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249 Hist. rec. Canada 1851

# ASYLUM

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Sisters of Charity,



AT



QUEBEC

QUEBEC:

Printed by Aug. COTÉ & Co.,  
Near the Archbishop's Palace.

1851.

SECRET

CONFIDENTIAL



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SECRET

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OF THE

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## ASYLUM OF CHARITY, AT QUEBEC.

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UNDER this name is designated a large establishment, now in the course of construction and contiguous to the Orphan Asylum on Glacis Hill, corner of St. Oliver Street, in St. John's Suburbs. The buildings were begun in the month of June 1850.

In the spring of the year 1831, several charitable ladies in the suburb of St. Roch conceived the pious project of establishing a benevolent society in favour of poor and destitute children. With the exception of a society of ladies for instructing the children of the poor, no such institution had yet existed in the city of Quebec. The suburb of St. Roch, already comprising a large population, principally composed of the working classes more exposed to the vicissitudes of fortune, presented to the zeal of the charitable ladies a most abundant harvest, in the number of children deprived of their natural protectors, who were exposed to the baneful influence of a life of mendicity and vagrancy. The condition of these children deprived of moral instruction and inhaling the poison of vice and of infamy from the lips and examples of their seniors, was, in the minds of the religious portion of the community, a source of serious misgiving touching the futurity of the rising generation.

The victims of misfortune were rendered much more numerous, by the tide of emigration annually setting in from the British Isles. During the season of navigation the wharves of Quebec were crowded with hundreds of unfortunate children, whom famine and sickness had deprived of their parents, either during the voyage, or shortly after their arrival in their adopted country. The sight of these numberless misfortunes induced the ladies of St. Roch to form a society for the relief of these orphans.

Under the protection of heaven, this noble institution prospered; but its means were not adequate to the extent of sufferings to be relieved.

In 1832, the emigration from Ireland had been much greater than during any preceding year; the ravages of cholera were dreadful amongst the poor emigrants enfeebled by the hardships endured on sea, and huddled together on the quays and in the streets of Quebec, without the means of being conveyed to their destination.

The number of destitute orphans thrown on the bounty of the citizens of Quebec, in consequence of this calamity, was considerable. Promptly and nobly did the country parishes come forward to claim their part in the work of benevolence and charity. Several hundred Irish children, bereft of their protectors, were adopted in families residing in the rural districts. But many more still remained to be provided for; the wants and sufferings of the poor were increasing; and winter was fast approaching under the most discouraging aspect. Christian benevolence knows how to multiply its resources; devotedness is always sure to find congenial hearts, prepared

to respond to its appeals in favour of humanity and generosity. The ladies of Saint-Roch to infuse a new life into their society, and to extend the sphere of their usefulness, invited their sisters, the ladies of the City of Quebec, to take part in their good work ; and consequently, on the 26th of December 1833, was remodeled, on a scale less disproportionate with the existing demands upon its resources, an association which has endured to the present day, supported by charitable donations, by legislative grants, and by the proceeds of annual bazars.

For several years, as already mentioned, had previously existed a society of Ladies for the instruction of the children of the poor. Established with the same views, and supported by the same means, it was natural that the two societies should unite their efforts for the welfare of the humbler classes. On the 1st of June 1834, they bought in common a property situated on the lot now occupied by the establishment of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Placed under the direction of ladies salaried by both societies, this institution became an Asylum for orphans, and a school for the poor.

Finally, after the lapse of eight years, on the 30th August 1842, the two associations were united into one bearing the name of "Society of charitable Ladies, for the promotion of education, and for the relief of orphans in the City and Suburbs of Quebec." On the 12th October of the same year, the new society was legally recognised and constituted by an act of the provincial parliament, under the title of "Charitable Society of Catholic Ladies, in Quebec."

Three years had scarcely elapsed when the

dreadful conflagration which consumed the suburb of St. John, on the 28th June 1845, destroyed in a few moments the Asylum consecrated to infancy; and the poor orphans were left to deplore their sad condition, over the ruins caused by this heart-rending catastrophe.

After such a deplorable accident, the only hopes of this noble but ruined institution were in heaven, and in the hearts of the benevolent ladies who had laid its foundations; there, God had planted the germe from which it was to spring forth with renewed freshness and vigour. But in the mean time what was to become of the poor children? The bountiful hand of providence came to their aid; the association of the charitable ladies of Montreal offered to take under their charge and protection the destitute orphans of Quebec, who were admitted gratuitously at the Providence Asylum, where they remained from the end of June 1845 to the 1st of May 1846.

