

ORDERED COMPASSION: IRISH MEMBERS OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF
OTTAWA IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY

by

LINDA FITZGIBBON, B.A.

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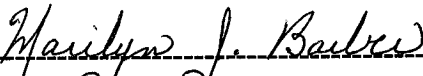
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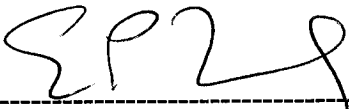
Linda Fitzgibbon, B.A.

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Thesis Supervisor



Chair, Department of History

Carleton University

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ABSTRACT

In 1845 the Sisters of Charity established a mission in Bytown. This thesis will examine the role that the Sisters played in shaping the network of social and religious services in the area. In doing so it attempts to fill a gap in our historical knowledge. A number of the Sisters were Irish female immigrants and played an active role in the Order. There has been a lack of attention to the female members of the Irish diaspora in Canada and the degree to which they displayed agency and helped to shape the emerging Canadian society. Although these women were members of a highly structured religious congregation, they worked within the system to carve out successful and satisfying careers. Their faith was central to their lives and they were inspired by the overwhelming urge to find their salvation by social action. The Sisters' spirituality cannot be separated from their lives and work. It allowed them to persist in overcoming the hardships and poverty of life in the convent and sustained them in their struggle to succeed in their mission in Bytown. The Sisters were actively involved in organizations which had a direct impact on the newly emerging city of Ottawa. By using records housed in the religious archives of the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa and the Oblate Fathers of Mary Immaculate, this thesis attempts to explore how the Sisters negotiated issues relating to gender, class, ethnicity, and religion as they worked to build their institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

On April 14, 1879, Sister Mary Josephine Phelan became Superior General of the Sisters of Charity in Ottawa. A member of a middle-class family, she was born in Kilkenny, Ireland on September 17, 1823 and had emigrated to Montreal with her family as a young girl. Her family had been encouraged to migrate by her uncle, Patrick Phelan, who arrived in North America in 1821. He was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in 1825 and had been instrumental in encouraging the Grey Nuns in Montreal to establish a foundation in Bytown in 1845.¹ In her history of the Grey Nuns, Sister St. Thomas Aquinas writes that as early as 1844 “Bishop Patrick Phelan, coadjutor and administrator of the diocese of Kingston, imparted to the Grey Nuns of Montreal his desire for a convent of the same community at Bytown. His Grace desired besides the works of charity, that it embrace the “education of [French-speaking] Canadian and Irish girls as well as the care of the poor and sick in their homes.”² From the moment of their arrival in 1845, the Order established services in response to the needs of the local population. Although it was a French-speaking order, Mary Josephine was determined to join and spent five months studying French in the boarding school of the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame, thus complying with the Superior’s requirement that her sisters should speak French. Mary Josephine was one of twenty-four Irish female immigrants who were members of the Sisters of Charity in Ottawa between 1845 and 1875. Their membership in this congregation enhanced the ability of the Sisters of

¹ Sister Paul-Emile, *The Grey Nuns of the Cross*, (Ottawa, 1989), p.31.

² Sister St. Thomas Aquinas Keefe, *The Congregation of the Grey Nuns: 1737-1910*, (Washington, D.C., 1942), p.221.

Charity to provide aid to the Irish immigrant population in Bytown, especially in 1847 when Irish famine immigrants flooded into the area. These women were members of the Irish diaspora in Canada, actively involved in the everyday life of the community. Through their schools, hospitals, orphanages, refuge for single girls and their daily visits to the sick in their homes, these sisters helped to establish a much needed network of social services in Bytown.

There has been a tendency to view Irish immigration as a calamity brought about by the famine of the 1840s. Donald Akenson points out that “an emotionally rich literature, based largely upon anecdote, that sees the Irish diaspora as tragedy and as having been largely an involuntary movement” has contributed to this belief.³ In his study of Irish immigrants in Ontario, Akenson uses statistical data to demonstrate that the Irish were the largest single ethnic group in Ontario before the famine migrations of the 1840s.⁴ The presence in Bytown of these Irish Sisters, whose already established structure of social services was expanded to cater to the needs of the famine immigrants, powerfully reinforces Akenson’s point that Irish immigrants were established in Canada before the famine arrivals. It also draws attention to the fact that Irish female immigrants played an active role in the migration process. These Irish women were an integral part of the Congregation of Sisters of Charity in Ottawa and their participation in the institutions established by the Order demonstrates the importance of examining the role that Irish immigrant women played in shaping the emerging new communities in Canada.

There has been a tendency to neglect the fact that women formed one half of the Irish diaspora. The use of new methodologies has begun to correct the stereotypical view

³ Donald Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora: A Primer*, (Toronto, 1996), p.11.

⁴ Donald Akenson, *The Irish in Ontario: A Study in Rural History*, (Kingston & Montreal, 1984), p.39.

of the destitute, Irish male immigrant who was forced to leave Ireland in the 1840s⁵. The Irish were established in North America decades before the famine and Irish female immigrants played an active role in the migration process. Recent studies highlight the value of using a fresh approach to analyze Irish migration patterns. In order to study Irish female immigrants in Canada, it is necessary to use an integrated approach that combines elements of gender and migration studies. Mary Josephine Phelan's influence on the growth of the establishment of the Sisters of Charity in Ottawa underscores the impact that one individual Irish female immigrant had on an emerging Canadian community. The fact that she was a woman and that she was a member of a religious community has meant that her contribution has not been adequately explored in existing historiography. There has been a tendency in the historiography of the Irish diaspora in Canada to focus on the actions of male immigrants while ignoring the impact that women, especially those in religious congregations, have had on shaping their communities. The neglect of the agency of these women has led to a history that is incomplete. Although the Sisters were members of a religious community, they were not merely passive followers of a male agenda. The Church hierarchy recognized the importance of having a group of Roman Catholic women who were dedicated to improving the lives of the people in the city and took advantage of the services they could offer. The Sisters worked within this framework, but also supplied their own initiatives in establishing their institutions. A case study of the work of the Sisters of Charity in Bytown and the many services they provided to the community in the period 1845 to 1875 sheds light on how the

⁵ Hasia R. Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century*, (London:John Hopkins, 1983).

Janet A. Nolan, *Ourselves Alone: Women's Emigration from Ireland 1885-1920*, (Kentucky, 1989).

participation of Irish Sisters enhanced the ability of the Order to provide services to both the French- and English-speaking citizens.

Using gender as a category of analysis it is possible to focus on the accomplishments of the Sisters and how they worked within the system to establish a viable network of social services. As members of a French-speaking religious organization, the Irish Sisters interacted with members of both ethnic groups. Therefore, it is important to explore the interplay of factors such as ethnicity, class and religion to understand the circumstances in which they lived. As Mary Cullen comments in her discussion of the merits of using gender as a category of historical analysis, “gender does not stand on its own as the only important analysis. It interacts with other factors such as class, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, political affiliation, religion, age, marital and parental situation and many more, in locating individuals or groups in their historical context.”⁶ The interaction among these factors is important when examining the impact of Irish female members of the Sisters of Charity on the evolution of Bytown.

In their studies of Irish women in America, Hasia Diner and Janet Nolan have shown how it is essential to examine the role played by women in order to correct the flawed understanding of Irish female immigrants. To access the lives of these women Diner examined a wide range of sources to trace how Irish women adapted to their new environment while retaining their particular cultural values.⁷ Janet Nolan also used a variety of sources including songs, letters and interviews to add texture to her study of the contribution of Irish female immigrants to their new American communities.⁸ The value

⁶ Mary Cullen, “History Women and History Men: The Politics of Women’s History”, *The Irish Women’s History Reader*, Hayes, Alan and Diane Urquhart eds., (London, 2001), p.17.

⁷ Diner, p.155.

⁸ Nolan, p.3.

of using such methodologies to study the history of Irish female migration is discussed by Kerby Miller, David Doyle and Patricia Kelleher, who, while they agree with Diner and Nolan that Irish female migrants made active decisions to emigrate based on rational calculations, argue that “no single model or interpretation can apply to all female emigrants from Ireland, either before or after the Great Famine.” Their point that “women from different class, regional and cultural backgrounds in Ireland had significantly different work and marital experiences in different regions of the new world” is even more pertinent when applied to the Irish members of the Sisters of Charity in Ottawa. These immigrants made an active choice to leave Ireland and in Bytown chose to establish a fulfilling life for themselves as members of a religious organization. However, their careers within the order were determined by their class and educational backgrounds.

Recent studies of Irish immigration have begun to recognize the importance of including women’s agency in their research and have demonstrated how an examination of the role played by Irish female immigrants can correct stereotypical images of Irish migration patterns. In a collection of essays, *The Irish World Wide, History, Heritage, Identity, Volume Four: Irish Women and Irish Migration*, Patrick O’Sullivan comments that “[e]very chapter in this, the women’s history and women’s studies volume of *The Irish World Wide*, begins by remarking on the paucity of research into the experiences of migrant Irish women and the paucity of comment on women in earlier studies of the pattern of Irish migration.”⁹ The purpose of this collection of essays is to recognize the earlier pattern of migration studies which focused on male migrants and in turn to step

⁹ Patrick O’Sullivan, “Introduction to Volume 4: Irish women and Irish migration”, *The Irish World Wide, History, Heritage, Identity, Volume Four: Irish Women and Irish Migration*, O’Sullivan, P., ed., (London, 1995), p.2.

outside of it, thereby allowing the women in history to speak for themselves. Irish female migrants were not just passive followers, but played an active role in the migration process. One of the essays in this volume demonstrates how a re-examination of Irish migrations to Europe in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries corrects the traditional assumption that these immigrants were male. A powerful mythology surrounding the brave and exiled soldiers was reinforced by a nineteenth century verse written by John Dalton. "In foreign fields it is their doom, to seek their fame – to find their tomb." Grainne Henry's research demonstrates that this image was based in myth not in reality; the soldiers were accompanied by their wives and children. Rather than being alone and exiled, these men were part of family networks which allowed them to develop a sense of community and linkage with the local population.¹⁰ As O'Sullivan points out it "turns out that for all these centuries, we have been talking about the 'Wild Geese' when we were really only talking about wild ganders . . . the women were always there, of course, but, as it were, hidden behind the men. With the 'sideways step,' the change of viewpoint, the change of perception, so typical of women's history, Henry reveals the women."¹¹ The value of re-examining stereotypical views of Irish migration is also explored by Pauric Travers. He suggests that exclusion of women's experiences can distort the perception of historical events and stresses the importance of including women's role in the migration process. Finding the lack of attention to Irish female migration remarkable, he notes that it is "not simply a question of female migration having been ignored or underrated. The exclusion of gender has produced a flawed understanding of the wider process of migration, both male and female. Thus female

¹⁰ Grainne Henry, "Women 'Wild Geese,' 1585-1625: Irish women and migration to European armies in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries", *The Irish World Wide*, p.25.

¹¹ O'Sullivan, p.11.

emigration warrants study in its own right and at the same time contributes to a more accurate picture of the whole.”¹²

Irish female immigrants who became members of religious communities demonstrated an ability to adapt to their new environments and to overcome both psychological and physical difficulties. They transferred their loyalty from the old country to the new, while retaining their commitment to the Catholic faith. There has been a reluctance to focus on the work and lives of women in Roman Catholic religious communities, because it was assumed that they were controlled by the Church hierarchy. Thus, the role that they played in the wider community has not been adequately explored. Mark McGowan has examined how the Irish immigrant community in Toronto in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries transferred its loyalty from Ireland to Canada. He points out that the Sisters of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Congregation of St. Joseph played a vital role in influencing this successful transition.¹³ In his examination of the making of what he calls a Canadian Catholic identity in Toronto, McGowan stresses the importance of re-evaluating the experiences of the English-speaking Irish immigrant population. According to McGowan the lack of analysis of this section of the population is “an unfortunate lacuna in Canadian historiography, since English-speaking Catholics in Central Canada adopted a tenuous middle position between the nationalism of their French-Canadian co-religionists and the anglophobia of their Anglo-Protestant neighbours.”¹⁴ The Irish women who became

¹² Pauric Travers, “‘There was nothing for me there,’ Irish female emigration, 1922-1971”, *The Irish World Wide*, pp.146-174.

¹³ Mark McGowan, *The Waning of the Green: Catholics, the Irish, and Identity in Toronto 1887-1922*, (Montreal & Kingston, 1999), p.4.

¹⁴ Mark McGowan, “Toronto’s English-Speaking Catholics, Immigration, and the Making of a Canadian Catholic Identity 1900-1930”, *Creed and Culture: The Place of English-Speaking Catholics in Canadian Society 1750-1920*. Murphy, Terrance and Gerald Stortz eds., (Montreal and Kingston, 1993), p.206.

members of the Sisters of Charity in Bytown were required to learn French before they were admitted into the congregation. Therefore, the Order was accepted by both the French- and English-speaking Roman Catholics in the city.

The Sisters of Charity occupied a unique position in Bytown where the Catholic hierarchy was compelled by the equal number of French-speaking and English-speaking Catholics to provide services to satisfy both ethnic groups. These sisters worked as members of the Order to establish successful institutions and in their roles as nurses, teachers and administrators they directly influenced the lives of the local population. Their acceptance of the necessity to learn French underlines how they had made an active choice to become members of an institution which required them to obey a strict set of rules and regulations. When the Sisters were professed, they took vows of poverty, obedience, chastity and promised to dedicate themselves to the service of the poor.¹⁵ That these vows included dedication to the poor is important to bear in mind when examining why these women chose to join this particular religious organization. As Elizabeth Smyth points out there is a distinction between the terms 'nuns' and 'sisters.' "Canon law, the set of guidelines that governs the Roman Catholic Church, codifies the difference between the two according to the type of vows they take, how they live, and the works in which they participate.¹⁶ While Nuns live within the cloister and take solemn vows, the Sisters take simple vows and are involved in work outside the convent walls.¹⁷ In her study of the involvement of religious women in the nursing profession, Sioban Nelson

¹⁵ Emilien Lamirande, *Elisabeth Bruyere: Foundress of the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa*, Translated by Sister Gabrielle L. Jean. (Ottawa: 1995), p.314.

¹⁶ Smyth, Elizabeth, "Professionalization among the Professed: The Case of Roman Catholic Women Religious," *Challenging Professions: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Women's Professional Work*, E. Smyth, S. Acker, P. Bourne, and A. Prentice, eds., (Toronto, 1999), p.237.

¹⁷ Smyth, Professionalization, p.237.

also stresses the importance of noting that although religious life has been defined by sacred vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, there are degrees of vows, which reflect the type of work undertaken by the religious congregation.¹⁸ As vowed women, the mandate of the Sisters of Charity was to care for the poor and infirm in the community.

The Sisters of Charity took advantage of the opportunities available to them and the variety of services they provided displays their flexibility and their willingness to adapt to the changing needs of the community. Because there was so much work to be done, the Catholic hierarchy allowed the women a certain amount of autonomy within these institutions. Therefore, much of the day-to-day work was organized and run by the Sisters themselves. In her study of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the Archdiocese of Toronto, Elizabeth Smyth explores how within the Catholic Church a traditional and a non-traditional view of the role of women in society could co-exist. She demonstrates how women who joined this religious community played an active role in society and carved out a space for themselves within the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁹ In a similar fashion, the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa worked within the system to create their own institutions. The study of the complex religious history in Canada has to include the role that Catholic women in religious communities played in the evolution of English Canadian society. In 1845, the Sisters of Charity were part of an institution that established services to fill a void in the community. As John Webster Grant points out, the Christian Church still plays a role in Canadian society and is therefore a legitimate

¹⁸ Sioban Nelson, *Say Little, Do Much: Nurses, Nuns, and Hospitals in the Nineteenth Century*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2001), n.1, p.169.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Smyth, "Christian Perfection and Service to Neighbours: The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Toronto, 1851-1920", Elizabeth Gillan Muir and Marilyn Fardig Whitely, eds., *Changing Roles of Women within the Christian Church in Canada*, (Toronto, 1995), p.41.

area of study. He stresses the importance of historians conducting a detailed examination of religious institutions and how they operate.²⁰

English-Canadian religious history has tended to avoid examining the lives and work of women in Roman Catholic institutions. As Elizabeth Smyth points out, one of the reasons that Terrance Murphy in his introduction to *Creed and Culture: The Place of English-Speaking Catholics in Canadian Society* could comment that the approach of French-Canadian historians was more “vital and creative” than their English-Canadian counterparts was the difference in their approaches to the study of women in religious orders.²¹ According to Murphy, the “failure to cultivate English-speaking Catholicism properly as a field of inquiry has been exacerbated by the fact that Catholicism in Canada has been closely identified with French language and culture, while the ethos of English-speaking Canada has been firmly associated with evangelical Protestantism.”²²

In her examination of the lives of religious women in nineteenth-century Quebec, Danylewycz considered two conflicting hypotheses put forward to explain the social dimensions of the rise of vocations. One suggested that the increase in numbers was a way to integrate single women into a religious community, the other suggests that the convents gave women an avenue to pursue a career. She points out that both hypotheses “are reminiscent of the ways in which Victorians in England debated the social significance of the growth of Anglican sisterhoods.”²³ She wonders if this irony is “less a

²⁰ John Webster Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era, Updated and Expanded Edition*, (Vancouver, 1998), p. x.

²¹ Smyth, “Christian”, p.42.

²² Terrance Murphy, *Creed and Culture: The Place of English-Speaking Catholics in Canadian Society 1750-1920*, Murphy, T. and G. Stortz eds., (Montreal & Kingston, 1993), p.xviii

²³ Marta Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood and Spinsterhood in Quebec*, (Toronto, 1987), p.84

reflection of time and place than the persistence of certain preconceived attitudes toward the role of women in society.”²⁴

It is interesting that the period that the Sisters of Charity established their congregation in Ottawa coincides with the period 1830 to 1875, which Margaret Van Die points out as a time when evangelicalism became an integral part of how Canadians defined themselves. She chooses this period because “it follows upon the intense revivalism of the early decades of the century and ends just before the national organization in Canada of two major denominations, the Methodists and the Presbyterians, and such important women’s organizations as the W.C.T.U. [Woman’s Christian Temperance Union], W.M.S. [Women’s Missionary Society] and Y.W.C.A.[Young Women’s Christian Association].”²⁵

Although the Sisters of Charity were members of a Roman Catholic religious congregation, they were not detached from the underlying currents of the age. Spirituality was central to their lives, but this spirituality was intricately connected with their belief that it was their duty to help the poor. For the Sisters of Charity their path to salvation lay in their dedication to cure the ills of society. These women did not join a contemplative order; they chose to join an order whose mandate was to care for the poor and infirm in society. In her analysis of Catholic religious women in nineteenth-century Ireland, Magray argues that the “primary religious and cultural justification for the great numbers of women joining active orders throughout Europe at this time was the achievement of

²⁴ Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil*, p.85.

²⁵ Marguerite Van Die, “A Woman’s Awakening”: Evangelical Belief and Female Spirituality in Mid-Nineteenth Century Canada,” *Canadian Women: A Reader*, Mitchinson, W., P. Bourne, A. Prentice, G. Cuthbert Brandt, B. Light, N. Black, eds., (Toronto, 1996), p.51.

personal salvation.”²⁶ In 1876, on the death of Mother Bruyere, Mother Superior of the Sisters of Charity in Ottawa, a letter sent by Mother Catherine-Aurelia, Foundress of the Sisters Adorers of the Precious Blood in St. Hyacinth, to console the Sisters in Ottawa strengthens this argument. Mother Catherine-Aurelia refers to the loss of her friend whom “the Bridegroom has called to heaven The memory of her virtuous life remains to serve as a model for us I cannot but know she is enjoying eternal bliss.”²⁷ This belief in an eternal reward for their commitment to alleviating the distress of the poor inspired the Sisters to endure the hardships involved in building their institutions in Bytown.

The Sisters of Charity channeled their energies through their public institutions and worked to enhance and to reform the lives of the poor. In doing so they also promoted the caring face of the Roman Catholic Church and their work included the provision of services and the promotion of the Roman Catholic faith. Their belief in the necessity of reforming society and helping the poor reflected the spirit of the age. While a number of Protestant women chose to join lay organizations, some Roman Catholic women joined religious congregations. However, the historiography of women in religion in English-Canada has tended to focus on evangelical women. It is important to include a focus on women in Roman Catholic religious congregations. In her study of women in religious congregations in Ireland Caitriona Clear has pointed out that the members “were imbued with the evangelism of the era, and missionary work among the poor was a vital element in this evangelism.”²⁸ As Luddy notes middle-class women in this period were

²⁶ Mary Peckham Magray, *The Transforming Power of the Nuns: Women, Religion, and Cultural Change in Ireland, 1750-1900*, (New York, 1998), p.47.

²⁷ Paul-Emile, *The Grey Nuns*, p.xiii.

²⁸ Caitriona Clear, *Nuns in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, (Dublin, 1987), p.103.

motivated by Christian duty, regardless of their denominational status, to help the poor. She argues that this charitable work enhanced and expanded the social role of women. “Women philanthropists believed implicitly in the moral and spiritual superiority of women. It was, many of them believed, principally through work by women, with women, that the social and moral regeneration of society could be attained.”²⁹ Magray points out that “[o]ne historian of nineteenth-century philanthropy has expressed the religious underpinning of the benevolent movement very succinctly: ‘Whether evangelical, High Church, Catholic, or Unitarian, all agreed: to be Christian was to be charitable.’ She might also have added that to be middle class and female was to be charitable.”³⁰ Magray believes that this was part of a larger process of social and cultural change that combined with what she refers to as “the increasing significance of the discourse of religiosity during the century. Central to that discourse, regardless of the particular Christian denomination or sect, was the stress placed on the role of charitable work for both personal salvation and the salvation of society.”³¹

Both Catholic and Protestant women also believed in enhancing the value of what they believed was women’s domestic role. In her examination of Catholic and Protestant literature in Ulster, Northern Ireland for the period 1850 – 1914, Andra Ebel Brozyna found that “Catholic and Protestant women’s piety promoted the same virtues.”³² An exploration of the lives of nineteenth-century Upper Canadian women by Jane Errington revealed that while Protestant women involved in the Kingston Dorcas Society in 1824 were careful to point out that they assisted Roman Catholic as well as Protestant poor,

²⁹ Maria Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, (Cambridge, 1995), p.214.

³⁰ Magray, p.35

³¹ Magray, p.34-35.

³² Maria Luddy and Cliona Murphy eds., “Introduction”, *Women’s History Review*, V. 6, No. 4, (1997), p.2.

one of the conditions for charity was attendance of Sunday school services. When criticized for including this stipulation, the president of the society stated that “it was not wrong to reward children for attending school.”³³ This woman’s belief that introducing the poor to her religious faith was an important part of their rehabilitation is similar to the attitudes of the Sisters of Charity in Bytown. They provided services to both the Roman Catholic and Protestant populations, but also believed in the importance of promoting the values of the Catholic faith. Whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, the importance of faith in women’s lives in this period inspired them to become agents of change.

Sharon Anne Cook has explored the strength of women’s religious beliefs in defining their reform agenda. In her study of the history of the Ontario Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, Cook asserts that instead of simply accepting male clerical authority, the piety of the members inspired them to reform society. The strength of their beliefs sustained them in their efforts and “reflected a leading religious and intellectual current of their age.” In addition, being a member of an organization allowed them to have an impact on their society.³⁴ As Cook demonstrates, instead of confining their actions, being a member of an organization gave the women an avenue through which to channel their energies and empowered them to influence their environment. Membership of the Sisters of Charity in Bytown allowed the Sisters to work together to develop a network of social services. As part of this organized congregation they were supported in their efforts by the Roman Catholic hierarchy and by members of the lay community. Although they obeyed the rules of their Order, membership allowed them to accomplish

³³ Elizabeth Jane Errington, *Wives and Mothers, School Mistresses, and Scullery Maids: Working Women in Upper Canada 1790-1840*, (Montreal & Kingston, 1995) p.174

³⁴ Sharon Ann Cook, *Through Sunshine and Shadow: The Women’s Christian Temperance Union, Evangelicalism and Reform in Ontario 1874-1930*, (Montreal & Kingston, 1995), p.12.

more than they would have been able to as lay-women in the nineteenth-century. The organization provided a framework in which they could attain their goals to help the poor and the infirm in Bytown. The Sisters of Charity worked as part of this congregation to effect change.

Elizabeth Gillan Muir has noted in her study of Methodist women that it is difficult to explore the experiences of the women and what compelled them in their work “since so much of the information has been refracted through a Methodist hagiography. Accounts often inform us only of the enthusiasm in doing “the work of the Lord.”³⁵ However, this enthusiasm should not deflect historians from examining what these women actually accomplished. The Sisters of Charity obeyed the rules of their congregation, but that does not negate the influence they had on shaping their environment through their institutions. A recent collection of essays, *Changing Roles of Women with the Christian Church in Canada* demonstrates that historians are beginning to disentangle the experiences of women from what they describe as a “tension between mythology and reality [that] can be found in every decade and in almost every branch of the Christian church in Canada over at least the past two centuries.” They illustrate this point by providing an example:

At the 1920 jubilee celebrations of the Maritime Baptist Woman’s Missionary Union, the guest speaker, Mrs. Peabody unwittingly illustrated women’s place throughout the history of the Christian church in Canada. Claiming that ‘God intended women to be homemakers, to be teachers, especially of little children, and to take care of sick people,’ Peabody reinforced the idea that permeated both society and the church at that time Yet Mrs. Peabody’s presence on the platform belied her words. The accepted mythology of woman’s place was contradicted by the reality of a woman assuming a leadership in a public forum, addressing a group of women who that year had raised and administered almost

³⁵ Elizabeth Gillan Muir, *Petticoats in the Pulpit: The Story of Early Nineteenth-Century Methodist Women Preachers in Upper Canada*, (Toronto, 1988), p.5.

eighty-four thousand dollars.”³⁶

This example demonstrates the value of looking beyond the traditional assumption that women in religious congregations were not empowered agents of change. It also highlights the importance of examining how they worked within the system to build their institutions.

