

The religious of the Sacred Heart in Canada 1842-1980¹

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The Society of the Sacred Heart was founded by Madeleine-Sophie Barat in Amiens, France, in 1800. This was a distressing period for the Church both in France and in other countries. But the nineteenth century was to witness an undeniable Christian revival: old religious orders were revitalized, many new ones were founded and foreign missions began to thrive once more thanks, in part, to the initiative and zeal of Gregory XVI, who was Prefect of Propaganda before he became Pope in 1831.

Madeleine-Sophie Barat was at heart a contemplative and a lover of the poor. But she felt the urge of meeting a great need of the Church in her time: the rechristianization of families by the education of youth. Hence she opened both boarding schools and "poor schools," the latter being financed by the formers' proceeds. Her aim was to let the young live in contact with the God of Love, helped by religious educators that were deeply contemplative themselves. Hence the latter's spiritual training was long and thorough. After a three to six months postulanship, they began a two years' novitiate at the end of which they made their first promises. Then they shared in the Order's apostolic works for five years. Finally, a second novitiate of six months culminated in the taking of their perpetual vows. Because Mother Barat felt that strict *papal* enclosure might hinder apostolic works, the religious of the Sacred Heart lived under a form of enclosure intended for contemplative Institutes with simple vows. This meant the sisters could leave the convent for reasons of medical care or for the occasional demand of the apostolate, but not for family contacts or

¹ [In the original, notes are referenced by a mixture of asterisks and numerals; in this electronic version these have all been converted to numerals.] The following paper is based on materials in the Society's Archives. It is the sixth paper in a series on Canadian religious congregations begun with the 1976 edition of Study Sessions.

holidays.

Madeleine-Sophie Barat early experienced a powerful attraction for the foreign missions. She herself was never to leave Europe, but as early as 1818 one of her companions, Philippine Duchesne, opened the first American Convent of the Sacred Heart near St. Louis, Mo. From there the society spread throughout the United States.²

The religious of the Sacred Heart came first to Canada in 1842. They opened houses in Montreal (1842), in Halifax (1849), in St. John, N. B. (1854), in Detroit, Windsor and London (1851), in Vancouver (1911), and in Winnipeg (1935). In these houses sisters shared in the common task of education. There were four nuns in 1842, 87 in 1865; by 1900 there were 305. Then came a decrease so that by 1940 they had diminished to 200. Today there are half as many. Internationally, however, the Society saw its membership increase throughout the first half of the twentieth century to 6,000 members, and only after World War II was there a decrease. In 1980 the Sisters numbered 5,380 with some 80 novices.

Six of the eight Canadian foundations took place between 1842 and 1861. During those years a great religious was at the head of all the North American houses: Provincial Superior Mother Aloysia Hardey. During her thirty years of government in this capacity she opened as many as 25 houses, including the Canadian foundations. Biographers stressed her courage, energy and keen business sense. We shall come across her name several times in the following pages.

THE MONTREAL AREA

The "sault"

The religious of the Sacred Heart first settled in the neighbourhood of Montreal. This diocese, separated from that of Quebec in 1863, lacked apostolic works and labourers. The Bishop, the dynamic M^{gr} Ignace Bourget, brought eight religious Orders or Congregations from Europe while taking an active part in the foundation of several Canadian ones. Travelling in France in 1841, he made plans with Mother Barat for opening a house in the

² Mother Barat was canonized in 1925. In 1940, Pope Pius XII beatified Mother Duchesne.

Montreal diocese, though not at first in the city itself. Until then only one religious Community, the Congregation of Notre Dame, had been authorized to run girls' boarding schools in Montreal and the public highly appreciated their training and teaching. Moreover, they were patronaged and directed by the Sulpicians, who would look upon the coming of others as an intrusion. Bishop Bourget thought it best to act prudently and allow the Sacred Heart nuns to begin discreetly, in a remote place; after awhile their graduates would be their best advertisement.

