

Gertrude Lawler and St Joseph's Academy: Alumnae, Advocate and Author¹

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The First Annual Alumnae Banquet, or as the members called it this year, the “Jubilee Banquet” ... was a notable gathering of Catholic women, speaking not only of loyal affection to their Alma Mater, but also of their devotion to the cause of higher education of women.²

Thus the *Annals of the Congregation of Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto* record the events of 28 October 1911. Two hundred graduates of the congregation's flagship boarding school in Canada, St. Joseph's Academy,³ gathered in the reception room of the Toronto motherhouse to celebrate two events. The first, and most apparent, was a celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the order's Canadian foundation. The second, and for the purposes of this essay, the more significant was to celebrate the formalization of their collective heritage and, continuing involvement with

¹ The author acknowledges the support of the Humanities and Social Science Foundation of Canada (SSHRC) and the archivists of the Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph, Carondelet and Toronto, in the preparation of this essay.

² Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto (Morrow Park) (ASSJ), *Community Annals Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto* (28 October 1911), 462 (Hereafter ASSJ *Annals*).

³ The school, established in 1854, was known as St. Joseph's Academy until 1912. Because of its affiliation with St. Michael's College within the University of Toronto, it was renamed St. Joseph's College Academy. The school again changed its name in 1931 to St. Joseph's College School. In the 1960s, when the Clover Hill property was sold to the Provincial Government, the order built a new day school on nearby Wellesley Avenue which retained the name St. Joseph's College School. The order moved the boarding school and the motherhouse to North York, near Bayview and Steeles Avenues to a property known as Morrow Park. St. Joseph's - Morrow Park operated as both a boarding school and day school until the 1970s. Today, both St. Joseph's College School (also known as St. Joseph's - Wellesley) and St. Joseph's - Morrow Park operate as girls' day schools. Of the order's two other Toronto day secondary schools, St. Joseph's Commercial School was renamed Thomas Merton Catholic High School in 1985 and St. Joseph's - Islington was renamed St. Joseph's - Michael Power after it affiliated with the Michael Power boys' school and became a co-educational school.

the Academy through the establishment of the St. Joseph's College Alumnae Association.

Presiding over the evening's events was the founding president of the St. Joseph's College Alumnae Association and the founding editor of the Alumnae journal, *The St. Joseph Lilies*,⁴ Gertrude Lawler. Lawler was a remarkable woman. The Academy Gold Medalist of 1882 and, since 1910, a senator of the University of Toronto, Lawler was building a reputation as a prominent Ontario educator and advocate of the rights of women to higher education. Her contributions to education and social service in the province of Ontario would be acknowledged by the University of Toronto, which, as part of its centenary celebrations in 1927, awarded her an honorary Doctor of Laws.

Lawler, like all the former "young lady pupils," was a product of a school whose carefully crafted ideology for the education of the contemporary woman had evolved over its fifty-seven year history. Sr. Emerentia Lonergan, the community annalist from 1899 to 1917, who had been both a former teacher and mistress of the boarding school, described the community's reflections on this gathering:

Could a Godless school, we thought, produce such women as met here this evening? No, it would be impossible. Education without religion is a failure. The spiritual nature cannot be disregarded without detriment to the whole.⁵

Drawing on the *Annals*, the *Lilies*, and archival materials housed in the Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, Morrow Park and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet (St. Louis, Missouri), the University of Toronto and the Toronto Board of Education, this essay explores the career of Gertrude Lawler in the promotion of ongoing education for women by focussing on an analysis of the growth of St. Joseph's College Alumnae Association and its literary magazine. It was through these two creations that Lawler, who chose to live her professional life within the broader secular context of public education and social service, cemented her associations with the convent-academy that she defined as her spiritual and intellectual home.

Because of the lack of state-sponsored schools for young women, private education was the only option available in the early to mid-nineteenth century for families who wished their daughters to engage in further study. It was this need for opportunities to educate young women that led to the establishment of the first two Toronto convent academies—Loretto Academy, founded in 1847 and St. Joseph's Academy, founded in 1854. From these two foundations, the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Loretto Sisters) and the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, established boarding schools for young women in many Ontario

⁴ Hereafter *Lilies*.

⁵ ASSJ, *Annals* (28 October 1911), 463.

cities and towns.⁶ In spite of the fact that convent academies were many and that they educated generations of women, Ontario historians, unlike their colleagues in the United States⁷ and across Canada,⁸ have largely overlooked the

⁶ Several orders of religious women, including the Grey Sisters, The Congregation de Notre Dame and the Ursulines operated boarding schools for girls out of their motherhouses. The Loretto Sisters and the Sisters of St. Joseph administered the vast majority of convent schools in Ontario.

⁷ Eileen Mary Brewer, *Nuns and the Education of American Catholic Women 1860-1920* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1987); Mary Oates CSJ, ed., *Higher Education for Catholic Women: An Anthology* (New York: Garland, 1987). Oates has also written extensively on the work of the Sisters of St. Joseph in New England, including: "Organized Voluntarism: The Catholic Sisters in Massachusetts, 1870-1940," *American Quarterly* 30 (Winter 1978): 652-80; "The Professional Preparation of Parochial School Teachers 1870-1940," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 12 (January 1984): 60-72; "The Good Sisters: The Work and Position of Catholic Churchwomen in Boston, 1870-1940," E. Sullivan and James O'Toole, eds., *Catholic Boston: Studies in Religion and Community* (Boston: Roman Catholic Archbishop of Boston, 1985), 171-200; "Lowell: An Account of Convent Life in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1852-1890," *New England Quarterly* LXI no. 1 (March 1988): 101-118.

