

The Catholic High School, Montreal

by
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Every Irishman when he leaves his homeland to go to another country carries with him, held high, two flaming torches. In his right hand is the torch of his Catholic religion and in his left, education.

The mass migration to Canada from Ireland was at its flood between the forties and the nineties of the past century. Thousands upon thousands of Irishmen came to this country and went on to the United States, but many remained in the city of Montreal.

Those who came were forced, at first, to fulfil menial tasks and their hopes of an education were unfortunately not realized. However, they instilled deep in the hearts of their children their religion, and thirst for knowledge.

While examining the records of births in the sixties in Montreal at the Court House, I was at first appalled at the oft repeated entry "godfather and godmother being unable to sign their names made their mark."

What a change has been wrought in the intervening years where here in Montreal we have Loyola College, soon to be a University, Marianopolis College, Catholic High School, and many high schools under the direction of the Catholic -School Commission.

Let us examine briefly the conditions under which education flourished, or rather languished, as far as English-speaking Catholics were concerned at the close of the last century.

Parochial schools, of course, had been set up but there was no place for the students to go from the primary schools except to the college or seminary.

Our Catholic children were in a minority in every educational institution., French being the language of the vast majority, it was only natural that English should hold a minor place. We were confronted with the situation of having our children taught their own language by French teachers.

One remedy was to have English-speaking teachers, but this seemed to be out of the question, because of the extraordinary expense and the lack of English teachers.

There were some, but not many English-speaking teachers, and those that were employed also had to direct the French in the classes. As a direct result of these conditions our children were far below their fellow non-Catholic citizens, educationally.

When our boys left the schools, except for the fact that they had a greater knowledge of French, they were incapable of competing with non-Catholic English boys for positions of preferment.

This condition of affairs had not been overlooked, but it seemed, at the time, that other matters were of greater urgency, and so they had taken first things first.

But now matters could be delayed no longer and, under the powerful guidance of the energetic Father Quinlivan methods were adopted to found a Catholic high school which would be well conducted for the teaching of sound English and mathematics by first class teachers, and located centrally, so that the boys from all our city parishes might come to it.

Father Quinlivan was determined that this dream of his and of other leading Catholics of Montreal, should no longer live in the realm of fantasy, but should become a material fact. With this great object in view he marshalled the doctors, lawyers, professional and business men, the citizens generally, and, not unmindful of the working girl who had given the thousand dollars, the women.

The result was an instant response by the generous and noble hearted people of that era and funds were quickly forthcoming to establish the first English-speaking Catholic high school in the Province of Quebec.

I need not dwell here on the tremendous work which was accomplished by these pioneers of education, but I think it only fair that I should mention the names of those who became the first Governors of the institution.

According to the Charter of the Catholic High School, the Pastor of St. Patrick's Church is the ex-officio chairman, two members were appointed by the Archbishop of Montreal, and six elected by the charter members.

His Grace Archbishop Bruchesi named Father E. Strubbe, C.S.S.R., pastor of St. Ann's Parish, and Father P. F. O'Donnell, pastor of St. Mary's Parish. The other Governors were the Hon. Mr. Justice Curran, the Hon. Doctor Guerin, M.L.A., Mr. Charles F. Smith, Mr. Frank J. Hart, Mr. William McNally and Mr. Martin Eagan.

It is interesting to note that of the lay members, their names and the names of their families are still to be found among the prominent Irish Catholics of Montreal.

One of Mr. Justice Curran's sons, Mr. Justice Frank Curran, succeeded his father as Judge of the Superior Court of Montreal. Another son, Mr. Louis Curran, K.C., is still a member of the Bar of the Province of Quebec, and another son carved for himself a distinguished career as a doctor in England.

Mr. Charles F. Smith's sons distinguished themselves in business and financial circles, and one, Francis Smith, S.J., became a member of the Jesuit

Order, and left his share of his father's estate to help pay for the erection of St. Ignatius Church in Montreal.

The Hon. Doctor Guerin's son, Thomas Guerin, distinguished himself as a diplomat and author, and for some time occupied the same seat in the Quebec Legislature which his father held many years before.