So the nuns came to St. Jacques-de-l'Achigan, 36 miles North of Montreal. The parish priest, Father Romuald Paré, was so determined to establish a good school for girls in his parish that he had started to build it as early as 1838. The four nuns who came to open it had a journey full of hardships and adventure. Starting from New York on December 11th, 1842, the seven-day trip took them up the Hudson River by boat; then over the Adirondacks in a stage-coach unsheltered from the bitter wind; then across the St. Lawrence River in a row boat amid the floating ice. In Montreal Bishop Bourget lodged them with the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame, who received them with warm hospitality. On December 26th, sleighs took them to St. Jacques, where Fr. Paré greeted them with delight and took them to their new house which was comfortably heated with five large stoves. The pantry was abundantly supplied; the furniture was nearly complete, all made by the village carpenters and craftsmen. On the next day, the new religious were formally introduced to the St. Jacques people in the parish church. Within a week a day school was open.

However, the population, though rich in the faith of their French ancestors, were poor in material wealth: they simply could not support the Convent and, consequently, their daughters were taught practically free of charge. The boarders, on the other hand, came from wealthier families in Montreal and they helped to keep the finances afloat. But their numbers were small, owing to lack of space and also because the parents found the school too far from the city. Thus it was soon decided that the Convent had to move. In following years it went first to St. Vincent-de-Paul on Laval Island, then to Sault-au-Récollet on Montreal Island. There the parish priest, Father Jacques-Janvier Vinet, bought two neighbouring farms and donated them to the Sisters. In 1858 a stately gothic stone mansion welcomed students to "the Old Sault", as this institution was to be called for over a century. A large chapel was

added in 1864 and school wings in 1887 and 1913. An historical Canadian house, “la Maison Meilleur”, stood on the property at the time of the sale. In 1864, Mother Barat gave the necessary sum of money to have this house enlarged and adapted. It became “l’École Sainte-Sophie”, a free school intended for the children of the working classes. It prospered. The curriculum covered basic subjects including book-keeping and dress-making.

The large boarding school, “the Sault”, prospered also. Within its walls many young people received a Christian education and many sisters laboured lovingly. However, seventy years later in the summer of 1929, lightning struck the building entirely destroying the older part. Notwithstanding the catastrophe, a few hours afterwards a telegram to the Mother General in Rome announced that all lives had been saved; and, promptly, a second telegram followed requesting permission to rebuild immediately. So the least damaged wing was repaired and the “Little Sault” opened in the fall of that same year. For a whole decade, children and teachers squeezed into their narrow quarters until in 1938 a large modern building eased the situation.

The City House

From the early days of the foundation in St. Jacques, it had become apparent that a school for day-pupils and a meeting place for the Sodalists and Alumnae was urgently needed in the city. However, Bishop Bourget, for the reasons mentioned above, withheld his consent for a long time. Finally he gave his permission and in September, 1861, the city school opened with an enrolment of 50 pupils. Like most houses established within cities the Montreal Sacred Heart day school migrated several times until in 1872 it was located at the corner of St. Catherine and Bleury Streets.

This section of Montreal was still residential and even rural. The old accounts tell us of a “very good cow” sent as a present from the Sault. Occasionally it would “break enclosure” and wanted for fresh air as far as what is now Sherbrooke Street; then it was the duty of the postulants to run after it and bring it back “to the fold.” The City House was to be exclusively a day school, and kept the students only up to “Classe de Troisième” (about 9th or 10th grade). The girls were to complete their education as boarders at the Sault. This situation created many links between the two houses.

Both Communities had the same Superior, and they would gather periodically, especially during the summer holidays. The Jesuit Fathers, with their College and church across the street, became the convent's chaplains, preachers, and retreat masters on most occasions.

By 1890, the St. Catherine Street school had about 150 students. That year the Montreal "poor school" was opened in a separate building. Love of the poor is often stressed in the accounts of the House. Apparently this was a trait of Montrealers in those days. According to the Convent chronicle, "foreigners visiting our city wonder at the number of charitable works and institutions, and at the generous collaboration of the laity." Nevertheless, a problem had to be faced. The yearly account for 1892-93 reads:

St. Catherine Street is getting more and more commercialized. The access to the school becomes increasingly difficult even dangerous, especially for the little ones. The noise is such that in summer we have only two options: either open the windows, and then we cannot hear one another; or else shut them and choke. Not to mention the discomfort during the night, especially since the electric cars are running up the street.