⁸ Among the key and recent works on women religious in Canada are G. Anthony, SC, *A Vision of Service: Celebrating the Sisters of Charity* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1997); G. Anthony, SC, *Rebel, Reformer, Religious Extraordinaire: The Life of Sister Irene Farmer SC* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1997); J. Cameron, *For the People: A History of St. Francis Xavier University* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1996); J. Cameron, 'And Martha Served: History of the Sisters of St. Martha, Antigonish' (Halifax: Nimbus, 2000); T. Corcoran, SC, *Mount Saint Vincent University: A Vision Unfolding 1873-1988* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999); M. Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1920* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986); M. D'Allaire, *Les communautés religieuses et l'assistance sociale à Montréal 1659-1900* (Montreal: Editions du Meridien, 1997); M. Dumont et N. Fahmy-Eid, eds., *Les Couventines: L'éducation des filles au Québec dans les congrégations religieuses enseignantes 1840-1960* (Montreal: Boreal, 1986); J.K. Gresko, *Gender and Mission: The Founding Generations of the Sisters of Saint Ann and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in British Columbia 1858 - 1914* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis: University of British Columbia, 1999); D. Juteau et N. Laurin, *Un métier et une vocation: Le travail des religieuses au Québec de 1901 à 1971* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1997); G. Laperriere, *Congregations religieuse de la France au Québec, tome 2* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1996); N. Laurin, D. Juteau et L. Duchesne, *À la recherche d'un monde oublié. Les communautés religieuses de femmes au Québec de 1900 à 1970* (Montréal: Le Jour, 1991); M.J. Losier, *Amanda Viger: Spiritual Healer to New Brunswick's Leprosy Victims 1845-1906* (Halifax: Nimbus 1999); H. MacDonald, *The Sisters of St. Martha and Prince Edward Island Social Institutions, 1916-1982* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis: University of New Brunswick, 2000); M.O. McKenna, SC., *CHARITY ALIVE: Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, Halifax 1950-1980* (Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 1998); D. Rink, *Spirited Women: A History of Catholic Sisters in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Harbour Publishing/Sisters' Association Archdiocese of Vancouver, 2000.); E.M. Smyth, "Preserving Habits: Archival Research Within Communities of English Canadian Women Religious," in S. Cook, L. McLean and K. O'Rourke, eds., *A Century Stronger—Women's History in*

study of nineteenth century Ontario Catholic institutions for girls and young women.⁹

St. Joseph's Academy was the first of many Canadian convent-academies established by members of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto. The congregation, an uncloistered order of religious women, had its origins in seventeenth century France. The Toronto community was established by women who had journeyed from France to St. Louis and Philadelphia, establishing foundations along the way. The order had as its mission "Christian perfection and ... service of their neighbour,"¹⁰ which in practice meant the order's members were engaged in both teaching and social service.

From the Academy's foundation, it is clear that the Sisters of St. Joseph had the managing of a large and growing school as a long term goal. The attendance books and other record-keeping volumes which date from the late 1850s had been specifically printed for the school. When plans

Canada 1900-2000 (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2000), 22-26; E.M. Smyth, "Professionalization Among the Professed," in E.M. Smyth, A. Prentice, S. Acker and P. Bourne, eds., *Challenging Professions: Women and the Professions in English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 234-54; E.M. Smyth, "Writing Teaches Us Our Mysteries: Women Religious Recording and Writing History," in A. Prentice and B. Boutilier, eds., *Creating Historical Memory: English Canadian Women and the Work of History* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), 101-128; R. Sullivan, "Revolution in the Convent: Women Religious and American Popular Culture, 1950-1971," (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis: McGill University, 1999).

⁹ Robert Stamp's *The Schools of Ontario 1876-1976* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) contains no references to convent education in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Susan Houston and Alison Prentice's *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) has more to say about schools for girls and young women but scarcely deals with nineteenth century convent education. R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar's *Inventing Secondary Education: The Rise of the High School in Ontario* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1990), a fine study of secondary education, with many references to private girls' education, discusses the convent schools in passing but does not assess their contribution nor that of the female religious orders to the development of secondary education.

¹⁰ ASSJ, *Constitution and Rules of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Archdiocese of Toronto* (Toronto: 1881), 11 (hereafter *Constitution of 1881*).

were drawn for a new motherhouse building located on a site known as Clover Hill, home to St Basil's Church and St Michael's College, and near the campus of the University of Toronto, the building was designed to accommodate separate quarters for sisters and boarders. Ample room was left for expansion within the structure of the building and on the surrounding property.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Sisters had achieved this goal. The order had duly incorporated regulations concerning the administration of the convent academy into its constitution.¹¹ Between 1856 and 1920, over two thousand pupils of all religious denominations had attended the Academy as boarders.¹² The large and flourishing school within the motherhouse complex was visible proof of the commitment which the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph had made to the education of young women.