The Sisters of Charity in Bytown believed in the importance of the work that they were doing and their faith was central to their lives. However, there has been a reluctance to recognize the importance of faith in these women’s lives, which inspired them to work to change their society. One of the difficulties of recognizing this stems from what Ruth Compton Brouwer calls an “unacknowledged quarantine” among historians which avoids making “their experience in the realm of religion a central focus of study.”³⁷ To understand what the Sisters did, it is necessary to understand what drove them to continue to be members of this particular religious congregation. By simply dismissing the idea that women in religious congregations could have had their own agendas, it is impossible to examine what they actually accomplished. As Brouwer points out “there has been a noticeable tendency to ‘approve of’ women’s religious zeal only when and as it has seemed to serve as a way-station on the road to feminist consciousness.”³⁸ The Sisters of Charity of Ottawa did work within the structure of the Roman Catholic Church, but their work progressed and succeeded due to their commitment and their dedication. Their religious beliefs motivated their action. Therefore, failure to acknowledge the importance

³⁶ Elizabeth Gillan Muir and Marilyn Fardig Whitely, Elizabeth Gillan Muir and Marilyn Fardig Whitely, eds., “Preface”, *Changing Roles of Women within the Christian Church in Canada*, Gillan Muir, E. and M. Fardig Whitely, eds., (Toronto, 1995), p.3.

³⁷ Ruth Compton Brouwer, “Transcending the “Unacknowledged Quarantine” Putting Religion into English-Canadian Women’s History”, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, V. 27, No.3. (Fall, 1992), p.47.

³⁸ Brouwer, p.48.

of these religious beliefs makes it impossible to understand what empowered them to become agents of change. As Brouwer points out “[t]he question of the extent to which particular religious traditions did or did not empower women is clearly a crucial one for feminist historians.”³⁹ As members of their Congregation, the Sisters worked closely with the people in the community and had the means and the support to influence the lives and circumstances of the people of the city. Their lives were infused with spirituality and this constantly reaffirmed the importance of the work they were doing.

Religious belief was intricately entwined in the work of the Sisters of Charity in Bytown. To focus only on their roles and empowerment dismisses the importance of spirituality as a driving force in their lives and cannot explain why they remained loyal to this highly structured and regulated community. Brouwer writes that to understand the continuing loyalty of women to their religious traditions “other factors, such as the status implications of a particular tradition, have to be taken into account, as do such related but distinct matters as denominational loyalty and association with national or ethnic identity.”⁴⁰ Sisters of Charity were respected members of society in Bytown. This was similar to the position of women in religious communities in Ireland in the nineteenth century. In her examination of religious women in Ireland for this period, Catriona Clear discovered that “they were for the most part, perceived as persons of rank and position The nun renounced rights over her property and her will, and had voluntarily excluded herself from social life, yet she enjoyed – especially in Ireland – a social standing which was higher than that of the unmarried woman and a socially approved area of activity

³⁹ Brouwer, p.51.

⁴⁰ Brouwer, p.51.

which was wider than that allowed the married women.⁴¹ Therefore, the Irish female immigrants who joined the congregation would have been aware of the value of being part of such an organization.

These Irish female immigrants had chosen to join an order that was dedicated to serving the poor. Joining a religious order was an active career choice. In her study of women in religious congregations in Quebec, Marta Danylewycz examines the reasons why they joined particular communities and notes that they “did not make indiscriminate choices about convents. Rather than abandoning themselves to God’s will by rushing into any convent, they reasoned and calculated, determining which community best suited their particular social preferences and personal aspirations.”⁴² The women who joined the Sisters of Charity in Bytown were well aware of what was expected of them. The period before they took their vows was spent working with the professed Sisters in the school, hospital and community. Therefore, this period of apprenticeship allowed them to fully appreciate the demands which would be placed upon them as active members. The agency of these women and the diversity of the roles they played in society is further reinforced by Elizabeth Smyth in her case study of The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Toronto in the years 1850-1920. She emphasizes the roles that religious women played and notes that those “who entered communities of religious dedicated their lives to God through professions of teaching, nursing and social service. These occupations were not intermediary steps between schooling and marriage; they were a lifelong commitment.”⁴³ The Sisters of Charity of Ottawa did not enter the convent as a way-station to somewhere else. They entered into religious life with a clear agenda and made

⁴¹ Clear, p.151.

⁴² Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil*, p.96.

⁴³ Smyth, “Christian Perfection,” p.51.

active and well-informed career decisions to devote their lives to the poor and ill. Membership in the order gave them the opportunity to have diverse and satisfying careers which would have been difficult for women of this time period to achieve. According to Marta Danylewycz, membership in the convent “offered an alternative to marriage, motherhood and spinsterhood” and allowed nineteenth century women to pursue life-long careers.⁴⁴

Danylewycz provides details of a 1977 *Globe and Mail* interview with Mother Martha Jutras of the order of the Daughters of Wisdom to illustrate her argument that religious women were aware of the socio-economic dimensions of their work. In the interview Mother Jutras noted “that changes in the occupational and educational status of women since the Second World War have contributed to the rapid decline in the numbers of women entering her community. By focusing on sociological as opposed to strictly religious factors, Mother Jutras was asserting that social conditions influence religious behaviour.” As Danylewycz points out, “[g]iven that the nuns of today see a relationship between the convent’s decline and the larger social context, one wonders whether their predecessors perceived a connection between the vigorous growth in vocations and the social conditions prevailing in mid-nineteenth-century Quebec.”⁴⁵ The archivist and historian of the Sisters of Charity in Ottawa had a similar view as to why there was a decline in the numbers of women entering religious orders. Sister Paul-Emile had joined the Sisters of Charity in 1902, earned her MA in 1922 and her PhD in literature in 1936.

⁴⁴ Danylewycz, p.96.

⁴⁵ Danylewycz, p.51.

In 1969, when asked if she felt sad at the decline in numbers, she said “I am not sad. This is a new age. Girls are better educated. They have more opportunity.”⁴⁶

Such new gender-driven investigations have led to the realization that religious organizations in the late nineteenth-century provided women with a respectable career outside of marriage. Membership in such an organization allowed the Sisters to have a wider sphere of activity than an unmarried woman and also gave them a higher social prestige within the community. Gail Cuthbert Brandt discovered in her study of women’s organizations in Canada that Catholic women tended to channel their energies through religious organizations while Protestant women were more accustomed to organizing as lay women. She notes that such membership gave women opportunities that they would have been unable to reach on their own.⁴⁷ Wendy Mitchinson and Rosemary Gagan in their study of female missionary societies have demonstrated that many of the women were able to take advantage of missionary organizations to pursue active and fulfilling careers.⁴⁸ Religion and determination to reform and to improve society was an important part of the lives of both the Catholic and the Protestant women. The Sisters of Charity were sustained by their belief in the importance of the work they were doing. However, it is difficult to capture something as ineffable as the spirituality of the Sisters which was an integral part of their lives and work. The autonomy of the members of the Sisters of Charity in Ottawa has been overlooked because it was assumed that their actions were controlled by the Church hierarchy. Instead of dismissing their spirituality as a mindless

⁴⁶ *The Ottawa Journal*, 8 November, 1969.

⁴⁷ Gail Cuthbert Brandt, “Organizations in Canada: The English Protestant Tradition,” *Women’s Paid and Unpaid Work: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, Paula Bourne, ed., (Toronto, 1985), p.81.

⁴⁸ Wendy Mitchinson, “Canadian Women and Church Missionary Societies in the Nineteenth Century: A Step Towards Independence”, *Atlantis*, v.2, no.2 (Spring, 1977), p.58
Rosemary Gagan, “More Than ‘A Lure to the Gilded Bower of Matrimony’: The Education of Methodist Women Missionaries 1881-1925,” *Historical Studies in Education*, v.1, no.2, (Fall, 1989), p.240.

obedience to a highly structured organization, it is necessary to examine why they chose to enhance their lives through service to the poor and ill members of society.

To understand their loyalty to an organization which demanded such hard work and service, it is necessary to include an examination of the records housed in religious communities which have tended to be dismissed as hagiographies. These writings provide a glimpse of how they defined themselves as religious women. The importance of examining this aspect of their lives could begin to augment an area that Carl Berger has suggested remains underdeveloped in the history of religion in Canada. When commenting on this underdevelopment of the history of religion in Canada he noted that even more underdeveloped is “a history that treated religion as a way of defining self, of feeling and faith.”⁴⁹ Barbara Cooper’s re-examination of the history of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary focused on the human element and used archival data to allow the women in this religious community to emerge as active participants in the community. Cooper argues that although ‘[h]agiography has a definite role within a certain context . . . the history of religious communities has suffered at the hands of those who spiritualized these communities’ pasts. Such ‘faith’ history . . . has robbed communities of a necessary perspective on their evolution.”⁵⁰ However, the existence of such material demonstrates how this faith was central to their lives and the value of examining why religion played such a vital role.

In her research on the lives of missionary women, Brouwer reflects on the difficulties of trying to grasp the significance of the historical value of women’s

⁴⁹ Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing since 1900*, Second Edition, (Toronto, 1986), p.292.

⁵⁰ Barbara J. Cooper, “Hagiology and History: A Re-examination of the Early Years of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” *“Catholics at the “Gathering Place””: Historical Essays on the Archdiocese of Toronto 1841-1991*, McGowan M. and B. Clarke, eds., (Toronto, 1993), p.89.

statements which seemed to be formulaic. Her advice to those historians who are interested in “recovering the history of women’s religious experiences . . . [is to] try to acquire some of the specific skills associated with discourse analysis to decode women’s religious language if it is possible to do so without losing [their] way in poststructuralist perspectives that suggest the futility of trying to find any fixed meaning in either the words “women” or “religion.” ”⁵¹ This methodology is especially useful in de-coding the necrologies which are housed in religious archives. Necrologies are a collection of accounts of the Sisters’ lives compiled when they are deceased. They serve as a way to commemorate the Sisters’ lives and their contribution to the community in their lifetimes. However they also give an insight into the degree of faith and piety, which was valued by the order. The language used in these sources stresses the importance of qualities such as obedience, piety, dedication and hard work. The records show that religion was vitally important and was central in their lives. It was also how the members of these communities defined themselves. Besides chronicling the lives of the Sisters, the necrologies also served as instructional reading material for the Sisters. By reflecting on the virtues of their predecessors, the Sisters would be inspired to follow their good and pious example. In her discussion of the importance of undertaking a thorough analysis of such records and the difficulties in accessing those housed in private religious archives, Smyth quotes J. S. Moir who writes: “Without historical records there will be no historical research . . . The churches [and religious communities] fear that the researcher may be unsympathetic to their particular positions . . . Mistakes will be made by

⁵¹ Brouwer, p.53.

historians, but the road to truth is surely paved with mistakes and with their rectifications.”⁵²

The records housed in religious archives also chronicle the development of their organizations and provide evidence that women in religious communities did not blindly follow the wishes of the church hierarchy, but worked within the system to create viable institutions. As Elizabeth Smyth points out it “is a well known fact that the experience of women religious in Canada is a record of female firsts: the first teachers, nurses, hospital administrators, and college presidents.” Smyth argues that the annals of religious communities are vital sources of historical details. Her examination of archives housed in three Ontario religious communities, demonstrates the diversity of the roles of religious women and their close connection to the communities in which they lived.⁵³ The records housed in the archives of the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa are equally revealing. Through their schools, hospitals, orphanages, home for young girls and their daily visitations to the sick in their homes the Sisters were deeply involved in the lives of the citizens in the city. The records chronicle the variety of the roles they played as they adapted their institutions to cater to the changing needs of the community.

Barbara Cooper and Laurie Stanley have successfully used archival data to examine religious communities in Canada. In her study of the early history of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Toronto, Cooper notes the value of combining what she calls “bits and pieces of archival data [to] lend other perspectives to some of the

⁵² Elizabeth Smyth, “Preserving Habits: Memory within Communities of English Canadian Women Religious,” *Framing Our Past: Canadian Women’s History in the Twentieth Century*, Cook, Sharon Ann, Lorna P. McLean and Kate o’Rourke eds., (Montreal and Kingston, 2001), p.23.

⁵³ Elizabeth Smyth, “‘Writing Teaches Us Our Mysteries’: Women Religious Recording and Writing History”, *Creating Historical Memory: English-Canadian Women and the Work of History*, (Vancouver, 1997), pp.101-104.

common tales in the Institute's particular body of lore." Her research sheds light on the determination of Mother Teresa Ball and three other sisters who had come to Canada from Ireland to "successfully preserve their traditional religious life and still respond adequately to the exigencies of their new environment."⁵⁴ A similar history of religious women's fortitude in the face of obstacles is revealed by Stanley in her study of the history of the Tracadie Leper Hospital. She explores their struggle to withstand the hardships of maintaining a successful hospital without adequate support and notes that this success was "a testament to their strength, faith, and resourcefulness."⁵⁵ The members of the Sisters of Charity in Bytown also survived physical hardships, especially during the typhus epidemic in 1847 when the fear of contagion was so great that they were unable to find anyone in the community who was willing to work for them, but they still remained committed to their congregation.

They also continued to work closely with the Oblate priests who had supported their efforts since 1845 and provided continuing academic education to the sisters who taught in the schools and to those who wanted to improve their French. Despite being closely monitored by the Catholic bishops and clergy, the Sisters maintained control of their institutions and had a high degree of influence on the population they served. In 1979 Gerda Lerner wrote that a truly universal history was only possible by recognizing that "women have always been essential to the making of history and that *men and women* are the measure of significance".⁵⁶ The Irish members of the Sisters of the Charity in Bytown worked in co-operation with the priests to provide services to the population

⁵⁴ Cooper, p.89-90.

⁵⁵ Stanley, Laurie C., "'So Many Crosses to Bear': The Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph and the Tracadie Leper Hospital, 1868-1910," *Changing Roles*, p.33.

⁵⁶ Lerner, Gerda, *The Majority Finds its Past: Placing Women in History*, (New York, 1979), p.172.

and played an important part in solidifying the Roman Catholic church base in the area. As the city expanded in the late nineteenth century more resources became available to the population as the Protestant community developed their own network of services. However, in this complex social structure the sisters were active members of a congregation that helped to shape the city. They had diverse and satisfying careers and continued to remain loyal to their Catholic faith. To understand their lives and the context in which they lived it is necessary to explore the intersection between gender, religion, ethnicity and class. The fact that they were part of an established Canadian institution in the 1840s and were in a position to provide services to the Irish famine migrants sheds light on the importance of exploring the roles played by Irish female migrants and demonstrates that they have a legitimate place in the history of both the Irish diaspora and the history of religion in Canada.

CHAPTER 1: BYTOWN: OBSCURE CRADLE OF OTTAWA

The mid to late nineteenth century was a period of re-organization of the Roman Catholic Church in Canada. Recognizing the need to establish a strong base for future growth, the Catholic hierarchy took advantage of the political changes brought about by the Union of the Canadas in 1840 to establish a series of successful missions in Upper and Lower Canada. The growing number of Irish Catholic immigrants, especially the famine immigrants of 1847, created both an opportunity and a challenge to the Church organization. In Bytown, the bishops responded to this challenge by encouraging the Grey Nuns of Montreal and the French Order of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to establish a mission in the area. These Orders supported each other in the struggle to create a viable network of social and religious services that could cater to the local population. In an unpublished manuscript, Sister Paul-Emile, archivist and historian of the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa until her death in 1971, describes the diverse ethnic mix in the area that served as a center of the lumber industry in the early nineteenth century. Recognition of the potential for growth and success of the Sisters' services in the area is reflected in her description of Bytown when she notes that the "Ottawa of today slept then in this obscure cradle of Bytown."¹

The mandate of the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa was to care for the poor and the infirm in the city. The significance of the work they accomplished in Bytown is heightened by the lack of resources that were available there before they arrived in 1845. The social problems in Bytown reflected those that afflicted other North American cities

¹ Keefe, p.219

in the nineteenth century. As Christine Stansell explains in her study of the city of New York in the nineteenth century, problems caused by poverty were heightened by the heavy concentration of the poor in some areas of the city.² In Bytown the poor were concentrated in the Lower Town area of the city, but their problems were accentuated by ethnic and religious tensions. In 1843, the Catholic population in Bytown was divided between 1300 Irish and 1064 French-Canadians most of whom lived in the lower part of the city.³ As Robert Choquette explains, these numbers created problems for the Roman Catholic Church. "Canadian Catholics, French- or English-speaking, were always faced with two principal adversaries: the Protestants and the Catholics of the other linguistic group."⁴ Therefore, in 1844 when the Roman Catholic hierarchy invited the Grey Nuns of Montreal and the French Order of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to establish a mission in Bytown, they were well aware of the necessity of providing services which would satisfy both ethnic groups. Encouraged to establish their mission in the Lower Town area, the Sisters planned to establish a hospital, school, and to visit the sick in their homes. The clergy requested that they also include the education of girls in their mandate. The creation of these essential services would promote the caring face of the Roman Catholic Church and strengthen their control in the area. The Sisters of Charity was a French-speaking order, but the presence of Irish Catholic immigrant women in their ranks satisfied the Irish citizens. However, the insistence of the Irish community that the Oblate priests recruit an Irish-born priest to serve in the mission illuminates the difficulties faced

² Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*, (New York, 1986), p.10

³ Gaston Carriere, o.m.i., *Histoire documentaire de la Congregation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie-Immaculee dans l'Est du Canada, De l'arrivee au Canada a la mort du Fondateur 1841-1861*, Tome I, (Ottawa, 1957), p.262.

⁴ Robert Choquette, "English-French Relations in the Canadian Catholic Community," *Creed and Culture*, p.3.

by the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy as they tried to negotiate the ethnic tensions in Bytown. The equal numbers of English- and French-speaking Catholics in the town made it essential to establish bilingual social and religious services that could cater to both ethnic groups.

In 1845, in a report to the Superior of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in France, the Oblate priest, Father Dandurand, described Bytown as an uncivilized town, prone to outbursts of violence. Lawlessness and murder were common and frequently murders occurred in broad daylight and in full view of the local population.⁵ Much of the violence was caused by the lumbermen who came into town from the outlying lumber camps and were frequently involved in violent, drunken brawls. The lumber trade began in the Ottawa Valley in 1806 and was vitally important to the commercial success of the area. The completion of the Rideau Canal in 1832 increased the efficiency of the timber trade, by providing a link between the Rideau and the Ottawa system, but led to the unemployment of Irish and Scottish immigrants who had been involved in building the canal.⁶ This group of immigrants threatened to displace the French-Canadian lumbermen and “the clash of racial groups, with employment rivalry urging them on, convulsed the Valley for a decade.”⁷ The social conditions in the city were also adversely affected by the depression of 1836-1837. Food shortages, high food prices and bad winter weather for lumbering, combined with the rebellions of 1837 and 1838 to create volatile and unstable conditions in Bytown.⁸ Before 1847, much of the town was marshland and the

⁵ Archives Deschatelets, Oblates of Mary Immaculate (hereafter OMI) GLPP 1066, Letter from Dandurand to Mazonod, 3 December 1845.

⁶ Michael S. Cross, “The Lumber Community of Upper Canada”, *Ontario History*, V. LII, No. 4, (Autumn 1960), p.221-222.

⁷ Cross, p.228.

⁸ John H. Taylor, *Ottawa: An Illustrated History*, (Toronto, 1986), p.30.

“roads were a bewildering maze of sandy hills and muddy holes.”⁹ The completion of the Rideau Canal had transformed what had been in 1827 an area of “dense cedar swamps and muskegs” where deer roamed freely into a commercial center.¹⁰ However, the emerging city was beset with problems especially in the poorer Lower Town area.

The social division between Upper and Lower Town was due in part to the importance of Bytown’s position to the British Colonial government and its subsequent land allocation policy. Following the war of 1812, the completion and maintenance of the Rideau canal as an alternate trade route was an important part of British imperial and commercial policy. The government was aware that the geographical location of the town also provided access to the North-West and its potential for future trade and development. Control of the site was ensured by Lord Dalhousie, and the British board of Ordnance, when he purchased 400 acres of land in 1823 to be leased to prospective settlers. Dalhousie refused to sell any of this land and reserved portions of it exclusively for military purposes. The inability to purchase lots encouraged the townspeople to build temporary wooden buildings rather than invest in stone structures. This practice only began to change in the 1840s when it was possible to obtain freehold tenure.¹¹ The reserved military land, consisting of Barracks Hill and Lower Town, created a division that was both physical and social in the early settlement. In 1836, James Stevenson, the first agent of the Bank of Montreal in Ottawa, described the dividing area of Barracks Hill as “. . . a rough common comprising of 40 or 50 acres of rising ground The whole was enclosed by a cedar-log fence skirting the loop of the road that joined Upper

⁹ Keefe, p.221.

¹⁰ A. H. D. Ross, *Ottawa Past and Present*, (Toronto, 1927), p.94.

¹¹ Michael Newton, “The Search for Heritage in Ottawa’s Lower Town,” *Urban History Review*, v.IX, no.2., (October, 1980), p.21-22.

and Lower Town.”¹² The fact that land policy was determined by Imperial and not local concerns contributed to the instability of the town even after the 1840’s when freehold tenure was established. Most of the people living in Lower Town were poor, could not afford to lease land in Upper Town and had no option but to rent the cheap housing built by speculators in the Lower Town area.¹³ Thus, the growth of Bytown in the 1840s was characterized by ethnic and religious differences between Upper and Lower Town. The Protestant and the more affluent Roman Catholic population concentrated in Upper Town and the poorer French and Irish Roman Catholics in Lower Town.¹⁴ Although Bytown continued to mature from a lumber town into a city, that was named Ottawa, Capital of Canada in 1857, in 1872, Lord Dufferin could still describe the city as:

. . .not an inviting town. It is just in that stage which is so characteristic of a new country. A collection of small wooden houses, scattered higgldy-piggldy all over the place but interspersed with new built or half built stores, shops and residences of considerable pretentions. The disjointed articulation of the city, however, are rapidly drawing into an organized mass . . .¹⁵

The Vesting Act, passed in 1843, permitted the freehold sale of Ordnance lots in Lower Town and contributed to this developing organization of the city by encouraging the settlers to build more permanent structures in brick or stone. Private ownership also offered security “to the sponsors of much needed public service institutions”.¹⁶ Among those who took advantage of the Act and built stone structures in Lower Town in this early period, were the Sisters of Charity who built the General Hospital in 1850 and

¹² C. C. J. Bond, “Alexander James Christie, Bytown Pioneer: His Life and Times 1787-1843,” *Ontario History*, v. LVI, no.1.(March, 1964), p.32.

¹³ Newton, p.29.

¹⁴ Taylor, p.31.

¹⁵ Cecil J. Houston and William J. Smyth, *Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement: Patterns, Links, and Letters*, (Toronto, 1990) p.149-150.

¹⁶ Newton, p.34.

Oblates of Mary Immaculate who built the College of Bytown in 1851.¹⁷ The Vesting Act of 1843 was one of a series of changes in the law between 1840 and 1867 that was taken advantage of by Roman Catholic Church hierarchy. The fact that the church in Upper and Lower Canada was in the process of an intense reorganization strengthened their ability to do so.

In the period 1800 to 1830 the church in Upper Canada had begun to consolidate its organization in response to the growing number of Roman Catholic migrants. In 1791, when the Province of Quebec was divided into Upper and Lower Canada, the numbers of Roman Catholics were not large enough to warrant the creation of two separate dioceses. Therefore, the Catholics in Upper Canada remained part of the Diocese of Quebec. When Father Alexander MacDonell arrived in Upper Canada in 1804, the mission was a neglected and poorly organized part of the Diocese of Quebec. "The Catholic population did not exceed a few thousand in number and was concentrated in two areas the Scots in Glengarry in the East and the French in Sandwich in the West."¹⁸ Even when MacDonell was made Vicar-General in 1807 the lack of priests often meant that he was the only priest in the area. By 1826 immigration from Ireland had increased the number of Catholics in the area and the colonial government allowed the Church to create a separate diocese of Kingston, encompassing all of Upper Canada, with Macdonell as Bishop.¹⁹

The choice of Remi Gaulin as coadjutor to Bishop MacDonell in 1833, reflects the difficulties faced by the Catholic hierarchy in finding a priest who would satisfy the Scottish, French, and Irish Roman Catholics in the area. Robert Choquette's examination

¹⁷ Newton, p.34.

¹⁸ Murray W. Nicolson, "Ecclesiastical Metropolitanism and the Evolution of the Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto," *Social History*, v. XV, no. 29, (May, 1982), p.131.

¹⁹ Nicolson, p.132.

of “Macdonell’s correspondence reveals few traces of ethnic or linguistic prejudice. He worked hand in hand with his French-speaking colleagues”²⁰ However, he was aware of the necessity of finding an assistant who would not inflame ethnic tensions. His first three choices, an Englishman, French-Canadian and Irish priest all refused the position; he then tried to find a candidate who was neither Scottish or Irish, the two major ethnic groups in the area. Thus, he was overjoyed with the appointment of Remi Gaulin, “a trilingual (French, English, Gaelic) Canadian priest”.²¹ This allowed him to communicate, without distinction, with the ethnic groups in the area. The difficulties of securing a suitable candidate highlights the lack of priests who were willing to come to the area and the actions of MacDonell show his awareness of the potential problems that could result from the ethnic diversity of the Roman Catholic population in the area. Gaulin eventually took over the diocese of Kingston on the death of MacDonell in 1840. He requested that Michael Power, born in Nova Scotia of Irish parents, be appointed his coadjutor.²² However, Michael Power who had been vicar-general to Bishop Ignace Bourget of Montreal, was instead appointed as Bishop of the newly created diocese of Toronto in 1841. Gaulin agreed to the appointment of another Irish priest, Patrick Phelan, who was appointed coadjutor to Bishop Gaulin in 1842. Born in Kilkenny, Ireland in 1795, Patrick Phelan had emigrated to North America in 1821 where he studied for the priesthood in Boston and Montreal and was ordained in September 1825.²³ Although Power and Phelan had Irish connections, they were both trained in Quebec.²⁴ Therefore, as Perin states, the

²⁰ Robert Choquette, “English-French” p.10.

²¹ Choquette, p.10.

²² Nicolson, p.136.

²³ A Clergyman, *Life of Right Reverend Patrick Phelan: Third Bishop of Kingston*, (Kingston, 1862), p.6.

²⁴ Roberto Perin, *Rome in Canada: The Vatican and Canadian Affairs in the Late Victorian Age*, (Toronto, 1990), p.19.

church in Ontario continued to evolve “under the protective wing of its mother church in Quebec.”