Mr. Frank J. Hart's sons conducted the business of their father and distinguished themselves in financial affairs in the city of Montreal.

Mr. Martin Eagan's family is still represented in one of the large business enterprises in Montreal.

It is hard to look back fifty years and to try to choose upon whom to award the palm for the initiation of an enterprise of this kind, but I think all will agree that it was due to the efforts of Father Quinlivan that the Catholic High School of Montreal became an accomplished fact.

Apart from the many other things which he had done for the English-speaking Catholics of Montreal, he was still not too busy to found the Catholic High School.

To me the most interesting story of the initiation of the Catholic High School is the following: – The original moneys that came to hand were \$2,000.00. \$1,000.00 was a bequest from the late Senator Edward Murphy and \$1,000.00 from a working girl, handed to Mr. Justice Curran. To me this proves that the desire for education was as great in the heart of that working girl as it was in the heart of the great philanthropist, Senator Murphy. A bazaar contributed another \$1,000.00 and a garden party completed the corner stone of the financial structure of the building.

It is impossible, at this time, to enquire into the actions, worries, troubles and heart-breaks that preceded that fine fall day, the 18th September 1898, when the corner stone was laid by Archbishop Bruchesi, in the presence of a most distinguished gathering of federal, provincial and municipal officials, of the highest members of the clergy, the various parish priests and the outstanding English-speaking Catholics of the day.

Father Quinlivan presided and introduced the Mayor of the city. The Hon. Doctor Guerin, representative of the English-speaking Catholics in the Provincial Administration, opened his address with these words, "This, indeed, is a proud day for the Irish Catholic citizens of Montreal. For a long time we have felt there was something we required; and the establishment of this institution today is going to create a boon amongst us, the want of which has been felt for very many years past." "We thank the French Canadian element for their sympathy and support and the Gentlemen of St. Sulpice for their cooperation and liberal contribution."

He referred to the magnificent work that Father Quinlivan had done for St. Patrick's Parish, and for the Irish people in general and congratulated

him on this, his newest achievement in the furtherance of the ambitions of his people.

Mr. M. J. F. Quinn, member of the federal Parliament, spoke of the success obtained by our co-religionists in the United States and in the other provinces of Canada, and deplored the fact that up to then there had been “only one elementary school in which the English language alone is taught.”

Let me quote the memorable words of His Grace Archbishop Bruchesi on this occasion. “I have said it more than once as a Bishop that I do not make any distinction in a City like this between one nationality and another; I am the father and friend of all those who live under my jurisdiction.”

“But if I did not make any distinction between French, English and Irish, I will not do anything to destroy nationality. On the contrary I will do all that is in my power to sympathize with all nationalities and to strengthen them because I know that if we French Canadians are proud of our language and attached to our dear traditions, the English and Irish are also proud of their language and also attached to the traditions of their ancestors.”

“Let the Irish be Irish, let the English be English and let the French Canadians be French Canadians, but we must not forget that both languages French and English are official in our Province and in our City.” “We must live together as brethren and as members of the same family. Let the French Canadians learn English, and let the English learn the language of their friends and brothers, the French Canadians.”

In this respect I might say that though a large number took advantage of the sage Archbishop’s advice, too many paid no heed at all.

It might be interesting to list here the Societies that attended the laying of the corner stone.

The ceremony was attended by representatives of the leading Irish Catholic societies of the city.

While the male choir of fifty voices under the direction of Mr. Fowler, organist of St. Patrick’s Church, and Mr. George A. Carpenter sang the *Veni Creator* the stone, into which had been placed a parchment scroll and a copy of the *True Witness*, was well and truly laid by the Archbishop.

The following September the building, erected by Messrs. Hughes and Brisson with William E. Doran as architect, was opened for the English-speaking Catholic children of Montreal.

The School was a three storey building in pressed brick and terra cotta above the stone basement. All the interior walls were brick, the staircases of iron and steel, and air conditioning must have been in the minds of the builders, for we read: “the heating will be by steam on the direct system. By this a constant stream of fresh air will pass through the radiators in each department, and being heated will diffuse through the rooms displacing the

vitiated air, which will descend through brick flues to the basement and thence by ducts, to the main shaft, the air in which, being expanded by the heat from the boiler flue, will cause an upward draft.”

