had in 1891-1892 when there

had been an epidemic of diphtheria. The risk of contagion never bothered this great lady who maintained a silent courage. A friend of hers wrote, "If she is ever canonized it will not be on account of her writings because Sister Laurent is sparing of words." On May 24 she wrote to Mother General: "Being out of practice with penmanship, I dare to use a pencil to thank you for your good wishes on the fiftieth anniversary of my profession. This celebration has filled my heart with gratitude and love for God and my dear community."<sup>44</sup>

Her "dear community" was increasing again at St. Boniface where it was decided to establish, at the request of Archbishop Langevin, an orphanage for boys at Fort Garry or Winnipeg. It was to be called St. Joseph's Orphanage. Sister Duffin, who had proved her mettle in Kenora, was put in charge. The house would be able to lodge about thirty children, according to Sister Ward who was passing through St. Boniface. "There will be a large yard for their recreation."<sup>45</sup>

Sister Duffin and Sister Clément installed themselves in the old priest's house of St. Mary's parish where, formerly, the sisters had had a boarding school.<sup>46</sup> The official opening took place May 8, when Sister Duffin, got back from Montreal, wondered what they had gotten themselves into. "Repairs were not yet completed. There were seven workers busying themselves everywhere. It was necessary for a time to live in the sight of both God and man. We already have ten orphans and we are expecting another five. They are little boys who have been running at large in the streets of Winnipeg. Their specialty is figuring out how to get into a fight." In the chronicles of the work we read: "We must make haste to provide clothing for our orphans; they could be called unclothed children." The lay committee which had asked for the work expressed great satisfaction at seeing these young charges, yesterday roaming the streets, now setting off for school well-kept, carrying their books and slates.<sup>47</sup>

At the turn of the century, the canonical province of St. Boniface counted fourteen convents.<sup>48</sup> Five Manitoba novices took their vows during 1901 and filled the places of those who died. Sister Ste-Thérèse was among the dead. After contracting erysipelas from a patient, she retired to the provincial house where she had devoted her last days to her work in the department of pharmacy.<sup>49</sup>

Others felt the weight of their days. Sister Lespérance, better known as Sister Youville, had lived through the tragic days of 1885 at Lac La Biche. She died February 5, 1902. On June 3 of that year, Bishop Grandin also completed his earthly career. He died in the company of his coadjutor, Bishop Legal,<sup>50</sup> his dear niece, Sister Grandin, and his companion in arms, Bishop Isidore Clut.

Mother Slocombe had summed up the opinion of the Grey Nuns when she wrote April 18, 1866: "Bishop Grandin<sup>51</sup> is a man full of zeal and devotion; the life he leads is admirable."<sup>52</sup>

The immense vicariate of Athabaska-Mackenzie was now divided so that Bishop Gabriel Breynat, consecrated April 6, 1902, shared leadership with Bishop Grouard.<sup>53</sup>

In that year, in the autumn of 1902, Sister Hamel was elected as superior general while the superior of the hospital, Sister Dugas, was named mistress of novices and Sister Royal became provincial superior.<sup>54</sup>

The turn of the century marked the end of a chapter in the history of the Grey Nuns in the West. They saw the last of the pioneers end their lives; the first generation was now extinct. Gone from this earth also were the titans of the apostolate; Archbishop Taché, Archbishop Fabre, Bishop Grandin, Bishop Laflèche,<sup>55</sup> Bishop Clut, above all, the unforgettable Bishop Bourget, in whose honour the diocese of Montreal built a monument dedicated on June 24. Other good friends departed for the after-



life. Mr. Louis Colin was replaced by Mr. Charles Lecoq as provincial superior of St. Sulpice and the good father "Stanlislus," faithful servant, died January 17, 1903.

Many noted visitors had come to St. Boniface during the last ten years. Bishop Falconio, the first apostolic delegate, visited on September 26, 1900, and Archbishop Bruchesi, after having taken part in the consecration of Archbishop Langevin, visited Red River in 1903 in his new capacity of Archbishop of Montreal. He had been a former pupil of the Grey Nuns. Sister Weekes, a graduate nurse from Notre-Dame Hospital, had just been named professor of health and of the care of the sick at the government industrial schools.<sup>56</sup> Archbishop Bruchesi had accepted in February 1891 to be a notary in the Cause of Mother d'Youville<sup>57</sup> and was pleased to note how the Venerable favoured the missions of the West. Since 1894 there had been recorded the cure of Mr. Théophile Paré, M.P. for La Verendrye;<sup>58</sup> a former orphan, Adèle Parisien, attributed her rescue from a forest fire to the protection of Mother d'Youville;<sup>59</sup> Sister Bourassa had been cured suddenly to the amazement of Dr. Todd, a Protestant doctor who was willing to give testimony in the Cause.<sup>60</sup> Father Jouan, an Oblate at Ile-à-la-Crosse, spoke in thanksgiving to Mother d'Youville for having obtained a cure,<sup>61</sup> and Mother Marie-Honorine-de-la-Croix, a canoness of Lyon who was living at their monastery in Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes, Manitoba proclaimed that "she was led back from the grave as a result of the intercession of the Venerable Canadian to whom she prayed at the instigation of the sisters of the Hospital."

It appeared evident that the Mother of the poor watched with special care the missionaries to whom were confided heroic work. Mother Hamel attributed to her success which was experienced by the new far northern post at Great Slave Lake where a mission was opened June 16, 1903 by Sisters Boisvert, McQuillan and Genereux along with the devoted auxiliary Sisters Honorine and Ernestine. This was the convent well-

called "Resolution"; it required great resolution to give the one hundred per cent effort needed, the courage, the self-denial, the forgetfulness of self. There, as elsewhere, the sisters were able to gain a great harvest of souls for God.

- 1 The details in this chapter are taken from *Circ. mens.* 1892-1895 at the mentioned dates. Only the other sources are noted.
- 2 Morice, *hist. abrégée Ouest can.*, p. 127.
- 3 Letter dated April 23. Dr. Taché, a former deputy minister of public works, who died in Ottawa April 15, 1894.
- 4 Benoit, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, p. 775. Father Soullier was accompanied by Father Antoine, a former provincial superior of the Oblate Fathers. The sup. gen. had already visited the missions in the West in 1883 as assistant general.
- 5 Morice, *Hist. Abrégée Ouest can.*, p. 127.
- 6 Bishop Laflèche celebrated his golden jubilee of priesthood in Three Rivers on May 22 and 23. The archbishop of St. Boniface then wrote to him saying, "Here we cannot forget the heroic tasks that you have accomplished. Having to remain at a distance, my thoughts will be with you. In the old St. Boniface convent for which you made the plans, we are going to have a solemn celebration in your honour. Next month when we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the Grey Nuns, we will not forget that you were here too." Letter published in *Circ. mens.*, 1892-1895, p. 414.
- 7 *Chronicles*, 1872-1904, Jan. 30, 1895.
- 8 Mgr. Emard, bishop of Valleyfield, confided how touched he was to lodge at the boarding school in the room where Archbishop Taché had died. Mgr. Laflèche visited St. François-Xavier where an armchair having belonged to Mgr Taché was kept in the presbytery. As for Bishop Fabre, his days were counted, for he died Dec. 30, 1896.

- 9 The sisters' ages vary between 24 and 35 years. Sr. Vincent's parents assumed the expenses of having her remains transported to Montreal. Before she died, she scribbled a touching message, "When I get to Montreal, if only I could open my eyes and tell you how much I love you."
- 10 Mr. S n cal, who had built the hospitals of St. Boniface and Calgary, was given the contract for Edmonton. Sr. Devins' generosity was of great help financially.
- 11 Father Damase Dandurand who in 1845, had welcomed the Grey Nuns when they founded the convent in Bytown, also participated in their 50th anniversary celebrations. Later he became chaplain of Hospice Tach  in St. Boniface and lived to be the oldest priest in the world.
- 12 According to an agreement reached with Archbishop Langevin, the St. Boniface novices would complete their novitiate at the mother house.
- 13 Letter dated December 4, 1844.
- 14 See supra, year 1858.
- 15 Details taken from an explanation signed by Archbishop Langevin May 12, 1913. In these convents out in the country, it was a little easier to survive.
- 16 This work was soon to be moved to the boarding school which had become Hospice Tach .
- 17 It was the 60th anniversary of her entrance to religious life on Sept. 9, 1836, and not that of her vows which were Sept. 10, 1838.
- 18 Canon Bruch si was a member of the tribunal for this Cause. Mgr Merry Del Val had visited St. Boniface the previous June 5. The life of Mother Deschamps was written by Sr. Collette

and completed by Sr. Fauteux. It is kept in manuscript form in the ASGM.

19 From now on, Qu'Appelle would be called Lebret in honour of the Oblate missionary Father Lebret who also served as postmaster for the district.

20 Letter dated July 21, 1897.

21 Letter dated June 28, 1898. There are some lakes and hills, but not close to the convents.

22 In 1898, the Lac La Biche mission was moved to Lac La Selle.

23 Annals, 1932-33, p. 16.

24 Sr. Hamel arrived in St. Boniface in 1869 and became vicar-provincial in 1872.

25 The vicariates did not cover the same area as the civil provinces. The St. Albert province became responsible for the northern missions.

26 Guichon, Sr. M., *op.cit.*, p.12. The kindergar-  
ten was open until 1905 when the Oblate sisters  
took over.

27 Sr. Dugas replaced Sr. Letellier as superior of  
the Edmonton Hospital.

28 As early as July 1895, Mother Deschamps had  
discussed the need for this School of Nursing  
with Archbishop Langevin.

29 Mgr Langevin visited the mother house on his  
way to Rome where a successor to Father Soul-  
lier who had died in office was to be nomi-  
nated.

30 Sr. Boulanger to the mother house, July 25,  
1898.

- 31 De Moissac, Sr. E., op.cit., p. 203.
- 32 "Le Manitoba", June 29, 1898.
- 33 The aged men occupied the old yellow house until 1904; then they were transferred to the old house.
- 34 Circ. mens., 1898-1901, pp. 28-29.
- 35 Document no.5 pertaining to the Orphanage.
- 36 Sr. Marie-Xavier was 61 years old, Sister Clapin, 78.
- 37 Letter dated Feb. 16, 1899. Sr. Pagé writes on her way to the R.-R. She had been elected superior for the St. Boniface Indian School.
- 38 The Kenora school was closed in 1930.
- 39 Morice, Vie de Mgr Langevin, p. 185.
- 40 Biography of Sr. Riordan, Annals 1950-51, pp. 1204-1205.
- 41 Mrs. Jetté had been a member of the diocesan tribunal for the Cause of Mother d'Youville. She was the spouse of the lieutenant-governor of the Province of Quebec. Her son, Father Jules Jetté, S.J., taught in St. Boniface College and became well known in the Yukon and Alaska.
- 42 Chronicles, 1872-1904. St. Roch Hospital had its own administration as early as 1902.
- 43 Biography of Sr. Pelletier-Phaneuf. The incident took place in March-April 1901. After the hut occupied by the sisters burned down, they found refuge in another humble shelter where they had to sleep on the floor. Letter from Sr. Bernier, April 11, 1901.



- 44 Circ. mens. 1898-1901, pp. 457-458.
- 45 Letter written in April 1900.
- 46 Tessier-Biron, op.cit., p. 204.
- 47 St. Joseph Orphanage, Winnipeg, Chronicles, p. 9. This orphanage work was relinquished in 1938 when Ste. Rose du Lac Hospital was founded.
- 48 The School of Nursing was part of the hospital and Hospice Taché took the place of the boarding school.
- 49 Biography of Sr. Ste-Thérèse.
- 50 Consecrated on June 17, 1897.
- 51 Father Grandin, the bishop's nephew, arrived the next day. On Feb. 24, 1937, the Cause of Bishop Grandin was introduced in Rome. On Aug. 23, 1938, his remains were officially identified.
- 52 Letter to Sr. Dandurand.
- 53 Bishop Clut had left the North for health reasons. He died on July 9, 1903.
- 54 Sr. Royal came to St. Boniface in 1858.
- 55 He died in Three Rivers on July 14, 1898.
- 56 Circ. mens., 1902-03, p. 743.
- 57 Ibid., 1887-1891, p. 527.
- 58 Sr. Paré, better known as Sr. St-Théophile, was professed on April 29, 1903. Her father, Mr. Paré, was cured in 1894. Widowed, he was ordained to the priesthood on July 26, 1906.
- 59 Circ. mens., 1895-1898, p. 66.

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60 Ibid., pp. 347-348.

61 Ibid., pp. 425-426.

## CHAPTER NINE - 1904-1913

"In a few years this Western region had made so much progress that no country in the world can offer an example of such swift transformation. Religion has been a central factor in this development, and Catholicism has advanced in common with others. The victories of the church in this new country are marked by many vibrant institutions." Thus wrote Archbishop Duhamel of Ottawa following a trip to Red River.<sup>1</sup>

What marvellous events occurred in the few short years since the arrival of the twentieth century. In 1902 it was estimated that the diocese of St. Boniface alone had now 25,000 Galicians on whose behalf Father Lacombe arranged to have Basilian missionaries come to Manitoba.<sup>2</sup>

To these territories, just yesterday almost inaccessible but now called "the country of the future" 50,000 immigrants came in the one year, 1906. Two years earlier 800 French-Canadians made up one of the largest contingents ever to arrive from the East.<sup>3</sup>

It became apparent that the religious congregations already existing in the West were not sufficient in number for all the work to be done. Bishop Langevin, like his colleagues elsewhere, did not hesitate to offer place to the communities which left France as a result of the persecution there. The Grey Nuns welcomed with sympathy the new workers who usually stayed a while in the humble provincial house while becoming acclimatized to their new country.

Equally welcomed were the communities of Canadian origin coming to lend a hand and also the local group inspired by Archbishop Langevin in 1904, the Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart and of Mary Immaculate. The two pioneers, Alma Laurendeau and Ida Lafraicain took as their convent a house next to the normal school which was founded in 1912, thanks

to the efforts of the Archbishop.<sup>4</sup>

These new congregations made a much appreciated contribution. To the Misericordia Sisters, the Grey Nuns gave the creche they had begun some years previously. The Daughters of the Cross (also known as the Sisters of St. André) replaced the auxiliary Grey Nuns at the bishop's residence.<sup>5</sup> The Oblate Sisters took over the kindergarten for boys. The Sisters of Saint Joseph of Lyon replaced the heroic women of Ile-à-la-Crosse in 1905. At this far-away post the missionaries experienced fires and floods and a precarious existence. The sisters who came back from there to St. Boniface had given thirteen, twenty-seven, thirty-two and thirty-four years to this arduous work. An article in *Les Cloches de St-Boniface* describes them as having tears in their eyes.<sup>6</sup> The Montagnais had made many requests to have the Grey Nuns stay but they had to obey orders, however much they might have wished to remain. Had they been able to see into the future, they would have known the Grey Nuns would one day return to this field of honour.<sup>7</sup>

The chronicles at this time were faithful to record even the details of incidents which occurred from day to day and which together form the history of the sisters. Sometimes it was tragedy that was recorded. So, on January 5, 1904, we have the account of the fire which destroyed the prospering work being done at Lebret. "Our dear school is now only a heap of smouldering ruins," wrote Sister Goulet. "Our Sisters Weekes and McMillen had to jump out the window. Both received the alarm from the Oblate priest who saved the Blessed Sacrament. We now have only the clothes on our back. We found refuge at the convent of the Mothers of Notre-Dame de Sion. As for the pupils, the girls are living in the parish church and the boys at the public school."

Misfortune, however, did not diminish courage since the correspondence proceeds to say: "We are certainly continuing our work here but with some difficulties. We were doing so well and now we have

absolutely nothing. We will be leaving here tomorrow. I am not sure where we are going but we hope at last to be reunited once again."<sup>8</sup> The sisters of the mother house were moved by this account and soon seven trunks were sent forward filled with new clothing. Sister Goulet wrote on February 17: "May the Lord clothe you in His grace. Do not be worried about us. Last night we slept on the pews in the church and we borrowed mattresses and blankets. We will soon be settled in the old shoemakers's shop."

After the fire came the flood, this time at St. Boniface itself. This was just at the time of the visit of Mother Hamel who arrived on April 23 to find the land covered by six feet of water. Travel between one house and another had to be by boat.<sup>9</sup> That's the way the visit to the hospital was made; the hospital had had 2,617 patients over the course of one year and two new wings were required by the increase in population.<sup>10</sup>

St. Joseph's orphanage in Winnipeg also had to be expanded. The work advanced slowly, the source of funds being public collections. The chronicler wrote: "We have had to refuse orphans every day. We accept only the most poor."<sup>11</sup>

At St. Norbert there died on March 16, 1905 Bishop Noël Ritchot whose name, bound to that of Riel, is famous in the history of Manitoba. He died at the convent, fire having destroyed his house the preceding January 10. A classroom was cleared to provide for his needs. He was in his 80's. Sister Dudemaine commented: "The public weeps for a good Father from whom much was received. Monseigneur built up his parish so that today we can see it with its religious institutions, his church which is the finest in the West, according to some, his organ, the magnificent bells which arrived just in time to sound out the death of their donor."<sup>12</sup>

St. Norbert convent had developed a splendid reputation. Besides the regular program, the school specialized in the teaching of music. "Our forty-two

musicians carried themselves off very well. Sacred music holds the first the place to the great satisfaction of the curés who can now count on the services of a musician and a teacher in their parishes."<sup>13</sup>

At St. Boniface all the works were prospering. The "yellow house" had to be changed into a hospice for old people.<sup>14</sup> St. Roch Hospital justified amply its reason for being built. Many of the newcomers from overseas appeared to be susceptible to infectious diseases. In the course of two months, October and November, there were five hundred and eighty-two cases of typhoid fever.<sup>15</sup>

As to the industrial school, a new policy was adopted. The buildings and land became the property of the Oblate Fathers who undertook in return to build boarding schools right on the reserves at Sandy Bay, at Fort Alexander, at Fort Frances and at Rainy River.<sup>16</sup>

On March 22, 1906 Sister Lajoie, assistant provincial, and Marguerite-Marie went to Couchiching Reserve where the Saulteaux lived. In times past this was the spot occupied by Pierre de La Verendrye and Christopher Dufrost de la Jemmerais, the uncle and the brother of Mère d'Youville. These explorers had built there Fort St. Charles. On a neighbouring island in 1736 the son of La Verendrye and twenty companions including Father Aulneau had met a horrible death at the hands of the natives.<sup>17</sup> It was fitting that now the Grey Nuns should assume the job of teaching in this place, thus keeping alive the memory of La Verendrye and Lajemmerais, as Bishop Langevin counselled them to do.<sup>18</sup> The four pioneers of 1844 had stopped at the site on their way to the Red River; they could not then foresee that one day the Grey Nuns would open a school there.

By the beginning of April there were already thirty-two pupils. Soon three sisters came to help: Sister Girard, Sister du Précieux-Sang and Sister Goyette. There were the usual hardships at the



outset but they could count on the limitless generosity of Mrs. Wight. While the baptized children were busy learning how to read and to calculate, the other little Indians stayed by the door at first looking on but gradually asking to take part. The light shone in the night, and this was a consolation<sup>19</sup> for the sadness felt at the necessity of abandoning the school at Minneapolis.<sup>20</sup> Archbishop Ireland of St. Paul expressed the regret of all at the decision of the sisters to abandon the work. "No doubt other sisters can take your places as teachers, but none will take your place in the hearts of the people. Thank you for all you have done in Minneapolis."<sup>21</sup>

The most remarkable event in 1906 at St. Boniface was the blessing of the cornerstone of the new cathedral. The rapid increase in the population had forced Father Dugas, the grand vicar, to build a tent near the metropolitan church to accommodate the vast crowds.<sup>22</sup>

On August 15 there was a Solemn Mass, celebrated by Bishop Legal of St. Albert in the presence of his colleagues from St. Boniface, Ottawa and Prince Albert. The old temple erected by Bishop Taché in 1865 donned its finest ornaments. The main altar was still the same one that had been used by Bishop Provencher and the first apostles of this new land. The banquet was served by the ladies of Ste. Anne. There was an excursion across to Fort Rouge where the incredible growth of Winnipeg could be seen. At the end of the day, with fireworks rivaling the splendor of the setting sun, they proceeded with the blessing of the cornerstone. Great emotion filled all hearts when they saw in procession representatives of Polish, German, Ruthenian and French parishes with their pastors, flags and musicians. "All proclaim that they are above all Catholic." The people were no less impressed with the presence of distinguished Protestants like Chief Justice Howell and Judge Mathers.<sup>23</sup>

Near the cathedral humble crosses marked the resting place of the departed Grey Nuns. Among the

other worthies there was now added the names of Sister Marguerite Connolly, the first pupil at the boarding house and the first native novice,<sup>24</sup> and Sister Cécile Cusson who had come on August 25, 1845 on the last journey made wholly by water and portage.<sup>25</sup> Another was soon to join them, Sister Curran who had spent thirty-five years of her life at Red River both as a teacher and as a secretary of Archbishop Taché. Having gone back to Montreal in 1887 she had become archivist and had been of much assistance to Bishop Ramsay who wrote the first English biography of Mother d'Youville. As it happened, Bishop Ramsay died only two days before his collaborator.<sup>26</sup>

"Life in the world passes away," was no doubt in the minds of the sisters as this austere truth stimulated their generosity in the exercise of their duties.

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One kind of apostolic work that everyone calls a "sad business" to be in is that of collecting alms. This is the job that fell to the lot of Sister Phaneuf and Sister Guay during August 1906. The institutions at St. Boniface had filled up with needy persons but there was not enough money to cover the costs. So the sisters had to go around to beg. The year 1905 had seen the birth of two new provinces carved out of the Territories. These were Alberta and Saskatchewan, the last named already having two "cities," Saskatoon and Regina. The two sisters arrived at Saskatoon on Saturday, September 29. They went to Mass the next day. As was the custom, they went around to the rectory to pay their respects to the parish priest. Imagine their surprise to hear Father Paillé who thought they came to help the sick, and who, for his part, exclaimed, "Don't tell me! You have come here to look after our sick." As a matter of fact it happened that he had in his house just at that time four very ill persons who had no other nurse available than the poor Oblate priest. When he saw the grey habits, he concluded right away

that Providence had sent them to help with the nursing.

For their part, the sisters were embarrassed. They had been away for six whole weeks and it was time they were getting home. Besides, their driver was hired on a limited time contract. They said they would have to have time to think it over. Meanwhile, a new request came from Mr. Cahill, a relative of the curé of Winnipeg. He said his mother was in immediate need of nursing care. The sisters decided they could not hesitate any longer. They agreed to serve for three days with the help of a young lady who had no experience whatsoever. The number of patients quickly increased and thus a new nursing service was established. Dr. Stewart was so impressed with this unhopèd for turn of events that he took steps to obtain a prolongation of their stay. After finding out the address of the superior, he sent a telegram to Mother Provincial who went along with his request. Thus was established the beginnings of a Grey Nuns hospital in Saskatoon.

Father Paillé made an appeal to his parishioners to offer assistance to the sisters. A man named Campbell volunteered to act as an orderly and he was assigned to the night shift. Unfortunately, however, he collapsed under the strain.

The missionary priest was not willing to resign himself to having the sisters working only on a temporary basis. He went to Winnipeg to talk over his problem with Father Vachon, his immediate superior. Mr. Cahill, happy to see his mother recovered, arranged for Mother Despins and Sister Archambault to visit the place to size up the possibilities. He covered the cost of the trip. The superior agreed that nursing help would be provided until the end of the epidemic but said she could not promise more since there were so many demands on the Grey Nuns.

But the people of Saskatoon were not ready to accept this response and planned to push their appeals to Montreal. When the epidemic had passed

its peak, the benevolent nurses got the little church ready for Christmas. Their work was so much appreciated that people came from forty to sixty miles away to congratulate them on their artistry. After much prayer, the citizens agreed to send a delegation of four persons to Montreal headed by Father Vachon. They arrived in Montreal at the beginning of January 1907. They said the sisters had saved twenty-eight patients from certain death. Bishop Langevin supported the request although he said he would not press for Saskatoon since he already had in mind to have a hospital at Regina. He was very surprised when the decision was taken to accept both invitations since community policy favoured having missions close enough to each other so that help could be extended easily in case of needs.

On the 19 of January, Sister Mailloux, assistant general, left Montreal with Sister Blakely who would join Sisters Phaneuf and Guay, already at Saskatoon. At St. Boniface they picked up Sister St-Dosithée, the superior-designate, and it was expected they would reach the end of their journey in a few days. However, the weather that year was frightful and temperatures going down to fifty-four degrees below zero (fahrenheit). An engine broke down and refused to budge. Two freight trains collided producing fire which spread to cars on the other line, thus impeding the train which the sisters had taken. In short, a trip that would normally take ten hours took five days and six nights.

Dr. Willoughby offered his farmhouse at Pleasant Hill; it was expanded on a temporary basis to provide a pavilion for forty-five sick persons. The hospital was called St. Paul's and in two months there were one hundred sixteen patients. They were considered as persons sent by Providence. Several, after being cured, forgot to pay their bills.

The sisters suffered much from cold on account of a shortage of coal; one of the nurses caught a disease, but things generally went on well and by the end of 1907 it was felt that the work would sur-

vive.<sup>27</sup>

As for the hospital planned for Regina, the new capital of Saskatchewan named after Queen Victoria, it was decided to install the sisters for the time being in the former rectory of the Oblates while renovating a building which had been serving as a church.

The population of the city had been increased to three thousand five hundred people of whom three hundred were German Catholics. Father Suffa, the parish priest, had just built a new church in which was sung a Te Deum in thanksgiving for the news of the coming of the Grey Nuns.<sup>28</sup>

Sister Duffin who had had nothing but success in her work as a foundress of the Kenora school and the St. Joseph orphanage in Winnipeg, was now named superior for Regina and arrived in company with Sisters St-Cyr, Daoust, Wagner and Lechasseur. They took over the old priests' house on May 23, 1907. Soon thereafter they had a piece of good luck. Dr. Johnstone put up for sale the sanatorium he had been operating for several years. The sisters acquired not only the building but also the patients. On June 26, Father Suffa celebrated the first Mass at this asylum which he dedicated, in secret, to Our Lady Queen of Heaven. A school of nursing was opened at the same time.<sup>29</sup>

It was not easy to establish a Grey Nuns institution in a milieu where Catholics were a minority. Soon difficulties began to get in the way and to threaten the viability of the hospital. One doctor, the first surgeon in the area, was opposed to having sisters and made a complaint to the city council.<sup>30</sup> Fortunately there were also friends. One woman came to the rescue of the sisters with financial aid; another, seeing the sisters tormented by mosquitoes "as big as birds," provided mosquito nets despite the tacit disapproval of her husband.<sup>31</sup>

Plagues of mosquitoes gave place to cold; coal

was rare and expensive. Sister Daoust had to have a thumb amputated as a result of infection. To top everything off, an epidemic broke out but this is what really saved the project since, at Regina as elsewhere, the nurses did not fear the risk of contagion. The city council ended up by donating \$1,000 in recognition of the services rendered by the young institution under adverse conditions.<sup>32</sup>

Cold did not relax its grip. At Lebret, in the house which was rebuilt after the fire but with larger dimensions, there were now three wings. It was necessary to use straw to keep the fire burning, and that lasted several days.<sup>33</sup> At Fort Frances it was water that was lacking; the pipes were too short and water had to be carried by the barrel.<sup>34</sup> At St. Norbert, wood had to be used as fuel. The fact that the ground was now frozen several feet deep was a source of hope for a good harvest next year since it was then believed that the early freezing of the ground was one of the secrets of the fertility of Manitoba soil.<sup>35</sup>

The summer which everyone looked forward to had its own evil. A terrible storm beat down on Winnipeg and its environs, notably St. Norbert, on the evening of August 10. Houses were torn from their foundations and carried as far as four hundred feet. It was said that, during the storm "everyone recovered his faith."

On October 4, 1908 the new cathedral was consecrated. St. Boniface now had a population of seven thousand of whom five thousand were Catholics. On May 1 the "town" of St. Boniface became officially a "city." In this stronghold of Catholicism in the West, there gathered for the celebration thirteen bishops and archbishops, about one hundred priest and an impressive crowd which included many Protestants. Archbishop Langevin presided with the assistance of Fathers Dandurand and Lacombe, both valiant veterans of the apostolate. During the afternoon there was a procession which rivalled that of the 300th anniversary of the founding of Quebec and even that of the



eucharistic congress at Lourdes.<sup>36</sup>

Among the priests there walked one who needed two canes. This was Father Goiffon, who had escaped from the fire of the twin-turreted cathedral in 1860.<sup>38</sup> The aged invalid encountered his old acquaintances, in particular Sister Ste-Thérèse,<sup>38</sup> his old nurse and Sisters Fisette, Laurent and Royal still working. They had all been witnesses of the fire forty-eight years ago. It was recalled how Mother Valade, looking out on the fire, had expressed the wish that God had taken her life instead.<sup>39</sup> And it was remembered how Bishop Taché had knelt in the ruins accepting the unsearchable ways of Providence.

Father Goiffon, like all the others, marvelled at the magnificent skyline of St. Boniface today, with the impressive St. Boniface Hospital flanked by St. Roch, Hospice Taché adjacent to the humble white house where practically everything began. This little white house was the centre of fourteen missions of the Grey Nuns spread out over three provinces of the Dominion of Canada.

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Before the demolition of the old cathedral had been completed, they exhumed the remains of Bishops Provencher, Taché and Faraud<sup>40</sup> and of the priests, Father Darveau and the Oblates, Tissot and Maison-neuve. The body of Archbishop Taché was found intact and the Grey Nuns were asked to replace the vestments. The translation of the remains of the venerable apostles took place June 23, 1909 in the presence of Archbishop Langevin, many clergy and sisters with the superior general in the lead,<sup>41</sup> and a big crowd of the faithful. There were always large crowds at such religious services because the faith in Manitoba was deep as was evidenced also by the large numbers of vocations. The vocations reflected the ethnic composition of the people. At the Grey Nuns' novitiate there were at one time five French-Canadians, two Hungarians, a Belgium and a Pole, while the thirty-three students at the Minor Seminary consisted of

nineteen French-Canadians, eight Galicians, two Germans and one each from France, Switzerland and Belgium.<sup>42</sup>

The years that pass are enlightened by the prospect of the future. Sister Royal, after fifty-eight years of generous service in the province of Manitoba, returned to Montreal mother house in 1909 while Sister Fisette celebrated her diamond jubilee. Father Lacombe's 60th anniversary as a priest coincided with the golden jubilee of the convent of St. Albert. There on September 8 Father Leduc reviewed the grand career of the one who always preferred to call himself "the Apostle of the Blackfeet." Father Lewis praised the work of the three Grey Nuns who arrived at Lake Sainte-Anne in 1859. After describing the many flourishing communities in Alberta, the orator said: "They have not, like the workers of the first hour, had to work in the fields, cut barley with a sickle, spin and weave, suffer hunger and cold, but they would have done all these things if conditions required them. Their devotion, their zeal, among all these congregations follow the example of that which we admire in the most heroic among our dear Grey Sisters of Charity."<sup>43</sup>

The "dear Grey Sisters" had finally triumphed over the opposition to their hospital in Regina. The taxpayers were faced with a choice of seeing the sisters go or of providing land for them. They chose the latter option even though the councillors were in majority Protestant. The sisters undertook to build a hospital within two years. Sister Duffin provided excellent leadership and the hospital established a fine reputation. The foundress gave her place to Sister Dandurand who was to complete the building.<sup>44</sup> The new superior had not long to live for she died of a stroke January 4, 1910 after having developed the plans with the architects. Sister Page succeeded her. While all this work was going on in Regina, Sister Despins, the provincial, set to work to realize a long-projected plan, the establishment of a new provincial house.

Sunday, August 7, Archbishop Langevin went to place the cornerstone bearing the inscription: "Provincial House, A.D. 1910." In it were placed relics, holy pictures, newspapers, coins, statistics of the sisters and their works. The hole was sealed with the same little trowel that had been used in similar circumstances in 1846.<sup>45</sup>

In the annals of all the Canadian congregations there is mention of an outstanding event in 1910, the holding of the Eucharistic Congress at Montreal. Archbishop Langevin was anxious for St. Boniface to take its full part and authorized a collection in his diocese which since 1895 had grown from twenty-nine thousand to one hundred thirty-three thousand Catholics. The number of communities of religious had gone up from seven to twenty-five.<sup>46</sup> An offering of \$500 was sent to the organizers. A carload of sheaves of the finest wheat of Manitoba was sent down to ornament the immense arc of triumph which was built. The finest wheat was also used for the hosts which would be distributed to the parishes and religious communities.<sup>47</sup>

An important delegation of one hundred fifty people went down from Manitoba to represent the people of this province. Several stayed at the Montreal mother house in the department set aside for elderly sisters recently arranged by Mother Filia-trault who herself died June 11.

Following the great feast at Montreal, Cardinal Vincent Vanutelli, the Papal legate, expressed a desire to visit the West where he arrived September 18 to be greeted at the station by the Archbishop and by Prime Minister Roblin. There was a parade of one hundred fifty-seven vehicles led by a red automobile. After a visit with the Sisters of Misericordia, the procession crossed the bridge<sup>48</sup> and made its entry into the third cathedral of St. Boniface. Archbishop Langevin surpassed himself in eloquence. "This is the first time that a Cardinal has set foot on Manitoba soil. Our autumn has put on its most colourful clothing to welcome you to St. Boniface,

the citadel of the Catholic faith in this vast country."

The eminent visitor blessed the foundation stone of the minor seminary being built near the cathedral. He then went to the little white house and celebrated Mass in the tiny chapel. Touching the ceiling with his hand,<sup>49</sup> the tall prelate said he was happy to have been able to offer Mass "in the most ancient temple of the West." He visited the infirmary and went to Hospice Taché where the orphans sang the national anthem. The Cardinal was heard to say to a missionary, "That hymn is the finest I have ever heard."<sup>50</sup> The Cardinal also visited the hospital and the Rutherian church.<sup>51</sup>

This was very much a year of visiting dignitaries. In October Mr. Garriguet, superior general of St. Sulpice, came as well as Mr. Hertzog, the postulator of the Cause of Mère d'Youville. The latter, like so many others, spoke of "this region being full of hope. With its riches and fertility, this country promises to become one of the finest and most flourishing in the whole world."<sup>52</sup>

But the time of testing was far from over for this country. On December 7 the sawmill, next to St. Roch Hospital, caught on fire and it was necessary to evacuate the patients. The sick were transported by ambulance to the "yellow house" which had been put to so many uses. The sisters went into the neighbourhood of the flames and placed pictures of Mother d'Youville on all the buildings. Soon all danger had passed and at about 10 o'clock the patients could be brought back. The nurses hoped there would be no unhappy after effects among the ill.<sup>53</sup>

The "yellow house" relapsed into anonymity after this hour of glory. The question was debated whether it should come down given that the new provincial house would constitute an ensemble with the Taché orphanage. The new building took the form of a Latin cross with four stories surmounted by a large dome which gave the whole an impressive charac-

ter.

Henceforth this building would house the members of the provincial administration, the infirmary of the sisters, the active sisters and the orphans. The official opening took place September 14; the actual possession was taken October 4 when the sick and aged made their entrance. As for the dear old white house, it was set aside for aged persons. This house, once the marvel of the West on account of its windows made up of small squares,<sup>54</sup> had been a witness to the heroism of the pioneers. It was full of precious mementoes and it was with regret that the sisters left it. Some of the old sisters had lived sixty years in it.<sup>55</sup> It was given the name of Youville Hospice and soon, with an expanding population, it became too small. In that year, 1911, the newspapers reported that 3,000 French-Canadians had come from Quebec, many of them via the U.S.A., to establish themselves in this area full of hope.<sup>56</sup>

At the end of this year the area experienced an outbreak of scarlet fever. This disease affected thirty-five orphans of whom three died. Some of the sisters and employees were also struck by it. St. Roch was besieged with patients and it was once again necessary to renew the courage which had been shown in 1847 by those who "went gaily to face the typhus epidemic." The spirit of fervour had not grown cold and the sisters went calmly to the sick beds. Sisters Phaneuf, St. Placide, Paré and Brabant were in the forefront.<sup>57</sup>

At the beginning of a letter to Mother Piché, Sister Provencher wrote: "I have just placed our overcharged hearts in your care." During April 1912 it was possible to talk to Mother Piché in person for she stopped on her way to the Far North, the first superior general to undertake such a journey. Everything was joyful now that the epidemic was but a memory. In a few days, April 23, there took place the first profession in the new house with its chapel as large as a parish church and beautifully deco-

rated. There Sister Olivier, Sister Poliquin and Sister Pulvermacher promised to serve Jesus Christ in the person of the poor.<sup>58</sup>

During their novitiate they had been initiated into the spirit of the Grey Nuns and to the traditions of hospitality in the provincial house.<sup>59</sup> In June, four Sisters of Charity of Evron had been received on their way to Alberta where they already had three houses. And in July, the 26 to be precise, seven Montreal Carmelites became the guests of the Grey Nuns. The year previously, hospitality had been extended to Mother Raphael-de-la-Providence and her companions who came to confer with the Archbishop. The bulletin noted, "We have reserved in the white house a little oasis where they could observe the rule of Carmel."<sup>60</sup> In Montreal, Sisters Royal and Desnoyers had taken them to the station assuring them they would always be welcome at St. Boniface.<sup>61</sup>

A few weeks later it was the turn of the Grey Nuns to be received triumphally in the village of La Broquerie, established in 1884 and no doubt called that in honour of Archbishop Taché's mother. This new mission had been inaugurated the prior August 15 with the arrival of Sisters Dupuis, Maurice and St-Joachim led by Mother Despins. The whole parish followed Father A. Giroux who accompanied the sisters to the church where the bells rang out and to an official reception of the kind usually reserved for great dignitaries.

