

St. Michael's College The Formative Years, 1850-1853

by
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During 1950 the Basilian Fathers of Toronto mark the centenary of the arrival of the first Basilian priest in America, and in 1952 St. Michael's College will celebrate the centennial of its founding. This paper presents for the first time a public record of the circumstances in which these two events took place. It is based for the most part on three sets of documents. First, the extant letters of Father Patrick Molony, the Basilian who accompanied Bishop de Charbonnel to Toronto. Secondly, the early letters of Father J. M. Soulerin, the Superior of the first religious house established by the community in the new world. Thirdly, the Register of the letters of Father Pierre Tourvieille who was Superior General at the time these events took place. The work of collating these documents with records preserved in the archives of the archdiocese of Toronto by one thoroughly familiar with the early history of the city of Toronto has still to be done.

Amand François Marie de Charbonnel was consecrated Bishop of Toronto by Pius IX in the Sistine Chapel on May 26, 1850.¹ Before proceeding to his diocese in America he spent some time in France recruiting a few priests to help him in his new work. He had been in Montreal a few years before his consecration and had a fair idea of the particular needs of the diocese of Toronto, and especially its need for well-trained priests who could speak English. He knew that ever since 1829² it had been the policy of the College of Annonay, where he had studied from the age of ten until his entry into the seminary of St. Sulpice in Paris at seventeen, to engage Irish instructors for the teaching of English. He was personally acquainted with one of these, Patrick Molony, who had been born in 1813 in Killaloe and raised to the priesthood in 1842. Young Father Molony had exercised the sacred ministry in his native diocese in Ireland for two years and had then joined the community of St. Basil in Annonay in

¹ J. R. Teefy, C.S.B., "The Life and Times of the Rt. Rev. Armand Francis Marie, Comte de Charbonnel" in the *Jubilee Volume of the Archdiocese of Toronto* (J. R. Teefy, ed.), Toronto 1892, p. 148. See also R. J. Scollard, C.S.B., *Lives of the Brethren*, (privately circulated), 1946, pp. 99-104. The great monograph is Candide Causse's *Vie de Monseigneur de Charbonnel*, Montpellier, 1931.

² A. Chomel, *Le Collège d'Annonay*, Annonay 1902, pp. 318-319. These instructors were: Mr. Dillon 1829-1834, when he joined the French consular service; Patrick Molony, 1834-1842 as a layman before entering the Society of St. Basil in 1844; and Mr. O'Tool, 1842-1878.

1844. During the next four years he taught at Feyzin. At the time of Bishop de Charibonnel's consecration he was attached to the Little Seminary of Vernoux and was also in charge of the tiny parish of St. Apollinaire nearby.³ In late June or early July, 1850, Bishop de Charbonnel made a formal request to the community of St. Basil for the services of Father Molony which the Superior General, Father Tourvieille, answered as follows in a letter to the newly consecrated Bishop who was staying at St. Sulpice in Paris:⁴

“Monseigneur:

I am busy with your request for Father Molony. Nothing could please me more than to bring God's blessing upon our community by contributing to the good work you are proposing. But I must tell you that in conformity with the practice of other congregations, we should like if possible to send another subject, a Frenchman, with Father Molony. Would you let us know, Monseigneur, if this is in line with your Excellency's views? We should also like to know your intentions in the matter of the expenses of this voyage and sojourn (in America). In this regard, Mgr., I simply must tell you that in order to save the Little Seminary at Vernoux, which was always a burden on the diocese, we have taken the administration into our own hands and are operating it at our own risk. Moreover, we have no idea just what will be the effect of the new law⁵ on the number of students in our establishments. We cannot possibly foresee what sacrifices we shall have to make on behalf of the subjects to be sent to our mission.”

In a subsequent letter of July 19 Father Tourvieille made it clear that a priest-companion had been selected for Father Molony.⁶ However there is no further mention of a companion and we know that Father Molony was the only Basilian to accompany Bishop de Charbonnel to America. It was not the intention of the Superior General that Father Molony should himself establish a house in Toronto, he was merely “ceded to the Bishop for a time.”⁷ But it is clear from the earliest correspondence between France and America that both Bishop

³ *Registre pour les copies des lettres de M. Tourvieille, 1850-1855*, p. 71 and p. 12, where it is a question of the duties of Father Bard who succeeded Fr. Molony at St. Apollinaire.

⁴ *Registre, 1826-1851*, from a transcript of the entry for July 14, 1850 kindly furnished by Fr. Charles Roume of the Collège du Sacré-Coeur and Maison St. Joseph, Annonay.

⁵ This is a reference to Falloux's law concerning teaching. Hitherto the State alone apportioned instruction. But Basilians had succeeded in obtaining the privilege of giving the full course for three of their houses – Annonay, Vernoux and Feysin. In these centres students were prepared for the official baccalaureate examinations.

⁶ It was Father Payan who was selected, according to Father Roume.

