

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

**The Rise and Development of Female Catholic Education in the
Nineteenth-Century Red River Region:
The Case of Catherine Mulaire.**

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**The Rise and Development of Female Catholic Education in the Nineteenth-
Century Red River Region: The Case of Catherine Mulaire**

BY

Diane Michelle Boyd

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree
of
Master of Arts**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the development of nineteenth century Catholic female education in the Red River region. Through the exploration of this development and the experience of one student in particular, Catherine Mulaire, this thesis, to a large extent, is a reaction to the sometimes monolithic representation of the Catholic Church. The impact of these clerical personalities and their initiatives upon the community often influenced and shaped the system in different and often conflicting ways. The examples of Monseigneur Joseph-Norbert Provencher, Father Georges Antoine Belcourt, and the Soeurs Grises, are considered here. My intention is to encourage further historical inquiry into the lives of students like Catherine Mulaire, in order to one day better determine the similarities and the differences of their experiences with the Catholic Clergy in Western Canada.

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Many people have contributed ideas, documents, and support throughout this process. I would like to thank Carole Boily and the Sœurs Grises of Saint-Boniface for allowing me to consult their archives and for locating copies of material conserved in their archives in Montreal. Alfred Fortier and Gilles Lesage of the Société historique de Saint-Boniface have also been a valuable resource. I would also like to thank David Dandéneau and the Mulaire family for the privilege of learning more about the life of Catherine Mulaire. My friends and family who patiently listened to my joys and frustrations throughout the research and writing process deserve recognition. And finally, a special thanks my thesis advisor Dr. Tamara Myers for all her assistance and for the distinction of being her first graduate student.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my great grandfather, Gabriel Cloutier, who gave me the desire to learn. This thesis is also dedicated to Robert Piché, who never stopped believing in me.

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Chapter 1

A Story of Negotiation

Problématique

The purpose of this study is to examine the development of nineteenth century Catholic female education in the Red River region. This thesis, to large extent, is a reaction to the sometimes monolithic representation of the Catholic Church. Quite often, in assessing the contributions of the Catholic Church in the Red River region, there appears to be little room for middle ground: many of the historical works to date have either glorified or condemned the “evangelizing” tactics of this institution. Often internal disputes within the church are downplayed or ignored. Because education in the nineteenth century became a major preoccupation of the Catholic Church, a study of the female education system in the Red River region will reveal how the Catholic Church was not monolithic and the extent to which individual clergy were able to shape that system.

In choosing a topic, I initially intended to explore the world of the Sœurs Grises. Having met a number of women from this order, my fascination with this religious community grew once I began to read about their history. In general, there was a tendency to portray the Sœurs Grises as a cohesive group of “heroines.” While these women have undeniably contributed to the community they have served, the myth did not fit the nuns that I had read about in the correspondence, Chronicles, and personal files of their archives.

In order to set the context for a history of the Sœurs Grises I have examined the roles and relationship of Mgr. Norbert-Joseph Provencher and Father Georges-Antoine

Belcourt who were fundamental to the establishment of education in the region. To illustrate the variety of opinion within the Catholic Church, the extreme differences in personality and policies towards female education of these two secular priests appeared an appropriate place to start. Additionally, the competitive relationship of these two clergymen played a part in Provencher's feelings of urgency to acquire the services of a female religious community, like the Sœurs Grises who came to the colony in 1844.

To examine the impact of these personalities and initiatives upon the community that was served by the Catholic Church, I will consider the case of Catherine Mulaire who was educated in the region from 1851 to 1855.¹ Her story contributes to our understanding of the initiatives of the Catholic Church as an example of someone who passed through the education system. The story of Mulaire also highlights the different ways that these influences were internalized and externalized. The intention of this discussion is to begin a dialogue concerning female students in the nineteenth-century Red River region and how their encounters with this system may have differed from one another, rather than representing one collective experience.

In order to examine how a woman like Catherine Mulaire would fit into the system of education that was influenced by Provencher, Belcourt, and the Sœurs Grises, the first chapter will introduce Mulaire, present the historical sources that shed light on her story, and the difficulties in deciphering the complexities of her life. Mulaire will then be placed within the historiography of nineteenth century religious and francophone

¹ It should be noted that Catherine's maiden name was "Lacerte" and her married name was "Mulaire." For the purposes of this study I have referred to her as Mulaire since this is the name that she is remembered by in her family history and tradition.

education in Manitoba and the history of prairie women. The other sources that were chosen to recreate the influences of Provencher, Belcourt, and the Sœurs Grises upon the structure of education in the Red River region will also be considered.

Catherine Mulaire, 1843-1922

Catherine Mulaire was born on 15 October 1843 in Île-à-la-Crosse.² Île-à-la-Crosse was a community and later a mission that was founded on a lake of the same name. This lake is part of the Churchill river system and Mulaire's birthplace was located in what is now the province of Saskatchewan. She was the first of fourteen or fifteen children of Louis Lacerte II and Josephte Vandal. Louis Lacerte II was born around 1818, possibly at Red River. In 1842, he married Josephte Vandal, the daughter of Joseph Vandal and Marie Lachevrotière, who was born in 1825 in the Red River region.³ Somewhere between 1848 and 1850, the family moved to Pembina and by 1851, Mulaire was in attendance at the local school.⁴ It was at this point that Belcourt moved the

² Her date of birth is debated. According to her great grandson, Bernard Mulaire, Catherine was born in 1843. Bernard Mulaire. "Notes biographiques," Photocopy obtained from David Dandeneau: 1, (henceforth: Mulaire I) This appears to be the probable date. However, in a letter from Father David Roy of the Parish of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, she was born in 1841. David Roy. "Lettre à Bernard Mulaire," Photocopy from David Dandeneau, 12 December 1973: 1, (henceforth: Mulaire II). In the book published by the Société historique de Saint-Boniface the Ligue Féminine du Manitoba. Femmes de chez nous, Saint-Boniface: Les Éditions du Blé, 1985: 91, it appears that she was born in 1844.

³ Mulaire I: 2.

⁴ The community was located in American territory yet maintained close relations with and was greatly influenced by the Red River Colony. The exact date of the family's arrival in the community is not clear, but there are a few indications. The family may have already been settled in the community when: "En 1849, le père Lacombe fit son premier voyage dans l'Ouest et Louis Lacerte II l'accompagne jusqu'à la région Pembina et Saint-Paul (sept-nov 1849)." Bernard Mulaire. "Lettre à Sœur Marie-?, snjm.," Photocopy from David Dandeneau, c.1977: 2, (henceforth: Mulaire III) They were most likely settled in the area by 1851, but they were certainly there by 1852. The reason for this assumption is that Josephte Lacerte had a child in Pembina in 1851, but Catherine remembered the flood of 1852. Mulaire III: 3.

mission of Pembina approximately thirty miles west to Saint-Joseph to avoid some of the constant flooding of the region, and the Lacerte family appears to have joined him.⁵

It was in Saint-Joseph in 1854 that Belcourt began his religious community, the *Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi*. This order was intended to be a female religious community of mixed descent with the mandate to educate the young in the vicinity of Pembina and Saint-Joseph. Before joining, Mulaire and another girl were sent to Longueuil, Lower Canada to be instructed about religious life by the *Sœurs des Saints Noms de Jésus et de Marie*. They departed from Pembina in 1855 and returned three years later and entered the novitiate of the *Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi*. The community was not to last, however, and Mulaire then turned towards a career as a lay teacher in Walhalla (Saint-Joseph, North Dakota).⁶

She remained there as a teacher until her marriage to Joseph Mulaire on 24 November 1862.⁷ Shortly after their marriage, the young couple settled with her parents in a place they called Saint-Adolphe.⁸ It was possibly here that their first child, Alfred,

⁵ An indication of the family's move to the new mission can be found in the marriage registers of Saint-Joseph, Leroy, in North Dakota. On 24 November 1862 the register indicates: "après la publ. d'un bon faite au prône de la grande Messe entre Joseph Mulaire fils majeur de Joseph Mulaire et d'Henriette Paul de Saint-David, diocèse de Trois-Rivières Canada d'une part et Catherine Lacerte fille mineure de Louis Lacerte et Josette Vandale, de cette paroisse d'une autre part." Archives of the Société historique de Saint-Boniface (ASHSB), Fonds SHSB, 1/671, Personnages: Mulaire, Catherine: 1, (henceforth: Catherine Mulaire).

⁶ One consequence of the dissolution of the religious community was that the Pembina Valley region was left without teachers. Catherine, due to her education and teaching experience with the *Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi*, was given the school of the mission.

⁷ The name Mulaire is spelt many different ways, as many of the ancestors of the Mulaire family were illiterate. Spellings changed as different priests wrote in various registers according to the pronunciation given at the time. The predominant spelling of the family became Mulaire. Other spellings of the name include Miller, Muler, and Mulère.

⁸ The exact date of their move is uncertain, but the family had moved by 1863. One indication is that Louis Lacerte II and Josephte Vandal are the godparents of his brother's new born daughter: "Car peu après la naissance d'Alfred 'Miller' naît Marie-Josephine, fille de François Lacerte et de Mélanie Charpentier. Le parrain et la marraine sont Louis Lacerte II et Josephte Vandal. Ce à St-Norbert, naissance 29 octobre 1863, baptême 8 nov.1863." Yet, the family had not yet left Pembina by January of 1863: "Après 21 ans de mariage, à l'âge de 39 ans (environ) Josephte Vandal donne naissance à son 14^e enfant Marie-Amélie le 29 janvier 1863. Baptisé le 31 à St. Joseph Pembina." Mulaire III: 5.

was born on 8 October 1863.⁹ To supplement the family income, Mulaire began teaching again in 1866, this time in a school built by Mgr. Alexandre-Antonin Taché¹⁰ and Father Noël-Joseph Ritchot¹¹ in Saint-Adolphe, where she would remain until 1882. Her husband was often absent from the family home due to his employment of delivering the mail between Red River and Pembina,¹² and she would face a new challenge, both financial and emotional, when her husband Joseph died of pneumonia in 1871, leaving her with several children all under the age of eight.¹³ To support her family she continued to teach. After leaving the Saint-Adolphe school in 1882 she began to teach out of her home between Saint-Adolphe and Sainte-Agathe and remained there until 1893. From 1893 to 1895, she taught in Saint-Nicolas and finally ended her official teaching career in her own home in Otterburne, which she shared with her eldest living son Honoré. Upon retirement in 1913, she settled with her two sons who abandoned their lands in Otterburne and moved to Saint-Pierre-Jolys. She later settled with her daughter Emma in

⁹ At this time, the boundaries between Saint-Norbert, Pointe à Grouette (Sainte-Agathe), and Saint-Adolphe were not clearly defined into parishes. The River Lot Files for the parish of Sainte-Agathe note that in 1865 Louis Lacerte (written Laferté) had Roger Goulet surveyed and certified what became lots 590 and 591 of the parish of Sainte-Agathe. Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM), RG17 D2, "River Lot Files, Parish of Sainte-Agathe."

¹⁰ Alexandre-Antonin Taché (b.23 July 1823, Fraserville, Lower Canada – d. 22 June 1894, Saint-Boniface) Mgr. Taché was one of the first two Oblats de Marie-Immaculée to arrive in Western Canada (1845). He would succeed Mgr. Provencher as head of the Catholic Church in Western Canada. See: Jean Hamelin, "Taché, Alexandre-Antonin," Dictionnaire biographique du Canada (DBC), vol.12 (1891-1900): 1093-1103.

¹¹ Noël-Joseph Ritchot (b. 25 December 1825, Assomption, Lower Canada – d. 16 March 1905, Saint-Norbert, Manitoba) See: Philippe R. Mailhot, "Ritchot, Noël-Joseph," DBC, vol.13 (1901-1910): 952-954.

¹² Mulaire I: 6. The family still has the old gun that Joseph took with him on his travels.

¹³ Joseph and Catherine had six children. According to the Baptismal Records of Saint-Norbert, Joseph-Alfred was born in 1863 and does not appear to have survived childhood but may still have been alive in 1871. The second child, Marie-Catherine was born in 1865 and died the following year. Marie-Emma was born in 1867, and Catherine gave birth to twins Henri-Honoré and Hermine in 1869. Hermine appears to have died at birth. Joseph died in April of 1871, and Catherine gave birth to Joseph-Hilaire in July. Catherine Mulaire: 1.

Saint-Jean-Baptiste, where she taught on an occasional and volunteer basis. Catherine Mulaire died in her daughter's home on 22 April 1922.¹⁴

Sources: The Construction of Catherine Mulaire's Story

The life and story of Mulaire can be pieced together from a variety of primary sources. I first heard of this woman in conversation one day with David Dandeneau from the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface. Through his active membership in the Franco-Manitoban community, he has developed a keen interest in this society's history.¹⁵ From him, I obtained a copy of Bernard Mulaire's research notes and correspondence recording the family genealogy and the story of Catherine and Joseph Mulaire.¹⁶ Bernard Mulaire's research has aided in locating archival and parish records concerning the family history. The Société historique de Saint-Boniface also possesses a variety of documents, including the genealogy of the family and a number of notes, letters, and correspondence in several collections such as the Fonds Société historique de Saint-Boniface, the Fonds Lionel Dorge, and the Fonds Pierre Picton. Documents found in the Provincial Archives of Manitoba further enriched this story with photographs of Mulaire and her family, the family's scrips, a description of the district of Sainte-Agathe from the Census of 1870, and the river lot files of this same parish. Parish records from

¹⁴ This is the information gathered by Catherine's great grandson Bernard Mulaire. According to another source, she taught in Saint-Adolphe until 1896. After a few years, she taught in her home between Saint-Adolphe and Sainte-Agathe and then taught the last three years of her career teaching in Saint-Jean-Baptiste. See: *Femmes de chez nous*, 1985: 91. However, this information does not appear to be exact; even the date of her birth is incorrect. Regardless of the exact details of where she taught, it is an impressive and very long career.

¹⁵ On a personal note, Catherine is an ancestor of his wife Huguette Dandeneau (née Mulaire).

¹⁶ Bernard Mulaire (1945-), the great grandson of Catherine and Joseph Mulaire, is an art historian and artist who at one point took an interest in the genealogy of his family. For further information about Bernard Mulaire, see "Mulaire, Bernard" in Gamila Morcos. Dictionnaire des artistes et des auteurs francophones de l'ouest canadien. Edmonton: La Faculté Saint-Jean and Quebec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1998: 231-234.

Saint-Norbert, Sainte-Agathe, and Pembina have also been particularly useful. Finally, newspaper articles and some of the religious correspondence of the time have shed further light on her life.

In addition to primary sources, there are four published works that reveal some aspect of Mulaire's life. The first, a two volume book published by the Sœurs des Saints Noms de Jésus et de Marie, contains some of the correspondence between Mulaire and her former teacher Mother Véronique du Crucifix.¹⁷ This book also provides a description of the style and content of education that Lacerte would have received during her two-year sojourn with the nuns. The second work was published by the Société historique de Saint-Boniface and the Ligue Féminine du Manitoba and includes short biographies of women in Red River history.¹⁸ Unfortunately, while Lacerte figures among those described, each individual is accorded only cursory examination. The third is a book published by James Michael Reardon.¹⁹ This book about the life and times of Belcourt provides many useful clues as to where the primary sources concerning the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi are located. Finally, an article written by Alfred Fortier of the Société historique de Saint-Boniface serves as an essential aid in recreating Mulaire's world as a member of this religious community.²⁰ Unfortunately, Mulaire figures but briefly, as the article is centered on Belcourt, not the nuns.

¹⁷ Sœurs des Saints Noms de Jésus et de Marie. Mère Véronique du Crucifix, 1820-1903, deuxième supérieure générale, 1849-1857. 2 vols. Montreal: Thérien Frères, 1930.

¹⁸ La Société historique de Saint-Boniface and La Ligue Féminine du Manitoba. Femmes de chez nous. Saint-Boniface: Les Éditions du Blé, 1985: 91.

¹⁹ James Michael Reardon, p.a. George Anthony Belcourt: Pioneer Catholic Missionary of the Northwest, 1803-1875. His Life and Times. St. Paul, Minnesota: North Central Publishing Company, 1955.

²⁰ Alfred Fortier. "Georges-Antoine Belcourt et la communauté des religieuses de la Propagation de la Foi," Bulletin de la Société historique de Saint-Boniface, 1 (1995): 3-23.

French-Canadian Identity?

One of the major difficulties in assessing and contextualizing the life of Catherine Mulaire concerns her ethnic identity. In many instances, the historical record has classified her as of mixed descent. Ethno-historian Jennifer Brown has defined “métissage” as:

biologically, métissage in North America can be defined in a unitary way, as the meeting and mingling of Indian and White racial groups. Socially and culturally, it has had a complex history over many generations – one that continues into the present, as people of this dual descent decide which of their many ancestral roots they wish to tap in defining a contemporary identity.²¹

In considering Brown’s definition of “métissage,” the story concerning Mulaire’s family and identity raises two questions. First, was she really of mixed descent? Second, what sort of meaning did she attribute to her ethnicity? To answer these questions, an examination of Mulaire’s descent and her identification with her heritage will be considered.

1. Difficulties of assessing lineage in a patrilineal world

In the correspondence of the time, Mulaire is referred to as “métis.” For instance, in 1854, Belcourt referred to her heritage: “j’ai ici deux bons petits sujets, deux métisses.”²² Over time, the historical record has privileged her mixed blood status over a French-Canadian one, and others who have later researched this story, such as Father Julius Belleau in the 1940s, also defined her métis. Belleau identified her as a “pauvre

²¹ Jennifer S.H. Brown, “Women as Centre and Symbol in the Emergence of Metis Communities,” The Canadian Journal of Native Studies, 3,1(1983): 40-46: 40.

²² Fortier, 1995: 6.

and malheureuse fille métisse.”²³ Yet, an initial analysis of the family history does not necessarily indicate Native ancestry. In other words, by applying the patrilineal genealogical patterns of French-Canadian tradition to the Lacerte family, there is no clear indication that she was biologically of métis descent.

The foremost difficulty that arises in the genealogy of the Lacerte family, is the identification of Mulaire’s paternal grandfather.²⁴ Mulaire’s father is referred to as Louis Lacerte II, but the research completed by Bernard Mulaire indicates an uncertainty as to which Louis Lacerte I from Baie-du-Fèvre is the grandfather of Mulaire. He wrote:

Louis Lacerte I. Aucune certitude que ce soit l’ancêtre. Mais il en est un qui entre au service de la Cie de la baie d’Hudson en 1816; il est au Fort Wedderburn de 1819-1821. On le dit Canadien. Il y a plusieurs Lacerte dans la Cie comme voyageurs et semblent venir de la Baie du Febvre au Québec.²⁵

Father Pierre Picton also mentions three men named Lacerte at Fort Wedderburn, one of whose name is Louis Lacerte: “Louis Lacerte, canadien, gouvernail, entra 1816, Fr Wedderburn 1819-1821; ‘a grumbling fellow, who does his duty well.’”²⁶ While this

²³ ASHSB, B1536/68, Correspondance personnelle: Belleau, Julius M. “Lettre à Mgr. Baudoux,” 28 September 1968: 3. The Société historique de Saint-Boniface also possesses three microfilm roles of 22000 pages of father Belleau’s notes. These notes were assembled during his years as the pastor of the Assumption parish in Pembina, North Dakota from 1934 to 1947. The collection was donated to the Assumption Abbey Archives in Richardton, North Dakota in 1951.

²⁴ What follows is a synopsis of the research compiled by Bernard Mulaire and Father David Roy. The research completed came from the North West Company roster of employees and those of the Hudson Bay Company. While a thorough examination of these records would have been useful, due to the volume of primary research in this thesis, decisions had to be made. These rosters do mention a number of men named Louis Lacerte. Unfortunately, it is impossible to assess which one would have been Catherine Mulaire’s paternal grandfather. Consequently, I have chosen to summarize the research compiled by these two individuals to serve as an illustration of the difficulties that sometimes arise in tracing the genealogy of a family. Furthermore, the Archives of the Société historique de Saint-Boniface are trained to trace family genealogies, and the ancestor they have chosen concurs with the findings of Mulaire and Roy, I have chosen to site their findings.

²⁵ Mulaire III: 1.

²⁶ Bernard Mulaire. “Lettre à l’Abbé David Roy,” 2 January 1974, photocopy obtained from David Dandeneau: 2, (henceforth: Mulaire IV).

seems most likely to be the Louis Lacerte in question, archival records do mention a number of men named Louis Lacerte working for the Hudson's Bay Company.²⁷

One such possibility could be a Louis Lacerte who was involved in the battle of "La Grenouillère." In the 1970s Father David Roy, a priest residing in Saint-Jean-Baptist, assisted Bernard Mulaire with some of his research concerning this matter. In a letter to Father Roy in 1973, Bernard Mulaire discusses the possibility that the Louis Lacerte they were looking for may have been implicated in the battle of "La Grenouillère" in 1816: "Il eu un Louis Lacerte dans l'affaire de la Grenouillère du 19 juin 1816, un des chefs Métis, accusé et témoin au procès de Toronto en 1817."²⁸ Returning Bernard Mulaire's letter, Roy noted that the Louis Lacerte of "L'affaire la Grenouillère" worked for the North West Company and not the Hudson's Bay Company, so he was not Catherine Mulaire's grandfather.²⁹

Another possibility may be a Lacerte of mixed descent referred to by Provencher in a letter dated 15 July 1824: "J'écris aujourd'hui par un nommé Lacerte, Bois-Brûlé, qui va s'établir à la Baie du Febvre."³⁰ It is possible that this could be the grandfather of Lacerte, but it appears that this Louis Lacerte was leaving the Northwest to establish himself in Baie-du-Fèvre. If the Société historique de Saint-Boniface is correct, then the Louis Lacerte who married Josephite Martin, and the man that Mulaire claims entered the service of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1816 and was in Fort Wedderburn from 1819-

²⁷ For instance, the records of Father Picton refer to a number of Louis Lacerte. ASHSB, Fonds Pierre Picton, 1.1/306 and 1.2/72.

²⁸ Mulaire IV: 1.

²⁹ David Roy. "Lettre à Bernard Mulaire," 11 January 1974, photocopy obtained from David Dandeneau: 9, (henceforth: Mulaire V).

³⁰ Provencher to Plessis, 15 July 1824. Société historique de Saint-Boniface. "Les Lettres de Monseigneur Joseph-Norbert Provencher : Premier évêque de Saint-Boniface, Manitoba." Bulletin de la Société historique de Saint-Boniface, 3(1913): 97-99, (henceforth: Lettres).

1821, were not likely the same person. Moreover, the father of Mulaire, born in 1818, appears to have been a man from the Northwest. None of the sources indicate that Mulaire's father had ever lived in Lower Canada. If the Louis Lacerte in question was moving to Baie-du-Fèvre in 1824, his son would have been six years of age and still living with the family.

According to Roy, there is no mention of a Louis Lacerte in the parish records of Baie-du-Fèvre to strengthen the claim that Mulaire's paternal grandfather originated from this area. In a letter to Mulaire he claimed: "J'ai le répertoire des mariages de la Baie du Febvre. Il y a 43 mariages de Lacerte (garçons ou filles) enregistrés la de 1874 à 1913 dont trois dans les 1700. Je n'ai pas celui que Picton mentionne."³¹ What Roy does not take into consideration is that he has only provided references of marriages found in the parish records. Since the Louis Lacerte in question was said to have married Josephte Martin in 1817 in the Red River region, he would certainly not figure in these records.³² There is also evidence that this couple settled in Saint-François-Xavier, where Josephte gave birth to Marguerite in 1833 and François-Noël in 1835.³³

If we accept the Louis Lacerte who married Josephte Martin as the correct ancestor, the records indicate that he was "canadien" and not "métis." But Louis Lacerte II believed himself and claimed to the federal government that he was of mixed descent. Louis Lacerte II, his wife Josephte Vandal, and their daughter, each received a land scrip. On each request form, they indicated that they were of mixed descent. Furthermore, as we can see on the request forms, each were accorded a scrip of \$160.³⁴

³¹ Mulaire V: 9.

³² Mulaire, III: 2.

³³ Mulaire, III: 2.

³⁴ See Appendix A.

Mulaire's mixed heritage may have come from her mother's side of the family. Unfortunately, the patrilineal French-Canadian society traces the genealogy of families through the male line and it is very difficult to trace the female descent of a family, but there are clues. For instance, a possible indication of Mulaire's and her mother's métis ancestry comes from the publication Nouveau Monde of 10 February 1869. The records of the Société historique de Saint-Boniface indicate that Joseph's parents were Joseph Vandal and Métis Marie Lachevrotière from Sorel, Quebec:

Il partit de Sorel (Québec) le 6 mai 1814, engagé pour la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest. Neuf ans après son arrivée à la Rivière Rouge, il épousa Marie Lachevrotière, métis(se) canadienne [...].³⁵

While these names can also be found in the records of the North West Company, this does not necessarily guarantee the mixed heritage of the family.

2. *The Lacerte identification with Métis society and culture*

Arguably, the identification with the métis culture does not necessarily stem from the fact that Mulaire was of mixed descent. Rather her identification with that society is what becomes more interesting. In his genealogy, Bernard Mulaire referred to the métis heritage of his great grandmother Catherine Mulaire: "Catherine Lacerte [...] était l'aînée d'une famille Métisse de quatorze ou quinze enfants."³⁶ Her father Louis Lacerte II, if not métis, was certainly been described in family stories as having led a life normally associated with métis men:

Louis Lacerte II aurait fait la livraison de marchandises entres autres besognes typiques de celles que faisaient les Métis. Il aurait livré le

³⁵ Quote from Nouveau Monde, (10 February 1869) that is reproduced in Société historique de Saint-Boniface. Ancêtres de Christian Dandeneau. Saint-Boniface: Société historique de Saint-Boniface, 1998. The Société historique de Saint-Boniface provides the service of researching family genealogies, (henceforth: Genealogy).

³⁶ Mulaire I: 2.

courrier en traînes à chiens de Saint-Cloud à Pembina ainsi que transporté les marchandises de Pembina à la RR employant 25 charrettes.³⁷

A further indication of their association with a mixed heritage may be the family's choice of settling first in Pembina and then in the Saint-Adolphe and Sainte-Agathe region. While French Canadians lived in these two communities, they were predominantly settled by families of mixed descent.³⁸ Additionally, the family connection may have been a deciding factor in the family's settlement pattern. Like the Lacerte family, Belcourt's family also originated from Baie-du Fèvre.³⁹ The dissertation written by Nicole St-Onge in 1984 provides evidence that members of the Vandal family were already living in Pointe-à-Grouette, when the family decided to move to Manitoba in 1862.⁴⁰ Moreover, Louis Lacerte also had family in the Red River region. The Parish records of Saint-Norbert indicate a number of Lacerte in the region. Bernard Mulaire summarized these findings as follows:

Il est intéressant de noter aussi que Louis Lacerte II retrouve de la famille à St-Norbert, soit son frère François-Noël et peut être aussi son frère Basille. [...] Le frère Basille est dans les environs car il meurt à St. Norbert le 24 déc. 1865, sépulture 26 à l'âge de 24 ans.⁴¹

Finally, Joseph Mulaire also appears to have led a life similar to that Lacerte's family:

“Joseph cependant ne se fait pas colon. À l'exemple du beau-père, il porte le courrier à cheval entre la Rivière-Rouge et Pembina.”⁴²

³⁷ Mulaire III: 2.

³⁸ See for instance Luc Dauphinais Histoire de Saint-Boniface. Tome 1: À l'ombre des cathédrales. Des origines de la colonie jusqu'en 1870. Saint-Boniface: Les Éditions du Blé, 1991 for Pembina or Nicole St-Onge Métis and Merchant Capital in Red River: The Decline of Pointe à Grouette, 1860-1885. Thesis [M.A.], Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1984, for Sainte-Agathe.

³⁹ Mulaire I: 2.

⁴⁰ St-Onge, 1984: 100-102. While it is unclear which branch of the Vandal family was settled in the region, they may have been relatives of Catherine Mulaire's mother, Josephthe Vandal.

⁴¹ Mulaire III: 5.

⁴² Mulaire I: 4.

Considering the mixed descent of the female line, it is not unreasonable to believe that some elements of that culture may have been shared among the female members of the family. After her husband's death in 1871, Mulaire most likely relied on the help of her family in raising her children.⁴³ Her mother, Josephite Vandal, was potentially there to provide much needed assistance, albeit briefly, as she died sometime around 1878.⁴⁴ Fortunately she would soon have another female relation to turn to for assistance, when her father remarried:

Il est intéressant que Louis Lacerte II veuf soit allé à St. François Xavier pour se remarier. Il connaissait l'endroit de son enfance, ses parents demeurés là en 1879 (24 nov.) Louis Lacerte II à 61 ans.⁴⁵

As this quote indicates, her grandparents were possibly still alive to provide assistance. It should also not be forgotten that Mulaire probably had many siblings still living.