The scope of programs offered by the Academy had likewise grown. From an initial *Prospectus* which offered a mixture of "accomplishments" and "academics," the Sisters of St. Joseph offered their pupils the choice of three courses: a Collegiate Course, an Academic Course and a Commercial Course. The graduates of the well-subscribed collegiate programs were examined by members of the Ontario Department of Education and eligible for admission to university. The academic courses included those subjects previously defined as the "accomplishments" in the vernacular of the nineteenth century "ladies academy": foreign languages, music and fine arts. The academic graduates were likewise eligible for external certification and credentials for employment. The music program was affiliated with the Royal Conservatory of Music; the art program with the Toronto School of Art and the commercial course, with a number of Toronto business schools including the Nimms and Harrison Business College.¹³ The fact that a commercial program was offered indicates that the Academy realised the necessity to provide some of its pupils with training to enable them to compete for the opportunities available to women in the growing commercial sector.

By 1911, a fourth option was made available to the pupils of St. Joseph's Academy. In that year, the Academy successfully affiliated itself with St. Michael's College and the University of Toronto. Pupils could also proceed to acquire the credits needed for a Bachelor of Arts degree.

¹¹ See especially the regulations concerning the Directress of the Academy in *Constitution of 1881*.

¹² ASSJ, *Register [of St. Joseph's Academy] 1856-1920*. An analysis of the Academy Register reveals that 16.9% of its pupils were non-Catholic.

¹³ ASSJ, *Scrapbooks of the Sisters of St. Joseph* (hereafter *Scrapbooks*) "St. Joseph's Convent," (Catholic Register: 21 June 1900). *Scrapbooks*, v.vii, 23-25. Neither this article nor others written on the Academy at the turn of the century specify who examined the pupils in foreign languages. Perhaps those sisters who had studied languages, or perhaps the staff of St. Michael's College (who, the *Annals* document, were used to examine a variety of "collegiate subjects") examined the pupils.

By the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of the Toronto foundation, the Sisters of St. Joseph had many pupils in whom to take pride. Some of their graduates went on to have outstanding careers in the secular world of public service, business and academic endeavours. Many were active in family life and contributed to their communities as volunteers. Few joined religious communities (including the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph). While the *Annals* of the order document the many informal links which bound the community and its graduates together, it was not until the efforts of a core of graduates from the 1880s, under the leadership of Gertrude Lawler, that their ties were formalized in the creation of the Alumnae Association. Lawler's Education and Career.

Gertrude Lawler was one of the most notable graduates of St. Joseph's Academy. Until her death in 1929, she was a prominent spokesperson for the Academy and for the more general causes of higher education and increased status for women.



Gertrude Lawler, Doctor of Laws Honoris Causa (1927). Reprinted

With permission of the Archives of the University of St. Michael's College

Lawler graduated from St. Joseph's Academy in 1882. At the ceremonies she read the valedictory address and was awarded the Gold Medal.¹⁴ She was the first of the Academy's graduates to sit the provincial examinations and gain admission to the University of Toronto where she proved herself to be an equally outstanding student at University College.¹⁵

¹⁴ ASSJ, *Annals* (23 June 1882), 122; *Annals* (27 June 1882), 122.

¹⁵ University of Toronto Archives (hereafter UTA) First Year Arts Results: First Class Honours in Mathematics, English, French, German; Third Class Honours in Chemistry, Latin, *Class and Prize List* (1887): 17-18. Second Year Arts Results: First Class Honours in Mathematics, English, German, Italian; Second Class Honours in History, French, Mental Philosophy, Logic, *Class and Prize List* (1888): 19. Third Year Arts Results: First Class Honours in General Jurisprudence, History, French, German; Second Class Honours in English, Italian, Spanish, Moral Philosophy, Civil Polity, Physics, Economics, *Class and Prize List* (1889), 24. Fourth Year Arts Results: First Class Honours in Ethnology; Second Class Honours in Mathematics, Spanish, Italian;

During her undergraduate years, she received a number of scholarships and awards, including, in 1889, the Special University Gold Medal For General Proficiency.¹⁶ She was active in the student community at University College and involved in the publication of *Sesame*, the College women's annual, as both an author and an editor. Lawler received her Bachelor of Arts (1890) with honours in Mathematics, English, Modern Languages and History.¹⁷

In 1891, she began her career in education as an English teacher at Stratford Collegiate Institute, the first woman to hold a position on that staff and, reportedly, the first woman to receive an initial salary of one thousand dollars a year as a teacher.¹⁸ One year later, she received a Master of Arts from the University of Toronto and joined the staff of Toronto's newly established Harbord Collegiate.

Lawler was a prominent and proficient educator whose teaching career was chronicled by the Toronto media. When the Toronto School Board announced its intention in 1906 to move her to Jarvis Collegiate, the Harbord Collegiate parents held a meeting to protest this move and had the plan overruled.¹⁹ Lawler was also featured as "Representative Women," in a 1913 series of articles printed in the Toronto *Globe*. The series' author speculated:

It is of interest ... that Miss Lawler's academic qualifications rank among the highest in the city...[She] has not applied for a principalship, but it is rather curious that her claims and qualifications have been ignored. Can it be a case of sex discrimination? Then, Toronto is behind many cities across the border in this respect, where women are frequently found discharging efficiently the duties of high school principalship.²⁰

In 1914, Lawler was touted as the likely successor to Dr. Luther Embree as principal of Jarvis Collegiate. Two Toronto newspapers, the *Star* and the *World*, ran articles and editorials regarding her application for this position. The *Star* supported Lawler's application, noting, "She draws attention to the appointment by the Board of Education of women as

Third Class Honours in French, English, German, *Class and Prize List* (1890) (n.p.).