⁷ *Registre 1850-1855*, “à M. Molony,” Oct. 25, 1850, p. 13.

de Charbonnel and Father Tourvieille were thinking of a Little Seminary or even a house of public instruction to be set up somewhere in the large diocese of Toronto.⁸

On August 20, 1850, Mgr. de Charbonnel sailed from Southampton aboard the American steamer *Washington* with the small group of companions and co-workers he had been able to assemble during the three months which had passed since his consecration. This trip is described in a letter of Father Molony's which he later wrote to a friend at Vernoux, Father Chavanon.⁹

"I left Paris August 10 with deep regret at not having met you at our hotel the day of my departure in order to say a last good-bye. I had only eight days to travel over England and Ireland, and said adieu, in passing, to all the relatives I was able to see. I then proceeded to Southampton, the English port from which we were to embark. Monseigneur kept his appointment. He was accompanied by several young men among whom were two Jesuits, a sub-deacon from Rodez, dear Brother Bernard, a young student from Aix, and two young laymen. The same day, August 20, at 2 o'clock in the afternoon we went aboard the American steamer *Washington*, which weighed anchor an hour later. Our voyage on the sea was very pleasant. I was hardly seasick at all, and happy to look after my companions who were much more disturbed than I was. The poor bishop was exceedingly ill. Brother Bernard entertained us a great deal by his enjoyable sallies. He kept to his hammock during half of the voyage, drinking a lot of tea, but at the end was one of the most sturdy of the band. The crossing took only 14½ days. The 5th of September, at 7 o'clock in the morning, the splendid bay of New York lay spread out before us. What a pleasant moment when we put foot on shore after 14 days of sky and water! We remained eight days in New York and had time to visit this immense city which is destined to become the most important in the world by reason of its commerce and its marvellous location."

During this two-weeks crossing the Bishop and Father Molony had ample opportunity to discuss the role the Basilians were to assume in the diocese of Toronto. They appear to have done this and to have devised a little scheme to find men to look after a possible foundation. At any rate, Father Tourvieille, the Superior General, received from each of them letters written very soon after their arrival. Father Molony's letter, indeed, was dated September 5, 1850, the actual

⁸ *Registre 1850-1855*, "à M. l'Ev. de Toronto," p. 10: "Mais, venons d'abord au projet que vous avez conçu. Il nous serait impossible, Mgr, de ne pas admettre la sincérité des vœux que vous nous avez plusieurs fois exprimés de nous voir fonder un établissement d'instruction publique au Canada."

⁹ This letter, dated Nov. 13, 1850 is addressed to his "Very dear friend and confrère." It is written to someone at Vernoux almost certainly to Father Chavanon. The *Registre 1850-1855*, p. 55 refers to a letter from Molony to Chavanon written Nov. 13, 1850.

day of their landing in New York.¹⁰

Two plans were placed before the General for consideration. The first was the suggestion that Bishop de Charbonnel should himself acquire or provide building and furnishings for a Little Seminary which would be staffed by Basilians. For the first few years Father Molony would serve as Superior. He would recruit two young Irish friends to join him in the work of teaching. The Community would appoint the fourth member of the faculty. For this appointment the name of Mr. Flannery was mentioned as he was preparing for his baccalaurate examinations and was ready to begin theology. This was the plan which met with the Superior General's approval. The second plan put forth by Bishop de Charbonnel is not outlined in Father Tourvieille's letter of September 25, but it seems to have been one whereby the Basilians should themselves open a school of public instruction in the diocese of Toronto. Whatever the details of such a proposed plan, it was felt by Father Tourvieille to be quite impracticable.

The proposals made in this first plan of Bishop de Charbonnel, and judged acceptable by the Superior General, have considerable significance. They show first of all, that both the Bishop and the French Basilians were primarily concerned with establishing in the diocese of Toronto a Little Seminary much like those already existing in the valley of Archèche. Neither Bishop nor Community were for the moment considering a secular school or college. It was only when the first house was actually established, and when the men stationed in America came to know and understand local conditions that serious considerations were given to the matter of secular instruction. In the second place these proposals also clearly demonstrate that the Bishop's invitation to the Basilians to establish a Little Seminary were neither subsequent to nor contingent upon the dropping of negotiations between the Bishop and other communities interested in schools and missions. The Little Seminary, a secular college, the local missions, were distinct projects in the Bishop's mind. Communities could not meet them because they simply did not have suitable men immediately available. Thirdly, it is essentially this plan which was to become a reality in 1852, save that Father Molony's recruits were not forthcoming, and their places had to be filled by French Basilians.

From New York the Bishop and his party proceeded to Montreal by way of the Hudson and Lake Champlain. After eight days in Montreal, where the Bishop renewed old friendships and Father Molony made a Retreat, they began the final stage of their journey to Toronto. Father Molony's account is well-worth giving

¹⁰ Neither this letter nor the Bishop's seems to be extant but it is clear from Father Tourvieille's replies that they were written. See *Registre 1850-1855*, Letters of Sept. 25, pp. 9-14. In his letter of November 13, 1850, Father Molony mentions having written to Father Montgolfier also.

because it provides more than a mere bystander's point of view.¹¹

“Finally,” he writes,¹² “we were en route for Toronto, with still two more days of navigation. We went up the magnificent St. Lawrence as far as Kingston, which is a bishopric. From there we continued our journey over Lake Ontario for one beautiful night in the clear moonlight, and at 7 o'clock on the morning of September 21, I caught sight of Toronto. Monseigneur gathered us together around him on the bridge of the ship and there we recited in choir the Litany of the Saints and the *Salve Regina*. It was known in the city that we were due to arrive, and consequently our fine people, poor children of Erin, made much ado. They gave us no time to disembark but crowded about us, pressing close to see and throwing themselves down before the Bishop. The quays, and all the streets were blocked with people. We were conducted in procession to the Cathedral. The Bishop of Montreal¹³ and several priests from that city were with us. We were received like true apostles. The following day, Monseigneur took solemn possession of his See. He officiated at Vespers preaching in English to a congregation of 3,000 persons, Catholics and Protestants.”