This space of time was actively employed by the Catholic Ladies of Quebec in forwarding measures for the re-establishment of the institution. A meeting of the ladies was held on the 31st July 1845, and it was determined immediately to begin the erection of an Asylum for orphans. The Reverend Curé of Quebec, who aided by the Society of Education, had undertaken to restore the house of the Christian Brothers, likewise destroyed by the conflagration, being impelled by motives equally favorable to both institutions, proposed an exchange of the ruins belonguig to the Catholic Ladies, for those of the house of the Brothers. The offer was accepted; the transaction concluded; and

the Ladies immediately laid the foundations of the house now occupied by the Sisters of Charity. Situated in a most central position, the benefits of this establishment can be extended to the Upper and Lower Towns, as well as to the suburbs of St. John, St. Roch and St. Lewis, from which hundreds of female children may be, within its precincts, admitted to receive the blessings of a solid and religious education.

Although the institution formed by the Catholic Ladies of Quebec had attained a degree of prosperity, unexpected after its former calamities, the society deemed it possible to widen its circle of usefulness. It is in the ways of providence that the most useful and salutary institutions should flourish and produce their fruits, only after having passed through the fiery ordeal of long and painful trials. The orphan Asylum had run its career of troubles and misfortunes. Having risen from its ruins, it was prospering under the wise direction of the Catholic Ladies and seemed animated with a new life. The orphans were brought up and instructed by pious women, under the attentive guidance of the Ladies, and of the ecclesiastical authorities.

It was reserved to Monseigneur P. F. Turgeon, at that period Coadjutor of the Archbishop of Quebec, to second the zeal of the pious directresses, in extending the scope of the establishment and rendering it more adequate to the present and future wants of the city.

A religious community could alone realise these hopes. Moreover nothing could be more consonant with the views and desires of the Ca-

tholic Ladies' Society than to entrust the direction of such an establishment to Sisters of Charity, who would find in the city of Quebec a vast field open to their charitable exertions. But whence were Sisters of Charity to be obtained? Insurmountable obstacles left no hopes of obtaining them from the mother-houses in Paris. In the midst of these perplexities, it was suggested by persons of great experience in these matters, that nothing could be found in Paris preferable to what Canada possessed in the community of the Grey Nuns, founded at Montreal by Madame Youville, about the middle of the last century.

Encouraged by this information, the Bishop of Sidyme, acting in concert with the Catholic Ladies, formally requested the superior of that institution to establish a house of her order in the city of Quebec. The answer of the Reverend Mother Superior was: "that having taken into consideration the importance of the demand, the community had named five sisters, who after mature reflection had cheerfully accepted the mission."

In a subsequent letter, dated the 28th July, the Reverend Lady Superior remarks: "that she reposes an unlimited confidence in the good will of the citizens of Quebec.... Our sisters, destined to found the new colony, do not shrink from the difficulties. The obstacles which now and then present themselves in the way seem to add to their courage, and to increase their desire of beginning their foundation in Quebec. They regret not being able to leave sooner, that they might assist the victims of cholera. Let us hope that the Lord will bless their zeal, and

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that they will never cause any dissatisfaction to him who has imposed upon himself such sacrifices to introduce them into his diocess."

Happy in having been able to realise a project so dear to his heart, the Bishop of Sidyme was desirous of hastening its execution as much as possible; he therefore caused repairs and new divisions to be made in the building, with the assent of the Catholic Ladies, and according to the directions of the Superior of the Nuns, who purposely came down from Montreal to Quebec. In consequence of these improvements being made, the arrival of the Sisters of Charity was retarded for a few months; this delay was painful to the good nuns, desirous of giving their assistance to those who were then suffering in Quebec from the prevalent malady.

At length, on the 21st August 1849, the charitable servants of the poor left the mother house in Montreal, and arrived at Quebec on the following day. The cholera was still raging in the city; two orphans of the institution had just died of it, and it was to be feared that its ravages might be extended to the other inmates of the house. The courageous sisters deemed this a most favorable circumstance to take possession of their charge; and the same day they were employed in distributing consolation amongst the poor children confided to their care. Heaven rewarded their zeal; for after their arrival, no other deaths occurred in the institution from the cruel malady. The Ladies who had devoted themselves to the good work were: Sister Marie-Anne Mallet, superior; sister Julie Pilon, of Ste. Croix; sister Eulalia Perrin of St.

Joseph; sister Perpetua Terriault, and sister Theresa Clement. To these was joined a novice, also from Montreal, Miss Alice Dunn, now a professed nun, under the name of sister St. Mary.