Historiography: The History of Francophone Education and Prairie Women's History

In order to fully understand the story of Mulaire and her relationship to the Catholic Church in the nineteenth-century Northwest, a brief overview of the historiography of both francophone education in Manitoba and prairie women is essential. In the following two sections, I have endeavored to portray the major shifts in interpretation of the history of these two themes to demonstrate the need for a story that

⁴³ As we have seen, Catherine Mulaire had begun to teach school again in 1866, but teachers, and particularly lay female teachers were generally underpaid. For further information on the wages of female teachers see: Nadia Fahmy-Eid et Micheline Dumont. Maîtresses de maison, maîtresses d'école: Femmes, famille et éducation dans l'histoire du Québec. Montréal: Boréal Express, 1983; Monique Hébert. Les Grandes gardiennes de la langue et de la foi: Une histoire des Franco-manitobaines de 1916 à 1947. Thesis [Ph.D.] Manitoba: University of Manitoba, 1994; and Marta Danylewycz. Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1920. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987.

⁴⁴ Mulaire suggests that: "La mère Josephite Vandal meurt après mars 1874 et avant nov. 1879. Car le 23 mars 1874 elle est la marraine d'un fils à Louis II, soit Louis Frédéric né le 18 mars précédant à St-Norbert." Mulaire III: 7. The Société historique de Saint-Boniface places the death of Josephite Vandal on December 12, 1878 at Saint-Vital. (Genealogy).

⁴⁵ Mulaire III: 7.

illustrates the different experiences of women and the tensions that were present in the Franco-Manitoban community at the time. However, it should be noted that these two areas of history are both complex and far-reaching and that this is not an exhaustive study, but rather a synopsis of some of the past and current trends.

1. Francophone Education in the Red River Region

The Manitoba School question that culminated with the abolition of bilingual schools in 1916 has received more than its fair share of attention in the history of education in Manitoba. Historical examination has been thorough and diverse in this controversial issue because of its political importance.⁴⁶ However, the history of education does have significance beyond the School Question. In order to fully appreciate the diversity of this history, I shall present the shifts in focus of authors who have studied various aspects of the education of the Red River Valley. Unlike many other areas of historical inquiry, the majority of studies outside of the Manitoba School Question, particularly since 1940, have remained in the form of master's and doctoral theses. In other words, much of the story concerning education in Manitoba is relatively unknown because these works were never published, but it is a place to begin.

Adrien-Gabriel Morice's Histoire de l'Église catholique dans l'Ouest canadien du lac Supérieure au Pacifique, 1659-1915, despite all its Catholic verbosity, provides considerable detail on the history of Catholic education in the Northwest.⁴⁷ Like Morice's work, many of the first French-Canadian publications on the history of education in the

⁴⁶ See: Jacqueline Blay. L'Article 23: Les péripéties législatives et juridiques du fait français au Manitoba, 1870-1986. Saint-Boniface: Les Éditions du Blé, 1987; Lovell Clark. The Manitoba School Question: Majority Rule or Minority Right? Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968; Gilbert Comeault. "La Question des Écoles du Manitoba – Un nouvel éclairage" Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique Française, 33,1 (1979): 3-24.

⁴⁷ Adrien-Gabriel Morice. Histoire de l'Église catholique dans l'Ouest canadien du lac Supérieur au Pacifique, 1659-1915. 4 vols., Saint-Boniface: L'auteur, 1921-23.

Northwest at the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, emphasized the positive role of the Catholic Church.⁴⁸

An early thesis that looks at the time frame currently under investigation is that of George Melvin Newfield. Newfield's thesis, completed in 1937, examined the development of schools in Manitoba prior to 1870. Newfield notes that the history of Manitoba and its education since 1870 has been examined, but "no intensive studies have been focussed on the history of education in the province prior to that date."⁴⁹ The utility of the thesis comes from his thorough examination of primary and secondary sources that were available at the time, but it is otherwise largely descriptive and cursory in nature. Other early descriptive works concerning the history of Manitoba and its education include studies by Alexander Begg, George Bryce, Harvey Golden, and David Scott Woods.⁵⁰

The historical writing concerning education in Manitoba began to shift focus in the 1950s and 1960s. Rather than including education in a general history of Manitoba or a chronology of events surrounding the establishment of education, many began to examine specific examples, such as the role of the Hudson's Bay Company, the history of schools in Saint-Boniface, and that of Saint-Boniface College.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Two examples of this form of history are: Dom Benoit. Vie de Mgr Taché, archevêque de Saint-Boniface. 2 vols. Montreal: Librairie Beauchemin, 1904; and Alexandre-Antonin Taché. Vingt années de missions dans le Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique. Montreal: Eusèbe Sénécal, 1866.

⁴⁹ George Melvin Newfield. The Development of Manitoba Schools Prior to 1870. Thesis [M.Ed.], Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1937.

⁵⁰ For instance see: Alexander Begg. History of the North-West. 3 vols., Toronto: Hunter, Rose and Co., 1895; George Bryce. History of Manitoba. Toronto: The Canadian History Company, 1906; Harvey Golden. The French Element in the Red River Settlement. Thesis [M.A.], Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1924; David Scott Woods. The Two Races in Manitoba. Thesis [M.A.], Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1926.

⁵¹ Sanford Stephen Harvey. The Part Played By the Hudson's Bay Company in Western Canadian Education, 1821-1869. Thesis [M.Ed.], Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1955; George Scott Belton. A History of the Origin and growth of Schools in the City of St. Boniface. Thesis [M.Ed.], Winnipeg:

A period of revisionism began in the late 1960s and early 1970s with works like Keith Wilson's 1967 dissertation and Arthur Rempel's thesis written in 1973. Unlike previous work in the field, Wilson insisted to a greater degree upon the "social" and "religious" aspects of influence in the history of education in the Northwest:

The purpose of this study is to present an account of the development of education in the province of Manitoba, and to assess the influence of religious, political, social, and economic factors on that development.⁵²

By covering an extremely lengthy period, he openly admitted the limitations of his study. Among these limitations, we are told that: "No attempt was made to provide a detailed history of all aspects of education; nor has any attempt been made to treat the influence of intellectual forces."⁵³

Rempel focussed upon the influence of religion on the education of the Métis and Aboriginal peoples prior to 1870.⁵⁴ He began his argument with a discussion about the religious beliefs and the history of Native people's education in Manitoba. He then shifted his focus to contemplate the policies of the three Christian religious groups present in the nineteenth century Red River region: Roman Catholics, Methodists, and Anglicans. Rempel argued that:

the history of the education of Native peoples is the tale of an epic struggle between two opposing views: one which holds that the purpose of education is to transmit the Native cultures; the other which believes that a Euro-Canadian culture must be inculcated. That the Native peoples have in the past been the passive recipients of these opposing views was historically and socially inevitable, for at all times, with the doubtful

University of Manitoba, 1959; and Paul Roland Régnier. A History of St. Boniface College. Thesis [M.Ed.], Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1965.

⁵² Keith Wilson. The Development of Education in Manitoba. Thesis [Ph.D.], Michigan: Michigan State University, 1967: 1.

⁵³ Wilson, 1967: 3.

⁵⁴ Arthur Rempel. The influence of religion on education for native people in Manitoba prior to 1870. Thesis [M.Ed.], Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1973.

exception of the Métis from 1816-1870, the Natives were an exploited minority with little influence over their destinies.⁵⁵

Rempel's thesis introduced the notion of different religious influences on the structure of education. Unfortunately, he did not recognize the agency of Native groups. While the position of Native peoples in Manitoba was tenuous in the nineteenth century, there have been indications that they did exhibit some agency. The experiences of women such as Catherine Mulaire, Marguerite Connolly, Manie Tobie, and Sara Riel, exemplify this agency.

These works of revisionism generally do not take into account individual participants in the education system. Furthermore, a great deal of time has been spent discussing the similarities and differences of the development of Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist education. While this story is of the utmost importance, particularly for introducing the ramifications of the events surrounding the Manitoba School Question, these works neglected the tensions found within the ranks of the Catholic society itself. Moreover, women were credited with some contribution to education in Manitoba, but they were not recognized to have had substantial influence.

Specific examples of French-Canadian women's agency in the history of education in Manitoba began in the 1990s. Monique Hébert's doctoral thesis, Les Grandes gardiennes de la langue et de la foi: Une histoire des Franco-manitobaines de 1916 à 1947, documented the history of nineteen women who chose the teaching profession and compared them with nineteen women who chose marriage and motherhood. While her study focuses on the period following mine, her work is still of great importance to the history of the education of women. Her approach traces the

⁵⁵ Rempel, 1973: 1.

contribution of Franco-Manitobaines to the survival of the French Canadian community during the period 1916 to 1947. She uses oral history as her method: "Nous avons rencontré un silence des sources historiques traditionnelles de la communauté franco-manitobaine."⁵⁶ Yet, if this is true, how can the lives of women and their educational experiences prior to this period be found?

While the female experience may have been largely ignored in many "traditional" histories, stories may still be pieced together. Two works within the historiography of francophone education in Manitoba will serve as a starting point. The chronology of events will rely on the work of historian Luc Dauphinais who charted the ever-changing teacher personnel in the Red River Valley through the religious correspondence of Catholic missionaries in Red River.⁵⁷

This thesis will also grow from the conclusions of archivist Gilbert Comeault's thesis.⁵⁸ In his 1977 thesis about Mgr. Louis-Philippe-Adélarde Langevin's relationships with Manitoba's Catholic groups, Comeault considers the various tensions that existed between Protestants and Catholics, the different Catholic ethnic groups, and within each ethnic group itself. Similarly, the present study will examine more closely the tensions which existed within the French Catholic community in nineteenth century Red River region, over proper female education, through the specific example of Mulaire's experiences. An article written by Rosa Bruno-Jofre on the Missionary Oblate Sisters of

⁵⁶ Hébert, 1994: 20.

⁵⁷ Luc Dauphinais. Histoire de Saint-Boniface. Tome 1: À l'ombre des cathédrales. Des origines de la colonie jusqu'en 1870. Saint-Boniface: Les Éditions du Blé, 1991: 47-190.

⁵⁸ Gilbert Comeault. The politics of the Manitoba School question and its impact on L.-P.-A. Langevin's relations with Manitoba's Catholic minority groups, 1895-1915. Thesis [M.A.], Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1977.

the Sacred Heart and Mary Immaculate will serve to provide context for the development of female religious communities and education in Manitoba.⁵⁹

This thesis will contribute to the historiography of francophone education in a number of ways. While Monique Hébert situates the female experience after 1916 more firmly into the historiography of francophone education, this thesis will examine it prior to the abolition of the French language in Manitoba schools in 1916. This thesis will also provide an example of how different members of the Catholic teaching personnel both influenced and were influenced by their female students. As a female member of the society of the Red River region, the story of Mulaire must also be considered in the context of prairie women's history.

2. The Writing of Prairie Women's History

A study of Mulaire's experiences in the nineteenth-century Northwest will contribute to a further understanding of the complex world of Catholicism and the different ways in which women externalized and internalized their relationships with that institution. More generally, the story of a little-known woman and the world in which she lived will add new insight to the general history of women in the Red River region of the nineteenth-century, and deepen our understanding of what it meant to be female at that time.

Authors like Joan Kelly-Gadol and Gisela Bock wrote in the 1970s that much of women's history contributed merely positive illustrations of "great" women.⁶⁰ Relating

⁵⁹ Rosa Bruno-Jofre, "The Founding of the Missionary Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart and Mary Immaculate in Manitoba," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation*, 9,1(1997): 1-20.

⁶⁰ Joan Kelly-Gadol. "The Social Relation of the Sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1,4 (1976): 809-823; and Gisela Bock. "Women's History and Gender History: aspects of an International Debate," *Gender and History*, 1,1 (1989).

Kelly-Gadol and Bock's argument to the instance of education, Joan Wallach Scott wrote in 1996 that:

When the argument was about education, feminists came up with stunning cases of brilliant women to demonstrate that learning did not distort femininity or, more radically, that sex had nothing to do with the operations of the mind.⁶¹

Like women's history in general, prairie women's history has seen its share of studies that commemorate "great" women.⁶² Undeniably, women like Marie-Anne Gaboury, Manie Tobie, Nellie McClung, and Gabrielle Roy deserve recognition, but what about other women? In short, the process of early women's history simply comprised the recovery of "worthy" women. Since then women's historians have unearthed sources and borrowed methodologies in order to write about ordinary women neglected in the historical record.

In her article, "Does A Sex Have a History?" Denise Riley mounted an important challenge to historians writing about women in the 1990s. The issues that Riley and Scott raise affect not only the historical interpretation of gender, but they will also: "afflict racial, national, occupational, class, religious, and other consolidations."⁶³ However, while it is important to keep postmodern discourse analysis in mind when considering gender identities, the material foundations of women's lives must not be neglected.

In her article, "Canadian Prairie Women: A Bibliographic Survey," Susan Jackel examines the historiography concerning Western Canadian women to 1987.⁶⁴ Among

⁶¹ Joan Wallach Scott (ed). Feminism and History. Oxford Readings in Feminism, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1996: 1.

⁶² See: Grant MacEwan. And Mighty Women Too: Stories of Notable Western Canadian Women. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1975.

⁶³ Denise Riley. "Does A Sex Have a History?" in Joan Wallach Scott (ed). Feminism and History. Oxford Readings in Feminism, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1996: 31.

⁶⁴ Susan Jackel. "Canadian Prairie Women's History: A Bibliographic Survey," Ottawa: CRIAW/ICREF, 1987: 1-22.

many other themes, her study reveals three major trends in the study of “ordinary” prairie women. One trend is the tendency of historians to focus on the settlement period, meaning the period between 1888 and 1930.⁶⁵ This period still remains popular, but the content has expanded in different areas to include the social and cultural impacts of the arrival of many different groups.⁶⁶ Women in agriculture and politics are the other common themes. In 1976, A Harvest Yet To Reap: A history of prairie women, edited by Linda Rasmussen, challenged the way scholars looked at the history of prairie women.⁶⁷ Photographs and extracts of autobiographies, reminiscences, newspaper clippings, and other sources were compiled into a book of snapshots. These snapshots demonstrated that the lives of prairie women could be constructed from a variety of sources. In other words, it was “a place to begin.”⁶⁸ An example of a work that expanded on this suggestion is the publication by Sara Brooks Sundberg, entitled: “Farm Women on the Canadian Frontier: The Helpmate Image.” Since then, many diverse topics have built upon these two themes of women’s roles in agriculture and politics.⁶⁹

In 1987, Jackel noted the challenge awaiting prairie women’s history:

Prairie women’s history to date presents something of a paradox. [...] there exists a varied and abundant body of published and unpublished materials, [but] one looks in vain for concerted discussions of prairie

⁶⁵ See: Georgina Binnie-Clark. A Summer on the Canadian Prairies. London, England: Edward Arnold, 1910; and Susan Jackel (ed.) A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982.

⁶⁶ For example, Angus McLaren discusses the use of birth control. Angus McLaren. “‘Keep Your Seats and Face Facts’: Western Canadian Women’s Discussion of Birth Control in the 1920s,” Canadian Bulletin of Medical History, 8,2 (1991): 189-201.

⁶⁷ Linda Rasmussen et al. A Harvest Yet To Reap: A history of prairie women. Toronto: Women’s Press, 1976.

⁶⁸ Rasmussen et al., 1976: 10.

⁶⁹ For instance: Christa Scowby. “‘I Am Not A Drone’: Farm Women, Reproductive Work and the Western Producer, 1930-1939,” Saskatchewan History, 1996, 48(2): 3-15; Angela E. Davis. “‘Country Homemakers’: The Daily Lives of Prairie Women as seen through the women’s pages of the Grain Growers’ Guide, 1908-1928,” Canadian Papers in Rural History, 8 (1992): 163-174; and Mary Kinnear. “‘Mostly For the Male Members’: Teaching in Winnipeg, 1933-1966,” Historical Studies in Education, 6,1 (1994): 1-20.

women's history as a discrete and self-conscious field. Questions of definition, chronology, methodology and rationale all await debate. Amid a vigorous regional scholarship, women's historians are, for the most part, decorous and discreet.⁷⁰

In response, authors such as Mary Kinnear, Sylvia Van Kirk, Jennifer Brown, and Frances Swripa have continued to expand and push the historical inquiry concerning prairie women, through the exploration of the interrelated themes of race, religion, class, and gender.⁷¹

One aspect of prairie women's history not included in Jackel's article is that of francophone women. One major reason for this neglect is the relative absence, until recently, of Western Canadian female francophone historians. As Monique Hébert notes in her thesis, no systematic historical treatment concerning francophone women has been done since the thesis of Sister Elisabeth De Moissac in 1946.⁷² At last, beginning in the 1980s and increasing during the 1990s, francophone women, and métis women in particular, have received some historical attention.

In general, the body of literature on francophone women is limited to exceptional women and female religious orders.⁷³ While these provide a great deal of valuable information concerning Catholic institutions, one cannot fully appreciate the individual

⁷⁰ Jackel, 1987: 2.

⁷¹ See: Mary Kinnear. A Female Economy: Women's Work in a Prairie Province, 1870-1970. Montreal and Kingston : McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998; Jennifer Brown and Elizabeth Vibert (eds.) Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1996; and Frances Swripa. Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity, 1891-1991. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993.

⁷² Elisabeth De Moissac. Les femmes de l'Ouest: leur rôle dans l'histoire. Thesis [M.A.], Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 1946.

⁷³ See: Manie Tobie. Manie Tobie, femme du Manitoba. Saint-Boniface: Éditions des Plaines, 1979; and Agnès Goulet. Marie-Anne Gaboury: Une femme dépareillée. Saint-Boniface: Les Éditions des Plaines, 1989; Estelle Mitchell. Les Soeurs Grises de Montréal à la Rivière-Rouge, 1844-1984. Montreal: Éditions du Mériindien, 1987; and Hélène Chaput, snjm. Synopsis S.N.J.M. 1974-1984: Une histoire sommaire des Soeurs S.N.J.M. au Manitoba. Saint-Boniface: Académie Saint-Joseph, 1985.

experiences of these women. These women possessed and exerted a great deal of power and influence in their community, and should be placed within that society.

Métis history has received a great deal of scholarly interest over the years. The “Resistance” of 1870, the “Rebellion” of 1885, and of course Louis Riel have been particularly popular topics, but since the 1970s, historians have attempted to study other aspects of Métis society.⁷⁴ However, works dealing specifically with the role of métis women have only begun to receive scholarly attention. Nathalie Kermoal is one such scholar, examining métis women’s roles during the years of resistance. However, Kermoal tends to fall into the trap of attempting to infuse women into the existing historical framework rather than to enhance the existing scholarship with a new theoretical interpretation. In other words, her work is a good example of contributory history.

Diane Payment has greatly contributed to the research on Western Francophone women, specifically, métisse. Two studies are especially relevant here. The first, an article, “On n’est pas métchif nous-autres: un aperçu des relations entre les femmes francophones au Manitoba durant les années 1810-1920,” examines the relationship between Francophone and Métis women. While the work does not relate specifically to the education of women, Payment has some interesting ideas concerning the relationship

⁷⁴ See: Auguste-Henri De Trémaudin. Histoire de la nation métisse dans l’Ouest Canadien. Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1990; Gerhard Ens. Homeland to Hinterland: the changing worlds of the Red River Metis in the nineteenth century. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996; David V. Burley and Gayel A. Horsfall. “Vernacular Houses and Farmsteads of the Canadian Métis,” Journal of Cultural Geography, 10,1 (1989): 19-33; Guillaume Charrette. L’Espace de Louis Goulet. Winnipeg: Éditions Bois-Brûlés, 1976; Thomas Flanagan. Riel and the Rebellion of 1885 Reconsidered. Saskatoon: Western Producer Books, 1983; Frits Pannekoek. A Snug Little Flock: The Social Origins of the Riel Resistance of 1869-70. Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer Publishing, 1991; D.N. Sprague. Canada and the Métis, 1969-1885. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988; and Nicole St-Onge. Metis and Merchant Capital in Red River: The Decline of Pointe à Grouette, 1860-1885. Thesis [M.A.], Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1983.

between those two groups. For instance, Payment argues that the tensions between French-Canadian and Métis women grew after 1870:

À l'époque de la colonie de la Rivière-Rouge, c'est-à-dire entre les années 1810-1870, il y avait peu de distinction entre les femmes francophones d'origine métisse et canadienne française. Les canadiennes minoritaires, s'intègrent au groupe métis minoritaire, contrairement à la communauté anglophone "halfbreed" et écossaise de l'autre côté de la rivière [...]. Certes, il y a parfois des différences et de sensibilités entre les deux groupes mais l'interaction est constante et dépourvue des préjugés [...]. Par contre après 1870, les relations commencent à changer."⁷⁵

Her analysis demonstrates that tensions developed within these francophone groups but unlike Sarah Carter and Sylvia Van Kirk, Payment does not clearly define the reasons for this change.

Carter's contribution examines the various cultural assumptions and images that white women had of native women.⁷⁶ Similarly, Van Kirk illustrates that fur trade relations were complicated by concepts of agency, personal initiative, and racism.⁷⁷ These notions applied just as easily to the relations between both sexes but also those between women of different cultures. I think Ann Laura Stoler, in her article "Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender, Race, and Morality in Colonial Asia," puts the situation in perspective. She suggests:

Concubinage was a domestic arrangement based on sexual service and gender inequalities which "worked" as long as European identity and supremacy were clear. When either was thought to be vulnerable, in

⁷⁵ Diane P. Payment. "'On n'est pas méchif nous-autres': un aperçu des relations entre les femmes francophones au Manitoba durant les années 1810-1920." Bulletin de la Société historique de Saint-Boniface, 3 (1992): 13-18: 13.

⁷⁶ Sarah Carter. "A Fate Worse Than Death" The Beaver, 68, 2 (1988): 21-28 and Capturing Women: the manipulation of cultural imagery in Canada's Prairie West. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997.

⁷⁷ Sylvia Van Kirk. Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society. Winnipeg: Watson-Dwyer, 1986 and "What If Mama is an Indian?: The Cultural Ambivalence of the Alexander Ross Family" in Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S.H. Brown. (eds.) The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985: 207-217.

jeopardy, or less than convincing, colonial élites responded by clarifying the cultural criteria of privilege and the moral premises of their unity.⁷⁸

In other words, prejudice was present, but as long as the métis were not considered a political, economic, or cultural threat, a co-existence appears to have prevailed.

Payment's other article, "Un aperçu des relations entre les missionnaires catholiques et les métisses," examines the social impact of the Catholic missionaries upon Métis women.⁷⁹ This article is quite useful as it traces the evolution of Catholic influence upon the métis community as greater numbers of missionaries came to the colony and particularly the impact of women missionaries. Unfortunately, the article is mainly a summary and does not venture into detail over any issue. On one hand, Payment's work is quite useful because, while historians Sylvia Van Kirk and Sara Carter look at the impact of white women on the population, Payment is the only one to consider the impact of the female Catholic institution personnel. On the other hand, Payment's work, like many histories written about women, has not placed women in a wider context and has not examined the male clergy's influence upon women's lives and how these women in turn influenced men's lives.

Two journals in particular have contributed to the study of francophones in Manitoba. The first is the Bulletin de la Société historique de Saint-Boniface and the series of publications of the papers delivered during the conferences of Centre d'études franco-canadiennes de l'Ouest.⁸⁰ Again, like much of the work written on francophone

⁷⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, "Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender, Race, and Morality in Colonial Asia" in Joan Wallach Scott (ed). Feminism and History. Oxford Readings in Feminism, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1996: 220.

⁷⁹ Diane P Payment. "Un aperçu des relations entre les missionnaires catholiques et les Métisses," Études Oblates de l'Ouest, 3 (1995): 139-158.

⁸⁰ For instance, the next issue is dedicated to women, including a paper given by Carole Boily on the first twenty years of the Sœurs Grises in Red River.

history, many of the articles provide valuable and interesting information, but they are predominantly descriptive in nature.

Where would the story of Catherine Mulaire and the religious influence exerted upon her fit into all of this? Like Linda E. Lee's thesis The Myth of Female Equality in Pioneer Society: The Red River Colony As a Test Case, it would question some of the belief of pioneer egalitarianism in the Western Canadian frontier.⁸¹ Lee's thesis examines influences exerted upon anglophone farm women, this thesis will inquire into some of the influences exerted upon female students and educators such as Mulaire. Furthermore, like the thesis written by Lesley Erickson that examines the life of Sister Sara Riel, Mulaire's story illustrates another experience by a woman living in the nineteenth century Northwest.⁸² The thesis of Erickson provides an example of how a métis woman named Sara Riel externalized her religious education through religious life and teaching, the case of Catherine Mulaire reveals a failed religious vocation. In other words, both highlight two different ways that métis women experienced their race, gender, and religion.

Methodology:

The life of Mulaire can be pieced together from a variety of sources, there still remains, as in much of women's history, many gaps in the historical record. Frederic W. Gleach provides a solution to the silences of a historical text.⁸³ In essence, Gleach employs the method of "controlled speculation." He defines this process as:

⁸¹ Linda E. Lee. The Myth of Female Equality in Pioneer Society: The Red River Colony As a Test Case. Thesis [M.A.], Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1978.

⁸² Lesley Erickson. At the Cultural and Religious Crossroads: Sara Riel and the Grey Nuns in the Canadian Northwest, 1848-1883. Thesis [M.A.], Calgary: University of Calgary, 1997.

⁸³ Frederic W. Gleach. "Controlled Speculation: Interpreting the Saga of Pocahontas and Captain John Smith," in Jennifer S.H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, (eds.) Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press Ltd., 1996, repr. 1998: 21-42.

The use of comparative material from other cultural or historical situations to infer crucial information that may be missing or obscured in the historical record of a particular situation; the comparative material is selected from contexts that appear most closely analogous. The speculative inferences are thus controlled by being carefully and explicitly grounded in the ethnographic, historical, and/or archaeological record.⁸⁴

The silences in the story of Catherine Mulaire become rather evident when she is placed in relation to other men and women in the colony. Thus, the method of Gleach will be employed by comparing Mulaire's experiences and relationships of others in the Red River region. The goal is to illustrate that the women who were exposed to the Catholic faith through education responded to these teachings in different ways. In other words, the Catholic community of the Red River region was not a homogeneous group, but rather a group of individuals that lived in a community.

To illustrate the educational system that Mulaire would have been introduced to, the second chapter of this thesis will consider the repercussions of Mgr. Joseph-Norbert Provencher and Father Georges-Antoine Belcourt's competitive relationship on the early female education of the Red River region. This competition and their relationship with another métis woman, Angélique Nolin, would influence Catherine Mulaire's religious educational training. The third chapter of this thesis will consider the changes to female education in the area after the arrival of the Sœurs Grises. This institution's influence through its services and personnel, would influence Mulaire's early education by the model they provided and through her teacher, Juliette Lefèbvre, who had been one of their novices in 1846 and 1847. The fourth chapter will assess the degree that Mulaire's religious training influenced her perceptions of religious life through an examination of her brief career with the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi.

⁸⁴ Gleach, 1998: 22.

Conclusion

There are a number of difficulties surrounding a representation of the story of Catherine Mulaire. In the first instance, much of the story is to be found in the correspondence and stories of the family. While Bernard Mulaire has gone to great lengths to uncover pieces of the family history, certain elements remain elusive. For instance, no mention is made of Mulaire's experience as a novice of the *Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi*. Fortunately, the works by Reardon and Fortier have assisted my search for this aspect of her life. Unfortunately, like the others authors, I have come across an unusual silence in the documentation of the period in question.

A consequence of the difficulty that has arisen in recreating Mulaire's life and experiences has been the sheer number of sources to consult. In addition to the sources noted above, this thesis has considered a large number of letters written by Father Georges-Antoine Belcourt, Father Julius Belleau, Mgr. François-Norbert Blanchet, Sister Marie-Rose Clapin, Sister Anastasie-Gertrude Coullée dite Saint-Joseph, Sister Mary Curran, Sister Hedwidge Lafrance, Sister Eulalie Lagrave, Bernard Mulaire, Mgr. Norbert-Joseph Provencher, Father David Roy, Mgr. Alexandre-Antonin Taché, and Sister Marie-Louise Valade.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Unfortunately, not a great deal of time was spent researching the ever useful collections of the period that are located at the Provincial and Hudson's Bay Company archives in Winnipeg. While a cursory examination of the employee records of the Northwest Company and the Hudson's Bay Company were considered, a more thorough examination may have shed further light on the life and world of Mulaire. To name but two other examples, the Selkirk papers and other contemporary collections like the Kittson Papers may also have proven useful.