A move to a new site, a handy five minutes' walk from the old one, gave the Religious the St. Alexander Street Convent, a large all-stone gothic structure with four stories above the large ground floor, spacious classrooms, wide corridors, lovely woodwork and a very high vaulted chapel. By 1895, the student could complete the Sacred Heart schooling in Montreal, and in 1907 the City House was allowed to take weekly boarders. Studies were serious and the old Sacred Heart Plan of Studies quite solid and cultural. These were also the years when a sectarian government in France forced the religious of the Sacred Heart to close 42 houses in that country. A certain number of Sisters were sent to the Sault and Montreal where they could speak and teach in their own language. Their collaboration was invaluable.

Apart from the pupils and Community, the Convent for awhile housed the Canadian novices. Unfortunately this Canadian novitiate was closed in 1898. It was thought better for the young Sisters' training to bring all candidates from North America together in one large novitiate, i.e. in Kenwood, Albany, New York. This had the unfortunate result of halting French Canadian vocations. From then on Quebec priests were unwilling to recommend the Sacred Heart Sisters to young girls called to religious life. In Kenwood, of course,

everything was in English: instructions, spiritual reading, recreation, etc. The candidates who knew no English were deprived of spiritual help for many weeks, even months, and their perseverance was made too difficult thereby. It is this drying up of vocations which explains the decline in numbers after 1900.

With the passing of time, the old Sacred Heart curriculum of Studies required transformations. In 1956, the Sault became the "College Sophie-Barat", with the right to confer a Bachelor's degree of the University of Montreal. But it was no longer bilingual, as the Montreal houses had been for so long. The religious were now too few to staff two sets of classes at once in both the Sault and the City House. Moreover, it became impossible to organize in the one house a timetable that would suit both the French and English curricula, now noticeably different. So the English staff and students were gathered together in the Montreal City House, while Collège Sophie-Barat became exclusively French. This change was carried out during the four years of 1958-62. In 1965, a large wing was added to Collège Sophie-Barat for the College students. By 1962 the City House had become an English-speaking private High School leading to Junior and Senior Matriculation. The Quebec government declared it a public utility, which endows it with much appreciated grants.

Halifax

As in Montreal, the Society of the Sacred Heart came to Halifax in response to the Bishop's invitation. Halifax became an Episcopal See in 1842 and two years later Mgr William Walsh was named its Titular Bishop (1844-58). He deplored the lack of private boarding schools for Catholic girls and got in touch with the Sacred Heart houses in Philadelphia and New York to see if the religious would open one in his city.

On May 19, 1849, Mother Hardey landed in Halifax with five religious. The Bishop was expecting the ship to dock later, and raced to meet the travellers. He drove them to his residence for breakfast, then to "Brookside", the nuns' first house. The new-comers found it completely furnished, not only with the items of first necessity, but with works of art as well, Bishop Walsh being a very cultured man.

Brookside was to be temporary. The Bishop took great pains to secure for the nuns the land on which to build a permanent house.

In March, 1852, religious and pupils entered this new dwelling. Old paintings and water color sketches depict this first Spring Garden Road Convent. They show a three-storey frame structure almost as deep as it is wide. Later on, a French roof was added and the front was faced with red brick. Bishop Walsh and his Vicar General, Father, later Archbishop Thomas Connolly, took an active part in the building. "The Bishop," according to one source, "insisted that our entrance and reception areas should not resemble any traditional conception of a convent, but rather a house of the period." Hence the vast entrance hall, stately winding stairs and solemn parlours. Father Connolly supervised the work, acting as the nuns' contractor. So pleased were they both with the finished work that the Bishop ordered a painting of the Halifax Convent to be sent to Mother Barat in Paris.

Old pictures show two small constructions next to the main building: the barn and the cottage. Shortly after the foundation, Sister Catherine Hartigan opened a free elementary school in the barn. Thanks to the help of Mgr Hannon, Bishop Walsh's second successor, it developed into a flourishing Public School (1866). In 1901 it was moved to College Street where it achieved outstanding success. The pupils passed examinations with honors and visits from the inspectors helped keep standards high. Several generations of Catholic men and women received their education at College Street, among whom many became prominent citizens, religious, priests and even bishops.

Meanwhile, the Academy on Spring Garden Road flourished also. In 1905 it received recognition from Dalhousie University and the students of the finishing class became eligible for admission to the University as Third Year students.