Bytown was part of the diocese of Kingston and was an area of concern for Bishop Bourget who had received a disturbing report in 1842 from the French priest, Father Neyron. In his letter Neyron described the difficulties of working in a town that was “divisée en deux factions;” he described the church there as “Babylone” and stressed the necessity of sending a priest who could speak both languages.²⁵ Realizing the gravity of the situation, Bourget chose a priest who had some experience in dealing with a bi-lingual population. Following his ordination Phelan, who was bi-lingual, had been “chapelain des irlandais de Montreal,” and had proven to have a powerful influence on his fellow countrymen and had played an important role in the political developments of the city.²⁶ Phelan arrived in Bytown on 26 October 1842. By 8 November he was pleased to report to Bourget that he could already report his success in the area. He wrote that he had been welcomed by the people and that he already had “trois ou quatre protestants qui se préparent au baptême.”²⁷

That Phelan thought it important to note the number of potential converts from Protestantism sheds light on the sense of mission which infused the work of Canadian priests in the mid to late nineteenth century. The church hierarchy’s joy in what they saw as rescuing someone from Protestantism was balanced by their concern that, without adequate direction, members of the Roman Catholic community would leak into

Patrick Phelan trained at the Seminaire de Saint-Sulpice in Montreal; Michael Power studied at Quebec and Montreal.

²⁵ De Barbezieux, Rev. P. Alexis, *Histoire de la Province Ecclesiastique d’Ottawa et la Colonisation dans la vallee de l’Ottawa*, Vol.I, (Ottawa, 1897), p.173

²⁶ De Barbezieux, p. 177.

²⁷ De Barbezieux, p. 174.

Protestantism. In Montreal, Bourget had established congregations on the outskirts of the island of Montreal. Perin argues that these were areas “where Protestant proselytism had made a breakthrough. Once the situation there stabilized, once regular parish and school life existed, these communities could go on to play a more dynamic role elsewhere.”²⁸ The judicious use of these religious congregations reflects Bourget’s attempts to make the most of his resources. The lack of priests to tend and to retain the faithful was a constant cause for concern as was the struggle to retain priests with adequate training and skills. Phelan’s report also demonstrates the tendency of the hierarchy to keep each other informed of every detail of their missions. To solve common problems the Bishops of Upper and Lower Canada recognized the importance of working together in their efforts to consolidate the faithful in the area. The organizational abilities of Bishop Bourget, who, even in the seminary, “was distinguished for his strength of character and brilliant intellect,” enhanced the ability of the hierarchy to work together which culminated in the establishment of an ecclesiastical province in 1844.²⁹ The bishops of Upper and Lower Canada had petitioned the Pope to create an archdiocese. This united the four dioceses, Quebec, Montreal, Toronto and Kingston into the single ecclesiastical province named the Metropolitan Province of Quebec under Archbishop Joseph Signay. “There were immediate, positive results from the formation of the ecclesiastical province. This arrangement strengthened communication links, established lines of authority with delegated responsibility and provided the opportunity for the interchange of ideas.”³⁰

²⁸ Roberto Perin, “French-Speaking Canada from 1840”, Murphy T. ed., Perin, R. assoc. ed., *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada*, (Toronto, 1996), 62n., p406.

²⁹ Paul Bruchesi, “Ignace Bourget,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume II, (New York 1907).

³⁰ Murray Nicolson, “The Growth of the Roman Catholic Institution in the Archdiocese of Toronto, 1841-90”, *Creed and Culture*, p.154.

There were now four viable dioceses working together, Quebec and Montreal in Lower Canada and Kingston and Toronto in Upper Canada. Therefore, in 1844, Bourget who had been appointed Bishop of Montreal in 1840, was in the position to work with the other Bishops and to utilize any changes in the law to their benefit. The political change brought about by the Act of Union in 1840 had also coincided with the amendment of an 1829 act which gave the Roman Catholic Church the freedom to exist and to rule themselves. This allowed the Bishops to have complete control and rights when it came to erecting Catholic parishes and had given them freedom from government when acquiring goods for worship or instruction. The religious institutions were now able to possess the lands and buildings they needed to pursue their works.³¹ In addition to these two factors, the close connection between the Bishops allowed Bourget to communicate to them his ideas for the future direction of the church.³²

Bourget had been sent to Rome with Power in 1841 to discuss the division of the Kingston diocese. When Pope Gregory XVI agreed, Bourget accompanied Power to London to obtain the assent of the British government. The main argument used to persuade the British government of the value of the creation of a new diocese was that a "Catholic bishop in case of emergency will provide more authority over those committed to his care than an ordinary clergyman, his presence and his advice may also prove highly serviceable to Her Majesty's Government in quelling that spirit of insubordination and fierce democratic spirit which unhappily exists in a formidable degree in many parts of

³¹ Jean Moncoin, , o.m.i., "The Civil Incorporation of Religious Institutes in Canada," Thesis-Doctor in Canon Law, (Ottawa, 1978), p.62.

³² Murray Nicolson, "The Growth of Roman Catholic Institutions in the Archdiocese of Toronto, 1841-1890," *Creed and Culture*, p.155.

the frontier line.”³³ Therefore, Bourget was aware of the urgency of creating services that would cater to the needs of the Catholic population in Bytown without losing any concessions that had been granted by the British government.

The strategic location of the town, which had attracted the interest of the British Imperial Government, was also a useful location for the establishment of an Order of priests interested in founding new missions. The Rideau waterway was tied to the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes trade route and the Ottawa river provided a route to the North-West. “Both routes offered facilities for settlement, exploitation, and trade.”³⁴ Bourget was aware of the possibilities offered by gaining access to the Hudson’s Bay Company lands and stressed the value of an establishment in such a location when he persuaded the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to come to Canada.³⁵ On 21 October 1843, Bourget wrote to Phelan asking him to think about the advantages of inviting the Oblate Order of Mary Immaculate to establish a mission in the Bytown. He stressed the amount of work that needed to be done and the dual role that these priests could play; they could serve the townspeople while at the same time establish “missions a droite et a gauche, tantôt dans le diocese de Kingston, tantôt dans celui de Montreal, et surtout que visiteraient les chantiers.”³⁶ The advantages of establishing such an order in Bytown were obvious, but Bourget remained aware of Phelan’s wariness of bringing in a French order and his interest in ensuring that the Irish Catholic population would have an Irish priest to minister to them. He informed Phelan that although it would not be possible for the order to send an Irish priest immediately, he had been assured by the Oblates that the idea was

³³ Nicolson, “Growth”, p.154.

³⁴ Michael Newton, “The Search for Heritage in Ottawa’s Lower Town,” *Urban History Review*, v. IX, no. 2. (October, 1980), p.22.

³⁵ Perin, “French-Speaking Canada from 1840,”p212.

³⁶ OMI. JE.101.C21.C9. Letter Bourget to Phelan, 21 October 1843.

“très feasables.”³⁷ Phelan who was now based in Kingston as coadjutor to Bishop Gaulin agreed to recruiting the Oblates, but continued to insist that the Oblates send an Irish priest to join the mission.

The Order of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate had been founded in Aix-en-Provence, France by Eugene de Mazenod in 1816, and was approved by Rome in 1826.³⁸ A missionary order, it had been designed “to re-Christianize the masses after the ravages of the French revolution.”³⁹ In response to Bourget’s invitation, the Oblates arrived in Montreal, Canada in 1841. Two French Oblate priests, Fathers Telmon and Dandurand established a mission in Bytown in 1844. Phelan welcomed them and assured them of help to build a schoolhouse, but the necessity of providing an Irish priest to administer to the Irish Catholics continued to be his priority. Although trained in a Montreal seminary, from the moment of his ordination he had dedicated himself to working to alleviate the distress of the Irish Catholic migrant population. Before he left Ireland, he had had the distinct impression that “God had called him to America, and that there should be the field of his real usefulness.”⁴⁰ In Montreal, Bytown, and Kingston he paid particular attention to the needs of the Irish immigrants in the community. An incident in 1837 gives an insight into his connection with the Irish people in the area.

. . . during the disturbance which arose among the Irish on the Lachine Canal, we learn what control he had over their minds, for on that occasion his sudden appearance amongst them, with a few words from his lips, sufficed to quell that wild commotion, when passion had risen to its highest, whilst an armed force would then have proved but very ineffectual.⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Murray W. Nicolson, *Catholics in English Canada: A Popular History*, (Toronto, 2000), p.88.

³⁹ Perin, “French-speaking Canada from 1840” p.199.

⁴⁰ Clergyman, p.6.

⁴¹ Clergyman, p.9.

Bourget had also commented on Phelan's "unusual adroitness in handling people."⁴² In recommending him to Gaulin as a good candidate for bishop, Bourget commented that Phelan was not as sophisticated as one would expect, tended to be too familiar with people with whom he did business, and "very simple-heartedly says what he is doing for the glory of God".⁴³ Despite these misgivings, Bourget praised his zealousness and his abilities to communicate with the people. However, his ability to handle people seems to have been the determining factors when appointing him to the diocese of Kingston in 1842. The language in this letter from Bourget to Gaulin suggests an underlying tension and a belief that a successful mission entailed more than a desire to work only for the glory of God. It also serves as yet another example of the Catholic hierarchy paying attention to detail when choosing a candidate who could negotiate the ethnic tensions in the area.

Phelan continued to insist that without an Irish priest it would be impossible to create a viable mission in Bytown. The equal number of Irish and French Catholics in the area supported the validity of this argument. The Oblate priests were aware of the situation of a town which they viewed as being in moral decay and welcomed the challenge to establish a successful mission.⁴⁴ However, they were also aware of the necessity of being able to provide services to both the French and the Irish Roman Catholics. In 1843 Father Telmon had informed his superior Mgr Mazenod of the importance of heeding Phelan's advice, especially since the Irish Catholics formed the major part of the Catholic population in Bytown.⁴⁵ This message was reinforced by

⁴² Letter Bourget to Gaulin, Apr. 8, 1842, Lamirande, p.113.

⁴³ Lamirande, p.113.

⁴⁴ Carriere, p.220-221

⁴⁵ OMI. HEF.1277.P62C.9. Letter Telmon to Mazenod, 20 December 1843.

Father Honorat who agreed with Phelan and Bourget on the urgency of having an Irish-born priest to satisfy the wishes of the majority of the Catholics in Bytown.⁴⁶ Both priests struggled to find a balance between the urgency of appointing an Irish priest and their belief that they were already providing bilingual services. The Irish people in the city insisted on having an Irish priest to minister to them. It was not just a matter of wanting to be understood by a priest who could speak their own language. Fathers Telmon and Dandurand were bilingual and could function well in the English language, but that was not enough to satisfy the Irish population. Dandurand admired Phelan for his commitment to the people of Bytown, but thought that his desire that the majority of the priests should speak English was excessive and would be impossible to accomplish.⁴⁷ However, Phelan recognized that the hierarchy would have to provide a bilingual Irish priest to augment the services of the French Oblate priests in order to satisfy both the French and Irish Catholics in Bytown. He had remained in close contact with the president of All Hallows seminary in Dublin and through him recruited priests for the diocese of Kingston. He sent passage money to accommodate their travel arrangements.⁴⁸ However, that he did not suggest recruiting an Irish priest who could not speak French demonstrates that he knew that this would not satisfy the French-Catholic population in Bytown. His continuing insistence that the Oblates provide such a candidate suggests his acceptance that the Irish priest would also have to be bilingual. It also reinforces the awareness of the Catholic clergy that the equal numbers of French and English Catholics in Bytown forced them to consider the needs of both ethnic groups.

⁴⁶ OMI. GLPP.1859. Letter Honorat to Mazenod, 24 December 1843.

⁴⁷ OMI. GLPP1066. Letter Dandurand to Mazenod, 3 December, 1845.

⁴⁸ L. J. Flynn, *Built on a Rock: The Story of the Roman Catholic Church in Kingston 1826-1976*, (Kingston, 1976), p.39

By June 1844 the frustration of Telmon is evident when he reports to Mazenod that although he speaks English, he is unacceptable to the Irish population because he had not been born in Ireland. He blames this on stupid national pride and writes:

. . . if faut que vous nous envoyiez un Irlandais d'Irlande, corps et âme, pur sang, et, s'il se peut, avec généalogie, descendant, chose assez facile, d'un des anciens rois de la vieille, malheureuse, mais toujours grande et noble Erin.⁴⁹

Honoret agreed, though not in as colorful a turn of phrase, when he wrote to Father Aubert in 1843 that the Irish loved to have an Irish priest. He acknowledged that a French priest who was able to speak English could not do half as much good as an Irish priest with his fellow countrymen.⁵⁰ Telmon's frustration with the situation highlights both the lack of resources available to the priests and the amount of pressure he was under to quickly accomplish a successful mission in this part of North America. It also sheds light on his own personality which tended to be excitable in his desire to do as much work as possible and not to waste any time. In January 1845, the situation was inflamed by the fact that the Irish refused to subscribe any money to the church until an Irish priest was recruited.⁵¹ By February 1845, Telmon had accepted that the Irish population would not be satisfied until they had a priest of their own nationality. He acknowledged that this did not make any sense because of the presence of Dandurand who spoke excellent English, but he noted that it was a matter of emotion that had nothing to do with reason. ". . . il y a bien des gens qui jugent plus par le ventre qu par la tête, et c'est ce qui arrive dans cette affaire."⁵² In December 1845, Dandurand complained to Mazenod about Phelan's insistence that the Oblates provide an Irish-born priest for Bytown. While he explained

⁴⁹ OMI. GLPP.2877. Letter Telmon to Mazenod, 20 June, 1844.

⁵⁰ OMI. GLPP.1941 Letter Honorat to Aubert 13 April, 1843.

⁵¹ Carriere, p.244.

⁵² OMI. HEF.1277. P62C.54. Letter Telmon to Mazenod, February 1845.

that Phelan had accepted him as a priest in Bytown, he pointed out that the Irish population were still expecting an Irish-born priest and the fact that he was born in France was a condition “presque sine qua non avec les Irlandais.”⁵³

The assertion by the French priests that the demand of the Irish for an Irish priest did not make any sense and was driven by emotion sheds light on the fact that they did not understand why they should make such a request. Because the Oblates were providing services to the Irish population, the continuing insistence on acquiring an Irish priest suggests that it was important for the Irish in Bytown to feel that they had some degree of control and agency within the church. In his study of Irish immigrants in Canada, David Wilson argues that the Irish immigrants were generally “especially ambitious and adaptable” to life in their adopted country. He also notes that “one of the most striking things about the Irish in Canada is their high degree of political activism. This was not confined to an elite; it permeated the entire ethnic group, whether rich or poor, rural or urban, Catholic or Protestant.”⁵⁴ Most Irish immigrants in Canada were aware of Daniel O’Connell’s Repeal of the Union campaign in Ireland which continued to be covered in the Bytown newspapers. It has been noted that his campaign in the 1820s and 1830s was important “not merely [for securing] Roman Catholic representation in Parliament; more important, he imparted political organization to his co-religionists in Ireland.”⁵⁵ The Irish Catholics in Bytown, who were insisting on importing an Irish priest in 1845, had the ability to voice their displeasure with the new mission of priests by withholding their subscriptions to the Church. This, in addition to the fact that they

⁵³ OMI. GLPP.1066. Letter Dandurand to Mazonod, 3 December 1845.

⁵⁴ David A. Wilson, *The Irish in Canada*, (Ottawa, 1989), p.14

⁵⁵ John Irwin Cooper, “Irish Immigration and the Canadian Church before the Middle of the 19th Century,” *The Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society*, v. II, no. 3, (May, 1955), p.2.

comprised fifty percent of the Roman Catholic population, gave them a level of control. In his study of the Irish in St. Patrick's Parish, Montreal for the period 1815 to 1867, William Nolte discovered that when the church authorities decided to re-align the parish along geographical rather than linguistic lines, the Irish went over the head of Bourget to Rome and successfully appealed the decision.⁵⁶ In 1847, when the Oblate Bishop Guigues assumed government of the newly created diocese of Bytown, his first public speech demonstrates his awareness of retaining the loyalty of the Irish Catholic portion of the population. In his speech he specifically addressed both Irish and the French-Canadian citizens. While asking them to support the priests of the diocese, he spoke directly to

. . .you, also, generous Children of Erin, calculate on our support and our tender solicitude . . .Children of Canada and Ireland, whom we name separately, but, who nevertheless form but one peaceful family, since you are both Catholic . . .united by bonds the most firmly cemented, those of Faith . . .⁵⁷

Guigues continued to tread carefully to negotiate the ethnic differences within the Roman Catholic population in Bytown. By 1850 he could report that "les rivalités entre nations sont disparues et une harmonie parfaite règne parmi les catholiques."⁵⁸ Although it is necessary to accept a certain degree of exaggeration may have led to this rather extreme statement, the fact that the Oblates had been successful in recruiting two Irish-born priests for the area had enhanced their ability to provide services to the two ethnic groups.

The arrival of the Irish priests satisfied the demands of the Irish immigrant population and marked a turning point for the Bytown mission. In December 1845,

⁵⁶ William M. Nolte, "The Irish in Canada, 1815-1867," PhD Thesis, (Maryland, 1975), p.127.

⁵⁷ National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), BX 824 A207, Guigues, Pastoral of His Lordship Joseph Eugene, first bishop of Bytown, 30 July, 1848.

⁵⁸ Carriere, p.263, n.93.

Dandurand was pleased to report that the Irish Father Molloy had arrived in Bytown.⁵⁹ Telmon and Dandurand were relieved to finally have an Irish-born priest who could cater to the Irish Catholic population. However, a letter from Dandurand to Mazenod reveals that while the French and Irish priests shared the goal of establishing a successful mission, they were still aware of the difference in their ethnic backgrounds. Dandurand writes that on his journey to Bytown:

... Il faut passer sous un certain nombre de ponts extrêmement bas. Malheur a celui qui ne se baisse point, quand on crie: Pont, pont!!!... C'est ce qui arriva au Rev. Molloy. En vrai Irlandais, il ne s'abaissa point, et le contrecoup de la précipiter tetre première sus l'escalier de la cabine inférieure. ...⁶⁰

Father Molloy recovered and arrived in Bytown to assume his duties. However, Molloy's ordination sheds light on Mgr. de Mazenod's decision to heed the call for an Irish-born Oblate priest in Canada. He had written to Bourget in 1844

La providence qui veille sur nos besoins m'a fourni précisément le sujet que l'on demande avec tant d'instance. C'est un excellent irlandais que j'ordonnerai pendant le cours de son noviciat, il a fini ses études théologiques, c'est un homme fait, plein de bon sens et de vertus et se sentant de plus appelle à cette mission. On en sera certainement content.⁶¹

Father Molloy was given special permission by Rome to be ordained six months prior to the official canonical period, due to the urgent need for an Irish priest in Bytown. Three or four days later he left for Canada.⁶²

The co-operation between the French- and the English-speaking Catholic priests was an important element in the successful consolidation of the Church organization in Bytown. Necessity impelled them to work together, therefore it was important that they

⁵⁹ OMI. GLPP.1066. Letter Dandurand to Mazenod, 3 December 1845.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Carriere, p.244-245.

⁶² OMI. HEC.3720.M62C.2. Swithum Bowers, "Father Michael Molloy (1804-1891)".

could rise above differences in background and focus on dealing with the urgent situation of day-to-day life in the city. By March of 1846, Telmon was able to report that Molloy was an excellent man who was flexible, pious and full of zeal. In January 1847, Telmon complained of “l’insuffisance” of Molloy, but praised his virtues and excellent character.⁶³ The fact that there was so much work to be done in Bytown allowed Father Telmon to accept and to be grateful for the help of Father Molloy. Before his arrival he had been overwhelmed with work that ranged from the spiritual administration of 4800 Catholics to the direction of the physical work in the building of their establishments. Besides administering to the spiritual needs of his parishioners and visiting the sick, he had also fulfilled the roles of architect, carpenter, mason, and carter of stone. Due to lack of skilled workmen he had to supervise daily the workmen who were building the presbytery. In addition, he also had to struggle to find the money to buy the wood and other materials needed for the new building.⁶⁴

The overwhelming need of the people of Bytown for religious and social services could not be dealt with by the Oblate fathers alone. Although the Oblate priests, Phelan and Bourget struggled to find a balance between the ethnic divisions in Bytown, they all agreed on the value of inviting a group of religious women to establish services in the area. This suggests that there were definite ideas among the clergy as to the kind of services that a group of religious women could supply. It is interesting that Perin notes “[in] the cities, indigence, social deviance, dependency owing to age, health or disability, and calamities such as epidemics and fires were reaching previously unknown levels [therefore Bourget] turned to female religious, both foreign and domestic, for social

⁶³ OMI. GLPP.2881. Letter Telmon to Mazenod, 30 January 1847.

⁶⁴ OMI. GLPP.2880. Letter Telmon to Mazenod, 25 March 1846.

assistance.”⁶⁵ The idea that women were suitable for certain areas of service permeated nineteenth century life. In an era of separate spheres it was accepted that women were nurturing, caring, and compassionate and, therefore capable of this type of social work. The priests were aware of the importance of projecting a caring face to the public and that the establishment of a group of religious women would help them to consolidate their mission. Their decision to approach the Grey Nuns of Montreal to send some Sisters to the area also suggests that they deliberately chose an order whose mandate was to care for the poor and the infirm. Through the establishment of a hospital and through visiting the sick in their homes, both accepted elements of women’s work, the Sisters would reinforce the importance of the Roman Catholic faith.

However, the Roman Catholic hierarchy also wanted the Sisters to provide education for girls in the area. That the Sisters include educating girls in their plan for opening establishments in Bytown was a high priority for the clergy. As Magray writes in her study of religious congregations in nineteenth-century Ireland:

... the female religious orders were a necessary component of the church’s transformation. Women religious, through their intimate and influential relationships with ordinary Irish Catholics and especially young female Catholics, successfully fostered an environment for a new style of religious devotion and social behavior.”⁶⁶

This influence was especially powerful in the schools. Before he emigrated to North America, Phelan had spent some time employed as a teacher in Ireland. His career in Montreal was marked by his interest in helping the Irish immigrant population and he remained actively involved in the schools. He regularly supervised their religious instruction and believed that this, in turn, had a good influence on their parents and

⁶⁵ Perin, “French-Speaking Canada from 1840,” p.211.

⁶⁶ Magray, p.11.

encouraged them to attend religious services.⁶⁷ When Phelan wrote to the Superior in Montreal in 1844, he specifically requested that their work should embrace the “education of Canadian and Irish girls as well as the care of the poor and sick in their homes.”⁶⁸ Education was not part of the Grey Nun’s mandate and created some difficulties for the order in agreeing to establish such a foundation. As early as 1821 the hierarchy of the Diocese of Kingston had been attempting to persuade some members of the Grey Nuns of Montreal to open a girls school in the diocese. Bishop MacDonell had been successful in recruiting Sister Raizenne, the assistant of the Montreal order, to open a school in Sandwich, Upper Canada in 1828. Because her colleagues in Montreal did not support the project, “she resigned from her office in 1828 and obtained, from Bishop Bourget, permission to leave the community and dedicate herself, in her own right, to a foundation in Upper Canada.”⁶⁹ Her actions demonstrate her belief in the value of such a foundation and her ability to leave an order which no longer served her purposes. This new foundation dissolved on her death the following year, but her difficulties emphasize the importance of the priests’ efforts to persuade Mother McMullen of Montreal to agree to allow the Sisters in Bytown to open a school in the area.

Because education was not part of the mandate of the Grey Nuns of Montreal, the acceptance of educational responsibilities in Bytown led, in 1854, to the separation of the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa from the Mother House in Montreal. This was a painful break for the Sisters and highlights the dedication and the spirituality of Elisabeth Bruyere, the new Mother Superior in Bytown. When she received word of the separation from Montreal, she “received the news with sorrow, but also with resignation to God’s

⁶⁷ Clergyman, p.9.

⁶⁸ Keefe, p.221.

⁶⁹ Lamirande, p.79.

will.”⁷⁰ However, two days later she had recovered enough to add “All that I am left with now is to work to establish, as well as I can, the spirit of our holy Foundress who, I am very confident, will always acknowledge us as her daughters.”⁷¹ This dedication to the spirit of Mother D’Youville, founder of the Order continued to inspire Mother Bruyere throughout the difficulties encountered in the mission in Bytown.

Born in L’Assomption, Quebec in 1818, Elisabeth was educated by the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame in Montreal and by her aunt who was a school teacher in Saint Esprit, Quebec. When she was sixteen she taught in the only girls’ school in the area. Following a serious illness in 1838, she moved to St-Vincent-de-Paul where she taught in one of the four schools for girls in the village. When she entered the Grey Nuns in Montreal in 1839, they did not require a dowry, but she had to appeal to her cousin for money to buy a trousseau. It is interesting to note the reaction of her friends when they learned of her decision to join the Grey Nuns. Although they were not surprised that she had chosen to enter a religious congregation, they were surprised that she did not enter a teaching order.⁷² After a period spent in charge of the orphanage in Montreal, she was chosen as Mother Superior for the mission to Bytown in 1845.⁷³

Although Mother Bruyere had believed that it would be possible to remain connected with the Mother House in Montreal, the different nature of work demanded of them in Bytown led to a separation. The break was painful for the Sisters, but signifies their ability to overcome their own preferences in their efforts to fulfill the needs of the local population. They did not plan to separate, but, dedicated to the success of their

⁷⁰ Lamirande, p.259.

⁷¹ Lamirande, p.260.

⁷² Lamirande, p.17-53.