The sisters stayed first at the rectory. By September they had 50 pupils which increased to sixty-eight by October. The sisters were cramped. One single room served as dormitory, dining room and recreation room. The kitchen could not have more than one person near the stove at the same time. The chapel was only six feet by twelve. But success was attained. At the end of the first school year the trustees gave a vote of thanks to the sisters for the brilliant examinations and great progress made by the pupils.<sup>62</sup>



The sisters did not cultivate souls only. Since 1909 they had obtained a farm which was leased to a sharecropper. It was called the "seigneurie du Manitoba," just as if it could be compared to the seigneurie of Chateauguay, which Mother d'Youville had left to the order. Officially it was called Youville Farm in honour of a beloved Foundress, Mother and Model for the Grey Nuns, as described by Father Clement Staub, Assumptionnist, in his recently published pamphlet, "Mère et Modèle."<sup>63</sup> A building was placed on the farm and dedicated May 18, 1913 in the presence of Archbishop Langevin and Father Bêliveau, his future auxiliary.<sup>64</sup> It was to be devoted to sick sisters in convalescence and would also act as a retreat house for the sisters.<sup>65</sup>

On May 21, there was much joy at the arrival of a new provincial superior from Montreal. Mother Dugas was returning to the province where she had served many years, particularly at the hospital. When she left in 1902 there were 126 sisters working in thirteen missions. Now there were 175 sisters, with thirty-five auxiliaries, in sixteen houses. An authentic Grey Nun, Mother Dugas admired the progress of the works and, following the example of Mother d'Youville, praised God for using the Grey Nuns "to do some little good."

- 1 Circ. mens., 1906-08, p. 15.
- 2 Mitchell, E., *L'Essor apostolique*, p. 191. Galicia in 1819 was a province of the Austrian empire and today it is divided between Poland and the Soviet Union.
- 3 Circ. mens., 1904-06, p. 949.
- 4 Jean, Sr. M., *op.cit.*, p. 155. Archbishop Langevin argued that a local Normal School was necessary because a teaching certificate was required of all would-be teachers. The Grey Nuns submitted themselves to these requirements. Sister M.-A. Beaupré obtained the highest percentage of marks at the examinations in 1907. Her name appeared at the head of a list of names in the *Winnipeg Free Press*. Circ. mens., 1906-08, p. 401.
- 5 The Daughters of the Cross were replaced by the sisters of the Holy Family in 1912.
- 6 "Les Cloches de St. Bon.", a bi-monthly publication, was started by Mgr Langevin in 1902. The same year, the Historical Society of St. Boniface was founded.
- 7 They returned in 1911. Conditions at Ile-à-la-Crosse were deteriorating. A safer place at Lac La Plonge was chosen to build the new boarding school. The canonical province of St. Albert is responsible for this institution.
- 8 Letter dated 5th and 6th of January, 1904.
- 9 Sr. Roy to the mother house, April 25, 1904.
- 10 Statistics published by the "Manitoba".
- 11 Circ. mens., 1907-08, p. 118. The work would be concluded in 1907.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 1904-06, p. 434. Mother Hamel on her

visit to the West had presented her respects to Mgr Ritchot.

- 13 Sr. Dudemaine to the mother house, June 20, 1905.
- 14 In 1904, Sr. Guichon, *op.cit.*, p.32.
- 15 Sr. M. de la Présentation to the mother house, Nov. 26, 1905.
- 16 Champagne A. Les La Verendrye et le Poste de l'Ouest, p. 125.
- 17 A document concerning La Verendrye reports that the remains of La Verendrye had been transported to the Fort which was now in ruins. Bernier, A., *op.cit.*, pp. 26-27.
- 18 In 1908, some eminent researchers, Archbishop Langevin, Justice Prud'homme, Father Béliveau, two Jesuit fathers and three Jesuit brothers found the bones of the martyrs.
- 19 ASGM documents pertaining to Ste-Marguerite School, Fort Frances.
- 20 The sisters of St. Joseph continued the work in Minneapolis.
- 21 Letter dated July 3, 1906.
- 22 Chronicles, provincial house, St. Bon.
- 23 Details from a report published in the newspaper and recorded in the St. Boniface chronicles.
- 24 She died on Oct. 7, 1904 in her 75th year.
- 25 Sr. Cusson passed away on June 20, 1906 in her 85th year.
- 26 Sr. Curran from Ottawa had been "loaned" to St.

Boniface in 1853. Reintegrated to the Montreal group of Grey Nuns, she died at the mother house on February 25, 1906.

27 The work prospered and soon comprised a School of Nursing. At the end of 1907, the hospital was placed under the jurisdiction of the St. Albert Province. *Circ. mens.*, 1906-08, pp. 426-27.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 316.

29 The first graduation took place in 1909.

30 The doctor later admitted having been won over by the charity of the Grey Nurses. He became the sisters' protector. "These women, I said to myself, are stronger than I am; I will therefore join them. Since I took that decision, I have spent the happiest days of my life." *Circ. mens.*, 1922-1923, pp. 319-320.

31 *Ibid.*, 1906-08, p. 320.

32 Mr. J.K. Hunter to Sr. Duffin, April 22, 1908.

33 *Circ. mens.*, 1906-08, p. 221.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 222.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 320.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 744. In 1908, Quebec celebrated the 3rd centenary of its foundation.

37 Article published in "Le Devoir", Feb. 5, 1935.

38 Sr. Ste-Thérèse had retired in the infirmary and assumed the role of annalist.

39 One remembers that Sr. Valade had to be buried temporarily under the ruins of the cathedral.

40 Bishop Faraud died in St. Boniface on Sept. 26,

1890.

- 41 Mother Filiatrault who, in 1907, replaced Mother Hamel at the General Chapter.
- 42 Seminary opened on Sept. 1st, 1909. Morice, *Hist. de l'Eg. Cath.*, Vol. 4, p. 66. The statistics are taken from *Circ. mens.*, 1909-11, p. 221 and from Morice, "Mgr Langevin", p. 252.
- 43 *Circ. mens.*, 1909-11, pp. 272-76. In 1909, Bishop Pascal asked for the return of the Grey Nuns to Ile-à-la-Crosse. His request was granted in 1911.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 181.
- 45 Letter from Sr. M.-A. Beaupré, August 1910.
- 46 *Chronicles*, provincial house.
- 47 These hosts were made by the sisters in Montreal.
- 48 On September 22, the Broadway bridge was renamed Provencher bridge.
- 49 The Cardinal must have been a very tall man because Archbishop Provencher, standing 6 ft, 4 in. tall, had often crossed this threshold.
- 50 *Chronicles*, provincial house.
- 51 Morice, "Vie de Mgr Langevin", p. 270. The Cardinal's visit certainly helped to hasten the creation of new dioceses in the West, those of Regina and the Keewatin. Mgr. E. Mathieu was named in Regina and Mgr O. Charlebois became vicar apostolic of the Keewatin.
- 52 Letter to Mother Piché, dated Nov. 5, 1910.
- 53 *Chronicles*, provincial house. St. Roch Hospital specialized in the treatment of con-

gationous diseases.

54 Tessier-Biron, op.cit., p. 214.

55 Here Sr. Fisette and Sr. Laurent had celebrated their diamond jubilee.

56 Chronicles, provincial house.

57 Sr. Provencher to Mother Piché, Dec. 13, 1911.

58 On Nov. 14, 1912, the organ, a gift from the mother house, and the bell, bequeathed in his will by Mgr Ritchot, were blessed. Letter by Sr. Despins to Mother Piché, Dec. 18, 1912.

59 Sr. Archambault, Director of Novices, who was named superior vicar of St. Albert, was replaced by Sr. Daignault.

60 Circ. mens., 1911-13, p. 297.

61 Chronicles, provincial house.

62 Circ. mens., 1913-14, pp. 167-168.

63 Published in 1912. The Cause of Father Staub is now introduced in Rome.

64 On June 14, it was announced that Father Bélieveu had been named auxiliary bishop of St. Boniface. He was consecrated July 25.

65 Chronicles, provincial house. The land comprising Youville Farm gradually became a commercial area and was sold in 1941.



## CHAPTER TEN - 1914-1929

The new superior of the province, like all the other sisters, hoped to spread the spirit of their admired Mother d'Youville and especially to see her promoted to the rank of a recognized saint.

She said to Mother Piché and Mother Ward when they went over to Rome to promote the Cause,<sup>1</sup> "The whole province is solidly in support of your mission."<sup>2</sup> These two left Montreal for Rome March 15, 1914 on the advice of Archbishop Bruchési. They were the first Grey Nuns ever to cross the Atlantic; on the way back they stopped in to visit the homes of the Breton recruits. These recruits had been especially attracted to the Far Northern missions<sup>3</sup> where Sister Ward had spent twenty-five years. They also stopped at London where the Faithful Companions of Jesus, warmly received by the Grey Nuns in former times at Montreal, St. Boniface and St. Albert, now felt themselves honoured to be the hosts of the two Grey Nuns from far-off Canada.<sup>4</sup>

Life in Canada, especially in the West, did not lend itself well to pauses for reflection, but it is good now and again to think of the travellers, representing all the sisters at the foot of the Saintly Pius X.<sup>5</sup> The country had been called the hope of the future destined to be one of the finest and most flourishing in the world. But while Mother General and Sister Ward were abroad, the country found itself in an involuntary recession. "The war in the Balkans interrupted British investments which had made possible the construction of railways and grain elevators and the material necessary for the founding of cities and villages." More serious still were the difficulties experienced with the harvest and the exportation of wheat, the nerve-root of Manitoba prosperity. The increases in the freight rates, drought over two consecutive summers, all made farming very difficult and contributed to the lowering in the price of lands both in the country and in the city.<sup>6</sup>

War broke out on August 1, 1914 between Austria, upheld by Germany and Serbia. Europe was engulfed in fire and blood. England, France and Russia mobilized their troops and made a common front.<sup>7</sup> The Canadians of Manitoba, for the most part descended from British ancestors, were unable to remain neutral and they adhered to the cause of the Allies.<sup>8</sup> It was not so simple for the immigrants who had come from overseas since the birth of the twentieth century. There followed racial tensions among Belgians, Germans, French, Polish, Hungarians, and Ukrainians. Many families experienced hardship as the bread-winners were summoned to the army or went voluntarily to the defence of their country.<sup>9</sup>

The field of action of the Grey Nuns expanded. The hour had come for them to prove the universality of their charity following the example of One who always cared for the sick, helping the poor without distinction of race, colour or creed.

Archbishop Langevin, who admired especially this largeness of view shown by Mother d'Youville, suggested to the Grey Nuns that they publish the life of their foundress in pamphlet form so it could be easily distributed. He said, "This would be the realization of one of my dreams."<sup>10</sup> The Archbishop did not know it at the time, but this was his last request of the Grey Nuns. His visit to the mother house is recorded as taking place June 6, 1915. Only nine days later, on the 15, at 8:00 a.m. he died at the age of 59 years in the Hôtel-Dieu in Montreal. The news came to St. Boniface by telegraph and stirred up great consternation.

A first funeral service was held at Montreal presided over by Archbishop Bruchési with His Eminence, Cardinal Bégin, with sixteen archbishops and bishops in attendance. Archbishop Bruchési escorted the mortal remains of his colleague and friend to Red River where a large crowd gathered at the station. The procession to the Cathedral took more than one hour; the illustrious deceased was exposed in the chapel until Tuesday, June 22 when a solemn Mass in

the Ruthenian rite preceded the requiem celebrated by the Archbishop of Montreal.<sup>11</sup>

There was grief over the departure of this champion of human rights and of the sovereignty of God. He was sorely missed when shortly after his death another serious crisis arose, a crisis that would have mobilized the energies of the tireless battler. A law making school attendance compulsory was welcomed on all sides but this was not the case with a law which at the same time abolished denominational schools and bilingual instruction.<sup>12</sup> His successor, Archbishop Béliveau, became heir to a very difficult situation. He said: "To sow after a Provencher, to follow a Taché, to second the heroism of a Langevin, is indeed a crushing burden. But between battle and dishonour, there is only one choice, that of duty, and I will walk in the path of duty."<sup>13</sup>

He met the challenge by creating an Association of Education to which he entrusted "the dearest interests of his compatriots." Consisting of lay people and of fathers of families, the Association grew quickly and soon became a powerful influence.<sup>14</sup> The task was complicated for teachers of French. They had to resort to ingenious devices to maintain the study of the religion and of the language while conforming to legal prescriptions. It often happened that many overtime hours had to be spent.<sup>15</sup>

This demanding situation came at a time when there were many other calls on the sisters. Since February 1915, the hospital, fortunately expanded again the year before, had to cope with the soldiers suffering from influenza. Their number soon counted almost 300. Soon the sisters had to deal with the wounded soldiers returning from the front.<sup>16</sup> The Grey Nuns were happy to be able to nurse these fine men who had the courage to risk their lives. It was called that Mother d'Youville had opened the doors of her hospital to the soldiers. "This is our war effort," they would often say to Mother Dugas<sup>17</sup> who, in 1915, returned to the mother house to be replaced

by Mother Pagé in St. Boniface.

According to the chronicles, the "war effort" was pursued elsewhere as well, at the mother house and at Regina which was filled to overcapacity. Sister Clermont, a volunteer who helped the nurses, described Christmas of 1916: "All our soldiers, Protestant as well as Catholic, attended Midnight Mass followed by a snack and an improvised concert. There poor boys, whose age ranged from 17 to 25, said to me, 'You know, sister, it may be our last Christmas.' On Christmas day a dinner was served on tables decorated in green and red. One of the youngest, overcome with emotion, called out: 'We will never forget this day.' Joy did away with all differences, and Sister Clermont called on God to bless the meal which was enjoyed by all. They all became accustomed to the prayers of Sister Clermont and when, in the mornings and evenings she knelt down to pray, silence was immediately observed.<sup>18</sup>

The difficulties imposed by the war, the danger of influenza (from which several sisters both at Montreal and in the West were to fall victims) were by no means the only test afflicting the community. December 28, 1915 the convent of St. François-Xavier caught on fire. There was no loss of life and a part of the furniture was able to be saved.<sup>19</sup> Construction was proceeded with right away and by November 1916 it was possible to enter into the new house.<sup>20</sup>

1916 produced many mixed emotions. Mother Piché, the tireless little Mother whose courage astonished those who saw her at work, made her official visit of the houses of the West. Arriving in Lebrét September 23, she came down three days later with an undiagnosed illness. It was feared she had influenza; she appeared to be at death's door. Archbishop Beliveau and Mother Pagé rushed to her sick bed and Doctor Hendricks came from Regina. He declared it was a case of pneumonia. Two weeks went by before there was any sign of improvement. Sister St-Jean-Baptiste questioned whether the superior

could continue her journey.<sup>21</sup> Mother Piché, for her part, did not hesitate. She went on to the different posts, an excellent means of reassuring those who were worried about her health. Mother Piché was not afraid to summon up heroism among her sisters; she preached it by her example. Despite the uncertainties brought by war, she agreed to the foundation of two new missions in the Far North of Canada, Forts Smith and Simpson.<sup>22</sup> Mother General would one day say that she "became a Grey Nun to be poor and go through many difficulties." Her expectations were to be realized: she visited the Northern missions twice and encountered then many trials and hardships. The great Mother Piché, despite the smallness of her stature, knew that she could count on the generosity of her spiritual daughters and she was not disappointed.

Special heroism was needed to face the tests of the next two years. On March 10, Sister Lafrance, aged 29, a native of St. Boniface was the first to succumb to what was called "the Spanish flu." The service of the poor became more and more demanding as even children of school age, women and old people, had to participate in war work. Since the entry of the United States in the war, arms were being made in Canada.<sup>23</sup>

The tragedy that occurred at the mother house on February 14, 1918 afflicted not only the Grey Nuns but the whole of Canada. Fifty-five babies died in a fire at la crèche while sisters, hospitalized soldiers and firefighters, worked miracles to save the innocent victims.<sup>24</sup> Messages of sympathy from the clergy flowed to the mother house. Particularly touching was a letter from a Winnipeg company president, William Jennings O'Neil, who wrote to Mother Piché: "If I can do anything, please do not hesitate to call on me." Mr. O'Neil had seen the sisters of St. Boniface at work and had concluded that the women wearing the grey habit were worthy of being helped.<sup>25</sup>

And yet it was they who had to go to the help of the sick people afflicted with influenza. Besides

those who were taken care of in the hospitals at Montreal, many others were nursed by sixteen sisters who went to the homes of the infected.<sup>26</sup> Mournful pages were thus added to the history of the Grey Nuns both in Montreal and at Red River. Sister Beaupré, the secretary, wrote a sad summary: "The most commonly used vocabulary in November has been made up of the words: sick, dying and dead. At St. Roch Hospital, two sisters are seriously ill; at Regina, four sisters, eighteen nurses and twelve employees have been put out of action. Father Suffa has died as a result of it, and his parish mourns him. At St. Joseph Orphanage in Winnipeg, one hundred and twenty orphans and all the sisters, except for three, are paying tribute to influenza. The three who are still standing are doing so only by their strength of will. We have had to send sisters to Kenora where forty-seven pupils and all but one of our sisters were sick. The schools at Lestock and at Lebret have not escaped the plague. At the Provincial House, the evil has laid low one hundred thirty-four orphans, twenty-seven sisters, sixteen novices and four proteges. St. Boniface Hospital is so full that appeals have had to be made for outside help. This call has been answered by six sisters of the Holy Family, two Oblates, two Daughters of the Cross, two Sisters of Saint Joseph and six Jesuit scholastic brothers. Four of the scholastics were themselves soon brought down by the disease. The Jesuits replaced them right away. Archbishop Béliveau has searched throughout his diocese and has recruited many persons of good will. Some institutions have deprived themselves of people they sorely need in order to do their part. The Archbishop well merits the praise given by Bishop Mathieu who on July 25 of this memorable year 1918 wrote: "For twenty-five years Archbishop Béliveau had found his happiness in the service of others. He considers himself a farmer for Christ. He is interested only in the harvest he must account for to his Master."<sup>27</sup>

The spectacle of congregations and religious institutes uniting their energies to fight against influenza was a subject of amazement for some and of



admiration for others. It demanded a heavy price. Sister St. Joseph of Arimathia, a sister of the Holy Family, died in the field of battle, a victim of the illness. Added to the list of the deceased Grey Nuns were four of them aged twenty-five to thirty-three. They were Sisters Bellavance, Ste-Elodie, Dumontier and Tétrault. These losses were hard to bear but they were not unexpected for it is the tradition of the community to exert itself especially in times of epidemics. Since 1755, Mother d'Youville and her companions welcomed those with pockmarked faces to their hospital at Montreal and cared for the Indians under the tent at Sault St. Louis.<sup>28</sup>

Kindred souls gathered to celebrate the centennial of Bishop Provencher's arrival to the Red River settlement reflected that: "His was a selfless soul, given to sacrifice and dedication; a man with a generous heart, giving wholly of his life for others in heroic silence, oblivious to his own needs."<sup>29</sup>

These praises could likewise be applied integrally to the Mother of the Grey Nuns and those who walk under her banner.

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The armistice put an end to hostilities but did not stamp out the plague of influenza. Now the convents in the country became afflicted with it. At St. Norbert twenty pupils came down with it; two of them did not recover.<sup>30</sup>

At St. Boniface the scourge seemed to have been overcome when Mother Pagé wrote to the Rector of the college to thank him for the help he had given the Grey Nuns. She offered prayers for the students who had contracted the disease.<sup>31</sup>

"God trims the wind to the shorn lamb," says the proverb. This truth was recognized once more. Influenza had just relaxed its grip when there broke out on May 16, 1919 a general strike.<sup>32</sup> "All the public services are taking part; nothing is func

tioning." Even though the strikers had a certain regard for the hospital, the strike still resulted in problems, some of them giving rise to funny solutions. One day the milk ran out and the cook was very upset. She went out on the street in search of milk and behold, she came across a cow which was attached to a wagon. After making a deal with the driver, she returned to the hospital with milk in time to serve a meal to the patients.<sup>33</sup>

Sister Beaupré wrote, "We are hungry and thirsty for letters from Montreal, having received nothing for thirteen days."<sup>34</sup> Once the strike was over, it was a paper shortage at Montreal which made it necessary to cut down on the chronicles.<sup>35</sup>

But all was not sadness at St. Boniface and the annalist was able to record some community joys. There were eleven postulants, the largest number ever to come to the novitiate since it began.<sup>36</sup> A Winnipeg newspaper spoke highly of the convent at Ste-Anne-des-Chênes. "The little convent does honour to Catholic establishments. Twenty-three pupils took the examination of the Department of Education; nineteen passed with honours and four with satisfaction."<sup>37</sup> The sister teachers are themselves pursuing studies under the Department to upgrade their qualifications and have had excellent results."<sup>38</sup>

And there were many successes in the hospital field. The School of Nursing became affiliated with the University of Manitoba, which permitted diplomas to be given in recognition of the competence of the nurses. Sister Wagner, in charge of the school, was part of the Board of Examiners. In June 1918, all eleven candidates presented by the school were congratulated by the authorities concerned.<sup>39</sup> In this field, Grey Nuns were in the forefront. Mother Piché had recommended in 1916 that the nurses should hold meetings in order to exchange their experience and knowledge so as to assure the best formation to students. Meetings were held in Edmonton July 10-12, 1917 and were a great success. There were recommendations that conventions should be held and that

there should be university courses for those in charge of the schools.<sup>40</sup>

The quality of care offered by the hospitals under the direction of the Grey Nuns gained them an excellent reputation which resulted in the necessity of enlarging their facilities many times. St. Boniface Hospital expanded several times. At the young hospital of Regina, it was noted on August 20, 1919 "that the need for enlarging the place is increasing. It is sad to have to turn away patients of every kind."<sup>41</sup> Mother Allaire, provincial, brought this work to a good conclusion.<sup>42</sup> As for Mother Pagé, who had to face so many dramatic moments, she now had some respite and even a few glorious hours as she ended her mandate. The golden jubilee of St. Boniface Hospital was celebrated in style. The sisters wanted a simple feast but the friends of the hospital, doctors, nurses, personnel, ladies auxiliary, would hear nothing of them. The celebrations lasted two days.<sup>43</sup> Religious services alternated with various meetings. Authoritative voices praised the fine institution and its works. The shepherd of the diocese, Archbishop Beliveau, proclaimed the good which the sisters had done over a half century at the hospital, working in obscurity, labour and hardship, performing the office of the Good Samaritan toward the suffering members of humanity.<sup>44</sup>

The distinguished surgeon, Dr. D. Collin, after recalling the memory of the little house with four beds, said, "Today, in looking on at the rapid developments at the hospital, we are struck with admiration and we willingly bestow a garland of merit to this community which has been able to realize such a masterpiece in so short a time. We admire the vast proportions of the building, its equipment, its administration but above all, what we find most remarkable is that the institution was begun and continued only at the cost of sacrifices, of labour, at the cost of the health and even the lives of the valiant daughters of Mother d'Youville... A half-century is a relatively short time for an institution

of this kind. If already more than 124,000 persons of every nationality and of every religion have found there care and cure, thousands of others will come in the future to give the Sisters of Charity further occasion to save lives and to assuage human grief... We likewise pay tribute to the lay nurses. Perfectly well formed and disciplined, they constitute a powerful and indispensable source of help to the medical staff which is able to count on their skill and devotion with complete security... The good being accomplished here is the clearest manifestation of the usefulness of religious communities in general and of the Grey Nuns in particular."

Doctor McKenty in turn explained why there was created the American College of Surgeons whose responsibility was like that of the Royal College of Surgeons in Great Britain and in Ireland. "It is only after three years of investigation and deep study that accreditation is given to a hospital with one hundred beds or more. The first inspection of Canadian hospitals has resulted in St. Boniface Hospital being named as one of three in this province meriting a place on the list of hospitals approved by this authority."

The provincial superior, Mother Dionne, and the superior of the hospital, Sister Lamoureux, both former missionaries, were delegated to represent the Grey Nuns at the feast and were able to recognize the notable progress. They were also able to congratulate in person Bishop J.H. Prud'homme who had been chosen by Pope Benedict XV to succeed Bishop Albert Pascal as bishop of Prince Albert and Saskatoon.<sup>45</sup> He was the first Manitoban to be elevated to the hierarchy.<sup>46</sup> The new bishop affirmed "the Grey Nuns have a special place in my affection since they were my first teachers at the old Provencher School." The sisters also took part in the reception following his consecration on October 28.<sup>47</sup>

Who could have predicted that such rejoicing would have such a sad tomorrow? Fires broke out in religious establishments. There was another fire at

Ile-à-la-Crosse where, just as in 1867 Bishop Grandin had to acknowledge he was not left even with a handkerchief to wipe away his tears.<sup>48</sup> At first it was thought this was an isolated fire but others were to follow, so that investigators concluded this was a case of arson.<sup>49</sup>

At St. Boniface itself on June 14, 1922, following an explosion, smoke infiltrated the dormitory of the orphanage where one hundred and twenty children were sleeping. Several were saved just in the nick of time.

But bravery does not always succeed in life-saving. Some months after, during the night of November 24-25, fire destroyed the beautiful St. Boniface College, causing ten deaths, that of a Jesuit brother and those of nine pupils; many sustained severe injuries jumping out of windows.<sup>50</sup> It was impossible to replace these lives. How would it be possible even to replace this building which had required a century of work and privations. Archbishop Béliveau and the Jesuit Fathers, meeting with community leaders, did not hesitate. The college would be merged with the minor seminary. The secular priests gladly gave up their professorships to the disciples of St. Ignatius who were providing higher education to Manitoba Catholic youth.<sup>51</sup>

A Winnipeg newspaper, trying to combat racial prejudice which had contributed to criminal deeds, wrote an article praising the St. Joseph's Orphanage which had been in existence since the beginning of the century. They said three hundred and forty-six children had been taken in there from sixteen different nationalities. In four classrooms the pupils received instruction in all subjects. The work was in deficit and an appeal had to be made to public charity.<sup>52</sup> The result of this appeal was very praiseworthy especially given that Manitoba had for three years been in a financial crisis which seemed to be eternal. The annalist wrote, "The poor are more numerous than ever, and the dear old house cannot admit any more." This situation gave rise to

a Youvillian idea. Mother Allaire, with the concurrence of her council, proposed to the sisters that they should give up the spacious new provincial house and move to the white house. The sisters all agreed and soon a move was made back to the old house of wood.<sup>53</sup> The other building took the name of Hospice Taché and received forty-five old men and thirty-seven elderly women. This was on October 7, the 176th anniversary of Mother d'Youville's entrance into the general hospital at la Pointe-à-Callières in Montreal.<sup>54</sup>

Archbishop Béliveau expressed great satisfaction at this beautiful gesture, as he termed it. On October 23, the hundredth birthday of Archbishop Taché was celebrated. The orphans reviewed the heroism of the man. Archbishop Béliveau remarked how suitable it was to have the celebration end at the orphanage which was particularly dear to Archbishop Taché's heart. "The orphanage had grown so that it was now sheltering the aged as well as children. The Grey Nuns have wished to change their headquarters so as to make room for more of the poor. I am happy with their decision and I would like to congratulate them on it, but there are some acts which can be witnessed only in respectful silence."<sup>55</sup>

Respectful silence was the only way to receive the latest sad news: Sister Cécile Nadeau, drowned along with three pupils at Ile-à-la-Crosse on September 29. The superior, Sister St-Nazaire, had died of typhoid fever on November 19 at Beauval. Among the Grey Nuns there was a deep conviction that the ways of God are inscrutable, and one adored without understanding. But submission to the will of God is less easy when there is question of human malice. That was the case when a building at Youville Farm went up in flames during the night of January 3-4, 1924. Sisters Saloie and Durand had gone to bed for the night after conscientiously checking all the outbuildings - they were always on the alert. Scarcely two hours later fire destroyed almost the whole of the old chicken house. The firefighters had to work a miracle to prevent the complete destruction



of all the buildings.<sup>56</sup>

Life in the convents of the Grey Nuns proceeded "full of joy and full of tears," as the saying goes. But how can one describe the happiness during May when Mother Dugas stopped at St. Boniface en route to Aklavik, called by the Inuit "back of the earth," fifty miles from the Beaufort Sea. Mother General was accompanied by several missionaries, notably Sister Allard and Sister Pagé, invited to the golden jubilee of the Sioux mission of Fort Totten. Their existence remained precarious. There was uncertainty whether the school would be maintained. During that school year it was necessary to send some of the children away. However, on the occasion of the jubilee, Mr. Byer, in charge of Indian schools said to the sisters, "You have done marvellous missionary work. I hope you will continue for long years."<sup>57</sup>

Mother General was received into the old house where she first resided when she came to St. Boniface in 1891. She regretted that the number of sisters who were sick had increased but she was not surprised that the works were flourishing. Mother Dugas had an invincible confidence in Divine Providence. In turn she was able to inspire confidence. In the preceding journey she had seconded the initiative of Mother Allaire in rebuilding and enlarging St. Roch Hospital.<sup>58</sup> The new building was now functioning to its full capacity. This time she encouraged the organization of an outpatient department at St. Boniface Hospital.<sup>59</sup>

Mother Dugas could not delay at St. Boniface, however. The generous spirit which she admired in the missionaries confirmed her in her plan to accede to a request coming from Bishop Breynat; to open a first mission in Eskimo country. She went there herself to see the possibilities of survival. At the new post, the sun sometimes shone through the whole of the night while at other times the moon and stars were visible during the day. The difficulties of adaptation were easily foreseeable. She was well aware that prudence was necessary. But, following

the example of Mother d'Youville, the Superior General and the Grey Nuns decided to ask the Eternal Father to grant "the grace to multiply their works of charity and for this purpose to make them capable of undertaking everything for the glory of God."<sup>60</sup>

The epic of 1844 had succeeded wonderfully. Why would it not be similar for the post situated at the back of the earth?

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There was not much room in the dear old white provincial house. The largest room, the chapel, was just not big enough for the crowd when there was a day of profession or a funeral. On these occasions it was necessary to go to the former house, now turned into Hospice Taché. Three separate retreats were now needed to accommodate the two hundred and fifty sisters working in the province. Instructions and conferences were given in the chapel.<sup>61</sup>

On the evening of January 14, 1925 at Hospice Taché Mr. Ernest Cyr spoke. He was one of those cured through the intercession of Mother d'Youville. He extolled the merits of the great woman whom he admired. The speaker with eloquence paid tribute above all of the strength of the soul of Mother d'Youville who was the inspiration of all Grey Nuns.<sup>62</sup> Despite the progress of the times, missionary life still remained very difficult. Even though the privations of the beginning no longer existed, other circumstances tested the courage of the sisters.

A tragedy took place at Kenora on February 12. After a Mass celebrated in the school, Brother Damour, an Oblate, and an employee were murdered by another employee who was stricken with a mental disease. The Grey Nuns went in large numbers to the funeral of the Oblate Brother whose untimely death made a deep impression on them.

Since 1853, when "Brother" Taché became a

bishop, had not the Grey Nuns been the indispensable auxiliaries of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate? One of them in particular had lived out this long association. She was a nonagenarian Grey Nun who had not been touched by senility. She had seen her strength decline. "At one time she fell on the road while going to visit the poor, but she said nothing for fear of being relieved of her functions."<sup>63</sup> However, the time had come for her retirement from active life and, since 1916, the humble sister had taken her place among the invalids.

Unwittingly, she became a professor of history as she charmed the new generations with her tales. She was the only one who could call to mind the memory of Provencher, of Taché, and especially of the foundresses.<sup>64</sup> She had come to Red River with Mother Valade in 1850. She had experienced three months of a voyage during which she had escaped narrowly the sinking of the steamboat, Saint-Laurent. She had completed her novitiate here at the old white house to which she was so happy to return to end her days. At her ruby jubilee, in February 1920, she wrote to Mother Piché: "If I have been able to do anything good for souls, it is due entirely to the Granter of all gifts... I am under no illusions. I am in the late evening of my life. I must prepare for the great voyage ahead." Now, this pilgrimage through earthly life, ended in her 93rd year on March 1 of the holy year, 1925. The venerable old sister breathed her last breath at 3:35 p.m., remaining conscious to the very end. At her funeral there was an extremely large crowd especially of her beloved poor as well as priests and sisters who had been inspired by her to make a total gift of all to God. This was Sister Laurent.

With her death there came an end to the first chapter of the life of the Grey Nuns of Red River. The works which she had seen born were to continue to grow after her death, always on a grander scale. In this year, 1925, the hospital became affiliated with the University of Manitoba. There was introduced at the hospital "a complete service of professors and

demonstrators who were full members of the teaching staff of the Faculty of Medicine. It was the only one in all of Western Canada to be approved for internship."<sup>65</sup>

Mother Allaire who, among her other tasks always promoted excellence in care, was partly responsible for this accomplishment. Other duties now called her as she was elected during the general chapter of October as the treasurer general of the whole congregation.<sup>66</sup> Mother Dionne who had been provincial during the years 1897-1902 succeeded her and took up her position on October 22.

As a member of the general council, the former provincial did not lose contact with the convents of the West and of the North. She spoke up in favour of the creation of a mission at Aklavik.<sup>67</sup> She was informed as to the assets and liabilities of each post. The tests of courage never ceased. At Ile-à-la-Crosse, on February 19, 1926, fire reduced to ashes the newly rebuilt convent.<sup>68</sup> Cold was intense; it was four o'clock in the morning when sisters and pupils had to find refuge with the Oblate Fathers. The telegram announcing the disaster contained the words: "We are starting to rebuild without delay."<sup>69</sup>

The sisters had to rebuild also at Regina, but for a different reason. The hospital could no longer meet the needs of the people who appreciated the quality of care at Regina Hospital. To the sisters the place was known as Regina Coeli, Queen of Heaven. At Ste-Anne-des-Chênes, it was necessary to enlarge the convent since two classes had had to be placed in a neighbouring building. In the midst of all this construction, the end of the year, December 18, brought a telegram with bad news: "The church and the convent of Fort Totten have been destroyed by flames." Then an hour later, another telegram came which read: "Sister St-Alfred, the superior, is dying." And then on the 20th: "Sister St-Alfred is dead."

The work of saving the lives of the pupils had

proceeded without panic. But the firefighters could not reach the buildings because of the bad state of the roads. Sister St-Alfred, believing that three sisters were sleeping in the dormitory in the attic, hastened to warn them. Fortunately the sisters had already fled, but the smoke was intense. Sister Juliette Lavoie, not seeing the superior reappear, went up to see what was wrong. She called out and the reply came back, "I am coming down."

Unfortunately, the descent was quicker than planned as the floor gave way. Sister Lavoie called out for help. Two sisters came running and they pulled the superior out of the building. Others came and she was moved first to an employee's house and then to the hospital. There she died after saying many times over, "My God, Thy will be done."

When the funeral cortege reached St. Boniface, Sister Maugras wrote: "Our Sisters Siebenaller, Lavoie, Comeau, Gaspard and Marie-Ida have accompanied the mortal remains. The tragic circumstances of this death have been a heartbreak for all of us. Our tears have flowed in abundance. The sight of our sisters, so poorly clad, has also increased our sorrow."

The Sisters of Mercy, despite their poverty, became an instrument of Providence toward the Grey Nuns. They offered the sisters clothing and shelter until such times as suitable lodgings could be found. Meanwhile, nine sisters had to share two rooms. The people were sympathetic. The auditorium was allowed to be used as a church and the Benedictine Fathers offered their house to the sisters. Sister Clermont, assistant provincial, who rushed to the help of the sisters, sent news to the mother house: "The barn was saved by people who threw snowballs on the cinders that fell on the roof." Teaching was continued at the school at the Fort.

As for Sister Jude, her kitchen became the community room of the sisters. "We have a table which we have to use each our turn for meals. I have

established my headquarters in the stairway. The stove is not functioning well. We have a sewing machine, nine chairs, two desks, a cupboard and four benches. In the dormitory we have three beds and a sofa. Four of us have to sleep on the floor, and I am one of them."<sup>70</sup>

The American government refused to provide funds for reconstruction. The Benedictine Fathers decided to build new quarters at their own expense on the Indian reserve called St. Michael, nine miles from the fort.<sup>71</sup>

One would have thought the Grey Nuns had had their fill of fires, but in the near future came yet another one. The mission at Beauval was entirely destroyed by fire September 20, 1927. Sister Lea and nineteen little boys died.<sup>72</sup> Distance was no barrier to the incendiaries, for on April 8, 1929 it was the turn of St. Norbert church to be burned down. The school at Cross Lake under the Oblate Sisters also went up in flames. Sister Marguerite-Marie and nine Indians were victims of the fire while other sisters were seriously injured.