The Halifax Convent has been remarkable for the dynamism of its outside apostolates. Some were akin to those in Montreal: Our Lady's Sodality, the Consolers of Mary, the St. Ann Sodality, the Barat Retreat Association. One form of apostolate, however, has been peculiar to Halifax, i.e. that of the Armed Forces. Military Chaplains, sailors, airmen found at Spring Garden Road a comforting welcome and real spiritual assistance. Better still: the CWAC's (Canadian Women Armed Corps) came and lived for awhile (1944-46) in the "Barracks" built on part of the Convent's expropriated ground, and benefitted a good deal from this neighbourhood.

In the post-war years changes were inevitable. By 1952 the

school building on College Street had grown old and outdated. The school Board decided to build on another site. As the nuns were cloistered, they were unable to follow their pupils and thus the school passed into other hands.

As for the Academy, this institution has been the largest source of vocations for the Canadian religious of the Sacred Heart. For the years 1964-1969 the Convent acquired the status of Junior College, the curriculum being taught on the premises. Though the Academy continued with its educational work, the College had to close for various reasons in 1969.

The Convent on Spring Garden Road resisted the passing of time. Indeed it underwent many transformations and adaptations: wings were added, then demolished to be replaced by new structures. But amid all the changes, the central original building, that of Bishop Walsh and Mother Peacock, the first Superior in Halifax, stands quite unchanged on the very piece of ground they had wisely chosen 130 years ago: a symbol of the Religious' attachment to the essential values they live for, and of Halifax' loyalty and steadfastness.

St. John N. B.

The religious of the Sacred Heart worked in St. John, N.B. from September, 1854, to April, 1897. They were invited to the city by Mg Thomas Connolly who had become its first Catholic Bishop in 1852. He was promised a foundation for 1855. However, in the course of 1854, a ship landed in St. John bringing with it the dreaded cholera. Bishop Connolly nursed the sick and ministered to the dying; then he found himself with the responsibility of 70 orphans and no one to help. So according to an old account, he went in person to Mother Hardey's New York residence in Manhattanville; and in September of that year he returned to St. John, bringing five religious: they were the first English-speaking sisters to set foot in Protestant New Brunswick. They took care of "the Bishop's little ones," in a small temporary house on Union Street until he established a religious community more specifically prepared for running an orphanage. This was the origin of the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception.³ When they took over, the

³ See: E. Kennedy, SCIC "Immigrants, Cholera and the Saint John Sisters of Charity, 1854-1864" [CCHA] *Study Sessions*, 1977, pp. 25-44.

religious of the Sacred Heart opened an Academy and organized outside sodalities.

During the following years, Bishop Connolly, a real father to the small foundation, gave the nuns a plot of land on the Cathedral property, and built for them a more permanent school on Waterloo Street, which was opened in 1862. Meanwhile, Archbishop Walsh of Halifax died in 1859. Bishop Connolly was chosen to succeed him while he himself was succeeded in St. John by Mgr John Sweeney, who was the Convent's close friend for 35 years.

A free school opened in 1878 and became popular at once. The outside Sodalities (St. Ann's Consoler of Mary, Our Lady's Sodality) had much success among the fervent Irish population. The priests, who were few in number, considered their zeal and cooperation quite invaluable. The house on Waterloo Street became the diocesan centre for Catholic works such as the League of the Sacred Heart, or the Apostleship of Prayer. The priests from the Cathedral were the nuns' chaplains.

St. John's population was, in general, poor. After the terrible fire that destroyed most of the city in 1877, there was outright misery. Families migrated to the U.S.A. in the hope of finding better conditions, and this fact did not improve the enrolment of boarders in the Academy. The pupils were quite satisfactory, but they were too few. Moreover, complaints about the house on Waterloo Street began to be heard. The insulation, heating and sewage were deficient. The religious looked for a more suitable place for a long time, until, in 1890, they thought they had found it at Mount Pleasant, a property in the suburbs overlooking a beautiful landscape with very pure air, where stood a handsome frame mansion. But drawbacks were overlooked: there was no proper means of transportation and there was a lack of water. Bishop Sweeney's opposition to the plan was ignored and the Sacred Heart moved to Mount Pleasant the very same year. The outcome was disastrous. Because of the location, the Sisters lost their Chaplains, their outside Sodalities and even their school when the enrolment dwindled to 34 pupils.

The one decision to take, painful but obvious, was the closing of the house, which, moreover, had never financed itself. The closing took place in April, 1897, and the Sisters left in small groups, with many sorrowful Alumnae, former Sodalists and friends accompanying them to the station.

