

Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada

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Annals Killam, Alta. series

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Summary information

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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 a short historical summary of the western mission in Killam, Alberta in the Archdiocese of Edmonton by the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, Ontario. The Sisters established and operated Our Lady of Fatima Separate School in Killam from 1952 to 1992. The historical summary covers a date range from 1954 to 1976. Starting in 1976, the staff at the Our Lady of Fatima School consisted of lay personnel. In this historical summary, there are topics on the founding of the school, building construction, official opening and renaming of the school, renovations, addition of extra classrooms including a science laboratory, increase of student enrollment, expansion and growth from an elementary to junior to a senior high school, scholastic exams, bus transportation, school trips, parent-teacher days, and the retirement and hiring of teachers. In addition, there is a photograph of a "Annual Hall of Fame Awards 1990" plaque from the Killam Chamber of Commerce which was given to Sisters Lourdes Thomas, Mary Kevin Moran, and Rose Ellen Donnelly.

Notes

Title notes

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

Immediate source of acquisition

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

Arrangement

Original order was maintained.

Restrictions on access

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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 [General]

In the early 1900s, the great expansion into western Canada experienced a steady stream of diverse immigrant settlers from eastern Canada, United States, and Europe who sought a new life in the vast farm areas of the prairie provinces. On December 21, 1912, His Grace Archbishop E. Legal founded the Sacred Heart Parish in the then newly emerging City of Edmonton to provide a spiritual foundation and to accommodate the surge of newcomers as they got settled in their new province. In 1922, the Archbishop Henry Joseph O'Leary requested Mother Mechtilde McCarthy, the Superior General of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, Ontario, have the Sisters to serve in the educational field in the Archdiocese of Edmonton, Alberta. On July 25, 1922, a group of seven Sisters travelled to Edmonton by train. Upon arrival, they purchased St. Ann's Convent from the Sisters of the Faithful Companions of Jesus and renamed it the Sacred Heart Convent. Their residence and the Sacred Heart Church were both adjacent to the school located in the city center of Edmonton. This area and the outskirts surrounding Edmonton is situated within the Treaty Six Territory and the traditional homelands and the Métis Nation of Alberta Region Four, as well as the Nêhiyaw (Cree), Denesuline (Dené), Nakota Sioux (Stoney), Anishnaabe (Ojibway/Saulteaux), Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk), and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot). The Sisters took charge of the Sacred Heart School, a two storey, twelve room, red brick building, with a capacity of 350 students. The Sisters held classes from kindergarten to grade eight. In 1922, the Sisters also operated and immediately opened a Novitiate and boarding school. The first Novice was received in August 1923, and by 1930 there were twelve in the Novitiate, which continued to increase in number until it was united with the London Motherhouse Novitiate in 1940. Over the years, the Sisters served as educators, administrators and principals and remained at the Sacred Heart Convent until April 14, 1961, when they moved into their newly built residence at the Edmonton Regional House, also referred to as St. Joseph's Convent Regional House. The Sisters lived here until 2000 when it was sold to John and Ausma Birzgalis, and it became Venta Nursing Home. The school was under the sisters' management until Sister Irene Fitzgerald retired in 1966, and Sister Gertrude Walsh was the last Sister to teach at the Sacred Heart School in 1969. By 1970 all the Sisters had withdrawn from the Sacred Heart school.

At first the Sisters taught the children general subjects like reading, spelling, and arithmetic with an emphasis on English language acquisition. Then in the years of World War II, there was a great push for cultural development courses, and in the early 1930s during the great depression the Sisters distributed fruit and cookies, and later the school board provided milk and vitamin pills. In the 1940s when a radio and phonograph were added to the classrooms, social studies and music classes were resounding successes. During the Alberta oil boom in the 1950s, industrial arts, home economics, special needs, and art and drama classes were introduced, as well as instigating a pre-employment work experience course called the Integrated Occupational Program.

From 1922 to 1992, about 56 Sisters taught at and administered schools that were primarily within the area or the outlying district of the Sacred Heart Parish. Some of the schools the Sisters were active in include the Sacred Heart School of Edmonton from 1922 to 1940, Fairview School from 1922 to 1933, St. Patrick's Elementary School from 1933 to 1985 (formerly Fairview School), St. Francis of Assisi Middle School from 1928 to 1974, St. Michael's School from 1945 to 1965, St. Basil's School from 1952 to 1992, Archbishop O'Leary High School from 1960 to 1974, St. Cecilia's Junior High Composite School from