“In the summer months, this flue will have a special heater thus drawing on ten flues in the different rooms, causing a thorough ventilation on the vacuum system, as fresh air will be constantly coming in to supply the place of that drawn away.”

The building stood in a magnificent plot of ground in Belmont Park, the corner of Palace and St. Geneviève Streets, which an historian of the day assures us was “a most respectable and central locality.”

Its position was central and healthy, being removed from the noisy streets to secure the quiet and seclusion so desirable for a school. It would have been difficult to choose a spot more convenient for pupils coming from the different English-speaking parishes of Montreal.

But if the educational condition of the children prior to the opening of the school had been bad, the lack of teachers was even worse.

For reasons best known to the then Governors of the school, it was placed in charge of lay teachers. The distinguished scholar from England, Mr. A. J. Hales-Sanders, M.A., was the first principal and in the course of the next two or three years the following served in a teaching capacity: Mr. Gordon R. Brady, Ontario, Mr. Michael Shine, Nova Scotia, Mr. Daniel O’Keefe, (still living and to whom I am greatly indebted for the early history of the school. He was the only local member of the teaching staff), Mr. Henry Matthews, Mr. F. D. Henderson and Mr. D. A. Shortell. Three of the priests of St. Patrick’s were also on the teaching staff, Father McShane, Father McGrath and Father Ouellette, the last named teaching French.

There were twelve classrooms with courses leading to the Seminary, University and Commercial life, and in addition a junior high school under the capable direction of the Reverend Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame.

The school was opened for pupils in the fall of 1899. This was a magnificent beginning for an educational venture, the like of which had not been seen before in the city of Montreal or the Province of Quebec.

One might, with justification, presume that the Catholic High School of Montreal was off to a glorious career. Such, however, was not the case.

On the 12th March, 1902, a cable was received from Paris which shocked the parishioners of St. Patrick’s by announcing the death of their beloved Pastor, Father Quinlivan.

The loss was a great one to the parish and, as later events proved, an even greater one for the Catholic High School of Montreal. For within a short time, the brain and the driving force being gone, it closed its doors

never to reopen as a Catholic High School. It survived Father Quinlivan by only one year.

The magnificent edifice in Belmont Park in the “respectable locality” remained idle for four years, when it was purchased by the Catholic School Commission and turned into St. Patrick's School.

It was subsequently vacated and torn down to make room for the new Canadian National Central Station.

It operated in a much smaller way under the name of “Blinkbonnie” on Sherbrooke Street West facing Durocher Street, under the same principal and a much curtailed staff.

The Governors of the Catholic High School were at no time inactive and when opportunity presented itself, they purchased a fine house with a yard and coachman's house in the rear, situated at the corner of Durocher and Milton Streets.

Four years later it reopened under its original name the Catholic High School of Montreal.

The choice of this site was particularly happy, because it was situated almost equidistant from the homes of Mr. Justice J. J. Curran and Mr. Charles F. Smith, two of the most active Governors of the School.

This house had been abandoned for sometime and was badly in need of repair. Weeds grew in the garden and the coachman's house had a sad and deserted look. The building was repaired and four class rooms established, a play room was set up in the basement, and the top floor was reserved as living quarters for the principal and his family.

The new teaching staff was a veritable league of nations. The Principal was from England, the teacher of mathematics from Ireland, the teacher of English and history from Australia, and the teacher of French was from France.

The school, apart from the ordinary subjects, also went in for dramatics and physical culture. The dramatic section was under the direction of Mr. W. A. Tremaine. Things proceeded well for some four years, and then a change was made in the direction of the school.

In 1910 the late Canon O'Meara persuaded the Brothers of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Cork, Ireland, to come to Montreal and take over St. Gabriel's parish school.

They received a warm welcome and quickly repaid the trust that had been placed in them. Their excellent work was brought to the attention of the then, and now, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Catholic High School, Father McShane, about whom I shall say more later, and a contract was drawn between the Board of Governors and the Presentation Brothers

whereby the latter would have the internal direction of the Catholic High School, under the Board, starting in September 1911.