Detroit

The three foundations of Detroit, Sandwich (Windsor) and London (Ont.), are closely connected. For the Religious of the Sacred Heart it began in Detroit in the year 1851, where Antoine Beaubien, a wealthy land owner held immense property. He had married Monica Labadie, a young school teacher trained by a zealous missionary, Father Richard, S.J., who in the past had asked in vain for a Convent of the Sacred Heart in Detroit. The couple wished to open and maintain an orphanage in the city, and confide it to the Society. They donated to the religious "a piece of property for an academy, on condition that a specified number of orphans would be supported and educated by the institution." The foundation was made in the spring of 1851.

This donation, however, brought on a lawsuit by the Beaubien heirs, who were determined to recover the property. Uncertain as to the future, Mother Hardey transferred the Academy to Elmwood, a property in the suburb, not owned by the Beaubien family. This displeased the Bishop, M^{gr} Pierre-Paul Lefebvre. He had welcomed the Sacred Heart Nuns when they first came, but now he sided with the Beaubien heirs. In a letter dated August 28, 1854, he states the reasons for his displeasure: He had expressed the wish that the nuns would open two day-schools in the city, one paying and one free, before organizing a boarding school in the suburb; this request of his, he contended, had not been respected. In retaliation he deprived the cloistered Sisters of their chaplain and of Mass, Communion and the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the convent. This situation lasted for three months after which the religious sold Elmwood, brought their Academy back to Jefferson Avenue and opened a free school the very next year. Slowly the Bishop became reconciled to the Sacred Heart Nuns. Under Bishop Borgèss (1870-90), they began to reap in joy, after sowing in tears, from all categories of people whom they reached through their schools and Sodalities.

In 1864, meanwhile, important decisions had been taken regarding the Detroit house. After the Society's eighth General Council, the North American houses were reorganized. A Canadian Province was created with Rev. Mother Trincano at its head. Until 1874 this Province included the Convent in Detroit, at which time it was joined to the New York Province.

Sandwich

The coming of the Sacred Heart religious to Sandwich, Ontario, on the Canadian side of the Detroit River, is due partly to Bishop de Charbonnel, and partly to the Beaubiens.

M^{gr} Armand de Charbonne, Second Bishop of Toronto (1850-60), was a first cousin of one of Mother Barat's first companions and he wished to have the Sisters in his Diocese. However, the decisive final impetus came from Mrs. Beaubien. In 1852, she thought Sandwich a more suitable place for her orphan girls than the busy Detroit city with its noise and allurements. So on April 30, 1852, five religious accompanied the orphans across the Detroit River. At once they benefitted from the devotedness and friendship of their long-standing allies, the Jesuits. Their Superior, Father Pierre Point, appears to have been an outstanding man.

About the Sacred Heart House in Sandwich we know nothing except that it stood on the bank of the Detroit River, a few steps away from an older church. The present-day Church of the Assumption was finished by Father Point. The religious must have known it, for the parish register contains the burial record of one of their Sisters, Mary Connolly, aged 26, who seems to have overworked herself when moving the Detroit orphans to Sandwich, and who died on January 22, 1854. She was buried in the church under the sanctuary, "on the Gospel side."

In Sandwich a free school was opened and soon the enrolment increased. By 1855 there were 10 orphans, 30 boarders and 50 day students. This looked like a promising foundation. Then suddenly on August 18, 1857, the Convent of Sandwich was closed and the Community dispersed. Nine religious returned to Detroit with the orphans. The others were transferred to London, Ontario. What had happened?

London, Ontario

In 1854, the Toronto diocese was divided according to Bishop de Charbonnel's suggestion. The Western part was in turn made into two dioceses: Hamilton and London. The first London Bishop, Mgr Alphonse Pinsonnault, was consecrated in 1857. Throughout that year the new prelate wrote letter upon letter to the Sacred Heart Major Superior about a London foundation. Finally it was granted and the move from Sandwich was made. The Bishop financed the purchase of a property and called it Mount Hope.

There, school opened on September 7 with 15 day-scholars and 3 boarders, one of them turning up at the unbecoming hour of 8 P.M. Bishop Pinsonnault, happy to have the religious in London at last, gave them all the help he could.

