

Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada

Finding Aid - Annals Belle River, Ont. series (F01-S036)

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Annals Belle River, Ont. series

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Summary information

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| Repository: | Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada |
| Title: | Annals Belle River, Ont. series |
| Reference code: | F01-S036 |
| Date: | 1883-2000 (creation) |
| Physical description: | 13.3 cm of textual records 1 album (42 photographs: col., and 7 photographs: b&w) 1 album (120 photographs: col.) 1 album (157 photographs: col., 1 photograph: b&w, and 4 negatives: 35mm) |
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Administrative history / Biographical sketch

Note

The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Diocese of London, Ontario was first incorporated on February 15, 1891 under chapter 92 of the Statutes of Ontario, 1870-1. London, Ontario is on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, L'naapéewak, and Attawandaron Peoples.

On December 11, 1868, at the request of Bishop John Walsh, five Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto arrived in London, Ontario. Mother Teresa Brennan, Sister Ignatia Campbell, Sister Ursula McGuire, Sister Francis O'Malley and Sister Appolonia Nolan were accompanied by Reverend Mother Antoinette McDonald and were welcomed by Bishop Walsh, Rev. J.M. Bruyere, V.G., and Rev. P. Egan, pastor of St. Peter's Church. Awaiting the Sisters were sleighs that transported them from the train station to a temporary home at 170 Kent Street.

In accordance with their mission in London, three Sisters began teaching at St. Peter's School in January, 1869. After classes, they visited the sick, the poor and the imprisoned. They were also mandated to open an orphanage in the future. In order to accomplish these tasks, more Sisters and larger facilities were necessary.

On October 2, 1869, the Barker House at the corner of Richmond and College Street in North London was purchased and the Sisters moved there from Kent Street. The building was named Mount Hope, and it became the first Motherhouse of the Sisters, eventually housing the elderly, orphans, Sisters and novices.

On December 18, 1870, the Sisters of St. Joseph became an autonomous congregation in the London diocese, independent of the Toronto congregation. Sister Ignatia Campbell was appointed Superior General, an office she held until 1902. On February 15, 1871, the congregation became legally incorporated.

On October 7, 1877, an addition was made to Mount Hope. This building stood until it was demolished on August 3, 1980, surrounded by the growing healthcare institutions founded by the Sisters, beginning

with St. Joseph's Hospital which opened at 268 Grosvenor Street on October 15, 1888, and followed by the opening of St. Joseph's Hospital School of Nursing in 1895, and the construction of a new nursing school building in 1927, which saw its last graduation in 1977. On May 1, 1951, St. Mary's Hospital was opened, followed by Marian Villa on January 12, 1966. In 1985, the hospital complex was renamed St. Joseph's Health Centre, and ownership was transferred in 1993 to St. Joseph's Health Care Society.

But it was not only in London that Sisters saw the need for healthcare and nursing education. On October 15, 1890, they opened St. Joseph's Hospital on Centre Street in Chatham, Ontario, which remained under their control until 1993. In 1895, they opened St. Joseph's Hospital School of Nursing, which saw its last graduation in 1970. On October 18, 1946, they opened St. Joseph's Hospital at 290 North Russell Street in Sarnia which remained under their control until 1993. In Alberta, they administered St. Joseph's Hospital in Stettler (1926), St. Joseph's Hospital in Galahad (1927), the General Hospital in Killam (1930), and St. Paul's Hospital in Rimbey (1932).

On April 10, 1899, the Sisters opened Mount St. Joseph Motherhouse, Novitiate and Orphanage at the former Hellmuth College at 1486 Richmond Street North in London. The orphans were moved to this new location from Mount Hope, which remained a home for the elderly and was renamed House of Providence on June 3, 1899. The orphanage remained at Mount St. Joseph until it was moved to Fontbonne Hall in 1953 (to 1967). The original Hellmuth College building was demolished in 1976.

