

On School Benches

Heaven forbid that our little parishioners attend an English, Protestant school!

There was only one school, dating from 1875, and it was on the Hamilton farm. It served the children of Scots and English colonists. But for parish priest Samuel Ouimet, it was unthinkable that French Catholic children be integrated into it.

During a special meeting held in 1880, the proposal to separate from the Arundel school board and build a school close to the presbytery-chapel was accepted. At a cost of \$400, a 25- by 30-foot house with a mansard roof was built. For this single classroom, the first female teacher of Saint-Jovite¹, Madame Isidore Légaré, accepted children from first to seventh grade. While in the early day of the colony teachers were required to be unmarried, Madame Légaré was exempted from this rule because of a shortage of potential employees. She received an annual salary of \$80.

Over a period of ten years, other range schools were built, as well, to ensure primary schooling to children living far from the village.

It was rare, however, for pupils to pursue their education past fifth grade, because their parents needed them on the farm to do agricultural and domestic chores. School attendance was also influenced by inclement weather and the long distances the youngsters traveled on foot.

Advised by the bishop, Monseigneur Duhamel, parish priest Samuel Ouimet asked, in 1890, the Filles de la Sagesse – nuns whose name translates as the “daughters of wisdom” and who were devoted to teaching – to instruct the children. The priest offered them five arpents of land (about 4.23 acres) belonging to the parish corporation, \$300, and heating for ten years. But they had to build the building at their own expense. It cost them \$1,800! It was a fortune at the time. Arriving straight from France, four nuns moved into the new wooden convent built by their community. When it was inaugurated, there were already 60 children registered. Four years later, with the addition of a boarding facility, grades one to eight were offered to girls from wealthier families from outside the village. The curriculum included music, “domestic economy” and the art of housekeeping.

The education of boys was more difficult. It was only in 1902 that four men from the religious order the Frères du Sacré-Cœur (Brothers of the Sacred Heart) established themselves on the main floor of the town hall. Dissatisfied with their accommodations and the material conditions in which they worked, they left four years later. While lay teachers continued to teach the older boys, the fifty or so youngest boys were entrusted to the nuns. As the years passed, there were more and more students. Classes were packed and the nuns had to perform miracles to accept them all.

¹ Saint-Jovite is the name of one of the former municipalities which merged to form what is today the Ville de Mont-Tremblant.

In the end, the Frères du Sacré-Cœur returned in 1931. They set themselves up in the former municipal room, now renovated, of the town hall, in spite of opposition from the State which still considered the premises unhealthy.

School life passed peacefully, punctuated by retreats at the start of the year, hockey practice on the rink built by the Chevaliers de Colomb (Knights of Columbus), and spring sugaring off parties. This continued until March 30, 1941, when a terrible fire changed everything. The Frères lost all their belongings in it. To deal with the urgent situation and so that classes could continue, the merchants loaned out their premises (the blacksmith's forge, the general store, and even the funeral parlour in which the dead were embalmed). Conditions were dreadful, particularly because of the cold; the students froze, in spite of the well-tended stove.

Happily, a new school was erected the following year on the same site and student life slowly returned to normal. The building housed five classes and could accommodate more than one hundred students. The facility, bigger and more modern, allowed a 10th grade class to be opened, theatrical works to be organized, and a choir to be formed.

In the early 'sixties, the old range schools closed their doors. The convent of the Filles de la Sagesse was demolished in 1962. The centre of the village boasted four new establishments which served, until the high school was built, to house both the young primary school children and the older secondary school students.

While the Frères du Sacré-Cœur left in 1962, it was not until 2002, after more than one hundred year of educational and pastoral services, that the Filles de la Sagesse left us for good.

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Legend: "Les croisées" in front of the convent of the Filles de la Sagesse.
Source: collection of the Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC



Legend: Starting in 1902, education of boys took place in the town hall, which was built in 1899.

Source: collection of the Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC



Legend: A range school built in accordance with plans from Public Education. All schools were built according to these plans from 1879 to 1942.

Source: collection of the Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC



Legend: The fire in the boys school and the town hall in 1941.

Source: collection of the Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC