

Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada

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Annals Langton, Ont. 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, L̄naapéewak, 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 chronicles of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, Ontario, during their mission from 1939 to 1976, at St. Joseph's Convent in the Sacred Heart Parish in Langton, Ontario. There are annals that record the various activities of the Sisters serving as teachers, administrators, and spiritual counsellors at the Sacred Heart School, the Sacred Heart Church, and in the Sacred Heart Convent in Langton, as well as within the surrounding area. Topics include the arrival of the first group of Sisters to Langton, the comings and goings of appointed Teacher Sisters to Sacred Heart School, Sisters going on retreats and attending workshops, Long Point Beach picnics with the students and parishioners, weathering severe snowstorms, and repairs, improvements, additions to and purchases for the convent, school, church, and rectory in the Parish of Sacred Heart. There is also record of annual events such as preparing the students for the singing and rhythm band contests at the Langton Fair, the opening and closing of the Catechetical Summer School, the chicken supper fundraiser, and the Catholic Women's League Christmas Dinner. The annals also discuss the challenges students faced in attending classes due to the flu epidemic and having to help with the harvesting of tobacco, the Victory in Europe Day or V-E Day celebration on May 8, 1945 that marked the end of World War II, the construction and significance of the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, the formation of the Parent Teacher Association, the elected members of the newly formed Haldimand-Norfolk County Roman Catholic Separate School (RCSSC) Board, and the successful growth of the Annual Belgian Fair and development of the Ontario Belgian Fair Association.

There is also correspondence, yearbooks, lists of Sisters and Pastors appointed to Langton, and a program booklet on the official opening of the renovated and expanded Sacred Heart School in 1970. The correspondence is from 1938 to 1986 and relating to the request for Sisters to serve as teachers in Langton, information to create a list of Sisters who served in Langton, and the transportation of Sisters to their assigned workplaces within Langton, and to nearby Delhi and Tillsonburg, Ontario. The two yearbooks, one from 1949 and the other from 1962, were prepared and published by the Sacred Heart Parish and include short articles and printed pictures that highlight the achievements and history of the Sacred Heart Church in Langton.

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.

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]

Erie Tri-County Catholic Family of Parishes, “Holy Rosary,” <https://etcfp.dol.ca/events/holy-rosary-1>, accessed 2024/10/4.

Ontario’s Southwest, “Land Acknowledgement,” <https://www.ontariossouthwest.com/land-acknowledgement/>, accessed 2024/10/01.

Note [General]

Some content within this record group contains language that is offensive, derogatory, or harmful. This language does not reflect the values of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada.

Note [General]

The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, Ontario established a mission in rural Langton, formerly known as Boughner's Corner, which was an integral part of the fertile Tobacco Belt in the southwestern agricultural region in Ontario. From 1935 to 1936, Bishop John Thomas Kidd purchased property in Langton and erected Sacred Heart Church. Father L. Blondell was appointed the Pastor in January of 1936 and on August 16, 1936, Bishop Kidd blessed the church. In September 1936, a two-room separate school named the Sacred Heart School started in the basement of the Sacred Heart Church. By January 1937, Miss Ella LaFortune was teaching 36 kids. In the summer of 1937, Father Blondell opened a Summer Vacation Catechetical School that started with Sister Ursula Dalton, Sister Cosmos Baker, and Sister Eileen Cronyn of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London teaching 127 children. Father Blondell temporarily vacated his rectory to provide accommodation for the Sisters. In October 1938, the construction of a new school adjacent to the Sacred Heart Church began under Father Blondell's direction. The students moved from the church basement into the new school, named Sacred Heart School, in January 1939. Also at this time, construction began for a new convent next to the Sacred Heart School.