The society of Catholic Ladies of Quebec were happy to confide the entire direction of their establishment to the Sisters of Charity, the former engaging themselves at the same time to lend to the latter the powerful aid of their counsels, their influence and their labours. This was not all. As this establishment was expected to undergo a fuller developement, and as the house in which the Nuns resided could at most form a wing of the building which it was deemed expedient to erect, in order to obviate to future difficulties, it was necessary that arrangements should be made between the two bodies. The society of Catholic Ladies, enjoying a legal existence, by virtue of an act, VIth. Victoria, Ch. 24, could not validly dispose of its property in favour of a religious community not legally recognised. On the other side, the nuns could not prudently undertake large and expensive constructions, upon ground of which they might be dispossessed. To overcome these grave difficulties, the Catholic Ladies of Quebec assembled, on the 27th April 1850, and resolved to make over to the Bishop of Sydime, the use of their property, in favour of the Sisters of Charity, with the power of extending the building for the ends of the institution. Annexed to this grant were several conditions, the principal of which was: that the nuns should receive orphans, keep schools for poor female children belonging to the city, &c., &c.

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It was already remarked that in order to extend the operations of the institution, it had been proposed to add a lot contiguous to that already possessed, and to erect on a large scale an asylum of which the existing house should form a wing. The present Archbishop of Quebec desirous of furthering the establishment of a charitable Asylum in the city, had purchased, on the 28th May, from Mr. Ed. Prendergast, for the sum of £1300, cy., two spacious lots, the one adjoining the property of the Catholic Ladies; the other, only separated from it by St. Oliver street, and extending to the cliff the cape, above the suburb of St. Roch.

A street, however, bearing the name of St. Francis, and uniting Richelieu and St. Olivier streets, separated the two properties, and presented an insurmountable obstacle to the projected constructions. This street, formerly opened by the proprietors of the two lots for their private convenience, in consequence of a long and peaceable enjoyment seemed to have become public property. This difficulty disappeared through the liberality of the Municipal Corporation. This body duly appreciating the advantages of such an institution, in order to prevent every future difficulty concerning this street, made it over to the Bishop, for the benefit of the Asylum, on the 30th March 1849. Such noble proceedings deserve to be recorded in the annals of a City, for the honour of the body to which are confided its ameliorations and its true interests.

Notwithstanding the insufficiency of the house actually occupied by the Sisters of Charity, it contains six professed nuns, four novices and four postulants, eight aids, thirty-five orphans,

and school rooms in which 260 girls are instructed. The nuns visit and assist the sick, the prisoners and the poor. At home their time is divided between prayer, manual labour, and attendance upon the orphans.

Not satisfied with all these occupations, the Sisters of Charity are desirous of extending their assistance to a greater number of orphans, as well as to the infirm and aged of both sexes, who are left without protection. Besides, they wish to establish halls of refuge for poor females deprived of work; infirmaries; a large kitchen in which might be prepared for the indigent the broken victuals sent from the tables of the wealthy; work-shops in which, with the assistance of the charitable Ladies of Quebec, clothes might be received and prepared for the poor and the orphans; a dispensary where medicines, lint, bandages, &c. could be distributed to the members of the labouring classes.

The work has been begun, without other resources than those which are expected from that divine providence which disposes of the hearts and the riches of this world. In the month of June 1850, the ground was cleared of the immense heaps of rubbish left by the disastrous fire of 1845. Since then, extensive excavations have been made in the rock by mining and the pickaxe, for opening drains and forming cellars.

After a most attentive study of the mother-house in Montreal, a plan has been drawn by Mr. C. Baillargé, Architect; and about the beginning of July, the execution of this plan was commenced under the superintendance of Mr. Baillargé himself, and of Mr. D. Dussault.

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The first story of this building has been finished in hammered stone, and covers spacious and deep cellars, in which are furnaces whence heat is to be distributed over the whole house.

The principal front of the Asylum is on St. Oliver Street, and measures two-hundred and twenty feet, including the house actually inhabited, which will receive a fourth story and be prolonged as far as Richelieu Street. This and a building corresponding with it, at the southwestern extremity, will form the two wings of the edifice. The central part will be raised six stories on St. Oliver Street. For the advantage of the sick and the orphans, galleries will be opened along the wings. The chapel facing St. Francis Street is to be of gothic architecture, and surmounted with a spire. The edifice will be one of the largest and the most chaste in design that the City of Quebec offers. To form a correct idea of it, the plan and the works commenced must be examined.