With Father Molony's arrival in September 1850, the first Basilian priest began his labours in Toronto. He was one of six priests, three Irishmen and three English-speaking Frenchmen working in the Toronto area. One of the priests was Father Tellier, S.J., whom Father Molony describes as “former rector of the Collège de Chamberry.” Father Tellier was hoping to establish a college in the city and had just been offered by a local convert a fine property consisting, says Father Molony, of fifty acres of land. This is actually the Elmsley property on which St. Michael's College stands today. Thus as early as 1850 we find Captain Elmsley making it available for educational purposes. Father Tellier hoped to establish here his *grand Collège d'haut-Canada*.¹⁴ Father Molony speaks of Father Tellier's vain pleas to his superiors for English-speaking priests and of their absolute inability to supply them.¹⁵ He tells of how Father Tellier proposed that the two of them should establish the college together.¹⁶ Finally, he writes in March 1852 that Father Tellier has left Toronto and has given up all hope of establishing a college.

Father Molony had been loaned to Bishop de Charbonnel to help him with the work of the ministry in Toronto. His chief duties were parochial and apparently quite heavy. But shortly after his arrival a church school was opened

¹¹ I have in mind the accounts that appear in the *Mirror*, Friday Sept. 27, 1850 and in the *Jubilee Yearbook* (ed. Teefy), p. 151.

¹² Letter of Nov. 13, 1850.

¹³ Mgr. John Charles Prince, Coadjutor Bishop of Montreal. The *Mirror*; loc. cit.,

¹⁴ Undated letter of Father J. M. Soulerin, probably written in December 1852 or January 1853.

¹⁵ Letter of Father Molony, Nov. 15, 1851.

¹⁶ Letter of Father Molony, Aug. 5, 1851.

in the Cathedral and one of his assignments was to teach in it. His delightful description of this school is to be found in his letter of November 13, 1850.

“We have improvised an ecclesiastical school in the house and since my first days here I have been hard at work. I have ten students, good and unthinking, who are already beginning to study Latin as best they can. I devote five hours a day to providing them with class. Moreover, I preside over their work and take them for walks. I have to congratulate myself on their success. Poor children, how they profit from my work! It is enough to make the least sign to them and at once all is done. They understand what we are doing for them. The other day I was telling them that in France children love the Blessed Virgin very much and have pretty little shrines in the classrooms. Right away, without a word to me, they clubbed together, and went and bought a lovely statue of Our Lady and some other pious objects. They busied themselves, making a shrine, and they got their sisters to work at home making little ornaments. Now we have a fine shrine which has been blessed with great ceremony and which would almost make our little children of Vernoux jealous. After this, they all made the resolution to be more holy. Twice each day in class they recite the *Memorare* in rotation. Their work is consecrated to Mary, and I am sure this good Mother is blessing them. You see, then, that I am laying the foundations alone – still alone, and not without a little pain! Judge for yourself how much our good bishop is set on a work like this when, although my services are so necessary for the ministering of the parish, he still excuses me from some parish work so that I can carry on this teaching.”

This school conducted in the Cathedral rectory during the Fall of 1850 cannot, strictly speaking, be regarded as the forerunner of St. Michael’s College. It was simply a parochial school in which Father Molony taught as one of the parish clergy. He seems to have regarded his teaching as a temporary arrangement until such time as the Sisters of Providence and the Christian Brothers should arrive. The Christian Brothers did arrive as expected six months later, that is, in May 1851.¹⁷ The Sisters of Providence, of course, did not come at all. Writing in August 1851, after the arrival of the Brothers, Father Molony describes with obvious pleasure the great improvement in the whole grade-school situation:¹⁸

“We have in Toronto at present five Brothers of the Christian Schools. They already have a flourishing school. All the other schools have been abandoned and the Brothers no longer have enough room, but receive all children. Moreover, the number of Brothers will be doubled, and a church in the city will be given to them to serve the school during the week. The Sisters of St. Joseph will arrive here in some days from Baltimore.”¹⁹

¹⁷ *Jubilee Volume* (ed. Teeffy), p. 205.

¹⁸ Letter of Father Molony, Aug. 5, 1851.

¹⁹ It was two months later, Oct. 7, 1851, that Mother Delphine and her companions arrived in Toronto. *Jubilee Volume* (ed. Teeffy) p. 221.

Father Molony's school in the Cathedral during the fall of 1850 looks forward to this institution rather than to the Seminary or College. But at least it is evidence of a Basilian teaching in a Toronto classroom at this relatively early date.