Brothers O'Connor, O'Keefe, Callaghan and Kirby were the first brothers at the school. Brother O'Connor was the Principal and the others ably assisted him.

Brother O'Connor was a fine physical specimen, well over six feet, built in proportion, whose two great passions were the love of teaching and hatred of hypocrisy. He was sincere, honest, hard working and from the very first captured the respect of the pupils, and at all times had their cooperation.

He initiated in the school an honour system, which bore great fruit, and the boys who were under his care went forth from the school enriched in learning and ennobled in character.

The teaching of religion was in the very capable hands of Father Reid, then Chaplain of St. Patrick's Orphanage, to-day the distinguished Monsignor Martin P. Reid, P.P., D.P., Pastor of the Church of St. Augustine of Canterbury.

It was soon found impossible for the Brothers to live on the premises, and a home was found for them on Durocher Street, which they occupied for a few years.

They moved later to St. Famille Street, and finally back to 55 Durocher Street, which was remodelled for their use after the new school had been erected.

Among the early graduates of the Catholic High School were J. J. Perrault, one of Montreal's distinguished architects and William Wall, later Chairman of the drive for Federation of Catholic Charities in Montreal.

Results of the teaching of the Irish Brothers, as they were affectionately known, came quickly, and in the first two years Herbert Foran and Clarence Honey won Exhibitions in the matriculation examinations at McGill University. Mr. Foran later went on to become the first individual to receive his Master of Science Degree in Chemistry at McGill University.

Hockey, basketball, track and field events were enjoyed by the boys. The old Jubilee rink augmented the miniature rink in the backyard and the spacious Shamrock Grounds allowed plenty of room for outdoor recreation.

Pierce Murphy, one of the pupils, held the World's High School record for the 160 yards dash, and later distinguished himself in business in Montreal.

Between 1910 and 1920 the Great War intervened and numerous students and graduates joined the armed forces and there worthily upheld the traditions of their *Alma Mater*.

In sports in those early days, competition in athletics was almost restricted to inter-class games, but now, and for many years past, the

Catholic High School plays in competition with other high schools of the city, and has earned more than its share of trophies.

It had been the custom in the old country that the teachers played with the pupils in the athletic contests. As this was unheard of here, it never took root and the Brothers were forced to find their exercise elsewhere.

They did not, however, give up without a struggle, but realizing that they could not impose it, they gracefully retired. They did, however, attempt to teach the students soccer and Irish rugby, but finding no cooperation in these games quickly turned to the Canadian games and became quite adept, not only in learning the games themselves, but passing on their knowledge to new pupils as they came in.

It is worthy of note here that when the Irish Brothers came to Canada, they came willing and anxious to receive and embrace the customs of the new country, and unlike the Romans of old, left their Lares and Penates at home.

One of the first things that they did, soon after reaching Canada and deciding that it was to be their home, was to establish a novitiate at Longueuil, and to-day eight of the nine Presentation Brothers of the Catholic High School are Canadian born.

With the close of the War in 1918 and the return of the soldiers from overseas, the number of pupils in the school quickly increased.

The Brothers pressed for time and space did great work and importuned the Board of Governors for larger quarters. Extra-mural scholars were taken on and were prepared for Board examinations.

Brother Boyce, the greatest teacher it was ever my privilege to meet, prepared four young men for the Board examinations of the Bar of the Province of Quebec. These examinations were taken in two parts. All four passed both examinations, and the late John P. Callaghan, K.C., led all candidates in both examinations. J. Austin Murphy, K.C., some time President of St. Patrick's Society, Alderman for Notre Dame de Grace, and some time Pro-Mayor of Montreal, was another member of this quartet.

In 1920 the Board of Governors decided the time had come when the expansion of the Catholic High School was a necessity. Again a rallying cry went out to the fine generous citizens of Montreal and after a terrific campaign the magnificent sum of \$260,000.00 was raised in cash and pledges.

Sometime previously a piece of property was placed at the disposal of the Catholic High School by the Board of Wardens of St. Patrick's in virtue of an emphyteutic lease for 99 years. The lot of land purchased measured 170 feet frontage and 120 feet in depth, and the sum paid by the Church was \$52,500.00.

