

Care of the Orphan and the Aged by the Irish Community of Quebec City, 1847 and Years Following

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Quebec City

If you drive out of Quebec City today along the St. Louis Road where it swings southward into the old part of the City of Sillery, you will come to a well designed, low built brick and wood building, large and comfortable looking with a magnificent view of the St. Lawrence River. This is St. Bridget's Home, the third building in a series that has borne that name since the first establishment near the old St. Patrick's Church on McMahon Street in 1856. The roots of that 1856 establishment go back even farther, however, and it is the beginning, as well as the continuation, of the story that I wish to sketch today.

My intention is to indicate the broad lines of the development of St. Bridget's Home. I do not intend to make this a definitive history – indeed I could not do the story justice in the hours of research that I have given to it, nor in the minutes of speaking time allotted to it today. In addition to the story of the Home, however, I wish to provide the background against which the drama unfolded – and drama it is, of a French city being steadily inundated with Irish immigrants – and of the work that both people did together to provide for the needy.

If I begin my story in 1847, the year of the Great Famine Immigration, it is only because it is a familiar date that I will use as a pivotal point. The huge immigration of 1847 has captured the popular imagination to such an extent that the real facts about Irish immigration to Quebec, before and after that date, have been obscured. 1847 is only one milestone. The story of the Irish in Quebec begins long before that date, but enough has already been said by the economic and social historians about the event itself to make it a memorable one.

Enough, however, has not been said about French-Irish rela-

tionships in Quebec City. It is my belief that St. Bridget's reflects in microcosm that larger meeting of the two Celtic cultures. It is much better labelled a relationship rather than a clash, as some would like to call it. I hope to show you this relationship as I proceed.

Let us begin on Sunday morning, March 21, in 1847, at St. Patrick's Church in Upper Town, old Quebec, where the Irish were celebrating the Silver Jubilee of Father Patrick McMahon. His twenty five years of priesthood were spent almost entirely in Quebec City looking after the English-speaking Catholics, nearly all Irish, who formed a very large part of the French parish of Notre-Dame de Québec. The Irish were assembled that Sunday under the chairmanship of the English lumber merchant John Sharples, who, in presenting Father McMahon with appropriate gifts reminded his audience of the growth of the Irish of Quebec into a community with a church of their own. I quote from Sharples:

By your untiring energy and zeal, careless of the sacrifice of health itself, you have collected the scattered wanderers from a distant land into a happy, numerous and a powerful class, conscious of their civil duties, and careful to perform them, you have established schools for the use and benefit of the youth of this congregation, and in your lectures from the pulpit you have taught the adults to respect themselves, and to compete through the unavoidable struggles of life, in honest emulation with their fellowmen.

With a devoted charity during two successive years when an infectious and fatal disease decimated this city your attendance in the cause of religion and humanity at the couch of poverty, contagion and death was unwearied, and upon all occasions and under all circumstances the orphan, the widow and the emigrant have found in you their comforter, their counsellor and their friend.

This congregation by your preaching has been taught and by your example has been shown a spirit of friendship to their fellow citizens, of loyalty to their sovereign, and of devotion to their religion.¹

In replying to Sharples' cordial words, Father McMahon echoed his thoughts about friendship to their fellow citizens and reiterated his own desire expressed long before in 1833, at the time of the

¹ James M. O'LEARY, *History of the Irish Catholics of Quebec*, (Quebec: Daily Telegraph Print, 1895), pp. 30 ff

dedication of the St. Patrick's Church, for peace and understanding between his people and their neighbours. After thanking his congregation for their generous gifts Father McMahon reflected upon the church building itself in words so gentle that one wonders how this orator could ever have been the center of a storm of political controversy over a sermon. He said, in these words:

The splendid church in which I feel this day both pride and pleasure in addressing you, is the work of your own hands and not of mine, for what could I have been able to effect without your cordial and unanimous cooperation. Yes, beloved friends, this noble edifice which you have raised for the worship of the God of your Fathers is and will continue to be evidence to all of your love of religion, as well as of the esteem in which you are held by your fellow citizens of other denominations who generously came forward to assist you in its erection. And I feel satisfied that the recollection of this will not fail to induce you to cultivate a friendly feeling towards them and to preserve unimpaired that spirit of peace, harmony and good understanding which now so happily exists among us and which as you well know is the vital principle, the very life and soul of every community.²