Later, on September 14, 1914, the Motherhouse and Novitiate moved to Sacred Heart Convent at Colborne and Dundas Streets in London, with the orphans remaining at Mount St. Joseph. The Sisters lived at Sacred Heart Convent until 1953, when they moved back to the newly built Mount St. Joseph, on the original location of the former Hellmuth College. The new Motherhouse and Novitiate was officially opened on June 29, 1954. It was here that they continued a private girls' school which had begun in 1950 at Sacred Heart Convent, and was now known as Mount St. Joseph Academy (to 1985). It was here too that they continued a music school which had also begun at Sacred Heart Convent and was now called St. Joseph's School of Music (to 1982). The Médaille Retreat Centre began here in 1992, and the Sisters also administered a Guest Wing for relatives of hospitalized patients (to 2005). The Sisters departed Mount St. Joseph for their new residence, a green building at 485 Windermere Road in London, in 2007.

On September 4, 1873, St. Joseph's Convent opened at 131 North Street in Goderich, Ontario, followed by other convents in Ontario, including Ingersoll (1879), St. Thomas (1879), Belle River (1889), Windsor (1894), Sarnia (1906), Kingsbridge (1911), Seaforth (1913), St. Mary's (1913), Woodstock (1913), Kinkora (1916), Paincourt (1923), Maidstone (1930), Leamington (1932), Delhi (1938), Tillsonburg (1938), Simcoe (1938), Langton (1939), West Lorne (1957), and Zurich (1963).

The Sisters also opened missions in other parts of Canada, including in Alberta: Edmonton (1922), Wetaskiwin (1929), St. Bride's (1934); and in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories Yellowknife (1953), and in British Columbia in Haney, now Maple Ridge (1956), and Rutland (1970). Branching even further afield, Convento San Jose was opened in Chiclayo, Peru in 1962.

Over the years, as well as their service as teachers in the separate school system, as music teachers, as healthcare workers, as nursing educators, in providing care to orphans, and in providing parish ministry, pastoral care, and administering spiritual retreats, the Sisters were also involved in social service ministry. In Windsor, they opened the Roy J. Bondy Centre on September 13, 1970 which was a receiving home for the Children's Aid Society, withdrawing in 1982 but continuing to provide residential care for disabled children afterward. In London, they opened Internos, a residence for teenage girls attending school and later for troubled teens (to 1979). This was followed by the opening of St. Joseph's Detoxification Centre on September 13, 1973 (to 2005) and St. Stephen's House, an alcoholic recovery centre on February 1, 1982 (to 2000). Loughlin House in London opened as a residence for ex-psychiatric female patients in 1986 (to 1989), followed by the Home for Women in Need at 534 Queens Avenue in 1979 (to 2004).

Later, St. Josephs' House for Refugees was opened in 1987 (to 2005), followed by St. Joseph's Hospitality Centre, a food security program, on February 2, 1983.

On November 22, 2012, the congregation amalgamated with those in Hamilton, Peterborough, and Pembroke into one charitable corporation under the name Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada by the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada Act, a Private Act of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which received Royal Assent on June 13, 2013.

Scope and content

This series contains the history of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, Ontario in the Parish of Belle River in Belle River, Ontario. There are historical summaries about the activities and events at the Convent of St. Joseph on Charles Street in Belle River, including the Sisters' contribution to education as teachers and administrators at the Sacred Heart School and St. Jean Baptiste School in Belle River.

There are also 1891 and 1893 land deeds within the Village of Belle River and various newspaper clippings documenting the Sisters' long service in the Parish of St. Simon and St. Jude in Belle River. The Belle River Mission was operated by the Sisters of St. Joseph of London when it was first established in 1889 until its closing in 1985. In addition, there are photo albums of the Sisters at St. Joseph's Convent in Belle River. Photographs in the albums also document the Sisters participating in events such as the school choir and fair at St. John Baptist School in Belle River, and going on outings to Niagara Falls, Banff, and Lake Louise.

Notes

Title notes

- **Source of title proper:** Title is based on the contents of the series.

Physical condition

File F01-S036-04-03 is very fragile and in poor condition.

Immediate source of acquisition

These records were accumulated by the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, Ontario.

Arrangement

Original order was maintained.

Location of originals

The records are located at The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada Archives.