⁷³ Sister Paul-Emile, *Mother Elisabeth Bruyere: Her Life and Work*, vol.I. Trans. Sister Gabrielle L. Jean, (Ottawa, 1989), p16.

mission, they continued to make decisions tailored to dealing with Bytown. In 1849 a memorandum from the Mother House in Montreal concluded that in Bytown “new practices were being introduced . . . without consulting Montreal, the mother house believed that there was no more hope of preserving among their houses a true unity of rules and practice.”⁷⁴ As Sister Paul Emile points out the differences between Montreal and Bytown were so great that it was inevitable that there would be separation. In Bytown the lack of religious institutes forced the Sisters to “respond to all the needs at once. A small city like Bytown needed generalists.” She also notes that the Church hierarchy “were convinced that they had to give top priority to education. And they expected that the Grey Nuns would support them in their efforts which for them, meant staying within the chosen space of devotion to the church and charity toward neighbor.”⁷⁵ The clergy were convinced that educating the girls in the area would encourage and provide a good example to their parents. Telmon’s letter to Mazenod on 25 March 1846 gives an insight into why the establishment of a school for girls was so important:

Nos soeurs font leur oeuvre a merveille. Le changement dans leurs élevés est déjà sensible quoiqu’elles savoient, qu’il y avait beaucoup a faire, bien des gens voudraient qu’elles pussent prendre des pensionnaires. Plusieurs femmes demandent une école pour elles-mêmes, et si elles pourraient faire une classe du soir.⁷⁶

In Bytown, as in Montreal, there was much work to be done and to be successful it would have to have a bi-lingual educational element which could cater to the French Canadian and the Irish groups in the city. The Catholic Bishops and the Oblate priests had persisted in their encouragement of Mother McMullen in Montreal to send some of her Sisters to establish such a mission in Bytown. In the flurry of letter writing, between

⁷⁴ Lamirande, p.259.

⁷⁵ Lamirande, p.288.

⁷⁶ OMI. GLPP.2880. Letter Telmon to Mazenod, 25 March 1845.

Bourget, Phelan, Telmon, and the convent in Montreal, that surrounded the persuasion of Mother McMullen to agree, Telmon had expressed his regret that Bytown was not nearer to Montreal, so that he could express himself directly to her instead of by letter and thus impress upon her the urgent need of such an establishment.⁷⁷ When Telmon wrote to McMullen he insisted that the adults were as much in need of the good example of these Sisters as the children were in need of good religious instruction. He begged her to send the Sisters to establish a bi-lingual school and promised that he would do all in his power to help them become established. He went so far as to promise that if he could not rent a house for them he would give them the presbytery to use. The Oblates were committed to helping the Sisters to become established. They were also well aware that the mandate of the Sisters was to care for the poor and infirm rather than to establish schools, so they pointed out that the school was necessary because it would enable the Sisters to finance their other charitable endeavours.⁷⁸ Telmon assured the Sisters that he would give them L50 per year. He also hoped to receive another L50 annually from the district's Public School Funds.⁷⁹ The enthusiasm of Telmon's letters to McMullen in Montreal reflects the urgency of his request. He wanted them to come as soon as possible and made sure that they knew that the citizens of Bytown were just as enthusiastic as he was to receive them. He explained that they would be welcomed by the people of both languages.⁸⁰ Phelan and Bourget were both closely involved with these ongoing negotiations to secure Sisters for an establishment in Bytown. When McMullen agreed to send some Sisters, Bourget insisted that Telmon prepare everything in advance, so that they could begin their work

⁷⁷ OMI. BK.2517.T27.1849. Letter Telmon to McMullen, 31 December 1844.

⁷⁸ OMI. BK.2517.T27.1849. Letter Telmon to McMullen, 20 October, 1844.

⁷⁹ OMI. BK.2517.T27.1849. Letter Telmon to McMullen, 21 December, 1844.

⁸⁰ OMI. BK.2517.T27.1849. Letter Telmon to McMullen, 31 December, 1844.

as soon as possible. He also impressed upon Telmon what an advantage this would prove to be for the city and directed him to fill a list of supplies sent by the Mother Superior.⁸¹ Considering how hard Telmon had worked to ensure their arrival this insistence by Bourget seems to be to remind him to share this knowledge with the parishioners and also demonstrates Bourget's interest in ensuring the success of the venture.

Phelan and Bourget continued to correspond and to encourage the Sisters and the priests in the establishment of this mission.⁸² Both men were aware of the importance of consolidating the power of the Catholic Church in the rapidly growing city of Bytown and agreed on the advantages of having a group of Religious Sisters to provide services to both the French- and the English-speaking citizens. The Grey Nuns in Montreal was a French-speaking order; therefore, it was no surprise that Phelan was interested in ensuring that they include some Irish sisters in their founding group. Sister Elisabeth Bruyere, who was chosen to be Superior of the new foundation and Sisters Thibodeau and Saint Joseph, her assistants, were born in Quebec. However, the other three members of the group had Irish connections. Sister Rodriguez "was born "somewhere" on the Atlantic on January 6, 1820 while her parents were crossing from Ireland to America."⁸³ Orphaned at the age of five, she had grown up in the Grey Nuns' orphanage in Montreal where she joined the order in 1839. Mary Jones had also been an Irish orphan under the care of the Grey Nuns in Montreal and volunteered to join the group going to Bytown. However, the connection between Phelan and the family of the third Irish Sister suggests his influence on her decision to join the group. Elisabeth Devlin had been educated first by the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame in Montreal and then in a private

⁸¹ OMI. JE.101.C21.C31. Bourget to Telmon, 6 December, 1844.

⁸² OMI. JE.101.C21.C32. Bourget to Phelan, 30 December, 1844.

⁸³ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, P18.

boarding school run by the Ursuline Sisters in Quebec. On hearing that the Sisters were founding a new house in Bytown, she had begged her parents to allow her to join them. There is evidence that Phelan was involved in helping her to make this choice for when she joined the order due to her “father’s friendship with Bishop Patrick Phelan, Elisabeth assumed the name of Sister Saint Patrice.”⁸⁴

Phelan’s interest in establishing an Irish element within the Sisters of Charity was further reinforced by his support and the timing of his niece’s application to join the order. When the first Sisters arrived in Bytown, Phelan wrote to congratulate Mother Bruyere and to wish her well in the new establishment. The same envelope contained a formal request for his niece Mary Josephine Phelan to enter the noviciate.⁸⁵ Mary Josephine had been born in Kilkenny, Ireland and had emigrated to Canada with her family when she was a young girl. Her family background and the timing of her decision to join a religious order sheds light on the importance of kinship ties among the Irish community as well as on Phelan’s persistent interest in the welfare of the Irish community. Mary Josephine’s father, Daniel, had a very close relationship with his younger brother Patrick. Daniel had left Ireland with his family to settle in Montreal.⁸⁶ The fact that he chose to settle his wife and children in the city where his brother was a priest suggests that he received some support in this move. The strength of this family bond is also demonstrated by the fact that it had been Daniel who had helped their widowed mother to pay for Patrick’s education in Ireland. Daniel had also accompanied him to Dublin when Patrick decided to emigrate to study for the priesthood in America in

⁸⁴ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.18-20.

⁸⁵ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.52.

⁸⁶ Paul-Emile, *Grey Nuns*, p.31.

1821.⁸⁷ When Daniel emigrated to Montreal it was inevitable that he would remain in contact with his brother. The fact that Mary Josephine's application was sent to the Order by Bishop Phelan reveals that he was consulted on the decision. The admittance of his niece to the noviciate would ensure that there would continue to be Irish-born Sisters to work within the Irish community.

Mother Bruyere was impressed by Bishop Phelan's letter and by his niece's application. However, her reaction demonstrates both the importance of bi-lingualism in her organization and the fact that she was strong enough to voice her own opinions. The Sisters insisted that all their members be proficient in French as well as English to ensure the smooth operation of the community. Therefore, even her familial connection with Bishop Phelan did not allow Mary Josephine to avoid the study of French. Although Mother Bruyere recognized the value of having an English-speaking Sister as part of the mission in Bytown, she requested that Mary-Josephine become proficient in French before she could be admitted.⁸⁸ The services provided by the Sisters were to be bi-lingual, therefore, the Sisters had to be able to function in both languages. Mother Bruyere herself had been required to learn to speak English when she was a novice in Montreal. The novices had been expected to spend more than two hours each day practicing their English conversation in order to work in the General Hospital in Montreal.⁸⁹ Mary Josephine accepted the challenge and spent five months in the boarding school of the Congregation of Notre Dame studying the French language. Her determination to learn is evident in her letter to Mother McMullen in Montreal on November 4, 1845 in which she writes: "the next time, I hope that I shall have the

⁸⁷ Clergyman, p.7.

⁸⁸ Paul-Emile, *Grey*, p.32.

⁸⁹ Lamirande, p.61.

pleasure of writing a French letter to you. I do not intend to be always writing in English. Though I find it difficult to learn French, yet I have to get over these little difficulties.”⁹⁰ Mary Josephine was twenty-two years old when she finally entered in 1845 and was sent immediately to Bytown where she took her vows on 8 September 1847. The timing of her entry into the order ensured that she was an integral part of the small team of women who, from the moment of their arrival, began to work with the residents of the city. Although she was young, she was mature, compassionate and enjoyed the good health that allowed her to overcome the difficulties of her work.⁹¹

Mother Bruyere’s courage and strength of character is obvious in her insistence that Mary Josephine’s connection with her uncle was not enough to be accepted in the order without knowledge of French. It also demonstrates her commitment that the Sisters of Charity in Bytown continue to remain loyal to the legacy of Mother d’Youville. This included obedience and observance of the rules and customs of what had been established as a French-speaking Order. She and Telmon were both aware of Phelan’s desire that their orders should have English-speaking members. She complained to McMullen that she would have to be careful in how she would deal with his particular ideas and views. On 23 April 1845 she wrote that

il est un peu singulier . . . il est tout à fait drôle dans certaines choses
 Les motifs qui m’ont déterminée à en agir ainsi, c’est que nous courions les risques, un jour à venir, de passer entre les mains de prêtres séculiers, ou de supérieurs irlandais ou anglais. Alors, adieu la langue française, et je crois sincèrement que les Soeurs, en parlant une autre langue que le français ne conserveraient pas longtemps l’esprit de notre état, non plus que

⁹⁰ Archives of the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa (hereafter SOC), Letter Phelan to McMullen, 4 November 1845. Archives.

⁹¹ *Necrologies des Soeurs Grises de la Croix*. Tome I, (Ottawa, 1932), pp.276-279.

usages.⁹²

While it is evident that Bruyere believed that it was imperative to preserve the French-Canadian element in their mission, she continued to stress that the spirit of charity and dedication to work should override issues of ethnicity. As with the Roman Catholic priests, it was essential that the Sisters of Charity avoid being distracted from their work by disagreements over language requirements. The institutions established by the Sisters of Charity in Bytown all provided bi-lingual services, but French was the language used for communal prayer in the Order. Although she encouraged all the Sisters to become literate in both languages, she was convinced of the importance of maintaining French as the primary language in the order. It is also possible that she recognized the danger of allowing Phelan to gradually turn the Order into an English-speaking one. This would not only destroy what she believed was the spirit of the organization; it would also remove the French-language services provided to the French-speaking population. In 1852, she “rose against ‘the infernal spirit of nationality’ which was in danger of compromising ‘the spirit of charity’ in the community.” She explained that since the Order had been founded as a French-speaking order it was important that it remain so. She was aware of the danger of having “two parties in the community” which, she felt, would destroy the order.⁹³ Her advice demonstrates that the Sisters had to make a conscious effort to resist feeling an allegiance to a particular ethnic group. In 1869 she again warned the sisters to refuse to be tempted to allow issues of nationality to creep into the order. She wrote:

To do good, we must all have but one heart and one soul; therefore, there must not be question of nationality among us. A Sister of Charity must be of all nations; are we not all sisters in Jesus Christ? What would we think

⁹² , Jeanne d’Arc Lortie, *Lettres d’Elisabeth Bruyere*, (Montreal, 1989), Letter Bruyere to McMullen, 23 April 1845, p.136.

⁹³ Lamirande, p.575.

if it was said that such a sister has that assignment because she is Irish or Canadian? Oh! What pettiness to have such feelings; you must have a more noble heart and loftier sentiments.⁹⁴

The mandate of the Sisters of Charity was to serve the poor and, therefore, their aim was to see the poor as deserving regardless of ethnic or religious background. Although recognizing the need to provide bi-lingual services and working as an integral part of the community, the Sisters' duty was to remain removed from issues such as ethnicity and class. This paradoxical role, wherein the Sisters were part of, but separate from the everyday life of the people of Bytown, was also reflected in the attitudes of the clergy toward the Sisters. The Sisters of Charity were invited to Bytown to provide services which included education of girls, visitation of the sick in their homes and the establishment of a hospital. All these were elements of what was accepted as being "women's work". It is interesting to consider that although Phelan and the Oblates disagreed over ethnicity and the number of French- and English-speaking priests necessary to consolidate the dioceses, they agreed on the roles that the religious women should fulfill. To persuade McMullen to agree to the mission Telmon stressed the importance of having religious women in Bytown and the good example that they would provide to the adults of the town.⁹⁵ When they opened the school in Bytown, Father Telmon praised the Sisters for the excellent impression that they had made on their students and noted that he could already see beneficial changes in the attitudes of the students. He also added that the townspeople appreciated this difference.⁹⁶ The instruction and services that they would provide were strengthened by the fact that they lived pure lives dedicated to serving God through helping the people. In Bytown, as in

⁹⁴ Lamirande, p.576.

⁹⁵ OMI. BK.2517.T27.1849. Letter Telmon to McMullen, 20 October 1844.

⁹⁶ OMI. GLPP.2880. Letter Telmon to Mazenod, 25 March 1845.

Montreal, the Sisters were admired by the people for their “zeal and devotedness.”⁹⁷ These qualities were part of what was expected of a Sister of Charity who had chosen to dedicate her life to the service of the poor. The public were aware of their frugal way of life and of the services that they provided. Therefore, they would be inspired by the example of these women and would be encouraged to emulate their qualities

Telmon’s dedication to quickly achieve as much as possible and his work ethic were matched by the enthusiasm of the Sisters when they arrived in Bytown. Telmon was pleased with the amount of work accomplished by the Sisters of Charity in a short period of time. Like Telmon, the Sisters were devoted to their duty and worked hard to create a network of social and religious services. From the moment they arrived they were flexible to the needs of the population and created their institutions to deal with these needs. Father Telmon ensured that the lay community was aware of both the lack of resources that the Sisters had to work with and the amount of good work they were planning to accomplish. From the beginning he invited the wives of Aumond, Barrielle and Masse, who were influential men in the city, to meet the Sisters.⁹⁸ His interest in enlisting the support of these women reflected his belief that the Sisters would benefit from the assistance of lay-women in the community. The clergy had requested the Sisters of Charity to establish their mission to attend to what was traditionally assumed to be “women’s work.” Therefore it is no surprise that Telmon would enlist other women to help them. However, it is interesting that he chose to encourage these middle-class women to become involved in the charitable work in Lower Town. Rather than resenting his request, the women seemed to be delighted to be able to help. They assisted the

⁹⁷ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.1.

⁹⁸ OMI. JE.101.C21.C6. “Annales des Soeurs Grises de la Croix”, Annee 1845.

Sisters in their work, contributed and collected money to their organizations, and donated food and clothing to the poor. This suggests that the women appreciated being able to become part of an organized charitable endeavor. It also ensured that they were aware of what the Sisters were doing and gave them a personal interest in seeing that the Sisters would be successful in their mission. In February 1846 a public notice in *The Packet* informed the readers of the value of the work of the Sisters of Charity and of the formation of a group of women in the town who planned to help them to raise money. The notice advised of the division of Bytown into six sections which would each be visited on a regular basis and believed that the generosity of the people would ensure their success. It also noted that the President of this association, Madame Aumond, was already well known for her charity and dedication to the poor.⁹⁹ The society comprised Protestant and Catholic, English- and French-speaking members and suggests that their interest in helping the poor overcame divisions of religion or language. It also highlights the lack of organized services in the area. Telmon was delighted with the Sisters' success. In March 1846 when he reported to Mazenod the establishment of a hospital, school, and orphanage and the regular visitation of the sick in their homes, he added that the Sisters were respected and loved by everyone in the community without distinction of their beliefs and that the school already had many Protestant students.¹⁰⁰

While bearing in mind that Telmon was anxious to assure Mazenod of the value of the foundation in Bytown and its chances of success, the lack of resources available in the city contributed to the women pooling their resources to help the poor. Before the Sisters had arrived some of the more affluent people in the town had attempted to provide

⁹⁹ *The Packet*, 24 February, 1846.

¹⁰⁰ OMI GLPP.2880. Letter Telmon to Mazenod, 25 March, 1846.

some services to the poor. In 1841, the Bytown and Ottawa Emigration Society was formed in an attempt to provide immigrants with employment for the first year “at the expiration of which they would be better prepared for location.”¹⁰¹ Social services would ensure the evolution of the town which would benefit both Catholic and Protestant citizens. Telmon pointed out that that it was not only the Catholics who looked forward to them coming. In fact, the Protestant population was pleased with the planned establishment and would not be the last to support them when they arrived.¹⁰² The priests and the sisters often noted the support of the Protestant citizens in Bytown. They were encouraged by this support as it reaffirmed their belief that they were all working towards the goal of improving life for the citizens of the city. It was also an affirmation of the urgent need in the area for these services. In 1845 when Bishop Phelan went door to door to collect funds for the church he noted that he had collected \$2000 in subscriptions and that the Protestants had given approximately \$320 of this amount.¹⁰³

This situation in Bytown was similar to that in Montreal in this period. The Catholic and Protestant congregations supported each other in their efforts to raise money to look after the poor. A newspaper report of the St. Patrick’s Orphanage bazaar in 1857 noted the considerable contributions made by non-Catholics. In a similar fashion, the Montreal City and District Savings Bank, founded by Bourget, gave an equal amount of funds to Montreal Protestant and Catholic orphanages.¹⁰⁴ The lack of resources and the disturbances caused by the poverty and social divisions in Bytown encouraged middle-class Protestants and Catholics to work together to create a more stable society. Although

¹⁰¹ NA, MG 24 I 152, “Bytown and Ottawa Emigration Society.”

¹⁰² BK 2517.T27.1849. Letter Telmon to McMullen 31 December, 1844.

¹⁰³ OMI. JE.101.C21.C5. Aubert, Father “Les OMI a Bytown”, p.2.

¹⁰⁴ Daniel Lyne, “The Irish in the Province of Canada in the Decade leading to Confederation,” MA Thesis, (McGill, 1960). P.143.

there were definite religious differences, it was important for the middle-class in Bytown to preserve and to encourage a stable social structure. While it was inevitable that poverty would exist in the town, some members of both middle-class groups were concerned by the plight of the poor. These middle-class Protestants and Roman Catholics shared the Christian belief that it was their duty to help the poor. In his study of Irish immigrants in Canada, Donald Akenson has noted that “if one were to study comparable groups of Protestants and Catholics . . . one would find that their behaviours and achievement in fundamental matters of economics and social adaptation were very similar. Indeed, they would be found to have acted more like each other than like their coreligionists who had markedly different class origins.”¹⁰⁵

The Roman Catholic hierarchy welcomed the assistance of these groups and also encouraged the development of lay organizations which could strengthen and build upon the work of the missionaries in Bytown. When Guigues reported that the rivalries between the nations had disappeared in Bytown, he also stressed that to keep the fervour alive in the families he had encouraged the establishment of congregations for men and women. There were gender divisions in the way these societies were organized, but they were designed to create an environment that was conducive to develop a better life. While the Sisters of Charity worked with the ladies of the parish, the priests concentrated some of their efforts on organizing a Temperance society. In Bytown, many social problems were accentuated by the drunkenness of the population. Phelan had been involved with organizing a Temperance society in Montreal in 1840. The organization was canonically established by Bishop Bourget in 1842 and serves as an example of how the goals of both Bishop Phelan and Bishop Bourget were similar in their attempts to take

¹⁰⁵ Akenson, *The Irish*, p.353.

direct action to organize groups which would influence the lives of their parishioners. The rules of a temperance society included a solemn promise taken by the members that they would not consume alcohol and subsequently served to control violent and anti-social behaviour. The Society organized by Bishop Phelan in 1840 was the first of its kind in North America and was modeled on a Catholic Temperance Society established in Cork, Ireland in 1839 by Father Matthew. In Montreal many of its members were Irish Catholic.¹⁰⁶ Shortly after the Irish-born Father Molloy arrived in Bytown in 1845, he too organized a Temperance Society in Bytown. Before leaving Ireland, Molloy had been a member of Father Matthew's Temperance society.¹⁰⁷ The society was designed to exert control over its members and to reform their behaviour. The formation of such a society by the Catholic Church in Bytown underlines their interest in creating a stable society and their belief that reform could be accomplished by setting up institutions dedicated to the needs of the people.

The Sisters of Charity of Ottawa and the Oblate Fathers of Mary Immaculate were committed to palliate the needs of the population of Bytown. The services they provided contributed to the stability of the area and were appreciated by the people, regardless of ethnic or religious background. However, the diverse mix of these backgrounds made it essential for the clergy to provide services which could cater to French- and English-speaking Roman Catholics. Although the Sisters worked with Protestant and Catholic women in the community, the French and Irish clergy were aware of the danger of Roman Catholic leakage into Protestantism. This combined with the overwhelming need for social and religious services in the area spurred them on to work together to provide

¹⁰⁶ Dorothy Cross, "The Irish in Montreal 1867-1896," MA Thesis, (McGill, 1969), p.174.

¹⁰⁷ OMI HEC.3720.M62C.2 Bowers, p.236.

bi-lingual services that could cater to both linguistic groups. The members of both orders also had to make a conscious decision to rise above the tendency to become involved in ethnic issues, as they worked to create a network of services that would cater to the population and thus form a well-organized and powerful base for the Roman Catholic Church.

CHAPTER 2: ORGANIZING COMPASSION

Daughters of the Cross, do not lose heart in the great trials that will beset your holy enterprise. When all will seem lost, hold firm to the belief that God will come to the rescue. Always be convinced of this truth: of ourselves we can do nothing but with God, everything is possible. There lies the secret for the success of any great enterprise.¹

The arrival of the Sisters of Charity in Bytown in 1845 greatly enhanced the ability of the Roman Catholic Church to establish a series of successful enterprises. Through their schools, hospital, and their visits to the poor and sick in their homes the Sisters contributed to the stability of the area. The bi-lingual organizations they established became the backbone of social services in the city in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century. Working in conjunction with the priests, the Sisters were assisted by lay people from the town. The dedication of the Sisters of Charity to their work was sparked by their spirituality. Their desire was to cater to the needs of the poor, regardless of ethnic or religious background. When the Sisters of Charity arrived in Bytown in February, 1845 they immediately began to work within the community. On the day after their arrival, even before they had settled into the house provided by the Oblate priests, they began to visit some sick people in their homes. The statistics in the Mother House describe this work as “Oeuvres Spéciales” and note that in 1845 they visited 250 sick people. They opened a small hospital in May 1845. By the end of that first year, the school for girls, launched within weeks of their arrival, had 238 pupils, 140 French-Canadians and 98 English-speakers. There were also 52 pupils in a section of the school for younger girls, 46 of whom were French-Canadian. Because more than half of the

¹ Letter from Bishop Ignace Bourget to the Sisters who were about to leave the Mother House in Montreal to establish a mission in Bytown. 12 February, 1845, Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.1.

Roman Catholic population were Irish immigrants, it was inevitable that they made up a large proportion of the people in need of the services provided by the Sisters through their hospital and home visits.

1847 marked the beginning of a period of intensely difficult work as the ranks of those in need of care swelled to immense proportions under the impact of the typhus epidemic. Some of the Sisters' work dealt specifically with Irish female immigrants who had just arrived. For example, by 1848 they had begun to look after 70 "filles émigrés et domestique."² This was a considerable amount of work, especially considering that there were only six sisters and one domestic servant in the newly formed community. All the members of the community shared the burden of the physical work. As Lamirande points out, even Mother Bruyere "besides teaching, taking care of miscellaneous affairs and cooperating in the service of the poor, took part in all the unpleasant jobs: the laundry which was often done by the river edge, the ironing, as well as the maintenance of floors."³ The Sisters worked from early morning till late into the night. Evidence of their zeal and commitment is underscored by the fact that the domestic servant did not meet their expectations. In a letter to Mother McMullen, Superior of the Mother House in Montreal, in March 1845, Mother Bruyere writes that she regretted bringing her along as she was "fit for nothing." The servant was sent back to Montreal in May 1845.⁴

The fate of the servant reflects the difference in attitude between the Sisters and the lay community. The servant was not interested in pushing herself beyond the limits of endurance to carry out her work. On the other hand the Sisters were driven by their belief

² City of Ottawa Archives (hereafter CA), "Rapport Annuals de l'hôpital general de Bytown. 1845-1904", p.364.

³ Lamirande, p.142.

⁴ Lamirande, p.94.

that they were doing the work of the Lord and that it was their duty to accomplish as much as possible in a short period of time. They believed that they were carrying out an apostolic mission which was infused with the “Gospel message of love: of God and of Neighbor.”⁵ The Mother Superior, Elisabeth Bruyere, besides providing a good example for her Sisters was committed to following in the footsteps of the foundress, Mother Marguerite d’Youville and to preserving what Bruyere saw as the essence of the Order. In 1750, Louis XV had given Madame d’Youville authorization to form a new community in Montreal and to take over the direction of the general hospital in the city. Dedicated to serving the poor, this widow combined qualities of “that blind trust in Divine Providence which was her strongest personality trait” with, what her son described as, “a male mind, very sound [in] judgement, [who] talked little but thought much: [qualities that] are rare in persons of her sex.”⁶ This combination of spiritual and temporal capabilities allowed M. d’Youville to establish a successful religious community in Montreal. Mother Bruyere was determined that all the Sisters of Charity in the new establishment in Bytown live up to the qualities of this remarkable woman who had devoted her life to caring for the poor. The importance of this combination of practical and spiritual purpose cannot be underestimated. The Sisters expanded their institutions to cater to the needs of the population, but they believed that these needs were both spiritual and temporal. Their belief that it was their duty to serve the poor was central to their faith and inspired them to build their institutions.

The Sisters of Charity were not interested in gaining a monetary reward for their work. Any money received in payment for services was immediately ploughed back into

⁵ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.vii

⁶ Lamirande, p.70-72.

funding the growth of their establishments. The records of the General Hospital in Bytown for example list only one employee as having a salary; Gilbert Plouffe, a manservant, received 72 Louis per year with board, lodging and washing. The Sisters are listed as “receiving nothing, other than their lodging, livelihood, for their services with their maintenance in sickness and old age.”⁷ However, they were interested in making sure that their students in the nearby schoolhouse recognized the importance of caring for the poor. They taught their students to recognize that it was their duty to help the disadvantaged and included hospital work in their educational agenda. From the beginning of the school in March 1845, the Sisters encouraged their older students to help in the hospital after school hours and on weekends. They helped to prepare the bedding and to sit with the patients who needed attention. They also brought treats from home for the poor patients.⁸ The physicians, Dr. Edward Van Cortland, Dr. Beaubien, and Dr. Hamnett Hill valued the commitment of the Sisters and aided them by providing their services to the hospital free of charge. Their recognition of the dedication of the Sisters and the value of their work is evident in the physician’s annual report to the General Hospital in 1854. In this report Dr. Beaubien offered “some observations relating to the institution and to show the connection between it and the community, which [he felt would] probably interest the public.” He praised the Sisters for caring for “the large number of operatives engaged in the lumber trade who of all classes are the most liable to accident and disease, and the almost destitute emigrant class [who] make up the grand body of patients in this city.” He also noted that “the devotedness of the Sisters of Charity is not merely limited to the interior of the Establishment, it is also visible in their

⁷ CA, “Rapport Annuals” p.16.

