

St. Mary's Teachers' College, Chapeau, Quebec, 1940-1969

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In October 1940, the Sisters of St. Joseph in Pembroke moved into another area of education with the establishment by the provincial government of Quebec of a bilingual residential normal school in Chapeau. It was the vision and the indomitable spirit of Monsignor Renaud and Reverend Harrington which brought to reality an institution which was to have an important impact on the educational



aspirations of the people of Western Quebec, and which would make the name of the village of Chapeau known throughout the province. This private educational institution was operated by the Sisters of St. Joseph under the jurisdiction of the Quebec Department of Education for 29 years.

With the revision of courses in 1955, Chapeau Normal School became St. Mary's Teachers' College. The specific purpose of the college was preparing English-speaking teachers, drawing candidates not only from western Quebec, but from the north, Montreal, Quebec City, Gaspé, and the Eastern Townships as well. There were important changes over time, including the introduction of the two-year "B" Diploma Course, the admission of male students, the change to lay administration, and a tremendous expansion that more than doubled the registration of the initial 40 students envisioned when the institution was first built.

Many Sisters taught here, and their role, especially during those very early years, was vital.

Hardship was par for the course in the first years. No bridge connected the island and Pembroke. The train came only as far as Waltham. There was no doctor; the water supply proved inadequate taking

unexpected detours through ceilings and walls; holidays were few; and much physical labour was required to make ends meet on a \$12.00 per month fee for board, lodging, and laundry.

During the first 15 years of its existence, Chapeau Normal School prepared about 300 teachers, French, English, or bilingual, to enter the teaching profession. In its last 14 years, some 412 English-speaking students graduated. The graduates of the institution were recognized for their superb preparation. Many religious vocations were nurtured and brought to fruition in this school. The first class in 1940 – 42 set a record, with six out of 22 students taking up a religious vocation.

St. Mary's Teachers' College closed after the last graduation ceremony in June 1969, mainly because, in the future, training in the Province of Quebec was to be affiliated with universities.

The consolidated archives hold many records of St. Mary's Teachers' College including correspondence, reports, statistics, grade reports and transcripts, student files, yearbooks, financial information, student registers, attendance records, exam papers, and personnel information.