The Chronicles of the Sœurs Grises from 1843 to 1874 were also examined as were a number of personal files concerning individual nuns that are located at the Archives of the Sœurs Grises in Saint-Boniface. A number of collections located at the Société historique de Saint-Boniface were read such as the dossier on Belcourt, the Nolin family, and a number of general files on Saint-Boniface and religious communities. A number of other collections, research notes, parish records, and letters from a variety of locations were also considered but are too numerous to mention in full here. The intention of this thesis was to begin an area of inquiry and to encourage further historical inquiry into the life of Catherine Mulaire and to see how the experiences of other women of this time period compare to her story.

Chapter 2

The Secular Clergy: The Influence of Joseph-Norbert Provencher and Georges-Antoine Belcourt on Female Education in Assiniboia, 1818-1859

Introduction

This chapter will consider the rise of female education in Assiniboia in the early nineteenth century.¹ Female education was largely inspired by the Catholic secular clergy's commitment to provide the youth of the colony with French-Canadian and Catholic instruction.² This form of education was developed slowly after the arrival of Mgr. Joseph-Norbert Provencher, Father Sévère-Joseph-Nicolas Dumoulin,³ and catechist Guillaume-Étienne Edge⁴ to the colony in 1818. In particular, Provencher, the first Bishop of the Northwest, largely defined the character and the structure of this system. After establishing why the Catholic clergy returned to the Northwest, the discussion will consider the role and the influence of Provencher.

¹ The use of the terms "Assiniboia," and "Red River region" is used here to designate what is now southern Manitoba and the area just over the American border in what is now North Dakota. The term "Northwest," is used to designate the territory that now comprises Western Canada.

² For an example of this style of education see: Micheline Dumont and Nadia-Fahmy-Eid (eds.) Les couventines. L'éducation des filles au Québec dans les congrégations religieuses enseignantes, 1840-1960. Montreal: Boréal Express, 1986. The style and structure of the education were largely defined by the French model. See: Gérard Cholvy et al. L'enseignement catholique en France au XIXe et XXe siècles. Paris: Société d'Histoire religieuse de la France, 1995.

³ Father Dumoulin (b. 5 December 1793, Sainte-Anne-de-Bout-de-l'Île, Lower Canada – d. 27 July 1853, Trois-Rivières, Lower Canada); ordained on 23 February 1817 in Nicolet, he remained in the Red River region until 1823. See Nive Voisine. "Dumoulin, Sévère-Joseph-Nicolas" Dictionnaire biographique du Canada, (DBC), vol.8, (1851-1860): 277-278.

⁴ Guillaume-Étienne Edge was born in Montreal on 1 December 1792. He left Red River in 1820 when Provencher returned to up-date Mgr. Plessis on the mission. Edge had decided that he did not have the ecclesiastical vocation. He died in 1869. Joseph-Norbert Provencher. "Notice sur la Rivière-Rouge" Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface (LCSB), Part III, 26,8 (1927): 177-182: 180.

Provencher, however, was not the only one to influence female education. By 1844, twelve secular priests had made their way to Assiniboia.⁵ Each clergy member brought his own ideas about female education. Father Georges-Antoine Belcourt, brought to the colony by Provencher in 1831, is an extreme example of a secular priest who opposed Provencher's method of introducing the French-Canadian and Catholic way of life to the Native population. The root of their differences was that, unlike Provencher, Belcourt believed that the material needs of the colony should be satisfied before they introduced a new way of life. Belcourt also believed in integrating aspects of the Native culture and way of life into the educational structure.

Provencher and Belcourt's relationship with Angélique Nolin elucidates the different relationships that women had with different members of the secular clergy. The case of Nolin also suggests that the women of the colony exerted some degree of agency and influence. Nolin opened the first Catholic school for girls in 1829 in Saint-Boniface. Her decision to follow Belcourt to his new mission called Baie-Saint-Paul in 1834 is significant because it left Provencher without a teacher for the girls' school in Saint-Boniface, and as a result, the school was closed.

⁵ The twelve priests were: Sévère Dumoulin (1818-1823); Thomas Destroismaisons (1820-1827); Jean Harper (1822-1831); François Boucher (1827-1833); Georges-Antoine Belcourt (1831-1847); Charles Édouard Poiré (1832-1839); Jean-Baptist Thibault (1833-1872); Modest Demers (1837-1838); Joseph-Arsène Mayrand (1838-1845); Joseph Darveau (1841-1844); Louis Laflèche (1844-1856); and Joseph Bourassa (1844-1856). Archives of the Sœurs Grises de Saint-Boniface. (ASGSB), *Chroniques des Sœurs de la Charité de l'Hôpital de Saint-Boniface, Manitoba (Chroniques)*, vol.1 (1843-1857), 1844: 88.

Nolin's relationship with Belcourt also set the stage for his subsequent relationship with Catherine Mulaire. Belcourt's positive working relationship with Nolin may help to explain why he chose to train Mulaire to join his religious community. Belcourt's and Mulaire's relationship, however, ended in controversy and led to the demise of the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi. The events surrounding this controversy will be considered in further detail in the fourth chapter of this thesis, but it will be important to note here that Belcourt's experience with Nolin did not guarantee an equally successful one with Mulaire.

The Red River Region and the Establishment of the Catholic Clergy

The events surrounding the life of Catherine Mulaire largely took place outside of Saint-Boniface. However, a consideration of the beginnings of this mission is essential because Saint-Boniface was to become the center from which Catholic missionary activity made itself felt in the Red River region during the nineteenth century. This period witnessed a great expansion of Catholic institutions in Saint-Boniface itself, but also in the surrounding regions. Despite this growth outside of Saint-Boniface, its centrality would remain paramount throughout this period.

While Rupert's Land was under the jurisdiction of the Hudson's Bay Company, the Catholic missionaries of the Northwest (Jésuites) came from France and New France. In 1763, New France was ceded to Great Britain, and Catholic missionary activity and instruction in the Northwest ended when much of the French Catholic clergy returned to France. The founding of the Red River Colony in 1812, sparked new interest in bringing

missionaries to the colony for the purposes of maintaining order and to provide instruction to the Catholic population.⁶

In 1808, Thomas Douglas, the fifth Earl of Selkirk began to develop a plan for the creation of a colony in the Red River region.⁷ The land in question was part of a large region under the jurisdiction of an English fur-trading company, the Hudson's Bay Company that had received a its royal charter in 1670. To gain influence, he began to buy the depreciating shares of this fur trading company. The shares of the company had begun to decline as a consequence of the Napoleonic Wars and the subsequent diminishing London fur market.⁸ Like many of his other colonies, Lord Selkirk was concerned in creating a home for dispossessed Scottish and Irish farmers. In buying shares, Lord Selkirk also envisioned a plan to create a solid economic base for the company by settling an agricultural settlement. This plan was intended to diminish the expensive costs of shipping food supplies to the company. Lord Selkirk also suggested that this colony would provide a home for retired servants of the company, particularly those with families of the region. A further incentive may have been to check their rival fur trade company, the North West Company.⁹ The North West Company was created in

⁶ See: Keith Wilson. The Development of Education in Manitoba. Thesis [Ph.D.], Michigan: Michigan State University, 1967.

⁷ Thomas Douglas (b. 1771, Scotland – d. 8 April 1820, France) For more information see John Morgan Gray. "Douglas, Thomas, baron Daer et Short-Cleuch, 5^e compte de Selkirk," DBC vol.5 (1801-1820): 289-295.

⁸ See: Harold A. Innis. The fur trade in Canada: an introduction to Canadian economic history. Rev. Ed. [Toronto]: University of Toronto Press, 1970; Douglas Mackay. The honourable company: A history of the Hudson's Bay Company. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, [1936]; Edwin Ernest Rich. The Fur Trade and the Northwest to 1857. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967; and Sylvia Van Kirk. Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society. Winnipeg: Watson-Dwyer, 1986.

⁹ Marjorie Wilkins Campbell. The Nor'Westers: The fight for the Trade. Toronto: Macmillan Press, 1954; and Gordon-Charles Davidson. The North West Company. New York: Russell and Russell, [1967].

1783-1784 by Simon McTavish,¹⁰ Benjamin Frobisher,¹¹ and his brother Joseph Frobisher.¹²

In June of 1811, the agreement between Lord Selkirk and the Hudson's Bay Company gave the former 185 000 square kilometers of land for 10 shillings sterling. This territory became known as the District of Assiniboia and his settlement was referred to as the Selkirk Settlement.¹³ The first settlers, under the new Governor of the colony, Miles Macdonell, arrived on 30 August 1812.¹⁴ The colony had a difficult beginning, and a lack of supplies forced most of the new arrivals to spend the 1812-1813 winter south of the Selkirk Colony in Pembina near the buffalo herds.¹⁵ The region had traditionally been a hunting and trapping ground for peoples of Native descent. The arrival of these new settlers caused uneasiness as they were seen as a new source of competition for buffalo. The North West Company also perceived the new colony as a threat. Following Macdonell's proclamation in 1814, which at first limited the exportation of pemmican through the colony, and later restricted the hunt itself, the North West Company resolved to ruin the Selkirk Settlement. The company convinced its employees of mixed descent to assist them in isolating the colonists and on 27 June 1815, the colonists left the colony.¹⁶

¹⁰ Simon McTavish (b. around 1750, Strath Errick, Scotland – d. 6 July 1804, Montreal) See: Fernand Ouellet, "McTavish, Simon," DBC, vol.5 (1801-1820): 617-625.

¹¹ Benjamin Frobisher (b. around 1742, Halifax, England – d. 14 April 1787, Montreal) See: Fernand Ouellet, "Frobisher, Benjamin," DBC, vol.4 (1771-1800): 298-30.

¹² Joseph Frobisher (b. 15 April 1740, Halifax, England – d. 12 September 1810, Montreal) See: Fernand Ouellet, "Frobisher, Joseph," DBC, vol.5 (1801-1820): 363-366.

¹³ Luc Dauphinais. Histoire de Saint-Boniface. Tome 1: À l'ombre des cathédrales. Des origines de la colonie jusqu'en 1870. Saint-Boniface: Les Éditions du Blé, 1991: 34.

¹⁴ Miles Macdonell (b. around 1767, Inverness-shire, Scotland – d. 28 June 1828, Pointe-Fortune, Upper Canada) See Herbert Mays, DBC, vol.6 (1821-1835): 484-489.

¹⁵ Pembina is located at the juncture of the Red and Pembina rivers in what is now North Dakota.

¹⁶ For a detailed analysis see: Dauphinais, 1991: 37-44.

The Selkirk Settlement was re-established with the arrival of new colonists under the direction of the new Governor Robert Semple in November of 1815.¹⁷ However, conflicts between the two fur-trading companies persisted and culminated in the conflict known as the Battle of Seven Oaks or “La Bataille de la Grenouillère” on 19 June 1816.¹⁸ The colony would establish itself permanently with the arrival of a force of retired soldiers, the Meuron Regiment on 10 January 1817.¹⁹

In addition to sending a military regiment to maintain law and order, Lord Selkirk believed that a Catholic priest would further promote stability to the French-Canadian and French-speaking Native population. Moreover, many of the Meuron regiment were also Catholic and requested the services of a Catholic priest in the colony. Rather than sending a priest from Ireland or Scotland, Lord Selkirk believed that French Canadians would better respond to the needs of the Catholic population that was predominantly of mixed descent.²⁰ A request for volunteers was sent to Mgr. Joseph-Octave Plessis²¹ of Quebec in 1815, and as a result, Fathers Joseph-Norbert Provencher and Sévère-Joseph-Nicolas Dumoulin, along with catechist Guillaume-Etienne Edge, arrived in the colony on 16 July 1818.²² The future site of Catholic institutions in the parish of Saint-Boniface, across the river from the Selkirk Settlement, was to begin.

¹⁷ Robert Semple (b. 26 February 1777, Boston – d. 19 June 1816, Red River Colony.) He was Governor of the territories of the Hudson’s Bay Company. He was one of twenty three casualties during the Seven Oaks Battle on 19 June 1816. Hartwell Bowsfield. “Semple, Robert,” DBC, vol.5 (1801-1820): 825-826.

¹⁸ See Dauphinais, 1991: 45-46.

¹⁹ See: Dauphinais, 1991: 51-54.

²⁰ See: Dauphinais, 1991: 33-54.

²¹ Mgr. Joseph-Octave Plessis (b. 3 March 1763, Quebec – d. 4 December 1825, Quebec), He was ordained priest on 21 January 1801 and took possession of the Episcopal See of Quebec in 1806. See: James H. Lambert, “Plessis, Joseph-Octave,” DBC, vol.6, (1821-1835): 646-661.

²² Provencher appeared quite reticent in accepting his new mission. He wrote to Mgr. Plessis on 15 March 1818 stating that: “En réfléchissant sur la grandeur de l’ouvrage proposé dans cette pénible mission, il m’a semblé que je n’étais pas l’homme qu’il fallait.” Société historique de Saint-Boniface. “Lettres de Monseigneur Joseph-Norbert Provencher, premier évêque de Saint-Boniface,” Bulletin de la Société historique de Saint-Boniface, vol.3, (1913), Provencher to Plessis, 15 March 1818: 5, (henceforth: Lettres).

The First Bishop of Saint-Boniface: Mgr. Joseph-Norbert Provencher

Joseph-Norbert Provencher was born on 12 February 1787 in Nicolet, Lower Canada. Son of Jean-Baptiste Provencher and Élisabeth Proulx, he came from a relatively poor and large farming family. He began to attend school at the age of fourteen, when the first free public school in Nicolet was opened in 1801. Assisted by an affluent uncle, he later attended a number of educational institutions in Quebec, and on 21 December 1811, he was ordained as a secular priest. Following his ordination, and prior to his posting in Saint-Boniface, he was an assistant to the parish priests of the cathedral in Quebec city in 1811, of Vaudreuil in 1812, and of Deschambault in 1813. In 1814, he was named the parish priest of Pointe-Claire and of Kamouraska in 1816. In 1818 he came to Saint-Boniface, and in 1820 upon his return to Lower Canada to update Plessis on the new mission, he was surprised to learn that he would be promoted to the rank of Bishop of Juliopolis and auxiliary to the Archbishop of Quebec. Provencher remained head of the Catholic Church in Western Canada until his death on 7 June 1853.²³

Provencher had been given a specific mandate when he was chosen to head the Catholic mission in the Northwest. Once there, he was to learn the Cree and Ojibwa languages, prepare grammars and dictionaries in those languages, and “regularize” the marriages of the region. Most importantly, he was to establish Catholic schools.

²³ For further information about Mgr. Provencher see Donatien Frémont. Mgr Provencher et son temps. Winnipeg: La Liberté, 1935; Lucien Lemieux, “Provencher, Joseph-Norbert,” DBC, vol.8, (1851-1861): 797-802; and Raymond Louis Thuot. Provencher: Pioneer Bishop. Thesis [M.A.], Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1970.

Education in the Red River Region

This section will examine how Provencher attempted to fulfill his obligation to set up schools. In short, he envisioned a “practical” education for the female population that was based on the French-Canadian and Catholic system. This attitude may be seen in the letter that he wrote to the Sœurs Grises of Montreal in 1843, when he finally found a religious community willing to venture to the West:

Depuis plusieurs années, je cherche à me procurer des religieuses pour donner aux personnes du sexe, une éducation solide sur la religion et les autres branches, qui tendent à former de bonnes mères de famille, à encourager l'industrie, à enseigner la tenue du ménage, la fabrication d'étoffe, de toilette, etc.²⁴

Consequently, the policies and the structure that he put in place and his vision to train the female population to become “good” Catholic wives and mothers, set a pattern for many of the relationships between the women in the colony and the male Catholic clergy.

There is only conjecture as to the exact date of the opening of the first formal Catholic school in Saint-Boniface. Several authors, such as Donatien Frémont, Georges Dugas, and Paul Régner, maintain that a first school or “collège” was opened soon after the arrival of the missionaries to the colony.²⁵ Luc Dauphinais, however, points out that there is no indication of a school in the clergy's correspondence of 1818. Rather, there was only the mention of preparing the population for baptism through catechism and

²⁴ ASGSB, *Chroniques*, vol. 1 (1843-1857), 1843: 6.

²⁵ Georges Dugas. *Monseigneur Provencher et les missions de la Rivière-Rouge*. Montreal: Beauchemin, 1906: 88 and 131; Frémont, 1935: 62; and Paul Régner. *A History of St. Boniface College*. Thesis [M.Ed.], Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1964: 10-14.

general religious instruction.²⁶ A letter written by Plessis to Provencher in 1819 corroborates Dauphinais' argument. Plessis wrote of his own misinterpretation of the status of education in the colony. He thought that Guillaume Edge had begun a school in Saint-Boniface, and when he realized his mistake, he warned Provencher that the establishment of a school was a priority and that catechism could be done at any time:

Je croyais apprendre par vos premières lettres que Monsieur Edge avait rassemblé les enfants de la colonie et ouvert son école. Cet objet est d'une nécessité plus grande pour la mission que l'enseignement du catéchisme auquel il peut vaquer dans ses intervalles, et vous en tout temps.²⁷

Rather, the mission in Pembina set up a school before Saint-Boniface. The decision to begin a school, sometime in 1818, in Pembina first, was largely due to environmental factors.²⁸ After the Selkirk Settlement's precarious beginnings, many in the community spent much, if not the majority of their time, in Pembina near the buffalo herds.²⁹

Plessis, while recognizing the advantages of the mission in Pembina, strongly recommended that the missionaries should concentrate their efforts at the Selkirk Settlement. His reasons for promoting the latter mission were based on the deal made with Lord Selkirk and the Hudson's Bay Company. His decision was also influenced by the land grants that the Church had received in the colony, and by suspicions that situated Pembina in American territory and out of the Quebec Catholic jurisdiction. Consequently, the Pembina mission was abandoned in 1823.³⁰

²⁶ Dauphinais, 1991: 66.

²⁷ Grace Lee Nute. Documents Relating to the Northwest Missions, 1815-1827. Saint-Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1942, Plessis to Provencher, 6 January 1819: 180.

²⁸ Nute, 1942, Dumoulin to Plessis, 6 January 1821: 284-285; and Dumoulin to Eden Colvile, 29 March 1821: 290. Eden Colvile (b. 12 February 1819, Langely, England – d. 2 April 1893, Devon, England). Colvile was an administrator of the Hudson's Bay Company. See: J.E. Rea, "Colvile, Eden," DBC, vol.11 (1891-1900): 223-225.

²⁹ Lettres, Provencher to Plessis, 30 August 1818: 30-31.

³⁰ For more information on the abandonment of the mission in Pembina, see Dauphinais, 1991: 77-80.

In the beginning there were indications that Provencher was not sufficiently fulfilling his obligations, but in all fairness he was faced with an unenviable task. Following his return from Lower Canada to Saint-Boniface in 1822, he did attempt to provide formal religious training for two boys of the colony that he felt were promising candidates for the priesthood. He also brought catechist Jean Harper³¹ from Lower Canada to open a primary school for boys.³² Despite his efforts, a school would not necessarily guarantee attendance. Provencher was faced with the further challenge of teaching his students without the classical books he had been waiting for. In other words, Provencher had none of the tools that he thought were necessary to provide an adequate Catholic education.³³ A final reason for his initial difficulty in encouraging school attendance, may have been an expression of “agency” on the part of the métis population.³⁴

If the boys’ school came from slow beginnings, the school for girls would be even slower. It was not until 1824 that Provencher made the first attempt to acquire the teaching services of Angélique Nolin. However, it would take another five years before Angélique and her sister Marguerite Nolin would begin teaching the female population of

³¹ Jean Harper (b. 6 September 1801, Lower Canada – d. 1869, Lower Canada. Harper would become the first priest to be ordained in Saint-Boniface. He received his ordination on 1 November 1824. He left the colony in 1831. Joseph-Norbert Provencher, *LCSB*, Part III, 26,8 (1927): 177-182: 181.

³² Archives of the Société historique de Saint-Boniface (ASHSB), 1.759/18, Provencher to Lartigue, 18 July 1823. Jean Jacques Lartigue (b. 20 June 1777, Montreal – d. 19 April 1840, Montreal) Lartigue was the first Canadian Sulpicien. He received his ordination on 21 September 1800 at Saint-Denis sur le Richelieu and he was consecrated Bishop on 21 January 1821 in Montreal. Gilles Chaussé and Lucien Lemieux, “Lartigue, Jean-Jacques,” *DBC*, vol.7 (1836-1850): 525-531.

³³ Lettres, Provencher to Plessis, 16 July 1823: 87-91.

³⁴ The term “agency,” may be defined in a variety of ways. In this thesis, agency is defined as a choice made by an individual or group. It may be expressed through passive or active resistance or in disinterest. It should also be noted that agency does not always equate with success.

the colony.³⁵ While Provencher was disappointed by his initial failure to acquire her services as well as the subsequent delay, he did not view the development of female education as important as the promotion of the religious vocation among the young men in the colony. For instance, the loss of his two best students of mixed descent, Antoine Sénécal and Victor Chénier caused him great concern.³⁶ As Luc Dauphinais suggests:

La déception qu'éprouve Mgr. Provencher face à l'obstination du vieux Nolin, qui tient à garder sa fille auprès de lui, est toutefois beaucoup moins amère que celle qu'il éprouve en voyant s'évanouir tous les espoirs qu'il avait fondés sur ses deux latinistes les plus avancés.³⁷

Even though he prioritized male education, Provencher still attempted to introduce domestic training to the female population.

The art of spinning and weaving were two such activities that Provencher had in mind. The idea for beginning this form of education for the female population may be seen as early as 1826. In a letter to Plessis, Provencher complained of what he saw as the métis reliance on the prairie hunt and the Hudson's Bay Company store for their provisions:

Tous ces gens ici comptent trop sur la prairie pour vivre, ce qui les empêche de semer autant qu'ils devraient, et sur le magasin pour s'habiller ce qui fait que les femmes qui ne savent rien faire, en fait d'étoffe et autres choses qui servent à habiller, se mettant peu en peine de l'apprendre. J'ai commencé cet hiver à faire montrer par la femme de notre fermier, qui est

³⁵ Lettres, Provencher to Plessis, 13 June 1824: 96; Provencher to Panet, 18 June 1828: 123; and Provencher to Panet, 6 June 1829: 127; ASHSB, 1.759/51-53, Provencher to Lartigue, 18 June 1828; and P4375, Provencher to Dumoulin, 28 June 1829.

³⁶ Antoine Sénécal left the mission in 1825. Victor Chénier decided that he too did not possess the religious vocation. Mgr. Provencher wanted him to finish his schooling and take over the boys' school in Saint-Boniface, but he also returned to his family in 1825. Lettres, Provencher to Plessis, 8 August 1825: 106.

³⁷ Dauphinais, 1991: 86; and Lettres, Provencher to Plessis, 12 June 1825: 102. Like the unsuccessful training of Sénécal and Chénier, Provencher continually lost other potential subjects like François Bruneau. François Bruneau, (b. May 1810, Lac Vert, Saskatchewan – d. June 27, 1856 of typhoid in Saint-Boniface) was of Métis descent and when he decided that he did not possess the religious vocation, Provencher had him teach the boys' school for a couple of years. In 1831, he married Marguerite Harrison. He later became judge and councilor for the Assiniboia government. See: Louis Mailhot, "François Bruneau," LCSB, 45,3 (1946): 69-72.

canadienne, aux filles de l'école à travailler le lin et la laine afin d'en donner l'idée et l'envie aux autres.³⁸

With the farmer's wife's departure in 1828, Provencher would eventually turn his attention, as we shall see, towards Angélique and Marguerite Nolin.

The school for girls in Saint-Boniface was closed when the Nolin sisters went to assist Belcourt in his new mission for the Ojibwa at Baie-Saint-Paul (Prairie à Fournier) on the Assiniboine River in 1834. Nonetheless, Provencher persevered with the idea of providing a "practical" education. With the financial assistance of the Hudson's Bay Company, two French-Canadian women were hired to teach the female population of the colony to weave. As a result, Ursule Grenier and Marguerite Lapalice opened a technical school in 1838 for this purpose.³⁹ However, in June 1841, the Hudson's Bay Company decided that it would no longer pay the wages of the two weavers. Provencher considered paying their wages, but quickly realized that the expense was beyond his means.⁴⁰ Once again, Provencher was given the task to reconsider the direction and structure of female education in the colony.

As head of the Catholic Church in the Northwest, Provencher exerted a great deal of influence and power over the religious and educational needs of the populace. Consequently, his attitude towards lay teachers in general would also influence the

³⁸ Lettres, Provencher to Plessis, 2 February 1826: 111.

³⁹ See ASHSB, P0406, Blanchet to Signay, 22 June 1838; ASHSB, P0625, Provencher to Blanchet, 28 June 1841; Frémont, 1935: 184; Diane Payment. "Un aperçu des relations entre les missionnaires catholiques et les Métisses," *Études Oblates de l'Ouest*, 3 (1995): 139-158: 144; and Lettres, Provencher to Signay, 6 August 1838: 174. Fathers François-Norbert Blanchet and Modeste Demers were the missionaries picked by Mgr. Provencher to head out to the far North-West. François-Norbert Blanchet (b. 3 September 1795, Saint-Pierre, Lower Canada – d. 18 June 1883, Oregon) was to become the first Bishop of Oregon City. See: Adrien-Gabriel Morice. *Dictionnaire historique des Canadiens et des Métis français de l'Ouest*. Quebec : Laflamme et Proulx, 1908: 28-31. Modeste Demers (b. 11 October 1809, Saint-Nicolas-de-Lévis, Lower Canada – d. 28 July 1871, Victoria, British Columbia). See Jean Usher, "Demers, Modeste," DBC, vol.10, (1871-1880): 240-242. Joseph Signay (b. 8 November 1778, Quebec – d. 3 October 1850, Quebec) Signay took over the See of Quebec in 1832, and officially on 16 February 1833. See: Sonia Chassé, "Signay, Joseph," DBC, vol.7 (1836-1850): 864-867.

structure of education in the colony. Dauphinois claims that Provencher believed that his main obstacles to providing an education for the youth of the colony was his lack of financial resources and his difficulty in finding a teacher that he liked.⁴¹ His explanation for his dissatisfaction with lay schools was that he felt their schools were badly maintained.⁴²

Many of the first lay teachers were of mixed descent. This is not surprising since the métis formed the majority of the French-speaking population of the colony. Provencher's attitude towards lay education is better understood when his opinion towards those of Native ancestry is considered. As Raymond Thuot suggests: "It is perhaps ironic that Bishop Provencher, the man who had the greatest influence over the Métis, should also have been the one who seems to have understood them the least."⁴³ In all fairness, even though Provencher did not appreciate the lay teachers at his disposal, he did, to a limited extent, see the potential of the métis children:

Tous ces enfants qu'on a appelés depuis quelques années Bois-Brûlés n'ont pas plus d'idée de Dieu et de la religion que les autres sauvages. Pourtant ces enfants ont beaucoup d'intelligence, ils apprennent avec grande facilité les prières et le catéchisme que nous leur montrons ainsi que la lecture.⁴⁴

Bad crops, flooding, harsh winters, poor hunting seasons, not to mention the fact that this was also a far outpost, all contributed to the tentative establishment of education in the Northwest. But Provencher's relations with other clergy members and how he reacted to

⁴⁰ ASHSB, P0625, Provencher to Blanchet, June 28, 1841.

⁴¹ Dauphinois, 1991: 106; and Lettres, Provencher to Panet, 23 July 1831: 133. Bernard-Claude Panet (b. 9 January 1753, Quebec – d. 14 February 1833, Hôtel-Dieu, Quebec) He took over the See of Quebec in 1825. See: Nive Voisine, "Panet, Bernard-Claude," DBC, vol.6 (1821-1835): 629-631.

⁴² ASHSB, P0250, Provencher to Rosati, August 15, 1831.

⁴³ Thuot, 1970: 48.

⁴⁴ Lettres, Provencher to Plessis, 13 September 1818: 17.

their attitudes, opinions, and actions, also largely influenced how this education developed and was shaped throughout this period.

The Case of Georges-Antoine Belcourt

Belcourt possessed a different view, from Provencher, of how to introduce French-Canadian and Catholic instruction to the Native population. Georges-Antoine Belcourt was born on 22 April 1803 in Baie-du-Fèvre, Lower Canada. After completing his studies at the college in Nicolet, he received his ordination on 10 March 1827. Following his ordination, he spent two years at the vicariate in Trois-Rivières and two years as the parish priest of Saint-François-du-Lac and then at Sainte-Martine in Lower Canada. Prior to his departure for Saint-Boniface, Belcourt spent several months learning the Algonquin language at Lac-des-Deux-Montagnes.