Such calamities were a constant threat, but it was necessary to go on expanding. On February 17, 1927 the general council of the Grey Nuns agreed to a request by Bishop Mathieu to establish a hospital at Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan, an enterprise entrusted to the province of St. Boniface. Sister Despins, ex-provincial, and Sister Duckett went to this little town on July 23 to preside over the work of construction. The future hospital was honoured even before its birth by the fact that Archbishop Andrea Cassulo, the apostolic delegate, became its first patient. Visiting the West in the autumn of 1927, he developed an infection which was treated successfully at the hospitals of Regina and at Saskatoon. Two Grey Nun nurses from Regina accompanied him to the town named after the tireless colonizer, Father A. Gravel, who gave his name to Gravelbourg.<sup>73</sup> The apostolic delegate left in good health after his cure.<sup>74</sup>



As work advanced in the new hospital at Gravelbourg, at St. Boniface the new School of Nursing was officially opened on the evening of March 7, 1928. Archbishop Béliveau said: "The establishment of this school is the crowning of a work begun in humility... The grain of seed thrown on the banks of the Red River more than fifty years ago has become a great tree... The hospital has been able to answer the needs of the population and is now a University centre. I express my gratitude to all those who have contributed to this happy result." Speaking to the Grey Nuns, he added: "You surely have the right to expect my thanks for your devotedness. The whole province has benefitted from the good you have done, but the City of St. Boniface has a special obligation of gratitude to you."<sup>75</sup>

A few weeks after this memorable evening, on April 28, the little town of Gravelbourg had its turn for festivities. A large crowd followed the college band to the church where Bishop Marois, in the absence of Bishop Mathieu, blessed the new building. Bishop Marois was the vicar-general of Regina. He was assisted by Father J. Guy, superior of the college, and Father J. Magnan, provincial of the Oblates. The hospital was called St. Joseph's and Sisters Lapierre, St. Elisée and Nault stayed there from April 11 on.<sup>76</sup>

The women of the parish prepared the banquet. Dr. Lavoie presided as chief of the hospital committee and he introduced the civic and ecclesiastical dignitaries.

On the evening of this fine day, the annalist of the mission wrote: "Already several patients have received care at the hospital. Thus the humble Grey Nun continues what was begun seventy-five years ago at St. Boniface; with devotion and discretion, in the sight of God, she binds wounds, assuages fevers."<sup>77</sup>

Mother Allaire who encouraged this foundation was not able to be present since she had been sent to Europe by the University of Montreal for a study in

view of the University hospital which was being planned.<sup>78</sup> Her voyage was not quite as fast as that of Bishop Breynat who returned from the southern United States by plane on April 25, 1929. "People are even saying that in the future we may be able to take holidays at the mother house thanks to the steel bird," wrote the St. Boniface annalist.

The 20th century, still only in its third decade, was already showing one of its characteristics: speed of executing. But this was not the case with the building of the school at Totten even though it was in the country of Uncle Sam. They had finished only the second floor.<sup>79</sup> There were also complaints about the slowness of the building of a new wing at the convent of Ste-Anne-des-Chênes.

There was profound sadness when the Carmelites decided to leave St. Boniface for other realms. Their departure had been foreseen for three years.<sup>80</sup> Bonds had been created with these contemplatives since their arrival in 1912. A Manitoban, Sister Bernadette of the Immaculate Conception, had entered the Carmel and had died a few years after her profession. Her body remains beside those of the Grey Nuns in the cemetery adjacent to the Cathedral. Sister Despins who had welcomed them on their arrival visited the Carmelites July 20 just before she went to Gravelbourg.<sup>81</sup>

In 1925, a Triduum (a three-day celebration) was held in honour of the canonization of the great Carmelite, Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus.<sup>82</sup> On that occasion the Mother Prioress had brought to the Grey Nuns, professed, novices and postulants, an artificial rose petal on which had been inscribed a pious thought taken from the writings of the Little Flower.

Their departure was effected in three stages: June 2, August 18 and August 20, in groups of four sisters. It is not without emotion that one reads the last message recorded in the annals of their monastery:

"The memory of the dear, devoted Grey Nuns naturally finds place here. More than once in the course of this humble chronicle, the name of the incomparable daughters of Venerable Mother d'Youville has been written by our pen. From the very first, they opened their hospitable doors to us and they have never since ceased to be for us a source of sensitive and ingenious charity. How well they carry the name of Sisters of Charity. To list all they have done would be quite impossible. Let us mention, however, the many occasions when they have come into our cloister to nurse the sick members of the family of St. Thérèse. The gifts they have given us we do not mention as they are done for the sake of the Lord. He alone knows the total of their charities. He also knows how to repay a hundredfold what they have done in the name of His merciful Providence."

- 1 Circ. mens., 1910-14, pp. 316, 325, 336.
- 2 Ibid., p. 329.
- 3 Pope Pius XI called these missions the most difficult in the world.
- 4 Sr. Ward's Journal, p. 51.
- 5 Joseph Sarto, Pius X, died Aug. 20, 1914. He was canonized May 29, 1954.
- 6 Morton, op.cit., pp. 328ff.
- 7 Circ. mens., 1913-14, p. 457.
- 8 Morton, op.cit., p. 338.
- 9 Circ. mens., 1913-14, p. 474.
- 10 Circ. mens., 1915-16, p. 129.
- 11 Morice, Mgr Langevin, pp. 363-365.
- 12 There were four bilingual schools in Manitoba: the Polish, Ruthenian, German and French. Circ. mens., 1915-16, p. 592.
- 13 A talk by Mgr Béliveau when he was consecrated as Archbishop of St. Boniface, Dec. 19, 1915. Part of the archdiocese of St. Boniface became the archdiocese of Winnipeg and was confided to Mgr A. - A. Sinnott on Dec. 4, 1915.
- 14 D'Eschambault, A. "Hommage radiodiffusé à la mémoire de Mgr Béliveau", Sept. 14, 1955. Annals 1955, pp. 413ff.
- 15 The Grey Nuns ceased teaching in St. Vital after the end of the school year 1915-1916.
- 16 Circ. mens., 1915-16, pp. 107 and 289.
- 17 She was elected assistant general at the chap-

ter Oct. 4, 1915.

18 Circ. mens., 1917-18, p. 85.

19 Ibid.

20 Chronicles, p. 66.

21 Letters by Sr. St-Jean-Baptiste, reproduced in  
Circ. mens., 1915-16, pp. 598-605.

22 Smith in 1914 and Simpson in 1916. Since 1914,  
the northern missions have been organized as a  
canonical province, that of Divine Providence.

23 The United States joined the Allies and entered  
the war on Good Friday, April 19, 1917.

24 An investigation revealed that the fire had  
been set by a pyromaniac employee.

25 Circ. mens., 1917-18, p. 609.

26 Ibid., p. 775.

27 Circ. mens., 1917-18, pp. 717-718. Archbishop  
Béliveau was celebrating the silver jubilee of  
his ordination.

28 In 1755, after 18 years of community life,  
Mother d'Youville and her companions were  
authorized to wear a religious costume. They  
"celebrated" this event by sending a group of  
sister nurses to combat the epidemic.

29 A talk by Bishop Mathieu, circ. mens., 1917-18,  
p. 718.

30 Annals, 1919-20, p.141.

31 Letter dated Dec. 3, 1918. Bernier, op.cit.,  
p. 16.

32 Chronicles, p. 31.

- 33 Sr. Pierson's biography. She died Sept. 15, 1922.
- 34 Annals, 1919-20, p. 159.
- 35 Ibid., p. 516, June 22, 1920.
- 36 Ibid, 1917-18, p. 716. August entry in 1918.
- 37 From an article reproduced in the Annals of 1917-18, p. 731.
- 38 In 1921, 9 sisters obtained a teacher's certificate. Annals, p. 162.
- 39 Annals, 1917-18, p. 730.
- 40 These gatherings brought about the creation of the Nurses' Association. For the Grey Nuns, it would lead to the establishment of the Marguerite d'Youville Institute founded by Mother Allaire in 1934. This Institute was the first French language school to offer a degree in nursing.
- 41 Annals, 1919-20, pp. 226-227. Letter from Sr. Couture.
- 42 Mother Allaire came to St. Boniface in the autumn of 1921. Mother Dugas, provincial superior from 1913-1915, was elected superior general at the chapter of 1920.
- 43 Aug. 24 and Aug. 25. On Aug. 30, there was a commemorative mass for the dead.
- 44 Annals, 1921, p. 260. The talks quoted on the following pages are taken from the same source.
- 45 Annals, 1921, p. 154. Bishop Pascal died in France on July 14, 1920, and Bishop Legal of St. Albert, on May 18 of the same year.
- 46 Bishop Prud'homme was the first Manitoban St.



Boniface College alumnus to become a bishop. Archbishop Béliveau also studies at the college, but he originated from Mont-Carmel, Quebec.

- 47 Annals, 1921, p. 255.
- 48 Mitchell, Sr. E., Mother J. Slocombe, p. 332.
- 49 Bishop Prud'homme visiting the sisters in Montreal told them how the missionaries were worried on account of the fires. Annals, 1922-23, p. 55.
- 50 Bernier, A., *op.cit.*, p. 37.
- 51 *Ibid.*, pp 38 and 38. In 1924, it was decided to enlarge the college. His Eminence Cardinal Bégin appealed to the faithful of the Quebec diocese, encouraging them to give generously.
- 52 Annals, 1922-23, pp. 218-221. Most of the orphans were boys; only a few were girls.
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 395. It took several weeks to complete the transfer.
- 54 Father Dandurand did not make it to the new quarters. When this venerable patient celebrated his 100th anniversary on March 23, 1919, he was able to leave his arm-chair and celebrate the Eucharist with the help of two young Oblate Fathers. He then told the participants, "My bark which was launched on the ocean of this world a hundred years ago is still good." Two years and a few days of illness later, he peacefully reached the eternal shore.
- 55 Annals, 1922-23, p. 422.
- 56 Annals, 1924-25, pp 39-40.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 273. This letter is addressed to

Sister Heart, name given to Sr. Jolicoeur by the Sioux who could never pronounce her name correctly.

58 Document No. 2 pertaining to St. Roch Hospital.

59 The work began on Oct. 25. The employees had to give up their quarters and retire to the basement of Hospice Taché.

60 The Litanies to the Eternal Father were composed in 1770 at the request of Mother d'Youville and since then, have been recited daily.

61 Annals, 1924-25, pp 797-798.

62 Provincial House Chronicles at the date mentioned. The details that follow are taken from the same source, unless otherwise stated. Mr. Cyr's conference was published in pamphlet form.

63 Biography of Sr. Laurent. Annals, 1924-25, Appendix.

64 Sr. Royal, another senior sister, died at the mother house on Feb. 15, 1923.

65 Annals, 1946-47, p. 399. An article by Dr. Cyde.

66 Annals, 1924-25, p. 710.

67 Annals, 1924-25, p. 681. The mission was founded in the month of August.

68 The first convent had burned down on April 1, 1920.

69 Annals, 1926-27, p. 12

70 Letter dated Jan. 2, 1927.

- 71 A four-storey convent placed under the patronage of St. Thérèse of the Child-Jesus. *Hôp. gen.*, t.3, pp. 261-262.
- 72 *Annals*, 1926-27, pp. 548-549. On March 28, 1929, an outhouse at the Beauval mission was entirely destroyed by fire. *Annals*, 1928-29, p. 315.
- 73 Morice, *Hist. Ouest Canadien*, Vol. 4, p. 79.
- 74 *Annals*, 1936-37, pp. 642-643.
- 75 *Annals*, 1928-29, pp. 65-66.
- 76 From Oct. 1927 to Apr. 1928, the sisters were lodged in the basement of the church.
- 77 *Annals*, 1928-29, pp. 112-113.
- 78 *Ibid.*, p. 98. At the congress held in July 1927, Mother Allaire recommended that nurses obtain university degrees.
- 79 *Ibid.*, p. 178.
- 80 The heavy taxes imposed on the monastery were the cause of this departure.
- 81 A magnificent statue of the Sacred Heart occupied a place of honour in the Carmelites' front yard. This statue now adorns the Despins grounds of the Grey Nuns' Provincial House.
- 82 Canonization was on May 17, 1925. The Triduum was held Oct. 1, 2 and 3, 1925. The sisters and the orphans of Hospice Taché sang at the solemn mass on the second day of this event.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN - 1930-1944

"You can be proud to belong to this congregation which has carried the faith even to the Polar reaches of the New World." This was the message of Father Duchaussois to the Grey Nuns of Montreal March 21, 1930. The Oblate writer set forth their accomplishments in his books, especially that called "Femmes héroïques" (Heroic Women)<sup>1</sup> He was not unaware that his words would reach the Far North itself by means of the monthly annals that were sent to all posts. He continued: "I have always admired the Grey Nuns. Let others wear snowshoes and shoot rapids. You have the first prize. Keep it." The author was alluding to the pioneers who had to overcome so many rapids on their way to open up the upcountry.<sup>2</sup> Father Théodore Labouré, superior general wrote to Mother Gallant: "His book is known throughout the world. Your work will be made known to many."<sup>3</sup> And so many brave girls not only from Brittany but also from other European countries would come to join the worthy battalion.

But heroism was not the exclusive preserve of the northern missions. The economic depression which now commenced was especially severe in the Western provinces with drought diminishing the harvests.<sup>4</sup> And yet it seemed there was a special need in Manitoba. There was only one sanatorium, in Ninette, to deal with tuberculosis in the whole province. Archbishop Béliveau was eager to offer the benefits of Christian ministry to help long-term patients.<sup>5</sup> Following in the footsteps of his predecessors, the Archbishop made an appeal to the Grey Nuns. The general council, on being consulted, gave their approval but said they could not send sisters since the sisters had accepted the management of St. Mary's Hospital at Montreal. It would be necessary to find workers on the spot.

Sister Ste-Émilienne, superior of the hospital, was sent to Montreal to submit building plans. The projected site was in St. Vital on the right bank of the Red River, right across from the new University

of Manitoba which, it was said, had seen the birth of Louis Riel in 1844. <sup>6</sup>

In February 1930 the sanatorium commenced construction and Sister Letellier, named superior, supervised the work and planned the organization of the different services. <sup>7</sup> The building would be of quite a size since it would have three floors in the form of an incomplete "H", measuring 240 feet by 225. It could serve 250 patients. <sup>8</sup>

A new work was thus being born, but an older one, at Kenora, founded thirty-two years ago with so much difficulty, was no more. Sisters Duffin and Ste-Lucie could not prevent feeling nostalgic for they had been the workers of the first hour.

It was in 1898 that they had gone there among hostile Saulteaux who had not been won over by the five lay teachers who had been there. Archbishop Langevin had gone to Montreal on behalf of Father Cahill, the resident missionary, and had succeeded in gaining the collaboration of the Grey Nuns. The transformation of the children of the woods had progressed gradually, who up till now had been so reserved, indeed even very aloof. Sister Duffin used to say that the surrounding of the school, splendid in natural beauty, made up for the isolation. The school had been the first Ontario mission of the Congregation.

The sisters had become attached to the little Indians who had become so docile. Their behaviour at prayer time impressed all the parents. <sup>9</sup> The pupils sang like angels and there was always a demand for concerts. <sup>10</sup>

The school had been in existence for twelve years when Kenora was visited by an eminent personage, Cardinal Vanutelli, the delegate at the Eucharistic Congress of Montreal. The children got up early so that they could come in their canoes which the girls were able to row with as much if not more skill than the boys. Then the pupils would walk two

miles on foot in order to receive the blessing of the Papal legate<sup>11</sup>.

And yet after so many years of work they had to leave the place in July 1930, the same month which brought the news of the death of the Cardinal visitor who had come in 1910.<sup>12</sup>

The Sisters of St. Joseph replaced the Grey Nuns at the school. The chronicler says the sisters left with deep emotion, but there was a surprise for them as they left. Father Baillargeon, principal of the school, had secretly asked the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary and the Sisters of Providence, settled on the other side of the river, to organize an outdoor party. Dinner was taken in the open air and, following the meal, the pupils, boys and girls, sang appropriate song and then there was a speech "which brought tears to their eyes." Thanks to your devotion in teaching, you have reached the mothers of your pupils. We have learned to put our confidence in you and to love you as our parents did. We want to express our gratitude to you and to assure you we will never forget you. We will always be happy to see the grey garb here."

And Father Baillargeon added: "I am sorry I am not an orator and can express only inadequately our feelings and regrets. Your community has worked miracles in this mission. I will always remember them to God."

On August 11, Sister Marguerite-Marie and Sister Guay, the last to leave Kenora, went back to St. Boniface and consoled themselves with the thought that a new field of action would not be far away. As a matter of fact, work was never lacking to the canonical province of St. Boniface. Regina Hospital was planning a cancer research centre.<sup>13</sup> The situation was not rosy at Gravelbourg by reason of its small population; survival was difficult. And yet the little town was erected into a diocese with Father Rodrigue Villeneuve, an Oblate, becoming titular. He was consecrated in the Ottawa cathedral



on September 11, 1930 by Bishop William Forbes assisted by Bishop Rheame of Hailebury and Bishop Guy of Grouard.<sup>14</sup>

Mother Piché and Sister Dalton extended congratulations to the new Bishop of Gravelbourg.<sup>15</sup> They could have also added their sympathy to him for Bishop Villeneuve would one day say to the Grey Nuns that he had wept with them. "Your sisters have suffered so much in these years of depression. They have not put an end to the difficulties of a religious order. I have always been afraid that the Mothers of Montreal would take the sisters away. But no, thank God, you have acted, in allowing them to stay, out of pure charity."<sup>16</sup> The bishop would attribute to the nurses his survival when he came down with typhoid fever.<sup>17</sup>

Another illustrious patient, Archbishop Andrea Cassulo, who had been treated at the hospital even before it was opened, always recognized the good work of the sisters at Gravelbourg.<sup>18</sup> And Gravelbourg was also renowned in far-off Paris where Mr. Jean Verdier, Sulpician, was made Cardinal-Archbishop. He had visited the west in 1923 and had become six years later superior general of his order. As Cardinal-Archbishop of Paris, he recalled: "I will never forget the warm welcome given me in your houses at Montreal and in your incomparable missions."<sup>19</sup>

One of these incomparable missions, St. Boniface Sanatorium, occasioned much anxiety, according to the chronicles. The treasurer general, Mother Allaire, had to come to preside over the signature of the construction contract.<sup>20</sup> Difficulties, however, were overcome to the great joy of Archbishop Béliveau. But then on May 28, the Archbishop suffered a stroke. For some time it was thought it might be fatal. After the danger of death passed it was with sorrow that one could see the aftereffects. His memory came back slowly but he was left with a persistent weakness of the right side.<sup>21</sup>

Since misfortune never occurs singly, on June

29, at the school in Lestock, just opened for 12 days since its restoration, an explosion occurred destroying almost all the laundry and the bakery. Mr. Doll, an engineer, escaped with his life but was horribly burned. In the absence of a doctor, the nurses had to treat him.<sup>22</sup>

The sisters sing daily "O Crux Ave" (Hail the Cross). In this they follow the example of Mother d'Youville who taught them that the cross brings forth good works. Fortunately, Providence offers joys as well as sorrows. So, on September 28, 1931, the sanatorium was finally opened officially. Bishop W. L. Jubinville, vicar general, gave the blessing instead of Archbishop Béliveau. In the evening, Hon. John Bracken, prime minister, cut the ribbon and thanked the Grey Nuns profusely for having given another weapon to the province in the battle against tuberculosis. He gave special congratulations to Sisters Ste-Emilienne who had brought the building to completion.<sup>23</sup> Archbishop Sinnot of Winnipeg said: "The Grey Nuns have added a new page to their history by the erection of this sanatorium which stands as one of the leading institutions of our city and of our province." Dr. Boardman added his thanks in both English and French.<sup>24</sup>

Patients began to be admitted October 5. There were more than 100 by the end of the year. Sister Ste-Emilienne, having completed her work as a builder, was named provincial superior to take the place of Sister Dionne.<sup>25</sup>

A short while later it was learned that Bishop Villeneuve had been appointed Archbishop of Quebec. Bishop Grandbois would say: "His humility makes him afraid, but he is admirably qualified for this position to which His Holiness, Pius XI, has just called him."<sup>26</sup> As for the future cardinal, he acknowledged the good wishes of the Grey Nuns saying, "I am moved by your attention. I carry Gravelbourg in my heart."<sup>27</sup>

In fact, the Cardinal-Archbishop of Quebec

remained always interested in the Western missions. He had seen the Grey Nuns at work not only in little St. Joseph's Hospital, but also in the Indian schools, a work eminently apostolic. He many times praised this work of Indian schools. He was not the only one to appreciate the missionary work of the sisters. From the school of Totten, now renamed Little Flower School since 1929,<sup>28</sup> came the following tribute to Mother Piché: "We recognize the great good accomplished thanks to the indefatigable efforts of the members of your order. If all the sacrifices and good works could be recorded in a book, the book would be an impressive volume."<sup>29</sup>

Also, at Fort Frances, Father Brassard wanted to celebrate the 25 anniversary of St. Marguerite School. There was a concert, a Mass of Thanksgiving, and speeches in French and in Ojibway. Two dramas and a comedy were performed by the pupils to the delight of the audience. The climax came when a Métis named Maurice Bruyère, who had been the first pupil enrolled at the school, read a speech of his own composition. With eloquence he reviewed the history of the institution and said he was happy to express the gratitude of all to Father Brassard, the first principal, to Sister Girard, the first superior and to Sister Marguerite-Marie, the first teacher.<sup>30</sup>

Recognizing the progress made by these schools on reserves, it was normal that any closing of them would be made with regret. But the hour was coming to give up the school at Lestock, the religious personnel of which moved to St. Boniface Sanatorium.<sup>31</sup> In the first days of April, 1932 the institution was handed over to the Oblate Sisters who carried on the work begun 35 years ago.

The Grey Nuns continued, however, the school at Lebret even though fire destroyed it on November 13 for the second time in less than 30 years.<sup>32</sup> There were no victims since the people had rushed to the aid of the pupils.<sup>33</sup> Once more, the classes and religious personnel had to move to the former church, in the basement of the new one, to the city hall and

to the Oblate Scolasticate. Teaching continued under these conditions, the sisters being confident they would be able to have the school rebuilt.<sup>34</sup>

In Ste-Anne-des-Chênes there was a celebration of a fiftieth anniversary, that of the founding of the convent in 1883. On this occasion the following statistics were provided: 7,000 pupils had attended the institution in the course of a half-century. Three had become priests; seventy had become sisters; many others had founded Christian families.<sup>35</sup>

The great event of the year 1933 was the appointment of a coadjutor-Archbishop for the see of St. Boniface. Archbishop Emile Yelle, a Sulpician, was consecrated at Notre Dame Church in Montreal, September 21, by Bishops Gauthier of Montreal, Papineau of Joliette and Charlebois of Keewatin.<sup>36</sup> The sermon was given by Bishop A. Melanson of Gravelbourg whose area "was part of the Canadian West which is being tested most cruelly in these days."<sup>37</sup>

Archbishop Béliveau with many of the clergy went to Montreal<sup>38</sup> and also to Winnipeg where the new Archbishop was welcomed on October 18. "All St. Boniface is on its feet. The reception was both enthusiastic and impressive. More than a thousand people, including civic leaders, took part in the procession".

The next day, Archbishop Yelle fulfilled a promise he made to the sisters at Montreal and he went to the provincial house. Mother Piché accompanied by her secretary having just returned from a visit to the Far North, was there to greet him. The coadjutor Archbishop celebrated in the renovated chapel. To recall his memorable predecessors, the chalice of Bishop Provencher was placed upon the altar. Addressing the sisters, the Archbishop said his last visit in Montreal had been to the mother house; his first visit in St. Boniface was to the same Grey Nuns of Montreal "who have such a fine reputation in St. Boniface. Your history is mingled with the history of Red River." During the reception

after Mass, the sisters were free to admire the chain which had belonged to Archbishop Taché and which now supported the pectoral cross of the speaker. Also they looked at the ring which was given to him by Cardinal Verdier, the superior general of the Sulpicians. Mr. Romeo Neveu, the immediate superior of Mr. Yelle when he was a professor at the major seminary, said: "Saint-Sulpice without subtracting any Sulpician, now has another bishop added to its ranks." The new bishop replied: "I intend to remain a Sulpician more than ever." These words were certainly not displeasing to the sisters of St. Boniface, conscious, as they were, of the long tradition of benefits received from the venerable Company of Saint Sulpice.

Archbishop Yelle quoted from a letter by Bishop Taché to his mother: "The Grey Nuns stop all illnesses. They give the best possible care. What I appreciate most is their apostolate with children and sick people, an apostolate even more appreciated since Manitoba is by no means all Catholic." This was an opinion shared entirely by the new Archbishop who knew how thorny the question of schools remained.

He looked with satisfaction on the growth of the Institute.<sup>39</sup> During 1933 new works were undertaken at Montreal with Notre Dame Establishment and the management provided to Pasteur Hospital. In the beginning of 1934 it was decided to open a novitiate at St. Albert<sup>40</sup> and in the following September there was begun the Marguerite d'Youville Institute, a school affiliated with the University of Montreal for nurses who wish to obtain a baccalaureate degree in nursing care.

Archbishop Yelle joined leading citizens of Canada in welcoming the honour given to Mother Piché by His Majesty King George V who gave the title of Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire.<sup>41</sup> Humble little Mother Piché, who had just completed her second trip to the Polar circle, attributed this honour to the missionaries in the West and Far North. She had great pleasure when her opinion was expressed

in a tribute made to her by the pupils of the Sisters of the Holy Cross who wrote on November 13: "When Bishop Provencher went to your institute on September 13, 1843 to ask for missionaries to go and break bread with the children of his vast diocese, the great bishop was divinely inspired. He could not have done better than to address himself to heroines...The polar solitudes have been changed into centers of happiness. The transformation of the natives has been the masterpiece of Christianity in the extreme North...It is not surprising that your apostolic labour has earned for you, from the highest authorities, recognition of your work as marvellous civilizers. The honour given to the Mother reflects on the daughters of Mother d'Youville, worthy heirs of her virtues and example."

When she came to Winnipeg, Thursday morning January 31, 1935, the assistant-general Mother Evangeline Gallant learned some disturbing news. Mother Ste-Émilienne, who came to the station to meet her, informed her that the evening before Sister Domitilde Carrière had died at the age of thirty-one.<sup>42</sup> Pneumonia had carried her off after only three days in bed. She had passed the supreme test with serenity. It was said: "It was just as if she had gone asleep. She left only good memories and deep regrets."

Another drama came to sadden the grey family about five months later on June 13. This happened at Fort Frances School at 6 o'clock in the morning. Sister Juliette Lavoie, in her capacity as baker, was in the course of putting the dough into the kneading machine when it caught her sleeve and then her arm and head. Two employees heard her calling out and alerted the whole house. Father de Bretagne had just started Mass. He interrupted it and arrived just in time to bring religious help to the dying woman. Her heart was still beating but it stopped shortly afterward. The sisters were engulfed with grief at the tragedy of a generous soul taken from the Grey Nuns after ten years of service to the Lord. She had been the one who at the Totten school fire did so



much to try to save the life of Sister St-Alfred. This day it was her turn to die unexpectedly as she was performing a humble task. She had not yet completed her 33rd year. The mortal remains were transported to the provincial house in June 14. A large number of sisters received the body of their dear companion in respectful silence. The weather was in harmony with what was experienced in the hearts of the religious family sharing in the grief of the Lavoie family, one of the oldest in St. Boniface. Her poor mother had been informed of the news by her sons, the priest.<sup>43</sup>

How mysterious are the designs of Providence and how they make us meditate on the Biblical passage: "You know not the day nor the hour." That is why it is necessary always to be in a state of readiness. This was the exhortation made to the eight novices who on February 15 bound themselves to God by religious vows. Sister Ferland also wrote that four more postulants had made their entry ten days earlier. The secretary of the visitor faithfully recorded the details of the trip and the events which marked the stay at each mission. This is the role of the secretary who accompanies the Mother General or her delegate, as stipulated by the constitutions. An official visit is made every five years by the general authority and every year by those in charge of the canonical provinces. Their reports provide precious information for the history of the order.

These reports are supplemented by the correspondence with the mother house, the chronicles of each mission, the news bulletins, all designed to follow the prescriptions of Bishop Bourget who recommended them as means of keeping up union of hearts despite distance. The records have also been the means of fixing the present for the benefit of future generations for whom the former present is now the past.

It is clear the chief official organ of communication was the community annals where one finds,

for the date of October 7, 1935, the results of the quinquennial election. Mother Gallant replaced Mother Piché at the helm; three ex-Manitobans were chosen to serve on the general council: Sisters Dionne, Allaire and Duffin. The fifth, Sister R.A. Laberge, had been Alberta provincial and she was replaced by Sister Ste-Emilienne who had been provincial of St. Boniface since 1931.<sup>44</sup> This last nomination left a vacancy in St. Boniface. It was filled by Sister Blanche Labrosse, until then mistress of novices. With her appointment as provincial superior, she was replaced in turn by Sister Ste-Croix.<sup>45</sup>

With these nominations, the face of the councils of administration changed but the objective remained: to stand amongst the people of God, recalling to them that there is a road toward the Father whose Providence watches over their needs; to service one's brothers and sisters throughout all humanity following the Mother of universal charity.

This spirit of availability had inspired Bishop Bourget to direct the steps of Bishop Provencher toward this institute founded by Mother d'Youville, for whom he always had a special admiration. Another historic bond between St. Boniface and Montreal dated back to 1836 when the district of Montreal had been erected into a diocese. Bishop Provencher had communicated to Archbishop Lartigue the happy response to the request that had been made to Rome while both were in the eternal city.<sup>46</sup>

At Montreal there was a celebration of the centenary of this event. The coadjutor-Archbishop of Montreal, Bishop Gauthier, spoke of the policy of mission expansion adopted by his illustrious predecessors, directed particularly to the West.<sup>47</sup>

Scarcely two weeks later, the annalist of St. Boniface recounts with many details a noteworthy page of history. On May 27, 1936, His Eminence Cardinal Villeneuve, en route to Saint Albert where he was to confer the fullness of the priesthood on Bishop-elect Jean Louis Coudert,<sup>48</sup> stopped at St. Boniface and

visited the institutions of the Grey Nuns. At Hospice Taché the elderly patients greeted him while sitting along the entrance way. The Prince of the Church stopped to chat with each one. At the hospice, someone said afterwards: "He is a real gentleman and full of fun." When he met the sisters of the hospice, where a department for retired priests had just been organized,<sup>49</sup> he heard Archbishop Yelle say: "After what you have seen, Eminence, I do not have to tell you what the sisters are doing. You have seen for yourself. They are even doing the work of the bishop, for the bishop is charged with looking after the poor." The eminent visitor replied in good humour: "Sisters, I recognize you not only by your works but also by your 'bad spirit.' You have emulated Deacon Lawrence and you have made a show of your treasures, the poor, in order to prove that you are doing bishops' work. Seriously, I thank you in the name of the Church and of the Bishops. Perhaps we have not enough virtue and we are leaving you with most of the heavy work while reserving for ourselves the lacework?"

In the community room of the provincial house, the banter continued. Archbishop Yelle said: "if you were not an Oblate I would say only that the Grey Nuns were the first auxiliaries of Archbishop Taché. If I were not a Sulpician, I would say that they were founded by Saint Sulpice. If you did not reside at Quebec, I would say their mother house is in Montreal. If you had not been bishop of Gravelbourg, I would tell you they have spread to every corner of the West." The Cardinal Archbishop thanked Archbishop Yelle, saying, "What he did not tell me, Sisters, I know already and I see that whatever faults you may have are due to your being daughters of Saint Sulpice!... Your works are truly admirable. You do miracles following in the footsteps of the Lord, although not as rapidly as He did... Sometimes I say that communities like yours are a cross for a bishop, but a cross of gold, specifically devoted to works of charity."

The Grey Nuns were again in the honours, though

this time indirectly, when on July 26, 1936, the Commission of Historic Sites immortalized the memory of Christophe Dufrost de La Jemmerais, the younger brother of Mother d'Youville. At the Forks of the Roseau there was erected a commemorative plaque to mark the place of his burial, May 10, 1736.<sup>50</sup> The young man of 28 years, lieutenant to La Verendrye, had died of deprivation and hunger while his cousins tried to carry him from Fort Maurepas to Fort St. Charles. He had already accompanied his uncle for several years and had gained his trust. He took part in the construction of Fort St. Pierre at the place where Rainy River has its source at the foot of a slight rapid near the town of Fort Frances.<sup>51</sup> The four pioneers had made a stop there on their unforgettable journey of 1844 and, since 1906, the Grey Nuns had had the direction of St. Marguerite School. More than one sister reflected, following these historical precedents, that Providence had done things well. The uncle and the brother of Mother d'Youville had preceded her spiritual daughters to the West and had opened her way for them, as it were.

The Indian schools, including that of Lebret which had reopened on February 29,<sup>52</sup> deserved the high praise which the authorities gave during their visits. They were always astonished at the progress and success of the pupils. The sisters had imposed on themselves many hardships for long years now. Catechism was taught to adults, and the sisters did not fear to live in tents during the summer in order to provide schooling for them.<sup>53</sup>

In view of such success it was not surprising for the sisters to receive an appeal to establish themselves at Berens River, a mission situated about two hundred miles north of St. Boniface where the Oblate Sisters had been teaching for a year. The Saulteaux had expressed a desire to have a hospital and since the Oblate Missionaries were not trained as nurses, Father Lamontagne forwarded their request to Mother Mann who had been chosen as provincial superior in March, 1937. He received a favourable reply: five sisters would be sent to this post which was far

away not so much in miles as in the problems of communication.<sup>54</sup>

Generous souls were invited to enrol as foundresses. These were Sisters Marie-du-Carmel, Marie-Louise Lacroix, Armandine Savoie, Maria Benoit and Jeanne Morand. On September 6 at 3:00 p.m. they rode to Selkirk by car with Fathers Lamontagne and de Grandpré, Mother Mann and Sister Breux. They boarded the ship, Kenora, which raised anchor after some delay. They went down the Red River and reached Lake Winnipeg where the waves were more noticeable. Sister Lacroix, to whom fell the lot of chronicler, barely escaped "lake sickness." When they reached port, an airplane came to salute the passengers with its wings. Distance would be reduced to practically nothing on board an iron bird!

Wednesday, September 8, they visited the little wooden hospital with a capacity of about fifteen patients who would be in the care of Sister Marie-du-Carmel and Sister Morand. The doctor would make a visit only once a year. The superior had to visit not only those on the reserve but also the few Whites living in the neighbourhood. Sister Benoit became teacher while Sisters Lacroix and Savoie took on the jobs of cook, housekeeper and seamstress. Berens was a little like the Far North from the point of view of solitude and diversity of employment. Mother Gallant, superior general, with her secretary made an unexpected visit on September 28 and the program took its usual course. By December 31, twenty-seven patients had been admitted and they had given out two hundred and eighty-six prescriptions, made twenty-two visits and had begun to become familiar with the Saulteaux language.

One of the chief hardships was the irregularity of the mail. More than two months would go by sometimes between deliveries.<sup>55</sup> But when they arrived, the messages from abroad would be literally devoured. Reading them, the sisters were informed that the school at St. François-Xavier, destroyed by fire, had been rebuilt so that the pupils were able

to take possession in mid-October.<sup>56</sup>

As for the novitiate, construction was finished by the beginning of December. On the 15th it was blessed by Archbishop Yelle in the presence of many priests and guests. The building was adjacent to the old white house. The beautiful lilacs which bloomed every spring were moved to the back.<sup>57</sup>

Gravelbourg was easier to get to than Berens River and yet the situation of St. Joseph's Hospital remained precarious. Bishop Guy, the new bishop,<sup>58</sup> would not have an easy task, the region always being affected by drought.<sup>59</sup> This situation presented an occasion for the sisters to show solidarity among themselves as witnessed by a letter from Sister Routhier to Mother Gallant, listing the houses from which material aid had been received, including the establishments in St. Boniface and Regina Hospital. She added, "We have our confidence in Providence reaffirmed."<sup>60</sup>

The sisters at the provincial house were surprised one day, the morning of January 1, 1939, when they saw sitting in the chapel one of the sisters whom they did not expect to see for a long time. Sister Marie-du-Carmel had come from Berens River by airplane, something which astonished her companions.<sup>61</sup> The one who always took the last seat found herself on an airplane trip. This was because there was no doctor at Berens and the government had decided to send her down for supplies. Her stay was of short duration as she soon returned with new material and news for the missionaries.

The rooms at the provincial house, freed by the opening of the novitiate, were now being transformed into an infirmary.<sup>62</sup> The work with orphans was drawing to a close. For some years now, these children had been placed in the different boarding houses, or thanks to the St. Adelard welfare society, confided to foster homes. At the orphanage 2,836 proteges had been sheltered since its foundation.<sup>63</sup>



In March, the statue representing Mother d'Youville was transferred from the hospital to the land of the provincial house. Given to Sister Lucie by the soldiers, it was placed near the corridor between the novitiate and the provincial house.