¹⁶ UTA, *Class and Prize List* (1889), 24-28.

¹⁷ "Resolution of the Senate of the University of Toronto," UTA Alumni Records (A73-0026/221) 92: 21 November 1929.

¹⁸ "Representative Women: Miss Gertrude Lawler M.A.," *Globe*, 4 April 1913, UTA Alumni Records, (A73-0026/221) 92 (hereafter "Representative Women").

¹⁹ "Parents of Harbord Collegiate Hold Protests Meeting," *Globe*, 22 October 1906, UTA Alumni Records, (A73-0026/221) 92.

²⁰ "Representative Women."

principals and urges that her womanhood not debar her from promotion.”²¹ The *Star*’s editorial concludes:

There is no reason why women should not be eligible for the highest educational positions ... There should be more women professors, women inspectors, women principals if competent women can be found. The relegation of women to subordinate positions is a relic of prejudice - one might say barbarism.²²

The *World* commented on both Lawler’s scholarship and her experience at Harbord Collegiate.

[She] lacks neither the experience nor the power of discipline ... in the absence of Principal Hagarty at any time she has acted with marked success as principal of that institute.²³

Despite such public support, Lawler did not receive the appointment.²⁴

Lawler was also very active within the University of Toronto community. She served as president of the University of Toronto Alumnae Association in 1899 and again in 1912. She was active in the campaign to have a women’s residence constructed for University College and she was associate editor of the *University of Toronto Monthly*. In addition, Lawler served as an examiner and instructor in English Methods with the Faculty of Education, and, because of her interest in teacher education, published several books for use in secondary schools and the university English classrooms, among them *Works of Arnold, Browning and Tennyson*.²⁵ In 1910, she became a member of the Senate of the University of Toronto and served on the Board of Governors for four terms.

In spite of these numerous achievements and the excessive demands of both her career and her other commitments, Lawler undertook to establish both an alumnae association and a literary magazine at her convent academy. Although she had worked and would continue to work with literary magazines and alumnae associations in other locations, including

²¹ UTA Alumni Records (A 73-0026/221) 92, *Star*, 30 April 1914. The first female principal within the Toronto Board of Education was Georgina Riches, appointed principal of the Palace Street School in 1882. Toronto Board of Education Archives (hereafter TBEA). See Donald Netherby, “Georgina Riches” in the *Women in Education Series* (Toronto: Toronto Board of Education, 1975).

²² “Editorial,”[unsigned] *Star*, 4 March 1914, UTA Alumni Records (A73-0026/221) 92.

²³ “Miss Lawler May Be Principal of Jarvis,” *World*, 30 April 1914, UTA Alumni Records (A73-0026/221) 92.

²⁴ It was not until 1974 that Ann Shilton was appointed as the first female principal of a Toronto academic high school. Ironically, that school was Jarvis Collegiate. TBEA, Jeff Sallot, “The First of a Kind for Jarvis and Metro,” *Globe and Mail*, 27 November 1974.

²⁵ C.G.C. Roberts and A.L. Tunnell, eds., *A Standard Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: Library Edition, 1934), 299.

Harbord Collegiate and the University of Toronto, she saw it necessary to found both for St. Joseph's Academy. Lawler believed that an alumnae association and a journal would fill a void and would continue to enhance that formative experience in her life: her days as a pupil at St. Joseph's Academy.

Established in 1911 with the motto "Pro Deo et Alma Mater"²⁶, the St. Joseph's College Alumnae Association was the third documented attempt to found an Alumnae Association within the Academy.²⁷ The first attempt occurred in 1891, when the *Annals* record that

it was proposed to form an Alumnae or Literary and Musical Association; thus affording the former pupils an opportunity of assembling at stated times within their Alma Mater.²⁸

After several meetings, it seems that the association did not continue. The second attempt occurred in 1907, but it too was unsuccessful.²⁹ The third attempt, and the ultimately successful one that has continued on to the present, was the association launched by Gertrude Lawler in 1911. One could suggest several reasons why Lawler was successful where others had failed: her experience, her drive and her commitment to creating linkages between the Academy and its former pupils.

Based on her writings and published speeches, it is apparent that Lawler believed that the Academy was a special place. She saw herself formed by and belonging to the Academy. Shortly after her appointment to the Senate of the University of Toronto, she gave a lecture at her alma mater commemorating the birth of Cardinal Newman. Wearing the Academy colours of brown and gold with her 1882 gold graduation medal around her neck, Lawler took the stage and delivered the following remarks:

To be a Senator of a University of Toronto is a great distinction, but never can it be so great to me as is that of knowing that my Alma Mater rejoices in the honour that has been conferred upon me. To be a senator of the University of Toronto necessitated being a graduate of the University of Toronto and to become a graduate, I had to do undergraduate work. Proud am I to say that my foundation work was laid strongly and firmly, in this, my Convent home ... I was placed here by my beloved guardian to be educated.³⁰

²⁶ "Constitution of the Saint Joseph's College Alumnae Association" as printed in the *Lilies* 1 (1) 1912, 11-16.

²⁷ There is no reference to these previous attempts in the publications surrounding the 1911 foundation. The *Lilies* lists "the First Officers of the St. Joseph's College Alumnae Association" in its first issue. *Lilies* 1 (1).