Upon arrival in the Red River Colony on 19 June 1831, Belcourt was given the mandate by Provencher to learn the Ojibwa (Saulteaux) language and to instruct them in the Catholic religion. In 1834, he founded the mission of Baie-Saint-Paul on the Assiniboine River. Although popular with many in the métis community, he did not get along well with the officials of the Hudson's Bay Company, or with the Catholic clergy (particularly Provencher) in the colony. When he was recalled back east in 1848, he offered his services to the Bishop of Dubuque and so was sent to re-establish the mission of Pembina in the American territory. In 1853, he took up residence at Saint-Joseph (Walhalla, North Dakota) where he remained until 1859. Recalled again, he was then sent to Rustico, Prince-Edward-Island, where he created a farmers' bank that would prove to

be the precursor of Alphonse Desjardin's caisses populaires. In 1869, he was sent to Shediac, New Brunswick where he remained for the final years of his career.⁴⁵

Initially, Provencher, seeing the young priest's potential, appeared quite anxious to procure the services of Belcourt. Donatien Frémont wrote that:

depuis 1827 il avait les yeux sur un jeune prêtre du Séminaire de Nicolet, l'abbé Georges-Antoine Belcourt, ordonné cette année-là et qui s'était offert lui-même pour la mission de la Rivière Rouge. Plein de talent et d'énergie, sachant assez bien l'anglais, il avait semblent-il, toutes les qualités voulus.⁴⁶

Moreover, Provencher wrote favorably of Belcourt's early progress in learning the Ojibwa language: "M. Belcourt paraît faire de jour en jour des progrès dans la langue sauvage."⁴⁷ Unfortunately, this favour did not last and the quality of the relationship changed for the worse.

In 1834, it was decided that Belcourt was well enough versed in the Ojibwa language to start a mission along the Assiniboine River, thirty miles from Saint-Boniface. The mission of Baie-Saint-Paul, however, was quickly moved downstream to a site nine miles from Saint-François-Xavier.⁴⁸ Provencher's desire for immediate conversions and a noticeable change in the lifestyle of the Ojibwa living in the vicinity was not to become a reality, and as a result, he soon came to find fault in Belcourt. Since Provencher perceived the progress as slow, he quickly blamed the methods of Belcourt. Frémont describes the situation when he suggests that: "Mgr Provencher attribuait une bonne part du maigre succès de son missionnaire à une cause fondamentale: il attachait trop

⁴⁵ For further information about Belcourt, see: Alfred Fortier. "Georges-Antoine Belcourt et la communauté des religieuses de la Propagation de la Foi," Bulletin de la Société historique de Saint-Boniface, 1 (1995): 3-23 or James Michael Reardon, P.A. George Anthony Belcourt: Pioneer Catholic Missionary of the Northwest, 1803-1875. His Life and Times. St. Paul, Minnesota: North Central Publishing Company, 1955.

⁴⁶ Frémont, 1935: 133.

⁴⁷ Lettres, Provencher to Panet, 26 September 1831: 134.

⁴⁸ Frémont, 1935: 141-143.

d'importance aux améliorations matérielles dont il attendait la transformation spirituelle."⁴⁹

The relationship, however, was not entirely negative. Provencher admitted that while he did not share Belcourt's vision, he did concede that Belcourt was respected by many in the métis community and that his service would be missed if he left. The ambivalent nature of their relationship may be found in their correspondence to other clergy members in Lower Canada, as shown by a letter written by Provencher to Mgr. Signay in 1834:

Je ne vois pas toujours comme lui sur cette partie de la besogne mais il n'est pas aisé de le changer de sentiment ni même de lui dire qu'il faudrait faire autrement. Il a bien lui aussi la petite portion de bonne opinion de lui-même, chose gênante pour les autres. On a trop vanté et plaint ce jeune homme. Il est assurément plein de talents mais d'une sensibilité épouvantable [...] En passant il est estimé de tout le monde Ceux qui vivent avec lui n'ont pas toujours des douceurs; malgré cela nous nous arrangeons toujours, je le laisse faire [...] Je pense que son départ, si vous l'accordez sera très nuisible à sa mission naissante.⁵⁰

In short, they were two very different people, and as a result, their personalities inevitably clashed in several instances.

Belcourt's relationships with the Native population was different from Provencher's relationship in a number of ways. Mgr. Provencher, as head of the Catholic Church in the Northwest, did not have the advantage of being in constant and in direct contact with these groups on a daily basis. Moreover, Provencher was also forced to deal with the politics of pleasing the officials of the Hudson's Bay Company. Belcourt, however, often spoke on behalf of the métis population, particularly when they had difficulties with the Hudson's Bay Company. For instance, in 1848, he found himself in

⁴⁹ Frémont, 1935: 143.

⁵⁰ Lettres, Provencher to Signay, 16 July 1834: 138-139.

a skirmish with the officials of the Hudson's Bay Company. Belcourt came into conflict with the Hudson's Bay Company over their monopoly of the fur trade and their arbitrary enforcement of this monopoly.⁵¹ In this instance, Belcourt assisted the métis in writing a petition to the officials in London. Governor Simpson wrote to the Archbishop of Quebec demanding that Belcourt be recalled or the Hudson's Bay Company would no longer cooperate with the Catholic presence in the colony.⁵² Consequently, Belcourt offered his services to Bishop Loras of Dubuque and established himself at Pembina where the story of Catherine's educational training began. Reardon describes the difference between most of the Catholic clergy and Belcourt as follows:

While the Church, as such, took no cognizance of the obnoxious practices, many of the clergy sympathized the oppressed and among them, Father Belcourt, the idol of the French settlers in the Red River Valley.⁵³

The opposing views of Provencher and Belcourt on how to introduce religious ideals and the European lifestyle to the métis and Ojibwa influenced the structure of education. While Provencher felt that the proper method of conversion would be to teach Catholic doctrine first and then build more formalized institutions, Belcourt felt that first he should provide material comfort and technical training, such as agricultural methods to the Ojibwa, before making them Christians. Provencher arguably best delineated their differences in a letter to his superior Signay on 16 July 1834, stating that: "J'ai toujours cru qu'il ne fallait pas faire des missions à la protestante c'est-à-dire acheter les sauvages

⁵¹ For more information on this topic, there are a variety of records located at the Hudson's Bay Archives and in the book published by James Michael Reardon. George Anthony Belcourt: Pioneer Catholic Missionary of the Northwest, 1803-1875. His Life and Times. Saint-Paul, Minnesota: North Central Publishing Company, 1955.

⁵² George Simpson (b. 1786 or 1787, Lochbroom, Scotland –d. 7 September 1860, Lachine, Lower Canada) See: John S. Galbraith, "Simpson, George," DBC, vol.8 (1851-1860): 902-909.

⁵³ Reardon, 1955: 80.

mais les gagner par la persuasion.”⁵⁴ Provencher was unhappy with Belcourt’s practice of providing for the material welfare of the Ojibwa and métis before teaching the Catholic doctrine. He compared this method of “conversion” that of the Protestant missionaries. Despite their opposing views, Provencher did recognize the positive contribution to the colony:

M. Belcourt croit que j’aimerai mieux qu’il restât en Canada. Il se trompe: je crois au contraire qu’il aurait dû ne pas abandonner son poste dans la détresse où j’étais pour le remplacer [...] Je me sens capable de vivre encore avec lui; Au reste nous ne sommes jamais en querelle, mais il souffre par temps et moi aussi. Je ne le demande pas pour moi mais pour le bien des âmes qui l’appelle.⁵⁵

Their differences also appear in the quality of their relationships with the métis population. Belcourt’s linguistic ability and the way the two priests utilized the skills of Angélique Nolin are two such examples. While Provencher expected her to teach “practical” skills and religious instruction, Belcourt also gave Nolin more responsibilities in determining the curriculum taught in the mission at Baie-Saint-Paul.

The Teaching Experience of Angélique Nolin

The life of Angélique Nolin is not easy to trace. From what is known, Nolin, the daughter of a mother of mixed descent named Marie-Angélique Couvret and a French Canadian merchant, fur trader, and militia officer named Jean-Baptist Nolin, was born sometime around 1787.⁵⁶ The Nolin family, who settled in Sault-Sainte-Marie, was no ordinary métis family. By 1780, after a humble beginning, Nolin’s father was an ever-

⁵⁴ Lettres, Provencher to Signay, 16 July 1834: 138.

⁵⁵ Lettres, Provencher to Signay, 13 August 1838: 177.

⁵⁶ Jean-Baptist Nolin (b. around 1742, New France - d. August 1828, Saint-Boniface) For further information see: Donald Chaput. “Nolin, Jean-Baptist” DBC, vol.6, (1821-1835): 604-605.

prospering merchant and had come to hold a privileged position in Sault-Sainte-Marie. Lord Selkirk was quick to recognize both the affluence of the family and its potential to serve as a model for other residents in the Red River region, and whenever the situation arose, he encouraged the family to settle in his new colony.⁵⁷ His endeavors were not a waste of time, as the family decided to move to the Red River region in 1818, and they settled in Pembina in 1819. Assisted by her sister Marguerite, Angélique Nolin opened a school for girls in Saint-Boniface in 1829 and taught there until 1834. For reasons that remain unclear, they left Saint-Boniface in 1834, to follow Belcourt to his new mission, Baie-Saint-Paul, where they remained until 1841. After the arrival of the Sœurs Grises in 1844, the need for the teaching skills from these two métis women diminished and by 1850, the two turned to farming. Marguerite Nolin died in September, 1868 and her sister Angélique followed in March, 1869.⁵⁸

Since his arrival in the Red River region, Provencher had been in search of someone to start a school for girls. His keen interest in Nolin were largely influenced by both the status of her family and her education. Provencher considered her upbringing and training to be close to his conception of the form of education that he wished to be taught in the colony. He believed that her upbringing in an affluent family and her education with the Sœurs de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame in Montreal would make her an exemplary model for the others in the community to emulate.

⁵⁷ For more information see the Selkirk papers that are located at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.

⁵⁸ Angélique Nolin opened the school in Saint-Boniface in 1829 with her sister Marguerite Nolin who, according to Father Pierre Picton, was born around 1770. However, in this discussion, Nolin will be considered in greater detail because she was the primary teacher and more information on this already sketchy story can be found about her life. For further information about the Nolin sisters, see Donald Chaput. "The 'Misses Nolin' of Red River." *The Beaver*, 306, 3 (1975): 14-17; or the family file: SHSB, Fonds SHSB, 1/700, Personnages – Nolin, famille.

Provencher's endeavor to establish a school for girls was not necessarily the "noblest" of causes as his letter to Plessis he suggested in June of 1824 that he would be happy to set up some kind of school before the Protestants of the colony: "Je ne serai pas fâcher d'avoir une école sur pied avant les protestants qui parlent à en établir une."⁵⁹ Whatever the reason, Provencher approached her father Jean-Baptiste Nolin, for the first time, in June, 1824.⁶⁰

Provencher was initially unsuccessful in his quest. Nolin's father refused to allow his daughter to leave the family home, claiming that he needed her services, even though he had four other daughters. Provencher believed that the rejection stemmed from her sisters because they realized that their father was nearing the end of his life and that they would have to live off their own industry. Moreover, he believed that they did not want Nolin to leave because she was the most industrious of the family.⁶¹ Later, Provencher indicated another of Jean-Baptist Nolin's reasons for not allowing his daughter to leave was based on his fear that Nolin would become his servant:

J'ai fait cet automne le voyage de Pembina dans l'espérance de mieux réussir à faire consentir le vieux Nolin à laisser partir sa fille; mais j'ai perdu mes peines [...] Il a toutes sortes de raisonnettes, mais surtout il ne veut pas sa fille soit servante.⁶²

While Provencher denied his intention to make her a servant, Nolin's father may not have been unwise in his reticence. Provencher believed that he could mould this woman to suit his personal needs. An indication of this desire can be seen in his

⁵⁹ Lettres, Provencher to Plessis, 13 June 1824: 96.

⁶⁰ "Depuis longtemps il a les yeux de confié l'éducation des filles à Angélique Nolin, de Pembina, fille d'une Indienne et d'un officier de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest qui a reçu une excellente formation chez les Sœurs de la Congrégation de Montréal." Frémont, 1935: 119. It should also be noted that Nolin was about thirty-seven years old by this date.

⁶¹ Lettres, Provencher to Plessis, 15 July 1824: 98.

⁶² Lettres, Provencher to Plessis, 2 February 1826: 111.

correspondence. For instance, in a letter addressed to Plessis in 1824, he spoke of his desire to transform Nolin into a kind of “fille donnée.”⁶³ He wrote: “Si je puis détacher une demoiselle Nolin (Angélique), je vais la métamorphoser en religieuse de la Rivière Rouge et lui confier l’éducation des filles.”⁶⁴ Jean-Baptist Nolin refused to give up his daughter until the very end. He died in August, 1826 and the Nolin sisters would not begin their classes until 1829.⁶⁵

Initially, Provencher was optimistic about the potential of his new teachers. In a letter to Mgr. Panet, he explained that his new teachers were beginning to learn how to make wool and linen cloth and would soon transfer these newly acquired skills to their students.⁶⁶ In another letter the following June, Provencher appeared to have been satisfied with the students’ progress: “J’ai de plus une école de filles tenu par les demoiselles Nolin [...] Les petites filles ont fait assez de progrès.”⁶⁷ However, he soon found fault in their performance, particularly over their inability or unwillingness to learn “practical” skills such as spinning.

In 1834 the Nolin sisters left Saint-Boniface and went to assist Belcourt in his new mission for the Ojibwa at Baie-Saint-Paul (Prairie à Fournier) on the Assiniboine River. With Angélique’s and Marguerite Nolin’s departure from Saint-Boniface, the school for girls was closed. The reason for their departure is unclear, but, as we have seen, Provencher’s attitude towards lay teachers may be one explanation. Their departure may

⁶³ Lettres, Provencher to Plessis, 13 June 1824: 96. The term “fille donnée” comes from the practice in religious community to accept women into the community as “partial” sisters. These women took simple vows but were not full-fledged nuns. Provencher appears to have wanted to give the same sort of status to Angélique Nolin.

⁶⁴ Lettres, Provencher to Plessis, 13 June 1824: 96.

⁶⁵ Lettres, Provencher to Panet, 18 June 1828: 123; and Provencher to Panet, 6 June 1829: 127; ASHSB, 1.759/51-53, Provencher to Lartigue, 18 June 1828; and P4375, Provencher to Dumoulin, 28 June 1829.

⁶⁶ Lettres, Provencher to Panet, 18 June 1828: 124; and Provencher to Signay, 23 July 1841: 197.

⁶⁷ Lettres, Provencher to Panet, 6 June 1829: 127.

be an active form of resistance to the education system that Provencher was trying to put in place in the colony. His policy of solely introducing a French-Canadian and Catholic system of education to the métis community may have sparked a desire to resist these new forms of instruction.

Nolin may have chosen to work with Belcourt because he did not omit all aspects of Native life in his teachings. For instance, Belcourt sought Nolin's skills to assist him in writing a Saulteaux dictionary and grammar.⁶⁸ The Nolin sisters would prove to be an asset to Belcourt. They were literate and educated, and they were fluent in French, English, Ojibwa, and Cree. He hoped that these two Métis teachers would help him bridge the gap between the Catholic and French-Canadian form of education and the cultures of the Native communities, rather than forcing a complete separation as did Provencher. Consequently, it may not be unreasonable to question the level of respect and treatment given to Angélique and Marguerite Nolin by Provencher.

The issue may not have been solely respect, but a reaction by Angélique and Marguerite Nolin to the way Provencher viewed the role of female education and its implementation into a curriculum that emphasized a complete rejection of all aspects of métis culture. Several years later, after the Nolin sisters' departure from Saint-Boniface, Provencher complained, in a letter to Signay, that he could not find a replacement to his liking. He grumbled over the issue that he found it amazing that he could not find a suitable teacher. After all, he did not feel that much more than a Catholic and "practical" education was needed for the female population in the colony:

⁶⁸ Provencher often speaks of Belcourt's dictionary. See for example: *Lettres, Provencher to Signay*, December 17-18, 1834: 143. "M. Belcourt part plein de projets d'impression de grammaires, de cantiques et autre petits livres. Comme personne ne sait lire à sa mission, il faut peu de livres. À quoi servira une grammaire imprimée?"

Pour les filles de nos habitants il ne faudra pas une éducation bien relevée. Le principal sera de leur apprendre à bien vivre et à travailler, afin de faire de bonnes mères de familles, ce qui relèvera le pays avec le temps, il en a grand besoin. Les femmes d'ici ne sont bonnes à rien, faute d'avoir été formées.⁶⁹

His negative attitude towards women further corroborates the idea that perhaps the Nolin sisters chose to leave the school in Saint-Boniface because they saw a chance to move to a mission where they would be appreciated.

A third reason for their departure may have been a sacrifice on the part of Provencher. He seems to have given the impression that the departure of the Nolin sisters were a noble sacrifice to a missionary that was, in his opinion, doomed to fail:

Il a fallu lui (Belcourt) donner les vieilles demoiselles Nolin sur lesquelles il s'est déchargé de son catéchisme et d'une école entreprise contre mon gré, le jugeant incapable de subvenir à tant de besogne.⁷⁰

There is, however, evidence that it may not have been that noble a sacrifice. In his article, Alfred Fortier brings to attention an interesting date. He explains that in 1834, Belcourt had officially requested the services of the Ursulines of Trois-Rivières.⁷¹ This date coincides with the arrival of the Nolin sisters arrival in Belcourt's mission. In sending Angélique and Marguerite Nolin to the mission in Baie-Saint-Paul, Provencher may have been trying to appease Belcourt so he could continue his search for his own religious community without competition. After all, Provencher, as early as 1819, had been interested in procuring the services of a female religious community: "Déjà si nous avions des sœurs pour l'instruction des filles, elles trouveraient de l'occupation."⁷² The

⁶⁹ ASHSB, P0629, Provencher to Signay, 8 August 1841.

⁷⁰ Lettres, Provencher to Signay, 17 November 1836: 155.

⁷¹ Fortier, 1995: 4. See ASHSB, Fonds Lionel Dorger, Recherches historiques – Correspondance Georges-Antoine Belcourt aux Ursulines de Trois-Rivières 1834-1854, 44/132, Belcourt to Sœur St-Michel, supérieure des Ursulines à Trois-Rivières, 18 August 1834.

⁷² Lettres, Provencher to Plessis, 15 January 1819: 35.

departure of Nolin from Belcourt's mission in 1841, also coincides with an intensification of Provencher's search for a female religious congregation.

The historical record also falls silent on the reasons why the Nolin sisters left Belcourt's mission in 1841. There are, however, a number of clues. In 1838, Belcourt made a brief trip to Lower Canada and upon his return, annual trips to other outlying missions, like Lac la Pluie and Wabassimong were added to his itinerary. The continual absences from his mission gradually led to its decline. Their departure may also have been a question of age. By 1841, Angélique Nolin was around fifty four years old and her sister was in her seventies. Given the circumstances, they may have chosen to retire. Another possibility may be that with the decline in the importance of the mission, they were no longer needed to teach. There is also the possibility that they did not get along well with Father Poiré, who was put in charge of the mission after Belcourt's departure.⁷³ A final reason may have been that the quality of their relationship had changed over time.

In the end, Provencher would be the first to receive under his supervision, a religious community, the Sœurs Grises in 1844. This may also explain Belcourt's change of heart as to the kind of religious community he envisaged for his own mission. Perhaps, in assessing the improbability of acquiring the services of an established one from Quebec, he saw the opportunity to do better and form his own. Belcourt rationalized the need for this religious community because he felt that the Cree and Ojibwa women were "extremely shy" with the clergy, but comfortable in the presence of métis women. He

⁷³ Charles-Édouard Poiré (b. 3 August 1810, Saint-Joseph-de-Lévis, Lower Canada – d. 15 December 1896, Sainte-Anne, Quebec) Poiré was a missionary in Assiniboia from 1832-39. He received his ordination in Saint-Boniface in 1833 and became the parish priest in Saint-François-Xavier. In 1838, he took over most of the duties in the mission in Baie-Saint-Paul. See: Morice, 1908: 231.

believed, that if he could train a group of Métis women to live the religious life, that the process of “conversion” would be made with greater ease.⁷⁴

There is evidence, in the correspondence of the time, that Belcourt seemed to be at odds with many of the clergy members, officials, and members of the community. For instance, in this chapter we have seen the difficulties in his relationships with Provencher and the officials of the Hudson’s Bay Company. Belcourt’s relationship with Nolin was one of the few times that the parting did not seem to occur on a sour note. Moreover, in his personal correspondence, he does not appear to criticize her work. A comparison of the differences between Belcourt’s relationship with Nolin and Catherine Mulaire illustrates the significant impact personalities and circumstances play upon a relationship.

The Impact on Catherine Mulaire

The relationship between Belcourt and Mulaire began on a positive note. Unlike Provencher’s initial failure in acquiring the services of Nolin years earlier, Belcourt did not seem to have as many problems. The Lacerte family appears to have chosen to send their daughter to Longueuil to be taught by the Soeurs des Saints Noms de Jésus et de Marie in 1855, in order to receive training for the religious life.⁷⁵ In short, Belcourt chose to invest in Mulaire’s education and training, in hopes that he could form a positive working relationship with her as he had years earlier with Nolin. Provencher had already received the services of a female religious community from Lower Canada, and Belcourt realized that he would have to create his own.

⁷⁴ Reardon, 1955: 149. See ASHSB, Fonds SHSB, Dossiers Belcourt, 1/46, Belcourt to [Bourget], 5 January 1850: 16-17.

⁷⁵ ASHSB, Fonds SHSB, Dossiers Belcourt, 1/45, Belcourt to Poiré, 10 June 1855.

Belcourt's interest in Mulaire, like Provencher's interest in Nolin years earlier, may have been influenced by the family and community connection. While the Lacerte family was not overly prosperous, the family did originate from Baie-du-Fèvre in Lower Canada, the same place that Belcourt's did. Furthermore, the Lacerte family appeared to have good relations with the Catholic clergy of the Northwest in general. For instance, Louis Lacerte II was a well-respected member of the community in Pembina and often served as a guide to members of the Catholic clergy on their trips, like the trip of Fathers Taché and Laflèche: "de 1846-48 il accompagne les Pères Alexandre Taché et Louis-Richer Laflèche dans les courses missionnaires de Saint-Boniface à l'Île-à-la-Crosse."⁷⁶

Seeing that Belcourt seems to have had problematic relationships with those around him, it would not seem unreasonable that his relationship with Mulaire might change over time. As we shall see in the fourth chapter of this thesis when Mulaire's experience with the Propagation de la Foi is further explored, we see that their relationship did sour which contributed to Belcourt's departure from the colony for good in 1859. It would also convince Mulaire not to follow a teaching religious vocation, but instead to become a lay teacher.

Conclusion

The rise and early development of female education in the Red River region is important to the study of Catherine Mulaire's life. The arrival of Provencher in 1818, and his commitment to provide for the women of the colony an educational system that emphasized the training of "good" Catholic wives and mothers, would have had an impact on Mulaire's educational training. The competition and variances in opinions

⁷⁶ Bernard Mulaire. "Notes biographiques" Photocopy obtained from David Dandeneau: 2.

between Provencher and Belcourt would also impact individual experiences in this educational system. At times, these tensions provoked hostilities and sparked a competition between these two clergymen.

Chapter 3

The Sœurs Grises' Influence on Female Education in the Red River Region, 1844-1874

Introduction

Men such as Provencher and Belcourt influenced the lives of métis women and the education of girls in the colony, but they were not the only Catholic clergy to leave their imprint. Another major influence was a female religious order, the Sœurs Grises. There were several female religious communities that could have come to the Red River Colony, like the Ursulines of Trois Rivières or the Sisters of the Amantes de la Croix who were established in Kentucky, but it was the Sœurs Grises who arrived in the colony from Montreal in 1844. This chapter examines how the Sœurs Grises came to be established in Red River and their role in the education of girls and in the lives of the inhabitants of the colony.

Individual nuns also played a significant role in forming the character of this religious community transplanted in the west. We will see how the Sœurs Grises from Lower Canada as well as new nuns born in the west influenced their community. The cases of Sisters Lafrance, Saint-Joseph, Connolly, and Withman will illuminate the variety of nuns who dedicated themselves to the service of the Catholic Church by their work in the missions of the Northwest.

There is evidence that a form of agency was exerted by the students in reaction to the initiatives of the Sœurs Grises. The study of this religious community and the reaction by the students is important to the early education of the Red River region because it gives us an idea that agency was in the hands of both groups. This story is also important

to the life of Catherine Mulaire because her teacher and later co-sister of the Propagation de La Foi, Juliette Lefèbvre, had been a novice of this religious community.

The Choice of the Sœurs Grises

The demise of Ursule Grenier's and Marguerite Lapalice's technical school in 1841, left Provencher without a school for girls, and to complicate matters he was also without a school for boys. His financial troubles, his difficulty in maintaining a consistent teaching personnel, and his inability to convince most of the métis community to settle and farm, also contributed to his frustration. To remedy the situation, Provencher decided to act upon his desire, dating from 1819, of acquiring the services of a female religious congregation that would be dedicated to the education of the colony's youth.¹ Having made a trip to Lower Canada, Provencher placed an official request to the Sœurs Grises in Montreal on 19 October 1843. Three days later the Sœurs Grises accepted the mission and agreed to send four nuns. Sisters Marie-Louise Valade, Marie-Eulalie Lagrave, Anastasie-Gertrude Coutlée dite Saint-Joseph, and Hedwidge Lafrance were chosen and they left Montreal on 24 April 1844 and arrived in Saint-Boniface on 21 June 1844.²

The Sœurs Grises' arrival in Saint-Boniface generated a great deal of interest within the colony and in the first few weeks, they were flooded with visitors. Lagrave's letters provide detailed descriptions of how she was "obliged" to receive the visit of

¹ Société historique de Saint-Boniface. "Lettres de Monseigneur Joseph-Norbert Provencher, premier évêque de Saint-Boniface," Bulletin de la Société historique de Saint-Boniface, vol.3, (1913) Provencher to Plessis, 15 January 1819: 35, (henceforth: Lettres).

² Luc Dauphinais. Histoire de Saint-Boniface. Tome 1: À l'ombre des cathédrales. Des origines de la colonie jusqu'en 1870. Saint-Boniface: Les Éditions du Blé, 1991: 139. Archives of the Sœurs Grises of Saint-Boniface, (ASGSB), 24/04 and 24/05, Dossiers personnels - Valade, Marie-Louise (1808-1861); 14/31, Dossier personnel - Lagrave, Marie-Eulalie (1805-1859); 05/43, Dossier personnel - Coutlée, Anastasie-Gertrude, dite Saint-Joseph (1819-1897); and 14/37, Dossier personnel - Lafrance, Marie-Hedwidge (1815-1882).

“thongs” of ten to twelve women of the colony at a time, and complained that they lacked etiquette and stayed too long. She also lamented that all of these visits required a great deal of patience on her part, and it was only just the beginning:

Je suis obligé de recevoir les nombreuses visites que nous font les femmes du pays; elles viennent par bandes de dix à douze, et vous comprenez qu’elles n’entendent guère l’étiquette. Leurs visites sont longue [...] il faut prendre patience, ce n’est que le commencement.³

Three days later, she wrote another letter and complained that she could not gather her thoughts or write more than two sentences at a time, since the visiting never ceased: “J’écris deux lignes et me voilà interrompue. Dès que ces dames sont parties, je reprends la plume, mais non mes idées, car une autre visiteuse vient encore m’interrompre.”⁴

The Sœurs de la Charité de l’Hôpital Général de Montréal, or the Sœurs Grises, had not initially been considered by Provencher. The Sœurs Grises were not commonly known as a teaching order like the Ursulines of Trois-Rivières. Rather, they were popularly recognized for their efforts in caring for the sick, the poor, the infirm, and the orphaned. Mgr. Ignace Bourget, Bishop of Montreal and the spiritual leader of the order, however, believed in the nuns’ suitability and assisted Provencher through the process of soliciting their services.⁵

It is difficult to establish with any certainty why Bourget suggested the Sœurs Grises. In addition to being the order’s spiritual leader, one reason may have been that

³ ASGSB, AA/01/06, Lagrave to McMullen, 22 June 1844. Mother Elizabeth Forbes-McMullen was Superior of the Sœurs Grises Mother House in Montreal from 1843-1848. Clémentine Drouin et al. Love Spans the Centuries, vol.2 (1821-1853), Montreal: Méridien, 1988.