His words here on the 'spirit of peace, harmony and good understanding' were given further weight when he informed his listeners of the "dispositions that our ecclesiastical superiors (have) towards us, and that the deepest interest is felt by our venerable archbishop in every matter that concerns the welfare and prosperity of this establishment."³ These words proved true time and time again. Because there were elements for misunderstanding everywhere around them, indeed all the makings of a long and bitter feud, the fact that a basic understanding and familiarity did develop between French and Irish in Quebec is all the more wonderful. It is part of the very fabric of my story.

However, it is Father McMahon's prophetic words voiced in a central paragraph that I choose to dwell upon as my link between the past and the present.

He said:

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

I have lived, beloved friends, to see a portion at least of my fondest hopes realized, and were it not that my shattered constitution and fast declining health forbid me look forward to any length of days, I should still hope to be spared to witness the accomplishment of other important projects which I have long been considering and which I feel convinced would very much tend to the happiness, respectability and prosperity of that congregation. But I have every reason to believe that Providence has reserved the realization of these fond projects for other days and abler hands.⁴

When Father McMahon spoke of a “portion at least of my fondest hopes realized” there is no doubt that he meant the building of the church itself, and the gradual cementing of the Irish people of Quebec into a community. But there were other accomplishments of the community that he had witnessed, if not directly promoted. In 1843 the Christian Brothers had opened classes for boys in Quebec, both in Upper Town, across the street from the church, and in Lower Town on Champlain Street; and in both places Irish boys in numbers usually greater than those of their French Canadian school mates took advantage of the education the Brothers gave. No doubt, the school was a portion of Father McMahon's “fondest hopes,” for in 1833 even while McMahon and his men were in the midst of building the church, they had expressed the need for a school for the numerous children of the Irish in “the cove,” the area around the Lower Town Church (Notre-Dame des Victoires) which was then their center.

At this point, it is good to look at Quebec of the 1820s and 30s, when conditions unfavourable in Europe and a little more favourable in Canada brought about a mass emigration across the North Atlantic such as the world had hardly seen up to that time. Quebec City stood at the head of deep-water navigation and as such was the landing place for the thousands who came to North America by the St. Lawrence River route. Not all the immigrants continued on to Upper Canada or to the States, however. A good number settled in and about Quebec City, lured by ready employment in the timber trade. Indeed, by 1830 according to some calculations, there were as many as 7,000 Irish Catholics in

⁴ *Ibid.*

Quebec City out of a total population of about 31,000.⁵ These people found leadership in their compatriot Father McMahon, and in a well established, cohesive group of Irish business men (of varying political stamp by the way) who, starting about 1824, had negotiated for and finally accomplished in 1833 the building of St. Patrick's Church on the then Ste. Hélène Street in the Upper Town.

A short review of these men and their work will further clarify the position of the Irish in Quebec, and lead to a better understanding of the background against which the story of St. Bridget's is built.

Documents exist that show the Irish in Quebec City as a group conscious of their particular needs as early as 1812 or so. Later on the principal document is a Minute Book covering 1831 to 1854 kept by the successive committees that built and maintained St. Patrick's Church. It shows that this group of Irishmen, both foreign-born and Canadian-born businessmen, had formed an executive group called the Committee of Management which resembled, to a great extent, in its original form and intent the "Fabrique" of the Church in Canada, that body of laymen established by law to look after the temporalities of the church. These records show that as the committee men worked on the business of building a church, they became more and more familiar with all the other needs of their people which, they felt, also required direct intervention and care where they could give it. Let two things be noted here: that the year of dedication of the church and interest in starting a school was 1833, long before the famine migrations of 1847, and that there were among the committee men some bright lights in Canada's history.