²⁸ ASSJ, *Annals* (11 November 1891): 173.

²⁹ ASSJ, *Scrapbooks of the Sisters of St. Joseph*, v.18, xl ix.

³⁰ "The Last Function in the Old Distribution Hall. February 21, 1911," *Lilies* 1(4) (1913), 71.

Lawler served as the first president of the Alumnae Association and founding editor of the journal, the *Lilies*. After her first term in office during which she established structures for their long-term survival, she moved to an advisory position of both. Always there for support, she contributed articles, poems and snippets of personal reflections to the *Lilies* and attended many of the alumnae-sponsored functions.

Although she was the driving force behind the Association, Lawler did not operate alone. Its first Executive Committee included many of the prominent graduates of the 1880s: Gertrude Lawler, Theresa Korman Small, Margaret Lillis Hart and Elizabeth Conry. These four graduates represented the diverse paths followed by the graduates of the Academy. Lawler, an educator, took a leadership role in secular society; Theresa Korman Small married and became a prominent philanthropist; Margaret Lillis Hart was a famous journalist and president of the Toronto Women's Press Club and Elizabeth Conry joined the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph. As Mother Irene Conry, the Superior of the Toronto community, she sanctioned the establishment of the Alumnae Association and gave it its mandate. As Lawler explained:

To our request to be allowed to establish the Association, Mother Irene ... replied that she was willing that the Alumnae Association exist, if its serious endeavour was to work for God and Alma Mater. Her inspiring words form our motto — Pro Deo et Alma Matre — For God and Alma Mater.³¹

The Association had two stated objectives: "to unite the Alumnae of St. Joseph's College; second to prove the loyalty of the Alumnae to their Alma Mater."³²

As founding president of the Association, Lawler participated in the drafting of the constitution and the circulation of the constitution in the alumnae journal, the *Lilies*. These documents gave the association and the journal both a purpose and a structure. As Lawler explained in the *Lilies*, the activities of the Alumnae Association demonstrate to the "outside world" that they were the graduates of a "college, which is among the first and the best of its kind in Canada."³³ One could also suggest that it was this need to demonstrate the value of their collective heritage and disprove the perception that convent-educated women were "a class of Catholic Women frequently looked upon by fellow Catholics as utterly useless."³⁴ Ultimately, this led the Association's Executive Committee to accept an invitation for membership in the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae.

³¹ *Lilies* 1 (1) (1912), 7.

³² "Constitution of the Saint Joseph College Alumnae Association," *Lilies* 1 (1) (1912), 11.

³³ *Lilies* 1 (2) (1912), 32.

³⁴ Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Carondelet (ASSJ-C), *International Federation of Catholic Alumnae, Newsletter* 2 (15 August 1918).

The Association's Executive Committee, comprised of elected officials, oversaw the organization's temporal and spiritual activities. In addition to the Executive Committee, the Association's constitution mandated the establishment of five standing committees: the Academic Committee, the Programme Committee, the Social Committee, the Spiritual Committee and the Cemetery Committee. The Academic Committee had several functions. In addition to the building of the College library, it was also responsible for the provision of scholarships for pupils in the Academy and for the provisions of scholarships for the higher education of the Sisters in the Congregation. The Program Committee was responsible for the intellectual and spiritual development of the Alumnae. It arranged the monthly meetings and administered charitable events. The Social Committee organized celebrations for both the Alumnae and the Congregation. These events took place around the feast of the Holy Innocents (27 December); a Spring Garden Party held on the convent grounds and a November Alumane Banquet. The Spiritual Committee provided flowers for the college chapel and arranged memorial masses for the alumnae and the Sisters. The Cemetery Committee was responsible for the annual outing to the graves of the Sisters.

The Constitution stated that no officer shall hold the same office for more than one year; but after the lapse of a year, she may be elected to the same office. This was one way of ensuring that the Executive of the Association would not be dominated by the same women year after year. In keeping with the constitution, Lawler served as President of the Association for one year and then stepped down. She retained editorship of the *Lilies* until 1914 and remained linked to the Association until her death in 1929.

The Alumnae Association sponsored activities for the intellectual and spiritual development of its members. It assisted in the growth of educational and charitable activities of the Sisters of St. Joseph and it contributed to the general good through specific welfare projects. Interspersed with the events planned by the Social Committee, and in addition to the invitation to attend executive meetings, lectures were scheduled for the members. Speakers were drawn from a number of sources: visiting lecturers to the University of Toronto gave presentations on such topics as "Christian Art and Grecian Culture;"³⁵ clergy and scholars from American universities spoke on topics such as "Apostolate of Womanhood,"³⁶ actors talked about their craft,³⁷ writers commented on their latest works;³⁸ foreign-decorated observers addressed global events,³⁹ the travel observations of sister alumnae,

³⁵ ASSJ *Annals* (30 October 1917): 532.

³⁶ ASSJ *Annals* (6 November 1917): 533.

³⁷ F.R. Benson, head of Stratford on Avon Players, speaking on Shakespeare. ASSJ *Annals* (9 January 1914): 78.

³⁸ Joyce Kilmer spoke on "The War and Poets." ASSJ *Annals* (18 February 1915): 501.