Restrictions on access

The Archives reserves the right to restrict access to the collection depending on the condition of the archival material, the amount of material requested, and the purpose of the research. The use of certain materials may also be restricted for reasons of privacy or sensitivity, or under a donor agreement. Access restrictions will be applied equally to all researchers and reviewed periodically. No researcher will be given access to any materials that contain a personal information bank such as donor agreements or

personnel records, or to other proprietary information such as appraisals, insurance valuations, or condition reports.

Conditions governing use

Permission to study archival records does not extend to publication or display rights. The researcher must request this permission in writing from the Archives.

Finding aids

Series and file list available.

Accruals

No further accruals are expected.

Note [Sources]

County of Essex, “Land Acknowledgement,” <https://www.countyofessex.ca/en/discover-the-county/history.aspx>, accessed 2024/09/04.

Ontario Heritage Trust, “The Founding of Belle River,” <https://www.heritagetrust.on.ca/plaques/founding-of-belle-river#>, accessed 2024/09/04.

Windsor-Lake St. Clair Catholic Family of Parishes, “History of St Simon and St Jude,” <https://catholicfamily.ca/history-of-st-simon-and-st-jude>, accessed 2024/09/04.

Note [General]

In 1879, Reverend Father Joseph Gérard, the second pastor of Belle River, Ontario, built a four-room brick schoolhouse 162km southwest of London, Ontario. Father Joseph petitioned the Bishop of London, John Walsh, to have the local children receive a Catholic education from the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, Ontario. Bishop Walsh negotiated with the Reverend Mother Ignatia Campbell, General Superior of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, and it was decided that Sisters Angela McKeogh, Agatha McCarthy, Columba Overend, Bernard Howell, and Herman Murphy would be the inaugural group of teachers on their first Mission amongst the French people at Belle River. On December 29, 1889, the Sisters moved into a red brick two-floor, three-bedroom house, named St. Joseph’s Convent on St. Charles Street, which was block away from the school. The school in Belle River, in the County of Essex had a significant French language speaking population and was later named St. Jean Baptiste. The Town of Belle River is situated on the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, comprised of the Ojibway, Odawa and Potawatomi Peoples.

In January 1892, additions to St. Joseph’s Convent were built and the Sisters moved in that November 1892. The Sisters traveled locally by horse and buggy. The influenza epidemic from 1917 to 1918 struck Belle River, and the nursing skills of the Sisters were put to advantageous use. On November 19, 1919, a violent cyclone tore through Belle River causing considerable damage to the Convent and the adjacent St. Simon and St. Jude Church. The church required extensive repair work, including new paint, wallpaper, flooring, windows, roof, and bell tower. In 1928, there were significant renovations to modernize St. Joseph’s Convent with hot and cold-water plumbing, electric radiators, an enlarged kitchen to accommodate a laundry room, two extra bedrooms and a lavatory on the second floor, and a covered porch surrounding the house. In 1947, there was a new roof, and statues of the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph were donated for the Chapel. In 1952, a new sidewalk replaced the old one from the front porch to the street and from the Convent to the Church. In 1957, new telephone lines were installed connecting the residence with the Church and Schools. In 1972, a community vehicle was purchased and the Sisters travelled in a Dodge Polara car.

In 1889, at St. Jean Baptiste School the Sisters gave music and debating classes, organized annual sport field days, and provided spiritual guidance to elementary students. The school was also used for celebrations, social events, musical concerts, and plays given in French and English for the culturally mixed population. There was no nearby high school in the area, so Father Joseph Edmund Meunier opened the Sacred Heart School in 1896. However, due to low enrollment it was closed in 1906 and transferred to secular lay teachers. The Separate School Act of 1863 accorded Separate Schools in the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec, but it wasn't until 1899 that a Separate School Board was established. In 1899, the Sacred Heart School and St. Jean Baptiste School (also known as St. John the Baptist School) became Separate Schools. In 1922, St. James High School was built with two rooms added in 1936 for Home Economics and Manual Training classes. The Sisters served as teachers, nurses, coaches, laboratory technicians, and administrative staff until St. James High School closed in June 1948.