One recognizes the important names of Edmund Bailey O'Callaghan, John Teed and Michael Connolly in a context different from the usual 1837-38 troubles with which all three are connected. O'Callaghan is better known as the editor of the *Montreal Advertiser and Irish Vindicator*, a reform newspaper which kept its Irish readers interested in the political work of Louis Joseph Papineau and informed its French Canadian readers of the parliamentary exploits of Daniel O'Connell. O'Callaghan

⁵ Antonio DROLET, *La Ville de Québec*, Histoire Municipale II, Régime Anglais, (Québec: La Société Historique de Québec, 1965), p. 15.

succeeded, in the post of editor, Dr. Daniel Tracey whose story was presented to this society several years ago by Dr. Emmett Mullally and published in the 1934-35 Report. O'Callaghan spent ten years in Quebec City after his arrival here from Paris before he became known for his connections with Papineau in the Montreal region. After his flight to New York State in 1837 he became famous for his work in editing and publishing documents relating to the early history of New York State. John Teed, his fellow worker in Quebec, was arrested in 1838 for his political activities. His eventual release from imprisonment, due to the petition of his wife and the decision of the French Canadian Judges Panet, Réal de St. Vallieres and Bédard in issuing a writ of Habeas Corpus after that law had been suspended by Governor Colborne, led to an official inquiry (and the suspension of the Judges).

Michael Connolly was a Wexford-born businessman, a political associate of John Teed and O'Callaghan. In his long life he engaged in provincial and municipal politics, was successful in the latter as alderman of Quebec, and at the end of his long life (he died in 1891) was one of Quebec City's most respected elder citizens. His daughter, Mary, married a French Canadian, Pierre Alexis Tremblay, who later became prominent, as a Member of the Legislative Assembly, for his defense of unionism.

These three men, out of a veritable parade of founding members of the Irish community in Quebec, were only the first of many fine men who, down till today, have given and still give their time and energy to guiding the destinies of the Irish and their descendants in Quebec.

Quebec, in the 1830s, was a bustling seaport, a busy city and garrison town. It saw more than its share of ordinary human suffering. Poverty and pestilence, famine and fire took a toll of men, women and children, and coupled with a vast immigration left a complement of helpless survivors – destitute old people, abandoned children and other unfortunates disoriented by too great misfortune. All these poor people were cared for by the benevolence of their neighbours in ways both public and private, as will be demonstrated.

For the years before St. Bridget's was started in 1856 there are records of the Committee of Management of St. Patrick's paying for the upkeep of disabled old people, parishioners. For example, on

May 31, 1841, the Minute Book stated:

the treasurer was ordered to pay 2/6 per week for the maintenance of
Granny Burke commencing on the 10th of May.

also, in November of 1842 the Chairman, Reverend Mr. McMahon

brought before the meeting the case of the Widow Willoughby a
distressed woman with but one leg, also the case of Sarah McGoughen
who had also lost a leg. The Treasurer was ordered to pay them each 7/6
per month until countermanded.

The records show that in 1852 Granny Burke was still receiving her
2/6 a week. Mrs. Willoughby died that year in May, still on the
relief roll of the parish.

The work of the pastor and his committee was not, however,
confined only to efforts by themselves, isolated from the life of the
city. They joined the French in many things. For example, when
the Saint Vincent de Paul Society was brought to Quebec in 1845,
members of St. Patrick's were present for its foundation meetings
and came forward with alacrity to unite their efforts with those of
the French Canadians in extending the work of the society. A St.
Patrick's Council of the St. Vincent de Paul Society under the
Chairmanship of John Patrick O'Meara was started in 1846, the
first of five parish councils that cared for different corners of the
city. This was not the first instance of organized care of the
unfortunate, but it is a significant one for it exemplified exactly
what McMahon wished for: "peace, harmony and good
understanding." And the time for everyone to exercise that good
understanding – to the fullest – came soon enough as the problem
of orphan care in the city became more and more acute. Beginning
as early as 1832, for example, the first cholera epidemic left forty
orphans under the care of the rector of the Metropolitan (Angli-
can) Church, Dr. G.J. Mountain. To care for them, he had called
together the heads of the families of his congregation by a notice
in the *Quebec Mercury* on July 3, 1832. But of course, the care of
children and others was not a sporadic affair of hit-or-miss
attention. Quebec saw the foundation of a long lasting institution
in 1831 when two separate groups of warm-hearted and energetic

ladies began to look after the education and the welfare of poor children and orphans. One group in the Upper Town under the leadership of Madame Jean Thomas Taschereau (mother of the future Cardinal of Quebec, Elzéar Alexandre Taschereau) called itself “Société d’éducation sous la direction des Dames Charitables de la Cité de Québec.” The other group, in the Lower Town or St. Roch’s, was founded by Madame F.X. Paradis under the name of “Société Charitable des Dames de Québec pour le soulagement des orphelins.” Madame Paradis had, in fact, taken twelve little children into her own home.

In 1834 the two societies merged and purchased a house and property at the corner of des Glacis and Richelieu Street in Upper Town. Under a new name, “Société des Dames Charitables de Québec,” (hardly shorter than either of the previous ones) they organized and managed a school and orphanage in that building. The ladies represented not only a respectable stratum of Quebec society, but also one interesting for its mixture of French, English and Irish names. Of the Irish names, a few are of French Canadian wives of Irish men. The need was universal and without boundaries, and the ladies worked together to meet it.

In 1842 the annual report of the society showed that in their first ten years of existence they had cared for 1,547 children in their school for a total cost of \$8,100. Of that amount, \$180 went for a teacher and \$60 for her assistant – both bilingual. The teacher, Henrietta Chaffers, according to the inspectors Fathers Parent and Demers, spoke French and English equally well. Again, testimony to the fact of Irish and French working together. Her later assistant was named Anne McMahon, a further indication that English-speaking as well as French children lived in the orphanage.⁶

This long description of the care of orphans in Quebec is not incidental to this story but describes an essential stage, for it was through this French institution’s later administration by the Grey Nuns of Montreal that St. Patrick’s people became familiar with the Grey Nuns and later became very closely connected with them.

About 1845 or so Bishop C.F. Turgeon of Quebec had been in

⁶ SŒURS DE LA CHARITÉ, *Une Fondatrice et son Œuvre. Mère Mallet et l’Institut des Soeurs de la Charité de Québec*. (Québec: Sœurs de la Charité, 1939).

correspondence with Bishop Bourget of Montreal concerning the need for Sisters to come to Quebec to take over the orphanage founded by Les Dames Charitables. In 1849 his pleas were answered when five Sisters of Charity (Grey Nuns) and their superior Mère Marie Anne Marcelle Mallet came to the school and orphanage on des Glacis Street and took the reins of management from Les Dames Charitables. They had even managed to find an Irish nun in Montreal, the novice Sister Ste. Marie, Mary Alice Dunn, daughter of John Dunn and Ellen O'Connor. It was understood that she would be especially useful in the orphanage caring for the little Irish children. And there were already large numbers of them here and there in the City.

Even before she left Montreal, Mère Mallet had been informed that Father McMahon of St. Patrick's was caring for thirty-three little children orphaned by the typhus epidemic of 1849. The parish had, in fact, been looking after children in one way or another ever since 1847 when sheds had been put up in the church yard of St. Patrick's to offer temporary shelter during the summer to orphaned children who were quickly adopted by French and Irish families. Besides the parish efforts, private individuals as well had opened their homes, as for instance, Mr. and Mrs. John J. Nesbitt (shipbuilder) who offered their house on Prince Edward Street as a temporary stopping place in July of 1847 for children awaiting the discharge of their sick relatives from the Marine Hospital (the quarantine hospital). Before the summer was out, faced with the tragic plight of so many children, the Nesbitts threw open their home as an Irish orphanage.

In 1849 Father McMahon's Irish orphans soon mingled with the twenty-five children already at Mother Mallet's orphanage on des Glacis Street. For several years things remained thus – the Irish congregation readily lending its support to the Grey Nuns' orphanage, and besides, allotting frequent donations from special collections for the poor. However, the time was ripe for Father McMahon's prophecy about "the accomplishment of other important projects." Not until about 1855, however, four years after Father McMahon's death, did the idea begin to take serious root that the Irish could be looking after their own children in their own orphanage, instead of putting their money and their children into the Grey Nuns' orphanage.