On May 13, 1939, Father Blondell requested the Right Reverend Mother Constance Dunn, Mother Superior of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, Ontario, for four Sisters to move to Langton to teach at Sacred Heart School and to reside at St. Joseph's Convent in Langton. In the summer of 1939, Sister Lidwina Sparr, Sister Bernadette Kerrigan, Sister Hildegarde Carrigan, and Sister Clotilde Morrissey moved into St. Joseph's Convent, and taught catechism at the Vacation Catechetical School. In September 1939, Mother Eileen Cronyn (Superior), Sister Scholastica O'Connell, Sister Francesca Doyle, and Sister Josephine Marie Peltier were appointed to the Langton Mission. On September 5, 1939, the Sacred Heart School opened with 20 pupils in the Junior level, and 6 in the Senior level. The low attendance was because most of the senior students who were working out in the tobacco fields, but by September 18 enrollment rose to 60, and in 1940 it went up to 70 students. In July 1939, the Sisters conducted Catechetical Summer School.

Father Blondell organized an annual small picnic with local parishioners as a fundraiser for the Sacred Heart Church. The Sisters and their students at the Sacred Heart School would spend several months on the preparations. The event grew to include surrounding parishes from Ontario and many Canadians of Belgian descent came together to socialize and participate in games such as pole climbing, potato sack racing, bicycle racing, and ride the merry-go-round, chair-o-plane, and Ferris wheel. In July 1942, the yearly small parish picnic became a two-day event called the Ontario Belgian Fair. In late June 1964, the Belgian Ambassador to Canada, Guy Daufresne de la Chevalerie, officially opened the Belgian Fair. He also visited the Sisters at the Sacred Heart School where the school choir sang for him, and the Sisters conducted a tour of their chapel at St. Joseph's Convent in Langton.

Many of the farmers who had settled in the Langton area were Belgian Catholics, and since 1926 they had never experienced a crop failure until 1946 when there was a serious drought. The people prayed to Our Lady, the Virgin Mary, for a good harvest, and the parishioners of the Sacred Heart Church promised to build a grotto in her honour if she would bring about a bountiful year, protect the tobacco fields, and ensure future crops. The Parish Pastor, Father Henry VanVynckt, assisted in the construction of the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes at Sacred Heart Church. At the entrance of the grounds are the statues of Our Lady of Fatima and the three children to whom she appeared, and behind the grotto, the Chapels of Fifteen Mysteries were erected alongside a pine bush path that led to a shrine with a life-sized statue in honour of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. On October 19, 1947, there was an opening and blessing of the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes by Reverend John C. Cody. The Sacred Heart Church held an annual candle lit processions to the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes during which the Rosary was recited in English, Flemish, Hungarian, and German, and there would be a band with singing for the Benediction. Over the years, people have made and continue to make pilgrimages to pray at the Grotto and hope to be blessed with physical cures and spiritual favours.

Also in 1947, public school students within the Sacred Heart Parish began to attend the Catechetical Summer School, and in September of the same year, construction began on a new full-sized classroom for elementary students in the basement of the Sacred Heart School. In September 1948, an enrollment of 131 students made it necessary to employ a secular teacher. A Parent Teacher Association for the Sacred Heart School formed in April 1950. On September 1, 1963, a newly renovated Sacred Heart Church held an opening ceremony. Although there was an increase of students and four classrooms were added to the Sacred Heart School in 1964, by June 1966 the Sisters decided to close St. Joseph's Convent in Langton. The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London also decided to close their convent in nearby Delhi, and to transfer the Langton and Delhi Sisters to their convent in neighboring Tillsonburg, Ontario. However, Sister Adelaide McAuliffe worked as a teacher and librarian at the Sacred Heart School in Langton from 1968 to 1976. In January 1969, the Sacred Heart School passed into the hands of the newly elected Haldimand-Norfolk County Roman Catholic Separate School Board. On April 27, 1970, the Sacred

Heart School had an official opening for additions of a library-resource centre, a math-science workshop, a gymnasium, and a primary classroom.

The Sisters stationed at St. Joseph's Convent in Langton who served as teachers at the Sacred Heart School also visited nearby parishes to provide substitute teaching, social counselling and spiritual care outside the Sacred Heart Parish in Langton, Ontario. Langton, Ontario is situated on the traditional and Upper Canada Treaty Lands, including the Two Row Wampum Belt, and One Dish One Spoon Wampum treaty lands of the Anishinaabe, Attiwonderonk (Neutral), Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), and Mississauga Peoples.

Other notes

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

Access points

- Textual record (documentary form)

Collection holdings

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