A new St. John the Baptist School was built and opened on September 28, 1955, and Sister Marie Cecile Janisse was the appointed principal. The Sisters taught classes in both French and English, and Sister Annette Gariepy coached the boys' basketball team from 1962 to 1965. On December 29, 1978, the four remaining Sisters moved out of the St. Charles Street Convent due to the poor condition of the house and moved into another residence. The old brick building was demolished and used as an addition to expand the adjacent parking lot. In September 1982, Sister Mary Philomene O'Keefe was the last teacher at St. Jean Baptiste School, as such the Sisters decided to close their Mission in Belle River on June 30, 1984. Sister Mary Philomene, who commuted from Windsor, Ontario, continued to teach in Belle River until 1985.

Sister Mary St. Louis served as the Pastoral Minister from 1995 to 2000 within the Parish of St. Simon and St. Jude in Belle River. Her work included Sacramental preparation, music ministry, pastoral care, and home and hospital visitations. In September 2000, Sister Mary St. Louis left Belle River because she accepted an invitation to join the Community Services Team, to coordinate liturgy and hospitality for the Sisters at Mount St. Joseph in London, Ontario.

Other notes

- **Publication status:** Published
- **Level of detail:** Minimal
- **Status description:** Final

Access points

- Multiple media (documentary form)

Collection holdings

Subseries: F01-S036-01 - Chronicles

Title: Chronicles

Reference code: F01-S036-01

Date: 1883-2000 (date of creation)

Scope and content: This subseries contains several historical summaries on the Belle River Mission of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, Ontario. This series includes a short history on the Belle River Parish from 1883 to 2000. There are the chronicles of St. Joseph's Convent at Belle River from 1889 to 1974 that include a postcard of St. Jude and St. Simon Church; printed photographs and pictures of paintings of the Sisters in Le Puy, Lyons, and St. Didier, in France; and a St. Jean Baptiste School Graduation program brochure on June 21, 1956. This subseries contains a list of Sisters and Clergy stationed in Belle River from 1889 to 1983. The topics within the chronicles include the foundational history of the Parish of Belle River, the arrival of the Sisters to Belle River, renovations and building extensions to St. Joseph's Convent and to St. Jude and St. Simon Church, influenza crisis, a fatalistic tornado, the Village of Belle River Council, the Roman Catholic Separate School Board, teachers' strikes, school open houses, sport events, teacher-parent meetings, musical recitals, and graduation ceremonies. There are also chronicles also document the Sisters' daily activities as well as religious retreats, conferences, travels, jubilees, and preparation for the centennial celebration. In addition, there is a typed draft of *Loose Leaf's* of Belle River 1965 – Some Old, Some New*, written by Sybil Little with a focus on the historical buildings during the founding and early history of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Belle River from 1868 to 1965. Also included in the draft are printed pictures of buildings, statues, and an aerial photograph of Belle River.

Physical description: 7.5 cm of textual records

Publication status:

Published

File: F01-S036-01-01 - Belle River Chronicles

Title: Belle River Chronicles

Reference code: F01-S036-01-01

Date: 1883-2000 (date of creation)

: 0344

Location of originals: London Annals Box 5 (0344)

Publication status:

Published

File: F01-S036-01-02 - Chronicles St. Joseph's Convent Belle River

Title: Chronicles St. Joseph's Convent Belle River

Reference code: F01-S036-01-02

Date: 1889-1974 (date of creation)

: 0344

Location of originals: London Annals Box 5 (0344)

Publication status:

Published

File: F01-S036-01-03 - St. Joseph's Convent Belle River

Title: St. Joseph's Convent Belle River

Reference code: F01-S036-01-03

Date: 1889-1985 (date of creation)

: 0344

Location of originals: London Annals Box 5 (0344)

Publication status:

Published

File: F01-S036-01-04 - Belle River St. Joseph's Convent, originals

Title: Belle River St. Joseph's Convent, originals

Reference code: F01-S036-01-04

Date: 1995-2000 (date of creation)

: 0344

Location of originals: London Annals Box 5 (0344)

Publication status:

Published

File: F01-S036-01-05 - Belle River Histories and Events

Title: Belle River Histories and Events

Reference code: F01-S036-01-05

Date: 1914-1978 (date of creation)