In April there was a considerate artistic success. The music pupils of Sister Blanche Brisebois were invited to broadcast on radio. Violin, cello, piano, trombone, cornet, and drums were all brought together by the young virtuosos who had had lessons from a true artist. Everyone recognized the exceptional talent of Sister Brisebois. Music had a high place among the Grey Nuns. Sister Lagrave had once said that "children can be attracted by singing." This tradition was maintained, and courses of music were organized for teachers during the summer season.<sup>64</sup>

During May, a building contract was signed for a new wing at St. Norbert convent. The institution had established a complete course in home economics. They wanted to produce "unparalleled women!"<sup>65</sup>

The chronicler did not limit herself to the activities of the Grey Nuns. She noted, July 25, with perceptible emotion despite her telegraphic style: "Silver jubilee of Archbishop Béliveau's consecration; example of submission to the will of God." "I thank God for having been afflicted with a stroke, for I could never have done the good which has been accomplished by Archbishop Yelle."

In the chronicle for August 31, there is record of the departure of five sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame for Japan. They stopped at St. Boniface on their way over.

However, the annalist left to another pen the recording of the closing of the Orphanage in Winnipeg which had to be abandoned to take on a new foundation at Ste-Rose-du-Lac at the insistence of Archbishop Sinnott. The Grey Nuns had worked in Winnipeg for 38 years. Sister Duffin had written about the children:

"They specialize in getting into a fight." Their attitude had quickly changed, so much so that the institution had a reputation as being the best in the capital city. The orphans were taught up to Grade VIII and then given an apprenticeship for a trade. One visitor would say, "This is not an orphanage; it is a family house."<sup>66</sup>

The Sisters of Providence of Kingston took over the work on July 31 and carried on the apostolate of the Grey Nuns who were celebrating the 200th anniversary of their birth.<sup>67</sup> It was also the 200th anniversary of the founding of Fort Rouge by Sieur La Verendrye. The anniversary was celebrated with a flourish: a parade of allegorical floats illustrating the different works of the Grey Nuns. The procession passed by the provincial house to stop, some distance away, at a pasture field called until that time "the coulee." This field has now become the magnificent La Verendrye Park where there exists a monument to the great discoverer. The chronicler wonders: "When La Verendrye said good-bye to his niece, Marguerite d'Youville, did he have any inkling that a few years from then the modest widow would found a new religious community? What surprise he would have felt if he could foresee that this institute would come, almost 100 years later, to establish a convent at Fort Rouge!" In a pleasant vein, she wrote: "Mother d'Youville whose statue is on our land must look with pride at this corner of the earth where there has been raised a monument to the memory of her uncle."<sup>68</sup>

Celebrations on the 200th anniversary of the Grey Nuns were likewise grandiose in Montreal and were crowned by a tribute coming from the very highest authority: His Holiness, Pope Pius VI who sent Mother General a Bene Merenti medal, "a distinction granted by reason of the generous labours undertaken in the mission field and for your works of education and in the apostolate." Archbishop Ildebrando Antoniutti presented this impressive decoration to Mother Gallant on December 21 and said it was a pledge of the Sovereign Pontiff's interest in the wonderful works of the congregation.<sup>69</sup>

These works were meeting with success everywhere. Thus, St. Boniface Hospital opened a new dispensary for poor patients. "There has been placed in the building a commemorative seal in recognition of the 200th anniversary of the inspiring thought of Venerable Mother d'Youville. It was inaugurated 19 January 1939. What was to be specially underlined, wrote Sister Breux, was the sensitive gesture of the President of the University of Manitoba, Dr. Smith, in spite of great difficulty began his address with a few words in French to render homage to all that the French Canadians had done for the province."<sup>70</sup>

For their part, the Grey Nuns saw in this new unity a means of helping their clientele more effectively "for in many cases, the patients' ailments were caused by unhealthy surroundings. Certain situations could be remedied by home visits."

The hospital built at Ste-Rose-du-Lac was begun on September 15, 1938 and opened its doors the following February 7. It was none too soon, for the parishioners through their priest, Father Theoret, had been asking for a hospital since 1935. They had no other resource than the Protestant hospital 25 miles away. It had not been possible then to meet the request as a result of a shortage of sisters. But the parish priest, with the support of Archbishop Sinnott and Dr. Lionel Gendreau, had returned two years later and it was then that the solution was taken of ceding the orphanage at Winnipeg to another community and adopting Ste-Rose.<sup>71</sup>

The building had dimensions of 72 feet by 45 and had room for 45 patients. Archbishop Sinnott congratulated Father Theoret, saying to him: "Your hope has been unswerving." He sent a telegram to Mother General in these words: "I make myself the interpreter of the parish priest, the clergy and the whole population of Ste-Rose in expressing our joy at having the Grey Nuns in this magnificent hospital."<sup>72</sup>

The title of foundresses of this venture was

shared by Sisters Berthe Ménéard, Ste-Euphémie, Alice Marcoux, Berthe Demers, Ann Hopcraft, Eugenie Bilodeau and Anna Gosselin. They had occasion to prove their zeal when seven patients were hospitalized on the very day of the official opening.

St. Boniface Sanatorium, a relatively recent work, also had to be extended. A floor was added to the chapel and above the preventative room, thus allowing another 30 patients to be received. As well there was a classroom for children who followed a specially adapted program.<sup>73</sup> At Regina, the cancer clinic was opened, a project which had been in the planning stages since the early 30's, but which had had to be postponed on account of economic conditions.<sup>74</sup> It could be said that "everything was for the best in the best of all possible worlds." Alas, war broke out in Europe, the war dreaded for many years now, about which Pope Pius XI had said in 1935: "War would be a crime so enormous, a manifestation so foolish and unthinkable that we do not believe one will be possible."<sup>75</sup> The Lord spared his servant the anguish of seeing Europe in blood. He died February 10, 1939 and on March 2 His Holiness Pope Pius XII became the head of the government of the church in this tormented period.

At Fort Frances School there occurred on January 10, 1940 an incident to say the least unforeseen. A young Indian aged 19 years became gravely ill. He was expelled from a neighbouring hospital on the ground that "he was not Treaty".<sup>76</sup> Having spoken to his "guardian" of his desire to die in a Catholic institution, the guardian approached the mission school. Without hesitation he knocked on the door and presented his request. A regular commotion ensued. The dormitory of the little boys was changed into a bedroom and the patient was placed there. He showed his happiness by smiling at each of his nurses. His health deteriorated rapidly; he was fortified with religious rites and expired peacefully at 8:00 p.m., five and a half hours after his admission. The witnesses at his death were deeply moved by the grief of his adoptive father.<sup>77</sup>

This event confirmed in their opinion those who wanted to have a Catholic hospital at Fort Frances, a little town of some importance since the exploitation of the forests in the neighbourhood was attracting a considerable working population.<sup>78</sup> Conversations were held with the Grey Nuns beginning in the month of June. The municipality granted the land and exempted it and the future building from taxes and they promised free electricity and telephone.<sup>79</sup> The sisters would have to construct a building larger than that of Berens River, which was already full to capacity.

As for Berens River, it was necessary to evacuate the place on August 13 since forest fire spread over both banks of the Berens. The mounted police made an appeal for help to the Indians of the region but they did not have time to respond since the destructive element advanced with unexpected speed. Houses were evacuated; a violent wind drove the flames toward the hospital. Patients and pupils were moved to a safe place while the four sisters,<sup>80</sup> dragging trunks full of whatever they could lay hands on, boarded a canoe which took them to Sigurson Island. About 4:00 p.m. they saw from the island dense smoke surrounding the hospital. It looked as if everything was being destroyed, although the sisters kept hoping that Mother d'Youville would save the house. In fact, Notre-Dame-des-Neiges was undamaged although the priests' house, the chicken house, the ice house and the other outbuildings were left a heap of ruins.<sup>81</sup> The misfortune was certainly regretted, but things would have been much more serious if the hospital and school had been destroyed. The hospital, inadequate to the needs, was to be enlarged in two years, while the school now housed 40 pupils, a Protestant teacher having left in December of the previous year.<sup>82</sup>

The terrible war raging in Europe left no one untouched. The media brought the news from across the Atlantic without delay. So it was learned that Cardinal Verdier, dying, was spared the sight of the invader occupying Paris.<sup>83</sup> The news afflicted

especially those Grey Nuns who had come from Europe. For instance, Sister Nathalie was overwhelmed when "her" Belgium was devastated. The chronicle records: "She has remained, despite distance, very attached to her native land."<sup>84</sup> It was the same for the Polish, Lithuanian and French sisters who had joined the congregation as well as for those of German nationality of whom three were born in Germany itself and three others in Russia, Austria and Switzerland respectively. It was a time when the universal charity of Mother d'Youville was manifested. Mother General preached by example as attested to by a letter from Archbishop Antoniutti: "I have begun my visit of the camps for war prisoners and internees in Canada. Your great charity helps me to assuage much suffering."<sup>85</sup>

National days of prayer were organized to obtain an end to the hostilities. The tales of horror persuaded both religious and civil authorities to remind everyone of the elementary duty to respect life. This is the theme taken up by Archbishop Monahan when he presided at the official opening of the nursing education wing at Regina, made necessary by the growing number of students.<sup>86</sup> The Archbishop reminded the nurses and the guests of "the precious gift of life and the duty to defend it against all criminal assaults."

This life, so precious, was appreciated doubly when some event occurred to recall its fragility. Such an event took place at Totten where Sister Blanche Forest barely escaped death. Her clothes caught on fire as she was waxing the floors. Quickly she wrapped herself in blankets from a nearby bed. She was horribly burned and taken to Devil's Lake Hospital where care was lavished on her.<sup>87</sup>

Joys and tragedies alternated in community life. On March 1 there took place at the mother house the reunion of the Grey Nuns of Nicolet with those of Montreal. There was feasting throughout the institute. Since 1886 when this branch had been formed, there had been good relations between the



Nicolet group and the mother house. This happy event in 1941 marked the "most perfect unity" but was followed by tragic news. "After the joys we have just experienced, how deeply disturbing is the stupefying message received from Ile-à-la-Crosse. Sister Eugénie, 37 years old, drowned along with a little girl whom she was trying to save." This was on June 22. Sister Eugenie had witnessed to her great love by laying down her life.

It was the same respect for life that inspired the new La Vérendrye Hospital at Fort Frances. Construction had begun October 8 under the supervision of the veteran builder, Sister Ste-Emilienne. Eight other sisters had joined her. Archbishop Yelle presided at the ceremony of opening. It was his last function as coadjutor-Archbishop since he had decided to retire on account of ill health. On the subject of this new institution, he said, "It is impossible to measure the extent of its Catholic influence."<sup>88</sup> He expressed his recognition in a telegram to the general council: "Magnificent blessing of the Fort Frances Hospital, thanks to the Grey Nuns." The opening took place June 3, a special holiday for the daughters of Mother d'Youville when they commemorated the turning over of Montreal's general hospital by Louis XV on June 3, 1753.

Archbishop Yelle, who was said to have proved the wisdom of an old man in dealing with the school question which was so difficult on account of the cosmopolitan nature of the population,<sup>89</sup> was succeeded by Archbishop Georges Cabana, consecrated June 30 at St. Hyacinthe. At the seminary of St. Hyacinthe he had taken the classical course as had Archbishop Taché in former times.<sup>90</sup> When he arrived at St. Boniface, like his predecessors, the new Archbishop honoured the Grey Nuns of the province with his first visit. As he said later, he recognized that to merit being a missionary in the West a supernatural spirit was necessary.<sup>91</sup> During the summer of 1941, he was edified to see the institutions which were continuing to multiply the apostolic work of the pioneer community. For several years now, plans for the cen-

tenary were talked of. Sister H. Girard collected documents and edited memoirs for this purpose. Father Tessier and M. H. Biron agreed to write the history of the first century of the Grey Nuns in the West. Social services were reorganized and moved from Taché Hospice to the hospital's outpatient department. Sister Valentine Lacroix retained the direction of these social services, assisted by a few companions. It was necessary to prepare food and clothing and to visit poor families in the company of a registered nurse. This ministry dated back to the pioneers and especially the unforgettable Sister Laurent. At the beginning of September it was announced that a juniorate would open for about twelve students who wanted to initiate themselves into the life of a sister of charity while pursuing their studies by correspondence under the direction of Sister Catherine Barton, an emeritus professor.<sup>92</sup>

The uncertainty of the times and even unforeseen misfortunes, like the cyclone which damaged the hospital at Gravelbourg,<sup>93</sup> did not restrain the zeal of the workers. The threat of war became concretized when on December 7, following the attack on Pearl Harbour, the United States declared war on Japan. The annalist wrote: "This event has increased the prospect that we may have a period of bloodshed in our own country."

It was not war, but fire that broke out at the sanatorium on February 1, 1942. It was at the time of Mass which was always impressive as there were 50 or 60 patients assisting from their beds gathered around the altar. Fire originated in the carpenter shop and soon spread. The firemen, responding quickly, mastered the flames and Mass was continued in calm.

The sanatorium had been in existence eleven years. The organization was cited as an example to be followed. Sister Driscoll, despite her blindness, continued her ministry of catechesis. She visited the sick of every colour and creed. She was especially happy when she could arrange treats for the

youngest ones.

A new initiative grew in popularity: occupational therapy, working with a sewing needle and knitting needles, weaving on a portable frame, all activities that could be carried on from a half-lying position. It was said that men became expert knitters.<sup>94</sup>

War industry contributed to the growth of the population not only in the capital but also in the small towns around it. At Ste-Anne-des-Chênes, two hundred and seventy-five pupils attended the ten classes, and the institution became a collegiate institute. As for the convent of St. François-Xavier, it increased its numbers and became a boarding school.<sup>95</sup> Seeing fine youth anxious to prepare for the future, it was sad to hear the news of Dieppe where so many of our own youth remained dead on the field of battle. "The whole nation weeps for these children lost to war."<sup>96</sup> Veterans of the First World War, who had returned from the front, expressed their gratitude. On October 6, some of them placed under the statue of Mother d'Youville, a plaque with the inscription: "Soldats reconnaissants. Grateful soldiers."<sup>97</sup>

Because of the progress of preventative medicine and the widespread use of vaccines and antibiotics, contagious diseases markedly decreased. It was therefore thought wise to merge St. Roch Hospital with St. Boniface Hospital and to have the St. Roch building used as a boarding place for employees of the enlarged hospital.<sup>98</sup> After forty-two years of precious service, St. Roch Hospital changed its orientation. The eight sisters who formed the personnel were sent to other posts. Sister Anna Trottier left her position as local superior to see herself chosen to be provincial superior to take the place of Mother Mann who had completed her six years of office. Father Primeau wrote: "The people of Manitoba are happy with this choice, giving to our province on the eve of the centenary the first Manitoban to fill this position. Her job will not be

easy because of the numerous problems arising from the war."<sup>99</sup>

It was not only the Grey Nuns who wanted to recognize the centenary of their arrival. Already, at the beginning of 1943, in preparation for the next year, two conferences were given by Mrs. W. Raymond and Sister May Guichon under the auspices of the St. Boniface Historical Society.<sup>100</sup> Mr. Antoine D'Eschambault, assuming the presidency of a Committee of festivities said, "The celebrations will have as their purpose to fully express the sincere tribute of appreciation and affection which a whole people have with regard to the Grey Nuns."

This affection was reciprocal. The sisters proved their affection by other enterprises. A school of medical technology was inaugurated at the hospital on September 1. The course of a duration of fourteen months prepared laboratory and radiology technicians. Dr. James Prendergast was the director and Sister Marie-Rose Tougas, a recognized expert, became professor.<sup>101</sup>

At Ste-Rose-du-Lac, because of the manpower shortage, Sister Yvonne Prevost began a school for the formation of auxiliaries to care for the sick. This was the first school for licensed practical nurses in Manitoba. These initiatives witnessed the readiness to adapt characteristic of the Grey Nuns.

Both lay and clerical historians have stressed this dynamism as a key to explaining the expansion of the community. Father Léonide Primeau began the publication of a series of articles for *La Liberté et Le Patriote*, followed by *Le Devoir* of Montreal. After recounting the story of our dear old provincial house, the author cited statistics. During the first 100 years, the Grey Nuns had gathered together 335 Manitoba professed sisters while 577 of their pupils had chosen a religious vocation including sixty-five secular priests, thirty-five religious order priests, twenty-seven brothers and 450 sisters in twenty communities.<sup>102</sup> Since 1844, 868 sisters had come from

Montreal; Hospice Taché had sheltered 4,709 aged persons.

Father Primeau stressed the cosmopolitan nature of the Grey Nuns where twelve nationalities could be counted. All these sisters learned to speak French fluently. French was taught in the novitiate and in the schools "at the end of the regular schedule and for an hour only. Even on Saturdays, extra hours were given so that, as Sister Ferland said in May 1934, the pupils were able soon to express themselves in good and beautiful French."<sup>103</sup>

Father F. Blanchin, an Oblate, wrote of the spirituality of Mother d'Youville. He marvelled at the action of the Holy Spirit on this elite soul: Her orientation toward God the Father and her imitation of His beloved Son explained in some way why she wished to constitute herself as "la petite providence", the little providence of her brothers and sisters in humanity.

"In this Sign They Conquered" is the title of a pamphlet on the centenary by Father Cosmas W. Krumpelmann, O.S.B. The author had himself received a favour due to the intercession of Mother d'Youville.<sup>104</sup> The praise which he showered on his benefactor revealed the depth of his appreciation.

The volume "Vers les Pays d'en Haut" appeared in its turn. The chronicles remark that it would do much good wherever it was read.

Sister Mary Murphy likewise wrote, for English readers, under the title: "St. Boniface Heroines of Mercy."

The pupils of Ste-Anne-des-Chênes put on a play, November 24, 1943 depicting the arrival of Marie-Anne Gaboury, the first white woman to come to the upcountry in 1807. It was a success worthy of inspiring theatrical careers.

The convent at La Broquerie was not to be

outdone. On January 14, 1944 they put on a pageant at the auditorium of St. Boniface Hospital, evoking the voyage of the Grey Nuns. Then it was the turn of the pupils of St. François-Xavier expressing their homage during the teachers' convention.

St. Boniface thus celebrated, but overshadowing all was the frightful war which was being fought in Europe with stories of nameless horror. Meanwhile so many families in the country were suffering grief. Mother Trottier and the members of her council thought it might be best to defer the celebration of the centenary. But Archbishop Cabana put an end to hesitations. He said, "People would blame me from the Atlantic to the Pacific and even until my death if I do not see this anniversary well celebrated."<sup>105</sup>

On April 24, the day when the pioneers embarked on Lac St. Louis, there was a mass of thanksgiving at the little white house. "Our hearts are filled with appreciation as we consider the abundant harvests due to the works of these heroic women." Mother Trottier invited Mother Gallant, superior general, to the feasts of June, saying: "If the province of St. Boniface has done something during the past century it is thanks to the mother house which was willing to reattach the frail branch to the living tree. Thanks to our superiors who have always shown themselves generous to us."

In her communication to the sisters of the province on June 5, Mother provincial noted that "the present time hardly lends itself to rejoicing" - Rome was still under threat by war - but she explained: "If we have yielded to the insistence of religious authorities and of different committees, it is so that the Eternal Father may thereby be more glorified, Mother d'Youville and our venerable foundresses better known, and so that our spirits may renew their first fervour."

These directives were followed at the celebrations at Lebrét where, besides the cemetery, they were marking at the end of May, the sixtieth anniver-



sary of the foundation of the mission. At Fort Frances on June 11, Maurice Bruyère, first pupil of Sainte-Marguerite School, explained the purpose of a surprise party given there: to commemorate 100 years of the arrival of the Grey Nuns and to express how much he and his friends appreciated the devotion and charity of the sisters. Father Placide Chatelain thanked his flock for responding to his appeal; he said that without the Grey Nuns the missionaries could not have accomplished all the good that had been realised. It was also stressed that the four foundresses in June 1844 had stopped at Point Cochiching, right at the stop where the school now stood.

At St. Boniface itself, the festivities began with a very Youvillian touch. Father Lavoie was asked to send a list of names of poor families whom the sisters would visit and assist.<sup>106</sup> Happiness was reciprocal for visitors and visited. The visitors were able to look after unexpressed needs and were able to make old clothes new.

On the anniversary of the arrival of the pioneers, June 21, Bishop R. Duprat, O.P., of Prince Albert offered Mass in the Cathedral. Bishop Philippe Perrier, representing Archbishop J. Charbonneau of Montreal delivered the sermon in French and Archbishop Gerald Murray, coadjutor of Winnipeg, gave it in English.

Following the Mass there was a touching scene. Bishop Provencher had, on the Sunday following the arrival, intoned the Te Deum after presenting the foundresses to his flock. The scene was reproduced once again. The little harmonium which had been won at a lottery by Father Aubert and given to the sisters in 1848 alternated with the great organ and accompanied the voices singing the same hymn of thanksgiving. The old house then opened its doors to those who wished to admire the souvenirs...

Distinguished guests were present, the evening of the same day, at a three-act presentation of the life of

Mother d'Youville. Bishop Perrier expressed the greetings of Ville-Marie, the mystic city, had been faithful to its mission. Mr. D'Eschambault in turn saluted Ville-Marie and applied to the city of St. Boniface the expression, "mystic city," pointing out its role relative to the Western territories and the Polar circle as being the same as that of Ville-Marie.

On Thursday, June 22, the day for the sisters, Father Philippe Scheffer, superior of the Lebret scholasticate, evoked the memory of the pioneers who came before the Oblates did. He expressed perplexity: "What a difficult task it is to pick out a few choice stones when one is confronted with a heap of them, all carefully shaped by expert artists," this is indeed a sacrifice very difficult for a historiographer! The speaker stressed that the 1,800,000 square miles confided to Bishop Provencher and a handful of priests now included five archdioceses, eight dioceses, 1,539 priests and almost 3,000 sisters serving a Catholic population of 700,000 souls. The Grey Nuns, he said, by their educative and civilizing work had largely contributed to the harvest being gathered today.

On Friday, June 23, there was a Mass of Requiem celebrated by Archbishop Cabana for the 125 sisters who had died in the field of honour and for the benefactors who had collaborated in the works. Mother Gallant, superior general and Mother Trottier deposited on the graves of the foundresses wreathes of flowers carried by four girls clad in white, representing convents directed by the Grey Nuns.

The ladies auxiliary, former pupils and the public were called to join in festivities on Saturday, June 24, the whole terminating at La Verendrye Park next day when Mother Trottier, with Sisters Valade and Ste-Lucie unveiled a monument raised to honour the Grey Nuns "as a public and official testimony of the appreciation and regard for the pioneers and the valiant community which, for 100 years, has tended to the sufferings of our people."

- 1 Annals, 1930, pp 73-75.
- 2 Father Duchaussois willingly joked about his stature saying that visitors meeting him for the first time would ask: "Did he write the books? Ah!..." The missionary then added: "When I see those puzzled looks, I just wonder...Well, even when one is small, one believes he is a giant."
- 3 Letter dated Oct. 6, 1932.
- 4 Moissac, Sr. E. de, op. cit., p. 24.
- 5 King Edward Hospital in Winnipeg also admitted patients suffering from tuberculosis.
- 6 Primeau, L., Centenaire des Srs Gr., p. 13.
- 7 Annals, 1930-31, p. 48.
- 8 Primeau, L., Centenaire des Srs Gr., p. 14.
- 9 Circ. mens., 1898-1901, p. 112.
- 10 Ibid., p. 152.
- 11 Circ. mens. 1909-10, p. 557.
- 12 Annals, 1930-31, p. 165.
- 13 Annals, 1938-39, p. 782.
- 14 Both Bishop Forbes and Bishop Guy were former pupils of the Grey Nuns. The latter first attended the Bethlehem School in Montreal. When he was consecrated a bishop in Ottawa on May 1, 1930, he solicited the presence of Sr. Marie de l'Assomption, who had been his first teacher.
- 15 Annals, 1930-31, p. 266.
- 16 Annals, 1932-33, pp.83-84.

- 17 Ibid., p. 408.
- 18 Annals, 1930-31, pp 250-251.
- 19 Letter to Mother Piché, Jan. 8, 1931. Mother Piché had been re-elected gen. sup. in Oct. 1930.
- 20 Chronicles, June 1931, St. Boniface.
- 21 Two of Archbishop Béliveau's sisters joined the order of the Grey Nuns. Sr. Coulombe who died on Aug. 28, 1928, and Sr. St. Antonin, still in active service in 1933.
- 22 Annals, 1930-31, pp 122-124.
- 23 Primeau, L., Cent. de Srs. Gr., pp. 13-14.
- 24 Chronicles, St. Boniface.
- 25 Annals, 1930-31, p. 717. Sr. Dionne had terminated her two terms of office.
- 26 Annals, 1932-33, p. 36. On Feb. 24, 1932, Bishop Grandbois stopped at the mother house on his way to Quebec for the enthronement of the archbishop-cardinal of the capital city.
- 27 Annals, 1930-31, pp 716-717.
- 28 In honour of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus who was canonized in 1925.
- 29 Father Mattingley, March 30, 1931.
- 30 Annals, 1930-31, p. 553.
- 31 In Jan. 1932, there were thirteen sisters working at the Sanatorium and 23 the following year.
- 32 One remembers the Jan. 5, 1904 fire in Lebret. That of 1897 had destroyed the workshops.

- 33 La Liberté, Nov., 1932.
- 34 The government decision was announced only Aug. 5, 1934. Annals, 1934-35 p. 150.
- 35 Annals, 1932-33, p. 460, p. 536.
- 36 Bishop Lajeunesse was named coadjutor to his uncle Bishop Charlebois on April 26, 1933. Bishop Charlebois died Nov. 20 the same year and Bishop Lajeunesse became vicar-apostolic of the Keewatin. Annals, 1932-33, p. 549.
- 37 Bishop Melanson, consecrated Feb. 22, 1933, visited the sisters at the mother house on Sept. 20 and confided: "Life is not easy back home. Grasshoppers have destroyed the crops." These details, as well as those that follow, are taken from Annals, 1932-33, pp 492-525.
- 38 During his stay in Montreal, the Archbishop of St. Boniface resided at the Grey Nuns' mother house.
- 39 On Aug. 5, 1933, nineteen postulants were admitted in St. Boniface.
- 40 Inaugurated on Aug. 19, 1934. ASGM.
- 41 Annals, 1934-35, p. 172.
- 42 Journal by Sr. L. Ferland - Annals, 1934-35, p. 330.
- 43 Sr Bonin to Mother Piché, June 1935.
- 44 Sr. L. Ferland was then elected gen. sec. and Sr. Mailloux, gen. bursar.
- 45 Annals, 1934-35, pp 466 and 470
- 46 Frémont, op. cit., p. 160. Bishop Provencher had written Memoirs about the event.

- 47 Circular written by Bishop Gauthier, April 23, 1936.
- 48 The consecration was celebrated June 7, 1936.
- 49 Following the example of Mother d'Youville, who admitted 4 aged priests who were ill. Father J. P. Lavigne, from Manitoba, former pastor of Richmond, U.S.A., had been sponsored as a student by Mother Hamel. In June 1924, he retired at the mother house where he died on Oct. 9, 1936.
- 50 ASGM, Document La Jemmerais, Jr.
- 51 Champagne, Les la V. et le Poste de l'Ouest, p. 125.
- 52 Moissac, Sr de, op. cit., p. 309. Mgr Monahan, 3rd Archbishop of Regina, presided at the celebration. He had replaced Mgr McGuigan, successor to Mgr. E. Mathieu, who had died Oct. 26, 1929.
- 53 This service had been offered since 1922. During the summer holidays, it was customary for the sisters in the various convents to give catechism courses to the children in the parishes where there was no residing priest.
- 54 Details concerning the foundation of the N.D.-des-Neiges Hospital are taken from the document concerning the mission of Berens River.
- 55 Sr. Mayrand to the mother house, June 1945.
- 56 The Jan. 8, 1937 fire had been caused by a faulty heating system.
- 57 Annals, 1936-37, p. 542. The kiosque was also moved.
- 58 He was named bishop of Gravelbourg June 7, 1937 to replace Bishop Melanson who had become



archbishop of Moncton, N.B.

- 59 Annals, 1936-37, pp. 395-396.
- 60 Ibid., p. 518.
- 61 Chronicles, St. Boniface, Jan. 1, 1938.
- 62 A department for the senior sisters was added.
- 63 On Feb. 18, 1858, Bishop Taché had brought the first 4 orphans in his humble wagon, to the sisters' convent. Primeau, L., Centenaire des Srs Grs. pp. 106-107.
- 64 In Nov., 1930, 13 Grey Nuns took courses in choral singing. Playing the organ was taught in Lebret to the students from the 12 surrounding Reserves, "in order to accompany the singing in the church."
- 65 Home Economics courses were offered not only to the regular students in St. Norbert, but also to other schools and to young ladies who had already left school.
- 66 Annals, 1938-39, p. 160.
- 67 Mother d'Youville had begun to shelter needy women in Nov. 1737, but she and her companions pronounced their religious vows on the 31st day of December of the same year.
- 68 Chronicles, St. Bon., Sept. 5, 1938. The monument was blessed by Bishop Comtois of Three-Rivers, where La Verendrye was born.
- 69 Annals, 1938-39, pp. 367-369.
- 70 The dispensary, opened in 1924 in the basement of the hospital, is now moved to better quarters in the new building, thus making the care

of the sick more effective.

- 71 The details concerning this foundation were obtained from ASGM.
- 72 Archbishop Yelle, for health reasons, left for Europe in December 1737.
- 73 Annals, 1938-39, p. 781.
- 74 Ibid., pp. 782-783.
- 75 Chronicles, St. Bon., April 1, 1935.
- 76 That is, he belongs to another Reserve.
- 77 Sr. Ste-Christine to Mother Gallant, Jan. 21, 1940. The adoptive father had taken charge of the child when the mother died.
- 78 Moissac, Sr. E. de, op.cit., p. 36, 3rd part.
- 79 La Liberté et le Patriote, June 1941. The prov. gov. also bestowed a \$10,000 grant.
- 80 The other four had left for St. Boniface.
- 81 Sr. Bonin to Mother Gallant, Aug. 22, 1940.
- 82 Sr. Savoie to Mother Gallant, Dec. 28, 1939.
- 83 Annals, 1940-41, p. 114.
- 84 Sr. Natalie died on Nov. 2, 1940.
- 85 Letter dated Dec. 23, 1941.
- 86 Annals, 1940-41. The construction begun July 4, 1940, was completed in Jan. 1941. The following year, another wing was added to the hospital.
- 87 Annals, 1940-41, p. 776. This serious accident did not end the career of Sr. Forest.

- 88 Tessier-Biron, op. cit., pp. 228-229.
- 89 Eulogy pronounced by Father Primeau, May 24, 1935.
- 90 Bishop R. Brodeur was consecrated as coadjutor of Alexandria the same day. He was a brother of Sister Alice Brodeur.
- 91 Archbishop Cabana, visiting the mother house, Dec. 2, 1942.
- 92 Annals, 1940-41, p. 1053.
- 93 Sr. Maynard to the mother house, summer of 1941.
- 94 Annals, 1942-43, pp. 86-87.
- 95 Ibid., pp 83-84.
- 96 Dubeau, M. A., Sulpician, curé of Notre-Dame, Sept. 2, 1942.
- 97 Chronicles, pp. 56-57.
- 98 Annals, 1942-43, p. 451
- 99 Ibid., p. 693
- 100 Details concerning the centenary are taken from the document, Fêtes du Centenaire, 1844-1944.
- 101 Annals, 1944-45, pp. 785-786.
- 102 Statistics, 1939.
- 103 Annals, 1934-35, p. 101.
- 104 Chronicles, St. Boniface, Jan. 2, 1939.
- 105 June 2nd, His Holiness Pius XII had declared: "Whoever would dare raise his hand against Rome would be guilty of matricide before the civi-

lized world and before God's eternal judgment." Four days later, it was broadcast by radio: "The eternal city has been spared and liberated." *Annals*, 1944-45, p. 213 and 216.

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In 1943, the curé of St. Boniface had confided the parochial social services to the St. Elizabeth Ladies' Auxiliary. The president asked the Grey Nuns for their help. The group moved from the basement of the cathedral to a house the superior of the Hospice Taché offered them. Sr. V. Lacroix was for many years a collaborator to these valuable services.

## CHAPTER TWELVE - 1945-1956

Archbishop Cabana had a right view of things when he advised to go ahead with the century celebrations marking the anniversary of the arrival of the Grey Nuns at River Rouge despite the war that was going on. The evocation of the past, with all its heroism, was such as to excite admiration and imitation. "Our spirit has been renewed in its primitive fervour," remarked Mother Trottier.

During this renewal there would be many occasions to recall the heroism of the pioneers. In 1946 there was the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Hospital to be followed by the 50th anniversary of the opening of the School of Nurses<sup>1</sup> and the 75th anniversary of the School of the Little Flower at Fort Totten.<sup>2</sup> The convents around St. Boniface did not wait for their first centenary, that of St. François-Xavier, established an alumni for its school. The golden jubilee of the religious life of Sister Ludovica Ritchot was such an occasion. On May 24, 1947 at St. Norbert Sister Eugénie Valade was chosen as director of a committee formed with a view of rallying all former pupils of the Grey Nuns.<sup>3</sup> It was felt necessary to call on the ranks to come to the safeguarding of religion and of language. During the celebrations of June, 1944 had not Mr. Guillaume Charette proclaimed: "The priests are the ones who gave birth to our Catholic life by baptism, but it is the Grey Nuns who have fashioned our national soul...They have taught us to love the French language,<sup>4</sup> and we know at what sacrifice. The difficulties of the past have not all been conquered; the good combat must continue to be fought".

Overseas, the so-called "phoney war" had changed in 1940 with the aggressor counting on a rapid victory as a result of surprise attacks culminating in Pearl Harbour. The death of President Roosevelt April 12, 1945 followed seventeen days later by the death of Hitler, marked the end of European conflict, the armistice being signed May 7. There remained only the war between the United States

and the country of the rising sun but this ended August 14 with the use of the atomic bomb. The annalist wrote, "We are all praying for a durable peace founded on justice and charity."<sup>5</sup> She had no idea that in the history of man there would be inscribed in less than forty years a new chapter called "star wars."

Even if the conflict had not touched Canadian soil, the repercussions brought many tests. The registered nurses from Grey Nuns' schools had done their part in the war effort; many of them crossed the Atlantic to care for the wounded. They served with distinction and those who had had a part in forming them were justly proud. As a result of their recruitment for war, a shortage of aids developed in the hospital sector. This situation contributed to a rapid development of the school for auxiliaries modestly begun by Sister Yvonne Prévost at Ste-Rose-du-Lac in 1943. On January 28, 1946 the School was officially opened with clinical teaching and practical formation for those who would serve at St. Boniface Hospital, Ste-Rose and Hospice Taché.<sup>6</sup> Soon there were pupils even from overseas for war had annihilated many frontiers and even countries and reprisals were such that only one ambition filled many hearts, to flee the soil now hostile, to seek refuge elsewhere. Immigrants and "displaced persons" came to our shores and a great number of them, to the Canadian West. Here was a need for the Grey Nuns to develop a work which would have been regarded as new had not history been there, to tell us of the same kind of work being done at the birth of the institute by Mother d'Youville. The Life of Mother d'Youville by Mrs. A. Ferland-Angers recalls how the foundress took care of the wounded of the English army and other soldiers who joined with the English.<sup>7</sup> Since then there has never been hesitation to bring aid to wounded soldiers, and, when on April 20, 1946 Sister Ste-Lucie died, many veterans of the First World War shed tears at her funeral.<sup>8</sup>

Actually, now it was not a question of caring for those physically wounded, but rather for those



fugitives from war who had to leave not only their devastated countries but also their dear ones from whom they would be forever separated. Several among the sisters knew the torment of these separations: Sister Ziegler whose family in Germany were living in poverty, and Sisters Imelda and Julia who took again their family names. Prokopowicz and Mirau, after the fusion of the vocal sisters and the auxiliary sisters.<sup>9</sup> These companions received assurance from the mother house that attempts would be made to be in touch with their families.<sup>10</sup> All the grey missions also joined in sending material help to the Vatican to meet the most urgent needs.<sup>11</sup>

At St. Boniface Hospital on October 20, 1947 a special autobus came to bring a contingent of young Poles who had been deported. Thirty of them stayed at the Hospital itself and the rest at Hospice Taché and at St. Vital Sanatorium.<sup>12</sup> Father Ladislas Paneck greeted them and invited them to the chapel but "the poor people were hunger-stricken" so dinner was served immediately and then they went to the chapel to sing the Magnificat. Tears ran down many eyes, but they were happy to know they were now living in security, notes the annalist.

The newcomers were quickly put to work. Also, Sister Neumann and Sister Dunlavey did not delay to teach them English, assisted by Father Schumiski who took part in the teaching. As Mrs. Swetchine would say, "to have suffered is to speak all languages". The refugees were ardent at work, refusing no task, but they excelled with patients for whom they had great sympathy. Many of the girls had been registered nurses but their qualifications were not recognized in Canada.

