

Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada

Finding Aid - Oral history series (27-0000)

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Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada

485 Windermere Road P.O. Box 487

London

Ontario

Canada

N6A 4X3

Telephone: 519-432-3781 ext. 404

Fax: 519-432-8557

[Email: csjarchives@csjcanada.org](mailto:csjarchives@csjcanada.org)

<https://atom.csjarchive.org/index.php/oral-history-series>

Oral history series

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Summary information

Repository:	Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada
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Administrative history / Biographical sketch

Note

The Sisters of St. Joseph for the Diocese of Pembroke in Canada was first incorporated by letters patent dated January 21, 1922 under the Ontario Companies Act. The town of Pembroke, Ontario is located on the traditional lands of the Algonquin and Anishinaabe Peoples.

In 1910, Sisters from Peterborough began teaching at St. Michael's Parish school in Douglas, followed by Killaloe in 1915 and Mount St. Patrick in 1916, all three being small rural communities in Ontario. Eleven years later, on August 25, 1921, a new community was formed at Bishop Ryan's request by 27 Sisters from Peterborough. 14 of these Sisters were already serving in Douglas, Killaloe, and Mount St. Patrick. Mother Vincent Carroll was elected General Superior.

The new community needed a motherhouse, and the O'Kelly farm was purchased by Bishop Ryan, giving the Sisters 40 acres of farmland and 107 acres of woods on the Ottawa River, along with an old farmhouse. On September 19, 1921 St. Joseph's-on-the-Lake, the first Motherhouse, was officially opened and blessed by Father Dowdall. St. Joseph's Convent, the first mission of the newly formed congregation, was established in Chapeau on August 27, 1921. Here the Sisters taught in the local school for many years.

The Pembroke Sisters spread out throughout Ontario and Quebec, and even made their way westward to Saskatchewan and Alberta. Some other missions included Calabogie (1924), Campbell's Bay (1925), Barry's Bay (1928), Renfrew (1928), Sheenboro (1936), Madawaska (1936), Deep River (1948), Quyon (1951), Des Joachims (1958), Whitney (1958). Bancroft (1959), Ottawa (1962), and Petawawa (1962).

The General Superiors of the Congregation were elected from the ranks of the founding Sisters until 1945 when Mother Magdalen Donegan was elected. She had entered the Congregation in September 1923. At the peak of its membership growth, the Congregation numbered approximately 190.

After three decades, on September 15, 1952, Bishop Smith took part in the sod turning for a new Motherhouse. On April 26, 1953 he blessed the cornerstone. The new motherhouse officially opened on December 12, 1953 – providing a home for years to which Sisters could return from missions outside Pembroke. Many of the convents outside Pembroke housed teachers, as education was a significant ministry. The first classes held at St. Joseph's Academy, a girls' high school in Renfrew, on September 10, 1928. A new building was completed in 1940 and the school stayed open for almost three more decades.

In October 1940, the Normal School, later St. Mary's Teachers' College, opened in Chapeau, and saw its last graduates in 1969. This ministry was unique to the Pembroke Sisters, as no other of our communities provided teacher training.

Following the original thread of the Sisters in Le Puy, the Pembroke Sisters served others in corporal works of mercy through healthcare. On July 25, 1946 Sisters arrived in Radville, Saskatchewan to establish the first hospital, which they administered until 1998. Ten years after opening the hospital, they founded Marian Home to provide long term care, and senior care. Sisters also went to Regina, where they opened Santa Maria Senior Citizens' Home on October 12, 1968. On January 7, 1947 they assumed the administration and staffing of St. Joseph's Hospital in Barrhead, Alberta from the Religious Hospitallers of St Joseph. This ministry lasted until 1978.

Closer to home, St. Francis Memorial Hospital in Barry's Bay, Ontario was opened on October 25, 1960. This hospital was also staffed by the Sisters. Sr. Rosenda Brady, who administered this hospital, later took charge of Valley Manor, a senior's home in Barry's Bay, which opened on June 23, 1978. On August 24, 1968, Sisters arrived to administer and staff St. Joseph's Manor, a home for senior citizens, in Campbell's Bay, Québec, where they remained until 1982.

There was only a short-lived ministry of orphan care at Villa St. Joseph in Renfrew from 1940 to 1947. In a spirit of adventure, the Sisters set sail to South America on April 17, 1964, to found St. Joseph's Convent in Chincha Alta, Peru. On the feast day of St. Martin de Porres, November 2, 1964, they opened Clinica San Martin. In the spring of the following year, on April 1, 1965, the parish school opened in Chincha Alta. Classes began at Colegio San Jose in March 1970. On January 1, 1966 Clinica Tom Dooley opened in Chincha Baja.

Still following the thread of the Sisters in Le Puy, the Pembroke Sisters served others in spiritual works of mercy through parish work and spiritual development ministry. On August 15, 1978, Sisters began parish ministry in Penticton (to 1984). In September 1969, St. Joseph Centre, a renewal centre in Chapeau, opened for a brief period, followed in July 1989 by Stillpoint House of Prayer in Springtown, which has seen decades of service.

On November 22, 2012, the congregation amalgamated with those in Hamilton, London, and Peterborough 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 consists of transcripts of oral history interview with Sister Elizabeth "Betty" Berrigan (1934-2020), conducted by Sister Marjorie Fitzpatrick (1929-2024) as part of the U. S. Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph's oral history project. There is also correspondence, a description of the project, list of participants, and a calendar.

Notes

Title notes

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

Immediate source of acquisition

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

Arrangement

Original order maintained.

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 anticipated.

Other notes

- **Publication status:** Published
- **Level of detail:** Minimal
- **Status description:** Final
- **Accompanying material:** Original cassette tapes from the project are in 100-0001 CSJ Pembroke – Audiotapes – Marjorie FitzPatrick Federation Interviews. Reference copies of the digitized audio recordings from the project and transcripts were provided by the U.S. Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph Archive. These are stored as Accession 2025-21.

Access points

- Fitzpatrick, Marjorie (subject)
- Berrigan, Elizabeth (subject)
- Textual record (documentary form)

Collection holdings

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