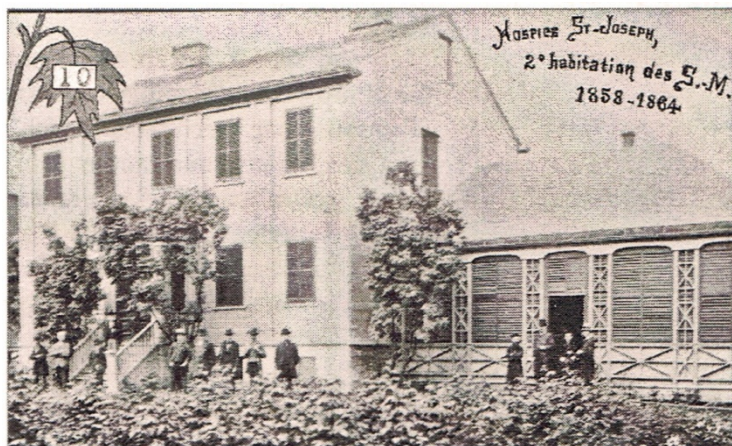


A GREAT WORK OF SPECIAL EDUCATION



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The Hospice Saint-Joseph, second school for deaf-mute girls, 1858-1864 Providence Archives Montreal

WHEN OPENING books, records, letters and images we find in the archives, we often glimpse hidden treasures and unknown stories. That of the Institution des Sourdes-Muettes (ISM, *Institution for Deaf-Mute Girls*) is astounding for it is fascinating and rich. Let us discover a few pages together...

IN 1846, three years after the foundation of the Congregation of the Sisters of Providence, Sister Marie de Bonsecours (Albine Gadbois) was fascinated by Father Charles-Irénée Lagorce's teaching to deaf residents, in a classroom at the Asile of Providence. There she learned the basics of sign language.

IN 1849, in the small Providence Saint-Isidore school², Sister Marie de Bonsecours took under

her wing young Marguerite Hanley³ and Georgiana Lavallée, both deaf. This encounter definitively changed their lives.

LOOKING at the success of Sister Marie de Bonsecours with her pupils, Mother Gamelin, foundress and superior of the Sisters of Providence, was convinced that it was necessary to officially adopt this work of special education. This happened in 1851 and Father Lagorce had already opened his

would later become the Institution des Sourdes-Muettes (ISM).

FROM PROVIDENCE SAINT-ISIDORE (1849-1858), the young beneficiaries and their teachers moved to Hospice Saint-Joseph (1858-1864) and then to the Institution des Sourdes-Muettes (1864-1978), *the first school exclusively for deaf girls in Canada.*

AS TIME WENT BY, and because of the economic needs that such an imposing and constantly evolving work incurred, ISM hosted other types of residents and students in order to fund the initial work. As soon as 1887, one could find a school for young boys, adult tenants and female students in need of a room in the city. The Sisters of Bonsecours to set the bases of what

1891-1892	
S.M. du Dio. de Montréal	105 dont 62 ont suivi les classes
" " " Sherbrooke	11 " 8 " " " "
" " " Nicolet	7 " 6 " " " "
" " " Rimouski	8 " 6 " " " "
" " " Trois Rivières	4 " 1 " " " "
" " " St-Hyacinthe	20 " 13 " " " "
" " " Ottawa	15 " 11 " " " "
" " " Châteauguay	3 " 3 " " " "
" " " Québec	29 " 35 " " " "
" " " Vic. de Pontiac	1 " " " " " "
" " " Dio. étrangers	21 " 11 " " " "
Total	257 dont 156 ont suivi les classes

The records of the Institution attest the presence of students from all regions of Quebec and Canada, and even from the United States.

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Providence also took advantage of these premises to support the poor of the neighborhood, set up a novitiate, a provincial administration, and the novitiate of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Seven Dolors.