The idea was not an entirely new one, for in 1836 there had been a petition made to Governor Gosford from one John Molloy on behalf of the British Catholics of Quebec for assistance towards the completion of an orphan asylum. In 1855 and 1856 various collections were taken up, notably one by Mrs. John Connolly of Couillard Street who went around to the non-coms and enlisted men at the Barracks before the Cathedral and to the citadel where she collected £ 18. She placed this sum in the hands of McMahon's successor, Father James Nelligan, towards the start of a home. Before Father Nelligan could act on it, he was replaced as Pastor by Father Bernard McGauran, who, with that modest sum of £ 18 or \$72. rented a house near the old church in 1856. Thus began St. Bridget's Home. Yet, at first, it did not care for children, but cared for old people. A list of the first residents shows a very fluid population of men, women and a few children staying very short periods before moving on to something better.

In December of 1856 a bazaar was gotten up, in the terminology of the day, by a group of zealous ladies of the parish to raise money for the continuance of the St. Bridget's Asylum, as it was first called. The advertisements for the bazaar stated that the Asylum "has been established for the support of the aged, infirm and destitute members of the congregation." The ad continued:

Donations of clothing, provisions of furniture are earnestly solicited for this object from the charitably disposed, who may either send such donations to the Asylum, St. Stanislas Street, or may have the same sent for by leaving their names and addresses at the St. Patrick's Presbytery or at the Asylum

At this point you are probably asking why don't we have a picture of the house? Simply because there is a disagreement in the descriptions of location – one says St. Stanislas Street; another says McMahon Street, making a compatible corner – but then the Grey Nuns' "*Annales*" says "sise devant l'église," a site impossible to reconcile with the corner of McMahon and St. Stanislas Streets.

From 1856 until the spring of 1858 the house near the church served to care for several old ladies and a handful of children. But necessity soon swept everything forward again in a series of swift-moving events: Father McGauran founded the St. Bridget's

Asylum Association and an agreement was reached with the Grey Nuns to provide some Sisters for the Home.

Early in 1858 the Association was in a sound enough financial condition to receive a lot of land from the Committee of Management of the Church. The lot was a piece of ground 200 feet long and half as wide 'on the Plains of Abraham' say the old descriptions, the western half of the cholera burying ground of 1832, i.e. on the corner of Grande Allée and De Salaberry Avenue. On it stood a sturdy old barracks 40 feet by 60 feet in size. The Committee bought lot and building from the Fabrique of Notre Dame de Québec for \$4,000, handed it over to the St. Bridget's Asylum Association which made the necessary repairs and alterations to the building. On April 11, 1858 the people from McMahon Street moved in. Tradition says that there was grumbling by both residents and parishioners that the new Home was too far away from the Church, that the priest would never get there in time if somebody were sick – a tradition of complaint revised and observed in plenitude in 1974. Nonetheless, they moved.

The Parish had had satisfactory dealings with the Grey Nuns in the des Glacis orphanage, and asked them to assume charge of the new establishment, and thus it was that about twenty old ladies and five or six children were accompanied to their new dwelling by two Grey nuns, Sister Youville Lavignon and Sister St. Ignace Mahon, another French Canadian-Irish team.

For the year or so on McMahon Street, the Asylum had been in the charge of a matron, Miss Anna Maria Bradley,⁷ who with the assistance of the St. Patrick's Ladies' Charitable Society, looked after the daily maintenance and interior running of the Home, while the St. Bridget's Asylum Association (the men) handled the money that the Home needed. When the Grey Nuns assumed charge, Mother General Mère Mallet no doubt foresaw some difficulties in such a loose arrangement, especially involving too frequent dealings of her nuns with laymen. In an attempt to spell out duties, responsibilities, privileges and limits, she drew up a contract between the community and the St. Bridget's Association. Evidently the contract was accepted verbally, perhaps offhandedly,

⁷ Anna Maria Bradley, daughter of Dr. Robert Bradley and Mary A. Power was born in Quebec in 1823 and died at St. Bridget's in 1894.

by the gentlemen of the Association. All one can gather at this point in the reporting of the events in the *Annales*,⁸ as well as in the exchange of correspondence, was that from the very beginning there were misunderstandings. The Sisters tried to maintain a convent order in the house they had taken over, and the committee men tried to continue what they considered to be their duty and their rightful role in the institution they were supporting. The *Annales* report, somewhat indignantly, that the men of the committee insisted on visiting the premises without warning; that the committee complained when a young French Canadian girl was hired by the Nuns; that they objected to the Nuns buying their supplies from other than Irish merchants (when, remarked the writer of the *Annales*, the French Canadian merchants gave better prices). All this occurred within the short space of the first summer.