⁴ ASGSB, AA/01/08, Lagrave to Beaubien, 25 June 1844. Possibly Mother Marguerite-Dorothée Beaubien who was Superior of the Mother House from 1833-1843. See: Laurette Duclos, “Beaubien, Marguerite,” Dictionnaire biographique du Canada (DBC), vol.7 (1836-1850): 64-65.

⁵ For general information about the history of the Sœurs Grises in Saint-Boniface see: Dennis King. Les Sœurs Grises et la colonie de la Rivière-Rouge. Agincourt: La Société Canadienne du Livre Limitée, 1983; and Estelle Mitchell. Les Sœurs Grises de Montréal à la Rivière-Rouge, 1844-1984. Montreal: Méridien, 1987.

Bourget was more aware of the Sœurs Grises' abilities, as opposed to those of other groups, since they were both from Montreal. A second reason may have been linked to his attempts to bring religious communities from France to Lower Canada in the 1840s. In expanding the missionary field he may have been trying to give himself more political leverage by increasing the need for the services of religious communities, and the Sœurs Grises, who were under his direction, may have been sacrificed for the "greater good."

A third possibility may have been Bourget's realization that the colony would need more than teachers. Past experiences with other Native groups like the Huron during the French Regime had taught the Catholic clergy that intensified contact was often coupled with disease. A religious community like the Sœurs Grises that could also provide medical services may also have influenced the choice made by Bourget and Provencher.⁶ A religious community that specialized in providing medical services also served as a powerful tool for the Catholic clergy's attempts to convert the Native groups to Catholicism. The healing techniques of several Native groups' were not necessarily the same as those from Lower Canada and a religious community that could provide medical services may have been seen as an advantage to members of the Catholic clergy.⁷

Regardless of Bourget's intentions, at first glance, the choice of the Sœurs Grises may appear odd, particularly when considering Provencher's desire to have a religious community that could provide teachers. The Sœurs Grises were founded in Montreal by Marie Marguerite d'Youville. On 31 December 1737, d'Youville, with three companions, Louise Thaumur, Catherine Cusson, and Catherine Demers, made informal vows to

⁶ In 1846, only two years after the arrival of the Sœurs Grises, a measles and dysentery epidemic broke out in the colony and the nuns' skills were put to the test.

⁷ Hoxie, 1996: 239-240, and 269-270.

dedicate themselves to the care of the poor and the sick. This informal community formalized under the direction of Father Louis Normant du Fornadon, a Sulpicien, and was officially recognized in 1745.⁸ In 1753, the Sœurs Grises took over the direction of the Hôpital Général de Montréal.⁹

One explanation for Provencher's choice may be that he felt that he could do no worse and took what he could get. Another consideration may have been the curriculum designated for the girls' school. As we shall see, academic subjects were not the primary goal of female education. Rather, the focus was placed on training the female population to become "good" Catholic wives and mothers. Provencher's letter requesting the services of the Sœurs Grises is indicative of the emphasis he placed on the "religious" and the "practical" nature of female education:

Depuis plusieurs années je cherche à me procurer des religieuses pour donner aux personnes du sexe une éducation solide sur la religion et les autres branches qui tendent à former pour la suite de bonnes mères de famille, à encourager l'industrie, à enseigner la tenue du ménage, la fabrication d'étoffes, de toiles, etc.; car les femmes de la Rivière-Rouge ignorent tout cela.¹⁰

Consequently, a general understanding of academic subjects, church doctrine, and a thorough knowledge of domestic skills were all that Provencher seemed to be requesting. It probably did not hurt that the Sœurs Grises had training in helping the sick. Like Bourget, he probably realized that the nuns' "expertise" in "care" would be important to

⁸ Louis Normant du Fornadon (b. 18 May 1681, Châteaubriant, France – d. 18 June 1759, Montreal). See: Antonio Dansereau, "Normant du Fornadon, Louis," DBC, vol.3 (1741-1770): 526-528.

⁹ For information about Mother Marguerite d'Youville see: Albertine Ferland-Angers. Mère d'Youville: Vénérable Marie-Marguerite du Frost de Lajemmerais veuve d'Youville, 1701-1771, fondatrice des Sœurs de la Charité de l'Hôpital-général de Montréal, dites Sœurs grises. Montreal: Centre Marguerite-d'Youville, 2nd edition, 1977, c1945; Rita McGuire. Marguerite d'Youville: a pioneer for our times: a biography based on the life and times of Marguerite d'Youville, Foundress of the Sisters of Charity (Grey Nuns) of Montreal. Ottawa: Novalis, c1982.

¹⁰ Archives of the Société historique de Saint-Boniface (ASHSB), 1.763/37-36, Provencher to McMullen, 19 October 1843.

the colony. Provencher also sought to find Catholic role models for the female population. The strict, disciplined, and hierarchical female religious community of the Sœurs Grises answered those needs. It should be noted that in this respect the Sœurs Grises were no different from the Ursulines of Trois-Rivières.

The Sœurs Grises were bound by their observance of strict rules and regulations and a set hierarchy. Upon their leaving for Saint-Boniface, Bourget reminded the nuns of the importance of strictly observing the rules of the community that centered on obedience, poverty, and chastity:

N'oubliez point que vous allez prêcher dans un pays lointain, par la pratique des vertus religieuses, l'Époux des Vierges. Pour accomplir cette sublime mission, attachez-vous avec amour à votre sainte règle. Obéissez aveuglement à votre digne Évêque et à qu'il vous donne pour vous diriger.¹¹

Upon their arrival in the colony, the Sœurs Grises seemed to exemplify Provencher's vision of obedience. Lagrave spoke of Provencher's authority and how pleased he was with his new "possessions:"

Monseigneur en faisant ses saluts à la communauté, me charge de vous dire qu'il est très content de ce qu'il possède, et même de sa bonne grosse à rien. Ce bon Évêque est dans sa maison comme un vrai Père de famille. C'est lui qui commande et dirige tout.¹²

This passage appears to indicate that Provencher seemed pleased that he finally "possessed" a teaching personnel that was obliged to follow his directives.

At times these rules would prove difficult to implement in the missions in the Northwest. For instance, Mother Valade wrote to Mother McMullen in 1844 and explained to her Superior that the mission would require new recruits from the Mother

¹¹ ASGSB, Chroniques des Sœurs de la Charité de l'Hôpital de Saint-Boniface, Manitoba (Chroniques), vol. 1 (1843-1857), 1843: 22-24.

¹² ASGSB, AA/01/08, Lagrave to Beaubien, 25 June 1844.

House for many years. Her reasons for making such a claim were based on two factors. First, she felt that it would be a long time before they could produce any quality candidates because most of their students were “young” and “ignorant” when it came to their knowledge of the Catholic faith, let alone the religious life. Second, she was concerned over the issue of the “legitimacy” of many of the children in the colony, who resulted from the “mariages à la façon du pays.”¹³

Nous ne pourrions avoir de soulagement que dans l'aide des sœurs que vous aurez la charité de nous envoyer, car pour les postulantes ici, il ne s'en est pas encore présenté, ce ne sera probablement que sur nos élèves que nous pourrions compter, et cela va prendre encore bien du temps, car elles sont jeunes et bien ignorantes. Pour les filles qui auraient l'âge, si elles avaient la vocation, il y aurait plusieurs raisons de les refuser. La première est la principale, c'est qu'un nombre parmi elles ne sont pas légitimes.¹⁴

Therefore, issues like “legitimacy,” would affect the work of the Sœurs Grises and their ability to implement the rules and regulations that were followed in Montreal.

In addition to their subjection to the Pope, the Bishop, and their spiritual chaplain, the Sœurs Grises were also constrained by a set internal hierarchy. The Superior and her governing council were the authority figures of the community. The Superiors of the new foundations by the Mother House in Montreal, like Saint-Boniface and Bytown, were also obliged to answer to their superiors in Montreal. Other nuns fell into the ranks according to their experience and their role and function with the community. Novices were generally isolated from the rest of the congregation and distinguished by a different

¹³ A “mariage à la façon du pays” was a union of consent between white fur traders and Native women in the Northwest. The Christian churches did not recognize their validity and attempted to “regularize” these unions through Christian ceremonies. Sylvia Van Kirk provides a thorough explanation of the custom in her article: “The Custom of the Country: An Examination of Fur Trade Marriage Practices,” in L.H. Thomas, (ed.), *Essays on Western History*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1976: 49-68.

¹⁴ ASGSB, AA/01/14, Valade to McMullen, 28 December 1844.

habit. At the bottom of the hierarchy were the “filles données” or the “sœurs converses.” These “nuns” made simple vows to dedicate their lives to the service of God, but were not considered full-fledged nuns. Historian Marta Danylewycz suggests that work for these nuns consisted mostly of drudgery in the kitchen or laundry room, only broken by prayer and Mass.¹⁵ An example of the hierarchy may be seen in a letter written by Valade explaining to McMullen that Lagrave had begun to call her “Mother,” since she was to be the Superior of the new mission in Saint-Boniface: “Ma chère sœur Lagrave, en vrai « fille d’obéissance » a commencé à m’appeler du nom de Mère.”¹⁶

Provencher placed his faith in the Sœurs Grises to rekindle his technical school and provide religious instruction to the female population of the colony. As we shall see, the Sœurs Grises as an institution would quickly develop during the first thirty years of the order’s history in the Red River Colony and in the Northwest.

The Role of the Sœurs Grises in the Red River Region

In fulfilling their primary obligation, the Sœurs Grises had many obstacles to overcome once they opened the school for girls on 11 July 1844 under the tutelage of Lafrance and the school for boys under the direction of Saint-Joseph on 23 July 1844. The main adjustment for the nuns was to reconcile their initial reactions of shock and surprise over the “ignorance” of European customs and schooling in the colony, and the

¹⁵ Marta Danylewycz, Taking the Veil : An Alternative to marriage, motherhood, and spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1920. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987: 108.

¹⁶ ASGSB, “Correspondance: Maison Mère et Maison Provincial Saint-Boniface,” (Correspondance) vol.1 (1844-1850), Valade to McMullen, 1 May 1844: Doc.2.

deference and passivity of the students.¹⁷ For example, Lafrance wrote: “Vous ne sauriez croire l’ignorance de ces enfants, mais ils sont d’une docilité vraiment admirable.”¹⁸ In many respects, the story of the rise of female education in the colony is the story of a struggle between religious newcomers, and in the case of the Sœurs Grises as female newcomers, and the Native population.

The nuns also faced the difficulty of having to provide for themselves through their work as teachers where parents could not afford to pay very much. Valade indicated to her Superior that they would only be able to charge the students’ parents a modest sum:

Nous prenons pour chaque enfant vingt sols par mois et une corde de bois pour l’hiver. Ce prix est médiocre, mais nous sommes obligés de nous conformer à la pauvreté du pays.”¹⁹

Despite their difficulties, the Chronicles suggest that the nuns were generally encouraged that their modest school would form the first Catholic mothers in the community.²⁰

It is difficult to establish the abilities and the composition of the female student population in the colony, but the Chronicles and the correspondence of the Sœurs Grises gives us some idea. For example, Saint-Joseph wrote in 1845 that the students had difficulty adapting to the French-Canadian form of education and that many students were forced to walk long distances to attend school: “Ils ont peu de facilité pour les classes. Ce n’est pas surprenant pour eux, ils n’ont pas l’habitude d’étudier [...] Il faut

¹⁷ The issue of “race” seems to have been an important issue in the colony. The term “ignorance” may have been another way of calling these children “savages.” See: Diane Payment, “On n’est pas méchifs nous-autres: une des aperçu des relations entre les femmes francophones au Manitoba durant les années 1810-1920.” *Bulletin de la Société historique de Saint-Boniface*, 3(1992):13-18.

¹⁸ ASGSB, AA/01/10, Lafrance to McMullen, 30 July 1844.

¹⁹ ASGSB, AA/01/13, Valade to McMullen, July 1844.

²⁰ ASGSB, Chroniques, vol.1 (1843-1857), 1844: 96.

que les enfants viennent de loin et à pied.”²¹ The Chronicles of the Sœurs Grises of 1844 suggest that: “Elles ouvrent leurs bras et leur cœur à toutes ces petites blanches ou noires avec une égale tendresse.”²² Students like Marguerite Connolly, Élise Marion, and Marie Nolin, indicate that their were students of mixed descent. It was also noted that many of these students could speak a variety of Native languages.²³

Many students were also of Indian descent. For instance, when Sister Marguerite Connolly made her final vows on 25 March 1848, two of her Saulteaux students, a girl of sixteen years of age and her brother who was fourteen years old, were baptized in the same ceremony.²⁴ In 1862, Sister Mary Curran noted that the nuns had recently accepted three young girls of the “pieds-noirs” nation:

Nous avons reçu, ces jours derniers comme pensionnaires, trois petites filles de la nation des pieds-noirs; nous voilà avec un ou plusieurs échantillons de différentes tribus sauvages.²⁵

The nuns also accepted Protestant students. The Chronicles noted on a number of occasions that the Sœurs Grises were “successful” in converting some of these students to Catholicism like the conversion of a student in 1852: “Mais nous apporta l’indicible consolation de voir une de nos élèves protestantes abjurer l’erreur et recevoir le baptême.”²⁶

²¹ ASGSB, AA/01/19, Saint-Joseph to McMullen, 6 July 1845.

²² ASGSB, Chroniques, vol.1 (1843-1857), 1844: 93.

²³ ASGSB, Chroniques, vol.1 (1843-1857), 1844: 129 and 145.

²⁴ ASGSB, Chroniques, vol.1 (1843-1857), 1848: 190.

²⁵ ASGSB, Correspondance, vol.3 (1860-1863), Curran to Deschamps, 6 September 1862: 217-220. Sister Mary Curran (1831-1906) was born in Montreal. She was the daughter of Charles Curran and Sarah Kennedy. She entered the novitiate of Bytown and took her final vows in 1848. She was sent to Saint-Boniface in 1853 and she taught here for twenty-eight years. She also served as Mgr. Taché’s secretary. In 1887, she left the colony and spent her remaining years at the Mother House in Montreal where she died on 25 February 1906. ASGSB, 06/02, Dossier personnel – Curran, Mary (1831-1906). Mother Julie Hainault-Deschamps, Superior of the Mother House in Montreal, 1853-1863. For more information see: Drouin et al, vol.3 (1853-1877) and vol.4 (1877-1910), 1990 and 1991.

²⁶ ASGSB, Chroniques, vol.1 (1843-1857), 1852: 252.

Provencher also seemed to be satisfied with the extension of the repertoire of their curriculum, when in the winter of 1845, Valade and Lagrave learned the art of spinning and began to teach their students. Their instruction brought some progress in this area, but it did not seem to be of a primary concern for much of the population. This opposition in refraining from learning to spin, may be seen an example of agency.

In the same way, the clergy's endeavors to promote the cultivation of flax and the rearing of sheep were met with general indifference. Other than the Catholic mission and the Sœurs Grises, by 1849 only thirty eight farmers raised sheep within the Catholic mission. Historian Luc Dauphinais noted that though fifteen métis families raised sheep, none of them were among the principal Catholic families: "Même si nous retrouvons parmi ceux-ci une quinzaine de Métis, aucun d'entre eux ne figure au nombre des principaux éleveurs, qui sont tous des canadiens solidement établis à Saint-Boniface."²⁷

The nuns also attempted to promote religious vocations among the female population in the colony. The reason for this pursuit was to replenish and fortify their numbers in the colony. To this end they opened the first novitiate in the Northwest on 5 April 1845. Marguerite Connolly, daughter of William Connolly and Suzanne Miyo-Nipiy (Bellefeuille) from the Cree Nation was their first candidate.²⁸ In seeing their classmate enter the novitiate, Élise Morin and Marie Nolin followed on 5 July of the same year. The community found it difficult, in the beginning, to develop a training system that saw potential candidates from the colony through the trial period. Many like

²⁷ Dauphinais, 1991: 165. Mgr. Provencher spoke well of these French-Canadian farmers, yet never mentioned their names. However, Dauphinais suggests some of the names within the élite in the colony: Jean-Baptiste Lagimodière, Amable Nault, Marion Lavallée, Charles Larence, Benjamin Marchand, Narcisse Marion, and Maxime Dauphinais.

²⁸ ASGSB, 05/34, Dossier personnel – Connolly, Marguerite (1830-1904).

Élise Morin and Marie Nolin left the novitiate after only a few months. Others like Isabelle Gladu remained only for a few short days: "Mlle Isabelle Gladu entrait au noviciat, ou pour mieux dire y faisait une apparition, car elle n'y demeura que quelques jours."²⁹ Furthermore, the novitiate would also remain empty for long periods of time. Once again, this looks like the métis girls did not want to get too involved with the Sœurs Grises and demonstrated considerable agency in walking away or not entering the novitiate at all.

In an attempt to increase their authority over the female population in the colony, the Sœurs Grises took in boarders. Upon their arrival in the colony, the nuns had taken over the old house of Provencher. Unfortunately, this building was practically in a state of ruin and when the weather began to turn cold, they were forced to move into Provencher's new house. Notwithstanding the cramped quarters, the Sœurs Grises, upon the request of several members of the community accepted a few boarders:

À peine nos sœurs avait pris possession de leur nouveaux appartements que plusieurs pensionnaires leur fut offerte avec prière de les recevoir. Elles purent admettre madame Connolly (mother of Marguerite), Suzanne McGilvry et Marie-Anne Chatelain.³⁰

A letter written by Mother Valade in 1844 suggests that members of the bourgeois of the Hudson's Bay Company had already approached the nuns and asked the nuns to teach their daughters.³¹

Several obstacles greatly impeded the ability of the nuns to take in many boarders.

One such difficulty was the general poverty of the colony during the 1840s. In a letter to

²⁹ ASGSB, Chroniques, vol.1 (1843-1857), 1845: 153. Isabelle Gladu would eventually become the Superior of the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi.

³⁰ ASGSB, Chroniques, vol.1 (1843-1857), 1845: 121.

³¹ ASGSB, AA/01/07, Valade to McMullen, 25 June 1844.

Bourget, Provencher complained to his superior about the consequences of the lack of money in the colony. He explained the frustration at his inability to finance his projects or even to feed and clothe those who depended upon his care:

Nous sommes tous au bout. J'ai arrêté toutes les dépenses d'ici à meilleures informations. Les sœurs sont encore plus pauvres que nous puisqu'elles n'ont point d'allocation et qu'elles ne tirent à peu près rien de leurs écoles [...] Trente personnes sont sur mes charges, pour l'habit et la vie.³²

A further difficulty of the boarding school was the lack of English-speaking teachers among the nuns. Both Provencher and the Sœurs Grises were convinced that the community's survival depended upon their ability to draw a student clientele from the officer families of the Hudson's Bay Company. Consequently, a nun who could teach the English classes was considered a top priority. Provencher felt that these families who had expressed an interest, would pay well to have their daughters taught by the nuns:

Mgr Demers doit s'intéresser auprès de Votre Grandeur et de la communauté des Sœurs Grises pour avoir des institutrices capables de faire une bonne école anglaise et montrer plusieurs branches d'éducation qu'il n'est pas nécessaire d'apprendre aux enfants de nos cultivateurs. Plusieurs fois on a demandé si les sœurs parlaient l'anglais, ceux qui faisaient cette demande avait des enfants à instruire [...] On paye cher, ceux qui y placent leurs enfants ont le moyen de payer [...] avec les écoles elles vivraient.³³

Even though some of the nuns could fulfill these duties, the opening of new schools and missions would constantly create a need for new teachers, while others like Sister Marie-Louise Ford did not complete her religious training and left the community.³⁴

³² ASHSB, 1.762/91, Provencher to Bourget, 29 November 1848.

³³ ASHSB, 1.762/31-33, Provencher to Bourget, 19 July 1848.

³⁴ Sister Marie-Louise Ford arrived in Saint-Boniface in 1850 to complete her religious training. Of Irish descent, she was immediately given the assignment of teaching the English class. Deciding that she did not possess the religious vocation, she left the convent in May, 1852. ASGSB, Chroniques, vol.1 (1844-1857), 1850: 214-215; and Correspondence, vol.2 (1851-1859), Valade to Coutlée, 2 July 1852: 30-32. Mother Marie-Rose Coutlée was Superior in Montreal from 1848-1853. See: Drouin et al, vol.2, (1821-1853), 1988.

The Sœurs Grises in Saint-Boniface were faced with another difficulty that threatened not only their ability to accept boarders, but also their very existence. During the first provincial council in Quebec in 1851, it was decided that the new missions of the Sœurs Grises would henceforth be independent institutions. Opposition to the plan was considered in the second council but the plan was accepted and the independence of the missions in Saint-Boniface, Saint-Hyacinthe, Bytown, and Quebec was proclaimed in 1854.³⁵ This meant that the Sœurs Grises in Saint-Boniface could no longer rely on the main institution for recruits.

A further blow to the nuns in Saint-Boniface was the decision at this same provincial council in Quebec, to discontinue the practice of charging fees for boarders. Cut off from further recruits and their main source of income, the nuns were able to accept only a small number of boarders. It would not be until the reunification of the mission of Saint-Boniface with the Mother House in Montreal in 1857, that the nuns were given permission to charge fees for boarders. They were allowed to continue this practice until another female religious community arrived in the colony. By 1858, the Sœurs Grises had twenty boarding students. The renewal of fees and recruits ensured the survival of the Sœurs Grises in the Northwest, in fact, it encouraged their expansion.

Another significant means of expansion came with the opening of more schools in and around Saint-Boniface. Lagrave and Lafrance opened the Sœurs Grises's first school outside Saint-Boniface in Saint-François-Xavier on 5 November 1850. Other schools such as the ones in Saint-Vital and Saint-Charles began classes in 1860 and in 1867 respectively. A new boarding school, called Académie Sainte-Marie, was built in

³⁵ Dauphinais, 1991: 196-197.

Winnipeg in 1869, and Sisters Malvina Collette³⁶ and Céline Allard³⁷ were assigned as teachers, while Sister Marie-Xavier (Marguerite Dunn) assumed its direction.³⁸ In 1868, the Sœurs Grises founded the Taché Academy that would remain open until 1898. Consequently, the nuns were able to reach more children and extend their influence in other areas. For instance, shortly after the opening of Académie Sainte-Marie, the Sœurs Grises were asked, among other things, to feed and lodge government officials, look after the military hospital, and feed and cloth the officers of the new province of Manitoba.³⁹

The nuns likewise set forth to extend their sphere of influence to other parts of the colony. Beginning on 17 December 1844, Lagrave set out twice a week to Saint-Norbert, to teach catechism to the children and adults of the area. During this period, the Sœurs Grises would begin a number of new missions such as the one in 1858 when Sisters

³⁶ ASGSB, 05/27, Dossier personnel – Colette, Malvina (1838-1925). She was born in Verchères, Lower Canada into a merchant family. Her father was named François-Xavier Colette and her mother, Zoé Blanchard. She entered the Sœurs Grises convent in 1856 and took her final vows two years later. She was sent to Saint-Boniface in 1868 with the assignment to teach French and piano. It is Sister Colette who initiated the students to theatre. Sister Colette is considered as the first female author in the Northwest. In 1876, she returned to Montreal. See: Annette Saint-Pierre. Le rideau se lève au Manitoba. Saint-Boniface: Les Éditions des Plaines, 1980: 20-21.

³⁷ ASGSB, 01/04, Dossier personnel – Allard, Céline (1843-1926). Born in Saint-Joachim de Châteauguay, Lower Canada, Sister Allard took her final vows on 23 January 1864. She taught in Saint-Boniface from 1864 to 1874. She then became one of the founders of Fort Totten in North Dakota. She spent the next thirty years as a missionary in Nazareth, Toledo, and Saint-Joseph.

³⁸ ASGSB, 07/38, Dossier personnel – Dunn, Marguerite (Mary-Xavier) (1837-1898). Born in Saint-Jean, Newfoundland, she entered the convent of the Sœurs Grises in Saint-Boniface in 1854 and took her final vows two years later. Believing that she would not be accepted into a religious community because of a deformity of her left hand, she had resolved to teach as a lay teacher in the missions of the Northwest. She taught in the Saint-Boniface boarding school for thirty years. In 1889 she began a career as a nurse at the Saint-Goniface Hospital. In 1895 she opened a hospital in Edmonton and a school in Montagne du Tondre in 1897.

³⁹ ASGSB, Chroniques, vol.3 (1869-1883), 1870: 55-60.

Flavie Laurent⁴⁰ and Hedwidge Dandurand⁴¹ set up a new convent in Saint-Norbert. There were many more expansions during this period, like the new missions founded at Lac Sainte-Anne (Alberta) in 1859, Île-à-la-Crosse (Saskatchewan) in 1860, and Lac La Biche (Saskatchewan) in 1862.⁴² With every new mission, the nuns provided schooling, religious instruction, and care for the sick, elderly, and poor. For instance, at the new mission in Prairie du Cheval Blanc (Saint-François-Xavier) in 1850, Lagrave and Lafrance maintained the school, the church and sacristy, were responsible for the housework in the presbytery, and they were assigned to visit the sick and the poor in their homes.⁴³

From the very beginning, the nuns' influence was also seen in their provisions of medical care as well as in the care for orphans. In accordance with the goals of their rules, the Sœurs Grises were to educate the young but also to assist in ensuring care for the poor and the sick. In October, Lagrave, versed in the art of healing, began to visit the poor and the sick in their homes. Among others, Father Louis-François Laflèche⁴⁴ noted the medical abilities of Lagrave for both the body and the soul: "La sœur Lagrave, sans avoir le titre de médecin, en remplit cependant charitablement les fonctions, et je t'assure

⁴⁰ ASGSB, 13/36, Dossier personnel – Laurent, Flavie (1832-1925). Born in Montreal, she was the daughter of Charles Laurent dit Lortie and Émélie Gougeon. She took her final vows in 1850 and left soon after for Saint-Boniface. Her main assignments were to visit the poor and the sick. In 1858 she became the Superior of the new convent in Saint-Norbert.

⁴¹ ASGSB, 06/04, Dossier personnel – Dandurand, Hedwidge (1837-1877). Born at Saint-Luc in Lower Canada, she was the daughter of Joseph Dandurand and Thérèse Daoust. She entered the Sœurs Grises convent in Montreal in 1853 and took her final vows on 4 December 1855. She came to Saint-Boniface in 1858 and went to Saint-Norbert. In 1864, she was sent to Île-à-la-Crosse where she remained there until her death.

⁴² See: Drouin et al, vol.3 (1853-1877), 1990: 107-131.

⁴³ ASGSB, Chroniques, vol.1 (1843-1857), 1850: 241.

⁴⁴ Louis-François Laflèche (b. 4 September 1818, Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade, Lower Canada – d. 14 July 1898, Trois-Rivières, Quebec). See: Nive Voisine, "Laflèche, Louis-François," DBC, vol.12 (1891-1900): 551-557.

qu'elle ne leur soigne pas moins l'âme que le corps."⁴⁵ Provencher even referred to her as his "bon vicaire."

The addition of Sister Sainte-Thérèse (Thérèse Macdonell)⁴⁶ in 1855, to the personnel in Saint-Boniface, further consolidated the nuns' role as purveyors of medical care in the community. Sainte-Thérèse and Sainte-Marie⁴⁷ were "lent" to the Sœurs Grises in Saint-Boniface by their "sisters" in Bytown for three years. Valade wrote to Deschamps and extolled the invaluable services rendered by Sainte-Thérèse, since there was only one elderly doctor in the vicinity. She also provided a synopsis of some of their other activities of providing care for orphans, and their continued classes. She also indicated that the nuns could not provide all the services they wished to provide due to their inability to generate any funds:

Comme pharmacienne sœur Ste-Thérèse a de quoi exercer sa charité, n'ayant qu'un vieux docteur pour le district, on vient souvent demander son secours. Nous soignons les malades qui sont nombreux et nous leur donnons les médicaments sans attendre aucun retour de leur part. Nous avons aussi à notre charge plusieurs orphelines et enfants du pays. Outre cela, nous donnons l'instruction, à plus de soixante-douze enfants, desquels je puis dire que nous ne retirons presque rien; il y en a cinq ou six qui donnent, et bien peu. Nous ne faisons pas assez pour le soutien de tous les malheureux.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ ASHSB, P0938, Laflèche to Caron, 1 June 1845. Thomas Caron (b. 19 June 1819, Sainte-Antoine-de-la-Rivière-du-Loup – d. 24 September 1878, Nicolet). See: Claude Lessard, "Caron, Thomas," DBC, vol.10 (1871-1880): 149-150. The two were described as very close friends.