Sometime during the spring or summer of 1851 the Community took a firm resolution to send more men to Canada without unnecessary delay.²⁰ Father Molony considered London, Hamilton, and Niagara as possible centres for a foundation, but Father Tourvieille from his room in distant Ardèche insisted that it be made in Toronto. His major problem was to find suitable men. Since the search in Ireland for two young recruits had proved futile, he adopted another of Father Molony's suggestions and turned his attention, in March or April of 1851²¹ to the Irish Seminary in Paris. He wrote to Dr. Miley, Superior of the Irish Seminary in Paris, asking for three subjects, including a Mr. O'Connor who was also an acquaintance of Father Molony's. He offered to lodge and teach these young men free of charge for a year in Annonay before dispatching them to their new labors in Canada. Unhappily, there was no reply to this letter. In the meantime, word came from Toronto in August that three Irish priests working in the diocese had proven quite unsatisfactory and had to be sent home. The zeal for Irish subjects flagged somewhat and Father Tourvieille decided that his best policy was to encourage the study of English in his French schools in the hopes of training subjects suitable for a foundation in Toronto.

On this whole question, Father Molony wrote at some length to the effect that French priests would do very well for the project he had in mind. He cites the example of the young man from Rodez who had come out to America in Bishop de Charbonnel's party. His only English on arriving in New York was what Father Molony had been able to teach him during the crossing. Now, eleven months later, he was a priest, and was exercising the holy ministry most successfully in Hamilton.²² Thus he concludes:

“At the risk of contradicting what I told you in an earlier letter, I can now quite easily reassure our own excellent young Frenchmen. English can be learned very easily here, upon proper application. In six months anyone can learn enough to do useful work. I beg you, Father Superior, to give this news to your dear confrères, particularly the young ones. Let those interested profit by the

²⁰ “Mais toujours celui (i.e. le projet) d'envoyer une colonie dans le Canada sous votre bienveillante protection fixera désormais notre attention, et il ne dépendra pas de nous qu'il ne s'exécute.” *Registre 1850-1855*, “à Mgr de Charbonnel, év. de Toronto,” p. 54.

²¹ This letter is lost, but the request is mentioned in Tourvieille's letter of June 30 to Father Molony. *Registre 1850-1855*, p. 80, “à Mgr de Charbonnel, év. de Toronto.”

²² Father Augustine Carayon. See C. Causse, *Vie de Monseigneur de Charbonnel*, pp. 71-72; and cp. Theobald Spetz, *The Catholic Church in Waterloo Country*, Toronto 1916, p. 241.

means available in France to learn the elements of English, and they will find that they will not have very much trouble here.”²³

It was this assurance that convinced Father Tourvieille that he should go ahead with the new foundation with what men he had.²⁴ From these details we get a fairly accurate idea of a few of the problems besetting an incipient foundation in the Toronto of the fifties. We also see something of the reason why the personnel of the first Toronto house took the form it did.

In the fall of 1851 and the spring of 1852 it became clear that neither the Oblates nor Jesuits would open schools in the Toronto area. The Oblates had been considering taking over the Niagara peninsula as a mission and possibly, too, of opening a school somewhere between Hamilton and Niagara; and Father Tellier, S.J., had, as we have seen, been working on his plans for a Jesuit college in Toronto. Father Molony wrote in March 1852 that both of these projects had been dropped, but that the Bishop had definitely decided to open the Little Seminary at once under the direction of the Basilians.²⁵ The Bishop himself wrote to the same effect, pointing out, however, that his financial burdens were heavy and that he could only afford to pay minimum salaries, but that he would expect three priests in three months. Father Tourvieille’s reply of May 5 acknowledges the validity of Bishop de Charbonnel’s observations and asks for a formal agreement so that there may be no misunderstanding after the Seminary is open.²⁶

The actual terms of the agreement drawn up by the bishop are to be found scattered through two letters of Father Molony’s, those of April 29 and June 4, 1852, as well as in a personal letter from Bishop de Charbonnel to Father Tourvieille, dated June 5, 1852. The bishop writes as follows.²⁷

“My heart tells me that I shall try to treat your house and its members, my helpers, in a manner compatible at one and the same time with the exigences of justice and charity, with ecclesiastical poverty and with an embarrassed administration.

Here, then, are some figures, if you cannot assist me, the expenses of the first voyage will be mine.²⁸

Next, I promise to your men a house, furniture, 50 louis for food and support for each priest who knows English well enough to be of service, not including Mass stipends. I also promise an increase as soon as my debt is paid.

Your priests will share Father Molony’s work and will be asked to found

²³ Letter of Father Molony, Aug. 5, 1851.

²⁴ *Registre 1850-1855*, p. 98: “à M. Molony à Toronto.”

²⁵ Letter of Father Molony, March 30, 1852.

²⁶ *Registre 1850-1855*, pp. 136-138.

²⁷ Letter of Bishop de Charbonnel to Father Tourvieille, June 5, 1852.

²⁸ The *si on ne peut m’aider* is stroked out and the following words in: *M. Molony me communiq. votre lettre et je bige mon si.*

a Little Seminary in the strict sense according to the terms of the Holy Council of Trent. It shall be exclusively at my expense.”

