

Western Catholic Reporter

Week of November 3, 2008

The sisters' proud legacy

Red Deer celebrates 100 years of Catholic education

By RAMON GONZALEZ
WCR Staff Writer
Red Deer

Catholic education in Red Deer is 100 years old and so is the presence in Central Alberta of the religious order of women that founded the school system.

Currently the Red Deer Catholic Regional School Division and the Daughters of Wisdom are busy marking their centennials.

"It's quite humbling to realize that these real, true pioneers came out from another country and started something that has grown so much and has become so successful," said board chair Christine Moore.

"I am very really proud of what they've done, really proud of the legacy they gave us and also I would like to convey our gratitude on behalf the board to all those involved in Catholic education because they really made Catholic education come alive and make the vision of the board a reality — bringing Christ to children."

It was on Oct. 8, 1908 that the Daughters of Wisdom (Filles de la Sagesse) arrived in Red Deer to start St. Joseph Convent. The sisters came on the invitation of Father Henri Voisin, the head of the missionary order of priests, the Peres de Ste. Marie de Tinchebray.

"He had a dream of establishing a major Roman Catholic mission on the brow of the North Hill. Part of that dream included the construction of a convent that would be used as a boarding school for the children of Central Alberta," local archivist Michael Dawe wrote in an article published in the Red Deer Express published Oct. 8.

"In late September 1908, four Daughters of Wisdom from France — Sisters Marie Agathe, Jeanne Eugenie, Rosalie Baptistine and Cesarine — started their arduous trip by train across Canada. In Ottawa two Canadian nuns — Sisters Marie Aimee and Alfred — joined them."



The New and the Old

St. Joseph's Convent School (below) stands in stark contrast with St. Francis of Assisi Middle School (above), one of 17 schools no run by the Red Deer Regional Division.





Mother Marie Agathe, one of the original four Daughters of Wisdom to arrive in Red Deer.

At 8 o'clock in the evening on Oct. 8, the sisters arrived in Red Deer.

"As it was too late to make the rest of the trip to their new home on the North Hill, the sisters spent the night in the Arlington Hotel, one of the best hotels in Red Deer at that time," Dawe wrote. "It was to be one of the last days of comfort for a long time to come."

The next morning Father Henri Voisin and Camille Lerouge, 15, transported the sisters to the new St. Joseph Convent in a horse-drawn democrat.

Sister Rosalie wrote, "There is no road up to the convent: the country is too new. The ascent through brush and up the hill is so steep that the democrat we rode in seemed about to tip backwards".

The convent was not yet finished, but the sisters quickly made it their home, recounted Dawe in his article. "They cleaned up the lime, plaster, sawdust and shavings. On Oct. 13, 1908, the first Mass was celebrated in the little convent chapel."

Because the autumn season was well advanced, the sisters initially had a great deal

of difficulty in attracting boarders. On Oct. 21, the first two pupils arrived.

Gwendolyn Gover, an Anglican, became the first boarder and her \$12 boarding fee was all the money the sisters had at that time. In November, two more boarders arrived and after Christmas, four children from a local Chinese family came to live at the convent.

In November an application was made to create a separate school district in North Red Deer. On Jan. 8, 1909, the North Red Deer Roman Catholic School District #17 was formally established. By February, 21 names were on the school register, with Sister Marie-Aimee as the first teacher.

Over the succeeding years, the school was expanded and the convent enlarged. The St. Joseph Convent School closed in 1960 and the boarding program ended in 1962. However, the convent continued to be a place of community service.

In 1978 a new convent replaced the old one. In 2005, with a number of sisters dying or moving to other locations, a decision was made to close and sell St. Joseph Convent. While an era had come to an end, the legacy of many decades of faithful service continued.

Today, Red Deer Catholic Regional Division has grown to more than 6,700 students in 17 schools, including a new school in Sylvan Lake and funding in hand for a K-to-9 school in Olds.

The division staff has grown to 598 from six in 1908. And while the finances were scarce in the beginning, today the school division has a budget of \$61million a year.



St. Joseph Convent and the cottage hospital on Red Deer's North Hill are shown in this photo taken circa 1914.

"I say 'Wow! What did our founders start?'" commented Sister Harriet Hermary, who studied at St. Joseph's Convent and then taught at Sacred Heart School. "I'm very impressed. This school system has grown beyond expectations and I think has done an excellent job in forming Christians."

Moore says the school board is "very proud of our reputation, our academic success and the really good citizens that we are producing in Catholic education."