⁴⁶ ASGSB, 16/01 and 16/02, Dossier personnel – McDonnell, Teresa (Sainte-Thérèse) (1835-1917). Born in Saint-Andrew's, Upper Canada, she entered the novitiate of Bytown and took her final vows on 19 March 1853. In 1855 she went to Saint-Boniface where she performed the duties of "doctor." She was superior of the convent in Saint-Norbert from 1872-1877 and again from 1888-1893. She was superior of the convent in Saint-François-Xavier from 1882-1888 and from 1897-1900. She co-founded the Saint-Boniface Hospital and assisted in the beginnings of Académie Sainte-Marie in Winnipeg in 1869.

⁴⁷ ASGSB, 21/15, Dossier personnel – St-Julien, Marie-Charlotte (Sainte-Marie) (1832-1907). She took her final vows from the novitiate of Bytown on 19 March 1854. She came to Saint-Boniface in 1855 and was assigned the school in Saint-François-Xavier. She returned to Ottawa in August, 1859. In 1861, she would be set to Buffalo.

⁴⁸ ASGSB, AA/01/61, Valade to the nuns of the Mother House, 30 May 1856.

Sainte-Thérèse would later remain in Saint-Boniface and along with Sister Vitaline Royal, she would found the first four-bed General Hospital of Saint-Boniface.⁴⁹ Despite the addition of Sainte-Thérèse and Sainte-Marie, the Sœurs Grises continuously felt that they were inundated with work: "Nous avons toujours de la besogne par dessus la tête: les classes, les malades, l'entretien de la maison et des missionnaire."⁵⁰

The Sœurs Grises opened an orphanage on 18 February 1858 under the direction of Saint-Joseph.⁵¹ Prior to this date, the nuns had taken in, from time to time, some of the orphans, infirm, or sick of the colony as best they could. One of the major impetuses for opening a formal orphanage, was the dire situation of the residents of the Red River Region.⁵² A grasshopper epidemic in the summer of 1857, caused a general famine during the winter of 1858. To help ease some of the suffering, Mgr. Alexandre-Antonin Taché placed a number of orphan boys with the Frères des Écoles chrétiennes and orphan girls with the Sœurs Grises. Despite their meager resources, by April 1859, the nuns had accepted seventeen orphans and provided them with food, clothing, care, and instruction.⁵³ Valade later wrote that they would have liked to accept more, but they could not provide the necessary care due to a lack of food in particular.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ ASGSB, 21/23, Dossier personnel – Royal, Vitaline (1835-1923). She took her final vows in 1857, and came to Saint-Boniface in 1858. She was initially in charge of the boarding school, but in 1870 she was designated as pharmacist. In 1882, she took over the direction of the boarding school and in 1893 she was named Assistant. In 1898 the office of Mistress of the novices was added to her agenda. From 1902 to 1905, she was Superior of the convent in Saint-Boniface and in 1910 she returned to Montreal.

⁵⁰ ASGSB, AA/01/57, Valade to Coutlée, 1 November 1853.

⁵¹ The need and the beginning of the construction of the orphanage is mentioned on two letters. ASHSB, T4885-T4886, Clapin to Taché, 27 August 1867; 44/AT867, Taché to Laflèche, 31 December 1867. ASGSB, 05/16, Dossier personnel – Clapin, Marie-Rose (1828-1898). Born in Montreal, she took her final vows in 1859 and left for Saint-Boniface. She was named Assistant in 1861 and was also responsible for the novitiate. She was named Superior in 1864 and returned to Montreal in 1869.

⁵² It should be noted that all of these children were not necessarily orphans. The Catholic clergy often removed children from the family home, particularly destitute families. However, when children were placed in the orphanage, the nuns were given full control over the lives of these children.

⁵³ ASGSB, Correspondance, vol.2 (1851-1859), Valade to Deschamps, 9 April 1859: Doc. 141.

⁵⁴ ASGSB, Correspondance, vol.2 (1851-1859), Valade to Deschamps, 23 April 1859: Doc.142.

While the Sœurs Grises had good intentions in setting up schools and caring for orphans, these endeavors sometimes produced more harm than good. The experiences in some of the residential schools, many of which were taught by the Sœurs Grises, in the Northwest is an example of some of the negative impacts of missionary activity.⁵⁵ In several instances, their “good intentions” were tempered by the Sœurs Grises’ attempt to assert their influence in the colony. The Sœurs Grises offered many new services to the Red River region and as a result held a great deal of influence, but it was also the individual nuns which gave the institution its face.

The Impact of Individual Nuns

The role of the Sœurs Grises expanded a great deal during their first thirty years in the Northwest. An assessment of their influence, however, must not only rely on the examination of the institution, but also on the individual actors. The period between 1844 and 1874, brought many nuns to the Northwest, such as Sisters Marie-Louise Valade, Vitaline Royal, and Sainte-Thérèse (Thérèse Macdonnel.) There were also a number of women from the colony who joined the ranks of the religious community like, Sisters Marie-Jane McDougall⁵⁶ and Annie Goulet.⁵⁷ While each story is fascinating, this

⁵⁵ For more information about the history of residential schools, see: John S. Milloy. A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986. Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1999.

⁵⁶ ASGSB, 17/13, Dossier personnel – McDougall, Mary-Jane (1844-1896). Born at Little Slave Lake, Sister McDougall was the daughter of a Scottish Protestant father and a mother of the “Têtes Plates.” At the age of nine, Father Thibault brought her to Saint-Boniface and placed her in the Sœurs Grises boarding school. She entered the novitiate in 1864 and took her final vows two years later. She would be headmistress of the boarding school and its superior in 1890. She also spent some time in Sainte-Anne-des-Chênes and Qu’Appelle and then finally assuming the direction of Académie Provencher.

⁵⁷ ASGSB, 11/03, Dossier personnel – Goulet, Annie (1841-1917). Born in the Red River Colony, she was the daughter of a French-Canadian father and a Scottish métis mother. She spent two years in the Sœurs Grises boarding school (1860-62) and then entered the novitiate, where she took her final vows in 1865. She taught in Saint-Vital, Saint-François-Xavier, and Sainte-Anne-des-Chênes. In 1887, she was sent to Qu’Appelle (Lebret), where she taught in the Industrial School, becoming its Superior in 1891.

discussion will only sample some of the individual experiences. The purpose of this examination is to consider the varied experiences of the nuns in relation to other nuns as well as with people, and particularly women, in the colony. The following will consider the experience of four Sœurs Grises that were among the first few of Red River: Sisters Anastasie-Gertrude Coullée dite Saint-Joseph, Hedwidge Lafrance, Marguerite Connolly, and Marie Withman. Mulaire's teacher in Pembina, Juliette Lefèbvre, was a novice of this religious community during this time period. A consideration of some of the nuns whom she worked with gives us an idea of the kind of experiences she encountered during her religious training, and influence her later teaching career.

Sister Hedwidge Lafrance was born in Pointe-aux-Trembles, Lower Canada. She entered the Sœurs Grises convent in 1848, and took her perpetual vows on 13 July 1840.⁵⁸ Chosen as the fourth missionary for Saint-Boniface, she was given the title of "conseillère."⁵⁹ Upon arrival in Red River, she was assigned to teach the girls' class. Father Aubert established the Congrégation des Enfants de Marie in 1846, and she was named the group's leader. Lafrance was placed in charge of the boarding school in 1848, and in 1850 she co-founded the school in Saint-François-Xavier with Lagrave. In 1853, Lafrance became the mistress of the novitiate. With the failing health of Lagrave, she also became Valade's assistant. Following the death of Valade in 1861, she was named Superior of the convent in Saint-Boniface where she remained until 1863. She was then named Assistant and continued in this role until her health obliged her to retire in 1872.⁶⁰

Lafrance appears to have greatly enjoyed teaching the Métis girls:

⁵⁸ Adrien-Gabriel Morice, *Dictionnaire historique des Canadiens et des Métis français de l'Ouest*. Quebec: Laflamme et Proulx, 1908: 148.

⁵⁹ ASHSB, P1138-P1141, Provencher to Turgeon, 9 November 1843.

⁶⁰ ASGSB, 14/37, Dossiers personnel - Lafrance, Hedwidge (1815-1882).

Oh! Que je me trouve heureuse au milieu de mes petites métisses, car malgré toutes les difficultés que nous éprouvons, non pas à les instruire seulement, mais encore à les élever; nous sommes portées comme naturellement à les aimer.⁶¹

Saint-Joseph, however, did not appear to be as positive in her perception of the situation: “Je vous dirai que ceux qui ont de bons parents sont reconnaissables et quoiqu’ils soient légers, j’espère qu’ils nous donneront la consolation, mais le nombre est petit.”⁶² While both performed their duties as teachers, Lafrance appears to have found her calling as a teacher, while Saint-Joseph would truly exert greater influence in the orphanage.

Sister Anastasie-Gertrude Coutlée, dite Saint-Joseph, did not possess the same calling for teaching as did Lafrance. Having entered the novitiate of the Sœurs Grises in Montreal, she took her perpetual vows on 1 June 1838. Chosen as one of the first four missionaries to be sent to Saint-Boniface, she was named “maîtresse des novices.”⁶³ Upon arrival in the colony, she was assigned to teach the boys’ class. This class was set up in the Bishop’s House and began on 23 July 1844. Once Connolly was capable of taking over the boys’ class in 1846, Saint-Joseph was assigned to teaching the novices.⁶⁴ With the nomination of Lafrance as the new mistress of the novitiate in 1853, Saint-Joseph began to teach the mixed day school until the arrival of the Frères des Écoles chrétiennes in 1854. Between 1854 and the opening of the orphanage in 1858, she was assigned a variety of roles such as replacing other teachers that were ill.

With the opening of the orphanage in 1858, Saint-Joseph was placed in charge of providing for the care and instruction of fourteen girls and two boys. According to

⁶¹ ASGSB, AA/01/18, Lafrance to McMullen, 15 June 1845.

⁶² ASGSB, AA/01/19, Saint-Joseph to (Bruyère), 6 July 1845. Possibly a response to Sister Élisabeth Bruyère who had written a letter to the nuns of Saint-Boniface, dated 28 June 1845. Correspondance, vol.1 (1844-1850). Sister Paul-Émile (Louise Guay), “Bruyère, Elisabeth,” DBC, vol.10 (1871-1880): 116-117.

⁶³ Morice, 1908: 71; ASHSB, P1138-P1141, Provencher to Turgeon, 9 November 1843.

⁶⁴ ASGSB, AA/01/27, Valade to McMullen, 23 November 1846.

Valade, Saint-Joseph was "charged" with a responsibility to teach, as far as she was concerned, children who "knew nothing." She also noted that Saint Joseph was continuously busy in her never-ending chores of washing and mending:

Sœur St-Joseph est dans un état de ruines complètes, elle ne soutient qu'à force de précautions et de bandages; [...] avec cela elle tient très bien sa salle et ses enfants au nombre de seize, qui ne savent rien faire, et n'ayant que bien peu de choses pour les vêtir [...] Il faut constamment laver et raccommoder.⁶⁵

In 1868, Saint-Joseph was assisted by Sister Sobienksy who was assigned to take over the class.⁶⁶

The health of the orphans appears to have been on the whole significantly worse than the other students in the colony. While Saint-Joseph may have provided excellent care, many died. For instance, in 1865, there was an outbreak of measles and dysentery in the colony and while thirty-one children under the nuns' care were sick, twenty-eight of them were in the orphanage. Some of these children suffered so much, that Curran wrote that she hoped that the will of God would soon end their suffering: "Nous commençons à espérer que ce serait la volonté du bon Dieu de mettre quelques unes des plus dépourvues, en possession du Royaume."⁶⁷ The higher instances of mortality in the orphanage was not solely during times of epidemic. Curran noted in 1866, that Saint-Joseph was yet again in mourning after the loss of another child.⁶⁸

Regardless of these difficulties, the Orphanage of Saint-Boniface expanded under the direction of Saint-Joseph throughout the period. For example, when the orphanage

⁶⁵ ASGSB, Correspondance, vol.2 (1851-1859), Valade to Deschamps, 6 April 1859: Doc.140.

⁶⁶ ASGSB, Correspondance, vol.5 (1867-1871), Curran to Slocombe, 20 September 1868: 100. Mother Jane Slocombe was Superior in Montreal from 1863 to 1872. See: Estelle Mitchell. Mère Jane Slocombe. Montreal: Fides, 1964.

⁶⁷ ASGSB, Correspondance, vol.4 (1864-1867), Curran to Slocombe, 17 September 1865: 144-147.

⁶⁸ ASGSB, Correspondance, vol.4 (1864-1867), Curran to Slocombe, 19 May 1866: 202-205; and Chroniques, vol.2, (1858-1868): 255.

opened its doors in 1858, there were sixteen children. By 1868, the numbers had grown to thirty-seven and Saint-Joseph constantly tried to convince others that she was capable of looking after more children: "Ma sœur St. Joseph à 37 orphelines, mais ce n'est pas encore assez pour cette vrai mère des pauvres."⁶⁹ The Chronicles often exaggerated the benefits of Saint-Joseph's work, like extolling how well the children had learned to work, study, and sing, and how her contributions, with the teaching assistance of Sobiensky, played an important role in assisting the orphans of the colony.⁷⁰

It should also be noted that these children were not necessarily "orphans." There were instances when the nuns took in children of impoverished families or families with only one living parent. In accepting these children the nuns assumed total control over their lives and raised them in the Christian faith and gave them chores as they saw fit. The Sœurs Grises may have been helping these families, but their method of severing all links between child and parent, and the total control that they possessed over these children, suggests that not all of the nuns' practices were in the name of "good works." This custom may be interpreted as an act of the Sœurs Grises' belief in the French-Canadian "superiority," particularly from Quebec, over the Native population in the colony.

Sister Marguerite Connolly was the first Sœur Grise of mixed descent to become a member of the convent in Saint-Boniface. Her case is intriguing as it illuminates how the Sœurs Grises utilized her talents and how women of mixed descent may have been

⁶⁹ ASBSB, *Chroniques*, vol.2, (1858-1868): 243.

⁷⁰ One of the entries in 1869 read: "Notre bonne Sœur St Joseph est toujours de plus en plus mère pour ces chères orphelines, qui sont aussi de bons enfants, elles étudient bien, travaillent beaucoup et chantent comme des anges. Notre chère sœur Sobiensky toute épuisée qu'elle est, ne s'épargne pas pour les instruire et les former." ASGSB, *Chroniques*, vol.3, (1869-1883): 6.

viewed within the religious community. Connolly was the daughter of a chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, William Connolly, and of Suzanne Bellefeuille (Miyonipi) of the Cree Nation. She was also the grandniece of the foundress of the Sœurs Grises, Mother Marguerite d'Youville. Her father had sent her to Montreal to be taught by the Sœurs de la Congregation de Notre-Dame and in 1840, she returned with her mother to Norway House. In 1844, her father had entrusted her care to Provencher who placed her under the care of the Sœurs Grises.⁷¹ On 5 April 1845, she became the first to enter the novitiate in Saint-Boniface and she took her perpetual vows in 1848.

Valade spoke of the event in a letter, noting that she hoped that Connolly would prove to be a good candidate.⁷² Given that Connolly had successfully completed the required training, such a comment seems out of place. In her thesis, Lesley Erickson rejects the assumptions of Frits Pannekoek that the Sœurs Grises viewed métis women with "disdain" because of their ethnicity.⁷³ She then provides examples of how Métis women like Sara Riel and Marguerite Connolly were able to rise within the ranks of the community. While Erickson is perhaps right that Pannekoek's conclusions are too rigid, she does not consider some of the other ambiguities of this relationship and how these two women might be exceptions. For instance, Erickson points out that Connolly was appointed to a teaching position even before she had taken her perpetual vows.⁷⁴ However, she does not consider that Connolly was put in charge of the boys' class. The Sœurs Grises did not feel that they were fully capable of providing adequate schooling

⁷¹ ASGSB, *Chroniques*, vol.1 (1843-1857), 1844: 93-94.

⁷² ASGSB, Valade to McMullen, 25 May 1848.

⁷³ Lesley Erickson. At the Cultural and Religious Crossroads: Sara Riel and the Grey Nuns in the Canadian Northwest, 1848-1883. Thesis (M.A.), Calgary: University of Calgary, 1997: 17.

⁷⁴ Erickson, 1997: 91.

for the boys of the colony and thus agreed to teach them rudimentary skills until a suitable replacement could be found. Dauphinois described the Sœurs Grises' attitude as hoping to be rid of the boys' class as soon as possible because they had only accepted to teach them "à leur corps défendant."⁷⁵ In other words, the Sœurs Grises placed Connolly in a job that they did not really want to undertake.

Furthermore, Erickson does not consider that the initial placement of métis women in teaching roles may have been a consequence of the lack of personnel in the early stages of the community's development. For instance, by 1853, Connolly no longer taught in the classroom. Sisters Curran and Pépin⁷⁶ who arrived on 11 September 1853 took over the education of the girls' boarding school. Postulant Marguerite Dunn, who had also arrived with the two nuns, began to teach the English class. With their arrival, Saint-Joseph took over the day school for boys and girls while Sister Christine Lespérance (Youville) began to teach art.⁷⁷ Connolly was then assigned to working in the fields and teaching catechism in the homes of the Saulteaux living in the vicinity.⁷⁸ In other words, the Sœurs Grises utilized her skills in the Saulteaux language, unlike most of the others who did not understand the language. She was also assigned roles in the missions outside Saint-Boniface, replacing nuns who were ill. For example, in 1869, she replaced Royal in Saint-Vital when the latter was ill.

These changes in her duties do not necessarily reflect a demotion, but it should be

⁷⁵ Dauphinois, 1991: 201.

⁷⁶ ASGSB, 18/26, Dossier personnel – Pépin, Marie-Anne (1832-1904). Born in Malbaie, Lower Canada she took her final vows in 1852 and came the following year to Saint-Boniface. With the declaration of the convent's independence from the Mother House in 1854, Sister Pépin would return to Montreal. She would return in 1859 as one of three missionaries to open a new convent in Ile-à la-Croise.

⁷⁷ ASGSB, 15/05, Dossier personnel – Lespérance, Christine (Sœur Youville) (1828-1902). Born in Dorval, Lower Canada, she took her final vows in 1850 and came to Saint-Boniface.

⁷⁸ ASGSB, Chronicles, vol.2 (1858-1868), 1858: 12; and vol.3, (1869-1883), 1869: 6.

noted that while the Sœurs Grises provided new opportunities for métis women to join their ranks, one must not automatically assume that giving them work translated into equality.⁷⁹ As we have seen, the Sœurs Grises often referred to the métis children as “ignorant.” Rather, it was a complex relationship where the nuns utilized their talents until they could be replaced.

Sister Marie Withman’s story is interesting because it illustrates the diversity of personalities present in the community. Marie Withman was thirty eight when she decided to dedicate herself to the Catholic Church and the missions in the Northwest. Unlike many women who entered the Sœurs Grises convent in their late teens and early twenties, Withman was already set in her ways. Withman’s decision to become a Sœur Grise arose when she heard Provencher speak of his mission in Saint-Boniface one day in Montreal. Upon reflection, she decided that her calling was to become a missionary. Bourget encouraged her to find a partner who would be willing to go with her and enter the novitiate of the Sœurs Grises. With her friend, Cécile Cusson, Withman entered the Sœurs Grises convent in Montreal, and the two candidates were sent to Saint-Boniface in 1845 to complete their religious training. The two arrived in Saint-Boniface on 25 August 1845 and took their final vows in 1847.⁸⁰

Upon their arrival in the colony, Provencher seemed less than pleased with the new recruits. Provencher desired “ready-made” teachers and felt that Withman would

⁷⁹ In her thesis, Erickson suggests that equality came from the fact that the Sœurs Grises allowed métis women to teach which she defines as superior to other chores performed by various other nuns like Sister Withman. Erickson, 1997: chapter 3.

⁸⁰ ASGSB, 23/03, Dossier personnel – Withman, Marie (1807-1875). 06/03, Dossier personnel – Cusson, Cécile (1821-1906). In 1845 she came to Saint-Boniface to complete her religious training and took her final vows in 1847. Sister Cusson spent twenty years working in the fields, doing the laundry, and looking after the sacristy of the Sœurs Grises and the cathedral of Saint-Boniface. She also provided her services of spinning, weaving, and cooking.

never be able to perform such duties.⁸¹ In her 1997 thesis, Lesley Erickson argued that teaching nuns held more power in the Sœurs Grises convent as opposed to nuns like Withman who performed “lesser” duties like sewing. For thirty years, Withman was in charge of the sewing of the clergy’s cassocks and the nuns’ habits. At times, she also monitored the dormitory and looked after the orphans in the convent. A further reading of the Chronicles and the nuns’ correspondence, like that of Curran, suggests that Withman took great pleasure in her work. For instance, Curran noted in 1866 that Withman was extremely conscientious in her work and took great pains not to waste the slightest piece of material.⁸² The dismissing of her work as less important does not consider the order’s need to provide for themselves through their own industry and encourage and cultivate each nun’s talents.

Withman stands out as an individual who was teased for her preconceptions and attitudes.⁸³ Entries in the order’s Chronicles and some of the individual correspondence recorded some of the perceptions and attitudes of Withman. For instance, Curran made light of Withman’s continual “colloque” with God, her saints, and her angels.⁸⁴ In 1868 Curran wrote in a couple of letters that Withman, who did not trust the “Orangemen” of Ontario, placed the Sioux on the same level but would eventually concede that it was perhaps possible to convert the “Franc-maçons et orangistes.”⁸⁵

Clearly, the convent of the Sœurs Grises was filled with different personalities,

⁸¹ ASHSB, 1.761/67, Provencher to Bourget, 29 August 1845.

⁸² ASGSB, Correspondance, vol.4 (1864-1867), Curran to Slocombe, 9 April 1866: 190-197.

⁸³ “Pour la taquiner, les malintentionnées affectent de parler des Orangistes, ou des Franc-maçons; alors il faut au besoin, déterrer une vieille histoire en guise de nouvelles, qui lui fait pousser bien des soupirs et faire bien des conjectures.” ASGSB, Correspondance, vol.4 (1864-1867), Curran to Slocombe, 9 April 1866: 190-197.

⁸⁴ ASGSB, Correspondance, vol.4 (1864-1867), Curran to Slocombe, 9 April 1866: 190-197.

⁸⁵ ASGSB, Correspondance, vol.5 (1867-1871), Curran to Slocombe, 25 August 1868: 90-93.

and as we shall see, this diversity was important to the story of Mulaire, because her teacher in Pembina, Juliette Lefèbvre, had been a novice of the Sœurs Grises of Saint-Boniface in 1846 and 1847. She worked with many of the nuns that have been considered here, and they would have influenced her perceptions of religious life. Despite her brief stay as a novice, it is not unreasonable to believe that Juliette Lefèbvre's perceptions and techniques concerning education and religious life were in part influenced by the Sœurs Grises. Her training gives us an idea of the kind of experience she encountered and provides an example of how one experience with the Sœurs Grises could influence an individual's subsequent relationships with other women in the colony.

The Impact on Catherine Mulaire

Juliette Lefèbvre, a former student who had passed through the convent school system, arrived in Saint-Boniface in 1846 from Montreal as a postulant and of the Sœurs Grises.⁸⁶ Upon her arrival, Valade placed her in charge of the refectory and assigned her to the role of assisting the nuns where there was the most pressing need.⁸⁷ Valade also noticed her potential as a teacher. In a letter to McMullen, Valade explained that she had considered assigning Lefèbvre to the role of teacher, but hesitated when she realized that the young novice needed to restore her precarious health and concentrate on her training in the novitiate.⁸⁸ Soon after, however, Lefèbvre left the convent in March, 1847, and

⁸⁶ ASGSB, Chroniques, vol.1 (1843-1857), 1846: 165.

⁸⁷ ASGSB, Chroniques, vol.1, (1843-1857), 1846: 172.

⁸⁸ ASGSB, AA/01/27, Valade to McMullen, 23 November 1846.

began to teach at the school in Prairie du Cheval Blanc (Saint-François-Xavier).⁸⁹ By 1849, there is evidence that she was teaching in the school in Pembina.⁹⁰

Lefèbvre, who had received an education, was briefly a novice of the *Sœurs Grises*, and was perceived to be a potential teacher, could have learnt from the others that she worked with in the convent. Furthermore, as we shall see, female religious communities in Lower Canada and France followed a general structure for their curriculum that was created by the *Frères des Écoles chrétiennes*. This structure provided a base that allowed for modifications in presentation and style. Nuns like Saint-Joseph and Lafrance provided a model for someone like Lefèbvre who was about to begin a career as a teacher. Thus, an examination of the curriculum taught by the *Sœurs Grises* is essential, as it is most likely the model followed by Lefèbvre.

Born in a family that was sympathetic to the Catholic religion, Mulaire's formal education began in 1851 when, at the age of eight, she began to attend the school of Fathers Belcourt and Lacombe in Pembina (North Dakota). Unfortunately, there are few indications in the historical record that describe the curriculum taught in this mission. One letter, written by Father Belcourt, suggests that students learned to read and write and were initiated to subjects like geography, arithmetic, and grammar.⁹¹

Religious instruction was also an integral part of the daily lives of the children. In a letter conserved at the *Société historique de Saint-Boniface*, Mulaire provided an indication of this latter reality. After having received religious instruction, she was able to

⁸⁹ ASGSB, *Chroniques*, vol.1 (1843-1857), 1847: 177; and ASGSB, Valade to McMullen, 15 June 1847.

⁹⁰ A letter written by Provencher noted that Belcourt had a large personnel to care for in 1849. Among his charges was his housekeeper, Isabelle Gladu; a teacher, Miss Lefèbvre; an Aboriginal cook; and an orphan that was the niece of Isabelle Gladu. ASHSB, Fonds SHSB, Dossier Belcourt, Georges-Antoine (abbé), Provencher to Turgeon, 30 November 1849.

⁹¹ ASHSB, Fonds Lionel Dorge, 44/132, *Recherche historiques – Correspondance George-Antoine Belcourt aux Ursulines de Trois-Rivières, Belcourt to Sœur Ste-Marie*, 27 June 1854.

assist the teacher in teaching other students their catechism lessons and prayers.⁹² These glimpses, however, do not provide a clear portrait, but there are nonetheless other observations and other examples that may be considered in deciphering the kind of educational system that Mulaire would have received.

The historical record has privileged to a larger extent the form and content of the curriculum taught by the Sœurs Grises. For instance, in 1846, the nuns taught on average one hundred students to read, write, and calculate. They were also initiated to grammar, history, and religious instruction. The Sœurs Grises believed that religious instruction was essential, otherwise all other forms of learning would remain inert:

Dans cette année, cent élèves d'une assiduité satisfaisante apprennent à lire, à écrire, à calculer, s'initient aux éléments de la grammaire, de l'histoire et reçoivent l'instruction des vérités de la foi avec un grand profit [...] Les institutrices s'efforcent de les former peu à peu à la bonne éducation de famille, à cette civilité chrétienne sans laquelle la science demeure inerte dans l'intelligence de l'enfant.⁹³

Some missionaries like Father Mestre also noted elements of the educational program of the Sœurs Grises. In his description, there is evidence of some of the academic pursuits, but also of the variety of domestic skills. It should be noted, however, that sciences and classical studies were still solely reserved for the male students. Academic subjects that were taught in the girls' school focussed primarily on the "artistic" nature of education like English, French, Art, and Music:

Pour ce qui est des élèves du pensionnat [...] des sœurs, j'ose vous affirmer que leur dernier examen aurait pu faire honneur aux beaux couvents d'ailleurs. Du reste jugez-en vous-mêmes d'après le programme: français, anglais, histoire, calcul, dessin, musique et, chose rare en bien des endroits, couture sur vieux; sans compter une foule de petites

⁹² SHSB, Fonds SHSB, 1/671, Personnage – Mulaire, Catherine: 1.

⁹³ ASGSB, Chroniques, vol.1, (1843-1857): 156-157.

industries très favorables au bon maintien d'une maison et à l'économie domestique.⁹⁴

He further indicated that the education provided by the Sœurs Grises had extended its influence to the family homes of their students:

On n'a qu'à visiter les familles à domicile et on s'aperçoit bien vite par le maintien des individus, la propreté et la mise des enfants, l'ordre de la maison, qu'elles sont les mères de famille qui ont été élevées chez les sœurs. Je vous avouerai même que le contraste est frappant et pénible entre ces dernières et celles qui n'ont jamais fréquenté les écoles.⁹⁵

Yet most of the entries do not provide any specific detail about the content of that education. There are, however, two ways in which some of the details may be found.