When later on the Czechoslovaks became refugees, the school at Lebret sheltered the Duroquaz family. As for the Hungarians in 1956, a clothing depot was opened for them in a furnished and heated house, which meant the School of practical nursing had to be evacuated. Sister Emma Henri, for her part, taught one would-be-priest French, Latin and

Philosophy.<sup>13</sup>

The after effects of the war imposed an increase in work, but other exceptional events are also recorded in the journals: the enthronement of the Sacred Heart by the illustrious Father Mateo, the holding of a missionary exposition for a week and also a noteworthy event, a new step for the French language, the opening of radio station CKSB at 6:00 p.m. May 27, 1946. The annalist stressed: "This is no small event. For a long time the French Canadian group has worked to obtain this result. With the support of other provinces, especially Quebec, the organization committee has been able to bring this project to fruition."<sup>14</sup>

Their care of the poor from overseas did not make the Grey Nuns forget the poor around them. Fifteen families, about 100 persons in all, were assisted at Christmas. The provincial secretary noted that food and clothing had been distributed and had created much happiness.<sup>15</sup>

Not all news was happy, of course. On January 17, precisely by means of radio CKSB, they heard of the death of Cardinal Villeneuve, the 20th Bishop and 10th Archbishop of Quebec. The worthy Prince of the Church, aged 63, closed the Missionary week at St. Boniface in 1945 and in September of the same year he had stopped again at the Hospital on his way to Edmonton.<sup>16</sup> Nothing had indicated the near approach of death. His talk on July 2 had been specially enjoyed: "Like Bishop Tache and so many others, Mother d'Youville often did sublime work without realizing it. Just as our mothers did fancy work back to front, seeing only the defective side of their work, you also, sisters sometimes work 'back to front' but the works of charity which you produce speak very well in your favour. Never stand in the way of progress. By all means adopt modern techniques. But keep the old virtues. Keep working 'back to front' since it is necessary to do so."<sup>17</sup>

It goes without saying that at Gravelbourg, the

loss of the Canadian Cardinal was doubly felt. The first two years of his bishophood had been spent there and his memory was still alive. One might say that the temperature itself communicated its sadness to the diocesans. A huge quantity of snow blocked the roads and railways from January 27 to the following February 24 and was cleared just in time for the delivery of necessary fuel.<sup>18</sup>

Gravelbourg was not the only see to deplore the death of its pastor. Archbishop J. P. Monahan died at Regina on May 6; on December 21 at Montreal, Archbishop Yelle died. Archbishop Cabana was present at the funeral. No doubt he was edified, as was Mr. Edouard Gouin, to learn that the deceased had wished to be buried "among the Sulpicians in the crypt of the Seminary of Montreal."<sup>19</sup>

There was a solemn service at the Cathedral on Wednesday, the following January 21 "for this wise and enlightened counsellor. The clergy of St. Boniface still venerates him and recognizes how much they owe to him."<sup>20</sup>

Archbishop Yelle was especially known for the wise directives he had given on the delicate question of teaching French. He had encouraged many fine initiatives. The Association of French-Canadian Educators organized a campaign for French books and on April 1, 1948 this association recognized the most illustrious teachers of French by giving out gold medals for those who had taught thirty years; silver medals for those with twenty-five years; bronze medals for those with sixteen years. Six Grey Nuns received the gold medal four, the silver medal, and sixteen the bronze.

In the field of hospitals, the cancer clinic was finally inaugurated at Regina. It was ultramodern. It has been completed despite the restrictions of wartime and difficulties experienced in the world of work.

The mandate of Sister Trottier came to an end

at the beginning of 1949; she was replaced at the helm by Sister Flora Ste-Croix who had been director of novices since 1935. Her functions were taken over by Sister Marie Garneau.

The reputation of the Grey Nuns, whether teachers or nurses, was now well established. Their help was solicited for the establishment of a hospital at Hudson Bay Junction in Saskatchewan. Unfortunately, the shortage of personnel required the provincial superior to give a negative reply. It was good, however, to know that the services of the sisters were appreciated. In turn they appreciated the friends whose loyalty was endless. One of these loyal friends was Mr. Richard, who, to prevent a fatal explosion, made the sacrifice of his life. On December 23, 1949 at Hospice Taché, a security guard found him inanimate near the furnace which he had stopped. Mother Ste. Croix had to communicate the sad news to his wife, the mother of thirteen children, of whom one, Sister Marie had pronounced the vows of a Grey Nun on February 15, 1940.<sup>21</sup> To this mournful family, what consolation could be offered except to say that of the promise of Christ to whoever make a sacrifice of his life. At the Richard home, these words were well understood.

The "language of the cross" of which St. Paul speaks (1 Cor. 1,18) is not easily learned. Confronted by this austere reality, Madame d'Youville had solicited for herself and her spiritual daughters "knowledge of this mystery of love" when she began the daily recitation of the aspiration to the Eternal Father.<sup>22</sup>

The cross was not, however, the exclusive lot of the Grey Nuns in the spring of 1950. It was the region of St. Boniface and its environs which were in the way of "the waters of tribulation" as one correspondent put it.<sup>23</sup> The rise in the waters was menacing since mid-April. In one 24-hour period there was an increase of three feet. Two years earlier, there had been a close call for an evacuation. The municipal authorities had even erected a

dike on hospital land, a dike which had not been needed as it turned out then but which was hoped to be sufficient now. However, the dike was unable to stop the Red River which overflowed its banks everywhere so that all the land it literally drowned was declared a disaster zone. The army was called in, many soldiers being sent to join some hundreds of volunteers. Sandbags were piled high at the places most vulnerable such as the little white house, Hospice Taché and around the hospital and sanatorium.

Taking part in this defence work were policemen, engineers, aviators, officers, doctors and internes. Archbishops Béliveau and Cabana put on their work clothes and took up shovels, being imitated in that by the clergy, the Jesuits, the Oblate Fathers, the seminarians and the students of the colleges.

The dikes extended twenty-six miles to protect the surrounding villages; it was necessary to uproot trees and dig up land because these dikes were forty-five feet wide and fifteen to eighteen feet high. A navy detachment attended to pumps. Cranes and mechanical shovels filled the grounds of the hospital, the provincial house and Hospice Taché. At the sanatorium in St. Vital, the Red seemed particularly threatening while at St. Norbert they had to send sixty boarding pupils away. Every building had to evacuate the basements and go up to the first and then to the second floor. Night and day, guards watched the dikes, signalling the least weakness. Night and day, nursing sisters administered vaccine against typhoid.

Radio station CKSB transmitted distress calls and brought the most urgent needs to the attention of the public. Mother Ste-Croix sent food to the Cercle ouvrier and, along with three sisters, she went to the sanatorium to relieve the worn-out workers. Alas, the latter did not profit much from respite since the incessant noise of heavy vehicles did not favour sleep.

Sunday, May 7, Mass was broadcast since access to the Cathedral was impossible. Already two of the three bridges between St. Boniface and Winnipeg were submerged. Barns were torn away and the animals drowned.

At the Hospital, the army at first stayed in the basement but then had to move to the first floor. The soldiers did not go about unarmed. When a door resisted, they simply broke it open. The annalist records: "Everything is shiny with mud." It was necessary to serve extra meals for the soldiers and volunteers. The Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary sent twelve of their pupils to help; they served for two days until relieved by the Red Cross.

To add to the misfortune, a ceaseless rain fell causing the Seine River to overflow too. The rush of water in the Red River prevented the Seine from entering and it had to find a new course with waves of water spreading everywhere. Many suffered from cold as the furnaces were neutralized by the water. Supplies of sand began to run low and there was risk of the dikes collapsing. The order was given May 7 to evacuate the patients. Hearing this news on the radio, one old man at the Hospice collapsed. Two other deaths occurred before the departure. Truly old age is vulnerable. Some 400 aged persons left their quarters; the soldiers admired the care given to these patients by the sisters. Their admiration was reciprocal, for the sisters commended the soldiers for their kindness and their respect towards the handicapped and the elderly. Sisters and nurses escorted their wards into exile to Brandon, Regina and Calgary where they were welcomed cordially.

At the Sanatorium, tubercular children learned that their outer clothing had not grown along with them; sometimes long months and even years had gone by since their admission. Adults and children found refuge at Ninette, Brandon, Deer Lodge and Saskatchewan. At the hospital, 220 ambulant patients were discharged; the other 300 were moved by ambulance or by stretcher to the hospitals of Winnipeg.



The sisters at St. Norbert had to flee the convent by canoe and then reach the station by wagon. The train was some eight hours late, full of passengers fleeing from the flood. The Daughters of the Cross with thirty of their pupils; whole families were on the move. Others separated by accident went from coach to coach looking for one another. The train reached the station in Winnipeg at about 5:00 p.m. The sisters had to protest to avoid being sent straight on to Portage la Prairie as planned by the authorities. They were welcomed at the provincial house where already the novices had been sent to the mother house in Montreal while invalid sisters had been sent to the hospitals at Regina, Ste-Rose and Fort Frances. The grey establishments sheltered only religious personnel and those employees who were willing to remain at their post.

From a bird's-eye view, the whole region presented itself as a series of islands with soil ravaged by mechanical shovels as if shells had dug ditches. One annalist remarked: "It was just like being in a war." The Sanatorium itself looked like a medieval fortress under siege. There lacked only a drawbridge. Small boats were attached to the doors so as to facilitate quick departures. It was this scene of desolation that Archbishop Cabana saw from the helicopter he used to bring a provision of altar bread to Bishop Paillé, the parish priest of Ste. Agathe. There was no question of landing. The box of hosts was dropped at the precise point agreed upon, by an Anglican minister who was in the helicopter with the Archbishop. He said, "This is the first time I have taken part in Catholic communion". Another passenger, a rabbi, said Archbishop Cabana had dropped manna on the desert of Ste. Agathe.

On May 14 a telegram came from overseas. The superior general, Mother Courville, was at Rome for the consecration of Archbishop-elect Paul Émile Léger of Montreal, following the resignation of Archbishop Joseph Charbonneau.<sup>24</sup> Mother General had gone with Sister R.A. Laberge, an aunt of the new Archbishop. The news of the flood had been sent by the assistant

general. Her message was read to the sisters by Mother Ste-Croix: "Prayer, sympathy, affection." This time it was not only the Red River which overflowed.

For two days yet, it was necessary to live in uncertainty. Would the old foundations of the white house, dating back to 1846, hold or would they give way? Mother Provincial inspired confidence by her serenity. At the hospital, Sister Marie-Berthe Dorais demonstrated such courage that the soldiers wanted to promote her to the rank of an officer. The same could be said of the other superiors who held on to their posts heroically, supported by the courage of those who participated in their responsibilities.

The water reached its crest at thirty feet, four inches above the normal level when it began to recede on May 16. The descent was slow and watchfulness had to be maintained. The Provencher bridge once more became visible and opened again to traffic. Then came the great clean-up with the shovelling out of the mud. Gradually the exiles began to return. The elderly who had gone to Regina where Sister Farley had kept them in good spirits returned along with the elderly sisters and invalids from the different convents where they had been warmly received. Novices and postulants returned from Montreal at the railway station June 1. The older sisters had been afraid to die "far away from home," from the humble house in which they had promised to follow the Lord. When they entered the chapel, Sister Ste-Mathilde, aged 81 years, voiced aloud these words of the psalmist that her companions were silently, but no less fervently praying, "One day within your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I have chosen to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." (Ps. 84,11). And now one could appreciate all the more the lot of the refugees and displaced persons from overseas. Those persons had no hope of seeing their native lands again or their relatives, while the evacuees from St. Boniface had not left their country and had not had to learn a new language. In a short time, all were settled and thanksgiving was offered with a sense of

wonderment at the fact "that the flood had spared all the religious institutions in the path of the flooding Red River, including the convent of the Sisters of the Precious Blood, the Archbishop's palace, the basilica, the college, the hospice and the houses situated on the course of the procession organized by Father Blais." There was another procession on the feast of the Sacred Heart to thank God for this very special protection. Many enthusiastic people joined the procession.<sup>25</sup> Petitions were numerous as barely 10% of the farms had been able to put in crops. The sisters followed the example of their foundress in saying, "I abandon everything to Providence in which I place my trust."<sup>26</sup> This total trust in Providence was one of the themes of a new biography of Mother d'Youville, published in 1950 by Sister Pauline Fitts of the Grey Nuns of Philadelphia.<sup>27</sup>

The memorable year also marked the centenary of the convent of St. François-Xavier. It had not had the damage of St. Norbert. The highlight for the convent was November 5 which the sisters intended to celebrate modestly and simply. However, the parishioners wanted to raise a monument to Mother d'Youville on this occasion, thus testifying to the regard they had for those who had for 100 years devoted themselves to the education of the children of the district.

At Ste-Anne-des-Chênes, likewise, there was less damage due to the water of tribulation but it was fire which ravaged the monastery of the Redemptorist Fathers. Fire threatened the parish church and the convent for 16 whole hours.<sup>28</sup> But both escaped. This was more fortunate than the fire at Ste-Cunégonde Hospice in Montreal where 35 victims perished including 2 Grey Nuns. This sad news came to St. Boniface by means of radio which also told of the death of Sister Berthe Marchessault at 9:00 p.m. She had gone to Berens River<sup>29</sup> the previous September 12 and had said at the time, "If I should die here, bury me near the biggest stone on the lakeshore." This wish was partially effected. Without means of transportation in winter, her body had to be buried in the little cemetery not far from the lake whose

beauty she had admired.<sup>30</sup>

Mother Ste-Croix did not know it but her gesture of January 10, 1952 was to put the finishing touch on her apostolate at St. Boniface. The ladies in charge of social service at the parish now had headquarters in the basement of the basilica; Mother provincial provided the furniture for them, including the tables, sewing machines, etc. She said she was doing this "for the poor," thus imitating the foundress. A few days afterward she went to Montreal for the general chapter of the Grey Nuns. She was to have a surprise nomination there, but she was not the only one to be surprised by a new posting. On February 1, it was learned that Archbishop G. Cabana had been appointed to be coadjutor-Archbishop of Sherbrooke. He would leave St. Boniface as soon as his successor arrived.<sup>31</sup>

As for Mother Ste-Croix, on February 11 she was chosen superior general. Her assistant, Sister Alice Laverdure, was named treasurer general. Archbishop Cabana wrote to the new superior general: "The province of Manitoba is in grief since two of its sisters have left it. You are following a bad example, that of myself."<sup>32</sup>

Both the Archbishop-Coadjutor and Mother Ste-Croix had been well prepared for their tasks. Both had shown leadership qualities during the flood in the recent year of great disturbance, as Sister Turenne referred to it.

The canonical province of St. Boniface was entrusted to Mother Clarilda Fortin who had served as a missionary in Alberta for many years and who had filled the office of assistant general for twelve years. Her nomination came only a few days before that of the Bishop of St. Paul, Alberta, Bishop Maurice Baudoux, now promoted to be coadjutor-Archbishop of St. Boniface.

The new Archbishop had been born in 1902 at La Louviere in Belgium and had come to Canada in 1911,

his family settling in Prud'homme, Saskatchewan. There he completed his primary and classical courses interrupted by a serious illness when he was only 15. He was taken to St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon. The doctors on staff despaired of his health but two Grey Nuns united their prayers to the best of care. One of the sisters was Sister Clarilda Fortin. When the young boy was cured, despite the unfavourable prognosis, she turned to his eldest sister, Mariette, who was a second mother to him, saying: "God must have a great role for this young man since He has saved him from certain death." This statement made a deep impression on the boy who later on was to say this was the beginning of his priestly vocation.<sup>33</sup>

St. Boniface welcomed its new shepherd on June 2 with 3,000 people in attendance. He made a grand impression with his height, being as tall as Bishop Provencher; his apostolic directions were revealed in the device which he adopted: "To spend oneself to the end." A cordial welcome was expressed by Father Léo Blais who himself was named Bishop of Prince Albert just a month later.<sup>34</sup>

Archbishop Baudoux appreciated the collaboration of the Grey Nuns. In fact, at his diocese of St. Paul, he had drawn up a plan for them to carry on works of mercy.<sup>35</sup> He honoured those of St. Boniface by his first visit on June 4 and expressed his satisfaction at the progress of the School of Nursing and of the hospital, works which were expanding again to meet the needs of the population. In his visit to the old sisters at the infirmary, the Archbishop showed he was a man of understanding and sympathy. It was noticed that he had to bow his head when he entered the rooms.<sup>36</sup>

Once again the mother-church of the West was subdivided. The new diocese of Thunder Bay, created April 29, 1952 had Bishop Edward Q. Jennings as its titular. St. Marguerite's School and La Vérendrye's Hospital were in his jurisdiction. It was the new pastor who opened officially the new wing of "our hospital which had become too small", as a correspon-



dent put it.<sup>37</sup>

Some two days earlier St. Jean-Baptiste parish had its 75th anniversary. Father S. Caron stressed the fact that the Grey Nuns were the first teachers there.<sup>38</sup> As a matter of fact, they had taught there from 1892 to 1895. The shortage of teachers and the needs of St. Boniface had forced the Grey Nuns to withdraw to the great regret of those involved and especially of Mother Hamel who was then the vicarial superior. The memory of this great sister was especially called to mind in 1952 as the fine trees planted by her fell under the axe. For the third time it became necessary to "rewood" the principal entrance-way to the old monastery. Among some 200 trees there were 150 lilac bushes which bloomed each spring.<sup>39</sup>

The new trees had not much time to grow when there took place at St. Boniface from August 7 to 10, 1953 the fifth national congress of the Association of French-language educators. Archbishops Béliveau and Baudoux welcomed the ecclesiastical dignitaries who came to the conference including His Eminence Cardinal Paul-Emile Léger, Archbishop of Montreal; the Primate of the Canadian church, Archbishop Maurice Roy; the Archbishop-elect of Ottawa M.J. Lemieux; Archbishop P. Pocock of Winnipeg; their Excellencies Bishops L.P. Lussier, Louis Levesque, Leo Blais, Henri Routhier, G.M. Coderre representing respectively St. Paul, Alberta; Hearst, Ontario; Prince Albert, Saskatchewan; Grouard, Alberta, and Saint Jean, Quebec as well as His Excellency Bishop M. Hermaniuk, auxiliary to the Manitoba Exarchate.<sup>40</sup>

Various activities took place including a missionary exposition, a folklore festival, an excursion into the Manitoba countryside. There was a Pontifical mass at the basilica celebrated by His Excellency Cardinal Léger with Archbishop Roy giving the sermon. The Mass was followed by the unveiling of a monument dedicated to the memory of the first bishop of the West, Bishop Norbert Provencher, by his third successor. His Excellency Archbishop Béliveau. This year of 1953 also marked the 100th anniversary



of the death of this valorous apostle who in 1843 had visited the Grey Nuns at Pointe-à-Callières.

The Archbishop of Montreal visited the old white house on August 7 and pronounced a eulogy of the pioneers "imitators of an extraordinary woman, a strong woman filled with daring. The spirit of the founders and of foundresses is one of boldness and conquest... A community which turns in on itself risks losing the spark of the first years. Works of God are always works of conquest."<sup>42</sup>

When the blessing of the cornerstone of the wing added to the School of Nursing took place, His Eminence recalled: "Four women came here and planted on this ground the precious seed of charity; today we see the great tree which has sprung from it. A multitude profits from the shade of this tree covering all the wonderful charitable works of the sisters, nurses and doctors, in a word, of all the personnel of this immense hospital which is the glory of Saint Boniface, the honour of this province and of our dear Canada."<sup>43</sup>

Two weeks after this unforgettable congress, the Grey Nuns of the 20th century, following the example of those who had gone before, carried assistance to King Edward Hospital in Winnipeg, burdened with many cases of poliomyelitis.<sup>44</sup>

Toward the end of the summer, a helping hand was extended to the mission at Chesterfield Inlet where a school was opened for Eskimo children. The Grey Nuns of Nicolet, in 1931, had heroically begun a hospital in this desolate area and had carried on an admirable apostolate. Sister Elizabeth Herauf, an excellent teacher, was sent up there.<sup>45</sup>

At St. Boniface itself, the Oblate Sisters, founded by Archbishop Langevin, planned the building of their mother house and sought and obtained the experience of Sister Ste-Emilienne, a Grey Nun.

Father Arthur Moquin, curé of Gravelbourg,

recognizing the availability of the daughters of Marguerite d'Youville had reason to say, at the 25th anniversary of the founding of St. Joseph Hospital, "Venerable Mother d'Youville is no more, but her valiant and generous spirit lives on in her religious family."<sup>46</sup>

Appealing to this generosity, Bishop Lemieux suggested the opening of a personal care home in Gravelbourg. His proposal was taken up by his successor, Bishop Aimé Decosse, a good friend of the Grey Nuns who appreciated the Sisters' help at the time of the flood of 1950. The new bishop received episcopal consecration in his own cathedral on January 20, 1954 at the hands of Archbishop Baudoux assisted by the previous bishop of Gravelbourg, Bishop Lemieux, and Archbishop O'Neil of Regina.<sup>47</sup> Bishop Decosse, ordained July 3, 1926 had been successively assistant secretary, vice-chancellor, founding parish priest of Treherne, vicar general, diocesan consultor, synodal judge and member of the Commission on Sacred music. Moreover, he had been superior of the Major Seminary where he filled the chair in Holy Scripture.<sup>48</sup>

During the summer, Father Hacault left the chaplaincy of the sanatorium and became in his turn a professor of the Major Seminary which, it used to be said, was a cradle of bishops.

\* \* \*

"Do not let the transformations of our century pass with the resignation of the conquered, but climb boldly on to the driver's seat and try to direct the machine;" these are the words of Albert de Mun.

More than ever these words were useful in the post-war years when science moved with bewildering speed and brought about radical changes in most fields. Adaptation became the key to survival for many traditional works which had to keep up with latest developments. With new legislation, sometimes excellent undertakings had to be given up, under

takings that had proven themselves excellent in their day but were now becoming obsolete. Technology, however, does not eliminate the dangers from accidents, nor the risks of trial and error in the search for progress. Success and hardship form the woof and warp in the life of man and of his institutions so that inevitably joy and sorrow keep alternating in the chronicles of the Grey Nuns.

On June 7, 1954, at the little town of Ste-Anne-des-Chênes the effects of a tornado were felt there and in the suburbs of Winnipeg. "The wind blew over the kitchen chimney; the bricks, in their turn, fell through the roof into a classroom which happily was vacant. Fire was mastered without difficulty, but there was considerable damage."<sup>49</sup> The upper half of the brick wall on the east side of the building was torn down and the outhouses badly beaten. At the Nursing School there were now more than eighty-four students and further expansion was necessary. An addition included classrooms, laboratories and a large library.<sup>50</sup> A campaign for subscriptions to pay for a new wing at the hospital was launched under the patronage of Archbishop Baudoux. With able collaborators it produced good results. A steel structure of eight floors was planned to become the central building of the Hospital to replace some of the old buildings which disappeared. For the last two years there shone from the top of the hospital a 16-foot high cross with a 10-foot traverse piece. It was a reproduction on a larger scale of the cross worn by the Grey Nuns as far back as 1755. Archbishop Baudoux presided at the dedication on September 8, 1954. He thanked God for having sent four sisters to found this hospital, the most important one in the West.<sup>51</sup>

The coadjutor-Archbishop of St. Boniface proceeded then to the opening of a new building which was absolutely essential in his eyes. A wing had been added to the major seminary, a wing sheltering a spacious chapel, an oratory, and 15 bedrooms all furnished by the hospital. More important still, the Messieurs of Saint Sulpice had agreed to take over

this school of priestly formation.<sup>52</sup>

The coming of the disciples of Mr. Olier did not draw the keen interest only of ecclesiastical superiors. Sister Ste-Mathilde who had a gift for expressing the thoughts of her companions<sup>53</sup> wrote: "We have been praying for such a long time that the Sulpicians might establish themselves here." Everyone knew the kindnesses of Saint Sulpice toward Mother d'Youville who had found in the persons of Mr. du Lescoat, Mr. Normant and Mr. Montgolfer the enlightened spiritual directors who guided her in her vocation as a foundress. Mr. Edouard Gagnon and his colleague, Mr. G. M. Bulteau rendered tremendous services to the Grey Nuns of St. Boniface and here as at Montreal the Sulpicians continued their tradition of good relations with the sisters.

While Ste-Anne-des-Chênes was troubled by a devastating gale, it was flooding that disturbed Notre-Dame-des-Neiges at Berens River. During the night of October 11-12, the wind came up so strongly that the house began to shake like a rocking cradle. Water spread everywhere. There was soon three feet of water in the stable and five cords of wood floated away. The narrator of these events concluded, "Water and Wind, O bless ye the Lord."<sup>54</sup>

The announcement that was made in November met with the approval of everyone. A house would be built within two years at the corner of Taché and Despins Streets facing Valade Street across from La Vérendrye Park. This was to be the residence of the Grey Nuns. Actually the house had been planned for during the last year. The kiosk was moved to a place near the Sanatorium by the river. Father Bonneville's input assured that the new chapel would conform to the liturgical norms. The contract for construction was signed November 17, 1954.<sup>55</sup> Assurance was given, contrary to rumour, that the dear old house would remain as a vestige of the past to which veneration was due.

The year 1955 was relatively young when at the

opening of the legislative session in Manitoba Mr. Roger Teillet, M.L.A. for St. Boniface, praised the hospital "as one of the most modern following the new construction that has been completed."<sup>56</sup>

Two weeks later, on February 24, Sister Dorais, the instigator of the whole undertaking, was named superior of the canonical province of Alberta. It was with this title that she assisted on May 17 at the opening of the magnificent edifice and thanked the collaborators and friends who had made the expansion of the work possible, thus ensuring the temporal welfare and spiritual good of patients.<sup>57</sup> As for Sister Jarbeau, replacing Sister Dorais, she reviewed the history of this institution during a radio interview. It now had 671 beds and sixty-seven cribs, replacing the 83-year-old building with its humble beginnings of four patients in 1871.

A few days later the sisters were present in the historic St. Boniface Cathedral at the consecration of Bishop Paul Dumouchel, "a native of the parish" who replaced Bishop Martin Lajeunesse in the vicariate of Keewatin.

Among the Grey Nuns there was a time of great joy when a cablegram was received from Rome announcing that the Sacred Congregation had proclaimed that Mother d'Youville was a woman of heroic virtue. This was on the Feast of the Holy Cross, a day always dear to Mother d'Youville.<sup>58</sup> It was another feast of the Holy Cross that saw the death of His Excellency, Archbishop Arthur Béliveau who died at the age of 85 in the 62nd year of priesthood and after 41 years of being a bishop. The venerable octogenarian had felt sick during the night but had waited until morning before calling for help. He was taken to the hospital at 7:00 a.m. but two hours later, all was finished. Archbishop Baudoux wrote, "Our sorrow is immense because Archbishop Béliveau was a father for all of us. A father Providence placed at our head to govern and edify us. He governed only until 1931 but he doubly edified us from then until September 14."<sup>59</sup>

Father d'Eschambault called it a national loss; the sisters felt a fraternal grief sharing in the sorrow of Sister St-Antonin, a younger sister of the deceased. The work of this giant was well remembered and especially his creation of the Association of Education of French-Canadians.

Archbishop Béliveau, Guardian of the faith, had battled heroically for his flock; he had edified by his attention to the humble tasks of gardening and beekeeping. He had recently participated in saving the bakery from the flood. His last message pronounced on the radio on March 2 had been moving: "I am pleased once more to bless the priests, sisters and brothers of the Archdiocese as well as all the faithful... God has permitted that I should be stricken; I have offered my sufferings and my silence for your good."<sup>60</sup> On September 21 the funeral Mass was celebrated by Archbishop Baudoux under the presidency of Cardinal McGuigan and Bishops Cabana, Pocock, Decosse, Dumouchel and a great number of priests and civic dignitaries. At the express request of deceased there was no funeral eulogy. He was buried in the crypt of the cathedral along with the remains of his venerated predecessors.

The year 1955 drew to an end with the sisters once again understanding the language of the cross. During the afternoon of November 12, Mother Ste-Croix, who was making her official visit of the houses of Saint Boniface was informed of the tragedy at Nicolet on the morning of that same day. There had been an earthquake with great pine trees of the park falling down one by one like soldiers moved down by gunfire. A minute later, the College of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, a part of the bishop's house, two houses and a gas station had disappeared in the abyss. A chronicler there described the scene as a vision of the Apocalypse. There was general panic; two persons lost their lives. The Hôtel-Dieu, the provincial house of the Grey Nuns and the old folks' home had to be evacuated speedily as the crater reached nearly to the cathedral nearby.<sup>61</sup>



The cataclysm at Nicolet recalled to the sisters of St. Boniface the drama of their flood. All joined in the message of sympathy to the dear sisters of Nicolet who were sharing in the work at Chesterfield Inlet. Four Manitoba sisters went to this mission where Sister Geneviève Rocan since the previous August 10 was serving as a teacher.<sup>62</sup>

The "hecatomb" ended on December 31 with the burning of the Hôtel-Dieu while it was being reinforced on account of doubts as to its solidity. Providence had put an end to doubts and it had to be wholly rebuilt. While the older sisters and the patients had to resign themselves to exile, flood threatened once again the village of St. Norbert.

But the tragedy which most deeply affected 7,000 who called themselves Grey Nuns occurred May 16, 1956 when an airplane crashed into the St. Louis Villa operated by the Grey Nuns of Ottawa. Thirteen persons lost their lives, the chaplain, eleven sisters and one lay person.<sup>63</sup> The Grey Nuns of the Cross, which was their official name, were particularly dear to the Sisters of St. Boniface who still retain the memory of Sisters Ste-Thérèse, Ste-Marie and Curran, valiant workers sent by their young convent of Bytown to help the emerging mission of Red River.<sup>64</sup>

More than ever, in these circumstances, was it necessary to heed the incomprehensible designs of God. One might even say that, since the declaration of the heroicity of the virtues of Mother d'Youville, many occasions were being offered to her daughters to prove that they were really following in her footsteps!<sup>65</sup>

- 1 Oct. 25, 1947. Marion Suttle, one of the first four graduates, was present at the celebration.
- 2 May 16, 1949. Mgr Cicognami, apostolic delegate, granted a benediction to the Grey Nuns as a token of esteem from the supreme pontiff.
- 3 Chronicles, prov. house, St. Bon., p. 85.
- 4 Annals, 1944-45, pp. 347-348.
- 5 Ibid., p. 877.
- 6 ASGM, St. Bon. Document, School of Practical Nurses. In 1948, Sr. Krause became director of this School and Sr. M. Michaud replaced her in 1956. Students of both sexes were admitted.
- 7 La Vie de Mère d'Youville, published in 1945, was widely distributed in the West. Annals, 1946-47, p. 81.
- 8 Biography of Sr. Ste-Lucie. Annals, 1950-51, pp. 118-119.
- 9 The fusion took place on Dec. 23, 1946, to conform to the decision made at the gen. chapter held in Oct. Sr. Imelda came from a Polish family; Sr. Mirau's mother was Polish, but her father was German.
- 10 Sr. Zeigler received a letter from the gen. secretary on Oct. 3, 1946, to that effect.
- 11 Mother Courville wrote a letter of thanks to the missionaries for their generosity. Annals, 1948-49, pp. 343-344. The St. Bon. province also sent clothing to a community in Poland. In 1956, two religious sisters from Austria were hired at the hospital and at the provincial house.
- 12 Other groups of immigrants were directed to the missions in Alberta.

- 13      Chronicles, prov. house, 1957-60. A tradition of service to immigrants had been established. In the 1970's, a helpful hand was extended to the boat people fleeing from Laos, Vietnam and other countries.
- 14      Annals, 1944-45, p. 1098, Nov. 24, 1945, the Grey Nuns' Ecole Ménagère students in Montreal made a \$325.00 contribution in favour of Radio-Quest.
- 15      Annals, 1946-47, p. 81.
- 16      Chronicles, Sept. 4, 1945.
- 17      Chronicles, July 2, 1945.
- 18      Annals, 1946-47, pp.716-717.
- 19      Annals, 1948-49, p. 285. Mr. Gouin, a French Sulpician, had been a professor to the future bishops Cabana, Desmarais and Yelle. In 1948, he had directed the priests' retreat in St. Bon. As for Mgr G. Cabana, on March 19, 1947, he consecrated his own brother, Louis-Joseph, vicar apostolic of Ouganda, a first in the History of the Church. Annals, 1946-47, pp. 801-802.
- 20      Chronicles, prov. house, p. 107.
- 21      Sr. M. Richard also met a tragic death in a car accident on Aug. 12, 1968.
- 22      At her request, Mr. de Lavalinière, Sulpician, composed these aspirations in litany form. They were recited for the first time on April 4, 1770.
- 23      The details concerning the flood are taken mostly from the Annals of 1950.
- 24      Annals, 1950-51, p. 228.

- 25 It was not necessary to imitate Father Paquette's strategy in 1948 at Ste-Rose-du-Lac. To stimulate the devotion of his parishioners for the Eucharist, he organized an automobile procession, placing the repository 6 miles away from the church. *Annals*, 1948-49, p. 238.
- 26 Letter dated March 1, 1765.
- 27 *Hands to the Needy*, reprinted several times.
- 28 *Annals*, 1950-51, p. 795.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 979, June 15, 1951.
- 30 Sr. Marchessault's biography.
- 31 *Chronicles*, prov. house, St. Bon., 1946-52, p. 267. In Winnipeg, Archbishop Philip Pocock replaced Mgr G. Murray who died June 7, 1951.
- 32 *Annals*, 1952, p. 491. Sr. M. Mann, ex-provincial of St. Boniface, also left the province, having been elected second assistant general.
- 33 Archbishop Baudoux studied at St. Boniface College from 1919 to 1923, then at the Edmonton Seminary for his Philosophy and finally at Laval University where he obtained a doctorate in Theology. In 1929, he was ordained to the priesthood at Prud'homme, Sask., and in 1948 became the first bishop at St. Paul, Alta. He died in 1988.
- 34 *Chronicles*, prov. house, 1946-52, p. 288 and p. 293.
- 35 *Annals*, 1950-51, pp. 673-674.
- 36 *Chronicles*, prov. house, 1946-52, p. 289.
- 37 *Annals*, 1953, p. 683.
- 38 *Chronicles*, prov. house, St. Bon., 1946-52,

p.327.

- 39 Ibid., pp. 309-310.
- 40 Programme for the 1953 Congress.
- 41 Chronicles, prov. house, 1953-56, pp. 42-43. It was not His Eminence's first visit for he had stopped at the monastery on his way to Japan as the founding superior of a Sulpician seminary.
- 42 Annals, 1953, pp. 1137-1138.
- 43 Ibid., p. 1143.
- 44 Chronicles, prov. house, St. Bon., 1953-56, p. 48.
- 45 ASGM, St. Bon., Chesterfield document. Sr. Herauf, assisted by a lay teacher, remained in charge of the school until 1954. Sr. M. Provencher became the first superior of the boarding school which opened its doors in August 1955.
- 46 May 13, 1953. Annals, 1953, pp 1017-1018.
- 47 Annals, 1954, p. 19. Bishop Decosse, born in Somerset, Man., studied at St-Boniface College, and was, for a time, chaplain at Hospice Taché.
- 48 Chronicles, prov. house, St-Bon., 1953-56, p. 83.
- 49 Letter written by Sr. C. Rioux.
- 50 Chronicles, prov. house, St-Bon., 1953-56, p. 137.
- 51 The St. Bon., Norwood and St. Vital Social Clubs collected funds for the construction of a lead case for a cobalt-60 bomb at St. Bon. Hospital.

- 52 The contract between Archbishop Baudoux and Mr. J. P. Laurence, provincial sup. of St. Sulpice, was signed July 5, 1954.
- 53 Recalled by Mr. Gagnon, Annals, 1960, p. 8.
- 54 Letter written by Sr. H. Leclair, Oct. 13, 1954.
- 55 Chronicles, prov. house, St. Bon., 1953-56, p. 167. Ste-Rose Hospital was also to be enlarged.
- 56 Ibid., p. 193, Feb. 11, 1955.
- 57 Annals, 1955, pp 217-222, Article published by La Liberté et le Patriote.
- 58 On May 31, 1954, Mother d'Youville's name was inscribed on the list of the Founders of the Catholic Church in Canada.
- 59 Annals, 1950, p. 412.
- 60 Chronicles, prov. house, St. Bon., p. 199, March 2, 1955.
- 61 Annals, 1955, pp. 503-512.
- 62 Srs. Herauf, M.A. Laramée, D. Emond and G. Rocan. The boarding school could accommodate 80 Inuit pupils. Annals, 1956, p. 360.
- 63 Chronicles, prov. house, St. Bon. p. 337.
- 64 Sr. Ste-Thérèse had been the first nurse at the St. Boniface Hospital, and one remembers that the Red River inhabitants refused to let "not' soeur docteur" leave in 1859.
- 65 It is worth mentioning that on the very day of the Ottawa tragedy, eleven African girls solicited their admission to the novitiate of the



Grey Nuns of the Cross in Basutoland. In 1956, there were 7,000 Grey Nuns who formed a large religious family including all the different branches whose members were scattered throughout the four continents.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN - 1956 - 1970

In 1956, many important events were to occur, some expected and others unexpected. One of the most notable was the move the sisters made from their old white monastery into their new provincial house. There were mixed emotions as they began to live in the large, five-storied house on Despins Street with its dimensions of 200 feet in length by 41 feet in width.<sup>1</sup> There was sadness at leaving the dear convent which had seen so many generations of Grey Nuns.

An unforeseen request came at the beginning of May when Father Walter Speeman, parish priest of St. Raymond, Illinois, U.S.A. asked permission to come to offer Mass in the chapel of the old monastery. He received a favourable reply and presented himself at the convent on June 28 accompanied by his cousin and housekeeper, Miss Moeller.<sup>2</sup> The visitors were received with courtesy by Sister Leonie Beaulieu, Assistant Provincial, who had no doubt that in the next hours the dear older sisters would evoke fond memories of more than 50 years ago.