1965 to 1969, and St. Anne's School from 1974 to 1982. Other schools located outside of Edmonton where the Sisters worked include the Sacred Heart School of Wetaskiwan in Wetaskiwin from 1929 to 1942, St. Brides School in St. Brides from 1933 to 1964, Our Lady of Fatima School in Killam from 1952 to 1992, and St. Bernadette's School from 1957 to 1991 and St. Nicholas School from 1960 to 1970 in Beverley. In late 1925, the Stettler Board of Trade in Stettler, located 185 km south of Edmonton, asked Reverend Father Ernest Battle of the Catholic Church Parish, to reach out to the Archbishop Henry J. O'Leary. The purpose was to establish what was known as a "Sisters Hospital" run by the Sisters of St. Joseph who had a renowned reputation for their medical services to soldiers during the First World War. In February 1926, at the request of Archbishop O'Leary, Sister Patricia Coughlin, Sister Virginia Lobban, Sister Austin Gurnine, and Sister Jane Frances O'Rourke travelled from London, Ontario to Stettler, Alberta, to operate a hospital. Reverend Father Battle arranged for the Sisters to work in a large building called Carder Hall, which was the former Stettler Cigar Factory that now served as a temporary hospital. In 1927, a decision to construct a 25-bed municipal hospital rather than a private Catholic hospital by a newly formed Municipal Board corporation with representatives from the districts of Stettler, Botha, Haig, Waverly, and Dublin all in the County of Stettler, and Vim in the County of Camrose meant the end of the Nursing Sisters' time in Stettler.

The Sisters opened and administered several small hospitals in rural Alberta: Stettler Hospital from 1926 to 1927, St. Joseph's Hospital in Galahad from 1927 to 1978, St. Paul's Hospital in Rimbev from 1932 to 1949, and Killam General Hospital from 1930 to 1990 and Flagstaff Beaver Auxiliary Hospital from 1963 to 1990, both in Killam. The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, Ontario provided funds to build and operate the hospitals until 1958, when the provincial department of the Ministry of Health and the Hospitals Division took over the administration and enacted the Alberta Health Plan. This government policy prevented any church owned and operated voluntary hospitals from being constructed in Alberta. However, it did have a limited provision to allow some upgrades and renovations to existing medical buildings. Also in 1958, there was a polio epidemic that struck throughout Alberta, requiring the services of the Sisters to work at full capacity.

The Sisters were instrumental in the early development of health care and social service, caring for the sick, poor and disadvantaged in the cities, towns, and rural areas in Alberta. In the harsh economically depressed years from 1930 to 1945, the Sisters never turned anyone away who needed help, and allowed payment in coal, hay, wood, farm produce, and manual labour. In the years of the Second World War, nursing Sisters worked up to 40 hours per week without a break. During the 1940s to 1960s, the Sisters were very active in coordinating relief work. During their time in Alberta, the Sisters occupied various health care roles in nursing, management, housekeeping, business administration, pastoral care, and as dieticians, occupational therapists, radiologists and technologists in medical labs.

The Sisters collaborated with services and agencies such as the Catholic Social Services, the Boyle Street Community Centre, Boyle-McCauley Health Centre, Edmonton People In Need Shelter Society, Elizabeth Fry Society, Edmonton Inner City Housing Society, Edmonton's Women's Shelter, Inner City Youth Development Association, and the Alberta Human Rights Commission. They worked in various capacities and supported the needs of the marginalized, the un-housed, people with severe or chronic mental health needs, previous offenders, youth at-risk, underage expectant mothers, and individuals struggling with substance abuse. The Sisters acted as board members, lived-in on-site as support persons, or they assisted financially through the advocacy for the Social Justice Commission of the Diocese. New initiatives for those in need were also launched to provide a sense of home and safe spaces for growth and social support. Elizabeth House was opened in 1987 by Sister Mary Leo Kirwin in partnership with the Elizabeth Fry Society to serve formerly incarcerated women, and Tess's Place opened in 1988 by Sister Therese (Tess) Carmel Slavik in collaboration with the Boyle Street Co-op Youth Unit was for homeless teenagers coping with addictions. The Crossroads House Too, opened in December 1994 by Sister Catherine (Kitty)

Stafford, provided shelter for former female sex workers over the age of 18, and was a project with Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation. The Anglican Parish of Christ Church donated their former unused rectory for the Crossroads House Too, paid all the expenses, including rent, utilities, insurance, and made substantial monetary donations.

The legacy of services provided by the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, Ontario in the Archdiocese of Edmonton, Alberta, in the field of education, healthcare, social work, and spiritual care provided a foundation that helped to establish the many present day Catholic schools, hospitals, and social welfare organizations.

Other notes

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

Access points

- Multiple media (documentary form)

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