One of the main focuses of the Catholic system is to bring Christ to



Christine Moore, current chair of the Red Deer Catholic school board.

children, she said. "It is the focus of everything we do. We do it through social justice projects (and) through permeation of faith in everything we do."

Moore said whomever graduates from Red Deer Catholic schools comes out with a good knowledge of the Catholic faith and "with a personal relationship with Jesus."

"They learn how to be followers of Jesus and good citizens so that they can make a difference in the world. Our mission is to make this world a better place."

Members of the Daughters of Wisdom were to hold an informal gathering with friends, family and the public on Nov. 1 at Sacred Heart Church to celebrate their centennial and their contributions to Catholic education in Red Deer.

Red Deer Catholic had its centennial celebration set for Nov. 2 with two special Masses followed by ceremonies at Notre Dame High School. Archbishop Richard Smith was to preside over the Masses.

(With files from Michael Dawe and the Red Deer Express.)

RED DEER ADVOCATE

Catholic education celebrates 100 years

By Laura Tester - Red Deer Advocate

Published: October 18, 2008 5:00 AM

Catholic education is celebrating its 100th birthday in Red Deer and so is a female religious order that brought it to town.

Next month, Red Deer Catholic Regional School Division and the Daughters of Wisdom will celebrate their 100th anniversaries.

The nuns from Daughters of Wisdom will have an informal gathering with friends, family and the public on Saturday, Nov. 1. The reception runs from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. at Sacred Heart Church.

"It's a double celebration in a way," says Sister Harriet Hermary, who taught at the convent.

The Daughters of Wisdom accepted the challenge of the Tincchey Fathers, to offer Catholic schooling in Central Alberta. The first students enrolled in the convent school in Oct. 21, 1908.

The school at the convent closed its doors in 1960 because classroom space was no longer adequate.

Some Sisters continued to teach with the Catholic school district, with the last one retiring in 1975.

Today, Red Deer Catholic Regional Division has grown to more than 6,300 students.

Red Deer Catholic will hold its centennial celebration on Sunday, Nov. 2, with two special masses followed by ceremonies at Notre Dame High School.

Ryan Ledene, faith co-ordinator for Red Deer Catholic, said Archbishop Richard Smith of Edmonton will preside over the masses. One will take place at 9 a.m. at Sacred Heart Catholic Church. St. Mary's Catholic Church will hold its mass at 11 a.m.

Lunch will get underway at about 12:30 p.m. at Notre Dame, followed by a program beginning at about 1:15 p.m.

Ledene said the program will include musical performances by current students, plus a high school dramatization of Red Deer Catholic's history.

"This is a pretty special moment," said Ledene.

Various dignitaries will also speak, including Daughters of Wisdom national representative Jocelyne Fallu, from Ontario.

Displays will also be on hand.

The public is welcome to attend the celebrations at Notre Dame. Cost is \$10, including lunch.

Tickets can be obtained through the Catholic district office at 5210 61st St. For more information, call 403-343-1055.

Contact Laura Tester at ltester@reddeeradvocate.com



Let's Celebrate 100 Years of Catholic Education

We celebrate 100 years of Catholic Education in Red Deer. It all began when the Daughters of Wisdom, a religious order, accepted the challenge of the Tinchebray Fathers, to offer Catholic schooling in central Alberta. The first students enrolled in the convent school in October 21st, 1908. Today, the Division has grown to over 6300 students, bringing Christ to children in a milieu of striving for excellence.

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We practice servant-leadership.

We focus on our mission through clarity of purpose.

We value our staff



The Daughters of Wisdom: The beginning years 1907-1932

The role that the Daughters of Wisdom played in Red Deer history is extremely important and also very interesting. In a series of articles, we will attempt to highlight their history using extracts from their history book called "The daughters of Wisdom in Western Canada 1904-1993" written by Simone Re, D.W.

In the summer of 1907, Fr. Voisin went to France on business and while he was there, he was promised 6 Daughters of Wisdom for a small boarding school in Red Deer. By the summer of 1908, two impressive buildings

rose on the mission hill: a presbytery for the priests and the first phase of the convent for the promised sisters. On September 29 of that year, four Daughters

of Wisdom disembarked their ship in New York. Bound for Red Deer they traveled by train to Montreal, then Ottawa. Two bilingual Canadian sisters joined them on the journey to the far west. It was about 8 p.m. when the sisters arrived in Red Deer on October 8. As it was too late to go to the convent, Fr. Voisin suggested that they stay the night at the Arlington Hotel. The next morning, Fr. Voisin and young Camille Lerouge arrived at the hotel with two democrats to take the sisters to the convent. The sisters were driven through town and across the river. It was only then that they saw their home atop the hill where construction of only the first and second

storey had just barely been finished.