In 1904, Mr. Speeman had gone to Montreal for theological studies. He had avoided military service in Germany, his state of health already being largely compromised and he wanted to celebrate Mass at least once before dying. Admitted into the Major Seminary, his strength had soon drained away and he had to be admitted at the mother house of the Grey Nuns as a patient.<sup>3</sup>

Archbishop Langevin on his way through Montreal had invited him to come to St. Boniface where, he said, the climate would reinvigorate him.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the aspirant to the priesthood had been able to complete his studies, with great difficulty, it is true, because of increasing weakness. He was ordained on June 29, 1906 in the chapel of the monastery and celebrated his first Mass the following day at 5:30 a.m. Despite the early hour, the choir had sung hymns appropriate to the circumstances. Now,

among those in that choir of 1906, five were still living, Sisters St-Antonin, Ste-Mathilde, Ste-Eugénie, St-Théophile and Eugénie Valade. Mr. Paré, Sister St-Théophile's father, has also been ordained to the priesthood on July 26, 1906. Father Speeman, the jubilarian, was able to relive with them a page out of the past while acknowledging himself stunned at all the progress that had been made. There was another surprise for him. At this jubilee Mass the sisters sang once again the very hymns that had been sung so long ago. One can imagine the emotion of the celebrant who at lunch afterwards expressed in warm terms his emotion, sharing with the sisters the steps of his career.

After his ordination, Bishop Ryan of Alton, U.S.A. had given him three months' leave to permit him to visit his family. En route to Germany he once again had to be hospitalized at the mother house under the care of Dr. D. Masson who told him he had not six months to live. Mother Piché, then one of the assistant generals, showed him a relic of Mother d'Youville. He kept the relic and attributed to it his cure. After two years in a sanatorium in the Black Forest of Germany, he had returned to the United States where he had been working ever since.<sup>5</sup>

Archbishop Baudoux, hearing this tale, took part in the feast, inviting the jubilarian to his table where a "golden" cake was served.<sup>6</sup> As June 30 coincided with the opening of a work dear to the hearts of all, he asked the visitor to accompany him to the blessing of the St. Amant ward of Hospice Taché, a department destined to receive epileptic and mentally defective children.<sup>7</sup>

The instigator of this work was there. She was a great lady with a great soul, Mrs. Beatrice St-Amant. Her heart was filled with appreciation for on this day she was assisting at the realisation of a hope that had sustained her for 17 years. Mrs. St-Amant, née Cyr, came from Maria, P.Q. to be a teacher at St-Jean-Baptiste parish, Manitoba in 1915. On January 11, 1916 she had married Herman St-Amant,

who, alas, died ten months after the birth of a son. The courageous widow returned to teaching this time at the parish of Ste-Genevieve. Another misfortune came on her. At the age of 5 years, her little Gerard became afflicted with epilepsy. Crises increased; the mother had to make a serious decision in 1939; to abandon her livelihood, a decision she made in "tears at the school library as she tried to hide her emotions by looking for a book". Having looked in vain for an institution where she could place her son, and hearing that many other mothers had the same experience as she, she decided to open what she called Youville Hospital for Epileptics. She had read in a life of Mother d'Youville that her general hospital had sheltered victims of "le haut-mal."

The sale of her house at Ile-des-Chênes enabled her to acquire a farm house at Transcona. The Kiwanis Club offered financial support to transform the house into a hospital. She also received material and moral support from a Grey Nun, Sister Pulvermacher then superior at Hospice Taché. Furniture and food arrived at her home along with patients within a month of the establishment of her house. Soon she began to receive mentally retarded most of whom were bed-ridden. Heroically she carried on her work. But then in 1954, struck by a heart attack, she began to recognize that her days were numbered. After a brief stay in a hospital, in spite of the advice of her doctors, she returned to care for twenty patients for whom she was the sole support. It was then that a journalist, Val Werier of the Winnipeg Tribune, undertook a campaign in favour of her work. Public opinion was alerted and Mr. Duff Roblin, Leader of the Opposition, obtained a government grant while many benefactors began to contribute to improve the quality of care. Mrs. St-Amant had one supreme hope, that the Grey Nuns would fully take over her work. Mrs. Margaret Chown, her friend, interceded with Archbishop Baudoux who became a negotiator with Mother Ste-Croix, the superior general. This is how it came about that in May of 1956 there began work on the fifth floor of the south wing of the Hospice with

a view to setting up a ward for thirty children, aged from birth to 6 years, after which they were eligible for an institution at Portage la Prairie.

The Kiwanis Club adopted the hospice as its work of charity on June 22, 1954.<sup>8</sup> The Knights of Columbus now came forward to add their assistance to that of the Kinsmen. Radio station CKSB publicized the cause effectively so that soon on June 30, 1956 there were magnificent rooms at the disposal of the children. Nine of them were by this time occupying the little white beds while 13 more were expected. Archbishop Baudoux, radiating with joy, pronounced the Ritual prayers and blessed each child and the place now at their disposal while Mr. Gérard St-Amant "whom God had cured," was happy to record on film the scenes which made the day memorable.

The dear patients were the object of the sympathy of everyone, sisters, employees, old folk and visitors. Mrs. St-Amant continued among them with her eminently humanitarian action. A journalist of *La Liberté* wrote, "Everything is of small dimension in this place. Even the director, Sister Philomene Lalonde, was of small height, her face shining with goodness." She would be assisted by four aids to assure continuity of care. Soon Sister Rose Bouchard would be assigned to this position; she was to work miracles there. Mrs. St-Amant, who did not lack humour nor humility, was to say pleasantly: "The sisters work in the shadows while as for me, my photograph has appeared in all the paper baskets of the region." She was appreciative of the courtesy of the sisters in changing the name of "Youville Hospital" for that of "St. Amant Ward".

Father Speeman was not slow to congratulate the dear Grey Nuns among whom he found the same availability as in the far-off days of 1906.<sup>9</sup> The venerated jubilarian was also congratulating himself that his jubilee came in June. A few weeks later it would have been too late...

On July 24 there was an official "acceptance of

possession" of the new provincial house situated at the corners of Taché and Despins Streets, "turning its back on our neighbours at Hospice Taché." His Excellency, Archbishop Baudoux had first blessed the building accompanied by many clergymen, representatives of the mother house, namely Sister Blanche Labrosse and Sister Emma Noiseux<sup>10</sup> and representatives of the different religious communities of St. Boniface as well as invited guests.

At the banquet, Archbishop Baudoux opened his heart: "I want to speak for all the clergy and members of every community in the diocese to thank the Grey Nuns for all the good they have done for bishops, archbishops and coadjutors of St. Boniface. It is so true that St. Boniface has become identified with the Grey Nuns. If St. Boniface has given birth to so many dioceses, it is thanks to the collaboration of the Grey Nuns... I would like to profit from this occasion to thank them particularly for having received our elderly and ill priests in the St. Antoine ward of the Hospice and of their lavish care which they bestow so courteously. I want also to thank them even more specially for the new ward which they have opened for epileptic children."<sup>11</sup>

The visitors who toured the new Provincial House on July 24 and 25 echoed the praises of the Archbishop who said: "You were the first to arrive here, but you are the last to procure for yourselves a house adequate to the needs of your old and invalid sisters who have sacrificed their lives for the good of our province."<sup>12</sup>

The time came for definitively leaving the old provincial house. On Wednesday, July 27 there was Mass for the last time in the white house where "we are leaving a part of our soul," as the annalist put it. For the first time, dinner was taken in the new residence. At 4:00 p.m. the Host in the tabernacle was taken from the blessed walls which enclosed it for 110 years and was brought to the fine chapel whose title was Mary, Queen of the World.<sup>13</sup>



A poet has once said, "If one person is missing, everything can seem desolate." As for the old house it was a question not of one person being missing but fifty leaving it. One might say that death descended on it and, figuratively speaking, the ancient walls which had seen so much activity now gave out a silent call for help...

Another fine work, that of the Sanatorium, was soon to question itself as to its future. Tuberculosis was now becoming rare on account of the progress of science. While waiting a decision the 25 anniversary was celebrated on August 21. On this occasion, one of the pioneers, Dr. A.C. Sinclair praised the services of the Grey Nuns given to the 6,000 tubercular patients received since 1931. Mr. Justice Thomas Beaubien, the chairman of the advisory board, recalled the epic voyage of 1844. Dr. Sinclair and Dr. J. V. Hagen received a tribute of recognition for their years of service. To Sister C. Maurice, the active medical staff presented a silver tray, while the sisters in their turn gave out awards to the employees whose collaboration was so much appreciated. The cooperation of employees was called on again at the beginning of December when all the dioceses of Canada opened their doors to the Hungarian refugees. It was necessary to prepare not only lodging and shelter but also warm clothing to protect the newcomers from the rigors of winter. Sister G. Jarbeau, superior at the St. Boniface Hospital, began collecting used clothing donated by the nurses and employees. A clothing depot was established in the house where the school of practical nursing had been carried on before its move to the dear old white house at the beginning of December.<sup>15</sup>

This move put an end to rumours that it was intended to demolish the old monastery and was approved by Archbishop Baudoux. In addressing Archbishop Giovanni Panico, apostolic delegate on February 18, 1957, the Archbishop of St. Boniface cited a letter from Bishop Provencher to Bishop Bourget at the end of 1844: "I have established two

more schools but they are of far less worth than those of the sisters." Archbishop Baudoux continued: "Here is the magnificent praise the first Bishop gave to the Grey Nuns. The same praise I offer you in 1957. Just as the sisters were the right hand of Bishop Provencher in his time, so they have remained for his successors. They are always ready to do whatever needs to be done. They have agreed to open a new department for a work which is extremely difficult, that of epileptics, and lately they have established a clothing depot, furnished and heated, to prepare clothes for the Hungarian refugees. The Grey Nuns, your Excellency, remain the 'apple' of the Bishop's left eye just as the priests are the 'apple of his right eye'".<sup>16</sup>

The clergy of the archdiocese suffered a great loss when on May 29th Bishop Léonide Primeau died. He had been "one of the most zealous priests in the diocese."<sup>17</sup> The chronicler recalls the work he did while the Carmelites had been in St. Boniface, and also his role as historian during the centenary of the Grey Nuns.

The sisters tried to record in their annals noteworthy events in the life of their friends. So, on April 26, it was recorded: "Our lawyer, Mr. Alfred Monnin, has just been appointed a judge. He has been on the Advisory Board of both the Taché Hospital and of the Sanatorium. Sincere congratulations to this gentleman who knows how to do honour to his faith, his language and his race."<sup>18</sup>

Another good friend, Dr. J. B. Trudelle, died suddenly during June. He was buried on the 25th while in Regina they were celebrating the 50th anniversary of the admission of the first patient to the hospital.<sup>19</sup> The event was celebrated with enthusiasm; the evening before special tributes were given to Sisters V. Allaire, Rose Vincent and Cecilia Wagner, the last named, in absentia, being represented by Mother Mann, the assistant general. Dr. D. S. Johnstone, whose house had been bought by the foundresses in 1907, came from Vancouver to take part

in the festivities. Invited to speak, he did not hesitate to say "that the Regina Grey Nuns hospital has survived thanks to the spiritual life of the Sisters."<sup>20</sup>

Another hospital was honoured some eight days later, July 4. Archbishop P.F. Pocock of Winnipeg presided over the opening of a wing added to the Ste. Rose Hospital. To tell the truth, the addition was larger than the original building which became a residence for practical nursing students. Dr. Gendreau congratulated himself on having been the one to promote this establishment which had flourished so well.<sup>21</sup>

If, in the domain of teaching, difficulties were being experienced with much talk of centralization and the secularization of the schools,<sup>22</sup> it was not the same in the field of hospital work. The care for epileptic children not only aroused financial contributions but also professions of faith. Mr. Joseph C. Stang, the state deputy of the Knights of Columbus of Manitoba, sent a substantial cheque to the St. Amant ward along with the following testimony: "We recognize by this gift the magistral work of the Grey Nuns on behalf of the children of the Good Lord, and we consider ourselves privileged to be able to extend to you a helping hand. This gift tells you that you are not alone when you work in this field, but your effort is understood and appreciated by a group of 3,400 Catholics."<sup>23</sup>

Everyone knew, of course, that the praise belonged in the first place to Mrs. St-Amant, the instigator. Was it too much for her to see the sympathy expressed by all the people? On July 29 she died suddenly on a visit to her son in Transcona in the very house where she had begun her charitable mission. The mortal remains were exposed at St. Boniface. Sister G. Tetreault, superior of the Hospice, led to the tomb three of the little ones carrying floral tribute. One of them called out, "Maman, Maman." The following day when the funeral was held, the same little children followed the

coffin with the superior and Sister Rose Bouchard. According to the chronicler, "they conducted themselves like little gentlemen" despite the emotions they felt. Everybody was in tears.<sup>24</sup>

Mother Ste-Croix recognized the rapid progress of the St. Amant ward which she had authorized. Replaced in the government of the institute by Mother Beatrice St-Louis in the autumn of 1957 she came back to St. Boniface where, while awaiting a new assignment, she went each day to Hospice Taché to help care for the old folk... and the children. She shared the joy of all the sisters when Mother Fortin announced that the old white house would become a public museum. A shadow came over this prospect when the plan of transferring the house to La Vérendrye Park was rejected by the municipal authorities on the ground that it would prevent the enlargement of Taché Avenue. There were also rumours that the land on which the house stood might be used for a new School for Practical Nurses. Mr. A. D'Eschambault, president of the Historical Society, put an end to these rumours by giving assurance that the sisters never had any idea of destroying this house, the oldest not only in the city but in the whole of the West.<sup>25</sup>

This statement calmed anxieties as the people prepared for the fiftieth anniversary of the incorporation of St. Boniface.<sup>26</sup> This took place June 15-21, 1958, the 114th anniversary of the arrival of the Grey Nuns who were invited to take part in the parade of allegorical floats. Mother Fortin agreed with this request. It was the last act of her term of office since her mandate as provincial superior ended in March. She was replaced at the helm by Sister Gertrude Jarbeau who had been superior at the Hospital for three years.<sup>27</sup>

The new provincial followed up on the initiatives of her predecessor and it was at the Hospital itself that there took place the inaugural banquet of the civil festivities on Monday, June 16.<sup>28</sup> Following the banquet, there was an interview broadcast on CKSB. Sister Eugenie Valade, aged 84, was asked,

"What would you say was the happiest day of your life?" She answered, "I would be hard put to answer that since I have always been happy." "Well, according to you, what is the secret of happiness?" "It is to give some to others," she said.<sup>29</sup>

The Grey Nuns shared in the joy of their fellow citizens but for themselves there was a still greater happiness when the long awaited news came at last of the beatification of Mother d'Youville to take place in the near future. It was even suggested the event might be December 8. But in the meantime there was a typical "grey" celebration. Since April 30, the provincial council accepted the direction of the parish school of Lisieux, Saskatchewan. At the request of Bishop Aimé Decosse, it was necessary to replace the Sisters of Jesus and Marie who had to leave on account of a shortage of workers.<sup>30</sup> Three sisters were sent there, Sisters M. Schmidt, T. Legal and R.A. Ritchot.<sup>31</sup>

The following May 31, the sisters agreed to take charge of two classrooms at Assiniboia School which was opened by the Oblate Fathers in Winnipeg on behalf of native children. Sisters B. Forest, M.R. Constantin, C. Tougas, J. Ell and A. Pepin were put in charge in September of a work undertaken at the request of Father O. Robidoux.<sup>32</sup>

One month had scarcely gone by since the opening of these new fields of action when the great joy at the prospect of the beatification vanished with the death of His Holiness Pope Pius XII on October 8, 1958. The Grey Nuns again had to live in hope while accepting with gratitude the joys of the present. The centenary of the convent at St. Norbert reunited the former teachers and students October 12. In attendance were the provincial council consisting of Sisters Jarbeau, Elodie Vachon, Cécile Rioux, and Marie J. Marleau. On this occasion it was natural to evoke the memory of Bishop Ritchot, founding parish priest, the confidant of Louis Riel, the uncle of Sister Ludovica Ritchot, the companion who, with an elegant pen, had recounted "the good moments of her

life as an adolescent when she had been able to listen to the good old man recalling the customs of former times."<sup>33</sup>

At long last came the shining day when the sisters, who were resigned to wait, learned that on May 3 amidst the glories of Bernini in Rome, the foundress of the Grey Nuns had been proclaimed Blessed to the joy of the Canadian people and especially of the more than 7,000 Grey Nuns represented there by the authorities of the mother house in Montreal, as well as the Grey Nuns sisterhoods of Saint Hyacinthe, Ottawa, Quebec, Philadelphia and Pembroke. In his decree, Good Pope John stressed the universal charity of the distinguished Canadian woman. This theme was repeated over and over again by the eminent cardinals, archbishops and bishops of the dioceses where her spiritual daughters were labouring. They were able to participate from afar at these grandiose ceremonies by means of the new invention, television.

At St. Boniface there was an unforgettable day. The choir of the Major Seminary sang in Gregorian chant. The Daughters of the Cross claimed that Mother d'Youville was a true daughter of the Cross.<sup>34</sup> At Gravelbourg they had, on this memorable day, the ceremony of sod-turning at the land where Foyer Youville would be built.<sup>35</sup>

Festivities were prolonged at Gravelbourg until June 11 when Father Paul Piche, native of the place, was raised to the status of a bishop in the cathedral. He would replace in the North West Territories Bishop Joseph Trocellier, who died in November 1958. The bishop-elect had filled, among other important functions, that of being director-general of the Oblate Commission on works among the Indians and Eskimo at Ottawa. The Grey Nuns of the school of Lebret knew of his competence and his devotedness. Their companions, the sisters of the Far North, these heroic women, would be in good hands.<sup>36</sup>

The atmosphere of jubilation was interrupted



June 12 when the Seine River flooded, inundating Ste-Anne-des-Chênes and La Broquerie as well as farms in Steinbach. At the convent in Ste-Anne water invaded the basement and the chicken house so that the chickens had to be put in the attic.<sup>37</sup> Several families had to be evacuated. Shelter was given to the Pelland family; in a few days the Seine was restored to normal, the flood having been caused by a broken sluice at Marchand. Fortunately everything was restored to order in time to allow the school year to finish normally.<sup>38</sup>

On July 14, there was not a commemoration of Bastille Day but an invasion of the sanatorium by the St. Amant ward. Government authorities had asked the sisters to take sixty young mentally deficient children. One of the Directors of the Association for retarded children, Mr. Nicolson, who himself had two children afflicted with cerebral palsy, was the indefatigable worker for the extension of this work which he so much admired. He was not a Catholic and he had never before met any sisters but he said he was astonished not only by their compassion but equally by the diversity of their skills. A fact worth noting is that he considered himself a recruiter for the order inviting young girls to consider devoting themselves to serve God by joining the community!<sup>39</sup>

It was a unique spectacle to see twenty-six young handicapped leave the Hospice en route for St. Vital. Twenty-six autos were put at the disposition of the group by the Knights of Columbus. In each car there was a sister and a child. The members of the provincial council, the sisters of the Hospice were honoured to be part of the cortège preceded by the police and followed by trucks carrying furniture, beds, clothing and games for the patients.<sup>40</sup> The reception at the Sanatorium was warm, to say the least.

As usual, the hand of Providence could be seen. the space vacated from the Hospice became the School of Practical Nursing on September 23. Then a group

of seminarians came to demolish everything "which had been added to the white house over its 113 years of existence. It was decided to keep only the original as a site for the museum."<sup>41</sup>

The clothing depot for Hungarian refugees was no longer needed. The house was given to a large family. On September 24 it was moved from its foundations and, a marvel of the 20th century, it was transported through the streets until it reached its new destination on Archibald Street after a "journey" of eight hours.<sup>42</sup>

The procession of allegorical floats of previous years was nothing compared to this movement of a house along the street. This was an entirely new way of helping people, a new facet of the universal charity of Mother d'Youville. When on November 8 to 10 there took place a Triduum marking the beatification, there was a very large crowd of people who were impressed by the panegyrics pronounced in both languages by the distinguished persons who presided over the religious services, including Archbishop Baudoux, Archbishop Pocock, Bishops Decosse and Dumouchel, Mr. E. Gagnon, p.s.s., and the chaplain, Father A. Fortin.<sup>43</sup>

It was Archbishop Baudoux who stressed the providential link between apparently distinct events. When there was the official opening of the work in favour of handicapped children already numbering fifty-one, he thanked the sisters for having accepted this work so dear to the Blessed Foundress, and told them that "by this gesture of Mercy, they had hastened the beatification of their Mother and model."<sup>44</sup>

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The beatification of Mother d'Youville provoked a return to sources among the Grey Nuns, to a new awareness of their mission and a conviction that the survival of their institute was due to their faculty of adaptation. Following Mother d'Youville whose praises were sung everywhere, they must perceive the

needs of their times in order to prepare an adequate response.

This second half of the twentieth century is marked by many radical transformations with incredible scientific discoveries especially in astronomy where its mysteries are being broached.<sup>45</sup> Television has allowed the ordinary citizen to travel throughout the world, to familiarize himself not only with strange phenomena but also with new ideologies.<sup>46</sup>

The fields of education and health care were being completely reorganized. Convents built more than 100 years ago or even those dating fifty years back were becoming obsolete. One of the teachers would say, "They stand only by the force of habit." Governmental authorities were proposing legislation for regionalization of schools and even of small hospitals set up in places difficult of access. These would become first aid posts while patients would be moved to the big centres by airplane.

It remained, however, that in spite of rapid progress there still remained poverty, suffering and inevitable death.

At St. Boniface at the beginning of 1960, Father J. Picod died on February 11 while, on March 18, Bishop Antoine d'Eschambault ended his deserving career. "He was a model priest, a convinced patriot, a national historian. He gave of himself without counting to all of the best causes."<sup>47</sup> The project he inspired of having the dear old white house become a national museum succeeded but he did not live to see it. A suggestion had been made and then annulled: to move the building to La Vérendrye Park so as to make room for a new School for Practical Nurses. On December 16, however, the newspaper *La Liberté* announced "that the Grey Nuns had made a donation of their oldest house of Western Canada to the St. Boniface Museum Committee and had given assurance that it could stay where it was for 100 more years."

Old things are precious, but they can't always last, noted the chronicler when on the preceding June 8, as they were trying to transport the kiosk, it broke apart. It had been a masterpiece done by an old man in 1917.

Buildings eventually crumble, but not so the reputations of the great figures in history. This was proved when Bishop Yves Plumey of Garoua, in Cameroun, came to kneel at the tomb of Bishop Taché whom he called "the giant of the Catholic apostolate."<sup>48</sup>

On June 9, 1961 the Grey Nuns suffered a great loss with the death of Mother Béatrice St-Louis, the 23rd superior general of the order. She died at the age of 52, the 33rd year of her life as a sister. Related to the foundress, this deserving Grey Nun, like her illustrious kin, had "much loved Jesus Christ and the poor."

Messages of sympathy came from all over Canada and notably from Archbishop Baudoux and from the new Archbishop of Winnipeg, G.B. Flahiff.<sup>49</sup> At the funeral on June 13 His Eminence Cardinal Paul-Emile Léger joined with the Apostolic Delegate, the hierarchy, clergy, religious communities and the civil authorities. The remains were taken to the crypt of the mother house near the place where the remains of the foundress were deposited.<sup>50</sup>

The General Chapter, convened for the following October, entrusted to Sister Georgette Leduc the office of superior general with Sister Ste-Croix as assistant and Sister G. Jarbeau as general counsellor. Sister Berthe Dorais was chosen treasurer and Sister E. Mayrand was chosen secretary. On December 14 Sister Rita Fortier was named superior for the Province of St. Boniface.<sup>51</sup>

Some 270 sisters were now working in institutions belonging to the provincial house. These institutions numbered nineteen since on the previous October 4 the Foyer Youville at Gravelbourg had

started operations. The building could take in eighty persons; it had only one floor to facilitate free movement. The foyer and the hospital were both placed under the same administration. The hospital, no longer having to lodge long-term patients, was able to receive and treat the patients of the town and its surrounding area.<sup>52</sup>

St. Boniface Sanatorium saw a gradual transformation in its functions. Since 1967 it had been renamed St. Vital Hospital where there were still some cases of tuberculosis and also thirty-seven old people and seventy-five handicapped children. Every energy was needed to assure the proper functioning of all the works already undertaken, yet still another field of action soon opened to the Grey Nuns.

His Excellency Archbishop Baudoux did not delay in transmitting the directives of the Sovereign Pontiff asking the Canadian and American hierarchies to help Latin America with its 167 million Catholics. Father Lafond had been a missionary in Bolivia since 1959. Two members of the secular clergy had left for Brazil while Mr. Edouard Gagnon, superior of the Major Seminary went to Manizales in Colombia. The chronicler noted, "The Archbishop makes an immense sacrifice by releasing a priest of such value."<sup>53</sup> Mr. Jean Piché, Sulpician, replaced Mr. Gagnon.

Bishop Baudoux accompanied by Father Antoine Hacault meets the worthy Sulpician again in 1961 during their long journey to Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Brazil. On July 30 in this last-named country the Archbishop of St. Boniface officially adopted the parish of Saint Joan of Arc in Sao Paulo.

A few weeks after his return, he presided over an extraordinary event, blessing Father Louis Bédard who went on board his own Cessna aircraft bound for Peru.

But the generosity of the Archbishop did not end there. He made an appeal to the sisters' communities and gathered together a group of workers:

catechists, social assistants who would go to help in parish work. Grey Nuns, Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, Daughters of the Cross, Oblates and Canonesses all named two sisters each to make their departure July 11, 1962.

In Brazil since 1957, the Grey Nuns had already been at work. Sisters from the Nicolet province had founded a mission at Alcantara and were planning to open a second convent at Guimaraes during the autumn. Missionary zeal did not stop there since the provinces of Montreal and of the United States had sent missionaries to Africa.<sup>54</sup>

The team from St. Boniface learned Portuguese at Petropolis. Sister M.A. Audette and Sister Anna Normandeau were part of the group. They did not delay in getting to work; by January 1963 they were involved in teaching catechism and in visiting poor homes.<sup>55</sup>

In order to reach their distant fields of action it was now necessary for sisters to become familiar with airplanes. In former times they had had to rely on canoes as in 1844 when the boatmen sang to the rhythm of the oars: "C'est l'aviron qui nous mène." Sometimes this means of travel was somehow regretted despite its slowness...

Sister Savoie became initiated into plane travel when she had to board an iron bird at Berens on November 23. She was to accompany two young patients bound for St. Boniface Hospital, a baby of a few months and a little four-year-old boy. The baby's bassinet hung from the ceiling of the cockpit while little Norris shared the sister's seat. Everything went fine until it was time to land on the Red River whose iced surface, it was said, was of the required thickness. Unfortunately a crack had developed the skis broke through the ice and the airplane could no longer fly. Pilot Dodds grabbed the little boy and put him on the roof telling him not to budge. Meanwhile he shouted at the top of his lungs calling for help. Seconds seemed unending



especially for Sister Savoie who was already standing in icy water. Finally a boat came and the pilot entrusted little Norris to the boatman. Mr. Clarkson arrived in another boat and the pilot said to his religious passenger: "Look out. We are going to open the door. Leave immediately." Which, as she said later, she did although she could not see a thing. Mr. Dodds grabbed hold of the bassinet which the water had not yet reached and the rescue was completed. Sister Savoie went to Mr. Clarkson's house on a truck. Thanks to the amiability of her host, she was able to pull herself together and above all to change her clothes. She confessed, "I never prayed so hard. I thought my last hour had come."

The accident happened about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. At 6:00 p.m. the traveller came into the provincial house with Sister Fortier and Sister Rioux who had been called by Mr. Clarkson.<sup>56</sup>

This is how the names of Mr. and Mrs. Clarkson and Pilot Dodds became added to the long list of friends of the Grey Nuns. As a matter of fact, the sisters for 120 years had benefitted from the help and support of benefactors often of a different religion. Their loyalty and devotion have been and remain a precious resource. Competent doctors, women's auxiliaries at Taché and St. Boniface hospitals, enlightened advisers, conscientious employees, all have the right to the gratitude of the Grey Nuns who, like Mother d'Youville, pray every day for the intentions of their benefactors.

The Second Vatican Council, convoked by Pope John XXIII, had by now held its first session and new ideas began to be discussed as a result of its call for "aggiornamento," updating. These included new forms of ecumenism, the presence of sisters in works outside the convent walls, the use of the vernacular during liturgical services. Things will not stop there, although the Sovereign Pontiff was recalled to God on June 3, 1963 with the whole world proclaiming his merits.<sup>57</sup>

Renewal adapted to the religious life was described in the document, *Perfectae Caritatis*, which came into effect on October 11, 1966 after a period of experimentation following the council norms.<sup>58</sup> There was no question of abandoning traditional values or already proven methods of carrying on the apostolate. Charity retained its inalienable rights; no one can deceive himself when there is work to be done. This is what was stressed when a deserving Sister, Marie-Rose Tougas, received on October 4, 1963 a plaque from the association devoted to cerebral palsy victims. The cities of Winnipeg and St. Boniface offered their tribute to the humble Grey Nun who, with her companions, had become the Good Samaritan of those afflicted with the disease.<sup>59</sup>

These Grey Nuns showed their acceptance of the role of Good Samaritan when they agreed to be hostesses at Camp Albert at the request of Father Léo Couture, the parish priest of the cathedral parish. They had to assume the role of cooks and to help organize games and activities for young people on vacation.<sup>60</sup>

During this period of adaptation the Sisters greeted with joy the elevation of Father Antoine Hacault to the hierarchy on September 8, 1964. Ordained at Bruxelles, Manitoba May 20, 1951 by Archbishop Georges Cabana, the young priest had obtained his doctorate in theology at the Angelicum in Rome and had been a professor at the Major Seminary which, it was said, "had lost an experienced professor while the diocese gained from the zeal of the newly elected so well prepared for the new functions as a result of attending with Archbishop Baudoux at the first session of the Council."

In St. Boniface Cathedral on September 8, the Archbishop conferred the episcopate on his auxiliary while as many Grey Nuns as could possibly do so attended the impressive ceremonies. Legitimate pride was taken in the knowledge that he was the fifth priest born in Manitoba deemed worthy of such an honour.<sup>61</sup>

A few days later, on September 13, Ste-Rose Hospital celebrated its 25th anniversary. Homage was rendered to Dr. L. Gendreau who assumed alone, and for nine years, the demanding task of caring for the sick of a large district and who had at times to transport them to the hospital in Dauphin even before the automobile had reached the remote village. Thanks to the support of good Father Théoret and of Archbishop Sinnott, with the help of the Grey Nuns, a hospital was opened in 1939, being enlarged in 1956. The statistics proved how needed the hospital was. In its 25 years there had been 44,262 admissions, 4,697 new-borns and 360,438 days of hospitalization.<sup>62</sup>

The authentic Grey Nun does not refuse any work whether it be that of a nurse, a teacher, a catechist, a social worker, a nurse's aide, a cook or a laundress. Social service was carried on at the provincial house and the hospital while there was already a ready collaboration with the work of the parishes with a strong emphasis on the teaching of religion not only in traditional schools but also in the parishes and above all in the Indian reserves during summer courses.<sup>63</sup>

Sometimes, things apparently done simply in the course of duty are recognized even forty-three years later as acts of bravery. This is how it was for Sister Rosa Desrosiers on January 7, 1965 when Mr. Arthur Humphries, the Fire Commissioner, gave her a citation in memory of her heroism June 14, 1922. At that time she had replaced the guardian of the dormitory of 120 orphans. About 11:30 p.m. there had been an explosion and the sister, having sounded the alarm, had to see to the evacuation of the boarders. One of them, Martha Dryda, did not answer the roll call. Sister Desrosiers climbed up to the next floor and found the child almost asphyxiated. She carried her out in her arms. A few minutes later and it would have been too late. Mr. E. Gourbil, then sub-chief of the fire fighters, never forgot this incident and it was he who recommended that the heroine, quite confused by "all the fuss", be honoured.

She said she had only been doing her duty. At the presentation of the plaque, several of the orphans of 1922 were present.

The other Grey Nuns received special recognition at the end of the year. Sister Geneviève Rocan was recognized by the federal authorities on account of her method of teaching Eskimos. Sister H. Neumann was honoured for having put in fifty years as a teacher.

The Grey Nuns had proven themselves in the field of education and Dr. Doyle wanted them to take over the entire responsibility for the classes at Ste-Anne-des-Chênes where two schools had been built, one for elementary and the other for high school programs.<sup>64</sup> The convent was transformed into a residence for the sisters. The part that was "tumbling down from old age" had been demolished and the land had been sold for the construction of Youville Villa for elderly persons. The Villa opened its doors on June 27. Sister Anna Gosselin took over the direction of it while Sister Clara Pelletier became a nurse at the hospital in the same village.<sup>65</sup>

When Father Simon, O.F.M. asked the help of the sisters to teach religion to the deaf-mutes, Sister Marguerite Forest and Sister Therese Vachon took a special course and went to initiate fifty pupils in the knowledge of God, teaching by signs.

The occasions for service were multiplying but now the number of workers began to decrease. Confronted by this apparent paradox, the Grey Nuns took heart from their certitude that God is not usually a bad debtor. How many times had not Mother d'Youville seen her works threatened, yet today her daughters were spread over almost every continent.

\* \* \*

"The faith which God loves best is hope," assures Charles Peguy. This is the kind of faith that had to be professed particularly by the reli-

gious congregations over difficult years when the decrease in vocations seemed to compromise the future even of existing works.

It was with great pain that the people saw the Jesuit Fathers leave the administration of St. Boniface College in the fall of 1966 after 81 years of apostolate. Archbishop Baudoux confided to Bishop Hacault as rector of the College the task of finding the necessary professors to replace the Jesuit Fathers. Two years later, at the end of June, the juniorate of the Oblate Fathers, until now a flourishing source of vocations, closed its doors.<sup>66</sup> It was the same with the major seminary directed by the Sulpicians.<sup>67</sup>

As for the Grey Nuns they had to close their school at Lisieux and their dear convents of St. François-Xavier and St. Norbert, in existence since 1850 and 1858 respectively.<sup>68</sup> These measures made necessary by social transformations did not decrease the spirit of the Sisters who remained persuaded, schooled, as they were, that the works proved the authenticity of their love. Even if some venerable institutions disappeared, it was still necessary to face the future with confidence, being ready to make new adaptations to serve our brothers and sisters in the great human family.

The field of health care remained a vast domain in which the Grey Nuns excelled. Sister Cécile Gauthier, during June 1966, received from the University of Washington her master's degree in nursing.

Sister Thérèse Castonguay was named superintendent of hospital education for Saskatchewan. It had become evident that nursing formation would be withdrawn from Saskatchewan hospitals, but the choice of a sister to prepare the University program was in itself a great mark of appreciation.

Another Grey Nun, of the Sioux nation, received a posthumous tribute. Sister Ione Hilger, a Benedictine Sister, came to the Provincial House on June 20,

1966 to obtain documents relating to Sister Josephine Nebraska who had made her profession at St. Boniface on May 31, 1877 and who died April 3, 1894.<sup>69</sup>

Two schools asked for the services of the Grey Nuns in the fall of 1967. Sister Jeanne Monchamp taught in St. Boniface for a few years in the school named after Louis Riel. At the school in Woodridge, 30 miles from La Broquerie, Sister Cécile Tougas and Sister Antoinette Normandeau began teaching at the request of the citizens and of Dr. P. Doyle, the chairman of the Seine River larger school division.<sup>70</sup>

As for the School of Licensed Practical Nurses, the plan to build was renounced and it was moved at the end of 1967 to St. Boniface Cultural Centre as St. Joseph's Academy had become.<sup>71</sup> 1967 was the centenary of Canada and a World's Fair was held at Montreal with the title of "Man and His World". Sisters from Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan and the Canadian Far North lent their cooperation to the kiosks showing the chief works of Indians and Eskimos. The high point of the year for St. Boniface was the inauguration of the museum on the evening of June 23.<sup>72</sup>

His Honour Mayor Joseph Guay, surrounded by federal, provincial and municipal representatives, presided at the ceremony. The La Verendrye band played the national anthems after which the bell in the old belfry awakened echoes of a far-off past. In pageants, six of the sisters agreed to present themselves clothed in the old habit for which there was already nostalgia.<sup>73</sup>

For Sister Fortier this was the last ceremony at which she would be present as provincial superior. On February 17, 1968 she was replaced by Sister Cécile Maurice<sup>74</sup> who was called upon to continue the initiatives of her predecessors according to the spirit of the Council and to represent the Grey Nuns according to circumstances as they should arise. In this capacity she was present on Easter Eve, April 13, at the cathedral cemetery when a monument was



unveiled honouring the four pioneer Grey Nuns and the 143 sisters who had been buried there since 1859.<sup>75</sup> This had been a project of the committee on the centenary of Confederation but it had been delayed. The central stone, of red granite, carried on its face the name of the four foundresses while on the reverse there is a tribute due to Canon L. Groulx: "If there is one special beauty in our history it is in the collaboration of women in all the great things we have done." On six other black granite stones there are engraved in chronological order the names of the deceased sisters of all the communities who had been working in St. Boniface since 1859.<sup>76</sup>

Now, great things are often accomplished by small means. So it has been with the "marathons" organized to help worthy causes. This is the way money was raised for the Louis Riel Institute the year before, this year novices and postulants took part in the "march of millions" to help education in Santa Lucia Island in the Caribbean Sea.<sup>77</sup>

The City of St. Boniface wished to renew its links with the past by having another manifestation which had been projected the year before. On July 16, 1968 there was a memorial of the 150 years since the coming of the first missionaries, Provencher and Dumoulin. This time, the Archbishops of St. Boniface and of Winnipeg took part in the evocation of the past. The trip from Point Douglas to St. Boniface was reenacted by canoe. Lt. Gov. Richard Bowles and a representative of the Mayor of the capital repeated the gesture of welcome made by Governor McDonnell in 1818. The route was retraced up to the cathedral where the Mayor of St. Boniface, the Knights of Columbus and a large crowd attended. A commemorative plaque was placed at the Provencher monument which had been erected in 1953. Then Mass was said in the open air in front of the basilica, the one which had replaced the twin-turreted cathedral destroyed to ashes on December 14, 1860. Alas, an identical misfortune destroyed this basilica as, six days later, the cry went up: "The cathedral is on fire". The memory of Sister Valade immediately came to mind,

the sister who said she would gladly have sacrificed her own life to avoid the disaster of 1860.<sup>78</sup> The fire assumed such large proportions that it was thought best to evacuate the oldest part of Taché Hospital. There was no loss of fire but the attempts to salvage precious effects proved in vain. The chronicler wrote: "There remains only the stone walls of this monument which was a fortress of the Catholic faith and of our French origins in the Canadian West."