The money for the passage, referred to in this letter, was not to come from the Bishop personally nor from the diocese of Toronto but from French missionary funds at the disposal of Father Carrière, Superior of St. Sulpice in Paris, and Father Choiselat, treasurer of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, rue Cassette, Paris. When the time came for the band of Basilians to depart, they paid their own way as far as Paris and picked up their passage money from the two parties mentioned above and designated by the Bishop.

From the agreement given above it can be seen that the proposed Little Seminary was to belong to the Bishop and the diocese and that it was to be a strictly ecclesiastical school, *un petit séminaire pur et sans mélange*.

At this stage of affairs a prominent Catholic layman plays an important role in making the foundation a reality. In the Journal of the College of Annonay,²⁹ Saturday June 5, 1852 the following entry appears:

“This morning there arrived a fervent Canadian Catholic, a business man, bearing a letter from Father Molony. He came to urge us to send subjects to Toronto. He left the following Sunday morning. This providential visit has done a lot of good. It has stirred up some of our young confrères and has made Father Malbos decide to take on this mission. It has been the occasion of increasing the determination of those members who are to set forth in July with this businessman.”

The College journal fails to record the name of this gentleman, but he can be readily identified from the Superior General’s Register³⁰ and from Father Molony’s Correspondence.³¹ He was S. G. Lynn, prominent convert and Catholic layman who with John Elmsley had in 1848 assumed responsibility for the entire debt on the Cathedral so that it could be consecrated.³² Father Molony speaks highly of Mr. Lynn. He explains how this gentleman is on the point of leaving for Europe on a business trip to purchase, among other things, furnishings for the Toronto churches. He plans to visit the priests in Annonay in order to advise them about the projected foundation and to give them details as to the best methods of travelling to America.

“I told Him,” writes Father Molony, “not to show himself around here again if he does not bring at least one or two of you with him, because frankly I do

²⁹ *Le Journal du Collège d’Annonay*, 1851-1855. I have not myself seen this journal but am greatly indebted to Father Charles Roume of the Collège du Sacré-Coeur, Annonay, for this and a few other extracts.

³⁰ *Registre* 1850-1855, p. 143.

³¹ Letters of April 29 and June 4, 1852.

³² *Jubilee Volume* (ed. Teefy), p. 150.

not see how I can keep up much longer as I am. Imagine this good man, father of a family, an honorable business- man assisting in the sanctuary of the Cathedral every Sunday in soutane and surplice, looking after my fifty altar boys who, under his guidance, are like so many little angels and who contribute so much to the edification of the Church.”

It must have pleased and encouraged Father Molony to learn later that his friend Lynn had made so favorable an impression in Annonay, no doubt confirming Father Tourvieille’s resolution to send none but the best to America.

In order to follow clearly the early development of the Little Seminary and to understand how it quickly became a college as well, it is essential to pay attention here to another of Bishop de Charbonnel’s projects as outlined in the Molony letters. After the Christian Brothers arrived and began to work so effectively in the Catholic schools, it was felt that they should do something for the boys and young men of high-school or college age who wanted a secular education and expected to take their place in the world. Hitherto, boys and young men were obliged to attend Protestant institutions which were pretty generally felt to be exceedingly dangerous to the faith of Catholic students. The Bishop accordingly, had the Cathedral rectory enlarged at considerable expense during the spring and summer of 1852 in order to house a secondary school or college. This was to open at approximately the same time as the Little Seminary. It was to be conducted by the Christian Brothers and to operate quite separately from the Seminary. It was hoped, however, that some of the boys attending the college would prove to have a vocation and be transferred to the Little Seminary which was to be exclusively for young men going on for the Church.³³ So it is that we find the following advertisement in the *Toronto Mirror*, August 20, 1852:³⁴

Prospectus, St. Michael’s College, under the direction of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, in the Palace, Church St., Toronto. This establishment presents to young people all the advantages of a Christian education, and at the same time of solid instruction preparatory to commerce and the arts. The Palace which is destined for the pupils is fitted up in a style that renders it in point of salubrity all that can be desired ... The number of pupils is limited to fifty ... Address: Directors of St. Michael’s College, Toronto, C.W.

The same issue of the *Mirror* carries an article on the opening of the Lesser Seminary and St. Michael’s College. With reference to the latter, it discusses in a general way the practical character of the curriculum to be offered and gives a short description of the renovations going on at the Palace and mentions that grounds have been appropriated for the use of the college. The enrolment is

³³ Letter of Father Molony, June 4, 1852.

³⁴ *The Toronto Mirror*, XV (Aug. 20, 1852), p. 3, c. 3. An article in the same issue of the *Mirror*, p. 2, c. 7 discusses the coming opening of the Seminary and St. Michael’s College.

expected to include both day-scholars and boarders. Thus the Fall of 1852 was to see the opening of two distinct institutions, the Little Seminary staffed by Basilians and St. Michael's College staffed by Christian Brothers. Both were to be the complete and direct responsibility of the Bishop of Toronto.