On October 13, the sisters had their first Mass in the Convent. On the following Sunday evening, fifty people came for Sunday Benediction. Most of the congregation were expatriated from France, who found in the evening benediction a reminder of their homeland.

Like other people who came to the Canadian West, the sisters faced many hardships. Though they had a substantial house, they had little furniture and few dishes. With only six chairs, the sisters

carried them from chapel to refectory to the parlour as the need arose.

Although the sisters had arrived in Red

Deer a month after school opened and children were already enrolled in school, a prospectus of St. Joseph's Convent was nevertheless sent out. When the Convent school opened on October 21 (twelve days after the sisters arrived in Red Deer), two pupils arrived... a day pupil from town and Gwendolyn Gover, the first boarder.

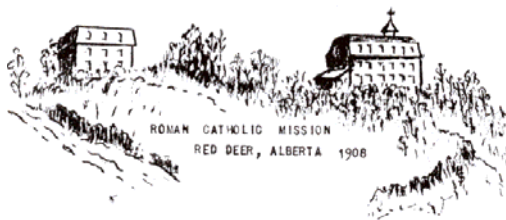
In their unfinished house, the sisters underwent a glacial initiation into Alberta's winter in 1908-1909. The basement was not yet cemented. The furnace was defective. There was no running water and if there had been, the pipes would probably have burst.

In August 1909, with thirty five boarders for

the fall term expected, permission was granted to finish the third floor and to put in plumbing at a cost of \$2500. By 1910, the school was developing beyond expectations. There were 36 boarders, and several children had to be refused due to the lack of room. In 1924, the Tincheray Priests left Alberta. The sisters, grateful for all that they had done for them and the community, gave their loyalty and support to the changes in the diocese under Archbishop O'Leary, welcoming Fr. MacDonald.

In 1927, the Sisters purchased St Mary's Apostolic School from the Tincheray priest who had moved to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. The school was renamed Montfort, and with an addition made in 1928, it provided a second classroom, and more dormitory space.

By 1932, Sacred Heart Church was build on 55 Street and the Sisters had bought the abandoned church. Emile Hermary built a grotto on the site of the former basement church using some of the cement foundation for the construction. For many years, the outdoor altar at the grotto was used in the Corpus Christi processions on the convent grounds. The grotto was dismantled when the present St. Joseph's Convent was build in 1978.



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The Daughters of Wisdom: From 1930s to 1970s

This series of articles are highlights of the Daughters Of Wisdom's history in Red Deer using extracts from the book "The Daughters of Wisdom in Western Canada 1904-1993" written by Simone Re, D.W.

In 1932, when the construction of Sacred Heart Church was finished., the sisters acquired the old church site at a tax sale. Emile Hermary

built a grotto using the former basement foundation. For over 40 years, it would be a landmark in our city.

In 1933, a mission club was formed and even in the deep depression, the students managed to raise money. From 1934 to 1949, they sponsored the education of a young African man, Leo Antonio Klove, helping him through his years of seminary study until his ordination in 1949. For that great occasion, St. Joseph's Convent sent him all he needed for his first Mass. In the years that followed, occasional gifts of money were sent including money for a much needed motorcycle!

In the thirties, a major change occurred in the Alberta school system. The one-room schools were being replaced by large centralized schools and rural pupils were being bussed. The original purpose of St. Joseph's Convent, namely to serve the educational needs of the vicinity, was no longer as critical. Another important change to take place was the introduction by the Department of Education of a new course of studies that

required the sisters to upgrade their qualifications. Sisters Paul-Marie and Sister Denise-du-St. Esprit attended university, each receiving a Bachelor degree.

In 1948, the "cottage", built in 1912 as an isolation hospital and used for many varied purposes over the years, was transformed into a studio-sewing room with a small store attached. Under the tutelage of Sr. Marie-Alexandre, the older girls spent much time there, doing fancy work, painting, and chatting as a small radio turned to full volume filled the room! The Grade XI class moved into the vacated studio, leaving only the typing class in a corridor! In 1948, the sisters purchased a long hut from the army camp. It was brought up the hill in two pieces. The smaller part provided a large, bright classroom for primary grades, The other part served as a hall for various student activities as well as a parish meeting place.