In September of 1859 the Secretary of the St. Bridget's Asylum Association wrote to the Mother General of the Grey Nuns acknowledging the committee's awareness of the complaints. Though the language is elegantly Victorian, the discomfort at the misunderstanding and determination to keep the role of real proprietors, came through in the letter. It reads in part as follows:

... as frequent visitors ourselves and believing we were acting in accordance with the rules, and to the entire satisfaction of the sisters in charge – they never having intimated to us anything to the contrary, it is with no small degree of surprise and regret, that we learn that anything should have occurred calculated to create the impression that these visits were made for the purpose of seeing how the duties of the Sisters were performed, or, for interfering in any manner in the internal management of the house ... Visitors ... were for the purpose of keeping the ... committee acquainted with its requirements... to obtain the necessary information from the Sisters ... The misunderstanding (over visiting all apartments) must in our opinion be owing to the fact of the respective parties not fully understanding each other's language ... The association which has been formed for the purpose of providing ways and means to sustain the institution imposed upon that Committee among other duties that of choosing (*sic*) the parties in question (suppliers), and to abandon this would be a betrayal of the trust deposited

⁸ *Les Annales de St. Brigitte* are contained in a large handwritten book. They consist of day by day reporting as well as of a collection of newspaper clippings.

in them ... it was always understood that the Sisters had the right of refusing (such suppliers) by signifying their objections to the Rev'd president of the Committee ...⁹

The rest of the letter continued in the same restrained tone reiterating the desire of the committee to see to the smooth running of the house, but stating that they wished to continue visiting (at predetermined times) and receiving regular financial reports with out which they could not function in their capacity of providers.

Not one word was said in the letter about the contract that Mère Mallet desired them to sign, although they had evidently seen it, hence, their references to "accordance with the rules" or "it was always understood that the Sisters should have the right of refusing," etc., etc.

This first conflict of principles of management did not have a happy ending. There were exchanges between Mère Mallet and the Committee at one time, or with Father McGauran at other times. Finally, Mère Mallet with a business woman's sense of pressure tactics and with a just desire to reach an understanding demanded a showdown. If the proposed contract were not signed, said she, by May 14, she would be forced to withdraw her sisters. When no signatories appeared on the evening of May 14, the two Sisters regretfully said goodbye to their charges and to Father McGauran, and returned to the Motherhouse. It would be eighteen years before they returned. Miss Anna Maria Bradley was persuaded to come back and take temporary charge of the budding establishment. It would be eighteen years before she, too, changed her position and relinquished the job that she had agreed to take temporarily. Thus for the intervening years from 1859 to 1877, the Home continued its benevolent work under the care of Miss Bradley.

With an astuteness that belies the stereotyped Irishman's "ag'in the government" attitude, the Association had made application to the legislature for incorporation in 1859. With the skilfull parliamentary help of Irishman Charles Alleyn, parishioner of St. Patrick's and well known public figure of the day, the bill became

⁹ T.J. Murphy, Secretary of St. Bridget's Association to Reverend Mother Superior, September 28, 1858, Grey Nuns Motherhouse Archives, Quebec.

an Act of Incorporation in 1860, passed without some of the damaging sub-clauses that other corporations had been saddled with.¹⁰

Despite the fact that it never received statutory grants, the Association received enough money to keep it free from major debts. The St. Patrick's Ladies' Charitable Association was responsible for collecting the largest amount of money each year especially through their annual bazaars like that of 1872, under the patronage of the Countess of Dufferin which brought in \$3,418 while the annual expenses had amounted to \$2,125.93.¹¹

Some people call the Irish dreamers, others call them men of vision. The people of the parish of St. Patrick's had a vision. They were not content with simply having a home that would care for the orphans and old people. They had a grand vision of a motherhouse at St. Bridget's. The correspondence between the men of the association and the Archbishop, both before and after the return of the Grey Nuns is filled with their dream of setting up St. Bridget's as the motherhouse of a community that would attract their daughters to religious life and guarantee the continuance and flourishing existence of the home.