Following Mr. Lynn's visit to Annonay, the Superior General, Father Tourvieille, and his Council proceeded to name the men who were to make the new foundation in Toronto.³⁵ They were, besides Father Molony, two priests, Fathers Soulerin and Malbos, Mr. Vincent in minor orders and Mr. Flannery a tonsured cleric. It is impossible to go into the backgrounds of these men within the limits of this paper. We can only say that Father Soulerin was perhaps the most distinguished and promising priest in the Community; he had very nearly been elected Superior General in 1848, and had served as Director of Studies at Annonay since 1842.³⁶ Father Malbos was a younger man, ordained in 1847 and had been teaching in Privas. Father Soulerin was named Superior, Father Malbos Treasurer, Father Molony assistant, that is, he was to be in second place, after the Superior.³⁷

The appointments represented a great sacrifice on the part of the Community. Father Tourvieille in his letter to the Bishop says: "I can tell you, Monseigneur, that we are going to the very limits of our strength, and perhaps beyond them." And Father Molony writes exultantly: "I dared not hope for such happiness. I hardly expected that you would be able to sacrifice Father Soulerin. But since you are giving us your very best, it is a proof that you wish to serve us as a friend. Consequently, we must act accordingly and be worthy of it." Thus the question of opening a house in Canada was now settled. It remained only to inform the Bishop of Viviers of the decision³⁸ and to arrange for the passage of the four confrères. The priests of the Community were asked to say at Mass on non-prohibited days the Collect *pro congregatione et familia*³⁹ and to recite during the day the *Veni Crator* and three *Aves*.⁴⁰

The little band left Annonay in July. Mr. Flannery left first, on July 15, in order to visit Ireland before the departure from Le Havre.⁴¹ Fathers Soulerin and Malbos and Mr. Vincent left on the morning of July 25.⁴² Father Soulerin, we are told, cried the whole morning and the others from time to time. They sailed from Le Havre, August 4, arriving in New York on the 17th and in

³⁵ *Registre 1850-1855*, June 12, 1852, p. 142. Father Molony discusses these appointments in his letter of July 23, 1852.

³⁶ R. J. Scollard, C. S. B., *Lives of the Brethren*, pp. 49-56.

³⁷ *Registre 1850-1855*, p. 161, "à Mgr de Charbonnel, Ev. de Toronto."

³⁸ See *Registre 1850-1855*, p. 150, "à m. l'Ev. de Viviers."

³⁹ The Roman missal was not yet in use in Annonay.

⁴⁰ *Registre 1850-1855*, p. 145.

⁴¹ *Journal du Collège d'Annonay*, jeudi, 15 juillet.

⁴² *Ibid.*, dimanche, 25 juillet.

Toronto on the 21st.⁴³ Father Molony met the party in New York as pre-arranged and accompanied them to Toronto. One little episode on this trip is worth recording because its touch of pathos reveals a little of the personal side of the venture, the fears of Father Soulerin that his young companions might not persevere and the quiet sufferings the, separation from dear ones entailed.

“At Le Havre,” writes Father Soulerin, “I received a letter for Mr. Vincent. It was from his mother who was writing to him at Annonay urging him to come and see her just as soon as the holidays began. I did not mention this letter to him until we were in the middle of the ocean. How did his poor mother take the news of his departure?”⁴⁴

After the party reached Toronto on August 21, the Bishop put them up in the Palace for two weeks until their temporary home was ready. During this period, Father Soulerin wrote as follows to Father Deglesne, a confrère and friend he had left behind in France:⁴⁵

“We are still at the Bishop’s palace, but Monseigneur has rented us a house beside the Cathedral, and we are only waiting for the workmen, who are busy with alterations, to leave, in order to transport our *penates*. There we shall open our Little Seminary and pass the winter. During the first six or seven months we shall hardly have any students other than day scholars because the house is not large enough for boarders, although the rent is costing Monseigneur fifty to fifty-five louis. In the Spring we shall have more room.”

While the Community was still waiting at the Palace, and before its removal to its first temporary quarters on Queen St., Bishop de Charbonnel formulated his first plans for a permanent seminary building. In this same letter we read of his decision to open Toronto’s third church on a property in the west end located on Bathurst St., near Adelaide. This church was to be built in brick. The Bishop hoped to consecrate it on the Feast of the Presentation and it was to be named St. Mary’s. Near the church a wooden building was to be erected which would serve

⁴³ There is some difficulty in determining the exact dates. According to the first arrangements (*Registre 1850-1855*, July 14, p. 160) they were to sail from Le Havre on August 4 aboard the Franklin for New York. Plans were then changed and they were to sail from Liverpool on August 14 (*Registre 1850-1855*, July 22, p. 11). The account in the *Toronto Mirror* says they sailed from Le Havre on August 6 and arrived in New York on the 17th and Toronto on the 21st. Father Soulerin’s first extant letter says that the voyage to Toronto took 18 days. Apparently they followed the original arrangement and sailed from Le Havre on the 4th.

⁴⁴ Letter of Father Soulerin, October 1, 1852.