⁸ Sister Paul-Emile, “A Pioneer of Bilingual Education”, (Ottawa, 1984), pp.7-8.

attention to the sick of the city.”⁹ The Sisters continued to include daily visitations to the homes of the sick when their first hospital was opened in 1845. Even as they began to enlarge the hospital, they never had enough physical space to house all those in need of their care.

The task of visiting the sick in their homes was made even more difficult by conditions in Bytown at the time. The roads were no more than muddy tracks and the Sisters had to wear special leather boots on their journeys. As noted in the annals of the community “the marshy, insalubrious and inhabitable sections became the domain of the poor, and consequently, the field of operation for the Sisters of Charity.”¹⁰ A number of these patients were men employed in the lumber camps in the surrounding area. Besides being subject to physical injury, they suffered from rheumatism and other diseases which resulted from working in cold and damp conditions. Those who could not be admitted to the hospital were visited in their lodgings by the Sisters. The Sisters also visited the sick poor in their homes. Predictably, these patients received spiritual as well as physical assistance. In fact, in her letters to Mother McMullen, Mother Bruyere notes that for many “a spiritual healing [was] a thousand times more precious than the bodily cure.” This reflects both the strength of her belief and her sense of her mission in Bytown, which included spiritual and physical services. It also reflects the amount of consolation that the people drew from the existence of a religious group and sheds light on why the Irish valued services provided by the Sisters. Belief that their lives were in the hands of God helped them to endure the harsh conditions in which they lived. By helping or being helped by the Sisters the people could feel that they had some measure of control over

⁹ CA, “Rapport Annuals”, Beaubien, J. C. Surgeon General Hospital, Report 1854. n.p.

¹⁰ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.61.

their lives, even if it was only the belief that they could pray for things to get better. Their spirituality drew them together and helped them psychologically to accept their situation. At the same time the Sisters also provided physical support. This blend of physical and spiritual services fulfilled the priest's agenda of strengthening the Roman Catholic faith among their parishioners. The fact that the Sisters had access to the people in their homes increased the level of their influence and promoted the value of loyalty to the Catholic faith. As Magray explains, in mid-century Ireland religious sisters were respected by the people in urban and rural areas. "Those who were more suspicious of strange visitors opened their doors to the sisters once they learned who they were."¹¹ She also points out the advantages of knowing a religious woman. "To know a nun well enough to ask her to speak on one's behalf or to have a nun in the family was to be in a fortunate position Women religious were valuable character references and were often asked, for instance, to write letters of recommendation, or "characters," for various individuals seeking employment."¹² The Sisters in Bytown were inundated with requests for their services. They could not visit a house without people in the neighboring houses asking for help. Therefore, it is no surprise that this devotion was encouraged by the priests. In fact, Mother Bruyere wrote that Bishop Phelan was "kind enough to send us all the Irish women who go to him to be cured."¹³ This suggests that the women saw the church as an organization that would grant them aid, but that they accepted that this aid would include spiritual direction.

The priests, who had encouraged the Sisters to come to Bytown, supported them when they arrived. They provided them with accommodation and encouraged the

¹¹ Magray, p.76.

¹² Magray, p.76.

¹³ Lamirande, p.135-136.

parishioners to contribute what they could spare. On their initial journey from Montreal to Bytown in 1845, the Sisters had spent the night at the estate of Denis Benjamin Papineau. When Papineau enquired how they would survive in Bytown, Telmon assured him that as long as he had bread to eat they would not be in need.¹⁴ The following day, when they arrived in Bytown, the Oblate priests moved out of their own house and allowed the Sisters to stay there until the new convent was ready. Later, Telmon purchased and helped to renovate a small cottage, which would be the hospital, next to that which served as the convent. Although the accommodations were meager, the enthusiasm of the Sisters was evident in the sparkling cleanliness of the interior. They often stayed up late into the night to mend the clothes of their poor patients. The support that the Sisters received from the residents of Bytown was evident from the beginning. From the moment they arrived the Irish people in the community helped them to set up a farmyard in their garden by supplying them with some geese, chickens, a pig and a rooster.¹⁵ The Irish recognized the value of having a religious community, dedicated to serving the poor, in their midst and made every effort to support them.

This support was encouraged and augmented by the priests who had ensured that the parishioners were aware of the Sister's imminent arrival. Thus, the Sisters were greeted with enthusiasm when they arrived in Bytown in February 1845. Even before they had drawn close to the area the crowds had gathered in anticipation. When the Sisters were more than half an hour away, they could hear the church bells ringing. There was so much noise that Mother Bruyere wondered if there was a fire. However, she was assured that it was anticipation of the arrival of her party which was the cause of the

¹⁴ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.45

¹⁵ SOC, Lortie, *Lettres*, Letter Bruyere to McMullen 24 April 1845, pp.138-139,

excitement. The people could not even wait for them to get there, so they went out into the countryside to meet them. When the Sisters were three miles from the city they were greeted by twenty-four carriages that had driven out to meet them. Upon arrival, they were struck by the welcome given to them by the Irish citizens. Mother Bruyere was surprised by the enthusiasm of the Irish people who curtsied and knelt to receive their blessing.¹⁶ The French Oblates also made a special effort to ensure that the Irish citizens were aware that three of these six women were Irish. In fact, Dandurand made his way through the crowd to introduce the Irish to “their compatriots.”¹⁷

This public display organized by the clergy was in keeping with the efforts of the Canadian clergy to stimulate the interest of the people and thus, encourage their participation in church services. Designing and orchestrating such public displays to impress the public had been common in Ireland as early as 1802. In her study of women, religion and cultural change in Ireland, Magray cites the example of a public profession ceremony for women religious held in Dublin in 1802. “According to one of those professed that day, ‘Our chapel, before 8 o’clock was as crammed as it could be. Fainting and almost suffocation was the consequence to several Many, particularly the priests, were much struck and pleased by the ceremony’.” As Magray points out “[t]he event, which was specifically designed to impress on Dublin Catholics the sacred and exalted nature of the religious life for women, was an overwhelming success.”¹⁸ The arrival of the Sisters of Charity in Bytown was just as carefully organized by Fathers Dandurand and Telmon. The Sisters had arrived at five o’clock and for two hours they stood in a reception line in the priests rectory where they were greeted by more than two

¹⁶ SOC, *Necrologies*, Tome I, p.17.

¹⁷ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.47.

¹⁸ Magray, p.74.

hundred visitors. As Bruyere later wrote to McMullen in Montreal, “a little more and I would have been crushed.”¹⁹ Telmon continued to remind the Roman Catholic population of the value of having an order of religious women in the town. The following Sunday he impressed upon the congregation the sacrifice that these women had made in leaving their congregation in Montreal to establish a new foundation. He also made sure that the Irish members of the congregation were aware of how much the Sisters were valued by the Irish community in Montreal and stressed the strength of the attachment between the Irish in Montreal and the Mother House.²⁰ As they carefully orchestrated the introduction of the Sisters to the Irish congregation, the priests were also conscious of the importance of ensuring support among the middle-class people in Bytown. Telmon arranged for the Sisters to receive some of the wives of the local merchants. By arranging for these Catholic and Protestant women to witness, first-hand, the meager conditions in which the Sisters would live, he had ensured that their attention was captured. When the ladies realized how few supplies the Sisters had in their new accommodations, they arranged for tables, chairs, and food to be delivered.²¹ These women, who were among the first to visit them, would become the nucleus of an organization called the Ladies of Charity and would continue to work with the Sisters in the community.

Concerned by the plight of the poor, the women who visited the Sisters of Charity were already known to Telmon for their generosity to those in need. He formalized their work by helping them to organize a society designed to work in conjunction with the Sisters. The involvement of Catholic and Protestant women in this society reflects the belief in the mid-nineteenth century that it was one’s duty to help the poor. The support

¹⁹ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.47.

²⁰ Lamirande, p.103.

²¹ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, pp.54-55.

provided by the ladies in Bytown was similar to that provided by upper class women in Britain and Ireland. In her study of religious communities involved in working with the poor in mid-nineteenth century Ireland Clear writes that the Sisters often noted the “goodwill of individual Protestants towards projects run by nuns.”²² In Bytown, Protestant and Catholic, French- and English-speaking middle-class women supported the Sisters in their work. This suggests that they shared the belief that the creation of a network of social services in the town was vital to the growth of the city. The services were designed to respond to the urgent needs of the people and were not confined to the Roman Catholic population. Therefore they contributed to the stability of the area. The involvement of the women demonstrates that instead of remaining isolated in their homes in Upper Town they were actively involved in helping the Sisters in their work in whatever area of town it was needed. Working as part of a religious congregation the Sisters had the ability to work together to establish a network of services. It was accepted that these religious women were dedicated to helping the poor and it is not surprising that the lay women, in their capacity as nurturing and caring women, would help them in this work. The Sisters’ organizations gave these lay-women an avenue to fulfill their duty to help the poor. Philanthropy was an important part of the lives of both Protestant and Roman Catholic middle-class women. The network of social services provided by the Sisters of Charity contributed to the growth of civil society in Bytown and gave the lay women the opportunity to contribute to the social stability of the area.

The Ladies of Charity was the first secular society that worked in association with the Sisters of Charity to alleviate the distress of the poor. Madame Aumond became the president of the society which was established by Telmon and Dandurand on 11 May

²² Clear, p.103.

1845. Madames Bareille and Masse served as vice-president and treasurer respectively. Although some of these women were Protestant, they shared a common goal with the Sisters in their desire to help the poor. This was part of what they saw as their charitable duty. However, they would also have been aware of the value of the Sisters' attempts to curb the spread of disease in the area. The society was comprised of Catholic and Protestant women who accompanied the Sisters in their visits to the sick and raised money to support the hospital. They also helped the Sisters to make and to repair clothes for the poor. Until reorganized in 1862, the Ladies of Charity continued to provide valuable physical and moral support to the Sisters, especially during 1847 and 1848 when they struggled to help the victims of typhus. The ladies took turns accompanying the Sisters when they visited the poor and sick. The city area was divided into five sections, Upper Town, Lower Town, Central district, district of York, and Bytown South.²³ The utility of this association was noted in the *Packet* on 24 February 1846, when the members appealed to the public in Bytown to financially support their efforts to help the unfortunate.²⁴ At first, the association comprised seventeen women who met bi-weekly, but a few months later there were over forty female members. They provided their own materials to make and to repair clothing for the poor. They worked in the afternoons and those who did not have small children often worked until nine o'clock at night to complete their tasks. Some of them accompanied the Sisters when they went into the city to visit the sick and to distribute alms. While the Protestant ladies continued to collect money and to sew for the poor, they asked to be excused from visiting the sick. In 1862

²³ Sister Paul-Emile, "Typhus of 1847 in Bytown," (Ottawa, 1984), p11.

²⁴ *The Packet*, Bytown, 24 February, 1846.

the society was divided into two sections, one of which was designated to collect money and to sew for the poor.²⁵

While the Ladies of Charity were involved in helping the poor on a voluntary basis, visiting the sick in their homes was an integral part of the daily work of the Sisters. The number of visitations ranged from two to six each day and the seriousness of the illnesses varied from consumption, fevers and paralysis to eye infections and indigestion. It is interesting to note that these visits were confined not only to the poor. The Sisters often visited patients in Upper Town and ill members of the clergy. This illustrates both the quality of the remedies provided by the Sisters and the fact that there was a lack of medical services in the city. The more affluent patients included G. H. Simard, Quebec deputy to the House of Commons, H. J. Friel, Mayor of Ottawa and a member of the house of Countess Dufferin.²⁶ That both the upper and lower classes trusted the herbal remedies provided by the Sisters sheds light on both their quality and the general lack of medical knowledge in the nineteenth century. Before the discovery of bacteria as the cause of disease the principal focus of public health was on promoting cleanliness and sanitation.²⁷ Although there were doctors in Bytown, the general opinion in the mid-nineteenth century was that doctors were useless or even harmful.²⁸ The Sisters had come to Bytown with the intention of giving "first aid to the sick and poor who could not see the Doctor."²⁹ This first aid included the distribution of herbal remedies prepared by Sister Thibodeau. From the beginning the people had been impressed by the knowledge and compassion of Sister Thibodeau. After Sister Thibodeau had joined the order in

²⁵ Keeffe, pp.241/243.

²⁶ Lamirande, p.434.

²⁷ Lyons, A. S. and R. J. Petrucelli, *Medicine: An Illustrated History*, (New York, 1978), p. 497

²⁸ Lyons, p.533.

²⁹ Lamirande, p.135.

Montreal in 1830, she spent the next fifteen years working in the pharmacy where “besides dispensing the prescribed medication, she devoted time to the special study of practical everyday medicine.³⁰ She was supervised in this work by Mother Marguerite-Dorothy Beaubien. The care and attention that Mother Beaubien devoted to the preparation of these remedies is illustrated by an incident that occurred in the Mother House in Montreal. A young Sister, “struck by the great care taken by Sister Beaubien in the preparation of an infusion of herbs, ventured out of curiosity: ‘Sister, but for whom are you preparing this beverage?’ the good pharmacist responded simply: ‘For one of our elderly men, little Sister. Should we not always treat the poor with great respect?’”³¹ Mother Beaubien had been trained by her uncle Paul Durocher who was a pharmacist in Montreal. He continued to remain interested in the medical practices of the Sisters and donated a medical book and money to help set up a pharmacy in Bytown. Thibodeau used the money to purchase medications, medical supplies and three hospital beds to be used in the new hospital.³² On the day after their arrival in Bytown, Thibodeau, accompanied by Mary Jones, began to visit the poor and sick. The fact that Mary Jones had been born in Ireland would have facilitated the connection between the Sisters and some of their new patients. In fact, Thibodeau later taught Maria Fitzmaurice, another Irish Sister, how to prepare remedies and how to care for the sick in their homes.

The Sisters also visited the sick in the city prison and brought them food and medications. The mandate of the Sisters was to care for the infirm and the distribution of their patients in both the Upper and Lower Town area and variety of their illnesses demonstrates the flexibility of the Sisters’ attitudes toward their patients. They did not

³⁰ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.17.

³¹ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.17.

³² Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.42-43.

discriminate between rich and poor, but concentrated on doing their best to alleviate the pain and suffering of all their patients. The Sisters were aware of the importance of this work and kept detailed records of the patients they visited, listing their addresses and their particular affliction. The importance that they placed on spiritual help is evident in the register where they also note the sacraments that they administered to the patients. By March, 1868 they had begun to record the number of visits to each home. These numbers ranged from one visit for rheumatism or fever to up to seventeen visits for heart problems or for asthma. Sometimes they continued to visit a patient on a regular basis for weeks, although usually these patients were admitted to the hospital.³³

The new hospital, when it opened in May 1845, allowed the Sisters to admit those who were in desperate need of help. There was no shortage of patients, who, like those visited in their homes, suffered from a wide range of ailments. From the beginning Mother Bruyere divided the patients into different categories: boarders, elderly, invalids, and "transient sick."³⁴ The popularity of the hospital reveals the shortage of facilities available in Bytown, especially considering the negative social stigma attached to hospitals at the time. As Jean Richardson points out nineteenth-century hospitals were generally associated with death rather than healing.³⁵ In the first year, 1845, the hospital looked after sixteen patients, twelve of whom they cared for free of charge. In 1846, that number had risen to forty-one patients, including sixteen who could not pay. However, the number of patients cared for in 1847 reflects the demographic shift brought about by the large number of immigrants who arrived in Bytown from Ireland. That year the

³³ CA, "Service des Pauvres et des maladies a domicile 1855-1886"

³⁴ Lamirande, p.137

³⁵ Jean Ellen Richardson, "Catholic Religious Women as Institutional Innovators: The Sisters of Charity and the Rise of the Modern Urban Hospital in Buffalo, New York, 1848-1900", PhD Thesis, (University of New York,1996), p.36.

hospital admitted 664 patients, 381 men and 283 women, most of whom were suffering from typhus.³⁶ As Lucien Brault points out, although Bytown escaped the greatest intensity of the disease, it prevailed there from 5 June, 1847 to the end of May, 1848, with as many as 3,100 immigrants landing between 1 June and 17 July.³⁷ As early as February 1847, the Sisters in Bytown had been warned by Mother McMullen that thousands of immigrants were coming. At that time, the Grey Nuns in Montreal were already dealing with afflicted Irish immigrants.³⁸ By March, the Oblate priests, the Sisters of Charity and the immigration agent, Mr. Burke had begun to prepare for the influx of the immigrants, but none of them anticipated the extent of the suffering that would follow.

The letters from Telmon to the Superior of the Oblate Order in France reflect the desperation of those who were trying to deal with the disease. In August, 1847, he apologized to Mazenod for not having had the time to write. At that stage typhus had raged for more than three months and they did not know when it would end. Telmon worried because some of the priests and sisters were ill. Although they were recovering, they were not well enough to continue their work.³⁹ The influx of the Irish immigrants in 1847 strained their already limited resources beyond their capacity. The panic and crises in Bytown in the summer of 1847 revealed that a system which would protect the population of the city did not exist. The immigrants who arrived in Bytown were in a miserable state. Many of them had taken advantage of the lower fares of the ships which sailed to British North America. However, because these ships were also used to

³⁶ CA, "Rapport Annuals", p.364.

³⁷ Brault, Lucien, *Ottawa Old & New*, (Ottawa, 1946), p.236.

³⁸ Lamirande, p.147.

³⁹ OMI, GLPP.2883. Letter from Telmon to Mazenod, 10 August, 1847.

transport timber, many were in very poor condition and this increased the suffering of the passengers. A report in *The Cork Examiner* explained that the sea-worthiness of these vessels was unimportant because on the way to Europe the cargo of timber could not sink and on the way back the owners did not care if the human cargo reached its destination.⁴⁰ The crowded conditions added to their misery and the spread of the disease. When the ships arrived in North America many of the passengers were suffering from typhus, therefore government authorities had no option but to look after these immigrants in an attempt to contain the disease. The Oblate priests and the Sisters of Charity did not hesitate to step in to help the stricken people. This was a natural extension of the services that they had provided since 1845 and they continued to work together to help the people. The upper class ladies who had co-operated with the work of the Sisters of Charity since they arrived in 1845 continued to assist them.

By December the situation was still serious. At this stage more of the priests had contracted typhus and Telmon noted that he was not well, but did not have enough time to take to his bed. He praised the zeal and devotion of the Sisters who continued to work in spite of their exhaustion and illnesses.⁴¹ In her letters, Mother Bruyere refers to these trying days and describes how the priests and the Sisters gave up their own beds, pillows, and blankets to the patients.⁴² Although the Sisters were afraid of contagion and did not have many resources, they were determined to do all they could to help the afflicted. The Ladies of Charity called a meeting on 2 May to prepare to deal with the immigrants. In a letter to McMullen in Montreal, Mother Bruyere praised the Catholic and the Protestant men and women who helped the Sisters to supply linen and clothes for the immigrants in

⁴⁰ *The Cork Examiner*, September 1 1847.

⁴¹ OMI. GLPP.2884. Letter from Telmon to Mazonod, 3, December, 1847.

⁴² Keefe, p.253.

the hospital.⁴³ The continued involvement of these particular women demonstrates the connection between the Sisters of Charity and the lay members of the public. At the height of the typhus epidemic Sister Thibodeau, Sister Phelan and a paid domestic servant would spend days by the water's edge washing the immigrants' dirty linen. The work was so disagreeable that eventually the paid help refused to continue. Mesdames Bareille, Faillon and Aumond often came to visit the Sisters while they were working. They pleaded with them to protect their arms from the sun and gave the Sisters clothes and linen for the poor immigrants. They also lent the Sisters woolen shawls to protect them from the rain when they negotiated the bad paths in search of abandoned immigrant children.⁴⁴

In 1847, a summer during which the heat was stifling, the Sisters pushed themselves to the limit in order to care for the immigrants. They acknowledged this as a period which would test their strength and which would give them the opportunity to live up to their name as true "Sisters of Charity." The need for the resources provided by the Sisters was highlighted by the fact that no other services were available to deal with such large numbers of patients. Although the authorities made plans to build a special hospital to house the immigrants, it was impossible to build it and to find people to staff it in such a short time period. Therefore, when the sick immigrants began to arrive before the immigrant hospital had been constructed, and the Sisters' hospital was filled to overflowing, Mother Bruyere prepared a separate house on Bolton Street to receive them. The first patient was Mary Cunningham who was admitted on 5 June. The young child was in such a filthy condition that the Sisters had to use scissors to cut through her

⁴³ SOC, Lortie, p.350

⁴⁴ SOC, "Chronicles", 27 December 1849.

clothes. The girl died on 8 June, but by 10 June she had been replaced by a steady stream of diseased immigrants.⁴⁵ In her letters to Mother McMullen in Montreal, Mother Bruyere describes the courage and charity of the Sisters and the fact that fear of contagion was making it difficult to find anyone to help them in their work.⁴⁶ The Sisters had to do everything themselves. They cared for the sick and washed their clothes. They also cleaned the hospital and not only prepared the dead for burial and placed them in their coffins, but also carried the coffins to the wagons because the drivers were afraid of catching the disease.⁴⁷ The immigrants came in groups and none were turned away. Because the drivers would not touch the patients the Sisters had to carry them into the hospital where they cared for them. It is estimated that 13,800 immigrants came to Canada from June to September. In Bytown more than 3,000 immigrants landed.⁴⁸

The lack of knowledge as to how to combat the disease and on how to treat the victims increased the fear of contagion. The fact that typhus could strike at seemingly healthy individuals added to the fear and hysteria of those who had heard about the disease. However the Sisters continued to work in the terrible conditions to help the victims. In a letter to the Sisters of Red River, Sister St. Joseph explained that once the sisters had cleaned them, many of the patients declared that they were no longer ill. She noted that this was not surprising when they had removed from each one "a large plateful of lice the size of wheat grains and as red as fire."⁴⁹ Each night the Sisters had to take time to delouse themselves before retiring. Sometimes the typhus took a terrifying form. A little girl called Anastasia Brennan was nine years old when she was admitted to the

⁴⁵ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.102.

⁴⁶ Lamirande, p.149.

⁴⁷ Lamirande, p.154.

⁴⁸ Keeffe, p.252.

⁴⁹ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.104.

hospital on 7 July. When she died six days later the Sisters were shocked to discover that her body was “noir comme charbon.”⁵⁰ The fear caused by the disease cannot be underestimated and underscores the courage and dedication of the Sisters who continued to put themselves at risk by tending to the patients.

By the summer's end the Sisters were exhausted. Sixteen of the twenty-one Sisters and two of the priests were stricken with the disease. Fear of contagion had made it impossible to find anyone to help them. The burden of work increased, and Mother Bruyere was beginning to lose hope that they would survive the ordeal. Even the priests were becoming more concerned. This anguish is evident in a letter from Father Allard written on 16 July 1847. He was worried because Father Molloy had fallen ill with typhus and notes that the disease was as intense in Bytown as it was in Montreal where already six priests had fallen ill in as little as three or four weeks. He was also afraid for the health of the others who were exhausted and were in danger of contagion.⁵¹ It was at that time that a statue which Bishop de Mazenod, Superior of the Oblates, had sent from France the previous year arrived. The timing of the arrival of this statue of St. Joseph proved to be providential. It provided the Sisters with hope and gave them a focus for prayer. The arrival of the statue also coincided with the renting of a convalescent house for the Sisters in the countryside in July and the closing of navigation on the Rideau canal on 2 August. These factors contributed to the relenting of the disease, but the Sisters were convinced that a miracle had occurred. Although the events were coincidental, the belief in the power of the statue had a powerful psychological effect. It reinforced their belief in the spirituality of their mission and allowed the Congregation to find the strength and

⁵⁰ Sister Paul-Emile “Les Debuts d’une Congregation: Les Soeurs Grises de la Croix a Bytown 1845 – 1850,” (Ottawa, 1943), p.27.

⁵¹ OMI. HE.1591.A41.C7. Letter from R.P.Allard to Ricard. 16 July 1847.

courage to continue. During this period it is interesting to consider how the strength of their faith allowed the Sisters to persevere. They believed that they had a vocation and had been called to serve God through administering to the infirm. The strength of their dedication and commitment was tested during this difficult period. Mother Bruyere was aware that the Sisters were so busy that they did not have time to pray. It seems that she recognized that this spirit of prayer had to power to sustain the Sisters and to allow them to persevere in their work. She worried that the work was so overwhelming that the Sisters did not have time to complete their daily religious exercises and appealed to Mother McMullen in Montreal to pray for them all to receive the strength to continue. The Sisters would not even allow themselves to fully convalesce before returning to nurse the sick immigrants.⁵² However, the belief that it was their duty as Sisters of Charity to help the poor and the suffering inspired them to continue in spite of the difficulties. The arrival of the statue provided a focus for and a renewal of their inspiration to pray. The statue provided them with a reason to continue to make time to pray and recharged their spiritual energies even in the midst of an epidemic.⁵³

The period of the typhus epidemic also demonstrates how important it was for the Irish immigrants to be nursed by a Sister of Irish heritage. The patients in Bytown and Montreal seem to have been aware that there were Irish Sisters available to help them and specifically requested to be nursed by them. In her study of Irish female immigrants in America, Hasia Diner suggests that Irish women, unless “driven to the point of desperation” would not accept the services provided by American government and private non-Catholic charities because of “cultural barriers that kept the Irish newcomers

⁵² Lamirande, p.152.