³⁹ Rev. Dr. Roche, decorated by King Ferdinand of Bulgaria, spoke on the Balkan States. ASSJ *Annals* (24 February 1914): 479.

especially the well-travelled Theresa Korman Small, who frequently spoke on her extensive travels which covered the globe from Japan and the East to Egypt.⁴⁰

The Alumnae Association played an active part in the various Catholic charitable endeavours within the Archdiocese of Toronto. It undertook fundraising activities to help support the social service endeavours of the Sisters of St. Joseph especially the orphanages, hospitals and old people's homes administered by the Sisters.

Once Canada entered World War One, the Alumnae focused their collective attention on the war effort. The Alumnae Banquet was cancelled and the funds transferred to the "poor of the city, the Belgians and the Canadian Contingent."⁴¹ It is important to note that in addition to membership in the Alumnae Association, many members worked with other organizations including the Red Cross, the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire, and the Women's Auxiliary to several of the Toronto Battalions. Yet, these involvements did not stop the members of the Alumnae Association from sponsoring their own activities. Members organized charitable events as fundraisers for the welfare of soldiers. They sponsored knitting circles and prepared Christmas packages to be sent overseas. At the war's end, the Alumnae Banquet was re-instated and at the 1919 dinner, Archbishop Neil McNeil congratulated the Association on its significant contributions to the patriotic cause.⁴²

The Alumnae Association grew in influence both within Toronto and within North America. Represented by Theresa Korman Small and Margaret Lillis Hart, it cemented ties with sister associations across the city and the province and participated in the formation of the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae Associations. The *Annals* report that St. Joseph's was invited to send representatives by "the New York Chapter" — probably as a result of correspondence with the network of American St. Joseph Convent Academies.⁴³

From the activities of the Alumnae Association during the decade of the war period, it appears that Lawler and her colleagues were successful in realizing their goals. There is ample evidence that the individual and collective activities of the members disprove that these convent-educated women were

⁴⁰ ASSJ *Annals* (22 November 1913): 477 and (26 October 1912): 469..

⁴¹ ASSJ *Annals* (18 January 1915): 491.

⁴² ASSJ *Annals* (7 January 1919): 567.

⁴³ The success of the St. Joseph's College Alumnae Association stimulated growth of similar organizations in the network of convent academies administered by the Sisters of St. Joseph around the province. In the 1930s, with the formation of the Canadian Federation of Convent Alumnae, a whole new thrust — a national thrust — was undertaken. Within this new organization, the three Alumnae Associations of St. Joseph's Academies were represented. This segment of research is but the beginning of what is emerging as a significant area of study on the role of the Alumnae Associations in the encouragement and support for higher education for Catholic women in the inter war period.

“utterly useless.”⁴⁴ They were community leaders; educational leaders; fund-raisers, philanthropists and providers of the means for women to enhance their own education. The public press congratulated Lawler for her leadership in creating an organization that was

the largest of its kind in membership. Being noted throughout a broad area for the alert and progressive nature of its work, the great success of the organization being due in a large measure to the will, the ability and assiduous attention of its president.⁴⁵

One of the most useful tools in communicating the activities of the Association to the world outside the walls of the Academy was Lawler’s other innovation, the Alumnae literary magazine, the *Lilies*.

Gertrude Lawler utilized her experience as a writer, an editor and an administrator to create *The St. Joseph Lilies*, the quarterly publication of the Alumnae Association, dedicated

to unite the alumnae with one another, to keep them united in a truly Catholic bond, and to bask in the light of the Alma Mater. Our literary aspirations are not feeble, but they are secondary to our chief aim.⁴⁶

Although the volumes listed the Sisters of St. Joseph’s Superior Mother Irene Conry and Gertrude Lawler as co-editors, Mother Conry’s role was honourific. Lawler held primary responsibility for the editorial tasks insofar as she wrote all the editorials and corresponded with the contributors. Lawler had definite goals in mind for the *Lilies*. She wrote that among the reasons for the founding of the *Lilies* was to highlight the achievements of the Sisters of St. Joseph:

It seems fitting that the completion of sixty golden years of noble work in philanthropic and educational institutions by the self-sacrificing Community of the Sisters of St. Joseph should be marked in some special way; hence the publication of the *Saint Joseph Lilies* wherein the outside world may learn a little of what is being done in the physical, mental and moral development of young ladies by our college, which is among the first and the best of its kind in Canada.⁴⁷

As founding editor, she took the *Lilies* from a concept to a self-sustaining, well-respected journal. When she achieved that goal, she stepped down.

The *Lilies* was a literary magazine. Each of the quarterly volumes contained on average some 130 pages of text and at least four photographic plates. Most contributions were prose, but poetry was also published. The contributors to the

⁴⁴ ASSJ-C, *International Federation of Catholic Alumnae, Newsletter 2* (15 August 1918).

⁴⁵ “Presentation to St. Joseph’s Head,” *The World* (11 July 1913): Editorial; UTA Alumni Records (A73-0026/221) 92.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ See especially the comments made in the article “Representative Women” cited previously.

Lilies, both men and women, were drawn primarily from the Catholic community in Canada but also included American and British authors and represented both the religious and secular communities. Contributions from members of the alumnae dealt with a variety of subjects: travel, literary analysis, comments on the role of women and an array of other subjects. The texts of speeches delivered to Alumnae gatherings, and invited articles on topics such as the higher education of women also appeared.