The next year already brought an unexpected blow. The Bishop, for financial and apostolic reasons – so he thought – decided to have the London diocesan See moved to... Sandwich! The main explanation may be that the aging prelate, who was also growing deaf, seems to have undergone some psychic trouble. His decisions were incoherent, his contacts increasingly difficult. In the end Mgr Pinsonnault was persuaded to resign his See on account of ill health. But his departure from London in 1859 had had an unfortunate effect on the convent. The few Catholic families who had means enough to support the boarding school were scattered, some following the Bishop to Sandwich.

Bishop Pinsonnault's successor, Mgr James Walsh (1867-90) soon had the episcopal See returned to London. He was to be a most reliable friend for the convent, endeavouring to recruit boarders, even sending one of his own nieces. He helped the house in every way, acting as professor of Religious Doctrine and Retreat Master for many years.

Contacts with members of other religious orders were very good; the Jesuits and the Dominicans provided generously for the nuns' spiritual needs. Relations were most friendly with the Sisters of St. Joseph who arrived in London in 1868 and who in 1869 bought the former Sacred Heart Convent to make it the "Mount Hope Orphanage and Home for the Aged."⁴

Meanwhile the religious of the Sacred Heart had left Mount Hope in 1866 for a larger private dwelling place on Dundas Street. There, the apostolic works could expand. The free school opened in 1875 and had to be enlarged ten years later. It was very successful.

In contrast with the free school the boarding academy never grew. The outside works were very active. Thanks to the Sodality members who were staunch Catholic women with deep convictions and great readiness to give, the devotion of the Sacred Heart spread in the Protestant city. But it seems the Sacred Heart classical course of studies appealed little to students and parents. The girls remained

⁴ See: Julia Moore, S.C.J.: "The Sisters of St. Joseph. Beginnings in London Diocese, 1868-1878." [CCHA] *Study Sessions* 1978. pp. 37-56.

in the school only two or three years, for the families could afford no more. They wished them mainly to study their religion, learn music and acquire good manners.

Thus the Sacred Heart in London was eventually closed in 1913. As in St. John, N.B., after many years of operation the Sisters had not succeeded in making the house self-supporting. For the boarders were always too few, and there was no hope for a significant improvement among a population whose upper class was overwhelmingly Protestant and often bigoted against Catholics. Catholics were mostly found among the poorer citizen and immigrants; hence the Sacred Heart free school's evident success, which must have induced Superiors to keep the boarding house open for as long as possible.

In addition to the lack of boarders, two other developments had to be faced. The first concerned the rule of enclosure which required the schools to be physically part of the convent because the Sisters were forbidden to leave the convent. The Sisters filled their day with labour and prayer according to a very strict timetable.⁵ When a law was passed, therefore, obliging all teachers in Ontario including those of the Catholic schools, to attend provincial Normal School for their Ontario teaching certification, the Sacred Heart nuns were unable and unwilling to comply. Henceforth, their work and that of their students would meet with failure at

⁵ Daily Timetable in use until the Second Vacitan Council:

A.M.	5:00	Rising.
	5:30-6:30	Mental prayer.
	6:45	Morning Office in common in Chapel.
	7:00	Mass and thanksgiving.
	7.45	Breakfast and then work.
	11:45	Examination of conscience in Chapel.
P.M.	12:00	Dinner and relaxation, if possible.
	1:30	Mid-day Office in Chapel.
Afternoon:		Work (but including—praying the rosary; a half hour “Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament” in the Chapel; and preparation for next day’s mental prayer).
	6:00	Spiritual reading.
	6:30	Supper and relaxation.
	8:00	Night Office in Chapel followed by study.
	9:15	Night prayer.
	9:30	Retire.

examinations and thus the house lost the confidence of the public.

Another negative factor was a sensational lawsuit against the convent in 1903-4. A Sister, Mary Archer, lost her mind and became even dangerous. She was treated but not cured permanently, according to the doctors, and therefore could not be taken back into the Community. The family then sued the Sacred Heart Sisters, who won in the end, but who had to pay the Sister a substantial compensation. This affair was a painful experience and caused the nuns to lose several friends.

Yet, when in 1913, the Superior General Mother Stuart decided to close the London house, outsiders expressed a deep and genuine grief. Once the school year was over, the religious began to leave in groups during August. It was sometimes a pitiable sight, as when the old, sick and invalids departed, among them dear Sister Reilly, who had been among the first arrivals and, who, now over 100 years old, had not left the convent for nearly 60 years.