⁵³ The Statue of St Joseph is still in the Mother House in Ottawa.

from using non-Catholic institutions.”⁵⁴ She argues that one of the reasons that the Irish female immigrants in need of assistance preferred to be cared for by “nuns, most of whom belonged to either Irish orders or orders that attracted many Irish women [was the] strong emphasis that these religious women gave to economic security as the key to female well-being confirmed the Irish female world view.”⁵⁵ However, this does not explain the situation of the famine immigrants in Bytown and Montreal. They were surely in a desperate situation, but there was Catholic assistance available to them, albeit in the French-language. Therefore, their demand for an Irish Sister suggests that language or cultural familiarity may have been as important as religion to the dying migrants. This point provides an interesting framework in which to examine the continuing tension which existed between the French- and English-speaking Roman Catholics in Bytown. They had to pool their meager resources in order to establish viable Roman Catholic institutions. However, if language is an integral part of shared cultural understanding then it is possible to understand the insistence by both ethnic groups on retaining services in their own particular language.

The Sisters of Charity did all that they could to help the afflicted in a spiritual and psychological as well as in a temporal capacity. Therefore, when the immigrants requested an Irish Sister, they did what they could to oblige them. At the height of the disease in Bytown the Sisters were divided into teams so that each ward could have one Irish sister. The pairs were Sisters Thibodeau and Phelan, Sisters Xavier and Curran, and Sisters Norman and Conlon.⁵⁶ The desire of the Irish immigrants to be nursed by an Irish Sister was further confirmed by the fact that when the epidemic began to abate in

⁵⁴ Diner, p.120-121.

⁵⁵ Diner, p121

⁵⁶ Paul-Emile, “Les Debuts,” p.27.

Bytown, Mother McMullen requested that they send some of the Irish sisters to replace the exhausted ones in Montreal. In a letter to Mother Bruyere, she writes of her urgent need for “a good Irish sister to go to the sheds for some time . . . because a Canadian is never gracious enough to replace an Irish sister so dearly loved.” Mother Bruyere replied by sending Sister Phelan and Sister Curran to Montreal.⁵⁷ The tendency of the Sisters to accommodate the wishes of the Irish immigrants in this matter is similar to the attitudes of the Oblate priests in their acceptance of the necessity of having an Irish-born priest to tend to the Irish parishioners. As Mother McMullen explained to Mother Bruyere, when the Irish patients heard that they would no longer have an Irish sister there was an outcry and she wanted to rectify the situation as quickly as possible so that they would be content.⁵⁸

Keeping Irish members of the Roman Catholic population content continued to be a priority for the priests and religious communities at that time. In 1848, Bishop Guigues explained that it was necessary to pay particular attention to the Irish because it was natural for a group that was not on its own soil to feel that preference would be given to the local inhabitants.⁵⁹ The Oblate priests worked hard to ensure the efficient running and expansion of their newly founded organizations. Although Protestant and Catholic members of the lay community worked together to assist the Sisters in their charitable works, Telmon’s complaints to Mazenod provide evidence that the differences between Protestant and Catholic clergy still existed and that they were sometimes aired in public.⁶⁰ Telmon informed Mazenod in 1847 that while the work that the Sisters and the priests

⁵⁷ Lamirande, p. 153.

⁵⁸ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.107.

⁵⁹ Lamirande, p.214.

⁶⁰ A series of letters were published in *The Packet*, 26 June 1847, 3 July 1847.

performed during the typhus epidemic was praised and appreciated by most of the Protestant population of Bytown, their ministers continually opposed and attacked the work of the Catholic Church.⁶¹ The tensions that contributed to this discord were heightened by the fact that all citizens had undergone a period of stress. The epidemic had exposed the lack of adequate services which could cater to those afflicted with the disease. At that time the Protestants did not have their own hospital and their ministers had feared that Protestant patients would be persuaded to convert to Catholicism. Although Telmon was convinced that the ministers were unjustly attacking the Sisters of Charity, the fact that the Sisters believed that conversion to Catholicism was a beneficial experience for their patients suggests that the Protestant clergy did have some reason for concern. In Bytown both the Protestant and the Roman Catholic clergy naturally tried to prevent seepage from one religion to another. Both groups were convinced that their own was the one true faith. Therefore it is no surprise that the clergy were anxious to protect their congregations. In fact, the letters from Father Telmon and the other Oblate priests to their Superior in France continually describe the progress of their work in the new community and this progress included strengthening the Roman Catholic faith in the area. Therefore, in the struggle for control of the emerging institutions it was inevitable that there would be friction between the different ethnic and religious groups.

The controversy that erupted culminated in a disagreement over payment of the Sisters for the expenses incurred in caring for the immigrants. In this case, control of the General Hospital was the central point of contention. The controversy had been sparked by a disagreement over the case of a patient who seemed to have been induced to convert to the Roman Catholic church. The subsequent action by the Board of Health and the

⁶¹OMI. GLPP.1066. Letter from Telmon to Mazenod, 3 December 1847.

public reaction by Telmon inflamed rather than resolved the disagreement. Telmon had a reputation for making dramatic gestures and his public letters fueled the controversy. When serving in Corbeau, south of the American border in 1843, he had aroused indignation when he had made a bonfire of Protestant Bibles.⁶² Telmon's typically vehement letters to *The Packet* in November and December of 1847 took issue with a report issued by the Board of Health in October 1847. This report had recommended to the Governor General that the Sisters of Charity should not be paid the full amount they had claimed for expenses incurred by the sick immigrants. The tone of this report did suggest that the Sisters had claimed an excessive sum and that in future such control by a religious organization should be avoided.

Although the report commended the services of the immigrant officer, Mr. Burke, it suggested that he should never have entered into a contract with the Sisters of Charity, but should have built a separate, government controlled facility.⁶³ However, Mr Burke had had no choice but to turn to the Sisters of Charity for help and the report demonstrates that the Board of Health had been caught unawares, unprepared to deal with such a large number of sick and dying. Without the facilities provided by the Sisters of Charity there would have been nowhere to house the immigrants. Even the sheds which were hastily erected on the quay side were staffed by the Sisters. The government did not have access to any organized society which was equipped to deal with such a situation. The epidemic of 1847 had demonstrated the inadequacies of the government and had highlighted its inability to deal efficiently with crises. The report of the Board of Health reflects a recognition of these inadequacies as well as the fact that, in Bytown, there had

⁶² Lamirande, p.155.

⁶³ Report of the Board of Health, 8 October 1847, *Bytown Gazette and Ottawa and Rideau Advertiser*, October 13, 1847.

been no alternative than to rely on the services provided by the Sisters of Charity. Typhus had spread rapidly and the devastation it caused had caught authorities by surprise. The inadequacies of the system were, thus, boldly underscored. Although the government had set up quarantine stations, ignorance concerning the disease led to the inefficient enforcement of the quarantine regulations and contributed to the ensuing chaos. Telmon seized on the intolerant spirit in which, he felt, the report had been written. In a letter to *The Packet* he reminded readers that, during the height of the epidemic, government officials had been content to allow the Sisters of Charity to bear the burden and the expense of caring for the sick immigrants. Therefore, now that the worst was over it was unfair to try to avoid paying the expenses they had incurred.⁶⁴ Mother Bruyere was upset by the controversy and resented being treated as if the Sisters were domestic servants. However, she explained matters herself in a letter to the chief immigration officer, Mr. Hawke, who eventually settled the matter by authorizing payment for the amount owed.⁶⁵ The controversy reveals how essential the services that the Sisters of Charity provided to the Irish immigrants were to their survival. Because they already had a framework for assistance in place, the Sisters had been able to respond quickly and efficiently to the crises. The care that the Sisters provided helped to contain the disease and therefore, served the whole community.

The controversy also reveals that ethnic divisions continued to plague the Roman Catholic community in Bytown and Telmon's attitude to both the Irish and the Protestant members of the Public Board of Health reveals his inability to curb his actions to resist inflaming an already tense situation. It is interesting that he had, in fact, been in Montreal

⁶⁴ *The Packet*, Letter from Telmon, 11 December 1847.

⁶⁵ Laminande, p.154/156.

at the time of the board meeting and on his return launched a public attack without adequately investigating the details of the situation. Telmon took issue with the language used in the board's report and listed his reasons for contradicting it.⁶⁶ He did not confine his anger to the Protestant members of the board and from the pulpit of the church he accused Mr. O'Connor, a Catholic magistrate, of voting against the Sisters of Charity. In a series of letters published in the local papers Father Telmon denounced the Board's decision and the actions of the Board Members. However, a letter written to the Irish Roman Catholics of Bytown by Daniel O'Connor, Chairman of the Board of Health who signed the controversial report, explains the Board's decision and demonstrates how he believed that the Catholic and Protestant members of the Board had made a rational decision based on facts and not on emotion. Instead of publishing the letter in the local press, Daniel O'Connor circulated it among the Irish Catholic population in Bytown. He refers to having been accused of voting against the Sisters of Charity, of "turning Protestant" and of having turned against the religion of his fathers. He explains that when the fever was spreading rapidly some men from the town had approached the government for help and on 1 July a Board of Health was established. Concerned at the state of his countrymen, he agreed to be a member of the board and with the other members, both Protestant and Catholic, had risked his life by visiting the sheds on a regular basis. One Protestant member of the board had died as a result of falling "victim to the contagion that then raged on every side." In September the Chief Immigrant Agent, Mr. Hawke, had recommended dividing the expenses incurred by the care of the immigrants between the board and the Immigrant Agent. Because the Immigrant Agent had the means to pay the Sisters of Charity, the board deemed that the Immigrant Agency should assume the

⁶⁶ *The Packet*, Letter from Telmon, 11 December 1847.

account. It was a pragmatic decision and Mr. O'Connor points out that it had nothing to do with "hostile or bigoted feeling towards the Sisters of Charity." He explains that he had believed that the Sisters had a better chance of being quickly reimbursed by the government than having to wait for the Board to accumulate the funds to pay them.⁶⁷

O'Connor also comments on a letter sent to the board by Telmon which had been read at a board meeting held on 8 October. O'Connor's letter suggests that the board were aware of Telmon's tendency to make inflammatory remarks, but that they were concerned and wished to investigate his charges that the report was not accurate. The Board of Health's meeting was held specifically to investigate the charges that there were errors and omissions in the report. O'Connor writes:

. . . he [Father Telmon] sent a long, printed document, being remarks and strictures upon the proceedings of the Board generally, and upon some of its members particularly, which were anything but complimentary to them. The result was, as you may be aware, that no notice was taken of it, and the Report of the 8th October re-adopted.⁶⁸

Daniel O'Connor's letter provides a glimpse into the workings of Board of Health and demonstrates that the Protestant and Catholic members worked together in an organized fashion and avoided being drawn into emotionally charged debates. It also shows that Telmon's suspicions contributed to the problems of ethnic division in the Roman Catholic community. The Sisters were paid for their services, but the controversy demonstrates that the shock of the influx of Irish immigrants had put a tremendous amount of pressure on the newly formed institutions. Although Telmon, who was known for his impetuous nature had quickly assumed that the decision was a direct attack on the

⁶⁷ NAC, M.G. 30 E 78, O'Connor, Daniel, "To The Irish Roman Catholics of Bytown and its Vicinity," Bytown, 15 December, 1847, Letter in William O'Connor Papers.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Sisters, the decision reflects the attempts of the immigration agents to try to reduce expenses incurred during the epidemic. The agents had also attempted to avoid paying the Protestant Dr. Van Cortlandt for his services to the sick in Bytown. Between 1847 and 1848, the Chief Immigrant Agent, A. B. Hawke in Kingston corresponded with George Burke in Bytown in an attempt to negotiate the doctor's payment for services. In the end, the intervention of Dr. VanCortlandt's brother-in-law, a government member, secured payment of only two thirds of the doctor's claim.⁶⁹ The struggle of the Immigrant Agency to reduce expenses reflects the lack of resources available and the pressure that exposed the inadequacies of the existing health services.

Telmon and the other priests and sisters had been completely overworked during this period. The pressure on them had been increased by the additional strain on their meager financial resources. During the height of the typhus epidemic in 1847, the Sisters had been forced to close their school due to fear of contagion and this had removed their only source of steady income. They were solely responsible for the efficient operation and the funding of their charitable works. Although they were helped by donations from the priests and the lay community, as Telmon had pointed out in his public debate over the Board of Health's report, the direction of the General Hospital was under the direct control of the Sisters of Charity.⁷⁰ He had also publicly reiterated the fact that the Sisters looked after as many patients as their means would allow without distinction of race, age, or religious beliefs.⁷¹ In doing so they had closed their school, their only source of income, had put their health in jeopardy, but had also provided a valuable service to the residents of Bytown.

⁶⁹ Margaret E. Moffatt, *Dr. Edward Van Cortlandt, Surgeon 1805-1875*, (Ottawa, 1986), p.9.

⁷⁰ *The Packet*, 9 July 1847.

⁷¹ Telmon, *The Packet*, 5th September, 1846.

In 1871 the Sisters again demonstrated that they were willing to risk their own health in order to care for patients who suffered from infectious disease, in this case, smallpox. Government authorities were aware of this and were happy to enlist their already proven help. Because smallpox was a highly contagious disease, the municipal government did not make public their appeal to Mother Bruyere. Like the typhus, the infectious nature of the smallpox epidemic had caused panic in the city. Although a hospital was necessary, no one wanted it to be opened in their area.⁷² When the municipal government turned to Mother Bruyere to provide assistance she agreed to open the old immigrant hospital, still within the convent, to house the patients. The hospital operated in secret under the name of St. Anne's Hospice and the patients were smuggled in during the night. By providing such a service the Sisters helped to contain the spread of the disease. The hospital remained open for more than two years and cared for one hundred and fourteen patients. During this period, five Sisters remained in isolation with the patients and were supported physically and psychologically by Mother Bruyere. She ensured that they were well supplied with the best of food and that they maintained strict rules of hygiene to reduce their chances of catching the disease. Sister Paul-Emile notes that Mother Bruyere encouraged these attendants to "supernaturalize their zeal."⁷³ In short, they were advised to rely on their faith to support them in their work. The spirituality of the Sisters sustained their efforts during this period as they gained strength from the belief that they were working in the true spirit of a Sister of Charity.

By responding directly to the needs of the people in Bytown the Sisters allowed these needs to dictate the direction of their work. Therefore, it was inevitable during the

⁷² Paul-Emile, *Mother Elisabeth Bruyere*, p.260.

⁷³ Paul-Emile, Sr. p.260.

typhus epidemic that a large number of orphaned children would require their care. Taking in orphans was a recognized activity of the Sisters. As early as 26 May 1845, Telmon had found a child who had been abandoned in a field. He brought the girl, called Mary Jordan, to the convent. In the years that followed this child was treated as a member of the small community. In fact, Mother McMullen, in a visit to Bytown in August, warned them not to spoil the child.⁷⁴ Even Telmon paid particular attention to the girl when he visited the convent and Mother Bruyere mentioned her often in her letters to Mother McMullen.⁷⁵ An anecdote in which the child took the priest's glasses and put them on the cat he was holding caused much hilarity and shows the degree to which she was regarded as part of the community.⁷⁶ The connection between Mary and the Sisters continued to be strong and in 1871 the community sold a house to support Mary and her husband on the occasion of her wedding.⁷⁷ However, Mary was just the first of many orphans cared for by the Sisters. Among the first taken in by the Sisters several months after their arrival was an Irish orphan called Mary Maloney. She was soon joined by a brother and sister, John and Jane Ryan, whose parents had abandoned them.⁷⁸ At the end of 1845 there were seven orphans in their care and by 1847 this number had risen to eleven children.⁷⁹ When the typhus epidemic abated at the end of 1847, the immigrant hospital was cleaned, repaired and disinfected and was used to house abandoned children. Guigues took an interest in the new orphanage and appealed to the members of the Irish congregation to support this work of charity. The orphanage was officially opened on 17

⁷⁴ Lamirande, p.139-149

⁷⁵ SOC, Lortie, p.153,p159.

⁷⁶ SOC, Lortie, p.194.

⁷⁷ Lamirande, p.141.

⁷⁸ SOC, "Chronicles", 27 December 1849.

⁷⁹ CA, "Rapport Annuals", p.364.

September 1847. The Ladies of Charity were again involved in this organization and helped the children to settle into the beds they had helped to prepare for them.⁸⁰ While the orphanage was sufficient to accommodate children, invalids and elderly, the newly arrived Irish female immigrants posed a particular problem.

The Sisters of Charity, with the help of the Oblate Father Molloy opened a house specifically to look after these girls. The Sisters had been asked by Father Molloy to undertake this work. This priest, who was born in Ireland, took a special interest in training and finding supervision for Irish female immigrants who were without support and protection. The Sisters also used their connections with the lay community to find work for these young female immigrants who were too old to enter the orphanage and were without means of looking after themselves. In 1848, they looked after seventy immigrant girls most of whom found employment as domestic servants.⁸¹ Some of these girls were described as having “fallen” and were referred to as “repentant prostitutes or magdalens.”⁸² Molloy encouraged the Sisters to open a refuge for these girls called “la Misericorde.” The original house used for this refuge was described as looking only fit to house rats and mice. Each girl had her own room and Sister Phelan was charged with visiting every day to ensure that the girls would live peacefully together. She was also in charge of dividing everything that had been provided by charity among them. This proved to be difficult as the girls had a tendency to quarrel. In fact, on one occasion Molloy begged Sister Phelan to help him to distribute some food he had received for them. When she asked him why he needed her help, he told her that he had already tried to distribute some and he had been unable to stop the girls quarrelling over their

⁸⁰ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.124.

⁸¹ CA, “Rapport Annuals”, p.364.

⁸² Lamirande, p215.

portions.⁸³ By 1850, Molloy had extended this work to include provision of shelter for “domestics momentarily out of work.”⁸⁴

The large number of girls admitted in the 1850s reflects the increasing number of young single female immigrants in Canada. In 1852 the refuge admitted eighty girls. According to Donald McKay, a typical instance which demonstrates the increase in single women coming to Canada occurred in 1852 when the Nenagh workhouse in Tipperary, Ireland sent out 387 women.⁸⁵ This increase was due in part to the policies of benevolent societies and Poor Law unions in Ireland. Poor Law districts and workhouses in Ireland were developed as a result of the Poor Law Act of 1838. Dympna McLoughlin notes that these workhouses “were deliberately grim buildings and were a physical manifestation on the landscape of the prevailing social doctrine with respect to the destitute poor.”⁸⁶ In the early 1850’s, believing that these women could find useful work as servants in Canada and the United States, the British philanthropist Vera Foster “organized the Irish Pioneer Immigration Fund and a Women’s Protective Immigration Society to finance the migration of thousands of young women.”⁸⁷ As Helen Cowan notes, this belief stemmed from the notion that “[t]he need for domestic servants and other female helpers for wives was well nigh insatiable and, according to some Poor Law officers, the supply was equally inexhaustible.”⁸⁸ Dympna McLoughlin’s research on

⁸³ SOC, “Chronicles”, 27 December 1849.

⁸⁴ Lamirande, p.215.

⁸⁵ Donald McKay, *Flight from Famine: The Coming of the Irish to Canada*, (Toronto, 1990), p.31.

⁸⁶ Dympna McLoughlin, “Workhouses and Irish Female Paupers 1840-70”, *Women Surviving: Studies in Irish Women’s History in the 19th & 20th Centuries*, Luddy, Maria and Cliona Murphy eds., (Dublin, 1989), p.117

⁸⁷ Diner, p.35.

⁸⁸ Helen I. Cowan, *British Emigration to British North America: The First Hundred Years*. (Toronto, 1961), p.223.

workhouse conditions in Ireland explains why, once in Canada, these girls proved to be unsatisfactory for domestic work:

Workhouses operated without kitchen utensils, crockery, or tableware. Pauper meals were served out of a large stirabout boiler and onto tin plates. The preparation of food was basic. Despite spending many years as 'cooks' within the Workhouse, pauper women never used a range or a stove. On entering domestic employment in the homes of the well-to-do in Ireland, England, or North America they were confronted for the first time by a stove and a whole host of cooking utensils.⁸⁹

However, according to McLoughlin unsuitability for domestic work did not concern the lay officials whose "prime concern was with the burden of pauperism in Ireland and [for whom] the ultimate fate of the paupers in North America was secondary."⁹⁰ The tone of a letter from the chief immigrant agent, Mr. Hawke's office in Toronto on 10 May 1852 indicates that the arrival of large numbers of young single women was not unusual and that the agents made special arrangements to accommodate them. He comments that the girls from the Kilrush and Nenagh unions had arrived the day before and the demand for the services of such persons was limited in Toronto. Therefore, he intended to send these girls to the vicinity of Hamilton and St. Catherines where he had been assured that places could be found for five hundred. He also notes that he intended to send the next party of one hundred and eighty to the same area.⁹¹ Therefore, it is not surprising that in September 1852 Mother Bruyere was asked by Father McDonagh and the immigration agent, Mr. Burke, to help them to find places for fifty young Irish girls who had just arrived and were still on the quay. The Superior of the Oblates, Father Aubert, gave the Sisters a key to a house which had not yet been rented.

⁸⁹ Dympna McLoughlin, "Superfluous and unwanted deadweight: the Emigration of nineteenth-century Irish Pauper Women," *The Irish World Wide*, p.75

⁹⁰ McLoughlin, "Superfluous", p85.

⁹¹ Carleton University Library, Hawke Papers, RG 11-1, Chief Emigrant Agent's Letterbooks, 10 May 1852.

Sister Phelan, Sister Lavoie and four other Sisters went to collect the girls from the quay. The girls told them that they had been looked after in Ireland by the Sisters of Mercy and they could not believe their good fortune on being again in the care of religious sisters. It was obvious to Sister Phelan that these girls were accustomed to religious ways as they sang hymns as they walked in pairs next to the Sisters. Because they were so tired they gradually fell into single file and followed behind the Sisters. As they passed, people in the houses came out to see them walk by. The Sisters were happy to use this occasion for a charitable cause, so Sisters Rivais, Hagan and Laflamme separated from the group to collect alms for the poor girls. In a short time they had collected money and other furniture which they carried back with glee. Mother Bruyere, Sister St. Joseph. Sister Youville and four novices were waiting at the house and were happy to help the girls to settle in by supplying them with shawls, hats and other clothing. Mr. Burke, the immigration agent, brought them bread, butter, and tea. After they had eaten, the girls settled down for the night.⁹² By 1854, the Sisters were looking after one hundred and seventy-one girls for whom the immigration agent paid "15 sols par jour."⁹³ In an 1854 report, Dr. J. Beaubien praised the Sisters for this work and noted that they regularly looked after these young female immigrants until they could be hired out in the city or in the adjoining country.⁹⁴

Although these girls were Roman Catholic and appreciated being looked after by the Sisters of Charity, it seems that the Sisters found the work to be a strain on their resources. Perhaps this strain was augmented by Molloy's apparent lack of control over the girls. The situation was also inflamed by the fact that some of the domestics returned

⁹² SOC, "Chronicles", 2 September 1852.

⁹³ SOC, "Statistics of the Mother House", 31 December 1854. Coll. A. Vol. V. p.8.

⁹⁴ CA, "Rapport Annuals" Beaubien, J. Report of Physician to General Hospital, 1854.

to the refuge when they left their places of employment. In a letter to Guigues on 1 December, 1854, Mother Bruyere tried to explain the difficulties the Sisters encountered in this work. She pointed out that in 1853 they had looked after ninety-seven girls and that number had risen to one hundred and seventy one in 1854. The house allowance supplied by the immigration agent per day was insufficient to cover expenses. Therefore she told Guigues that if Molloy could not augment the support they would have to discontinue the work. She also pointed out that the girls were strong and were capable of looking after themselves.⁹⁵ Considering the amount of work and hardship that Mother Bruyere and her Sisters had encountered since their arrival in Bytown, it is not surprising that they felt that this particular work did not fit into their mandate of helping the poor and the infirm to survive. Mother Bruyere's attitude regarding the girls reinforces that the Sisters were not divorced from the cultural values of the nineteenth century. They provided shelter to those in need, but these girls were young, strong, and capable of work. Therefore, she did not have any sympathy for what she deemed were feeble reasons for leaving their employers and felt that they should be encouraged to return to work. As she explained to Guigues:

For the most part, these are robust girls who leave their job for little if any reason, and they come here to be fed, often for eight, fifteen days, under the pretext that they do not like being hired in the country, or that they did not like the house they left.⁹⁶

Mother Bruyere's comments reflect the attitudes of the ethos of the middle-classes to those in need in the nineteenth century. She does not question the class system, but stresses that she cannot provide charity to those who are capable of looking after themselves.

⁹⁵ SOC, Lortie, p.324.

⁹⁶ Lamirande, p.215.

The difficulties that the Sisters experienced underline that they were not willing to continue to run an organization that they felt was not fulfilling their desire to care for the poor. It also suggests that they were capable of discerning who was in more need of their care and allocating the resources effectively. In her research on women in Irish workhouses Dympna McLoughlin noted that in many cases the women sent to Canada were among the most troublesome in the workhouse. She has suggested that “[f]or the unsuspecting Canadian employers it was necessary to give the impression that these were poor and unfortunate women, but that, at the same time they were decent and respectable, and thus needed to be chaperoned and protected. The appearances of the inmates in Canada was thus a crucial factor.⁹⁷ However, it seems that Mother Bruyere was able to distinguish the people who were most in need of the Sisters’ services. The situation was resolved in 1865 when the refuge was taken over by the Sisters of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd who had come to Buffalo from France and had been invited to Ottawa that year by Bishop Guigues.⁹⁸

The education of the young was also outside the mandate of caring for the poor, but was justified by the fact that the Sisters needed the income from the school to allow them to proceed with their other works and to finance their existing institutions. It was also part of the agreement they had made with the priests who had invited them to come to Bytown in the first place. In 1844, Bishop Phelan had specifically asked the Sisters to educate the young Irish and Canadian girls in Bytown. He assured Bourget that he would do all in his power to help the Sisters to be successful in their mission.⁹⁹ The Oblate Father Telmon also assured Mother McMullen of his assistance. Telmon promised that

⁹⁷ McLoughlin, “Superfluous”, p.81.

⁹⁸ Lamirande, p.215.