⁴⁵ Undated letter of Father Soulerin to Father Deglesne, but obviously written before September 4, 1852, the day the Community moved from the Palace to Queen St.

as a Little Seminary. Both buildings were to be entrusted to the Basilians but owned by the diocese. The Community was familiar with no other sort of arrangement. In France they had always worked for the Bishop much like diocesan clergy. Even today in Annonay it is the Bishop of Viviers who names the head of the Basilian Collège du Sacré Coeur. But no sooner had the Basilians set foot in America than they realized that this arrangement would not do. No bishop could afford to provide buildings particularly in a city like Toronto where the church was without endowment and the faithful were for the most part recently-arrived and impoverished immigrants. The Community simply had to make a material contribution if the much-needed institutions were to flourish. Other Communities were showing the way and the Basilians sensed from the beginning that it was the best way. Thus we find Father Soulerin saying in the same letter to Father Deglesne:

“In New York we visited The Fathers of Mercy. They are in much the same position as we are, save that they have built their own lovely church and are still deeply in debt. But they are satisfied they are doing great work; and it is only lack of English and German-speaking priests that prevents them from doing much more. We visited, too, the Redemptorist Fathers in Rochester. They have built both a Church and a school at their own expense. This is the way to get established in this country and to grow.”

So it is that in this earliest letter of Father Soulerin’s we see the germ of the idea which was eventually to result in the diversion of St. Mary’s to other purposes⁴⁶ and in the ultimate construction of a Basilian church and college.

On September 4, 1852,⁴⁷ the small Community moved into their temporary home on Queen St.,⁴⁸ and classes commenced September 15 with nine students.⁴⁹ In view of its destined location in the newly-proposed west-end parish, it was called St. Mary’s Seminary. The following extract from an

⁴⁶ The Little Seminary building was first given in charge to the Sisters of Loretto, then to the Sisters of Charity for an Industrial School for girls, then to the Sisters of St. Joseph, etc. until sold and removed to make room for the presbytery. *Jubilee Volume* (ed. Teefy), p. 290. On Sept. 8, 1869, it became the first Toronto home of the Sisters of the Precious Blood. See E. J. Auclair, *Mère Catherine Aurélie* (Quebec 1923), p. 191.

⁴⁷ Letter of Soulerin to Tourvieille, Sept. 4, 1852. This letter begins “Nous coucherons ce soir pour la première fois dans notre maison provisoire.”

⁴⁸ Mr. Ed. J. Hand, an alumnus of St. Michael’s who enrolled in 1889 recalls that the Seminary was located opposite Metropolitan Church at Nos. 61-67 Queen St. It was, he says, contiguous to the old Orange Hall which faced on Perty St. Perkins Bull, *From Macdonell to McGuigan* (Toronto 1939), p. 424 says confidently that the college building was on Queen Street “where the district Orange Hall now stands.”

⁴⁹ *Grand Livre du Petit Séminaire de Sainte-Marie à Toronto, 1852-1853*, pp. 1-15.

important letter of Father Soulerin's describes life and work in this first Basilian school in Canada. It also throws a great deal of light on Bishop de Charbonnel and local conditions.⁵⁰

"For three weeks we have been living in our provisory home and have been receiving the first students of the Little Seminary since the 15th. We have some ten students to whom we are giving class regularly, morning and afternoon. Mr. Flannery has charge of the six youngest who have not yet learned *Rosa*. Fathers Malbos and Molony are sharing the rest of the teaching. Mr. Vincent is on discipline and is studying English and Theology. Thanks be to God, we are all well. . . . At the end of our parlour, there is a tiny closet, no larger than yours, and in it Mr. Vincent has made a pretty little altar out of things given to him by a good family. There, in the morning and at various times during the day we unite our intentions with those of our beloved confrères at Annonay. So far, meditations, particular examen, spiritual reading have been regular. God grant that the fervor of these first days continue and increase. Mgr. has assigned us to the two convents of Loretto and St. Joseph's, and also to the Brothers. I have been confessor to the latter for a month. Next week I shall be taking another job. Father Molony will be giving a Retreat to the Sisters of St. Joseph on the occasion of the taking of the habit by five postulants, and I shall try to be their extraordinary confessor. Poor Father Molony has had his work reduced a little since our arrival, but he still has a good share of ministerial duties. There are only four priests in the city of Toronto, including a suburb several miles away. Monseigneur is not without his work to do. When we arrived he was preaching a thirty-day retreat to the Ladies of Loretto and was speaking to them three or four times each day. No sooner was the Retreat over than he left for Montreal and Quebec in order to negotiate with the government on the important school question. He returned here on the 26th, and left the day before yesterday for Cincinnati where he is going to give the priests' Retreat.⁵¹ Then he will go around his diocese giving missions while the people are not so occupied with their work. So you can get some idea of the character and activity of the holy Bishop. He is in danger of losing his sight completely in a short time. It is a cataract. The doctors have told him that in two years he will no longer have the use of his eyes. He has asked for and is still asking with hue and cry for a coadjutor. He would like to be free to go himself to Europe for a year or two in order to find good priests and resources for his diocese."

This same letter has a great deal of detail concerning the new buildings at St. Mary's Parish and returns to the theme that the Community should erect its own building both as a favor to the diocese and as a safeguard for the future and suggests that 30,000 francs be found in France to begin such a project.

During this fall of 1852 the Catholic educational institutions were having

⁵⁰ Letter of Soulerin to Tourvieille, October 1, 1852.