With this project in mind, the committee approached others besides the Grey Nuns: the Sisters of the General Hospital and the Good Shepherds of Quebec. However, they found that the cloistered rule of the General Hospital as well as their need for a large private enclosed garden or yard could not be met. As to the Good Shepherds, letters to the Archbishop show that their work of caring for penitents was considered out of keeping with the work of St. Bridget's in its sheltering of old people and orphans. In the long run, when negotiations resulted in the return of the Grey Nuns, the Association had to content itself not with a Motherhouse but simply with a clause in the contract stating that the Grey Nuns would always provide four Irish nuns for St. Bridget's. Eventually this ruling resulted in a rotation system, in which the same four, and later two Irish nuns, alternated as Superior and subjects of the Home.

¹⁰ *The True Witness & Catholic Chronicle*, March 4, 1859.

¹¹ Archives de l'Archevêché de Québec, 61 CD, St. Patrick's 94.

When the nuns agreed to return to St. Bridget's, the men of the Association remembered their lesson about contracts, and on February 13, 1877, before Notary John B. Parkin, they signed the document that stated the conditions under which the Grey Nuns would resume charge, ("conditions un peu difficiles à remplir" commented the writer of the *Annales*). Among the signers were Honorable John Hearne, Member of the Legislative Council, Reverend Michael Burke, C.S.S.R., chaplain of St. Patrick's, Henry O'Connor, merchant, and James Shea, merchant (acting as duly constituted attorney for Felix Carbray, merchant). The contract was for five years only and gave the management of the House to the nuns: they must see to the upkeep of the building and grounds, and to care for the inmates (except those who prove refractory!) providing proper food and clothing and spending some time of each day in the education of the children. The right of admission and discharge of residents was left to the trustees of the Association, with the Sisters, however, retaining the right to judge how many above the agreed minimum of sixty the house could hold. Annual reports of finances and of admission and discharges were to be made to the Trustees. Thus it is that we know that from 1856 to 1945 the Home cared for 590 men, 1,383 women and 2,223 children. The Trustees agreed to pay to the Motherhouse of the Grey Nuns for the upkeep of the Novitiate \$12 per year for each Sister who worked at the Home.

When the Sisters arrived on Grande Allée on February 14, 1877 for a preliminary inspection, the children had climbed the trees in front of the house to get a first glimpse of the strangers as they arrived from town. As far as the Sisters were concerned the Home was in deplorable condition. In fact, there was no place for them to sleep. For the next two weeks, therefore, two Sisters commuted every day from the Motherhouse to the Home, working all day to rearrange the household, to take inventory and list the needs of the new management. Conditions in the house could not have been as black as the *Annales* writer declared, for on March 1, two weeks later, the house was ready for a Solemn opening ceremony presided over by Archbishop Taschereau himself. Whether he came out of love for the Grey Nuns or out of love of the Irish we don't know, but we like to think the latter and we have good reason to believe it.

The Archbishop sat through a real performance of welcome. Among other greetings, there was a long welcome offered by a young lad named Conway. To my mind the occasion gave the lie to the assessment that the residents of the Home had been neglected during the time they were outside the care of the Grey Nuns. Much of the material on the above has been taken from the *Annales de St. Brigitte*, a large volume which combined both handwritten and newspaper clippings of the passing years. Through it we know the established routine of both the residents within the Home and the parishioners surrounding it. In addition, Quebec's English newspaper, the *Morning Chronicle*, carried the Annual reports and the public thank you of both the Committee and the Grey Nuns.

When I recite the homely lists of gifts given by generous people to the Home at Christmas for instance, gifts ranging from barrels of apples and pails of candy to pipes and tobacco, automobile rides and picnics at Montmorency Falls, I wish to do more than simply evoke memories. I wish also to create a picture of the two-way role played by the Home in caring for the people of the community and the receiving in turn of the support it received from the community. There was another important role played by St. Bridget's: it proved to be a focal point for receiving visitors to the city who wished to meet the Irish community or those whom the Irish wished to honor: for example, in 1880 the Vicar General of the Diocese, C.F. Cazeau.