The articles which Lawler published in the *Lilies* ran the gamut of opinions on the role of women in the pre-war period. In spite of her own thoughts advocating equal pay for women and equal opportunity in the job market, Lawler published the full range of opinions, including an article on “A Convent Training and Women’s Rights” by Rev. F.J. O’Sullivan, who recommended against

the fashionably dressed woman of the world. To emulate her [too many girls] flock to the offices and department stores to earn by hard work and drudgery the price of a little vanity and pleasure...[rather than] a correct estimate of life - a happy blending of the ideals of knowledge, work and worth. Thus she is prepared to take her place in the home which she loves, adores and sanctifies ... imbued with the Catholic principles in the halls of her alma mater.⁴⁸

In another issue, Lawler published “Catholic Women and Journalism” in which author Florence T. Robinson complained about the lack of female representation among the accredited journalists writing for the Catholic press. Robinson wrote,

The days have long gone by when it was considered unwomanly for a woman to write; when such writers as Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte and her sisters had to keep a piece of needlework to throw over their papers in case visitors were announced. Then the pen, though it might have been mightier than the sword, was not considered, in woman’s hands, mightier than the needle. There is, believe me, a great future before the Catholic newspaper woman... there is no money and there is hard work, work that cannot be shirked or slurred over, if one is to have any measure of influence.⁴⁹

In addition to topical pieces on women’s rights and current affairs, Lawler presented her readers with spiritual lessons. Allegorical stories contributed by students and adults, such as “A Christmas Story” in which a young girl survives a train wreck and is reunited with her father at midnight mass, was appropriate to the season in which the volume appeared. Reminiscences of convent education, poems celebrating friends who

⁴⁸ “A Convent Training and Women’s Rights,” *Lilies* 2 (3) (1913): 26-31.

⁴⁹ “Catholic Women and Journalism,” *Lilies* 3(1) (1914): 86-89.

entered religious life, prayers and meditations were also included in the pages of the *Lilies*.

There were contributions from women religious of both St. Joseph's and other religious orders. Those written by members of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph were generally identified by initials rather than name. This was a common characteristic of any works produced by the Sisters of this order and of others. Paintings were signed with initials; books identified as being written by a "member of the Community."

Not all departments of the *Lilies* had such religious overtones. As well as the advertising which contributed to the funding of the magazine, other regular features included reports from the College Academy, results of examinations, items from the music department, alumnae items, and a segment entitled the "College Department" with its own editor, staff and contributions—all drawn from the students of St. Joseph's College. This ensured that the Alumnae Association would have intergenerational contacts and was a strategy to ensure the long-term survival of the Association. "Exchanges" was a feature consisting of comments from and about other college publications. As editor, Lawler circulated the *Lilies* among other colleges and invited them to comment upon the issue. Likewise, she commented upon the contents of their volumes. In this way, Lawler achieved her objective of sharing the successes of St. Joseph's Academy with the outside world.

Lawler held the job as editor of the *Lilies* until March of 1914. Her final editorial provided a personal assessment of her tenure as editor. She wrote:

We set before ourselves a task of dutiful love; we gave freely of our best endeavours to succeed; and now that we have attained our end, we voluntarily resign our high office, for we are conscious of the pioneer work has been done as well as we know how to do it...We have tried to do our best for the glory of God and the lasting welfare of the institution to which we have pledged allegiance. We resign in the confidence that the 'Lilies' is flourishing and needs now only care and attention to secure a constant and vigorous growth.⁵⁰

Continuing, she reported that the circulation, currently 1000 copies per issue, could easily be doubled. Lawler wrote about the authors who had sent her work and thanked "the unexpected contributions from friends anxious to see our *Lilies* flourish and anxious to advance the scholastic interests of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the cause of high education."⁵¹

In the first two years of its existence, Lawler set the standards and the tone for the *Lilies*. It continued to be published under the editorship of members of the community until 1953. Its first Sister-editor was Sr. Emerentia Lonergan. As Annalist, Mistress of Boarders and contributor to the *Lilies* and other publications,

⁵⁰ "Editorial: Our Last Number," *Lilies* 2 (4) (1914): 2.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Sr. Emerentia was well qualified to take over the editorship from Lawler. Throughout the rest of the war years, the *Lilies* continued to receive contributions from prominent Catholic authors. In 1916, Sr. Emerentia wrote:

It is now two years since Miss Lawler resigned the Editorship of the "Lilies" and since that time our little Magazine has been completely in our own hands. We have gained too in that period the friendship of many distinguished literary people such as Mr. Kilmer, Miss Eleanor C. Donnelly, Miss Caroline D. Swan as well as drawing closer the bonds that bind us to our literary friends and helpers, Father Donnard, Dean Harris, Rev. Dr. Talbot Smith, Dr. Wm. Fischer, Father Casey, Father Kehoe, Rev. Dr. Ryan, Dean O'Malley and others, all of them such dear good friends who spare neither time nor labour to make our book a success. Msgr. Bickerstaffe-Drew (John Ayscough) has not lost interest in our venture. His last letter to the present writer, a couple of weeks ago, was written from an English Hospital in France where he is ill.⁵²

When Sister Emerentia Lonergan died in 1918, the Archbishop of Toronto commented "Not only has the Community of St. Joseph sustained a great loss ... but the literary world as well."⁵³ Her successor, Sister Dymnpna Stritch, was the editor for twelve years.⁵⁴ *The Lilies* continued to be edited by a Sister of St Joseph and published by the community until 1953, when the Council of the community discontinued it because "there was no one to replace Sister Leonarda who became ill."⁵⁵

Thus, Lawler's creation, the *Lilies*, survived her leaving the editor's chair by some thirty-nine years. It achieved her objectives of giving the Alumnae a means of communicating with each other. Secondly, it was successful in bringing to the attention of the wider community the achievements of the Academy's teachers and pupils.