When the clearing of the ground and mining were commenced, in June last, the only funds at disposal were the sum of £420 cy, placed in the Savings Bank. This sum hardly sufficient to pay the expenses of levelling the ground, was partly the gift of charitable Ladies of St. Roch, and partly the amount of individual donations, of alms, and of savings made in the house during winter. This sum was soon expended to pay the wages of fifty workmen; the foundations were not yet above ground, and the funds were on the point of failing, when the present Archbishop of Quebec imposed upon himself the sacrifice of all that remained of his private property, amounting to the sum of £600, to which he has

since added another sum of £50 cy. Including £80 obtained from different sources, the whole amount of money received reaches the sum of £1,150 cy.

To these liberal donations, must be joined a handsome gift of building timber, valued at £62, from MM. Wood, Petry and Poitras, and from F. X. Paradis, Esquire, of St. Roch.

The public may judge of the order and economy with which the works have been carried on, by casting a glance over the following estimate of what has been done to this time.

Cartage of rubbish.....	£160	11	11
Labourers employed in clearing the ground.....	7	7	7
Miners.....	145	1	4
Joiners and sawyers.....	77	1	4
Drains.....	25	0	0
Blacksmith's works.....	9	1	0
Architect.....	25	0	0
88 toises of masonry, hammered stone, at £2 10 0 per toise.....	220	0	0
81 toises of masonry at 35s.....	141	15	0
334 toises of common masonry, at 30s.....	501	0	0
Estimated value of the works.....	£1315	18	2
Money expended.....	1150	0	0
	£165	18	2

This balance of £165 18 2 is due to the strict economy of time, to the attentive distribution of labour according to the capacity of the workmen, and to the choice of materials.

The Sisters of Charity have now been fifteen

months in the City of Quebec ; they have visited the poor, tended the sick ; watched over the orphans ; instructed the ignorant ; they have entered the halls of the rich to obtain assistance for the indigent ; they have, in fact, been the connecting link between the two extremes of society, wealth and poverty.

Whilst large sums of money are daily squandered by worldlings, for their pleasure and in vanity, would it be impossible to lay aside our mite, in order to assist in preparing an Asylum for want and old age. If we pay attention to the misfortunes which surround us, we will hear voices appealing most piteously to our hearts. Behold the decrepit old man, extending his trembling hand to obtain a morsel of bread with which to prolong his days. Who shall give him a refuge, when he is too weak to reach your door ? How many aged and infirm women left without support ? How many poor girls lying on the bed of sickness, who for trifling wages, have ruined their health in the service of the rich, and who now are left without shelter ? Who can understand the moral anguish, the cruel anxieties of these forsaken beings, who wholly depend upon the charity of strangers. There are spectacles more melancholy still. One is frightened, when descending to the lowest receptacles of human degradation, debased beings are found writhing under fearful maladies, outcasts from the ranks of society, condemned to die slowly, blaspheming the God of heaven, and cursing the human family. The world turns aside from such scenes as these ; but charity kindly bends over the victim of vice, and whilst ministering to the wants of the body, strives to heal

the wounds of the soul. This is not all: if we probe the wounds of society to the bottom, we will find that many infanticides are yearly committed by unfortunate mothers, who desirous of concealing their shame, leave their offspring to perish, because no place is opened to receive them.

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To whom then will be entrusted the care of soothing these sorrows, of healing those wounds, of preventing those crimes? To the Sister of Charity who has devoted herself to this sublime calling. With the alms of the charitable, she will open a refuge for the aged and the sick; she will protect the foundling; she will instruct the ignorant; she will reclaim the victims of misfortune and of vice.

An appeal, made for such a noble cause to the liberality of the citizens of Quebec, cannot remain fruitless. It is well known that a charitable institution for these ends was wanting in the City of Quebec; the constant efforts of the Catholic Ladies, during the last twenty years, show that they were aware of the necessity of such an establishment. The Almighty will reward their zeal; to them has been entrusted by the Archbishop of Quebec, the execution of those projects they had so skilfully planned. Under their auspices, with the assistance of Heaven, will be raised a monument of charity which will be an honour to the City of Quebec, and a blessing to the suffering classes of our population.

Besides the members of the committee of the society of the Catholic Ladies of Quebec, the following Ladies have consented to collect sub-

scriptions for the erection of an Asylum of Charity in this city :

MES. POWER,  
 J. PRENDERGAST,  
 COLFER,  
 H. MURRAY,  
 J. SHARPLES,  
 C. SHARPLES,  
 ALLEYN,  
 D. MAGUIRE,  
 J. BLAIS.

MISSES DOWNES,  
 HORAN,  
~~POWER~~, *Power*  
 O'MEARA.

L. PROULX,

*Curé of Quebec and Director of  
 the Sisters of Charity.*