Vancouver

The story of the two other houses must be summarized quickly. The Vancouver school opened in 1911 on request of Neil McNeill, the Second archbishop of that city. In 1913 the Sisters moved to Point Grey, then a suburb, to a ten-acre property on which they had raised in imposing Tudor Gothic structure of grey granite. The boarding school was soon joined by paying day scholars.

The Point Grey pupils have been good students, and have maintained satisfactory results in government exams. The graduates passed the tests leading to Junior and Senior matriculation, and several scholarships were awarded them. They took part in a number of public contests (public speaking, debating, liturgical singing, etc.) and often led the other Vancouver schools.

Like the Sacred Heart Convents in the East, Point Grey gave birth to a variety of apostolates. One very interesting form of apostolate in this house was hospitality. A number of associations availed themselves of the convent's housing facilities: the Cana Conferences, the Newman Club, the Knights of Columbus, the Legion of Mary, the Holy Name Society, the Catholic Doctors' League, the Catholic Lawyers' Guild, the Catholic Teachers' Association, the C.Y.O.

Converts and retreatants were received and helped from the very-first years of Point Grey, and some retreats were preached to

large groups of participants.

In 1953, the religious sold part of their property and built a wing for classrooms and a gymnasium provided with more modern equipment. Thus the convent functioned for over twenty more years. Then social transformations and the ensuing problems met by the Society in Eastern Canada did not spare this West Coast house, as we shall see.

Winnipeg

The story of the Winnipeg house may be brief. The Convent was opened only in 1935, but the idea went back twenty years to the visit to Winnipeg of the then Superior General, Mother Stuart in 1914, with whom a group of Alumnae pleaded to have a Sacred Heart school in the Prairies. But Mgr Langevin, Bishop of St. Boniface, was not favorable to the plan: he feared that the proposed institution would interfere with the Holy Name Sisters, who had struggled in Winnipeg for 60 years. Bishop Sinnott (1915-52) shared the same fears. Even the religious of the Sacred Heart were not unanimous on the projected foundation. Some were enthusiastic, others reticent, as the plan lacked financial backing.

Suddenly, on August 31, 1935, Mgr Sinnott – after having decided to postpone the foundation, asked Mother Clapin, the Provincial, by telegram to open a school in that same year. In her name, M^{gr} Sinnott had already rented the historical mansion “Ravenscourt,” on West Gate Street. Within thirteen days, furniture, linen, gifts from all sides were shipped over from Montreal. Seven religious formed the foundation stones of the new Community. Thanks to everyone’s help, the Sacred Heart school opened on October 8, 1935, with five pupils. Archbishop Sinnott, once so reticent, now gave the nuns a cheering welcome.

Ravenscourt was a stately stone mansion built in the early 1880’s, but it was small for a school. No boarders could be taken. The religious had to sleep in their own classroom, folding up their bedding every morning. The problem came to a head in March 1949, when Mother Padberg, the Provincial, fell ill during her regular visit. This difficult situation had at least one good outcome; the search for a larger house, already begun, was pushed ahead with greater diligence and within eighteen months the Sacred Heart school had moved to 86 West Gate, where they built a school wing in the spring of 1950, in spite of delays by a memorable flood.

The occupants of the new convent lived there fourteen busy and happy years. Afterwards they moved once more, to Charleswood, a suburb to the South West of the city, where they erected a large modern and well-planned school which opened in the fall of 1964. But by this time major changes were underway in the entire Church.

Vatican II

The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1962-65) brought about major changes in the life of the Church and in that of many religious orders and congregations. All were asked to return more explicitly to Gospel values as well as to the original ideals of their founders. This search for renewal was accompanied in the Western world by a major crisis in religious vocations.

In 1965, five Sacred Heart institutions were in operation in Canada the "Sault", the Montreal City House, Halifax, Winnipeg and Vancouver. Because of fewer religious, these schools had to be staffed at least partly, by lay teachers; and financing a lay staff became increasingly difficult. What was to be the Canadian Province's policy in such context?

A careful study of the problem, meetings and discussions, a sociological survey of the Province, all seemed to point more or less to the solution that met the directives of the Society's Mother House phase out certain works, even houses, in order to staff the remaining institutions with religious. Roman authorities, for their part, recommended religious to change their image and present a simple life-style, with buildings that avoided a too affluent look.