This new High School was inaugurated in the fall of 1922. The school building proper had cost \$260,000.00, and the old school was renovated and made into residential quarters for the Brothers at a cost of a little over \$13,000.00.

Needless to say, the Brothers were delighted, not only with the magnificent school, which had been placed under their internal management, but also because at last they had satisfactory living quarters.

The Catholic High School was indebted to our French-speaking brethren for much assistance in its foundation and in its establishment.

The school has continued to repay this debt year after year, and among leading French Canadian doctors, lawyers, dentists and men in commercial life, are to be found many Catholic High School graduates.

The school has grown tremendously in the fifty odd years of its existence. It has taken its place firmly in the community life of the city. It has sent forth to the priesthood, professions, and to the business world many fine graduates and pupils who have continued to shed lustre both on the school itself and its capable teachers.

A special book should be written on its contribution to the armed forces during the past War. Too often we saw a picture in the public press of a clean cut boy with the notation "killed in action... pupil of the Catholic High School."

No attempted paper on the Catholic High School could possibly omit St. Patrick's Parish and Father McShane. As Mr. John Hackett, K.C., has so wisely written – "it matters not what honours or titles may be bestowed upon him by Church, State, or educational authorities, the Right Reverend Monsignor Gerald J. McShane, PP., D.D, LL.D., will always remain Father McShane to his devoted parishioners."

This young priest, ordained in 1897, came to St. Patrick's Church in 1900, and three years later when the Sulpicians gave up the direction of the Church, he became a curate of Notre Dame. From 1900 he taught in the Catholic High School and in 1907 became Chairman of the Board, a position which he has continuously held.

Gentleman of St. Sulpice, never was a title more worthily bestowed. He brought to St. Patrick's the fire and energy of his youth coupled with a tremendous capacity for work and a keen mind.

If Father McShane were said to have an ambition, I think that it was to see that the English-speaking Catholics, not only of his own parish but of Montreal generally, should be better educated and better prepared for what life might have to offer them.

Day in and day out he has preached the value of education. He has continuously urged parents to leave their children in school, at no matter what sacrifice to themselves.

He has encouraged scholarships among all the English-speaking Catholic boys of Montreal, and God has seen fit, not only to reward his labours, but to grant him these rewards in his own lifetime.

He has been a driving force continually seeking to better the standard of education. Not content with the high standard set by the Irish Brothers themselves, he insisted on outside examiners, eminent teachers and professors to test the results of the Irish Brothers' training.

I have personally examined every minute of the meetings of the Board of Governors of the Catholic High School and they disclose, not only by what they say but by what they leave unsaid, the intense interest of the Chairman in the institution.

These minutes are a model in brevity and taciturnity. It is true fire and flood are mentioned in the minutes, but one will search them in vain to find one word of thanks or appreciation for the Chairman of the Board.

Father McShane received from McGill University the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws, and though it was undoubtedly given to him in great part for his interest in educational matters, yet no mention is made of it.

There is no doubt that in the election of Governors to the Board, Father McShane's advice was asked and taken. Men were chosen from far beyond the limits of St. Patrick's Parish. Men, who were known, not only for their interest in education, but men who had made a personal success of their own lives and were therefore in a position to advise youth about its future.

On examining these minutes I was most forcibly impressed by the fact that money seemed to be of the least importance. On those occasions when a deficit was announced it was quietly absorbed by the Parish.

When land was needed upon which to erect the new building, again the Parish was there with a choice centrally-located plot of land. When teachers were required for religious instructions and apologetics, the Parish supplied them.

When money was needed to erect a new school, Father McShane found it. In this regard I would like to recall the conversation I had with Monsignor Reid many years ago, when I said to him – “tell me Father why is it whenever Father McShane asks for money he always gets it,” “because” said Father Reid, “whenever you give money at the request of Father McShane you can always see it. If you give it to the church, you may go there to Mass and you will find dustless pews, well lighted interior, beautifully adorned altar, fine choir, excellent music, and above all the devotions carried on with the utmost dignity and reverence. If you give money for a school, you

may go up to Durocher Street and place your hand upon a brick and say ‘my \$5.00 paid for that brick’.