: 0344

Location of originals: London Annals Box 5 (0344)

Publication status:

Published

File: F01-S036-01-06 - Belle River St. Joseph's Convent

Title: Belle River St. Joseph's Convent

Reference code: F01-S036-01-06

Date: 1965-1983 (date of creation)

: 0344

Location of originals: London Annals Box 5 (0344)

Publication status:

Published

File: F01-S036-01-07 - Belle River

Title: Belle River

Reference code: F01-S036-01-07

Date: 1995-2000 (date of creation)

: 0344

Location of originals: London Annals Box 5 (0344)

Publication status:

Published

Subseries: F01-S036-02 - Newspaper articles and pamphlets

Title: Newspaper articles and pamphlets

Reference code: F01-S036-02

Date: 1968-1984 (date of creation)

Scope and content: This subseries contains newsclippings, pamphlets, news bulletins, and cards on the activities of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, Ontario during their Belle River Mission in Belle River, Ontario. The newspaper articles are published in the Ontarian newspapers of *The Catholic Register, The Windsor Star, The Saintinel,* and *The Belle River North Essex News.* There are news articles about the ministry of the Sisters of St. Joseph in teaching, administering, fundraising, providing counseling, and spiritual guidance to the parishioners of Belle River and an article on their Peru mission. There is news regarding the Essex County Roman Catholic Separate School Board legal teachers' strike that started on March 16 and ended on April 6, 1981. There is also news about the Catholic Women's League and their church services and accomplishments in Belle River. There is news about the business of the clergy in the London Diocese in assuming positions as Bishops, Reverends, Fathers, Priests, and Brothers in their assigned church and parish. There are newspaper clippings on general topics such as public announcements of obituaries, weddings, funerals, fires, hockey, NHL, Terry

Fox, and the resignation of the Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau. Notably there is an obituary of Sister Mary Angela Flaherty who passed away on November 21, 1981. She served as a school principal from 1937 to 1962 in London, then was on the General Council for 22 years, and finally as the Secretary General for 10 years.

This subseries also contains various program brochures and pamphlets of special events such as, the 150th Anniversary from 1834 to 1984 of the Parishes of St. Simon and St. Jude in Belle River; the Liturgical Installation of the Most Reverend John Michael Sherlock in becoming a Bishop on his appointment at St. Peter's Cathedral in London on August 21, 1978; the official opening on April 8, 1973, of Pavillon des Jeunes, an elementary Catholic French and English bilingual school in Belle River; the Sisters of St. Joseph Concert Band for the 100th Anniversary of the arrival of the Sisters in the London Diocese; a Silver Jubilee 25th Anniversary 1953-1978 of the Sisters of St. Joseph dated September 17, 1978; and on the on the graduating class of St. Jean Baptiste School on June 24, 1981, where the Sisters of St. Joseph taught for many years.

There are two calendars in this subseries. The first calendar is from 1968 to 1969 with printed pictures of historical milestones of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, Ontario on their various missions from 1868 to 1968 as a souvenir in celebration of their Centennial. The second calendar is for 1982 on the Sisters Adorers of the Precious Blood with printed photographs of the Precious Blood Sisters and their activities in the church and monastery.

There are two cards of handwritten signatures, one of which contains a small, handmade flag inside for the occasion of a Centennial Tea to celebrate the Community Centennial from 1868 to 1968 at St. Joseph's Covent in Belle River on November 30, 1968. There is a booklet, *Beginnings in London Diocese 1868-1878,* on the founding history of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London. In addition, there is a list of Sisters of St. Joseph who were stationed at Belle River from 1889 to 1981; and three postcards of photographs of the Roman Catholic School and Church in Belle River from 1834 to 1934.