In 1950, the Separate School Board came into possession of its first school building when it purchased the YMCA recreation centre at the army camp and opened two classrooms staffed by lay teachers. The School Board then began building more schools. In 1955, two four-roomed elementary schools were erected, Sacred Heart and Montfort. Eventually, Maryview was build for the Catholic children of the South-East section of Red Deer. When River Glen County School

was vacated in 1960, the Separate School Board purchased the sprawling array of army huts to accommodate junior and high school pupils. Seven sisters went down to the barrack school to teach with lay staff. The Board provided a bus for the convent's boarders and the sisters, and a hot lunch was transported from the convent every noon hour. When St. Thomas opened in 1962, the teachers and students moved from the barracks to the brand new school. At this time, the sisters felt they could no longer accommodate boarders and transport them and their meals the three miles to St. Thomas. As well, with the bussing of rural pupils, the convent was no longer as critical as in earlier times. Accordingly, it was closed in June 1962.

When Camille J. Lerouge School opened in 1968, only three sisters were still teaching in Red Deer. Two retired of them in 1971 and one in 1975. It was only in the last ten years of their teaching that sisters reached parity of pay with the lay teachers.

By the early 70s, it was evident that a new home was needed for the sisters. Construction began in 1976. On April 7 1978, the sisters wistfully watched the huge back-hoe knock down the walls of their beloved St. Joseph's Convent. People came to gather souvenir bricks from the debris.. On May 6 1976, Archbishop McNeil blessed their new home and Sister Mary Hamill, Provincial Superior, welcomed the people.



St. Joseph Convent 1950s



Sr. Harriet Hermary 1956

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*Best wishes to Sacred Heart Parish
as we both prepare to celebrate
100 years in Red Deer!*

The Priests Who Served Us:
Father Wilfred Patrick McNabb *(cont'd from page 2)*

Fr. McNabb was an avid golfer driving to the Mayfair in Edmonton once a week to play on grass greens. He did play in Red Deer but at the time, the Red Deer Golf and Country Club had sand greens. We are told that Father had a Labrador dog that often accompanied him to the golf course, much to the chagrin of many of the local members. It seems that the dog had a bad habit of taking off with golf balls on the fairways.

In May of 1952, Father left Red Deer with an unlimited leave of absence. He returned to the London Diocese. On December 7, 1956, Bishop J. C. Cody incardinated him into the London Diocese. From 1956 to 1965, he served as pastor for St. John Vianney Parish in Riverdale, now called Windsor. When the church burned down, Fr. McNabb's health was such that he could not rebuild it. He resigned and asked for another parish. He was appointed as pastor to St. Mary's Church in Maidstone in August of that year. His health continued to deteriorate and in May of 1966, he resigned and settled in San Clemente, California. He moved to Pacifica, California in 1973 helping in the Parish of St. Peter.

Father McNabb died on April 9, 1974. His funeral was held in St. John Vianney Church in Windsor and he rests in St. Mary's Cemetery in Maidstone, Ontario.

The Daughters of Wisdom:
Superiors of St. Joseph's Convent in Red Deer

Sr. Marie Agathe	1908 -1922
Sr. Louise Emmanuel	1922 -1923
Sr. Jeanne Eugénie	1923 -1923
Sr. Hyacinthe de Jésus	1923 -1929
Sr. Ernest de Jésus	1929 -1930
Sr. Marie Herve de Jésus	1930 -1932
Sr. Rosalie Baptistine	1932 -1938
Sr. Lucia de St Joseph	1938 -1946
Sr. Paul Marie du Sacre Coeur	1952 -1955
Sr. Denise du St Esprit	1955 -1959
Sr. Lucienne de Jésus	1959 -1961
Sr. Paul Marie du Sacre Cœur	1961 -1966
Sr. Cyrille de la Croix	1966 -1966
Sr. Béatrice de l'Immaculée	1966 -1971
Sr. Ruth Mary of Jesus	1971 -1973
Sr. Claudette St. Onge	1973 -1980
Sr. Dorothy Cire	1980 -1984
Sr. Paul Marie du Sacre Cœur	1984 -1988
Sr. Genevieve Hochhausen	1988 -1991
Sr. Claudette St. Onge	1991 -1994
Sr. Aline Lemieux	1994 -1998
Sr. Mary Hammill	1998 - 2002
Sr. Harriet Hermary	2002 - Present



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