IN ADDITION TO hosting Quebec girls, deaf children from all Canada and even from the United States were referred to the ISM. Sign language (finger spelling) was taught in English or in French, according to the wish of the parents. Trained in prestigious American and European colleges, the teaching religious offered advanced education methods. They used the most advanced technologies available, such as hearing aids and amplifiers. At the same time, the Institut F.-X. Trépanier (1938-1967) was founded for the training of special education teachers.

The ISM offered, among other subjects, the oral method, the global active method, the Braille system

for the blind, a kindergarten class for girls, a special curriculum, a house-keeping school, and the *Institut familial spécial*, leading to certificates for the young women. This offered them the possibility of a fulfilling professional life. The subjects, in addition to French or English, were art, religion, physical education, typing, home economics, etc.

IN THE SEVENTIES, education in Quebec was reorganized, and the ISM was no exception. The students were gradually integrated in the CECM⁵ and up to the school year 1975-1976, which marked the end of teaching at ISM.

THE BUILDING became too big for the sisters only; they finally left on July 1, 1978. It was sold on April 9, 1979 to *Corporation d'hébergement du Québec*, which left the access to some of the rooms, including the Chapel, to the Social Services for Deaf-Mutes.

The Sisters of Providence have continued their involvement with the deaf, mainly with aged persons in the Cartierville borough.

THE PROVIDENCE Archives in Montreal have been officially engaged since 1970 in the conservation of documents and in the diffusion of the story of the Congregation of the Sisters of Providence. Since their founding in Montreal in 1843, they have had more than forty establishments in the Quebec metropolis only.

WE FERVENTLY HOPE that the passage of time will preserve not only the majestic building of ISM, but also the memory of Sisters of Providence involvement in benefit of the deaf community and in the Plateau-Mont-Royal borough.

Notes

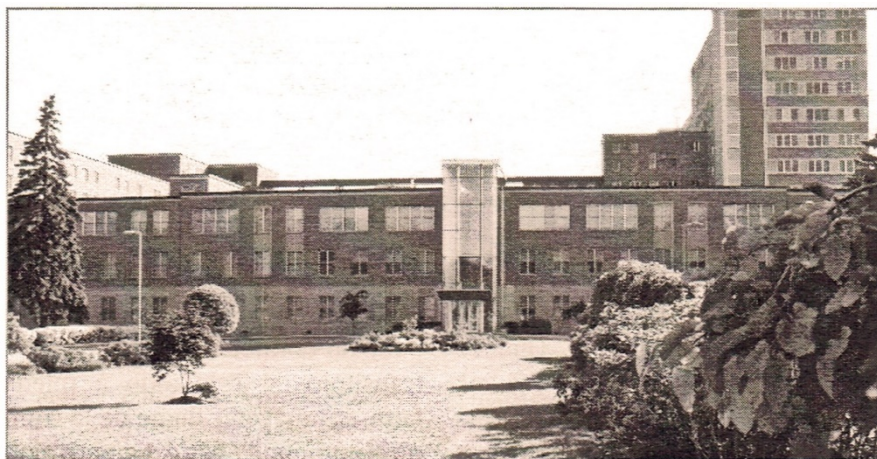
¹The Asile of Providence was located on the corner of Sainte-Catherine and Saint-Hubert Streets. It was sold to the City of Montreal in 1962 and destroyed the following year. On its former location we now find Émilie-Gamelin Square.

²In the town of Longue-Pointe that was located in the eastern suburbs of Montreal.

³In 1858, she becomes Sister Marguerite du Sacré-Coeur, first deaf Sister of Providence.

⁴On the corner of Saint-Hubert and Mignonne (now De Maisonneuve) streets, in Montreal.

⁵CECM stands for "Commission des écoles catholiques de Montréal" (*Montreal Catholic Schoolboard*), which later became Commission scolaire de Montréal (*Montreal Schoolboard*).



Providence International Centre, 12055 Grenet Street, Montreal

Come and visit our museum for free! One of the three exhibition rooms is entirely dedicated to "Free the Treasure", about the education given to deaf girls by the Sisters of Providence; it's at Providence International Centre, 12055 Grenet Street, Montreal. Tel.: 514-334-9090