“If you give him money for the orphanage or the old people’s home, you may go to either of these places and see your money at work.”

The minutes of the annual meeting of the Board of Directors contained a resolution that a campaign be authorized to raise \$250,000.00 to erect a new building for the Catholic High School of Montreal.

One turns the pages and reads in the next minute that the campaign had been a success and \$259,000.00 had been raised. Not a word, not a line, not a phrase is set down to tell posterity of the effort required to raise this large sum of money. The Governors of the Catholic High School took it in their stride.

The Catholic High School has contributed greatly to the number of priests in the archdiocese of Montreal. In my own class there were Father Francis Gallery, CSS.R., Father Thomas O’Shaughnessy of the Paulists, Father William Sullivan, Parist Priest at St. Kevin, Montreal, Father Smeaton of the Society of Jesus. Fathers Brown and McCaffrey, afterwards Rectors of Loyola College, Montreal, studied at the Catholic High School.

In the formation of a character of a priest, many factors must be taken into account, but I feel that the Right Rev. Monsignor Martin P. Reid must be given the credit for leading many of these youngsters of the Catholic High School to the altar of God. He, it was, who came to us from beyond the mountains and taught us the principles of our religion. Chaplain of St. Patrick’s Orphanage, it was said of him that “he lived in a library” where his plain room in the Orphanage was lined with well thumbed volumes.

In teaching us our religion he conveyed to us some of his great culture and learning, and also his charm and gentleness. He taught us that our religion was bright and cheerful, to be followed for its own sake, but through it, with it, and by it, we would certainly find, not only eternal happiness, but temporal happiness as well. He became in turn a school inspector and member of the Catholic School Board, and those of us who went on to McGill University found him our Chaplain in the Columbian Club.

Through the years the following have been Governors of the Catholic High School: the Right Rev. Monsignor Donnelly, Very Rev. Canon O’Meara, the Very Rev. Canon McCrory, Mr. J. T. Davis, the Hon. Doctor Guerin, the Hon. Doctor W. L. McDougall, Mr. Patrick Monohan, Mr. G. W. Farrell, Mr. J. J. Meagher, K.C., Doctor William Atherton, Ph.D., K.C.S.G., M.B.E., Litt.D., Mr. E.M.G. Quirk.

The present Board is composed of the Chairman, the Right Rev. Monsignor Gerald J. McShane, the Right Rev. Monsignor Martin P. Reid, the Rev. Jasper Stanford, Mr. Justice Paul Casey, Mr. Justice Frederick Collins, Doctor E. J. Mullally, Mr. Donald G. Munroe, Mr. H. C. Fortier.

The Dean of the Presentation Brothers in Montreal to-day is Brother O'Keefe, who for many years taught in the Catholic High School.

There are in Montreal to-day a large number of professional and business men who found, and find in him a great mentor and friend. A brilliant teacher with a kindly disposition and infinite patience, he endeared himself to the students as none other. To-day, after fifty years in the Order he is still active as Director of St. Willibrords School in Verdun.

Dr William Atherton, was associated with the Catholic High School for many years. For some time he acted as Secretary of the Board and his great learning and culture did much to uphold the high standards of the school.

To-day the Catholic High School of Montreal as an institution makes a great contribution to the community.

The school itself has fourteen classes with an enrollment of over five hundred pupils, with the best and most modern equipment. It has a staff of ten brothers, two priests, two French teachers and five lay teachers.

It is a great monument to those early pioneers who did something to provide the English-speaking Catholics of Montreal with a high school education.

I would like to close with the words taken from the Catholic High School Year Book of 1935 written by the distinguished present Rector of Loyola College, himself a graduate of the School in 1923: "Schools should not be judged by the magnificence of their buildings, nor by the success or calibre of their teams nor even in the ultimate analysis by the scholastic attainments of their graduates, though this is a more reliable criterion than the others. No, schools should be rated by what they do to you, by the training, mental and physical which they give, by the character they develop and impress upon their pupils."

The Catholic High School of Montreal is not wanting in the above requisites for a successful school.