On the following August 12 there was another tragedy: the death of Sister Marie Richard in a highway accident. She had done apostolic work at the Roseau Indian Reserve. A worthy teacher thus was lost at the very time when many appeals were being made for the services of the Grey Nuns in education.<sup>79</sup>

The personnel of the province of St. Boniface was increased by fifteen sisters during the summer when the general council decided to entrust to this province the mission of Chesterfield Inlet, a place where daily heroism was still required. When the supply ship was delayed, they were reduced to killing chickens or eating seal. The herds of caribou which could be seen at certain seasons constituted one of the principal entertainments. Fortunately there were also the northern lights to behold. As for communication with the outside world which had depended on planes and boats, there was now installed a satellite which made possible to speak by telephone all over the world!

During the summer, the superior general, Sister Georgette Leduc went to visit the mission with Sisters Maurice, E. Chabot and R. Veilleux. They could see that St. Theresa Hospital was gradually being transformed into a home for aged Eskimos. On December 2, 1959 the first couple had been admitted. They have been living happily there since. These distant places did not escape the changes that occurred in larger centres. In 1969 the residence for pupils, Turquetil Hall, was closed and became a

centre for the education of adults.<sup>80</sup>

Sister Thérèse Isabelle, a nurse practitioner employed by the government, assisted by Sisters A. Latreille and Eloïse Parent, would visit the vast territory, the posts at Pelly Bay, Igloodik, Rankin Inlet, Baker Lake, Repulse Bay and Eskimo Point. A smattering of the Eskimo language was acquired. Soon visits to these points would be organized to such an extent that a Grey Nun, Sister Lise Turcotte, was able to form catechists who could "win over their brothers to Christ". Trips were usually made by airplane but to reach the airfield it was sometimes necessary to travel by snowmobile. It was in such a vehicle that Sister Isabelle reached the airport of Rankin Inlet in time to go to the consecration of Bishop O. Robidoux, the successor of Bishop Marc Lacroix.<sup>81</sup>

Catechism. This was an excellent means of dealing with the secularization of the schools. The Archbishop of St. Boniface did not delay in confiding the organization to Father O. Laroche. So, on November 12, 1968 the Diocesan Pastoral Centre was established in the major seminary building with an office given to Sister Thérèse Legal who was put in charge of the catechetical apostolate. The initiative was crowned with success and in the following year the services of Sister Legal were called on by the diocese of Grouard and also of St. Paul, Alberta where on March 25, Mr. E. Gagnon had been elevated to the episcopate.

Courses in religion were begun for adults and on some evenings there were as many as 100 students invited to be involved in this essential work. Archbishop Hacaault would sometimes lend a hand as a "visiting" professor.<sup>82</sup>

Pastoral work, concentrated on explaining the Gospel, led during 1969 to the creation of two posts of which one was Pelly Bay where two Grey Nuns contributed to adult education, visits of families and teaching home economics.<sup>83</sup>

On September 1, Sisters J. Ell, L. Beaudry and R. Lavallée went to the Indian reservation at Roseau where, during the previous year, Sister Marie Richard had earned the respect and affection of her pupils. It was on the road to this post that she had lost her life. Her companion, Sister Beaudry, although seriously injured, was fortunately spared from death.

In this place situated six miles from the American frontier, efforts were made to improve the deplorable situation of the Amerindians. During their apostolic works, the sisters came across the monument that had been raised to commemorate Christophe Dufrost de la Jemmerais, the brother of Mother d'Youville. It was in front of the church of Letellier, a neighbouring village. They thought "Mother d'Youville would be happy to see us there," as one sister remarked. They felt it a privilege to be able to transmit the message of love received from the foundress by her spiritual daughters.<sup>84</sup> Since governmental decisions caused the closing of Assiniboia School, the sisters were free to push further north and on August 20, 1970 Sister Thérèse Arcand and Sister Eugénie Bilodeau left St. Boniface for Igloolik, an island situated on the east side of the Melville Peninsula across from Baffin Island. There lived 559 Eskimos of whom 286 were Catholic. They hunted whales, walrus and caribou. In this isolated place, there had been since 1961 a group of eighteen Eskimos who were called "Tuksiartit", or women who prayed. They renew their commitment each year on December 8. The sisters said they were impressed to see there "religious of the heart, if not of the habit" praying before the Lord three times a day.

At Igloolik there was darkness from November to February with superb northern lights, more beautiful than anywhere else. Sister Arcand wrote, "The thermometer registers temperatures of 56 degrees below zero. Without heavy oil, we would have to go outside to get warm!"

In this isolated northern land good was done

without noise. The post had to be abandoned to the great regret of both Catholic and Protestant people. This was in June 1973 and the departure was motivated by age and health. But the seed had been sown in good earth and would bear fruit in the future. Of that there was no doubt, since this faith which God prefers, in hope, was the inspiration of everyone.

- 1 The dedication of the new building was held on  
May 9th. Chronicles, St. Boniface, p. 338.
- 2 Miss Moeller is a graduate from the Grey Nuns  
School of Nursing, Nashua, U.S.A.
- 3 Circ. mens., 1904-06, pp. 880-882.
- 4 The same proposition had been made in 1871 by  
Bishop Taché to Adolphe Forget, seminarist, who  
was ordained on Jan. 13, 1875.
- 5 Chronicles, St. Bon., 1953-56, pp. 353-54.
- 6 Annals, 1956, p. 258, Sr. Mayrand to the mother  
house.
- 7 The particulars concerning this work are ex-  
tracted from the chronicles, from correspon-  
dence with the mother house and from "The  
History of the St. Amant Ward" by W. Nicolson.
- 8 Chronicles, St. Bon., 1953-56, p. 121.
- 9 Mr. Speeman also went to Montreal where he  
visited the general assistant, Mother Mann,  
whom he had counselled in 1914 to enter the  
Grey Nuns' Novitiate.
- 10 Presently director of the sisters in formation  
preparing to renew their annual vows at the  
Mother House.
- 11 Annals, 1956, pp. 335-337.
- 12 Ibid., p. 364.
- 13 Chronicles, St. Bon., 1953-56, p. 365.
- 14 In 1954, ten Inuit patients from various posts  
in the North were admitted to the St. Boniface  
Sanatorium. Later the institutions at Clear  
Water Lake and in Brandon were able to cope  
with existing demands.



- 15 Specialists declared that the old convent met  
the required standards for protection against  
fire. Chronicles, St. Bon., pp. 408-409.
- 16 Annals, 1957, pp. 81-82.
- 17 Since Feb. 23, 1954, Mgr Primeau was retired at  
Hospice Taché where, as he had wished, he  
remained until his death.
- 18 Chronicles, 1957-60, p. 45.
- 19 Sr. Mann to the Mother House, June 25, 1957.
- 20 Report of the celebrations, by Sr. J. Laporte.
- 21 Annals, 1957, p. 335.
- 22 Chronicles, St. Bon., 1957-60, p. 179.
- 23 Chronicles, St. Bon., June 28, 1957, p. 68.
- 24 Sr. Mayrand to Sr. Gravel, Aug. 5, 1957.
- 25 Chronicles, St. Bon., 1957-60, pp. 113, 138,  
139.
- 26 Incorporation dated Feb. 26, 1908.
- 27 Sr. Jarbeau had been working in St. Bon. since  
1942.
- 28 On Sunday, June 15, two masses were celebrated  
at the cathedral, one at 10:30 by Father E.  
Raimbault who had just been ordained, and the  
other at 11:45 by Bishop Paul Dumouchel, a  
native of St. Boniface.
- 29 Annals, 1958, pp. 239-241.
- 30 The Sisters of J. and M., Sillery, Quebec, had  
worked in the parish from 1939 to 1957.
- 31 Annals, 1958, pp. 319-320. The project was not

without difficulties. On Aug. 30, the school inspector wanted to send the Grade IX and X students to the regional public school.

32

Chronicles, St. Bon., 1957-60, p. 183.

33

Sr. Ritchot died May 21, 1949.

34

Chronicles, St. Bon., 1957-60, pp. 383-384. In March 1927, a generous amount had been offered to the Mother House "for a statue representing Mother d'Youville". This statue was inaugurated in 1959.

35

Annals, 1959, p. 211. For several years, this project had been on the drawing board as the 2nd floor of the hospital was filled to capacity with senior patients.

36

Annals, 1959, p. 79. Mgr Piché attended the beatification of Mother d'Youville May 3, 1959.

37

The event brings to mind the periodic flooding at Pointe-à-Callières where the first Grey Nuns' General Hospital stands. In one case, the reluctant cattle had to be forced up the stairs into the choir loft.

38

Chronicles, 1957-60, p. 296.

39

"The History of St. Amant Ward", p. 14.

40

Chronicles, 1957-60, p. 306.

41

Ibid., p. 329. The wood salvaged from the additions was used to build a parish hall, a wing added to the seminary and a wing at the camp, Albert Beach.

42

Ibid., p. 328.

43

Annals, 1959, pp. 427-428.

44

Chronicles, 1957-60, p. 348.

- 45 Year 1957 was the year of the launching of the first sputnik.
- 46 CBWFT, the French language T.V. station inaugurated in Winnipeg on April 24, 1960.
- 47 Chronicles, St. Bon., 1957-60, pp. 412-413.
- 48 Chronicles, St. Bon., p. 454. Unless stated otherwise, the details that follow are taken from the Chronicles.
- 49 Archbishop Flahiff replaced Archbishop P. Pocock who was named coadjutor of Cardinal McGuigan in Toronto.
- 50 Mother d'Youville's remains exhumed in 1849 had been resting in a room until 1884 when they were placed in the crypt beneath the main floor of the church.
- 51 Sr. Fortier, sup. at the Regina G.N. Hospital since 1959, showed tact and sensitivity when a painful accident occurred in the month of March. Five sibilings died because of an error in the preparation of the formulas. After an inquest had been conducted by six judges, the Health Minister, Mr. J. W. Erb, declared that the accident was indeed deplorable, but that the authorities of the hospital could not be held responsible.
- 52 Annals, 1961, pp. 146-147.
- 53 Mr. E. Gagnon, Sulpician, would be promoted to the cardinalate in 1985.
- 54 To Kabba, Nigeria, to Tunis, Tunisia; and to Lebanon.
- 55 Other Grey Nuns continued the work begun by the pioneers: Srs. M. Lafreniere, C. Rioux, L. Arsenault until 1971 when the sisters working in Sao Paulo joined the group from Nicolet who

maintained four missions in the northern state of Maranhao, Brazil. Srs. R. Bissonnette, Lucille Sabourin and I. Ferreira from St. Boniface also went to collaborate with the Nicolet missionaries.

56 Sr. A. Poirier to the Mother House. *Annals*, 1962, pp. 416-418.

57 *Annals*, 1963, p. 217.

58 Philipon, M.-M., o.p., *La Vie religieuse selon Vatican II*, p. 126.

59 *Annals*, 1963, pp. 494-495.

60 One remembers that in 1959, some of the planks salvaged from the provincial house had served to build part of the Camp Albert complex.

61 Bishops J. H. Prud'homme, R. Brodeur, L. Tétrault and A. Decosse were also born in Manitoba. Ten years later, they were twelve, one of whom was Bishop Donze, bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes, France.

62 *Annals*, 1964, pp. 588-589.

63 Holy Cross Church in Winnipeg, the villages of Morden, Haywood, Birtle; the parishes of East Selkirk, Cook's Creek, Sts-Martyrs-canadiens, also benefitted from the voluntary work of the sisters.

64 Letter dated June 7, 1965. The sisters help in the pastoral service at the Villa and the Hospital. A few continue teaching at the school.

65 In 1972, a new wing was added to the Villa Youville. Sr. R. Lagassé would replace Sr. C. Pelletier at the Hospital while Srs. A. Sicotte and B. Turenne would become part of the nursing staff at the Villa.

- 66 The Oblate Fathers and Brothers joined their colleagues at their provincial house in Winnipeg.
- 67 Mr. E. Gagnon, Sulpician, left Manizalès in 1964 and became provincial sup. in Montreal. Mr. R. Robidoux was named sup. at the major seminary, Montreal in 1973.
- 68 A new school opened its doors in 1961. Sr. A. Gauthier was in charge of one of the classrooms and Sr. E. Vachon taught catechism. The convent was sold in 1968.
- 69 Sr. Ione Hilger is an American sister.
- 70 In 1972, this apostolate was discontinued on account of lack of personnel.
- 71 Sr. I. Desbiens replaced Sr. M. Michaud in the direction of the school on Nov. 13, 1970. It was moved to the 4th floor of the St. Boniface Hospital School of Nursing.
- 72 The convent was given to the city without rent on a long-term lease which stipulated that if the museum were to cease to exist, the property would return to the Grey Nuns.
- 73 The 1967 general chapter approved a beige tailor suit for the sisters' habit, the black veil becoming optional. The former uniform could also continue to be worn by the sisters who so desired.
- 74 A native of Sask., Sr. Maurice possessed a vast experience in the administration of hospitals. Besides, she had replaced Sr. Garneau as director of novices in 1963. The counsellors elected to assist Sr. Maurice were Sisters M.-R. Tougas, D. Clermont, E. Chabot, R. Veilleux and C. Champagne.
- 75 Sr. Lagrave died on Aug. 4, 1859. In 1967, the

community acquired a parcel of land on Archibald Street for use as a cemetery.

76 193 names were engraved on the monument by Mr. Pierre Brunet of St. Boniface.

77 The Nov. 4, 1967 walkathon covered twelve miles; that of May 11, 1968, thirty-five miles.

78 On Dec. 14, 1960, Father Picton had recalled this event in a conference. He was followed by Father Deniset-Bernier who summarized the history of the St. Boniface basilica rebuilt by Archbishop Langevin in 1908.

79 During the summer months, Sisters Richard and Herauf had taken special courses in Chicago. In September, Sister Herauf gave religion courses in General Wolfe Public School, Winnipeg, and became a volunteer worker at the Dom Bosco Centre for Indians in Manitoba.

80 Choque, C., Hôp. Ste-Therese de Chesterfield, p. 17.

81 Ibid., p. 20, May 21, 1970.

82 Sister S. Gagnon would join Sister Legal in this pastoral ministry. On Nov. 28, 1976, Archbishop Hacault, in the ceremony to establish a diocesan pastoral council, described the needs of the Church and invited the participants to share their talents with and offer their collaboration to the members of the council.

83 Sisters Bielka and Servant arrived in Pelly Bay on Aug. 25. In conformity with the spirit of the Vatican Council, they visited the Anglican as well as the Catholic families.

84 Sisters L. Doiron and Yvonne Bouchard exercised this apostolate.



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN - 1971-1984

How changed were the banks of the Red River since the pioneers came more than 125 years ago. The skyline of both Winnipeg and St. Boniface were impressive with St. Boniface taking a legitimate pride in its tree-surrounded fine buildings.

Among these buildings there was one which was impressive not only by its structure but by its mission of which all were justifiably proud: St. Boniface Hospital which celebrated its centenary. It had been begun on August 5, 1871 on the second floor of a house for personnel, situated near the old monastery and becoming thus an entity apart. Four beds had been set aside for patients. Since then the hospital had not ceased to grow in dimensions and in prestige, thanks to the competence of the doctors on its staff and the quality of care given, as well as to the teaching which was given special place with a multiplicity of specialized services. One principle remained at the core, however, that of offering to the sick the best quality of care possible.

This principle of excellence inspired not only the words on the Red River but everywhere right up to the upcountry reaching even to the Arctic Ocean.

When the foundresses left Montreal on April 24, 1844, a journalist of La Minerve told his readers he had been "struck with admiration to see these four Sisters of Charity leaving their native land to go spread the knowledge of the Gospel and the benefits of civilization which are its accompaniment."<sup>1</sup> They had not then any fixed program; they were journeying to the unknown. But they had in their hearts an immense ambition: "to recall to all the members of the great human family the tenderness of God toward each and every one of them, and to announce the Good News to all the disadvantaged."<sup>2</sup> Action was dictated by needs to which they tried to respond: teaching the rising generations, care of the sick, assistance to the poor, the protection of orphans, of elderly people. It was sufficient to keep one's eyes open to

discover the sufferings especially those which were unattractive. It may be said even that, before the Province of Manitoba was formed, the Sisters assumed almost all the functions of government. This fact gave rise to a title given to them by Miss E. Dubuc, that of "foundresses of the West." She praised the Sisters' social action and their sense of adaptation, even attributing to them the merit of having inaugurated the arts.<sup>3</sup>

The time had evolved, however, so that it was becoming impossible to have boarding schools with professional staff consisting only of Sisters and a similar transformation was occurring in health care where it was no longer possible for all the administrative positions to be assumed by the sisters. Already, for more than ten years, as far as hospitals were concerned, there was planning for the day when, disengaged from administrative responsibilities, the Grey Nun could devote herself entirely to pastoral work with the sick.<sup>4</sup>

This time arrived at St. Boniface Hospital when at the end of the decade of the sixties Mr. Luigi A. Quaglia was named executive director.<sup>5</sup> This initiative was soon followed in many other places. The Grey Nuns retained ownership and both legal and moral responsibility for the Hospital and it was they who named the members of the Board of Directors.

In choosing lay people for administration positions, there was no distinction as to religious belief or race or age, but all collaborators undertook to respect the medical-moral code and the general policies by which the Grey Nuns manifested the charism of their foundress, that of universal charity. To this end, a committee of Sisters and competent lay persons would establish the mission, aims and objectives of the Hospital in the light of Christian philosophy and the teachings of history.<sup>6</sup>

Because of the importance of always announcing Jesus Christ and of recalling to man "that life is a journey which does not end with the traveller's life"

(Stevenson), at the hospital there was begun a service of pastoral care called by that name. It was not in itself a new service. When Bishop Provencher had sent Sister Lagrave to St. Norbert, in 1845, did he not designate her as his "little vicar"? Had not the Sister, as nurse and as teacher, always really been engaged in caring for the spiritual health of patients and pupils?

At the hospital since 1951 morning prayer had been communicated over the PA system in the two official languages. Ukrainian and Polish had been used two days a week. A Protestant minister would say he was very moved to see Sisters transporting patients to the Holy Thursday celebration.<sup>7</sup>

In 1971, Father Gilbert Gariepy took charge and proceeded to the systematic organization of pastoral work when the workers were enrolled in courses of Sacred Scripture, psychology and gerontology.<sup>8</sup> The hospital organization served as a model for other institutions directed by the Grey Nuns.

With reference to actual teaching, the sisters were engaged in schools where there was entrusted to them, besides their regular work, responsibility for catechizing both pupils and professors.<sup>9</sup>

In the Indian missions situated near their convents, the catechists were already at work. By their social service, their visits to the sick and the poor, the teaching of domestic arts, the Grey Nuns spread the knowledge of God and were also involved in forming catechists destined to make up for the lack of apostolic workers. Moreover, the Grey Nuns followed their consistent tradition of having ambulatory catechism during the summer to prepare on the reservations both children and adults for the reception of the sacraments.

Community life was itself adapted to new conditions by the creation of "fraternities" limited to five or six sisters who, leading a community life, took on domestic chores along with their professional

obligations.

Other more numerous fraternities resulted from giving up quarters formerly occupied in different institutions. Thus, the sisters working at Taché Hospital occupied the former novitiate and the sisters of St. Boniface Hospital moved to the interns' residence. The interns now shared the building named after Dr. S. McEwen under whom internship had begun in 1928 and who, since then, had filled many important positions.<sup>10</sup>

Spiritual animation in the parishes, the organization of retreats, liturgy workshops, sacred music workshops, Biblical courses all demanded the cooperation of the Grey Nuns who even took on quite unexpected services as when three nursing homes entrusted the organization of their food services to the Grey Nuns. These were Oakview, Hillcrest and Gendreau Homes.<sup>11</sup> Casa Bonita, a residence for retired oblate missionaries, benefitted from the experience of a Grey Nun in organizing its internal services. Sister A. Gosselin was employed there in the years 1977-78.

Seeing so many activities it is easy to conclude that the apostolate of the word did not end the traditional charitable works of the Grey Nuns. Had they not assimilated the teaching of the Mother of Universal Charity by authentically making themselves the servants of the poor? Just as the Foundress had been able to discern the needs of her time, so her imitators of the 20th century had to discern suffering and find the means if not to wipe it out at least to assuage it. Nor were they indifferent to the decline of traditional values in the country at large: the lack of respect for life resulting in abortions and euthanasia; the erosion of matrimonial bonds which affected so many children and young people, the abandoning of old persons so many of whom were left in hopelessness.

There can never be enough thanks expressed to Bishop Bourget for having persuaded the pioneers to

carry on a regular journal in every foundation. It is a custom which is still being carried on. Thanks to this journal it is possible to have a bird's-eye view of all the progress of works new and old permitting us to see that the "grey ship" was not on a wrong course. There are numerous testimonials to prove that, as appears in the following pages.

Sister A. Héroux, one of the valiant foundresses of the mission of Chesterfield received a special honour from the Commissioner of the Territories, Mr. S.M. Hodgson "for her 35 years of service among the Eskimo."<sup>12</sup>

During the centenary of the Hospital, ecclesiastical and civil authorities lavished praise on the Grey Nuns. The festivities began on January 22 and continued on. Friends, benefactors, advisers, women's auxiliaries, collaborators, employees all participated in planning the program which had three high points. On September 11 there took place the sod-turning for the new wing for long-term care. On this occasion, four Grey Nuns and eight voyageurs in costume of the time disembarked from a boat near the site and an oarsman presented to Hon. E. Schreyer an oar which the Manitoba prime minister used to accomplish the symbolic sod-turning gesture. During the Autumn there was created the Research Foundation thanks to the support of Senator G. Molgat and many friends including Mr. Pangman, Mr. Cohen and Mr. MacLean. Through his Foundation there would be established a centre "by means of which our researchers will be able to pursue their eminently humanitarian work without having to exile themselves."

At the end of December, after the 200th anniversary of the death of Mother d'Youville, the last meeting of the program was held. Each participant was able to sample the dessert: a piece of the 228-pound cake representing the little four-bed hospital of 1871.

Festivities had ended but activity continued along Taché Avenue. In June 1971 the work of rebuild-

ding the burned cathedral was begun, using the walls that remained standing from the fire. The cathedral was opened to the public July 17, 1972. The disappearance of the bells "which had been believed to be immortal" was a loss which time did not attenuate. Instead of a new bell, it was decided to install a carillon to note the joys and sorrows of the parish. Three memorable bells were offered for this purpose, one by St. Boniface College, one by the Oblate Fathers and the third by the Grey Nuns. The Sisters presented the bell which had been used successively at the boarding house, the academy, the orphanage, the provincial house, the hospice and finally at Taché Hospital, an establishment which had to disappear since it was not fire-safe.<sup>13</sup> The new centre had no bell-tower. Finished March 17, 1973 it was occupied by the residents the same day while the wreckers began to tear down the old walls "witnesses of so many sacrifices."<sup>14</sup>

On the following May 30 the official opening of Taché Nursing Centre took place. Archbishop Baudoux blessed the cornerstone in which there had been deposited the documents which had been placed in the one of 1910. Sister Maurice was handed the scissors to cut the ribbon together with a certificate of gratitude to the Grey Nuns. Sister G. Jarbeau, assistant general, Honourable L. Desjardins, the Minister of Cultural Affairs, and Mr. B. Wolfe, chairman of Taché Nursing Centre Board of Directors, were presented with little silver trowels on which their names had been engraved. The key was then given to Sister Yvonne Prevost to open the door to the house for which she had been primary responsible.<sup>15</sup>

As for St. Boniface Sanatorium, it was not rebuilt but was converted to its new specialty, the care of handicapped children.<sup>16</sup> While the official opening was taking place May 22, 1974 the Red River started to act up once again and created fears of a repetition of the 1950 flood. The new Taché Nursing Centre hastened to offer hospitality to 42 persons from St. Adolphe where the personal care home was



threatened by flooding.

The danger was far from over when Archbishop Baudoux presided at the opening ceremonies with Archbishop Barry Valentine, the Anglican prelate, acting as co-president. The changes in the building were quite remarkable; it was to be known from now on as St. Amant Centre in memory of the great lady who had started this work in 1939.<sup>17</sup> The proceedings went on even as the water threatened the electric generator, creating an emergency situation. Sister Baumann, who received from Mr. J. Guay, M.P. a certificate of honour and whose fine work was recognized everywhere, had no time to think of all the glory bestowed on her; her mind was on the possibility of having to evacuate the place.

There was no tragedy involved the following October 7 when the new wing of St. Boniface Hospital was opened.<sup>18</sup> Mr. J. F. O'Sullivan congratulated the Grey Nuns for their ability to adapt to a world with such rapidly changing circumstances. He pointed out that ecumenism had been practised at the Hospital well before the Second Vatican Council.<sup>19</sup> The speeches were followed by a tour of the wards where the new services of the vast hospital would be inaugurated. Warm congratulations were also given to Sister M. B. Dorais as the University of Winnipeg gave her an honorary doctorate "in recognition of your work in the field of public health in the province and in all of Canada."<sup>20</sup> An honour well deserved as noted by representatives of the Research Foundation, the City of St. Boniface and the Grey Nuns. Sister B. Poirier, who replaced Sister C. Maurice as provincial, congratulated the recipient and assured her that no effort would be spared to uphold the great reputation of the institution.<sup>21</sup>

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The decline in vocations affected religious congregations in these years just as their services were more and more needed. The Grey Nuns, like so many others, had to sacrifice with regret activities

sometimes carried on for long years.

In 1972 the Regina Hospital became government property and three years later La Vérendrye Hospital was ceded to the municipality of Fort Frances.

At the Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Hospital at Berens River, the government set up a nursing station in 1974. In June of the same year, Ste. Marguerite School in Fort Frances closed its doors for lack of sufficient pupils. As for the school at Lebret, responsibility was taken over by the Indian School Commission there.<sup>22</sup>

Regina was not abandoned altogether since there was a fraternity grouping a few sisters who provided pastoral service at three hospitals, including the former Grey Nuns hospital which was now called Pasqua in honour of a great Cree chief.

As for those living in Fort Frances they carried on the same apostolate at La Vérendrye Hospital, visiting the families not only of Couchiching reserve but also those of neighbouring villages. One of the workers became the coordinator of catechises in three schools in the neighbourhood.<sup>23</sup>

These changes in the methods of engaging in the apostolate persuaded Mr. O'Sullivan to say to the sisters: "You have abandoned in order to save; you have created new initiatives with prudence."<sup>24</sup>

The creation of small fraternities allowed the Grey Nuns to carry on their good work even though it was necessary to take into account that the numbers were not increasing in proportion to the needs. In default of large institutions for which they could not take responsibility, they multiplied apostolic insertions as diversified as the places where these fraternities were established.<sup>25</sup>

In 1971 there was opened at Ste. Bernadette residence in Windsor Park a welcome centre for young English-speaking girls interested in the religious

life. Catechism was taught in two schools while sisters participated in parish committees, looked after the sacristy or became involved in parish activities. When a personal care home was built on Elizabeth Road, the sisters assumed at least part of the pastoral service.

Three sisters lived at the Aulneau residence created in 1972. Two of them worked for the Children's Aid Society of Winnipeg and the third, at the Provincial House.

In 1973 it was in a poorer part of Winnipeg on Spence Street that there was established a fraternity where sisters visited the sick of the General Hospital and also the prisoners. Two years later, the service called Pregnancy Distress asked the help of the Grey Nuns and it was decided to let them have the house for \$1.00 per year, which made Mrs. Louise Adams have the inspiration to call this haven of hope, Youville House.

The pastoral service at St. Boniface Hospital met the hopes of everyone. In 1972 a non-Catholic minister became part of the team.<sup>26</sup> Now in the fall of 1974 the Hospital opened a service with the name, "Palliative Care" with the special aim of looking after terminally-ill patients and giving moral support to their families. Dr. Paul Henteleff, the one responsible for the unit, would say that, by means of this service, it was possible to give care "of the whole person". The work done by his group helped the "patient to die with dignity, reconciled to the idea of a definite departure from this world."

As to the mission of Chesterfield and its satellites, Pelly Bay, Baker Lake, Eskimo Point, Gjoa Haven and Spence Bay, life was far from restful. Sister D. Lefebvre, the superior general, favoured the presence of the sisters in these posts as well as in Crane River, Ebb and Flow and Toutes-Aides. At Chesterfield itself, there was question whether the hospital could survive since there was talk of replacing it with a clinic. What would then become

of the handicapped? Bishop Robidoux defended their cause so that the planned clinic could be established but not at the expense of the wards of the hospital.

In these regions, the sisters in charge of catecheses would go from one place to the other by airplane but sometimes by snowmobile or even by dog-team. By means of courses they prepared catechists commissioned in their turn to go to teach at other places. In 1976 two Sisters lived at Rankin Inlet, a big village with 1250 inhabitants of whom 900 were Inuit. The chief obstacles to a Christian way of life were alcohol and its effects.<sup>27</sup>

At Ste. Rose du Lac, a personal care home for aged persons was built by the Knights of Columbus who named it after Dr. Gendreau. It opened March 11, 1975 thus affording a new field of action for the Grey Nuns who visited the residents there as well as at the hospital. The Sisters started a pastoral care department and also adopted some poor families who lived on a reservation a short distance away.

The Sisters of the Provincial House who were forced to retire on account of age or ill health did not resign themselves to idleness. At the beginning of 1975 a workshop was opened called Marguerite workshop. This allowed the retired Sisters to help the poor in an anonymous fashion, so to speak. Since the social service at the Cathedral had been closed due to fire restrictions, there was an attempt to provide a kind of substitute. Taché Nursing Centre from June, 1974 on, provided meals-on-wheels for elderly people in the neighbourhood.<sup>28</sup>

Then, at the end of 1975 the Sisters accepted an offer from the Manitoba government to take charge of a personal care home on Archibald Street where seventy residents were being cared for. The residence, formerly the provincial house of the Daughters of the Cross, had opened its doors on July 1, 1951. Some Grey Nuns had been invited to be present at the inauguration.<sup>29</sup> Becoming vacant in 1975, the St. Norbert Lodge company had bought it but a planned

transformation had not been achieved. The Grey Nuns took care in the preparations to make the house attractive for elderly persons, "hoping that they would find there the same providence as when Mother d'Youville had opened her doors in 1737".

Foyer St-Boniface, for francophones, was officially established on March 1 when twenty-five residents came to it from Foyer Ste-Therese at Otterburne. There was an official opening on the following September 10. Sister B. Poirier called to mind the great woman of the poor who had shown the way, and Honourable Desjardins, Minister of Health, congratulated the Grey Nuns on having accepted the direction of this new work.<sup>30</sup>

As for St. Boniface Hospital, it remained faithful to its tradition, adapting ceaselessly to the needs of the hour. In June, 1976 it opened a Centre for mental health in the former School for Practical Nurses.

Two months later, on August 26 the director of the pro-life movement, the "Front commun pour le respect de la Vie", Alliance for Life and Coalition for Life, all met together at the invitation of Sister Poirier. A new work was set up having as its objective the promotion of life and the protection of the unborn child "the most powerless citizen in society". The initiative was called Service Valade Vitae and it proceeded to a mass bilingual advertising campaign to awaken consciences from coast to coast. Several lay persons were involved in the movement under the direction of Sister Thérèse Vachon giving support to the various sectors of the pro-life movement with days of prayer, rallies, petitions with the signatures of more than a million people, parades, marathons, ecumenical meetings, all for the purpose of awakening respect for life in all its phases. A Grey Nun, Sister Alice Dupuis, provided home care to Mrs. Landolt to enable her to give full time to her work as president of Alliance for Life.<sup>31</sup> Valade Vitae ceased its activities in 1981 but it gave birth to lasting enthusiasm in all parts of

Canada and helped the various movements involved in this important work.<sup>32</sup>

Foyer St-Boniface, which had been accepted at the suggestion of the government, did so well that the same authorities encouraged the building of a 120-bed annex at Taché Nursing Centre "in order to meet the needs of the area". Plans proceeded smoothly as it was a question of adding on to an already successful home.<sup>33</sup>

In 1977 two other projects were inaugurated after years of preparation.<sup>34</sup> The first was a work for the rehabilitation of "young mentally ill patients". For this purpose, the convent of the Sisters of the Holy Saviour was acquired at 210 Kenny Street and adapted to its new functions. It was a kind of transitional residence for those moving from psychiatric institutions to normal living. It was named Sara Riel and had for its executive director, Sister Jean Ell, whose experience was precious.<sup>35</sup> In this house, the post-mentally ill who did not know where to go on leaving hospital would be welcomed. The idea was to offer them a residence with adequate care and a program to prepare for living on their own after convalescence. A few months at the house would usually suffice to allow the patient to recover his or her emotional and mental balance.<sup>36</sup>

The growing numbers of persons over the age of 65 and the gaps in quantity and quality of services led planners in the ministry of Health to establish regionalized service units. The Grey Nuns offered to establish such a service on a voluntary basis under the name "Youville Foundation" in memory of the first apostolate of the Foundress. The objective was to keep elderly people living independently for as long as possible. To this end, the personnel of the Foundation assessed the needs of each and arranged for the needs to be filled by already existing agencies, all in St. Boniface and St. Vital. Faithful to their philosophy, the Grey Nuns worked with other devoted and competent volunteers and the foundation progressed with such speed that soon there were more



than 700 clients. The offices were moved to Kenny Street which already housed Sara Riel and Valade Vitae. The complex formed by these three works was henceforth called "Centre Marie-Berthe Dorais".<sup>37</sup>

In 1978 there was realized a project in the planning stages for almost seven years. This was the Pastoral Education Institute. Archbishop Hacault of St. Boniface strongly supported this initiative which assured to priests, sisters and lay persons a pastoral formation to enable them to work in the clinical field at St. Boniface Hospital. The program of teaching, formulated under the auspices of the Canadian Association of Pastoral Workers was affiliated with the University of Manitoba, thanks to the collaboration of St. Boniface College and its rector, Mr. R. Cloutier.

The commission in charge of the project included Mr. E. Wehrle, chairman, Mr. Justice A. Monnin, vice-chairman, Father E. Baril, representing the Archbishop Dr. P. Doyle, and Sisters G. Rocan and M. Thille.

Father G. Gariepy on his return from Houston, Texas after two years of specialized studies in this field, now possessed qualifications recognized by the Catholic Chaplains' Association and the Canadian Association of Pastoral Education. He assumed the general direction of the clinical courses. Sister Marie Bonin added to her functions as coordinator of pastoral services, that of being director of the centre which offered a first session of studies May 29, 1978. The session covered eleven weeks. Catholic teaching was given alternately in French and English; it was open to candidates of all denominations. There was also an intensive session for six students. An Anglican group asked for a program which was given. At the end of it there was a recitation of the breviary in common. Sister T. Legal, who had replaced Sister Bonin in 1979 as executive director, was deeply moved by this thoughtful experience in ecumenism. Before Sister Legal left the Diocesan catechetical office to take up her

new assignment, Sister Louisa Sabourin assumed responsibility for the catechetical correspondence courses which were being reorganized and which met with outstanding success.<sup>38</sup>

A Grey Nun, Sister Jacqueline St-Yves, was placed in charge of diocesan Vocation work in July 1978. So it can be seen that the Grey Nuns were deeply involved in the propagation of the Word bringing hope to the world which stands in so much need.

The luminous cross shining above the Hospital was no vain symbol. It expressed to society the love of God for all and specifically for those who suffer. It also showed the determination of the Grey Nuns to shine forth the charism of the Mother of universal charity.

While giving out certificates to four students in pastoral work, on August 26, 1979, Dr. P. Doyle, chairman of the Board of Directors, reflected the thought of many when he said: "The dream of Sister Dorais has become a reality".

It would not, however, be very convincing to have only didactic teaching. Providence sees to it that works seal teaching with authenticity. This Providence "who disposes admirably of everything," as the daily prayer of the Grey Nuns says, once again invited their collaboration.