In the years following her most direct involvement with the *Lilies* and the Alumnae Association, Lawler continued to maintain her actively involvement with public service agencies. During the years 1914-18, Lawler was involved in the war effort and she worked closely with the 201st Battalion under the command of her Harbord colleague, Colonel E.W. Hagarty. These years must have been particularly hard on her, for "overwork caused Miss Lawler's health to break down last January and since that time she has been on a leave of absence."⁵⁶ In 1918 she retired from Harbord Collegiate, maintaining her association with the school as Honourary President of the Alumnae Association.

By 1919 Lawler was pursuing a life of active public service, taking

⁵² ASSJ *Annals* (2 March 1916): 502.

⁵³ ASSJ *Annals* (22 Sept 1918): 554.

⁵⁴ ASSJ *Annals* (3 July 1939): 1153.

⁵⁵ ASSJ *Annals* (20 March 1953): 1434.

⁵⁶ "Miss Lawler Resigns," *Telegram* (17 September 1918); Alumni Records (A73-0026/221): 92.

executive and administrative roles in a host of service organizations. Common among all these organizations are the causes they represent: the improvement of women's social, political and educational status. She organized the Toronto Catholic Women's League, wrote its constitution and was its first president. She went on to hold national executive offices of vice-president and director of education for the Canadian Catholic Women's League. She was especially concerned with social service organizations. Between 1920 and 1929, she served as chairman of the Mothers' Allowance Board, where her annual reports continuously advocated the expansion of its services. She was also active as a co-ordinator of general fund raising drives: two of the most noteworthy were the campaigns to build a women's residence at University College and to expand Women's College Hospital. As a member of, and participant in, countless charitable and literary associations,⁵⁷ she was the recipient of numerous awards: one of the most significant was the Papal Medal that she received in 1925 for her contribution to "education and religious work."⁵⁸

Lawler could be considered among the pioneers of equal rights for women in Canada. She was a proponent of higher education for women and an advocate of equal pay for women in the teaching profession. Her thoughts on these two issues were well highlighted in the *Globe*'s 1913 profile of her that appeared as part of its "Representative Women" series. Lawler used this interview as a platform to advocate equal pay for male and female teachers. She expressed great concern that "women teachers, who are freely acknowledged as eminently successful in discipline and scholarship have always been paid less than men who do the same work ... just because of their womanhood." Commenting on her own experience of always receiving the same salary as a man performing the same job, she concluded, "Consequently, I feel it keenly that my women colleagues in the teaching profession have not been treated so generously as I have been. Why should they not?"⁵⁹

She also strongly believed that women must receive good and thorough education for their chosen professions. In the *Globe* interview, she remarked:

the more solidly that she [woman] is educated - that is, accurately trained to do her work first in the home, and secondly, where possible or desirable, out of the home ... the more intelligently the woman is able to act, the more useful she is to her family, her community, to her nature ... as the bread-maker, the bread-earner or the bread-giver.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Among the organizations to which she belonged: the League of Nations Society, Canadian Red Cross, American Women's Club, Pure English Society of Chiswell, Alpha Kappa Theta Society, Dickens Society. She also served on the Ontario Social Service Council, the Toronto Social Hygiene Council and was active in the peace movement.

⁵⁸ ASSJ *Annals* (11 June 1925): 851.

⁵⁹ "Representative Women"

⁶⁰ "Representative Women"

As a single woman, Lawler supported herself throughout her life through her teaching income. She was concerned that women who held the maximum qualifications earned their rightful salary. She certainly was not averse to holding her successful experiences in gaining pay equal to her male colleagues as an example to other women. Lawler's concern for the higher education of women at the university level was one of the driving forces in her life. Her lifelong association with the University of Toronto began in 1886. The University of Toronto recognized her contribution by awarding her an Honourary Doctorate of Laws, in 1927, as part of the University's centennial celebrations.

Lawler died in 1929. In its expression of sympathy to her sisters, the Senate of the University of Toronto wrote that her death

was universally regarded as a deplorable loss to the country, in education, philanthropy, religion, culture - - all those things most essential to enrichment of the national life. But assuredly her works do follow her.⁶¹

Two scholarships were established at the University of Toronto in her name: the Dr. Lawler Memorial Scholarship and the Gertrude Lawler Memorial Prize in English. Significantly, scholarships were also given in her name at her convent academy home.

While a committed Catholic and prominent member of the Toronto Catholic community, Lawler worked within the public education system and never taught for the convent Academy. Although she remained single throughout her life, there is no indication that she ever considered entering a religious order. While she saw herself as firmly rooted within a Catholic community, she chose to live her professional life within the broader context of public education and social service. Perhaps this is the reason why she was so committed to the launching of both the St. Joseph's College Alumnae Association and the *Lilies*: she wished to establish a permanent means by which she and her fellow graduates could be linked with the Congregation that created their intellectual and spiritual home.

⁶¹ "Resolution of the Senate," UTA Alumni Records (A73-026/221): 92.