The first example is the notebooks of a contemporary of Mulaire, Sara Riel, the sister of Louis Riel, who had been a student and later joined the Sœurs Grises.⁹⁶ Born five years after Mulaire in 1848, Riel's experience in the boarding school of the Sœurs Grises may shed some light on the content of the education taught by Lefèbvre. According to Erickson, Riel's education appears to have been based on copying and memorizing various exercises based on religious themes.⁹⁷ Academic subjects were not necessarily a priority, and students were primarily exposed to the virtues of piety, modesty, artistic skills, and devotion. Religious practices such as church services, prayers of all sorts, sacraments, and penance were all integrated into the school day. Domestic training also played a significant role in her education. The students were taught to knit, sew, weave, embroider, spin wool, and perform all household duties.

⁹⁴ ASHSB, T53572-T53576, Charles Mestre, Mission de Saint-Boniface.

⁹⁵ ASHSB, T53572-T53576, Charles Mestre, Mission de Saint-Boniface.

⁹⁶ ASGSB, 22/21, Dossier personnel – Riel, Sara (1848-1883).

⁹⁷ Erickson, 1997: 63.

The second example may be found in the curriculum formed by the Frères des Écoles chrétiennes.⁹⁸ The Sœurs Grises were relieved of the task of teaching the boys' class with the arrival of the Frères des Écoles chrétiennes in 1854, but they also lost that sphere of influence. However, their power over the curriculum had always been overshadowed by the fact that they were constrained to follow the guidelines of the Frères des Écoles chrétiennes.⁹⁹

The Frères des Écoles chrétiennes were founded by Jean-Baptiste de La Salle in Reims in 1680. The first members of this community came to Lower Canada in 1837 and in 1854, Andronis (Alexandre-Joseph Gadenne), Arcisse-Marie (Nicolas Mouard) and Anselm (Pierre Adhémar) made their way to Saint-Boniface.¹⁰⁰ The goals of this religious community were to provide an education that met the needs of the popular classes by providing a primary and commercial education to all students. The introductory paragraph of their Rules and Regulations clearly states their mission:

L'Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes est une association, ou congrégation, dont la fin est de donner à ceux qui la composent des moyens particuliers pour travailler à leur propre perfection, et pour élever chrétiennement la jeunesse, spécialement les enfants des artisans et des pauvres, en tenant des écoles gratuites.¹⁰¹

The curriculum was based on instruction provided in one's mother tongue, religious instruction, and discipline. The class was often separated into groups and the more advanced students taught the others. The curriculum was divided into many levels;

⁹⁸ Nive Voisine. Les Frères des Écoles chrétiennes au Canada. Tome 1: La Conquête de l'Amérique, 1837-1880. Sainte-Foy: Éditions Anne Signier, 1987.

⁹⁹ ASGSB, AA/01/13, Valade to McMullen, July 1844.

¹⁰⁰ Dauphinais, 1991: 203.

¹⁰¹ Voisine, 1987: 121.

students had to successfully complete each level before moving on to the next. For example, in arithmetic there were seven levels, and in writing there were twelve.¹⁰²

Despite these constraints on the curriculum, the Sœurs Grises still possessed a great deal of agency in their relationship with various members, and in particular their female students. Their influence was due to the fact that it was the Sœurs Grises who were in daily contact with their female students. Therefore, their training of teaching nuns, like the efforts with Lefèbvre, was important in attempting to maintain their agency in forming Catholic wives and mothers.

Conclusion

The Sœurs Grises held a great deal of influence in introducing the female population to a curriculum that focussed on forming Catholic wives and mothers. Their sphere of influence grew in the first thirty years in the Northwest through the development of new schools and missions, and in providing “care” for the sick, the elderly, the poor, and the orphaned. Lefèbvre, Mulaire’s teacher had been exposed to these methods of teaching during her brief sojourn at the convent of the Sœurs Grises. While she did not get a chance to teach in a formal setting during her training, Valade had noticed her ability. Consequently, it would not seem unreasonable that her training in the novitiate focussed on acquiring the skills to become a teacher.

There is evidence, that Lefèbvre did not possess the religious vocation. One indication is that she did not complete her training with the Sœurs Grises and left the novitiate in 1847. Another sign of her lack of the religious vocation came with the dissolution of the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi in 1859. Mgr. Taché wrote to Father

¹⁰² Voisine, 1987: 307-364.

Faraud claiming that the Sister Sainte-Agathe (Juliette Lefèbvre) was returning to Lower Canada from which she never should have left in the first place. He further indicated that if she wrote to him, he should not return a response.¹⁰³ In another letter, Taché wrote to Caseau in 1860 that he was pleased that certain ex-nuns of the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi were not allowed to speak with Mgr. Floa. He further indicated that if he was given the chance to see him in person he would explain the whole matter.¹⁰⁴ Considering that he had earlier warned Faraud not to listen to Lefèbvre, it would not seem unreasonable that she was also part of the latter group as well. In the end, Lefèbvre may not have proved to be positive influence as Mulaire's teacher and co-nun in the religious community the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi.

¹⁰³ Alfred Fortier, "Georges-Antoine Belcourt et la communauté des religieuses de la Propagation de la Foi," *Bulletin de la Société historique de Saint-Boniface*, 11995): 3-23: 20. Taché to Faraud, 7 June 1859.

¹⁰⁴ ASHSB, Fonds SHSB, Dossiers Belcourt 1/45, Taché to Floa, 27 May 1860.

Chapter 4

Religion in Education: Catherine Mulaire's Religious Training, 1855-1859

Introduction

In recording the family genealogy and story of his great grandparents in the 1970s, Bernard Mulaire emphasized the religiosity of Mulaire. In one instance, he told the story of why his great grandmother had a cross built in 1900 between the two lands of her sons in Otterburne, Manitoba. Bernard Mulaire's account begins by stressing Mulaire's concern for the spiritual welfare of her family because her two sons, Henri-Honoré and Joseph, and their families rarely attended church. Their lack of church attendance was put down to the fact that her two sons lived at the far end of the parish a fair distance away from the church. With no means of transportation, it was a very long walk in the summer and an almost impossible journey in the winter.

To partially remedy the situation, Mulaire contracted a local man named Louis Laferté to build a cross. The two families and other Catholic families of the vicinity would meet together and pray when it was not possible to attend the town church. Thirteen years later when the two sons moved to Saint-Pierre-Jolys to be, among other things, closer to the church and convent school, Mulaire did not want to leave the cross unattended and ended up giving the cross to the Clercs de Saint-Viateur.¹

Bernard Mulaire's assessment of Mulaire's teaching career also highlights her profoundly religious life. In his research notes he wrote: "Elle enseigna pendant nombreuses années. Elle était profondément catholique, d'une grande piété et d'une

¹ Bernard Mulaire, "Notes biographiques," photocopy obtained from David Dandeneau: 1, (henceforth: Mulaire I).

générosité remarquable.”² There is other evidence to support this claim. For instance, in 1887, the “Section Catholique du Bureau d’Éducation du Manitoba,” sent samples of Catholic students’ school work to an exhibition in London, England. The officials in charge were surprised at the quality of the work and sent diplomas and medals to the schools that participated. The student samples had been chosen from eight schools and the school where Mulaire taught was the only one involving a lay teacher.³ In considering that the decision came from a Catholic school board, it is most likely that Mulaire privileged religious themes in her curriculum.

Since childhood, Mulaire had been greatly influenced by the Catholic religion. As we have seen, she was born to a métis family that was sympathetic to the Catholic Church and her early education in Pembina was under the tutelage of Juliette Lefèbvre, a novice of the Sœurs Grises in 1846 and 1847. Belcourt, desiring a female religious community and based on his positive relationship with another métis woman, Angélique Nolin, years earlier, chose to train Mulaire for the religious life in 1855. Consequently, Mulaire was sent to Longueuil to be trained for the religious life by the Sœurs des Saints Noms de Jésus et de Marie. She returned to Pembina and entered the novitiate of the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi in 1858.

The Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi was created by Belcourt in 1854 with the mandate of teaching the young and caring for the sick and poor.⁴ Rumors of misconduct began to circulate five years later, leading to controversy. The rumors varied from sexual

² Mulaire I: 1.

³ Mulaire I: 4; and Société historique de Saint-Boniface et la Ligue Féminine du Manitoba. Femmes de chez nous. Saint-Boniface: Les Éditions de Blé: 91.

⁴ For more information see: Alfred Fortier. “Georges-Antoine Belcourt et la communauté des religieuses de la Propagation de la Foi,” Bulletin de la Société historique de Saint-Boniface, 1 (1995): 3-23.

misconduct by Belcourt, to the misbehavior of the nuns, to mischief by other members of the Catholic clergy. Whatever the controversy, Belcourt was recalled to Lower Canada, the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi were no more, and Mulaire began a new career as a lay teacher.

The impact of this religious education also remains unclear. Clearly her great grandson felt that she internalized all that she was taught and led a very religious life. Her story, however, is more complex. Was religion simply a form of habit, formed after years of religious education or had she truly developed a deep sense of Catholicism, as part of her identity? Did she embrace religion from guilt over her actions within the community of the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi? In an attempt to answer these questions concerning Mulaire's apparent religious nature in later life and her role in the controversy, this chapter will consider the impact and the problems that arose during Mulaire's religious training with the Sœurs des Saints Noms de Jésus et de Marie and the events surrounding the demise of the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi.

Catherine Mulaire and the Sœurs des Saints Noms de Jésus et de Marie

The order of the Sœurs des Saints Noms de Jésus et de Marie was founded in 1844 by three women under the leadership of Mother Marie-Rose Durocher. This religious community was the project of Bourget who had encouraged these women to dedicate themselves to the education of the female population in Longueuil. He placed the nuns under the spiritual guidance of the Oblats de Marie-Immaculée. Mother Véronique du Crucifix became the second Superior and was still performing those duties

when Mulaire and her companion, Marie-Léocadie Martel, arrived at the convent in 1855.⁵

Born in 1820, Véronique du Crucifix was baptized under the name Hedwidge Davignon. In 1825, her father Captain Joseph Davignon died, and her mother, Marie-Victoire, who had sixteen children, many still very young, opened a school with some of her daughters. Véronique du Crucifix attended this school and later began her teaching career there. She felt, however, attracted to the newly founded religious community in Longueuil, that was dedicated to the education of poor children. Initially, her mother forbade her departure, but when she ran away to her uncle Victor's home in Boloeil in 1844, and asked him for his help, her mother finally conceded to her departure. The community was still in infancy when she entered the novitiate, and due to her prior experience as a teacher, she was given that responsibility.⁶

The Oblat de Marie-Immaculée spiritual advisor of the community when Véronique du Crucifix had entered the convent was Father Allard. He initiated the nuns to their religious exercises, grammar lessons, mathematics, literature, and so forth. On two separate occasions, he sent Véronique du Crucifix and Sister Thérèse de Jésus to Montreal, to spend some time with the Frères des Écoles chrétiennes. With their assistance, the two nuns developed a female version of the order's strict discipline-based education.⁷ During these two visits, the nuns were also initiated to the way the Sœurs de la Providence and the Sœurs Grises functioned in daily life. The nuns were boarders in

⁵ Mother Véronique du Crucifix was the Superior of the Sœurs des Saints Noms de Jésus et de Marie from 1848 to 1857.

⁶ Sœurs des Saints Noms de Jésus et de Marie. Mère Véronique du Crucifix, 1820-1903, deuxième supérieure générale, 1849-1857. Vol.1 Montreal: Thérien Frères, 1930: 7-45, (henceforth: Crucifix).

⁷ Crucifix, vol.1, 1930: 50-56.

these two communities during their instruction by the Frères des Écoles chrétiennes. Upon her return and in taking her final vows in 1845, Véronique du Crucifix was delegated to teach the advanced students French, English, and piano.⁸

By the time Mulaire and Martel had arrived in Longueuil in 1855, a religious-oriented curriculum was well in place. Even by 1845, there were signs of a precise and well-organized curriculum. An excerpt from an article published in Mélanges Religieux, after the public exam on 29 July 1845, provides some indication of the curriculum's structure and content:

Nous avons été témoin de la justesse et de la précision des réponses sur l'histoire sainte, l'histoire du Canada, la géographie, l'arithmétique, la grammaire, l'orthographe et l'analyse [...] c'est la religion qui préside à cette éducation.⁹

A "practical" education was also in place. For instance, after the exam, officials, parents, and friends were invited to inspect some of the students' handiwork in sewing, knitting, and embroidery. A further facet of the religious education provided to their female students may be seen in the obligatory religious exercises, like retreats and church services.¹⁰

According to Mulaire, Véronique du Crucifix was an excellent role model and teacher. In a letter written to her former teacher on 3 December 1896, Mulaire remembered the qualities of the teaching provided by her former teacher:

J'ai attendu avec impatience jusqu'à ce jour, afin de vous témoigner tous mes sentiments de respect et de reconnaissance pour vos sages avis et pour le profond intérêt que vous m'avez porté lorsque j'étais sous votre

⁸ Crucifix, vol.1, 1930: 61.

⁹ Crucifix, vol.1, 1930: 57.

¹⁰ Crucifix, vol.1, 1930: 69-79.

direction. Vous m'aviez aidée à acquérir des connaissances qui me sont bien utiles dans le chemin de la vie.¹¹

It is unlikely that all experiences were this positive, but Mulaire was not the only student to have written down praise concerning the teaching skills of Véronique du Crucifix. For instance, Véronique du Crucifix's biography reproduced other letters like the one written by Aglaé Rottot (née Benoit). In this letter, she recalled the maternal care of Véronique du Crucifix, her ability to share the students' joys and sorrows, and that each student felt comfortable in seeking her confidence:

Elle fut pour nous, d'une tendresse quasi maternelle; son cœur noble et bon le faisait s'intéresser à toutes nos familles, elle partageait nos joies et nos peines; nous allions à elle avec confiance. C'était une institutrice de premier ordre; [...] Ses entretiens sur la religion s'élevaient au sublime; on sentait qu'ils étaient le fruit de fortes études et de profondes méditations.¹²

From these two testimonies, it appears that Véronique du Crucifix sparked her students with an enthusiasm about the importance of a Catholic education, by making the learning process something special.

The relationship between Mulaire and Véronique du Crucifix appears to have been a positive experience for Mulaire. Their renewed relationship through correspondence years later, beginning in 1896, indicated the nature of this experience. In this exchange of letters, Mulaire also favorably recalled her stay with these nuns during the period between 1855 and 1858. Their correspondence also hints of their special connection, since there is no other evidence that Mulaire corresponded with any of the

¹¹ Passages of their correspondence from 1896 to 1901 is reproduced in the second volume of Crucifix's biography. The original letters are held in the archives of the Sœurs des Saints Noms de Jésus et de Marie in Longueuil. Copies of this correspondence may be found in the genealogy file of the Mulaire family located at the Société historique de Saint-Boniface. These copies were given to the archives by Bernard Mulaire who had requested a copy from the nuns in the 1970s. Crucifix, vol.2, 1930: 414.

¹² Crucifix, vol.1, 1930: 193.

other nuns of this religious community. The content of their correspondence speaks of the inseparable connection between religion and education, and reflects the religious influence on the early life of Mulaire.

Mulaire's and Martel's stay with the nuns would also be influenced by the tumultuous environment present within the ranks of the nuns in the community. During their sojourn, two camps within the community had formed with opposing visions of the kind of education that was to be provided for the students, and this would develop into a crisis in 1857. The conflict over authority in the convent had polarized around two individuals, Véronique du Crucifix and Thérèse de Jésus. The latter group believed in a very strict discipline-based education. These nuns were supported by the spiritual chaplain of the community since 1849, Father Georges Chabot. Others, like Véronique du Crucifix, believed that some of the nuns demanded a great deal of perfection from their students and reprimanded them too severely when they could not uphold these standards. These difficulties date back to almost the beginning of Véronique du Crucifix's leadership and by 1857 the situation had escalated to a breaking point. Bourget, afraid that a schism was imminent and that the result would undermine the work that they provided, accepted Véronique de Crucifix's resignation. A passage in her biography describes the gravity of the situation:

Quoiqu'il en soit, il est évident que sœur Thérèse de Jésus désirait mieux que l'état actuel des choses, au couvent de Longueuil. Elle en aurait parlé à Mgr. Bourget avec quelques autres, et, comme ce saint Prélat ne voulait pas voir une scission dans une maison alors à son début, ce qui l'aurait trop affaiblie.¹³

¹³ Crucifix, vol.1, 1930: 290-291.

The result of this controversy was the naming of Thérèse de Jésus as Superior, Sister Marie-Rose became her assistant, and Véronique du Crucifix became the assistant of Marie-Rose.¹⁴

While the students were most likely not aware of all the controversy that was going on, it would seem unreasonable that they did not perceive some of the tensions, particularly in the teaching methods of the nuns. In 1857, the students were sent on a retreat at the end of the school year and the biography of Véronique du Crucifix suggests that many of the students were difficult to handle and the general level of obedience and piety suffered as a consequence:

Pour la première fois, les élèves eurent une retraite à la fin de l'année. Parmi elles, plusieurs avaient des caractères difficiles; il avait fallu pour maintenir dans l'ordre, toute l'autorité de sœur Thérèse de Jésus. L'esprit de piété et d'obéissance avait diminué.¹⁵

In the end, while the education provided to Mulaire and Martel was among the best available, the main reason for their stay was to learn how to live within a religious community. The tensions and the division among the ranks of this relatively new religious community, the Sœurs des Saints Noms de Jésus et de Marie, may not have provided the best model for the two young women who were to join another fledging community.

Catherine Mulaire and the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi

The mandate of the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi was to “propagate” the Catholic faith by teaching school and by looking after the needs of the destitute and the

¹⁴ Crucifix, vol.1, 1930: 285.

¹⁵ Crucifix, vol.1, 1930: 283.

sick. The first known mention of Belcourt's idea to create this female religious community is in a letter to Bourget in 1850.¹⁶ Following this declaration, there does not appear to be any mention of this project for several years.

Prior to the idea of creating his own religious community, Belcourt had first looked to the Ursulines. He officially requested their services for the first time, in August of 1834, in a letter addressed to the Superior Sister St-Michel.¹⁷ The Ursulines were introduced to New France in 1697 by Mgr. Saint-Valier, with the mandate to primarily dedicate their efforts for girls' education. In 1853, Belcourt attempted once again to acquire the services of the Ursulines of Trois-Rivières.¹⁸ This appears to have been the last time that he asked for their services. In a letter dated on 27 June 1854, Belcourt seems to have changed his requests to the Ursulines from asking for their services to inquiring about the possibility of training candidates for his new métis female religious community.¹⁹ Unfortunately, it is unclear why the Ursulines never came out west, nor is the reason why Mulaire was sent to Longueuil instead of Trois-Rivières.

The first official mention of this religious community is found in a letter to the Archbishop of Saint-Louis, (Missouri) Mgr. Peter Richard Kenrick.²⁰ The letter is not dated, but it was most likely written around 1854. The Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi were officially incorporated under Iowa State law on 3 May 1854. There appears to have

¹⁶ Archives of the Société historique de Saint-Boniface (ASHSB), Fonds SHSB, Dossiers Belcourt, 1/46, Belcourt to [Bourget], 5 January 1850: 16-17.

¹⁷ ASHSB, Fonds Lionel Dorge, Recherches historiques - Correspondance Georges-Antoine Belcourt aux Ursulines de Trois-Rivières 1834-1854, 44/132, Belcourt to St-Michel, 18 August 1834.

¹⁸ ASHSB, Fonds Lionel Dorge, Recherches historiques - Correspondance Georges-Antoine Belcourt aux Ursulines de Trois-Rivières 1834-1854, 44/132, Belcourt to Ste-Marie, 15 October 1853.

¹⁹ ASHSB, Fonds Lionel Dorge, Recherches historiques - Correspondance Georges-Antoine Belcourt aux Ursulines de Trois-Rivières 1834-1854, 44/132, 27 June 1854.

²⁰ ASHSB, Fonds SHSB, Dossiers Belcourt, 1/43, Belcourt to Mgr. l'archevêque de Saint-Louis, Peter Richard Kenrick, [1854]: 35-38.

been three professed nuns and seven novices of the Propagation de la Foi in 1854.²¹ Unlike Belcourt's initial assertion, not all the nuns were of mixed descent. In the beginning, Belcourt noted that the nuns were teaching the female population of the mission and he planned for them to begin teaching the missionaries of the Northwest the "langue du pays," namely Ojibwa and Cree.²²

In 1858, Mulaire and Martel returned to the mission in Pembina and became novices of the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi. There does not appear to be any word from Belcourt about the daily activities of his religious community until the rumors of misconduct began sometime in 1859. Rumors of all sorts began to circulate in Pembina, Saint-Boniface, and Lower Canada over episodes of misconduct but much of the story remains unclear. Part of the debate lies in the issue of who was misbehaving, the nuns, Belcourt, the other Catholic personnel, or a combination of several individuals in the Pembina Mission. Even the form of misconduct, if it even occurred, remains under contention. Stories of a sexual nature, dancing at all hours of the night, and other episodes circulated in the colony.

To further complicate the story, the historical record concerning this controversial episode, is fraught with contradiction, ambiguity, and many silences. A few versions of the events surrounding the demise of the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi, by people who lived or were descendants of residents in Pembina during the controversy have been recorded. To illustrate the confusion surrounding the details of the controversy, three stories will be examined here.

²¹ ASHSB, Fonds SHSB, Dossiers Belcourt, 1/43, Belcourt to Mgr. l'archevêque de Saint-Louis, Peter Richard Kenrick, [1854]: 35-38.

²² ASHSB, Fonds Lionel Dorge, Recherches historiques - Correspondance Georges-Antoine Belcourt aux Ursulines de Trois-Rivières 1834-1854, 44/132, 27 June 1854.

The first version was recorded years later by Sophie Morin. Unfortunately, there is no record as to why she decided to tell her version of the story that had been passed down to her through her father. In her version, she claimed that one night, Frère Thimothée (Pierre Curtaz) who had been sent to the community to assist Belcourt with domestic duties, hid one night and saw Belcourt secretly enter the convent to spend the night.²³ It should be noted however, that Sophie Morin was the daughter of Thimothée. Thimothée left the religious life in 1859 and married Caroline Hénault on 11 June 1861 in Saint-Boniface. The couple lived for the next ten years in Saint-Joseph and then settled permanently in Sainte-Anne-des-Chênes where they had several children.²⁴ Morin's reasons for making such a claim may have been influenced by stories her father had told her, a way to dispel the suspicion concerning her father's actions, or her own perception of the events.

The second version of the story, by a M. Jetté, provides an example of the shame that Sophie Morin may have been trying to hide. According to Jetté, the trouble began with Thimothée: "On sortait avec Madeleine Plouffe et il y en avait aussi d'autres qui venaient voir cette fille, une sœur. Le Père Belcourt renvoya chez-elles ces sœurs."²⁵ Taché also accused Belcourt for having placed too much confidence in Thimothée, when no one else would have been so foolish: "Il (Belcourt) a aussi pour se faire plaindre, donné beaucoup trop d'importance à cet aventurier le frère Curtaz qui n'est rien et à qui personne ne s'est jamais fié."²⁶

²³ ASHSB, Fonds Pierre Picton, 1/98, Dossier Curtaz, Pierre: 1-18.

²⁴ ASHSB, Fonds Pierre Picton, 1/98, Dossier Pierre Curtaz: 1-18 His name is also spelled "Timothée." After leaving the religious life in 1859, he took his former name: Pierre Curtaz.

²⁵ Alfred Fortier, 1995: 18.

²⁶ ASHSB, Fonds SHSB, Dossiers Belcourt, 1/45, Taché to Caseau, January 26, 1860: 39.

In the end, it is very difficult to assess the role played by Thimothée, and only the fact that he never once came to the aid of Belcourt during this controversy is certain.²⁷ Part of the reason for this indecision concerning his personality stems from other positive opinions of Thimothée. Belleau was one such person who appears to believe that Thimothée was a good man, and he claimed that he had received on good authority from a Father Deschambeault that Thimothée was extremely devout and religious: "C'était d'ailleurs un homme fort respectable. [...] L'abbé Deschambeault [...] m'assurait qu'il l'avait connu comme un homme dévot et fort pieux."²⁸

Alfred Fortier, of the Société historique de Saint-Boniface, claims that a third version, by a Lina Rondeau, is the most plausible explanation of the events surrounding the demise of the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi. Lina Rondeau, (née Catherine Lina Bellegarde), was an orphan and at the age of nine was taken in by Belcourt and placed in the convent with the nuns, and she remembered remaining in the convent for five years.²⁹ If this is correct, she would have been thirteen or fourteen years old at the time of the incident.

In her version, Rondeau recalled that Mulaire and Madeleine Kline would go out in the evening with Thimothée to dance.³⁰ Thus, in her mind, the demise of the religious

²⁷ See Reardon, (1955) for more information about how the Frère Thimothée and Father Goiffon (another priest in the region) added fuel to the fire by publicly accusing the conduct of Father Belcourt and their constant complaint of how Belcourt treated them to their superiors in Saint-Boniface and Quebec prior to these events.

²⁸ ASHSB, Correspondance personnelle – Belleau, Julius M., B1536/68, Belleau to Baudoux, September 28, 1968: 1. (Henceforth: Belleau)Mgr. Maurice Baudoux (b. 1902, Belgium – d. 1988, Saint-Boniface) came to Canada in 1911 and settled in Saskatchewan. He studied in Saint-Boniface, Edmonton, and Quebec and was ordained in 1929. In 1948, he became the first Bishop of Saint-Paul, Alberta. In 1952, he became the coadjutor of the Archbishop mgr. b/liveau, and Archbishop in 1955. He retired in 1974. See: Lionel Dorge *Le Manitoba, reflects d'un passé*. Saint-Boniface: Les Éditions du blé, 1976: 168; and ASHSB, General Files, Baudoux, Maurice.

²⁹ Fortier, 1995: 18.

³⁰ Belleau, 1968: 1.

community was due to their misconduct. From her rendition and to explain why Belcourt was made the scapegoat and recalled back out east, Fortier proposes that Louis Lacerte, the father of the postulant Mulaire and possibly other members of the community, complained to Mgr. Grace, the Bishop of Saint-Paul about the misconduct of Belcourt and he believed them.³¹

Rondeau's explanation for why the misconduct of the nuns was allowed to happen points to the fact that Belcourt was often absent from the mission as he was continually in search of new recruits and financial assistance for the community. She also suggested that as soon as he learned of these infractions, he punished the nuns in question and sent them to their families: "Il a pris un poteau de la galerie de l'escalier et a donné une bonne fessée à ces jeunes sœurs."³² Belcourt's disciplinary actions would lend fuel to the fire.

In her article, "A Cree Nurse in a Cradle of Methodism: Little Mary and the Egerton R. Young Family at Norway House and Barents River," Ethno-Historian Jennifer Brown suggests that the children's nurse opposed the Reverend Young's views on discipline and punishment:

Among the Youngs' later memories of her, Mary's Cree abhorrence for Euro-Canadians' corporal punishment or confinement of naughty children stood out most vividly.³³

In the same article, Brown states that: "the 'lady teachers,' in particular, usually gave a naughty child blows with a bamboo rod or a strap until the recipient cried [...]"³⁴ The métis nuns' objection possibly stemmed from their belief that it was improper for a male

³¹ Fortier, 1995: 19.

³² Belleau, 1968: 1.

³³ Jennifer S.H. Brown, "A Cree Nurse in a Cradle of Methodism: Little Mary and the Egerton R. Young Family at Norway House," in Mary Kinnear (ed.), First Days, Fighting Days: Women in Manitoba History. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1987: 19-40: 23.

³⁴ Brown, 1987: 32.

clergyman to strike a female nun. Catholic religious life required the strict observance of rules of separation between men and women. In their concern to uphold these rules, the *Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi* the actions of Belcourt would seem inappropriate.

Rondeau rationalized the nuns' accusations as a means of revenge. For instance, she remembered some of the nuns saying that Belcourt forced them to have sexual intercourse: "Pour se venger elles ont fait des histoires et placottages contre le Père Belcourt, disant qu'il les avaient prises seules dans sa maison et leur avait fait l'amour."³⁵ However, it should be noted that this may have been Rondeau's conclusion of the events. A reason for this uncertainty is that in another version Rondeau stated that the nuns did not make any official accusations. Rather they left the matter to gossip: "Pour se venger ces filles l'accusèrent dans le peuple [...] en métisse laissant plutôt entendre ou sous-entendre des choses! [...] et ce qu'on me dit qu'à demi c'est toujours plus dangereux."³⁶

Rondeau's story was recorded by Father Julius Belleau, the parish priest in Pembina, when she was nearing a hundred years old: "Dans ma paroisse de Pembina vivait une vieille métisse, qui avait près de cent ans, avait vécu près de lui dans sa maison et avait connu toute l'affaire."³⁷ In considering that Rondeau was thirteen or fourteen at the time of the incident and was nearing one hundred at the time that he recorded her story, this interview probably took place in the early 1940s. Unfortunately there is no indication why he wanted her story. Belleau's reasons for recording the matter are not clearly stated. The letter written to Baudoux in 1968 suggests that he had promised the latter the "exact" details of the incident: "Ensuite je vous avais promis les faits exacts sur

³⁵ Fortier, 1995: 11.