In May 1979, Sister Poirier announced during an assembly, that there should be discussion about opening a welcome centre for those in need of clothing and food.<sup>39</sup> Now on August 6, His Holiness John Paul II launched a moving appeal on behalf of the boat people, the Indochinese, coming to seek refuge on our shores as had the Poles and the Hungarians ten years ago and more recently as had the Chileans in 1976.<sup>40</sup> Archbishop Hacault strongly supported this opportunity to offer to each person to perform acts of human solidarity. So the mission of Sister Pepin became transformed into a liaison between the Grey

Nuns and the various offices involved in sponsoring immigrant families.

As to the name to be given to this new venture, there was no hesitation. The memory of little Sister Laurent was still alive after 50 years. She had gone up and down the streets of St. Boniface after her arrival in 1850 in search of the needy. Laurent Centre, with the aid of volunteers, was to become a clothing depot for refugees and would distribute the results of the work of the elderly sisters in the Marguerite workshop. Different community groups would be in charge of lodging the newcomers. On November 21, 19 Vietnamese were welcomed at the airport by ten Grey Nuns who sympathized with the drawn faces and haggard eyes of the refugees. The Provincial House, Taché Nursing Centre (which had already received some on October 16), the convent of La Broquerie all took their part in providing for these new wards whose homes were ready to turn their tears into smiles.

Scarcely eight months later, the forty-five refugees sponsored by the Grey Nuns had found a new native land. The adults found employment thanks to a course in English received from their hostesses and the children went to school.

Laurent Centre, having responded to this exceptional need, now went back to its more humble work of giving out clothing to the needy following the example of Sister Laurent.

The seven years between 1977 and 1984 were very demanding, requiring a maximal effort of the Grey Nuns not only to keep up the viable works but to create new ones. Yet they did not neglect inter-provincial aid. Two sisters were sent to help the mission of Zaira, Africa, a mission belonging to the Alberta province. Another left for Brazil and three sisters were sent to lend a hand at the Mother House, at the Centre of documentation, to Marguerite House and to Centre Marguerite d'Youville.

Through all these turbulent years where everything seemed to be in question, it is good to know that the tradition remained among Grey Nuns of being in a state of readiness, "consecrating their time, their days, their industry always to work," in this way imitating Jesus who came into this world not to be served but to serve.<sup>41</sup> (Mk. 10,45).

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Many years now separated the present from the time of the epic voyage of the Grey Nuns, yet it seemed that admiration for them was ever increasing. This was stressed on the 130th anniversary, June 21, 1974. This time it was Archbishop Baudoux who welcomed the "immigrants" with two "voyageurs".

A commemorative plaque was unveiled bearing the names of the four pioneers. When the monument was finished October 2 the following inscription was added, concerning the old monastery: "This convent, which housed the first group of Grey Nuns to come to the West, was constructed between 1845 and 1851. As a mission house, it provided facilities for the Grey Nuns' various works of education and charity, which included caring for the aged and for orphans, treating the sick and instructing children. It was the first institution of this kind in the West. The convent was built of white oaken logs and subsequently repaired and enlarged to meet changing needs. It is an outstanding example of early Red River frame construction."

The guest of honour, Mr. Jean Chrétien, Minister of Indian Affairs, said he was "always moved at seeing what an interest Manitobans took in their past."<sup>42</sup>

This acknowledgment was very apt for in Manitoba people seized every occasion to relive "what had been". In St. Boniface Cathedral the following August 25, the 100th anniversary was celebrated of the arrival of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. Only thirty years after its establishment

the community had sent several sisters abroad. On the banks of the Red, the Grey Nuns were waiting for them, history tells us, and the newcomers spent two days in the old white house before going to replace their predecessors at Fort Garry (now Winnipeg). The Sisters of the Holy Names would also replace the Grey Nuns at St. Joseph's Academy and at St-Jean-Baptiste School.

Five years later there was a celebration of the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Oblate Sisters who, since 1904 had done much admirable work. Another monument was set up to honour the memory of Father Aulneau, of J.B. de La Vérendrye and their 19 companions massacred at Lake of the Woods in 1736. This monument owed its existence to the generosity of the MacDonald-Stewart Foundation of Montreal.<sup>43</sup> The industrial park in St. Boniface, south of Dugald Road and east of Lagimodière Boulevard, was given the name of Lajemmerais, brother of Mother d'Youville and cousin german of the son of La Verendrye.<sup>44</sup>

The St. Boniface Historical Society, which was behind all these historical recollections, itself celebrated its 75th anniversary on October 21, 1977. The Society gave to one of its members, Sister De Moissac a certificate of merit in recognition of her contributions to history. She was made a member for life and was recommended for investiture as a Dame Knight of the "Company of One Hundred Associates".<sup>45</sup> Sister De Moissac, at the request of Sister Maurice, had been since 1972 compiling much documentation relating to the history of the Grey Nuns of Montreal in the Canadian West.<sup>46</sup>

The chronicles of the order continue: "The oldest parish of the West, Saint Boniface, is faithful to its title as cradle of bishops. On July 18, 1972 Bishop Raymond Roy of Saint Paul, Alberta was consecrated as a bishop at the hands of Archbishop Baudoux with co-consecrators, Archbishop A. Jordan of Edmonton and Archbishop G. Cabana of Sherbrooke."<sup>47</sup> "Forty-four bishops presented a marvellous sight in the sanctuary of the new cathedral." The whole

spectacle was telecast. The carillon which Father Roy had planned when he was parish priest of the cathedral did not chime for him since it was not completed until October 7.<sup>48</sup>

In the same year, 1974, on February 19, another Manitoban, Father Noël Delaquis, from Notre Dame de Lourdes, was invested with the plenitude of priestly office by Archbishop Baudoux who had ordained him in 1958. Again the basilica was the scene of a splendid celebration and this time the carillon did ring out. The new bishop was replacing at Gravelbourg, Bishop Decosse who had resigned a few months previously.<sup>49</sup>

Now, on September 7 next, the Grey Nuns of the Provincial House learned of the resignation of Archbishop Baudoux "after twenty-two years in the service of the most illustrious and oldest diocese in the Canadian West." The Archbishop did not wait until the retirement age of 75 for, according to his motto, "He gave himself entirely to God." The worthy Archbishop thanked His Holiness Pope Paul VI for having accepted his resignation and for granting to him authority to carry the title "Monseigneur l'Ancien"<sup>50</sup> (Archbishop Emeritus). He expressed his deep appreciation for his successor, Archbishop Antoine Hacault; he thanked his priests for the marks of affection they had given him; he spoke of his admiration for the sisters and their dedication, and he expressed homage to the lay people whose cooperation had been much appreciated.

The worthy successor, Archbishop Hacault, received the pallium, symbol of the pastoral charge of a metropolitan church, from the hands of "Archbishop l'Ancien" on January 15, 1975.

Archbishop Hacault was well known and respected in St. Boniface where he had been working for twenty years. The Sanatorium, now St. Amant Centre, had had the honour of his ministry as chaplain in 1954, a ministry interrupted when he was called to be professor of theology at St. Boniface College up to 1964 when Rome had designated him auxiliary Bishop of the



archdiocese.

Archbishop Hacault celebrated his silver anniversary of priesthood on May 20, 1976. The jubilee was recognized with a solemn eucharistic concelebration. On this occasion Bishop R. Roy preached the homily on the theme of vocation as a call to witness and prophecy. Mr. A. Thorimbert, of St. Norbert parish, was the spokesman for the people of the dioceses in expressing to the Archbishop best wishes, congratulations and thanks for the pastoral service given with so much kindness and devotion. The spokesman did not allude to the difficulties which had arisen as to the French language. Rights were threatened in the Seine River Division and this drew forth the efforts of all people of good will. Forty-four petitions were presented to the School Board June 24, 1976. The Grey Nuns who had been teaching in this district for 120 years prepared a memorandum which ended with the assurance of their determination to remain in solidarity with their compatriots in their demands for justice.<sup>51</sup>

Since 1968 the Société Franco-Manitobaine replaced the Association d'Education, following the same kind of beneficial action. A victory was achieved when there was opened at St. Norbert the Noël Ritchot French School named after a man in the centre of early Manitoba history. Mr. G. Lagassé, the president of the St. Boniface Historical Society, recalled the memory of this great patriot and took the occasion to stress the support of the Grey Nuns in the field of education especially at St. Norbert since 1858. All the guests at this opening, including the Ministers of Health and of Education, expressed themselves in French to the great delight of everyone.

It was likewise in French that the Mission, Aims and Objectives of St. Boniface Hospital was published May 17. A great principle was set forth; Life is a gift of God and must be protected from conception until the tomb. There was to be no discrimination of race, colour, creed or social

status in the care of the sick. All must be treated according to their needs with love and kindness.<sup>52</sup>

The aims and objectives were equally the main theme when it was a question of formulating the text of the corporative constitutions of the different works. Sister Poirier proclaimed: "The common project consists of proclaiming the Good News that God is Father, that we are all brothers and that Christ is present in a privileged way in the poor. this is to be applied not only in our works but in the spirituality which inspires our activity. For us, it is a question of faith in the Father and in Providence. It is our participation in the charism given by God to Blessed Marguerite and transmitted across the generations to the Grey Nuns of today." Mr. Justice J. F. O'Sullivan, the always available counsellor and friend, spoke in a like spirit basing himself on the spiritual testament of Mother d'Youville.<sup>53</sup>

In this fast-moving 20th century, it was important to discover new formulas to meet the needs of the people of God. That is why Archbishop Hacault created the Diocesan Pastoral Council, consisting of twenty-seven members with eighteen lay persons, four priests and five sisters. Two Grey Nuns took part in this committee or coordination when it was established February 10, 1977.

It was in the following year that, with the strong support of the Archbishop, the Centre of Pastoral Education had its first session for the benefit of those, men or women, lay or religious, who were anxious to share with the sick and disadvantaged the message of Christian hope. To work today, to be prepared for tomorrow, these were the main preoccupations of the Grey Nuns and they recognized that to succeed they had to strengthen themselves with the values of the past. There was proof that everything owed its origin to the first "fraternity" established by the four pioneers of 1844 at Red River.

A regard for the past meant for the sisters

recognizing all those who had lent a helping hand in the past. Never do the sisters forget their kindnesses; they have been inscribed in their records so that those who live in the future will be able to read of what they have done. The custom has continued of noting faithfully not only the names of our friends and benefactors but also the honours that have come their way and the griefs that have afflicted them. Over the years the quality of the services of personnel employed in collaboration has been indispensable. A special recognition has always been given to the Trappist Fathers of St. Norbert "who have helped the workers at the convent when extreme poverty forced the sisters to ration their bread."<sup>54</sup>

The cult of the past has been a thanksgiving to God for his graces and for the assistance given by so many. In an admirable "commerce", born of the communion of saints, the people in turn pray for the Grey Nuns. In an article entitled "Women of Our Times," the influence of the Grey Nuns was noted even from far-away. "Men and women have studied in their schools. A number of nurses have been prepared in their hospitals. Old people, patients and handicapped have been cared for in their institutions. The poor have been clothed and fed, and the abandoned have been reclaimed. Blessed Marguerite d'Youville has trained women in the service of God to be present among the poor."<sup>55</sup> Proof of their being appreciated multiplied; nomination or election to positions of trust: presidency of the senate of Winnipeg sisters, proclamation of a Grey Nun as "woman of the month" during the International Year of the Woman, vice-presidency of the Association of Catholic Hospitals, membership in the Board of Governors of the University of Manitoba, election to the position of administrative secretary of the Canadian Religious Conference of the West, grant of a commemorative Confederation medal for distinguished services, membership in a permanent Committee of Women, and so on.<sup>56</sup>

When in April 1980 Sister Denise Lefebvre, the

superior general, presided over a provincial chapter, she recognized the progress of the works under the wise direction of Sister Poirier who was replaced at the helm by Sister Marie Bonin, assisted by Sisters L. Damphousse, C. Richard, M. Thille and R. Veilleux.

The Grey history thus entered on a new chapter, marked by notable events such as the Beatification of Kateri Tekakwitha in June 1980. Sisters L. Beaudry, Y. Bouchard and L. Doiron, all of whom had spent long years in the Indian missions, were sent to Rome for the ceremony.

At St. Boniface General Hospital, a program was inaugurated by Sister Colette Tardif whereby hospital nursing was taught by closed-circuit television as a result of a gift received from the Helen Fudd Foundation of New Jersey, U.S.A.

At the beginning of 1981 the McEwen Building was changed in purpose. After necessary alterations, it became the McEwen Psychiatric Centre. Until then, four residences had sheltered this category of patients. Centralization would facilitate care and mark a new era in this field.

In May, it was the distant mission of Chesterfield that was honoured after 50 years of existence. Heroism was still required in this place, difficult of access, where the good seed was slow to rise. On this occasion, the speakers were unanimous in acclaiming the merits of the sisters and their associates who accepted to work in this distant land of snow and barren rock.

The School of Nursing had its 85th anniversary in 1982. On this occasion there was begun a Heritage room with photographs and souvenirs of teachers and pupils grouped together. The highlight was the visit of Mother Teresa to the provincial house. She was of worldwide reputation. The Hospital Research Foundation gave its International Award to this woman who distinguished herself by her attachment to human values and her incomparable devotedness to the poor.

There had been talk of her coming for two years; it was finally possible to greet her and her companions on June 25. Sister Bonin and Sister Hickey went to meet her at the airport and to drive her to the Provincial House on Despina Street. In the name of the Grey Nuns, Sister Bonin wished her the most cordial welcome and considering the lateness of the hour, they retired early after having sung the evening hymn, *Salve Regina*.

The following day, Archbishop Hacault celebrated Mass with Bishop Delaquis and Father R. Bélanger. During the homily the Archbishop drew a parallel between Mother Teresa and Mother d'Youville, saying that across the ages, great souls meet each other.

At Holy Cross auditorium, Mother Teresa gave a message to the religious men and women with very evangelical simplicity expressed with a communicative fervour. Ukrainian Archbishop M. Hermaniuk made a presentation to her, and Archbishop A. Exner of Winnipeg thanked the foundress of the Missionaries of Charity.<sup>57</sup>

On Sunday, June 27 at the Winnipeg Stadium there was an ecumenical meeting attended by 21,000 people. Mr. G. C. MacLean, chairman of the Research Foundation, praised the recipient who had received the Nobel Prize but, among the honours which descended on her, preferred to serve those whom the world rejected. A newspaper writer said: "A very fine day made expressly by God. I have been attracted by her beauty; I did not see her wrinkles any more, I was moved to tears."

He was not the only one to be touched by the humble Mother saying to the crowd: "You and I, thanks to your generosity, we are going to do something beautiful for God." The following day, Mother Teresa received the Order of the Buffalo Hunt with a gift of \$10,000 from Premier Howard Pawley and Mr. L. Desjardins, the Minister of Health. For his part, His Honour Mayor W. Norrie declared the visitor an

honourary citizen of the capital.<sup>58</sup>

Mother Teresa inscribed in the Guest Book of the Grey Nuns: "Keep the joy of loving Jesus in your hearts and share this joy with all you meet and through this sharing, become carriers of God's love and compassion."

The "compassion of God" was expressed in a special fashion for patients afflicted with cancer. on July 7, construction was begun on a Centre for the detection and treatment of this mysterious illness which still puzzles medical science. The building would have 22,000 square feet and would be furnished with up-to-date equipment. The O'Reilly ward would complete this unit. It was a room put at the disposal of parents with gravely ill children allowing them to be present at their sick-beds regardless of the hour of the day or night.<sup>59</sup>

At Rainy Crest Home in Fort Frances, Sister Marguerite Forest would demonstrate the compassion of God toward elderly persons as well as following her apostolate among alcoholics who had to be brought back through their long journey to rehabilitation.

It was at Fort Frances that there was born in 1981 the group of Associates of the Grey Nuns for the canonical province of St. Boniface. "The proposal to admit as associates those wishing to participate in the spirituality of Mother d'Youville", was approved by the General Chapter 1981. Sister Marguerite Letourneau, superior general, stressed that this was not really an innovation for Mother d'Youville and her companions had called themselves "associates" for serving the poor in 1737. The involvement of the laity, something highly recommended by the Council, favoured the movement and the eight members present at the first meeting on October 8 increased until there were 80 the following year. The group did not cease to grow.

To the associates, whether men or women, was proposed, besides collaboration in the works, an



attitude of soul: the desire to do something for God by serving without distinction all the members of the great human family, especially the disadvantaged."<sup>60</sup>

Two centenaries marked 1983, that of Taché Nursing Centre and that of the parish of St-Joachim de La Broquerie. As for the centre, there was genuine regret at the disappearance of the former magnificent building, but there was the same spirit of charity and mercy in the new ultra-modern "home" where a climate of serenity reigned.

At St. Joachim's parish in La Broquerie, they asked the Grey Nuns to appear at their festival "clad in the old habit," just as in 1912 when they founded the convent. The convent had become obsolete and it was proposed to leave it. Sister M. Letourneau explained, October 23, that the lack of workers forced the Grey Nuns to leave and launched a vibrant appeal to the youth.<sup>61</sup> Mr. A. Laurencelle, chairperson of the committee expressed in moving terms the appreciation of the parishioners for seventy years of service by the Sisters "of whom we keep the best of memories".

On November 22, when the last missionary returned to the provincial house, Sister Bonin expressed the thought of all while saying there was deep regret at leaving the parish where more than one generation had come to learn to know and to serve God.

Langevin residence, opened a few months earlier, was receiving young ladies of the French language who were following University courses of study while living a religious experience.<sup>62</sup> To the insistent demands of the merchants of illusion, with their artificial joys, there was opposed a climate of prayer and reflection. The Sisters preach without words, witnessing to the joy they live, a joy "which no one can take from you." (Jn 16,22) This joy rises from an inexhaustible source which is found in the imitation of the One who said: "I have not come to be served but to serve." (Mk. 10,45)

It was in the cause of life that Youville Clinic was formed. It was announced by Sister Bonin on February 6, 1983 with Mrs. Verna Sylvestre as executive director. It began in the Marie Berthe Dorais complex and was moved the following February 2 to the "Domo" shopping centre on Marion Street. Sister L. Doiron joined the team which had as its chief objective the promotion of maternal health, education of young mothers, family planning, the processes of adoption, aid to persons in distress. medical problems were referred to doctors and other cases to professional agencies.<sup>63</sup> It was a facet of Valade Vitae; care was taken to emphasize that "it was responding to a need of the Church."

When the cancer treatment wing was opened April 27, 1984, Archbishop Hacault of St. Boniface stressed the purpose of the new unit, a worthy complement of the services already offered by the general hospital. He blessed the 8th station of the Way of the Cross while appropriate hymns were sung explaining that in some way "suffering members of humanity will be consoled".

Dr. P. Doyle, chairman of the Board of Directors, thanked the government authorities who had collaborated in the project, and Sister Bonin spoke of the traditional mission of the Grey Nuns desiring to serve the sick with kindness, without distinction as to colour, age, race or beliefs.

Less than two months later a new project was begun nearby. On June 21, the 140th anniversary of the arrival of the Grey Nuns, the usual ceremonies were held to mark the beginning of the Research Centre building which had been in the planning stages for a number of years.<sup>64</sup> There was much nostalgia when St. Roch Hospital was torn down to make room for the new project. It had occupied the space for 85 years.<sup>65</sup> The members of the Board of Directors of the Foundation were happy to see the beginnings of the Youville Research Centre named in the year of the 25th anniversary of the beatification of the foundress of the Grey Nuns.

In this extraordinary year, one feature without precedent was the visit of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Canada. The Research Foundation offered to the illustrious visitor the international award reserved for outstanding benefactors of humanity.<sup>66</sup> When the news came that the award would be accepted and would be part of the program, the chairman of the Foundation remarked with pride: "It is a signal honour for us." Now, Mr. Samuel Cohen, of Jewish nationality, had created the Foundation of which he was honorary chairman while Mr. Campbell MacLean, of Presbyterian belief, was the current chairman. So the visit of His Holiness Pope John Paul II was indeed marked with an ecumenical character.

This visit, reviewed in the pages which follow, will terminate this story of the 140 years of work by the Grey Nuns in the "Pays d'En-Haut", the upcountry.

- 1 Refer supra, Chapter Two.
- 2 Letourneau, Sr. M., gen., sup. Grey Nuns, July 20, 1982.
- 3 Miss E. Dubuc at a conference for the Historical Society of St. Boniface, Dec. 8, 1964.
- 4 In 1957, Dr. P. l'Heureux, medical director, had alluded to this project.
- 5 Mr. Quaglia was nominated March 5, 1969. Mr. R. Beaudin became business manager for the Grey Nuns of Manitoba in 1979; Mr. R. Simard, executive director of Ste. Rose Hospital and Mr. R. E. Mulaire, executive director of the Gravelbourg Hospital and Foyer in 1983.
- 6 The preparation of these policies was begun in 1976 and terminated in 1978. Gradually, the mission, aims and objectives of the various institutions were put into writing so as to remove any risk of ambiguity.
- 7 Bonin, Sr. M. "La catéchèse des malades d'hier et d'aujourd'hui."
- 8 Sr. M.R. Lacroix, s.g.m., was invited to come and share her knowledge of gerontology with the St. Boniface sisters and students.
- 9 They assumed this responsibility in the following schools: Lacerte, Lavallée, Queen Elizabeth, East Selkirk, Richer, Sandy Bay, St-Laurent, Laurier and Norway House. Three sisters obtained qualifications for the transcription of Braille.
- 10 The McEwen building, erected close to the hospital, was inaugurated on Feb. 6, 1971.
- 11 Sr. A. Dupuis was successively entrusted with these new projects between 1970 and 1975. The nursing homes are in St. James, Brandon and

## Ste-Rose-du-Lac.

- 12 ASGM documents, Sr. St-Ignace-de-Loyola - A. Héroux. Three years later, the Winnipeg Tribune said that the missionary sisters were wonderful ambassadors of civilization.
- 13 The bell installed in 1912 weighs 1013 pounds. On it are engraved various inscriptions, e.g., Archbishop Langevin's coat-of-arms, the names of 3 Grey Nuns, and that of the donor, Mgr Ritchot.
- 14 The statue of the Blessed Virgin was safely brought down from the niche on the exterior wall of the north wing where it had been hoisted in 1912. It now stands on the museum grounds.
- 15 The centre has a capacity of 200 beds.
- 16 The elderly residents were transported to other centres or to the new wing that had just been added to the SBGH.
- 17 On Nov. 10, 1960 the Kiwanis Club erected a monument to Mrs. St. Amant in Transcona at the very location where she had begun her work with the handicapped.
- 18 228 years ago on the same date, Mother d'Youville had entered the Montreal General Hospital.
- 19 Mr. J. O'Sullivan was the first lay chairman of the St. Boniface General Hospital board of directors.
- 20 Celebration held April 20, 1974.
- 21 Sr. Poirier herself was honoured a few weeks later when she received the Vigor Award from the Quebec Federation of Social Administrators.

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22 For these different institutions founded respectively in 1884, 1907, 1937 and 1941, the years of service by the sisters added up to 293!

23 Echos de St. Bon., July-Aug., 1977, p. 10.

24 Report of the Oct. 11, 1974 meeting.

25 This part of the last Chapter deals with the initiatives taken in the years 1971-1979.

26 Bonin, Sr. M. "La pastorale des malades d'hier et d'aujourd'hui." She is referring to Dr. T. Appleton who was ordained an anglican minister on January 14, 1979.

27 To stem the rise of alcoholism and to limit its obnoxious effects, the government offered courses and conferences to the natives.

28 Members of the Ladies' Auxiliaries and other volunteers help in the distribution of meals. At the prov. house, a light lunch is given to those who ask for one at the door.

29 Chronicles, prov. house, 1946-52, p. 242.

30 Sr. M. Thille was the administrator, replacing Mr. G. Lougheed who had accepted the role on a temporary basis. The seven sisters working at the Foyer lived in a residence on McTavish Street. In 1986, a new building was to be constructed close to St. Amant Centre and was to be called Foyer Valade.

31 Every summer for several years, Sr. A. Dupuis spent two of three weeks in Toronto for this purpose. Another Grey Nun, having invented a hearing apparatus for the handicapped, the profits from the sales were invested in the Pro-Life movement.

32 Begun at the prov. house, Valade Vitae moved to



Kenny Street in 1978.

- 33 The construction was completed in 1978.
- 34 Sr. M. B. Dorais in 1973 had expressed the wish to see the creation of the Sara Riel services.
- 35 Sara Riel, a Grey Nun and Louis Riel's youngest sister, died in 1883 at Ile-à-la-Crosse. Miss M. Jordan published: "To Louis from Your Sister Who Loves You", which is Sara's biography and the collection of the letters she wrote to Louis. Miss Jordan was honoured by the Red River Valley Historical Society.
- 36 The Regina residence having been closed, a few sisters were available for this new venture. A day centre was added to Sara Riel and plans made for a long-term patients' program to be called Louis Riel.
- 37 Sr. Dorais died in Montreal Jan. 13, 1976.
- 38 Pastoral Services were officially organized at the Taché Nursing Centre on Sept. 4, 1979.
- 39 Sr. I. Pepin visited the Marian Centre in Regina in order to obtain ideas for the organization of the proposed services.
- 40 Furniture and other items had been given to the Chilean refugees in Regina. In a letter to Sr. Poirier dated June 17, 1976, Mr. J. Dunn wrote that he was convinced that "wherever there are Grey Nuns, their charity of Christ prevails."
- 41 Art. 5, Constitutions, Grey Nuns, p. 18.
- 42 SGM review, June 1974, pp. 9-13.
- 43 The event was celebrated June 6th, but Mr. H. Granger's two sculptures of Aulneau and La Vérendrye were only installed on Oct. 17.

- 44 The title was officially conferred June 30, 1976.
- 45 These honours were bestowed respectively in 1972, 1975 and 1982.
- 46 Sr. de Moissac died Jan. 21, 1984 before being able to complete her project.
- 47 Bishop Roy received from Archbishop Baudoux the ring of Mgr Béliveau to whom he was related. Bishop Roy often referred to the Grey Nuns' participation in the history of his vocation to the priesthood.
- 48 Two of the bells were cast by Paccard of Anecy-le-Vieux, France.
- 49 Sr. Louisa Sabourin, s.g.m., served as secretary to Mgr Décosse in 1972-73.
- 50 The same title was conferred upon Archbishop Laval when he was succeeded by Mgr de St-Vallier.
- 51 The memorandum was prepared by Srs. J. Monchamp, T. Cloutier, T. Vachon and E. de Moissac. The latter who read the script at the official rally was honoured with a standing ovation.
- 52 Mr. J. O'Sullivan had thus summarized the orientations which were soon to be expressed in both official languages in a brochure for each of the Grey Nuns' institutions.
- 53 In 1975, Mr. J. O'Sullivan became a judge at the Manitoba Court of Appeal. Another eminent friend, Mr. A. Monnin, became Chief Justice of the same Court in 1979.
- 54 The Trappist Fathers came to St. Norbert in 1892 and left in 1978. It was in their new monastery, Holland, Man., that on Oct. 24,

1980, they celebrated the 15th century of the foundation of their Order.

- 55 Two T.V. programs, on February 7 and 16, 1979, were an occasion to inform the public concerning the new projects. Sr. Poirier was then interviewed by Father Rocan and by Deacon E. McCormick.
- 56 This list obviously is not exhaustive.
- 57 Archbishop Exner succeeded Cardinal Flahiff who had resigned a few months earlier.
- 58 The school children too wished to offer their contribution. Sr. T. Cloutier, having spoken about Mother Teresa's apostolate to Kindergarten and grades one to six students collected \$565 for Mother Teresa's works of mercy.
- 59 The O'Reilly ward was opened April 5, 1983; the Diagnostic & Treatment Unit, April 27, 1984.
- 60 Constitutions, Grey Nuns, p. 13, art. 6.
- 61 The convent was sold in the locality for \$1.00. On the site, a senior citizen's club built a "Résidence de l'amitié".
- 62 The Langevin residence replaced that on McTavish Street. Sr. T. Cloutier, sup. was also responsible for catecheses at the Lavalée School. Two formation centres were opened for Grey Nun candidates, one at Montreal and the other at the regional centre, Edmonton, Alta.
- 63 In 1985, there was to be added a resource centre for diabetes patients and their families.
- 64 The Research Centre would be built by the hospital which provided the land. The government of Manitoba offered a grant and the centre itself would assume the operating costs.

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65 This building where Mgr Faraud died in 1890, became St. Roch Hospital in 1890.

66 Mother Teresa, Mrs. J. Carter, then First Lady of the U.S.A., and Prince Philip also received this International Award which comprises a \$20,000 honorarium. Prince Philip donated this amount to the Physical Education of Youth.

## EPILOGUE

Like the whole Canadian population, Manitobans had their eyes fixed on the television screen when His Holiness Pope John Paul II arrived at Cape Diamond on Sunday, September 9, 1984. It was with emotion and pride that the people listened to the speech of welcome by Her Excellency, Madame Jeanne Sauvé, Governor-General: "We welcome you as a pilgrim of compassion and peace... Everywhere in the world, disarray reigns. Children seek their fathers; adults look for teachers. In a sense what is most lacking is the boldness of the prophets. Your Holiness should not be surprised that we see in you a prophet, for more than all the other leaders of our time, you have known how to perceive the causes of universal suffering and you have proclaimed that we must not have fear, that we must dare, that God is not dead."

This assertion was borne out by the Head of the Church in different ways during eucharistic liturgies, and meetings with patients, handicapped, natives, young and elderly people.

The itinerary brought the Pope to Winnipeg on September 16. "Is it credible," asked the chronicler, "that Our Holy Father the Pope is in Manitoba?" We are all fascinated by this authentic figure."

From the airport the august visitor went to the Cathedral of the Ruthenian rite. He compared the Manitoba Ukrainian episcopal province to the little grain of mustard seed spoken of in the Gospel. It had grown and multiplied admirably.

From there the procession proceeded to St. Mary's Cathedral, Winnipeg, where he was greeted by Archbishop A. Exner, Archbishop M. Hermaniuk and Archbishop A. Hacault. After the Angelus, His Holiness invited the members of this meeting "of all creeds to recognize God's mercy in the generosity with which we give care to the poor." Then Sister Bonin, provincial superior, summarized the apostolate

of the oldest religious community in the West

"Dear Holy Father, we welcome you with great joy and wish to say how happy we are that you have accepted the International Award presented by this Catholic hospital: the St. Boniface General Hospital, the first hospital founded west of Toronto in 1871.

"This university health and charity centre is under the direction of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal, called Grey Nuns. The Grey Nuns were pioneers in the Canadian west. Founded by Mother d'Youville, they came here in 1844 from Montreal to St. Boniface. It was a perilous canoe trip that lasted 59 days.

"It is with joy and faith that we serve the Church, the sick and the needy in Western Canada for the past one hundred and forty years. As we gather to celebrate our faith with you, we are here as a community of service. With competent laymen and laywomen of different faiths we serve in thirteen works of charity, St. Boniface General Hospital being among the oldest and largest. We want to serve with compassion and tenderness. Your Holiness, you are a visible herald, a great promoter and true witness of this fine spirit.

"It gives me pleasure to introduce two laymen who among many others work to improve the quality of care at St. Boniface General Hospital through its Research Foundation: Mr. Samuel Cohen, honorary chairman of the Research Foundation, and Mr. Campbell MacLean, the present chairman."

Mr. Cohen expressed to His Holiness a salute of peace: "Shalom". Mr. MacLean described the Research Foundation and was honoured to present to the illustrious visitor its International Award:

"Your Holiness, God continues his marvels. A new Pope from a Far-away Country, John Paul II, we welcome you to the St. Boniface General Hospital Research Foundation. On October 16, 1978, we all



rejoiced when the Cardinal Archbishop of Krakow became the new Bishop of Rome. I would like to add that October 16th is also the liturgical feast of Blessed Marguerite d'Youville, the foundress of the Grey Nuns.

"In an age of turmoil and uncertainty, we gain stability from Your Holiness who exemplifies abiding values and steadfast faith. In a world scarred by conflict and strife, we draw strength from those who stand for peace and for all that must be done to achieve it. When social, political and economic transformations engulf us in a sea of complexity and discord, we are anchored by Your Holiness reaffirming the sanctity of the individual human being.

"Holy Father, your tireless devotion to your apostolic mission, your generosity, intelligence, courage, adaptability and determination command universal respect and admiration. We acclaim Your Holiness when the voice of the Pope is raised in defence of human rights, of freedom and justice for all men, women and the little ones, especially for those who are oppressed and powerless.

"People of our generation shall forever be indebted to you, Holy Father. We acknowledge your role in lifting the eyes of the world toward the holistic vision of man, which animates the relentless search for the means by which we can achieve the highest possible degree of physical, social and spiritual well being.

"May it please Your Holiness to accept this International Award. Thereby, you honour the Foundation in its search to "prolong life" with love and dignity. We humbly ask Your Holiness to bless the Foundation and all its dedicated people."

The citation had other praises: "His rise through the Church hierarchy of itself identified Karol Wojtyla as a man of great intellectual and spiritual endowments, and therefore worthy of special regard within the Catholic world. However, he also

attracted the intense interest of people of all faiths through the strength and appeal of his personality... In presenting its International Award to Pope John Paul II, the St. Boniface General Hospital Research Foundation pays tribute to a man who, through the strength of his dedication to fundamental humanitarian ideals and through his passionate commitment to peace has nurtured renewed hope for a better world in all of us."

At the eucharistic celebration at Bird's Hill Park, there was a chalice on the altar donated to the Grey Nuns by Bishop Provencher. Present at the Mass were seventy-two Inuit who came from Chesterfield, Churchill, Rankin Inlet, Eskimo Point and Pelly Bay, Whale Cove, Gjoa Haven, Spence Bay, Igloolik and Repulse Bay. They stayed at the Provincial House while in St. Boniface. Her Excellency Madame Sauvé had promised the Pope: "The natives and descendants of the founding people await your coming. They understand your call to love."

In the evening of this wonderful day, the Grey Nuns in St. Boniface and elsewhere had the unspeakable joy of seeing His Holiness fly to Edmonton and be received at the Regional Centre there. Sister Marguerite Letourneau, the superior general, was the spokesperson for all the Grey Nuns.

"Most Holy Father: We are delighted that your pilgrim path has led you to Canada and that tonight, we have the great joy to welcome you under our roof. With my Sisters present here and with those of the entire Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal, I wish you warm welcome in our home. It is with deep faith that we sing: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." May you find rest, hospitality and peace in our home!... You have won our hearts because you are our Pastor and were elected on the Liturgical Feast of our Foundress... Your personal faith helps ours to grow and your presence encourages us to Celebrate Our Faith! Your radical message moves us toward an enlightened fidelity. Your strength, your courage and personal

endurance make us question the quality of our own apostolic zeal. Your stay among us gives us great hope and your love for the poor calls us to creative charity...

"Holy Father, we have prepared this visit for a long time through prayer and personal reflection. Our hearts are open and available to receive your words. Words, that will confirm our joy and awaken our fidelity."

The Holy Father replied to this request. After having noted that the colours, black and white, traditional for sisters have always been considered evangelical colours, His Holiness added: "that the colour Grey could be an Evangelical Colour; it can serve to fulfill a vocation to the Evangelical Counsels. It can also serve to realize the evangelical radicalism that is specific and characteristic of your vocation... I wish for you the same thing as I do to men and women religious and to priests. I wish you many vocations! I say this according to the universal norms of the Church. You are in need of many religious and priestly vocations in order to witness to the world, with a numerical strength, and in a qualitative manner the Gospel of Christ... You need strength that is ever renewed in order to fulfil various tasks that belong to your specific apostolic mission."

This wish was accepted by the sisters as a proof of benevolent approbation by the Successor of Peter on their apostolate. And so that their works might continue, they prayed "the Lord to send workers to gather the harvest." (Luke, 10,2)

Archbishop Hacault, making allusion to Mother d'Youville said, "Her vigorous charism of charity without boundaries seems tailored for a world troubled as ours is."<sup>1</sup>

Because she considered humanity as the great family of God our Father, the foundress of the Grey Nuns has left to her spiritual daughters a legacy of

universal charity. It is this heritage which has been the strength of the first generations and which has inspired their missionary action in the West and in the Far North of Canada and indeed in foreign lands as well.

Thus we recognize once more that the little community born in Montreal in 1737 has taken its impulse from the four humble women who embarked on frail canoes on April 24, 1844 to descend to Red River on the following June 21. They praise the Lord, following the example of their foundress, for the "little bit of good" they have been able to do.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Sr. Bonin, Aug. 1, 1984

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Front view of the chapel, Mother House of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal "Grey Nuns", Guy Street. (Photo: Sr. B. Morneau, s.g.m.)

Bishop J.-N. Provencher welcomes the Grey Nun missionaries at the Red River on June 21, 1844 at one o'clock in the morning.



The oldest house in the Canadian West: the first convent of the Grey Nuns of St. Boniface, inhabited since December 1846.

The "voyageurs" who have sailed on rivers and great lakes have asked themselves many questions since the departure from Lachine at the end of April 1844. The four women, dressed in strange costumes, who boarded the canoes are leaving for the Northwest. This journey astonishes the old "sea-dogs" who are well aware of the hardships of the trip and the difficulties in adapting to this new life.

Should the "voyageurs" question these women, the reply would be: "We are going to reveal God's incomparable tenderness for his children to the inhabitants of that region". This revelation came about through the teachings and works of charity of these women which history refers to as "marvellous civilizers".