⁹⁹ OMI. JE.101.C21.C32. Letter from Bourget to Phelan, 30 Dec 1844.

the Sisters who would be sent to Bytown would receive the sum of 50 Louis a year. He hoped to obtain some funds from the students who could afford to pay and the rest from the government public school funds.¹⁰⁰ Father Telmon was particularly interested in how this school would be perceived by the public. He pointed out to Mother McMullen that everyone should be required to pay something towards their education otherwise the poor people's sensibilities would be offended, as they would believe that they were accepting charity.¹⁰¹ Telmon was also insistent that the school would be bi-lingual. He assured Mother McMullen that he would help the Sisters to establish such a school and that he had enough money to help them to set it up. He noted that if he could not find a house to rent he would give them a house and would supply all the furniture that they would need.¹⁰²

The moment the Sisters of Charity arrived in Bytown in 1845 they began to prepare an area to serve as a school. The school for girls, which opened on 3 March, 1845, was the first bi-lingual school in Ottawa and was housed in a two-story shed in the convent garden on St. Patrick Street.¹⁰³ From the beginning it served both French- and English-speaking students. Mother Bruyere taught the French-speaking girls and Sister Rodriguez the English-speaking. Later, Sister Rivet replaced Mother Bruyere and Sr. St Pierre took over the English classes when Sister Rodriguez became ill. In the first few months they recognized that they also needed to provide evening classes to educate the adults of the area and plans were made to educate some working class women, most of whom were married to lumbermen. Due to lack of resources, this work was only carried

¹⁰⁰ OMI. BK.2517.T27.1849. Letter Telmon to McMullen, 21 Dec 1844.

¹⁰¹ Lamirande, p.128.

¹⁰² OMI. BK.2517.T27.1849. Letter Telmon to McMullen, , 20 October, 1844.

¹⁰³ Sister Paul-Emile, "A Pioneer of Bilingual Education," (Ottawa, 1984),p.7.

out for a short time.¹⁰⁴ However, it does demonstrate the progressive thinking of the Sisters and the priests who were trying to shape the emerging community and that they were sensitive to the needs of the people. In their effort to do all they could to help the people, the sisters tried to accommodate everyone who applied for admission to the school. They accepted children of different religious backgrounds and those who spoke different languages. In the realm of education the Sisters respected and were advised by the Oblate priests. As early as 1848, Guigues had stressed the importance of trying to avoid distinction between young people. He gives an insight into why the clergy continued to insist on the importance of providing a girls' school that would cater to all the ethnic and religious groups in the area when he notes that an educational institution should:

. . . contribuera puissamment a cimenter les liens les plus durables de tous, ceux de la jeunesse, entre les homes d'origine et de religion différentes et effacera les antipathies naturelles et toujours déplorables parmi les citoyens de la même patrie.¹⁰⁵

Teaching the students to respect the existence of diversity in the community continued to be part of the mandate of the Sisters of Charity in their schools. Sister Therese de Jesus, the daughter of Hugh Hagan, who operated a school on Sussex Street, helped to chart the direction of the Sisters of Charity boarding school. It was noted that one of her favorite and often repeated maxims was that “the pupils should be prepared for the realities of life.”¹⁰⁶ In Bytown, this preparation included teaching the girls to respect the ethnic and religious diversity of the area. The Oblate priests also recognized that in an area where

¹⁰⁴ Lamirande, p.132.

¹⁰⁵ OMI, JE. 101.C69.R146. Roger Guindon, “L’Universite d’Ottawa et le Couvent Rideau 1848-1901,”p.6.

¹⁰⁶ Fitz-Grey, Vivia “Memories of Mother Teresa Hagan”, (Ottawa, 1912), p.11.

the majority of the population were English-Protestant, the survival of Catholicism depended on the co-operation of French- and English-speaking Catholics.

The Oblates were intricately involved with helping the Sisters of Charity to develop their school. In 1841 the government had granted separate schools to the Catholics of Upper Canada, but the system was not yet in place by 1845 when the Sisters opened their first school. Therefore their school was technically a private institution.¹⁰⁷ In 1845, Dandurand had expressed the hope that the education which they could provide the young men would be supplemented with the help of the Sisters of Charity who would educate the girls. He believed that this was an essential element in order to remedy the terrible conditions and situation of the poor people in Bytown.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, in 1847 Guigues turned his attention to helping Mother Bruyere expand her school. Before this expansion could begin both Guigues and Mother Bruyere had to obtain permission from the Mother House in Montreal. It is interesting to consider how both stressed the importance of establishing the school as quickly as possible to consolidate the emergence of Catholic institutions in Ottawa. As the city was developing so quickly, the Catholic authorities were unwilling to waste time. As Mother Bruyere pointed out to Guigues, because the situation in Upper Canada was so different from that of Montreal they were inclined to accept all types of work once they had approval to do so.¹⁰⁹ Her comment shows her willingness to remain flexible to the changing needs of the people of Bytown.

Education was not part of the mandate of the Grey Nuns in Montreal and therefore continued involvement in the educational system in Bytown would result in a permanent separation from the Mother House in Montreal. The boarding school opened

¹⁰⁷ Brault, p.226.

¹⁰⁸ OMI, GLPP.1066. Letter Dandurand to Mazenod, 3 December 1845.

¹⁰⁹ Lamirande, p.208.

in September 1849. The Sisters taught all the courses, but were guided in their academic careers by the Oblate fathers.¹¹⁰ In 1849, Guigues approached the government for the official recognition of and support for the bilingual schools. By 1850 the Public School Board agreed to allocate some funds if the Sisters would undergo an oral examination. Due to disagreement over whether they should have had knowledge of philosophy, the Sisters were only awarded second class certificates. The Sisters had been well prepared to answer all other questions, but failed to answer a question regarding an ancient philosopher. This humiliation spurred the Sisters to even greater lengths of academic achievement under the instruction of the Oblate priests of the newly founded Bytown college.¹¹¹ The struggle to establish the schools added to the determination of the Sisters of Charity and increased their commitment to concentrate on providing a high quality of education for their students. This education was closely aligned with a spiritual and moral education which was enhanced by the example of the Sisters who encouraged the students to volunteer their time to help them in their many works for the poor. In 1852, some students who had accompanied Sister Thibodeau on her visits to the poor organized their schoolmates to make clothes for the new-born babies they had seen.¹¹²

The Sisters also augmented the male lay organizations founded by the Oblates by encouraging the formation of female lay societies. Within the school, the Congregation des Enfants de Marie was organized in 1864. Its mandate was to encourage the girls to be well behaved towards their superiors, to obey their parents and to give a good example to others by their thoughts and deeds. The rules of the organization strictly outlined their duties within the parish. The juxtaposition of the importance of the girls' spirituality and

¹¹⁰ Paul-Emile, *Grey*, p.129.

¹¹¹ Paul-Emile, "Bilingual", p.9.

¹¹² Paul-Emile, "Bilingual", p.12.

their work in the parish community highlights the fact that the Sisters believed that one enhanced the other.¹¹³ The congregation met regularly and held annual elections for the positions of president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer. At these meetings a fee was collected and was used to help the poor.¹¹⁴ Magray maintains that in Ireland this society was the vehicle through which the Sisters had the most significant impact on the social attitudes and behavior of their students. “This society, which appeared as early as 1842 in the Ursuline convent in Cork, was promoted as the “highest privilege” to which an Irish Catholic girl could aspire.”¹¹⁵ Margaret MacCurtain also stresses the importance of membership of the *Enfant de Marie* on shaping the attitudes of young Roman Catholic women. She goes so far as to say that the *Child of Mary* manual was one of the most influential books in shaping the minds of Irish Catholic women in the final quarter of the nineteenth century. “Admittance to the ranks of the Sodality conveyed an aura of dignity and conferred status, even privilege, on a class educated into middle-class virtue.”¹¹⁶ The school also organized alumni associations who continued to work with the Sisters. Besides raising money for the Sisters charitable works, these women also helped them to furnish the convent and the school.

In encouraging their students to become members of lay societies the Sisters were strengthening the structure of the Roman Catholic Church in Bytown. They prided themselves on operating a truly bi-lingual school that treated each language equally and concentrated on the higher goal of providing an excellent education. In doing so they were respected by both the French- and English-speaking people of the town. They also

¹¹³ Marcel Belanger, “Vade-Mecum des Enfants de Marie”, (Ottawa, 1944)

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Magray, p.101.

¹¹⁶ Margaret MacCurtain, “Fullness of Life: Defining Female Spirituality in Twentieth Century Ireland” *Women Surviving*, p.233.

successfully negotiated the ethnic divisions that occurred when the orphanage needed to be expanded in the 1860s. While the Mother House continued to shelter both English- and French-speaking orphans the creation of two separate institutions revealed that ethnic tensions still lurked beneath the surface of the town¹¹⁷. In 1865 Sister Thibodeau, who spent much of her time visiting the sick poor in Bytown, became concerned by the increasing number of orphaned children in the area. She appealed to Guigues and obtained permission to create a new refuge for orphans. She strengthened her case by explaining that such an establishment would also look after the invalids and the elderly. However, at the same time the Irish Oblate priest, Father James McGrath was seeking the support of English-speaking Catholics to open an orphanage and refuge for the elderly.¹¹⁸ In December 1865, with the permission of Guigues and Mother Bruyere, Sister Thibodeau rented a house on Water Street for Irish orphans and furnished it with ten beds.¹¹⁹ In 1867 this orphanage, called St. Patrick's, was moved to a bigger house on Church Street¹²⁰. The Canadian children remained in the original orphanage called St. Joseph's. By 1866, Mother Bruyere reported to the Sisters in Montreal that the work in the orphanages was prospering. At that time there were thirty children at St. Patrick's and fifty-three at St Joseph's. The interaction between the Sisters of Charity and the lay members of the community is evident in these institutions. Both St. Patrick's orphanage and St Joseph's orphanage were supported with the help of some citizens in Bytown. The ladies, with the help of their families, continued to fund-raise to support the orphanages. They donated clothes, livestock and furniture to help the children and the elderly in these

¹¹⁷ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.285.

¹¹⁸ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.285..

¹¹⁹ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.264/265.

¹²⁰ Lamirande, p.430.

organizations. However, both orphanages remained under the control of the Sisters of Charity, who were respected by both ethnic groups.

The Sisters' good relationship was reflected by the monetary assistance provided to their institutions by the public. They were also accustomed to asking for donations for their projects. When the Sisters needed to further extend the hospital in 1860, Sister Phelan accompanied by Sister Marie-de-la-Nativite went directly to the lumber camps in Aylmer to ask for a donation of wood for their new building.¹²¹ The donation allowed them to go ahead with their project and was supplemented by the help of the lay community. A bazaar was organized by the Catholic ladies of the community to raise funds. The wives of Henry Friel and R. W. Scott, both of whom had held the position of Mayor of Bytown, regularly organized these bazaars. Mrs. Friel was the daughter of Daniel O'Connor and had been the first female child born in Bytown.¹²² The Sisters also received donations to the building fund from the community at a ceremony that was held on 26 May 1861 when Bishop Guigues blessed the cornerstones of the building. The pattern of co-operation between the Protestant and the Catholic community was still evident in the 1860s. For example, the contribution of the Protestant population was noted in the form of \$180 subscribed by Mr. Goodwin.¹²³ Despite this generosity and support from the community the Sisters continued to struggle to maintain their services to the poor and the ill.

However, despite never having enough money, the Sisters of Charity benefited from having control of their institutions. This was possible due to the changes in law from 1840 to 1867 which recognized their existence as an institution of religious women

¹²¹ "Ottawa General Hospital: Souvenir Book", (Ottawa, 1929).p.6.

¹²² NAC MG 30 C32, Lilian Desbarats, "The Irish Settlers of Bytown and Early Ottawa," (Ottawa, 1841).

¹²³ "Ottawa General Hospital: Souvenir Book", (Ottawa, 1929).p.6.

who were involved in charitable work. In 1849 the Province of Canada passed an Act to incorporate La Communauté des Révérendes Soeurs de la Charité, in Bytown. In their dealings with legal matters, the Sisters received the advise and assistance of the lay community. On 27 March 1850, Mother Bruyere wrote to Major James Sutton Elliott, head of the Board of Ordnance informing him that Richard W. Scott had registered their “long desired deed” in the name of the community and thanking Major Elliott for his help and interest in their institution.¹²⁴ In 1861 and 1863 the act was amended to incorporate the Community, General Hospital, Alms House and Seminary of Learning of the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa.¹²⁵ The Sisters were granted incorporation due to the nature of their work with the poor. Corporations were granted for works of charity, education and hospital care.¹²⁶ This was important step for the Sisters to achieve their legal rights. According to English law, each corporation had the right to acquire and to maintain lands and buildings, but their worth could not go above the fixed rate mentioned in the charter.¹²⁷ After 1840, due to the nature of their charitable work, the State gradually began to contribute financially to their activities.¹²⁸ Between 1840 and 1867, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the Sisters of Charity were among the “three institutes of men and six of women [who] came to settle in Canada, and thirteen other institutes of women [that] were founded in the country.”¹²⁹ The thirty-nine special acts which were passed in favor of the religious institutes between 1840 and 1867 included an act which allowed

¹²⁴ Jean d'Arc Lortie, *Lettres d'Elisabeth Bruyere 1850-1856*. Volume II, (Montreal, 1992), p65-66.

¹²⁵ Jean Moncion, “The Civil Incorporation of Religious Institutes in Canada,” Thesis-Doctor in Canon Law, (Ottawa, 1978), p338.

¹²⁶ Moncion, p.76.

¹²⁷ Moncion, p.78

¹²⁸ Moncion, p.80

¹²⁹ Moncion, p62-64.

them the right to acquire or to sell properties.¹³⁰ These acts demonstrate that the government recognized the value of the network services provided by these religious institutions. However, the speed with which the Roman Catholic institutions took advantage of these opportunities demonstrates that the Church hierarchy was aware of the opportunities provided by these special acts. It also explains why the Bishops were supportive of both the Sisters of Charity and the Oblate Fathers' mission in Bytown.

In Bytown, the Sisters of Charity occupied the paradoxical position of being both residents of the town, but also not quite part of it. Although they were inspired by their belief that they were doing the work of the Lord, their duty was to see beyond outward appearances and to rise above ethnic and religious tensions. In an era during which women were believed to exist in their own separate sphere, the sphere occupied by the Sisters gave them a number of advantages. All their organizations were funded by their work in the schools. Besides providing the Sisters of Charity with the money necessary to finance their charitable work, the schools allowed them to interact with the members of the community. As teachers, their role in education supported this charitable work and allowed their students to witness the extent of the services they provided. The Sisters were constantly supported by the Oblate fathers who were also driven to help the poor. When the influx of immigrants threatened to overwhelm the city, because they already had a framework in place, they could build on these nascent institutions and were able to provide the much needed assistance. The work was also enhanced by the fact that the Sisters did not ask for a monetary reward, therefore the meager amount of money available did not diminish the extent of the work they performed. Spirituality was central to their lives and allowed them to push themselves to accomplish arduous tasks that they

¹³⁰ Moncion, p.67.

could not pay people to undertake. Meanwhile, in this rapidly evolving society their charitable undertakings were augmented by the ladies of the community who supported them psychologically and financially. These women worked with the support of their husbands and families and provided a network of support which helped the Sisters and allowed them to develop their organizations to achieve their goals of caring for the sick and the poor. The creation of these social services contributed to the stability of the area and provided a framework for the French- and English-speaking Roman Catholics to work together and to negotiate the ethnic and religious tensions in the area.

CHAPTER 3: ENTERPRISING WOMEN

In *Elisabeth Bruyere: Foundress of the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa*, Emilien Lamirande describes his work as “a slice of the religious history of Ottawa that is presented, since the life of Mother Bruyere cannot be separated from the birth, growth and development of this diocese.”¹ Historians, however, have failed to recognize the crucial importance of her Irish colleagues. Indeed, the lives and experiences of the Irish women who were members of the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century are a significant part of the history of the network of social services which they helped to create. In addition to joining an order which imposed great physical demands, these women were required to learn French before being accepted. However, despite these challenges, between the years 1845 and 1875 twenty-four Irish women, fifteen Irish-born and nine first generation Irish-Canadian, chose to become members of this congregation. They each made a deliberate choice to obey the rules of the order and to work as part of a community dedicated to serving the poor. It is impossible to separate the works that the Sisters performed from the spirituality which infused each day of their lives. This spirituality combined with the acute desire to make an active contribution to society was central to the historical role of the Sisters of Charity in Ottawa.

The most basic sources for reconstructing these individual lives are the *Necrologies*, a collection of detailed accounts of the Sisters’ lives collected and written when they are deceased. Although these are a valuable resource to show the patterns of these women’s lives, they have been filtered through the community annalist and have

¹ Lamirande, p.9.

been collected at a later, unspecified, date. The challenge of employing them as historical sources is further complicated by the fact that they are designed to serve as instructional reading for members of the noviciate and therefore, stress the importance of values such as piety, obedience, humility, and dedication to work. As Maria Luddy has pointed out the language used in such records tends to obscure what these women actually accomplished. "The rhetoric of convent life, the language of communication between the nuns and the public and between the nuns and the clergy hides the very direct impact which these women had on the work they were determined to carry out."² However, an analysis of the language used offers a glimpse into the expectations of the Order and how the Sisters were expected to conform to a particular set of values. They also highlight the importance of the Sisters' sense of faith and mission which was central to their lives. Moreover, carefully sifted, they provide crucial details which allow the women to emerge as active participants in the life of the community.

As revealed by these necrologies, although these twenty-four women shared a similar ethnicity, their class, educational backgrounds, and the period in which they emigrated influenced their subsequent career choices within the order. There is a disparity in the economic backgrounds between those born in Ireland and the Irish-Canadians. While those born in Canada were middle class and their average age was eighteen when they joined the order, all but two of the Sisters who emigrated from Ireland came from working class families, had had limited educational opportunities and their average age when they joined was twenty two. Their careers in the order also illuminate the class differences between the pre- and post-famine Irish female immigrants who joined the Sisters of Charity in Bytown. Four of the Irish-born Sisters were

² Luddy, p.26.

founding members of the mission in Bytown in 1845. Active and visible in the community, these women were central to the growth of the new foundation. Their career choices are similar to those of the first generation Irish-Canadian Sisters. Of these nine, only one did not become a teacher. However, in contrast, the majority of the Irish-born Sisters who emigrated after the 1847 famine dedicated their lives to manual labour, working in the kitchens and laundries.

For these post-famine Irish female migrants joining the convent provided an opportunity to work as part of an active and organized community. Although they did not attain important positions within the order, membership provided them with a safe place to work and a guarantee of security and support in their old age. The first post-famine Irish migrant to join was Elisabeth Sergeant, who was admitted in 1856. Up to this point the community had followed the recommendations of Bishop Guigues who in 1848 had declared:

May they avoid within the community all distinctions in work under the futile pretext of a better education or lack of natural ability; their Rule does not allow such distinctions as lay sisters and choir sisters which are accepted in other communities.³

However, by 1856 the Sisters had been encouraged by the Oblate priest Fr. Aubert to allow uneducated girls the advantage of admittance. These girls would be admitted to the congregation as religious Sisters, but “would have no part in the governance of the house and would not be involved in the external works of charity.”⁴ Instead they worked in the laundries and kitchens or carried out domestic work in the various establishments. Although she allowed the introduction of two categories of Sisters, throughout her career

³ Lamirande, p.316

⁴ Lamirande, p.317.

Mother Bruyere continued to stress the importance of treating Lay Sisters as equal members of the community. In a letter to Sr. Phelan in 1867 she wrote:

. . . in the good communities, the distinction of Lay Sisters is not noticed; they are not set apart because the habit and charity remove all distinctions; the difference lies in the rule that assigns them to Martha's role, that is all.⁵

As Suellen Hoy points out in her examination of the recruitment and emigration of Irish religious women to the United States, Lay Sisters had been a part of most religious congregations because it was customary for wealthy women to bring their maids with them when they entered the cloister. Therefore, admission as a Lay Sister provided an opportunity for some working-class women who would have been accustomed to manual labour. He notes "[t]hey were not afraid of the long hours of physical labor that awaited them in convents; they had been introduced to hard work in their homes. Instead they were probably attracted to a community of educated and religious women, where they would receive regular meals, a full night's sleep, periods of recreation each day, and care when they became ill or old."⁶ Elisabeth Sergeant had gone to some lengths to join the order. A member of a Protestant family, Elisabeth ran away from home and took refuge in her uncle's house where she asked to be baptized by the Oblate Father Michael Molloy. He then brought her to the convent where she was accepted by Mother Bruyere. Elisabeth became a valued member of the community who was praised in the necrologies for her spirit of prayer and poverty. Although she could not read or write, she took pride in knowing the prayers by heart. She worked as a domestic in the boarding school and later in the mission in Ogdensburg. She then was the door-keeper of the Notre Dame du

⁵ Lamirande, p.319.

⁶ Suellen Hoy, "The Journey Out: The Recruitment and Emigration of Irish Religious Women to the United States, 1812-1914," *Journal of Women's History*, v.6, no.4/v.7, no. 1.(Winter/Spring, 1995), p70-71.

Sacre Coeur until her death in 1901. When she died, Mother Dorothy Kirby, founding Superior of the Sisters of Charity mission in Ogdensburg, spent the last night with her.⁷

The co-operation of the Oblate priests in encouraging girls to join the Order highlights their interest in the growth of the congregation and their awareness of the possibilities that religious life could offer a young female immigrant. Father Molloy's work in Bytown was marked by his continuing interest in the welfare of Irish female immigrants. A number of these Irish immigrants were employed as domestic servants in the Oblate College. Because this work was supervised by the Sisters of Charity it was inevitable that a number of these domestic workers decided to join the Order. Although they would no longer work for the Oblates, these women pursued similar domestic work in the institutions run by the Sisters of Charity and in the Mother House in Bytown. The difference, however, is that they were now part of a respected religious community and were ensured that they would be cared for when they could no longer work. In addition to these advantages, the lay Sisters were also encouraged by Mother Bruyere to read and write and were given the opportunity to learn French. She stressed that the lay Sisters "are to be respected as religious and as members of the family, allowed time for their pious practices, and cared for when they are sick."⁸

Supervision of domestic work in the Oblates of Mary Immaculate had been taken over by the sisters of Charity in 1858.⁹ In particular the example of one supervisor, Soeur Leblanc, inspired three of the Irish women working there to join the order in 1866. Although they continued to work in the laundry and kitchen as religious women and did not attain important positions in the order, they were given the opportunity to study and

⁷ *Necrologies Des Soeurs Grises de la Croix, Tome I*, (Ottawa 1932), p.290.

⁸ Lamirande, p. 318.

⁹ Lamirande, p.433.

to be part of a religious family. These were opportunities that would have been difficult to achieve as a single lay-woman. Mary O'Donnell, daughter of a Cork farmer, was twenty-one when she arrived in Canada. When she found employment with the Oblate Fathers, she was so impressed by the example of Soeur Leblanc that she applied to join the order in 1866. It is interesting to note that she was held up as a model in the necrologies because she was an excellent novice and overcame her total ignorance of French under the instruction of the Oblate Father Grenier. Her career included nursing the victims of smallpox in the hospital hidden within the Mother House. She was also praised for her happiness, her positive attitude toward life and her sympathy and dedication to the poor. The sense of community she enjoyed is evident by the fact that she was so loved by the other sisters that they would gather around to talk to her in the evenings.¹⁰ The attraction of religious life for the other two domestic servants who joined in 1866 was probably heightened by the fact that they were conscious of their advancing age. Bridget O'Neill was thirty and Rose Brannon was twenty seven. In the Order they were admired for their hard work, dedication, and commitment to prayer.¹¹ All the Lay Sisters were encouraged to learn prayers in French and took pride in the combination of work and prayer in their everyday life.

The significance of prayer and the importance of religion for the women whose lives had been disrupted by the famine is evident in their decision to join a religious organization dedicated to serving the poor and infirm. In exploring the connection between religious beliefs and ethnicity, it is important to bear in mind that the active role the Sisters played and their dedication to their religious beliefs was accepted as the norm

¹⁰ *Necrologies Tome I*, p.158-159

¹¹ *Necrologies Tome I*, p.126 , p280.

in Irish society. The case of two sisters, Delima and Maria Ward demonstrates that faith was an important element in their lives even at a very young age. These siblings were born in Roscommon, Ireland and came to Canada in 1847. While in quarantine on Grosse Isle, they lost their mother, father, and two brothers to disease. The girls were among the Irish orphans adopted by French Canadian families and remained in contact while growing up in the small town of Nicolet. Maria joined the order in 1857 and Delima followed her in 1859. While they both had long careers within the order, an incident that occurred while they were on Grosse Isle demonstrates the importance of faith in their early lives. One day, while waiting with her sister to be chosen and placed in an adoptive family, Delima went for a walk alone. The necrologies note that she was approached by a “protestant” who began to question her on where she was from and on what she believed in. The vignette notes that when he said to her:

Mais la sainte Vierge est une femme comme les autres!” Le petite orpheline, toute rouge de depot, en entendant ces paroles, répliqua avec vivacité: “Non, monsieur, cela n’est pas. La sainte Vierge est la Mere du bon Dieu et elle est bien au-dessus de toutes les autres femmes; maman me l’a dit bien souvent lorsqu’elle vivait et elle nous a bien recommande de l’invoquer toujours. Sa soeur, qui ne l’avait pas perdue de vue un instant, accourut vers elle, trancha la question et sauvegarda l’enfant.¹²

Although these girls were only seven and ten years old, instead of turning away from their faith and perhaps blaming it for the loss of their family, they gained strength from their beliefs. Throughout her career, which included work in the Ottawa General Hospital and Saint Patrick’s Orphanage, Maria was noted for her devotion to the poor and to the orphans. Her sister is also praised in the necrologies for her hard work and dedication.