Physical description: 5.5 cm of textual records

Publication status:

Published

File: F01-S036-02-01 - Newspaper Articles Belle River

Title: Newspaper Articles Belle River

Reference code: F01-S036-02-01

Date: 1973-1984 (date of creation)

: 0344

Location of originals: London Annals Box 5 (0344)

Publication status:

Published

File: F01-S036-02-02 - Belle River Newspaper Articles

Title: Belle River Newspaper Articles

Reference code: F01-S036-02-02

Date: 1968-1983 (date of creation)

: 0344

Location of originals: London Annals Box 5 (0344)

Publication status:

Published

File: F01-S036-02-03 - Newspaper Clippings Belle River Diocese

Title: Newspaper Clippings Belle River Diocese

Reference code: F01-S036-02-03

Date: 1978-1983 (date of creation)

: 0344

Location of originals: London Annals Box 5 (0344)

Publication status:

Published

File: F01-S036-02-04 - Essex County Separate School Board

Title: Essex County Separate School Board

Reference code: F01-S036-02-04

Date: 1973-1984 (date of creation)

: 0344

Location of originals: London Annals Box 5 (0344)

Publication status:

Published

File: F01-S036-02-05 - Convent Belle River

Title: Convent Belle River

Reference code: F01-S036-02-05

Date: 1979-1983 (date of creation)

: 0344

Location of originals: London Annals Box 5 (0344)

Publication status:

Published

Subseries: F01-S036-03 - Land deeds

Title: Land deeds

Reference code: F01-S036-03

Date: 1891-1899 (date of creation)

Scope and content: This subseries contains the legal documents and correspondence about the land ownership in the Village of Belle River, in the County of Essex, by the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, Ontario. There is an official folded document, a Deed of Land dated September 29, 1891, and an official Article of Agreement dated September 5, 1893, about the sale and purchase of property at Belle River. There are two handwritten letters addressed to the Reverend Mother Ignatia from Sister Josephine Gerard, one dated on March 9, 1892, and the other from August 11, 1899. The letters concern Mr. Murphy, the lawyer from London, and the Registry Office regarding the land transaction at Belle River.

Physical description: 0.3 cm of textual records

Publication status:

Published

File: F01-S036-03-01 - Belle River Land Deed

Title: Belle River Land Deed

Reference code: F01-S036-03-01

Date: 1891-1899 (date of creation)

Physical description: 0.3 cm of textual records

: 0344

Location of originals: London Annals Box 5 (0344)

Publication status:

Published

Subseries: F01-S036-04 - Photo albums

Title: Photo albums

Reference code: F01-S036-04

Date: 1926-1982 (date of creation)

Scope and content: This subseries contains three photo albums that document the visual history of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, Ontario, during their Belle River Mission in the Parish of St. Simon and St. Jude, Ontario. There are photographs of the exterior and interior of St. Joseph's Convent, St. Simon and St. Jude Church, and St. John Baptist School, in Belle River, Ontario. The photographs in these albums provide a glimpse into the lives of the Sisters and the various social, cultural, and spiritual activities they participated in such as, religious retreats, Jubilees, and seasonal celebrations like Easter, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. There are photographs related to the travels the Sisters took on holiday trips to Niagara Falls, Ontario, and to Alberta. There are also photographs of the Sisters interacting with students at school events.

Physical description: 1 album (43 photographs: col., and 7 photographs: b&w.)

1 album (120 photographs: col.)

1 album (157 photographs: col., 1 photograph: b&w., and 4 negatives: 35mm)

Publication status:

Published

File: F01-S036-04-01 - St. Joseph's Convent, Belle River, Ontario, Oxley Retreat House M-2

Title: St. Joseph's Convent, Belle River, Ontario, Oxley Retreat House M-2

Reference code: F01-S036-04-01

Date: 1926-1979 (date of creation)

: 0344

Location of originals: London Annals Box 5 (0344)

Publication status:

Published

File: F01-S036-04-02 - Belle River Convent M-2.1

Title: Belle River Convent M-2.1

Reference code: F01-S036-04-02

Date: 1975-1982 (date of creation)

: 0344

Location of originals: London Annals Box 5 (0344)

Publication status:

Published

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File: F01-S036-04-03 - Belle River Mission M-2.2

Title: Belle River Mission M-2.2

Reference code: F01-S036-04-03

Date: 1968-1975 (date of creation)

: 0344

Location of originals: London Annals Box 5 (0344)

Publication status:

Published

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