When the Home, in 1881, celebrated its own Silver Jubilee, the Irish committee men and the French nuns could look back on years of growth. By 1873 a new wing had been added to the old barracks building and in 1881 apartments were ready for the first men to come and live at the Home. There was no major change in the structure until the roaring twenties when very generous donations by parishioners made it possible to extend the building to its greatest size. That was the familiar building that was demolished in 1975.

After it was completed in 1920 the Home extended in three distinct grey stone parts from Grande Allée northward along De Salaberry Avenue, the most northerly end at approximately Aberdeen Street. The Monastery garden on the east and the tree lined playground on the North gave a pleasant look to the place. For many years the recreational center next to the Home formed,

along with the church, a community sports and social complex in which the Home shared. The building itself was typical of institutional and convent architecture. Gleaming hard wood floors, long corridors imparted a very special aura to the place. Parlors and corridors both held their share of statues and paintings as well as those precious luxuriant ferns that nobody was allowed to touch. The chapel extended two stories in height, offering extra pew space in its galleries. The stained glass windows there were gifts of parishioners. For many years a huge painting of the Crucifixion, originally a gift of the artist Joseph Légaré to the old church on McMahon Street formed the backdrop of the ornate altar.

Such was the building in which old people and young children received shelter and care from the Grey Nuns. In addition to a debt of gratitude to them for the keeping of records and the memory of those day-by-day events, we owe an unpayable debt of gratitude to the Grey Nuns for their years of devotion to the Irish in St. Bridget's Home.

It seems that things just never stood still for St. Bridget's. The last thirty years or so have followed the pattern set by the first eighty years. One change was a direct result of a shifting population in the larger framework of Quebec City. As the Irish population of Quebec dropped steadily from its 19th century and early 20th century heyday, so the number of Irish girls entering the Grey Nuns and other Quebec City communities diminished. The first to be affected by the gradual change were the school girls in French convents where English classes had been offered since the first little girls were taken in by the Ursulines in 1822. Unlike the boys who had a St. Patrick's School, Elementary and High, for many years, the girls had received their education from Ursulines and CNDs, Grey Nuns and Good Shepherds in small groups within the French schools around the city. In 1935 the girls were at last grouped in one school under the Quebec Catholic School Commission. The Sisters of Charity of Halifax agreed to come and run the school – the Leonard School. There were some Boston Irish among those Sisters and they not only created a school but they captured and reinforced in the children the spirit and the heritage that parish associations like the St. Patrick's Literary Institute had been upholding for years. It was not surprising then to see that as the number of Irish Grey Nuns available for St. Bridget's went down,

that the Sisters of Charity of Halifax should be asked to assume responsibility there also. They did so in 1944. After that, the most visible change that came about occurred when the children at the Home, instead of attending class within their own school rooms at the Home, began to go out every day to mingle with their peers at St. Patrick's or the Leonard School. Very soon even the number of children dwindled as the rules of the Department of Social Welfare encouraged the placing of children in foster homes, and discouraged keeping both little children and old people in the same residence.

Greater changes still were bound to come. The buildings were getting old. The roar of traffic on that corner was heavy. These and other considerations led several interested men, especially Dermot I. O'Gallagher and John Martin to launch the project of a new home, not only modern and fireproof in construction, but offering all the advantages of participation in Provincial Government health and welfare schemes. These two men instituted meetings with the Parish Trustees and with the Sisters to insure their cooperation; with the Provincial Government for the purpose of creating the non-profit organization that would assume ownership of the Home, and with men and women who came forward to assist in the project. Past history had moulded the present, and the Irish again received wholehearted and voluntary assistance from their French Canadian fellow citizens especially from the ladies and gentlemen who had recently built an old people's home called La Champenoise. This was only one more example of close association and cooperation in matters of such importance. By 1972 the new Home was ready, built on a lot of vacant land belonging to St. Patrick's Cemetery.

On a bright June day an efficient and joyful task force moved 108 residents from the Old Home on Grande Allée to their new quarters on St. Louis Road. The property was given to the St. Bridget's Corporation by the people of St. Patrick's. Money for the enterprise was supplied by the Provincial Government; but the greatest credit goes to the many men and women of the English Catholic community of greater Quebec who had the desire, acquired the know-how and expended the energy to go ahead with the dream. Theirs the abler hands, and ours the better days forecast by Father Patrick McMahon in 1847.