⁵¹ Bishop de Charbonnel says in his letter to Tourvieille, Sandwich Nov. 28, 1852 that on this trip which lasted 5 weeks he preached 78 times and was bringing home 5000 francs to meet the interest on his crushing diocesan debt.

their troubles. The Little Seminary was doing fairly well and before the end of December its numbers had reached 21, 9 boarders and 12 day scholars. But it was proving costly to the Bishop because he had to pay not only the rent but much of the tuition too, which, of course, in any case went to him. He was paying salaries of 50 louis to the three Basilians whose English was adequate, deducting half of this sum for the board and lodging of the staff of five. The school for young women, although now established six or seven years, had only seven boarders. As for the Brothers' College in the Palace, Father Soulerin writes:

“St. Michael's College, opened in the new buildings of the Bishop's palace, and directed by the Brothers of the Christian Schools has as yet a total student body of but eight day scholars.”⁵²

This was a serious blow to the Bishop's economy. Accordingly, he was all the more ready to divert the Little Seminary from its proposed location at St. Mary's and move it into the Cathedral with the College. In an undated letter of December 1852 or January 1853 we find Father Soulerin preparing the Superior General for this move. Obviously such a move, if it took place could only be temporary, and so in this same letter we find that the Bishop and Father Soulerin have canvassed all the possible locations for a new and permanent establishment to be paid for and owned by the Community. These building lots are as follows: 1. the property where St. Mary's church is already rising. 2. A property near St. Paul's church contiguous to the public cemetery.⁵³ 3. A piece of land north of the city, once offered to Father Tellier, and known as Clover Hill. Thus when it was decided to close the house on Queen St. and move into the Cathedral palace, consideration had been given to the selection of the permanent home of the Seminary. Father Soulerin liked the Clover Hill property but thought it rather far from the centre of things, particularly for priests going out into the city each morning for Mass. Father Tourvieille tended to favor the St. Mary's property because it had been the first considered and seemed to offer the least risk. From all this, it is clear that the transfer of the Community to the palace, February 14, 1853, was a temporary move. This is the more certain in that the move was the signal for the Basilians to take positive steps towards acquiring property of their own.

This was done in two steps recounted by Father Soulerin in a letter to Father Tourvieille dated April 9, 1853. Four lots on Clover Hill were donated by Mr. and Mrs Elmsley for the new College buildings. Four additional and adjacent lots were purchased by the Community with funds provided from France. The details of these transactions form part of another story, but they are recorded here as testimony of the generous loyalty of the Catholic layfolk and the keen vision of

⁵² Letter of Soulerin to Tourvieille, towards the end of 1852 or early in 1853. Father Tourvieille answers it Feb. 8, 1853.

⁵³ This is no doubt the present House of Providence property.

the founders of the College.

When the Little Seminary was moved from Queen St. into the Bishop's Palace, it quickly absorbed the tiny College already existing there and gradually assumed its name. There is practically no documentation covering these days. Father Malbos' account book for 1852-53⁵⁴ has a few enigmatic entries. The account of Nicholas Murphy, for example, who entered the school Feb. 12, 1853 is credited with £5 which "les frères ont reçu" and is debited £10/5 "pour la pension avec nous."⁵⁵ John Foy entered June 3, 1853 and under his name the following note appears: "The brothers were paid £6 for two children for half the year. But they only stayed for three months. This comes to only 4 louis. The two remaining louis are on the account of John Foy during two months at St. Michael's."⁵⁶ We find Father Tourvieille commenting on the change, but only to warn his priests in Canada to limit themselves as much as possible to the work of teaching and not to become preoccupied with parochial affairs. He also objects violently to any tendency to destroy the ecclesiastical character of the school.⁵⁷ His letters right on to the end of June are addressed to "M. Soulerin, Supérieur du Petit Séminaire de Ste. Marie." On July 5, however he addressed him as "Supérieur du collège St. Michel."⁵⁸

The *Toronto Mirror's* account of the examinations and distribution of prizes speaks of St. Michael's as both a Seminary and a College and of the Basilians as having been its directors for "a space of nine months."⁵⁹ With the opening of the next term all ambiguity ceases. The columns of the *Mirror* call attention to the prospectus of St. Michael's College for 1853.⁵⁴ and an advertisement appears on the same page for "St. Michael's College, Toronto, under the superintendence of the Reverend Gentlemen of St. Basil."⁶⁰

The formative period in the history of St. Michael's College falls roughly into three stages: First, the preparatory stage during which Father Molony studied the situation in Canada at first hand and provided his superiors in France with the kind of information necessary for establishing a successful house. Secondly, the exclusively Little Seminary stage when the four Basilians tried to blend a little bit of old Ardèche into muddy, adolescent York, and found the mixture just a little unpalatable. Thirdly, the short period of transition into a classical college adapted in so far as possible to the needs of both lay and clerical students who otherwise would face life under serious academic or spiritual handicaps. With September 1853 St. Michael's passed from her formative period into her long and steady period of sound development.

⁵⁴ *Grand Livre du Petit Séminaire de Sainte-Marie à Toronto, 1852-1853.*

⁵⁵ pp. 38-39.

⁵⁶ p. 42.

⁵⁷ *Registre 1850-1855*, à M. Soulerin, pp. 216-219.

⁵⁸ *Registre 1850-1855*, p. 252.

⁵⁹ *Toronto Mirror*, July 29, 1853, Vol. XVI, p. 2, c. 5.

⁶⁰ *Toronto Mirror*, Aug. 26, 1853, Vol. XVI, p. 3, c. 5.