In the light of these various directives, three Sacred Heart houses out of five ceased to operate after 1970. The "Sault" was closed in 1970, after 112 years of successful operation, mainly because of the lack of French-speaking religious in the Canadian Province. In Winnipeg the one great problem had always been proper finances. However, other values should have been brought to bear on so important a decision. They were overlooked, and the closing in 1972 caused much grief and even bitterness. In Vancouver this mistake was avoided and the people and groups concerned were consulted first; in 1979 they accepted the closing bravely.

At present, two large Sacred Heart schools still function in Canada: the Montreal City House and Halifax. Both houses maintain many types of apostolates, traditional or new. Both run

a prosperous school and practice a generous hospitality. The Montreal Auditorium and large chapel provide a meeting place for a variety of Catholic activities. The boarding facilities offer an unflinching welcome for travelling religious and friends. "If Atwater Avenue did not exist," someone said, "we would have to invent it." In Halifax, the Convent recently underwent one more transformation: for the second time the West wing was demolished (including the chapel, alas!) and replaced in 1979 by a modern and handsome infirmary for the sisters. However, Spring Garden Road Convent is still young and dynamic with many activities.

This brief outline of the history of the Society of the Sacred Heart in Canada also presents negative aspects. When the Sisters came to this country, the prospects for development were good. Yet their endeavour ended in apparent regression. From 1900 onwards their numbers decreased steadily. One may wish to identify the main causes for such an outcome.

We saw that in 1898 the Montreal novitiate was moved to Albany, N.Y. This did not hinder English-speaking vocations, but French-speaking priests stopped sending girls to the Sacred Heart. After 1900, a few still entered, but they were far between; there were none after 1936. The coming of the religious from France during the first decade of this century staffed the Montreal schools for awhile, but they were not replaced.

A second reason was the lack of adaptation of the curriculum. The French mistresses were slow to realize how necessary it was to comply with the needs and demands of the changing society. After 1920, parents and students became more and more interested in courses of studies that met outside standards and qualifications: matriculation and the Baccalaureate. Other Orders sensed and fulfilled this need; and even the English-speaking religious of the Sacred Heart were more open to it, preparing girls for Junior, then Senior Matriculation. They had fuller classes in Montreal, not to mention their schools elsewhere in English-speaking Canada. Hence, too, they had some vocations. But the French held to the Society's plan of studies up until the early fifties. Of course this plan was valuable, and when first introduced in Montreal, it appeared definitely superior to whatever existed there for girls at the time. But it had been drawn up for nineteenth century young ladies. Parents wondered whether it was likely to prepare democratic-minded young women interested in careers and other professional activities. Cultural as it was, it appeared outdated to

many. Hence the French school enrolment decreased. Only after 1951 and still more after 1956, with adoption of outside curricula did the French classes again number 25-30 pupils.

But by that time most religious congregations found their numbers decreasing. The reasons were generally found in the Church at large, but such characteristics as triumphalism, paternalism and formalism existed in religious communities also. With the coming of the Second Vatican Council the public became much more conscious of these traits and tolerated them less and less. Hence a disaffection took place within both the Church but especially with forms of religious life that appeared outdated, or even obsolete. In the Society of the Sacred Heart, a teaching Order, for instance, enclosure seemed a contradiction and little likely to attract vocations.

The present day trend is to foster the setting up of small fraternities as more conducive to a simple life style. In the Canadian Province the example was given by the Provincial Team, who since 1968 have lived in an apartment. Since the closing of the "Sault", ten different fraternities have been organized in various parts of Montreal. Halifax also witnessed the births of smaller communities. In Winnipeg a fraternity is living on Avonhurst Street. Three religious have made an apostolic venture in Whitehorse, Yukon. Small communities exist in Ottawa (1978) and Toronto (1980). Individual religious are now freer and more available to undertake new and varied forms of apostolate. So, instead of the five large convents of 1965, today the Canadian Society of the Sacred Heart maintains some fifteen small houses.

These small groups are seeds of life. When the dandelions fade away, nothing seems to remain of their glorious vigor and sun-like color. But every small seed, clinging to its tiny parachute, is ready to fly away and spread life wherever the Spirit carries it.

So theirs is not a story of mere death, but of life through death. The necessary abandonment of once flourishing works is a call from the Lord to read the signs of the times and labour in other parts and in new ways, in His ever-busy vineyard.