³⁶ Belleau, 1968: 2-3.

³⁷ Belleau, 1968: 2.

le départ de Mr. Belcourt de ses missions du Dakota. Vous trouverez le tout en détail dans le document ci-attaché en trois feuilles.”³⁸ It is perhaps not unreasonable that either Belleau had a deep rooted interest in and curiosity in about an incident that happened many years earlier in his parish, or others had asked him to find out more about the incident.

Rondeau’s reason for telling the story at the end of her life is also a mystery. While telling her story years later is not technically a problem for remembering the events, the manner in which she finally told her story should be considered. In short, one must question both Rondeau’s and Belleau’s motives. Belleau had asked her on a number of occasions over twelve years about the incident and she dismissed his request by remembering the episode as simply des “placottages des Métis.”³⁹ The context of a deathbed confessional should not be overlooked. Rondeau was deathly ill when she finally told the story and it is possible that she told him a story that he wanted to hear and not necessarily an exact rendition of what she remembered. After all, he was the parish priest and the one to administer her last rites. In his letter to Baudoux, Belleau described this final visit and her death one hour after having told him the story:

Un matin on me fait demander pour cette vieille qui avait la grippe, ce qui ordinairement tue les sauvages [....] Comme je la quittais, elle se mis à me raconter tout ce que j’avais toujours demandé sur le départ du Père Belcourt. Une heure plus tard [...] elle mourut.⁴⁰

Additionally, her rendition is rendered even more complex as it is difficult to decipher at times where her story ends, and where Belleau’s opinions begin.

³⁸ Belleau, 1968: cover letter.

³⁹ The term “placottages,” is used in a derogatory sense to describe the “gossip” of the métis. It is generally used to dismiss the actions and words of an individual or group as irrelevant or to show inferiority.

⁴⁰ Belleau, 1968: 2.

Rondeau also added that Mulaire (Sister Philomène) was the “leader” of the group. In another testimony, she claims that there were three nuns, Catherine (Mulaire) Lacerte (Sister Philomène), Madeleine Plouffe (Sister Madeleine) and a Kline girl (Sister Gertrude), who served as a bad example to the rest: “Elles étaient plutôt légères et se montraient très empressées envers un frère de la Sainte Famille de Boily, France, qui était venu en qualité de domestique aider le P. Belcourt, le frère Dosithé.”⁴¹ There are, however, a number of errors or contradictions in her story.

Rondeau asserts that Mulaire was Sister Philomène and the Kline girl was Sister Gertrude in one of the written testimonies. In another, Sister Ste-Philomène was Madeleine Kline or Cline.⁴² It could be possible that she had mistaken the identity or mixed up the names of some of the nuns, particularly as the years passed. Rondeau and Belleau believed that Sister Gertrude died of a painful cancer, possibly of the tongue, a fate that was just punishment for her crimes. They stated that Madeline Plouffe (Sister Madeleine) departed for Winnipeg after the dissolution of the community and lived as a “concubine” with a Scottish man and had a very unhappy life.⁴³

As for Mulaire, the “leader of the group,” she is described by Rondeau and Belleau as having lived with a man out of wedlock. This man was said to have mistreated her and her daughter. He died in a terrible accident and she returned to her parents in Saint-Boniface where she died, mentally disturbed.⁴⁴ This cannot be the same Catherine Lacerte that married Joseph Mulaire in 1862, had six children, had a husband who died of

⁴¹ Belleau, 1968: 2. The Frère Dosithé here is the same Frère Thimothée mentioned earlier.

⁴² Belleau, 1968: 3 and Fortier, 1995: 13.

⁴³ Belleau, 1968: 3.

⁴⁴ Belleau, 1968: 3.

pneumonia, taught for more than thirty six years, and died herself of old age in 1922. Furthermore, at no time did Mulaire or her parents live in Saint-Boniface.

As we have seen, there are other explanations for the demise of the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi. The nuns' inability to establish and understand the traditional function of a female religious order is one possible explanation of the difficulties. For instance, some of the nuns of the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi, like Juliette Lefèbvre and Isabelle Gladu, were not sufficiently trained or did not possess the religious vocation. Moreover, Lefèbvre, as we have seen in the last chapter, was not well seen in the eyes of some of the missionaries like Taché and consequently a poor model for the others, in particular Mulaire who had been one of her students. The tensions and divisions that were present in the convent of the Sœurs des Saints Noms de Jésus et de Marie during the training of Mulaire in Longueuil, did not introduce her to a stable environment from which to learn about the religious life.

There is also evidence that questions the leadership abilities of the Superior of the religious community, Isabelle Gladu. Gladu had been the "ménagère" for Belcourt for a number of years before the creation of the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi.⁴⁵ It should be noted that she was remembered favorably by the male clergy. For example Father Faraud was impressed with her abilities:

Ou je me trompe fort, ou cette personne méritait un meilleur sort. Elle m'a surpris par son bon sens, ses réflexions judicieuses sur le passé, l'expression mâle et naïve de ses douleurs, sa politesse, etc. Je suis resté convaincu que cette femme, mise dans une autre position aurait pu faire merveille.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Fortier, 1995: 3-4.

⁴⁶ Belleau, 1968: 13.

She was described as a model nun, but her earlier indecision or inability to cope with the religious life with the Sœurs Grises suggests that she was not necessarily the right person to lead a newly founded religious community through the initial growing stages.⁴⁷

Even the Sœurs Grises had some difficulty in applying their rules and regulations to the context of their environment. Many of the established rules that worked in Montreal were simply impracticable in the Northwest. For instance, there was a great deal of discussion as to how the nuns would deal with living in close quarters with some of the male clergy. In a letter to her superiors in Montreal, Valade explained the necessity for the priests of the missions to take their meals in the sisters living space:

À propos des missions, je dois vous dire ma bonne Mère, que j'ai fait part à Monseigneur de la répugnance que vous éprouvez à permettre que les Prêtres prennent leurs repas chez les Sœurs [...] Monseigneur trouve qu'il y a ici plus d'inconvénients à ce que les Sœurs apportent le manger au presbytère [...] Dans le cas où les Sœurs manqueraient de filles, ce qui est assez fréquent; il faudrait quitter quelques fois des ouvrages bien pressants, pour aller deux ensemble au presbytère; autrement, une Sœur devra y aller seule [...] Cette dernière manière de faire, serait [...] opposé à nos saintes Règles."⁴⁸

Unlike the Sœurs Grises, the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi was a newly formed community and seemed to have had a difficult time adapting religious community rules to the environment the early missions demanded.

It was not only the female religious communities that had difficulty in adapting the rules of their religious communities to the context of the Northwest. A male religious order, the Oblats de Marie-Immaculée, was also not immune to these difficulties. Founded in 1826 by Mgr. Eugène Mazenod in France, this order established their first

⁴⁷ It was noted in the Chronicles that Isabelle Gladu entered the novitiate but only remained a couple of days. ASGSB, *Chroniques*, vol.1 (1843-1857): 5.

⁴⁸ ASGSB, "Correspondance: Maison Mère et Maison Provincial Saint-Boniface," vol.1 (1844-1850), Valade to [?], 25 January 1859.

headquarters in Montreal in 1841 and four years later two members headed out to the mission of Saint-Boniface.⁴⁹ This male religious order became a major influence in the missions and following the death of Provencher in 1853, one of the first two of the order to make their way out west, Taché became the head of Catholic Church in the Northwest.

Alexandre-Antonin Taché was born in Fraserville (Rivière-du-Loup), Lower Canada. In 1833, he entered the seminary of Saint-Hyacinthe and then that of Saint-Sulpice in Montreal in 1841. Upon receiving his tonsure on 21 May 1842, Taché then decided to enter the novitiate of the Oblats de Marie-Immaculée in 1844. Taché, along with Father Joseph-Pierre-Blaise Aubert were the first two Oblats de Marie-Immaculée missionaries to be chosen to journey out west, and they arrived in Saint-Boniface on 25 August 1845. He was ordained as a deacon on the 31 August 1845 and as a priest on the 12 October of that same year.

One of Taché's main projects prior to 1853 was the foundation of the mission at Île-à-la-Crosse in what is now the province of Saskatchewan. On 14 June 1850, Taché was nominated to become coadjutor to Provencher with the right to succession and he received his consecration on 23 November 1851. After the death of Provencher, Taché did not immediately take over his new position. He would not officially take over the Episcopal Chair until the 5 November 1854 because he wished to consolidate his new mission at Île-à-la-Crosse. Amongst other things, the first Archbishop of Saint-Boniface would be known for his dedication in founding new parishes, actively promoting French-Canadian colonization, fighting for the rights for French and denominational schools, and assisting in the negotiations for the creation of the new province of Manitoba.

⁴⁹ See: Raymond Huel. Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indian and the Métis: The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Western Canada, 1845-1945. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996.

Taché also wrote about the history and the events that surrounded him.⁵⁰ It is largely through his writings that we are provided with an interesting example of the relationship between Oblats of Marie-Immaculée and the women and the Sœurs Grises in the Northwest. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Oblats de Marie-Immaculée were established at many of the posts of the Hudson's Bay Company and in many cases, the Sœurs Grises were also present. It is thus important to consider their influence in relation to the Sœurs Grises in order to better understand both the social position of females in the Northwest during this time period, as well as the attitude towards them.

Like the Sœurs Grises who came from Montreal, the Oblats de Marie-Immaculée were influenced by Catholic ultramontanist.⁵¹ This mindset was the reaction to a liberal movement in France, led by Father Félicité de Lamennais that began in 1815. Essentially, the movement sought to rejuvenate the Gospels by privileging their aspects of freedom. The movement was crushed in 1832 and Pope Gregory XVI and his successors transformed Rome and the Catholic Church into a centralized "protection agency" against the products of modern, liberal, and secularized societies.⁵² Historian Raymond Huel provides an interesting summation of the mindset: "In sum, for an ultramontane Catholic, human beings cannot be trusted; they must be protected from themselves."⁵³

The Oblats relationship with lay and religious women alike was difficult. The

⁵⁰ His writings include: *Vingt années de missions dans le Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique*. Montreal: Eusèbe Sénécal, 1866; *Une Page de l'Histoire des Écoles de Manitoba – études des cinq phases d'une période de 75 années*. Saint-Boniface: Le Manitoba, 1893; *Mémoire de Mgr. Taché sur la Question des Écoles en réponse au rapport du comité de l'Honorable Conseil Privé du Canada*. Montreal: Beauchemin et Fils, 1894; and "Rapport aux directeurs de l'œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi (1880)," *Bulletin de la Société historique de Saint-Boniface*, 5,2 (1915).

⁵¹ The term "ultramontane," was coined in France, designating the Catholics were to look over the Alps towards Rome for their Salvation.

⁵² Huel, 1996: 3.

⁵³ Huel, 1996: 4.

awkwardness lies in the two opposing views they had of women. Like others views of the time, women were perceived as morally superior to men, but they were also a source of temptation. Consequently, the Oblats had very strict rules concerning their association with women. In general, they were not allowed to have anything to do with women except in conversation in places where they could be easily observed.⁵⁴

An example of this awkward relationship can be found in Taché's writings. On the one hand, Taché praised the work of the Sœurs Grises, as in the letter he wrote to his mother describing how:

les soeurs font un bien remarquable; on s'aperçoit d'un changement bien grand dans la population depuis leur arrivée. Leurs écoles marchent parfaitement. Quant à la sœur Lagrave, elle a pour partage la guérison de toutes les infirmités.⁵⁵

On the other hand, his book Vingt années de missions dans le Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique, published in 1866, barely mentions the Sœurs Grises. Thus even though he praised the nuns for their contributions, in an official publication they were almost invisible.

Reconciling the opposing views of the Oblats de Marie-Immaculée would have been difficult for the newly created Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi. In attempts to stabilize their fledging religious community, they were trying to define themselves in an environment that was complex and often contradictory. Their spiritual leader, Belcourt was often absent from the mission, thus the nuns had to cope on their own. Moreover, religious communities, like the Oblats de Marie-Immaculée or the Sœurs Grises, were not trained to respect other cultures. Rather, the nineteenth century philosophy was to convert rather than learn about new cultures.

⁵⁴ Lesley Erickson. At the Cultural Crossroads: Sara Riel and the Grey Nuns in the Canadian Northwest, 1848-1883. Thesis [M.A.], Calgary : University of Calgary: 118.

⁵⁵ ASGSB, Chroniques, vol.1: 145.

Whatever the reason for the demise of the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi, it appears that the historical record seems to fall silent, particularly from some of the key players in the controversy, making it extremely difficult, if not impossible to determine the reasons for the demise of the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi. For example, there is no record by Mulaire about any aspect of her life in the religious order and the events that surround its dissolution.⁵⁶ The silence could suggest a variety of conclusions. The situation may have been so traumatic that she wished to forget its very existence. She may have been instructed by others never to mention the episode. Or perhaps she was ashamed of her conduct.

Mulaire was not the only one who wished to bury the incidents. For instance, Valade, Superior of the Sœurs Grises convent in Saint-Boniface wrote to her Superior in Montreal in 1859 that the whole situation was disappointing as it fueled the gossip of the Protestant population in the colony against the Catholics in general: “Comme on ne manque jamais de trouver beaucoup à redire, surtout parmi les protestants dans de semblables circonstances cette affaire a, je crois, fait bien du mal.”⁵⁷ The content of the letter also records that Taché made a trip down to Pembina to absolve the three professed nuns of their vows and to wrap-up any other unfinished business with the religious community. The letter also informed the Superior in Montreal that two members of this former religious community had requested to enter the convent of the Sœurs Grises. Valade does not name the individuals but does indicate that she immediately rejected one

⁵⁶ For instance, in a letter written in 1912, Mulaire speaks of returning to Pembina in 1858 and then there is a sentence that does not make any sense. The sentence reads: “Je suis revenue en 1858 à 15 ans chez mon père du temps de Mr. Goiffon en 1859 que j’ai continué jusqu’en 1852, j’avais 19 ans. SHSB, Fonds SHSB, 1/671, Personnages – Mulaire, Catherine: 1.

⁵⁷ Fortier, 1995: 12. A copy of this letter is conserved at the Archives of the Sœurs Grises in Saint-Boniface. The original is conserved in the archives of the Mother House of the Sœurs Grises in Montreal.

of the candidates for “good reason.” The other, Valade indicated that she would be willing to accept her only as a “fille donnée,” but did not believe that the offer would be accepted.

The historical record also does not provide an explanation as to why Belcourt, who did not seem to obey many of the rules of his superiors, decided to keep quiet, for the most part, on this particular issue. Perhaps he was not as innocent as he claimed, but was instructed to keep the general silence that has managed to surround the events of 1859 in Pembina. In a letter to his friend Caseau in 1862, Belcourt himself realized the negative implications of his request to return back to his parish and clear his name:

Le salut des âmes y perd, la religion est rendu méprisable et si j'allais poursuivre en réparation d'honneur je suis bien sûr de gain de cause et de faire tomber en cinq minutes tous ces châteaux de cartes; mais je ne pourrais faire sans dévoiler l'indigne abus des pouvoirs de l'Église et la honte en retomberait sur le sacerdoce qui l'on croirait toujours agir uniformément.⁵⁸

However, it should be noted that while Belcourt's correspondence did not speak of the details concerning the demise of the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi, he certainly did condemn them in a letter written in 1862 to his ex-parishioners. In this letter, he lamented all the time that he had invested in their training and hoped for their conversion, otherwise their final judgement would be horrific:

Mais ce qui est sûr, c'est que si les malheureuses filles pour lesquelles j'ai fait tant de dépenses, que j'ai traitées comme mes filles et mes propres enfants [...] Malheur à ces pauvres enfants, pour l'ingratitude avec laquelle elles ont agi envers moi! Leur jugement sera terrible; car elles sont de plus la cause de l'état d'abandon où vous êtes. Je leur pardonne et je souhaite leur conversion.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Fortier, 1995: 10. A copy of this letter is conserved in the archives of the Société historique de Saint-Boniface.

⁵⁹ Fortier, 1995: 11. A copy of this letter is conserved in the archives of the Société historique de Saint-Boniface.

Unfortunately, after this letter and his failure to convince his superiors to allow him to return to his mission, Belcourt appears to have given up the fight and began his new career in the maritimes.

Conclusion

The impact of Catherine Mulaire's religious education and training on the events surrounding the controversy of the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi in 1859 remains obscured. Mulaire's initial religious education focussed on forming her to become a Catholic wife and mother. When it was decided that she should be trained for the religious life, the orientation of her teaching shifted slightly to train her for the religious life. However, once she joined the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi, she did not appear to have internalized the religious life.

In the end, it still remains a mystery why the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi imploded in 1859. Belcourt asked his former parishioners to petition for his return in 1862, the name of Mulaire's father Louis Lacerte was not found on the list. Belcourt wrote another letter to his former parishioners that noted the hurt he felt that a person he had considered a friend, would not speak out on his behalf:

En relisant vos noms sur la pétition, je cherche en vain le nom de plusieurs que je sais être mes amis, le nom de Louis Lacerte dont l'enfant depuis l'âge de sept ans m'a causé tant de dépenses et dont l'ingratitude ne m'a payé que de chagrin.⁶⁰

However, in order to do so, Louis Lacerte would have had to take the opposing side of his daughter.

⁶⁰ Fortier, 1995: 11. A copy of this letter is conserved in the archives of the Société historique de Saint-Boniface.

All that can be said with certainty is that Taché sent a priest to Pembina from Saint-Boniface to look into the matter and that nothing could be proven: “ces accusations furent portées à Mgr. Taché, de St-Boniface, qui envoya un prêtre pour faire une enquête. Rien ne fut jamais prouvé et les parents reprirent les sœurs chez-eux.”⁶¹ The end result was that the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi no longer existed after 1859, Belcourt was recalled back to Lower Canada, and the nuns either returned to their families, took teaching positions, or married.

Perhaps it was not the controversy itself that was important in this instance and could have some other meaning. Regardless of whom was to blame – Belcourt, the nuns, Thimothée, or others – the critics of the community were successful, since the Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi were no more and the insubordinate Belcourt would never return to the region. Thus, even the slightest bit of controversy may have created a chance to be rid of the problematic Belcourt and his female métis religious community.

Moreover, like the apprentices and journeymen depicted in the “Great Cat Massacre” by Robert Darnton, the scandal explored in this thesis may have been an example of “symbolic externalization.” In the Red River region scandal, it was the symbolic externalization of the frustration towards the assimilative tactics of the Catholic Church or an example of a form of agency on the part of the Native community.⁶² Clearly there was tension between some of the nuns and Belcourt and his actions had raised enough suspicion for him to be recalled to Lower Canada. In the end, Mulaire would become one of the first female lay teachers in rural Manitoba. What is interesting about

⁶¹ Fortier, 1995: 11.

⁶² Robert Darnton, “Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin,” in The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1984: 75-106.

her story is that she continued to teach even after she married and started a family. Despite all the controversy, then, there is evidence that she retained many aspects of her Catholic faith, such as her letters to her former teacher Mother Véronique du Crucifix and the story of her having a cross built on the land of her two sons in 1900.

Conclusion

Foundations of Female Catholic Education

In her book Living Religions, Mary Pat Fisher reminds us that:

The history of Christianity is characterized more by divisions than by unions among Christian groups, and the Church is vast and culturally diverse, and Christian theologies are complex and intricate.¹

Similarly, each Christian group is characterized by many divisions and tensions, and the Catholic Church is no exception. The Catholic Church, particularly in assessing its doctrine, is often perceived as a stagnant and monolithic institution. Through the example of female education in the nineteenth century Red River region, the portrayal of the differences between two members of the secular clergy and their approaches toward female religious communities and students was the purpose of this thesis. This discussion has also considered how this religious instruction influenced the life of a woman who went through the system.

To illustrate this process of negotiation between the various agencies of the Catholic Church, this thesis has explored the role and the influence of Mgr. Joseph-Norbert Provencher and Father Gerges-Antoine Belcourt upon the implementation of a female educational system in the Red River region. Provencher's desire to initiate a "practical" form of education did resemble Belcourt's vision, but their method of establishing this goal differed. On the one hand, Provencher desired to introduce a Catholic and French-Canadian educational structure in isolation from local practices. On the other hand, Belcourt sought to teach the local population about the Catholic and French-Canadian way of life in relation to the regional custom. Additionally, the

¹ Mary Pat Fisher. Living Religions. 2nd edition, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1994: 275.

competitive relationship of these two clergymen led to the arrival of the Sœurs Grises in the Red River region in 1844.

Members of the male clergy were not the only ones to influence the development of an educational system in the Red River region. This thesis has also considered the authority exercised by the Sœurs Grises upon their arrival to Saint-Boniface in 1844. This thesis has also explored some of the ways in which this institution changed during its first thirty years in the region; namely the creation of new missions, schools, and health care institutions. The role played by the Sœurs Grises is essential to a study of the development of female education in the Northwest because they were in daily contact with their students. The individual experiences of Sisters Saint-Joseph, Lafrance, Connolly, and Withman served as examples of how each individual nun possessed her own sphere of influence.

An analysis of the introduction of an educational system is not complete without a consideration of someone who has passed through that system. The case of Catherine Mulaire is an example of a woman who received a religiously-based education in a variety of contexts. She was taught to read and write by two local priests, Fathers Thibault and Belcourt, who served the Pembina mission where she lived. At the same time, she also received further instruction from a woman, Juliette Lefèbvre, who had passed through the religious educational system in Lower Canada and had attempted the religious life with the Sœurs Grises in Saint-Boniface. Mulaire was then sent to learn more about the religious life in Longueuil with the Sœurs des Saints Noms de Jésus et de Marie.

Upon return to her home, she entered a newly created religious community by Belcourt called the *Sœurs de la Propagation de la Foi*. This religious community was intended to serve the local population in teaching the youth and in caring for the poor and sick. Mulaire is thus an example of a woman who had been specifically trained to teach others from her community about what she had learned about the Catholic and French-Canadian way of life. This enterprise did not necessarily end as many had hoped. Belcourt's venture in creating a female religious community ended in controversy. The exact nature of the conflict cannot be assessed with any certainty, but what is essential to note is that the critics of this enterprise were successful; an insubordinate priest was no longer able to keep his mission and the locally created religious community was no more.

At first glance, Mulaire's failed attempt at the religious life suggests a failure in the system of religious instruction. Rather than perceiving her case as an example of inadequate enterprise, the diversity that has been demonstrated here within the experience of religious instruction within the ranks of the clergy may also be found in the pupils that passed through the system. While the experience of Mulaire is but one example, it is a place to begin an exploration of the different ways in which students internalized and externalized the instruction that they received as children. Despite her failed religious career, there is evidence that Mulaire continued to hold her Catholic religious beliefs throughout her life as a wife, mother, and lay teacher in rural Manitoba.

There are a variety of different individuals who introduced this religiously-based system of education to the children of the nineteenth century Red River region. The story of Catherine Mulaire also suggests that further consideration of the ways in which women

understood and experienced their education at the hands of the Catholic Church is needed, rather than considering all experiences to be the same.

**Appendix A:
Scrip Application of Catherine Mulaire**

Source: Provincial Archives of Manitoba

DOMINION OF CANADA: *Catherine Miller, alias Mulaire*
 PROVINCE OF MANITOBA: of the Parish of *St Robert* in the County
 of *Provencher* in said Province, *widow of*
 Parish of *St Robert* *the late Joseph Miller, farmer.*
 I am a Half breed head of a family resident in the Parish of *St Robert*
 in the said Province, on the 15th day of July, A.D. 1870, and consisting
 of myself ~~and husband~~ *children*
 and I claim to be entitled as such head of family to receive a grant of one hundred and sixty acres
 of land or to receive Scrip for one hundred and sixty dollars pursuant to the Statute in that behalf.
 2. I was born on or about the *15th* day of *October* A.D. 1844 in the
 Parish of *St. W. Gertrude*
 2. *Louis Lacerte, half-breed,* is my father;
 and *Josephine Vandal, do* do my mother
 4. I have not made or caused to be made any claim of land or Scrip other than the above in
 this or any other Parish in said Province, nor have I claimed or received, as an Indian, any
 annuity moneys, from the Government of said Dominion.

Catherine Mulaire

Sworn before me at the Parish and County aforesaid on the
25th day of *November* A.D. 1875 having
 been first read over and explained in the *French*
 language to said deponent who seemed perfectly to under-
 stand the same and *signed* in my presence.

[Signature]

Commissioner.

Aff. No 2064
Claims No 1864
Scrip No 10763 \$160.00 (C)
Scrip issued 4th Sept 1876

C. E. H.

Scrip Application of Louis Lacerte

Source: Provincial Archives of Manitoba

DOMINION OF CANADA. } *Louis Lacerte*
 PROVINCE OF MANITOBA. } of the Parish of *S. Robert*
 County of *Powinches* } of *Powinches* in said Province. *merchant*
 Parish of *S. Robert* I make oath and say as follows:

1. I am a Half breed head of a family, resident in the Parish of *S. Robert* in the said Province, on the 15th day of July, A.D. 1870, and consisting of myself and *wife and children* and I claim to be entitled as such head of family to receive a grant of one hundred and sixty acres of land or to receive Scrip ~~for~~ one hundred and sixty dollars pursuant to the Statute in that behalf.
2. I was born on or about the *15th* day of *January* A.D. *1824* in the Parish of *North West Territory* in said Province.
3. *Louis Lacerte, half breed* was my father; and *Marie Martin* is my mother.
4. I have not made or caused to be made any claim of land or Scrip other than the above in this or any other Parish in said Province; nor have I claimed or received, as an Indian, any annuity moneys, from the Government of said Dominion.

Louis Lacerte

Sworn before me at the Parish and County aforesaid on the *23rd* day of *November* A.D. 1875 having been first read over and explained in the *French* language to said deponent who seemed perfectly to understand the same and *signed his* name in my presence.

M. H. G. M.
 Commissioner.

Affdt. N° 2046.
Claim N° 1840.
Scrip N° 10737 #160 C.
Scrip issued on 2/1/76

Scrip Application of Josephhte Vandal

Source: Provincial Archives of Manitoba

Josephhte Lacerte

DOMINION OF CANADA,)
 PROVINCE OF MANITOBA,) of the Parish of *St. Hubert* in the County
 County of *Provencher* of *Provencher* in said Province. *wife of*
 Parish of *St. Hubert* make oath and say as follows: *f. merchant*

1. I am a Half breed head of a family resident in the Parish of *St. Hubert*
 in the said Province, on the 15th day of July, A.D. 1870, and consisting
 of myself and *husband & children*
 and I claim to be entitled as such head of family to receive a grant of one hundred and sixty acres
 of land or to receive Scrip for one hundred and sixty dollars pursuant to the Statute in that behalf.

2. I was born on or about the *18th* day of *July* A.D. 1825 in the
 Parish of *St. Boniface* in said Province.

3. *Joseph Vandal, French Canadian,* is my father;
 and *Marie Lachetiere, half-breed,* was my mother

4. I have not made or caused to be made any claim of land or Scrip other than the above in
 this or any other Parish in said Province, nor have I claimed or received, as an Indian, any
 annuity-moneys, from the Government of said Dominion.

Josephhte Lacerte
 mark

Sworn before me at the Parish and County aforesaid on the
13^d day of *November* A.D. 1875 having
 been first read over and explained in the *French*
 language to said deponent who seemed perfectly to under-
 stand the same and *affixed her*
mark in my presence.

M. J. G. M.
 Commissioner.

Affdt. N° 2045.
Claim N° 1841.
Scrip N° 10738. # 160 (C).
Scrip issued on 10/1/75.
25/1/75

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 - Curran, Mary
 - Lafrance, Hedwidge
 - Lagrave, Eulalie
 - Valade, Marie-Louise
- Dossiers personnels
 - 01/04, Allard, Céline (1843-1926).
 - 05/16, Clapin, Marie-Rose (1828-1898).
 - 05/27, Colette, Malvina (1838-1925).
 - 05/34, Connolly, Marguerite (1830-1904).
 - 05/43, Coutlée, Anastasie-Gertrude, dite Saint-Joseph (1819-1897).
 - 06/02, Curran, Mary (1831-1906).
 - 06/03, Cusson, Cécile (1821-1906).
 - 06/04, Dandurand, Hedwidge (1837-1877).
 - 07/38, Dunn, Marguerite (Mary-Xavier) (1837-1898).
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