Although class and educational background did influence the position that these famine immigrants achieved in the order, there is evidence that their careers were also

¹² *Necrologies Tome I*, p.143-144.

determined by their abilities, determination and hard work as much as by their backgrounds. While Delima did work in the kitchen, Maria Ward had a successful career in the hospital and orphanage and also visited the poor and sick in their homes. The career of Maria Meaney also demonstrates that the ability to work hard for the benefit of the community allowed her to develop a successful career. A farmer's daughter, Maria was born in Waterford and entered as a novice in 1862 when she was twenty years old. She was noted for her strength which she did not use sparingly. Despite her humble beginnings, Maria, known as Soeur Sainte-Marthe went on to become Superior of the Saint Charles Hospice from 1877 to 1878 and then was Director of Saint Patrick's Orphanage until her death in 1891.¹³

Being a member of the Sisters of Charity gave Maria Meaney an opportunity to achieve a position of power that it is unlikely she would have achieved as a lay woman in this period. She had become an intricate part of an organization that had a high level of autonomy in the day to day running of its institutions. Although they were aided and directed by the Roman Catholic priests, the latter realized that too much interference would be counter productive and were content to assume an advisory role. Dedicated to the Catholic faith, the Sisters created a network of much needed social services and in turn carved out a niche for themselves within the Roman Catholic Church organization. Father Telmon declared in a letter to *The Packet* in July 1847 "A l'Hôpital-General les Soeurs sont maîtresses. Elle ne reconnaît d'autre autorité que la leur."¹⁴ Although this statement was aimed at those who he felt were refusing to recognize the value of services

¹³ *Necrologies*, Tome I, p.207

¹⁴ *The Packet*, 9 July 1847.

provided to the famine immigrants, the fact that he stressed their autonomy suggests that he accepted that this quality allowed them to run successful institutions.

From the beginning when the Sisters agreed to come to Bytown they had subtly asserted this autonomy in decision making. In 1844, in response to Telmon and Phelan's request for three Sisters to establish a mission in Bytown, Mother McMullen disagreed with the number and decided that it would be necessary to send four Sisters to undertake such a mission.¹⁵ Recognizing this subtlety is important in examining the lives and careers of the Sisters of Charity in Ottawa. As Magray explains, although many religious women were

highly dynamic and outspoken, religious etiquette dictated that they either mask their assertiveness or explain it in religiously acceptable terms. As a consequence, these women appear to us on the surface as having been extremely humble and blindly obedient servants of their superiors when, in fact, they were highly resourceful and manipulative.¹⁶

As their work progressed, the Sisters remained flexible in their attitudes and expanded their services to cater to the changing needs of the population. In her examination of women's involvement in social welfare in nineteenth-century Montreal, Jan Noel discovered that the flexibility of Catholic religious women allowed them to survive the British Conquest of 1760 and to extend their services. She also noted that their conciliation and diplomacy and the success of their institutions won the regard and the interest of the British governing families and that this success attracted the interest of "curious British visitors."¹⁷ Lay-women also visited the Sisters' organizations in Bytown. In her diary Lady Dufferin recorded her visit to the Sisters' hospital and orphanage in

¹⁵ Clementine Drouin, *Love Spans the Centuries, Volume II, 1821-1853*, trans. Antoinette Bezaire, (Montreal, 1988), p.187.

¹⁶ Magray, p.12-13.

¹⁷ Jan Noel, "Women and Social Welfare in the Montreal Region, 1800-1833: Preliminary Findings." *Changing Roles of Women*, p.226.

1872. Although Lady Dufferin and her companions were given a tour, she was aware that the Sisters did not approve of being inspected by one of the ladies, Miss Lees. Lady Dufferin recorded that Miss Lees “likes to turn up every sheet, and to peep into every corner, and this is the kind of inspection to which the good nuns are not accustomed. They like my perfunctory style much better.”¹⁸ Her comments also shed light on the fact that the Sisters’ authority in their institutions was accepted by members of Bytown society.

The lay perception of the Sisters in Bytown is important to consider when examining why a number of middle-class Irish-Canadian families decided to allow their daughters to enter the Order. The Order offered a measure of social mobility based on merit which would have appealed to the middle-class mentality of the age. The fact that they chose to send their daughters to the boarding school suggests that they valued and respected both the Order and the education for girls that the Sisters offered. Diner’s research on Irish women in America suggests that “of all the groups only the Irish sent more girls than boys for a high school education.”¹⁹ The Sisters who taught in the boarding school were active and visible within the community and in their school they incorporated service to the poor in their curriculum. This proved attractive to respectable members of society who were aware of the importance of having a social conscience and of their duty and responsibility to the poorer members of society. Therefore, it was inevitable that the Sisters inspired some of their students to pursue a religious life. As Marta Danylewycz notes, in the nineteenth-century family “boundaries were loose, its

¹⁸ Gladys Chantler Walker, ed. *Lady Dufferin: My Canadian Journal 1872-1878*, (Don Mills, Ontario, 1969), Monday 23 December 1872.

¹⁹ Diner., p.140.

structure was elastic, and its perception of its role and function ill defined”²⁰ This allowed artificially created families such as the convent boarding school to cut into and to shape individual experiences.²¹ She suggests that:

[e]veryday life in a boarding school was fertile ground for vocations an ideal setting for those with a penchant for monastic life. Prayer, silence, retreats, mass, and sustained contact with religious women were daily reminders of the alternative to marriage. Over time students learned to live by the clock of the convent, grew to love and admire their mentors and to want to share their lives.”²²

Therefore, it is not surprising that seven of the nine Irish-Canadian girls who joined the order before 1875 had been students in the boarding school.

In the school Marguerite Howley had been pious and loved to study, but also had a mischievous nature and delighted in playing tricks on the other students. However, she was noted for her ability to stress order and economy and allowed nothing to escape her observant eye in the day to day running of the institutions. She joined in 1859 and worked in Buffalo, Ogdensburg, Plattsburg, and gave arithmetic classes in the Mother House. She also was among the founding members of a mission in Hudson and in Point-du-lac. In 1891 returned to Ottawa to run St. Patrick’s orphanage where she remained until 1904. Admired for her calm and discretion when dealing with the lay administrators of the orphanage, she then was appointed Superior of Aylmer, where she restored the church with the help of money donated by her father. Her father also donated a cross to the chapel of the Mother House in 1906. Throughout her career she remained in touch

²⁰ Marta Danylewycz, “Through Women’s Eyes: The Family in Late Nineteenth Century Quebec,” *Canadian Historical Association*, (June, 1980), p.2.

²¹ Danylewycz, “Through Women’s Eyes,” p.2.

²² Danylewycz, “Through Women’s Eyes,” p.13.

with her family and one of her nieces joined a religious order in Albany, New York.²³ Her sixty-seven year career in the order demonstrates the opportunities available for this nineteenth-century woman who managed to carve out a varied and stimulating career. It also demonstrates the significance of family connections in the development of the order.

It was no doubt a source of pride for Marguerite Howley's family when they were invited to a special ceremony on 2 January, 1906 to thank her father for his generosity in giving the cross to the chapel.²⁴ This public service reaffirmed the advantages of being connected to a respected institution and would have given added status to the family in Ottawa. The connection also highlights the importance of appearances in the capital city. The Sisters were known for their good works and admired for their piety and virtue. This included providing service to the poor. When Bridget Green was a student at the boarding school she was inspired by the work of the Sisters, but this inspiration was heightened by the influence of her mother at home. Every day her mother would put aside part of the family's meal for an organization run by the Oblate Father M. Molloy. Bridget took responsibility for carrying the basket of food to them. One day, on finding that her brother had taken the basket, she told her family that it was her duty to do this as she had every intention of joining the Sisters of Charity when she was old enough. When she was fourteen she persuaded her family to allow her to attend classes to learn the French necessary to gain admission. She entered the convent in 1874, when she was fifteen years old. Her career, which spanned fifty-four years, included teaching in Plattsburg and visiting the families and the prison there.²⁵

²³ *Necrologies, Tome III, p.55-59*

²⁴ *Necrologies, Tome III, p56-57.*

²⁵ *Necrologies, Tome III, p. 51-52*

The “Chronicles” of the Mother House, in which they record daily activities of the Order, stress that “[l]es pauvres sont nos enfants, de plus nous sommes leurs servants . . . nous sommes destinées de server.”²⁶ As Caitriona Clear has pointed out in her study of religious women in nineteenth-century Ireland, the women of religious communities were “imbued with the evangelism of the era, and missionary work among the poor was a vital element in this evangelism.” She also notes that those involved in this Catholic missionary work were highly sensitive to the importance of showing the “caring and utilitarian face of the Roman Catholic church, showing its social ‘respectability’ to the non-Catholic onlooker.”²⁷ For the Irish-Canadian families in Ottawa the social respectability conferred on a family whose daughter entered a religious order was enhanced by the knowledge that she had chosen to devote her life to the service of the poor. It must also have served as a sense of satisfaction that many of these poor were Irish immigrants in the city.

The Sisters recognized these advantages and gained satisfaction from membership in the Order. In fact, they often encouraged other family members to join the Order. When Bishop Patrick Phelan encouraged his niece Mary Josephine to follow Mother Bruyere to Bytown, he was ensuring that there would be an additional Irish woman in the French order to accommodate the Irish population in Bytown. He would also have been aware of the advantages that such membership would provide for his niece. Magray’s research into Irish female religious orders reveals that a connection between family and friends was maintained within the Orders. Although the Sisters were encouraged to

²⁶ SOC, “Chronicles”, 8 January, 1850.

²⁷ Clear, p.102.

detach themselves from emotional contacts that would interfere with their religious observances, Magray discovered that siblings frequently entered the same Order and that:

. . . a feeder system developed between the convent school and cloister, meant that novices were likely to know one another from school or know another woman already in the community when they entered.²⁸

Of the twenty-four Irish women who joined the Sisters of Charity in Ottawa, four of them, Sisters Howley, Phelan, Kirby, and Curran, had been friends in the boarding school.²⁹ It is probable that they also had known the other Irish Sisters who had attended the school. There were also three sets of siblings within this small sample group of Irish female immigrants who joined the Order. The Phelan family provides an example of a sibling following in the footsteps of her elder sister and joining the order. Marguerite-Therese Phelan entered the noviciate in 1853 when she was sixteen. She pursued a career as a teacher and remained in the order until her death sixty-four years later.³⁰

In some cases devotion and service to the poor required some adjustment for middle class girls used to a comfortable life. The boarding school had prepared them to follow rules and regulations, but the strict and highly structured life in the convent was not easy to adhere to. As part of this religious community, they were expected to follow a strict schedule which included prayer, physical work, and adherence to the Rule of the Order. The Rule of the Sisters of Charity in Ottawa was modeled on that of the founder M. d'Youville. It consisted of four parts:

The first dealt with the purpose of the institute; the second with the vows, the sacraments, religious exercises and certain observances; the third . . . where topics ranged from relations with the outside, study, meals, seniority, the sick sisters and funerals; the fourth dealt with the general governance of

²⁸ Magray, p.51-52

²⁹ *Necrologies, Tome I*, p.55.

³⁰ *Necrologies, Tome I*, p.147-149.

the congregation.³¹

All elements of the Sisters' lives were regulated, but, in 1848, one of the hardest tests for Rachel Curran was the early morning start to each day. In fact, she had such difficulty in getting up every morning at 4.30 a.m. that Mother Bruyere decided she was not capable of remaining in the order and sent for her father to collect her. When Charles Curran, Port Officer of the District of Montreal, arrived to collect his daughter she was overjoyed to see him until she learned that he was there to take her home. She was so upset that Mother Bruyere agreed to give her another chance. Rachel's age probably played as large a part in this incident as did that of her class, since she was only fourteen at the time. Her difficulties also highlight that as a middle-class girl, she had not been accustomed to such a rigorous life of work and prayer. Her reaction to her father's arrival also suggests a close bond between them and the probability that he would have supported her in her choice of another career. At fourteen she would still have had the opportunity of marriage. It is interesting then, that she persisted in her desire to become a Sister of Charity³². She had a long and successful career as a teacher and encouraged her sister Elisabeth to join the Order in 1858. Elisabeth loved to teach the young children and remained a teacher until 1879 when she was appointed General Secretary. For twenty-six years she occupied this position as "bras droit de sa supireure" and served under Mother Superiors Phelan, Duguay, Demers and Kirby.³³

Working as teachers within the supportive environment of this religious organization allowed the Currans to occupy positions of importance within the schools in which they taught. Similarly, Martha Hagan's career as a teacher highlights the

³¹ Lamirande, p.302-303.

³² *Necrologies*, Tome I, p.370-374

³³ *Necrologies*, Tome I, p.375-378.

advantages that being a member of a religious order afforded the child of Irish immigrants in Bytown. Martha was born in Quebec in 1829, but her father Hugh Hagan moved to Bytown in 1837. Martha and her siblings had the advantage of attending an elementary school he established there. When the Sisters of Charity opened their school on St. Patrick's Street, Martha attended classes and decided to join the order, taking the name Sister Theresa de Jesus. Although her brother and father would have preferred if she had not joined an order whose primary mandate was to serve the sick and the poor, her choice was justified by her subsequent illustrious career.³⁴ She was a highly successful teacher and the inspiration behind the growth of the schools, the first of which opened in the convent of the Mother House. As director of the school, Sister Theresa de Jesus insisted that the Sisters maintain a high level of academic achievements and made arrangements that they could attend the advanced courses in mathematics, philosophy, and science provided by the Oblate College.³⁵

By 1869 the school had been relocated to what was once Matthews Hotel on Rideau Street. The school, under the direction of Sister Theresa de Jesus, had two hundred boarders and seven hundred day students.³⁶ It prided itself on providing a superior level of bilingual education which included arithmetic, history, geography, and language arts. The Sisters also gave French lessons to some of the local citizens including Lady Agnes Macdonald who attended French lessons with Sister Olier.³⁷ The school encouraged the girls to study science and mathematics. In fact, compared to other female educational institutes for girls at that time, as early as 1850 Sister Theresa de

³⁴ *Necrologies*, Tome I, p28.

³⁵ Sister Marguerite-Louise, *Un Heritage: A Light Rekindled*, (Ottawa, 1988), p44.

³⁶ Hector Legros, *Le Diocese d'Ottawa 1847-1948*, (Ottawa, 1949), p.582.

³⁷ Paul-Emile, *Mother*, p.234.

Jesus had advanced ideas as to how a girl should be educated.³⁸ According to V. Fitzgrey, as early as the 1850s “her pedagogical ideas were by some thought to be too advanced for the period . . . her free-born aspirations clashed with an over-cautious conservatism in the matter of mathematical studies for girls.”³⁹ The school also encouraged the students in debate, fine arts and music.⁴⁰ The quality of the teachers of these subjects did much to enhance the instruction of the students and lay teachers were employed to supplement the expertise of the Sisters. For example, Mother Bruyere in 1868 had employed Gustave Smith as a music teacher; a composer, writer, and painter, who had emigrated from France in 1856, Smith was renowned for his skills. This enhanced the quality of the school’s curriculum. The school also gradually became known for its musical evenings. Among the dignitaries who attended such evenings included in 1869, His Highness Prince Arthur, Sir John A. Macdonald and Sir Georges-Etienne Cartier. In 1872 Lord and Lady Lisgar came to see the performance of their niece who had been studying music and linguistics at the convent since 1868.⁴¹ Visitors included Lord and Lady Dufferin who praised the Sisters for both educating the young and for taking care of the sick. His Lordship also acknowledged that these services had even been extended to a member of his own vice-regal household.⁴²

The Sisters’ choice of curriculum for the education of young girls provides an insight into how they viewed themselves as educators and into what was considered to be suitable for the education of young girls in the nineteenth-century. On one hand, the Sisters, encouraged by Sr. Theresa had high academic standards in subjects such as

³⁸ Marguerite-Louise, p.42.

³⁹ Fitz-grey, p.10.

⁴⁰ CA, “Pensionnat Notre-Dame du Sacre-Coeur, 1889-1927”

⁴¹ Louise-Marguerite, pp.182-183.

⁴² Louise-Marguerite, p.46.

mathematics, philosophy, and science, yet, service to the poor and teaching girls to fulfill their duty as members of a civil society included training them to be good wives and mothers with an appreciation of their duty to the poor. The parents who sent their daughters to the school were aware of the extent of the services provided by the Sisters of Charity to the people of Bytown and service to the poor was included as an acceptable part of a Catholic education. Since the establishment of their first school the Sisters had encouraged their students to follow their example in helping the poor and the destitute in the area. Sister Theresa de Jesus remained Superior of the boarding school until her death in 1912 and wielded power and influence over the institution and earned the respect and admiration of the general public. The school was bilingual and prided itself of providing an excellent education for the students. She was the driving force behind the success of the school and occupied a position of power that was uncommon among nineteenth-century women.

Being a member of a religious congregation allowed the women to develop careers within a supportive environment. The Sisters were respected members of the community. As Clear argues, although they had chosen to exclude themselves from society, they enjoyed a social standing and a socially-approved area of activity that was unavailable to nineteenth-century women.⁴³ However, the experiences of Mary Josephine Phelan demonstrate the how a young religious woman could also exercise powers of leadership and business acumen. Mary Josephine Phelan became Superior General of the Mother House in Ottawa in 1879. From the moment she joined in 1845, Mary Josephine had demonstrated her intelligence and her ability to overcome obstacles. Throughout her years working in missions, including Kingston, Buffalo and Plattsburg she remained in

⁴³ Clear, p.151

contact with Mother Bruyere who valued her opinion and endeavoured to share her own experience with the younger woman. Phelan's versatility and ability to manage situations is evident in her many accomplishments. Among those was her supervision of the construction of the General Hospital when the Order could not afford to retain the services of the contractor in 1850. The Sisters constantly struggled to raise money to finance the expansion of their institutions. The planned extension to the General Hospital was to be built in stone. The Sisters hired Mr. Robillard, a local contractor, to undertake direction of the construction. Due to lack of money to pay them the workers were often sent away which added to the delay in building the fourth floor. To save money and to continue with the construction Bishop Guigues suggested that the fourth floor be built of wood. However, the Sisters were determined that the hospital would be completed in stone. Their solution was to replace the contractor with Sister Phelan. "From morning till evening, Sister Phelan stood by the masons and carpenters who were working the roof trussing. This Sister saw to having the carting of stone, limestone, sand etc. . and attended to everything."⁴⁴ The building was finished in stone and serves as example of how the Sisters, while heeding the advise of Bishop Guigues that they save money, managed to resolve the problem and follow through with their plans for the building. As a member of a religious community her qualities of "firmness and distinguished deportment" and her "ability to overcome obstacles of all types" were enhanced by her status as a religious woman.⁴⁵ Working within the constraints of the situation the Sisters took advantage of the opportunity to continue and took control of the operation.

⁴⁴ Lamirande, p.204

⁴⁵ Paul-Emile, *Grey*, p.32.

Sr. Phelan's success in managing a group of workmen in Bytown in 1850 raises the question of why these men obeyed her and how they viewed a Sister of Charity. It is probable that they would not have taken such direction from a lay-woman. In her discussion on undertaking a study of religious women in nineteenth century Ireland, Caitriona Clear mentioned that when she told people what she planned to do "a common reaction was one of incredulity and amusement – what were nuns anyway, half-clergy, half-women, and not enough of either to merit examination."⁴⁶ In nineteenth century Bytown the Sisters were able to take advantage of the incongruity of this situation. Recognized by the public for the value of the work they were doing with the poor, they had the advantage of the good-will of the population. They utilized this advantage to expand their services and their work with the poor. As Maria Luddy has pointed out philanthropy was an integral part of female religious organizations. Working with the poor in their homes and through their organizations they had a powerful influence on the religious beliefs of the people. She notes that in "pursuing their own religious life, which involved charity work, nuns were agents of missionary activity"⁴⁷

The Sisters of Charity were also agents of change in nineteenth-century Bytown. While the work that they did fulfilled the mandate of the Roman Catholic clergy who wanted to consolidate these institutions as part of the Catholic Church, it also provided the Sisters with successful and satisfying careers. In working with the Irish in Bytown, the Irish immigrants who joined the order had the satisfaction of knowing that they were providing much needed services. However, the spirituality which infused their lives and provided the impetus to continue to work in this religious community encouraged them to

⁴⁶ Clear, p. xvii.

⁴⁷ Luddy, p.46.

treat all they served as equal regardless of class or ethnic background. This egalitarianism was extended into the lives of the members of the community and was reinforced by the Mother Superior, Elisabeth Bruyere. She continually reminded the Sisters of their purpose which was to fill their lives with prayer and to dedicate themselves to the service of the poor. For the lower-class Irish women, membership allowed them to enhance the value of their work which was done in the service of God and for the good of the religious community; for the middle-class women working to serve and to educate the poor gave them the opportunity to utilize their individual talents. It also fulfilled the aspirations of the middle-class families who appreciated that their daughters had become part of a respected religious community. They had all been drawn to join a community whose mandate was to help the poor and the destitute. Therefore, the work that all the Sisters accomplished combined to create a network of social services that served the needs of the individual members of the Order, those of the population and helped to fulfill the mandate of the hierarchy by strengthening the Roman Catholic church in the area.

CONCLUSION

When the Sisters of Charity arrived in Bytown in 1845, they established a hospital, a bi-lingual school, and began to visit the poor and infirm in their homes. The Sisters and the network of social services they provided are central to the social history of nineteenth-century Bytown. This frontier area was rapidly developing into a commercial centre and the Roman Catholic hierarchy was aware of the importance of establishing a viable mission in the town. The situation in Bytown was complicated by the equal number of French- and English-speaking Catholics in the area. Therefore, necessity impelled the clergy to provide bi-lingual services which could cater to both ethnic groups. The establishment of the Sisters of Charity in Bytown strengthened the ability of the Church to negotiate the ethnic tensions in the area. Although they were members of a highly structured organization, the Sisters were fluid and progressive in their thinking. This enabled them to expand their roles in the society. The overwhelming need for religious and social services in the area could not be dealt with by the clergy alone and the Church hierarchy allowed the women a certain amount of autonomy. Consequently much of the day-to-day work was organized and run by the Sisters themselves. They took advantage of the opportunities available to them and the variety of services they provided displays their flexibility and their willingness to adapt to the changing needs of the population.

The fact that a number of these Sisters were Irish reinforces the importance of recognizing that Irish migration to Canada pre-dated the 1847 famine. The crucial

significance of the social services framework created by the Sisters was evident in 1847 when a flood of Irish immigrants threatened to overwhelm the city and exposed the inadequacies of the public health system. Because the Sisters already had services in place, they were in a position to alleviate the distress of the population. That the Sisters were assisted by Catholic, Protestant, French- and English-speaking members of the public demonstrates that the urgency of containing the disease and re-establishing order in the city transcended ethnic, class, gender, and religious tensions. The services provided by the Sisters benefited all segments of society. When the crises passed, the situation of the Roman Catholic Church in Bytown continued to be complicated by the ethnic diversity of the Catholic population. Although both ethnic groups were aware of the necessity of working together, neither side was willing to allow the other group to have complete control and both remained conscious of their linguistic and cultural differences. Therefore, while French- and English-speaking Catholics co-operated, the ethnic tensions were never far below the surface. The Sisters of Charity were not immune to these subtle and underlying tensions, but the Mother Superior, Elisabeth Bruyere, continued to insist that their duty was to cater to the poor and infirm and struggled to focus on the spirituality which was central to their lives.

The mandate of the Sisters of Charity was to care for the poor and the infirm regardless of their ethnic or religious background. Although they worked within the Roman Catholic hierarchical system and are easily overlooked, they did not just assume a male agenda. They shared the clergy's belief that the population would benefit from the establishment of Roman Catholic services. The Sisters had come to Bytown with the intention of creating a network of institutions designed to alleviate the distress of the poor

and were inspired by their belief that these services were essential to the lives of those they served. Their institutions expanded in response to the needs of the population and were financed by their income from the school and donations from the public. The Sisters' spirituality and dedication was evident in their commitment to their work and sustained them, especially in periods when they put their own lives in danger while caring for the poor. They administered both spiritual and physical care to their patients and were convinced that it was their duty to do so. This social action was central to their faith and their spirituality inspired them to become agents of change.

In an era in which middle-class values stressed the importance of women's role as nurturing and caring members of society and their duty to help the poor, it was accepted that a group of religious women would be suitable to undertake such tasks. The local population appreciated the assistance provided by the Sisters and a number of local middle-class women of both denominations took advantage of the opportunity to augment these organized services. This was an accepted part of what was considered to be women's work in the nineteenth century, therefore, the women were not upsetting the mores of society by undertaking such an endeavor. However, they gained satisfaction from knowing that they were helping to stabilize society by fulfilling their duty to help the poor. The Sisters were active and visible in the community. As members of this religious congregation and through their organizations, the Sisters gained access to the people in ways that would have been impossible for the male clergy to achieve. They were welcomed into the homes of the poor and the more affluent members of Bytown society and therefore promoted the caring face of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Sisters of Charity in Bytown had taken vows which separated them from the society. However, their work brought them into daily contact with the population. Although their lives were regulated by their dedication to a routine of work and prayer, the Sisters continued to uphold the middle-class values of nineteenth-century life. The rise in the number of vocations in the nineteenth century demonstrates that lay women were aware of how much the Sisters accomplished and the advantages of being part of a religious community. The fact that in Bytown between 1845 and 1875 twenty-four Irish women decided to join an Order dedicated to work with the poor provides a glimpse into the lives of the Irish diaspora in Canada. The subsequent careers of these women within the Order highlights the complexity of Irish female immigrants' experiences in Canada. For the famine immigrants becoming a member of the Sisters of Charity allowed them to carve out satisfying lives for themselves, albeit a domestic one. The first generation Irish-Canadian girls who joined were well educated and decided to pursue careers as teachers in the Order. Their parents had chosen to send their daughters to be educated by a group of Sisters whose curriculum stressed the value of educating girls in academic subjects while continuing to remind them of their obligation to the poorer members of society. The deliberate choice to send their daughters to such a school demonstrates that the middle-class Irish immigrants in Bytown approved of such an education and shared the values of the nineteenth century. The fact that a number of these girls decided to join also underlines the powerful influence that the Sisters had as role models in society. The juxtaposition of a highly academic curriculum and emphasis on the importance of charitable works inspired these girls to join the Order to share the lives of their mentors and to continue their work in the schools.

The important role that the Sisters played in shaping the emerging city was enhanced by their position as religious women in the society. The clergy were certainly involved in the decision making in the Order, but the Sisters persisted in following their own agenda. Although they occupied a subordinate position in the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy, the work that they did gave them leverage and allowed them to have a level of autonomy that was unusual for women in this time period. The Sisters' paradoxical situation in Bytown, which became Ottawa in 1857, allowed them to create a network of institutions that had a powerful influence on the people that they served. As the city grew and more resources became available their services were augmented by Protestant institutions and the French- and English-speaking population were no longer forced to share facilities. However, the institutions they established remained under their control and were central to the development of social services in the area. The Sisters established a viable mission and through their organizations they played a significant role in the history of the growth and development of the city of Ottawa.

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