

**MARITIME ENTRANTS TO THE CONGREGATION OF NOTRE DAME,
1880-1920: A RISE IN VOCATIONS**

by

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ABSTRACT

Nearly five hundred women from the Maritimes entered the Montreal-based Congregation of Notre Dame between 1880 and 1920. They were an integral part of the rise in vocations that characterized religious life in Canada in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Most entrants had come to know the Congregation through its Maritime convent schools, particularly in the northeastern region of New Brunswick, eastern Nova Scotia, and Queen and Prince counties in Prince Edward Island.

The Congregation tended to attract well educated women, with previous work experience, from families with relatively high socio-economic status. These women identified various factors which influenced their decision to enter religious life, including spiritual calling, and family influence. While the demographic characteristics of entrants changed over the four decades of study, the motivational factors remained constant.

By 1920, Maritime women constituted one fifth of the new entrants to the Congregation. Their presence, and their Scottish, Irish and Acadian origins, diversified and enriched the ethnic composition of this traditionally French-Canadian community.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS IN CANADA

This thesis focusses on women from the Maritime provinces who entered the Congregation of Notre Dame (CND) between 1880 and 1920. It is an attempt to redress an imbalance in the existing historiography which often details the impact of the rise in vocations in Quebec, but ignores the fact that non-Quebecoise women also experienced this phenomenon. Not only did communities in English Canada experience growth, but the increase in vocations in the CND and other Quebec-based orders could not have occurred to the extent that it did without the substantial influx of women from outside Quebec. The sharp differences in the historiography of Quebec and that of English Canada on this topic are not surprising, however, given the role of Catholicism in the two areas. While Catholicism and religious life were central to the Quebec experience, they were more peripheral to the experience of English Canada. As a means of expanding the historiography, two basic questions will be examined: who were the Maritime entrants, in terms of socio-economic status and origin; and why did they choose to enter religious life?

There are several reasons for examining the foundation and development of the Congregation of Notre Dame in the Maritimes. By 1869 it had established houses in all three Maritime provinces, it continued to expand its Maritime mission well past 1920, and it welcomed increasing numbers of Maritime women to its fold over the period in question. As well, the existing historiography of female religious communities in Canada devotes considerable attention to the CND, due in part to its rich and accessible archival sources.

The period, 1880 to 1920, encompasses the establishment of the Congregation in the Maritimes. By 1880 the Congregation had been teaching in most areas for several years and an increasing number of Maritime women were making the decision to enter the order. As well, 1880 often is cited as the time when vocations in the Canadian Church began increasing significantly. The parameter of 1920 was selected somewhat arbitrarily, since the increase in entrants continued until the 1960s, but ending in 1920 allows for the study of four decades of entrance patterns and trends.

The primary sources used in this research are almost exclusively from the CND archives. Novitiate registers, necrologies and other community documents provide the essential information. Necrologies usually contain excerpts from the woman's biography which detail her reasons for entering and her family history. Though these biographies may be somewhat self-censored, given that they were written at the

request of superiors and kept in the woman's file, they nevertheless serve as valid indicators of the factors which motivated the woman to enter religious life. These documents are supplemented with census material and career files. The availability of this material makes it possible to know a great deal about the women who chose to become sisters and about the community they entered.

Women within the Catholic church have always received some attention from historians, but traditionally their stories were told because they were considered to be saints, or examples of virtuous living. More often than not these women were nuns¹ or young women esteemed for their determination to preserve their virginity and to follow the will of God. Such historical works were hagiographic in tone and were intended more as examples to the faithful than as records of historical fact. Written works on Catholic women in Canada, both lay and religious, heralded the achievements of these faithful, God-fearing women, but rarely credited them with the ability to think or act independently, or to assess critically the situations in which they found themselves.²

¹ Throughout the thesis the terms nun, sister, and women religious will be used interchangeably, despite the canonical differences among them, to denote women who entered religious communities and took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

² As examples of this see: The Pearl of Troyes, (Montreal: Canada Printing Co., 1878); Sister St. Rita of Jesus, A Grain of Mustard Seed. The Congregation de Notre Dame of Montreal, (Montreal: Congregation of Notre Dame, 1965); Robert Rumilly, Histoire de Montreal, tome I and II,

It was not until the late 1970s, when women's history emerged as a vibrant field of research, that the lives and contributions of religious women, sisters and lay women, shook off the cloak of hagiography and took their rightful place in the wider context of historical achievement. No longer did women organize groups, found religious communities, open schools and hospitals, and venture to frontier areas simply because divine providence urged them to do so. Rather, after 1970, historians began to situate such efforts within the context of developing socio-economic and religious structures which had prohibited women's activities in certain spheres while strongly encouraging their participation in others.

In the late-nineteenth century, the home and family were considered to be the most suitable realms for women's activities. Male church and secular leaders devoted much thought to what was proper for women, or perhaps more pointedly, what roles women would be required to take on to help society reach the goals these leaders had set. The Catholic Church, especially after the proclamation of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, promoted a narrow version of the Virgin Mary as the ultimate role model for women. She was praised for her lack of sensuality, sexuality and worldliness, and for her obedience and purity; and Catholic women were encouraged to follow her example as

perfect wife and mother.³ Without diminishing its emphasis on the Catholic woman's importance as wife and mother, in the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries the Catholic hierarchy also, with great success, promoted religious life as a legitimate and highly desirable alternative to marriage and motherhood for young Catholic women. The image of Mary proclaimed by the Church also served as a powerful role model for women choosing religious life. In fact, only celibate women could hope to attain the Christian perfection exemplified by the Virgin Mary.⁴ Women responded to this alternative in unprecedented numbers between 1850 and 1960 and this century-long movement to the convent can now be identified as one of the most significant events in Canadian women's history.

Unquestionably, the rise in vocations beginning in the 1850s had its greatest impact in Quebec due to the overwhelming Catholicity of the society and the culture, but the impact was not negligible in the rest of the country. Congregations were created outside of Quebec and Quebec-based orders established houses in other parts of Canada and the United States and, subsequently, women from these areas entered religious life in large numbers as well, thereby

³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, Mary - The Feminine Face of the Church, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 41.

⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether, Liberation Theology, (New York: Paulist Press, 1972), 45.

fueling the growth of Quebec-based religious communities.⁵

Not surprisingly then, most historical work on women religious in Canada has focussed on the Quebec context and has been carried out by Quebec scholars. A substantial body of work has emerged in the United States⁶, however, and research on religious life in the rest of Canada slowly is beginning to accumulate. The body of work on Canadian religious women outside of Quebec, however, remains limited and piecemeal and an overall cohesive picture has yet to emerge.⁷

The recent scholarship of women religious has emphasized

⁵ Chapter three will discuss the increase of Maritime entrants to the Congregation of Notre Dame during this period.

⁶ Among others, see: Eileen Mary Brewer, Nuns and the Education of American Women 1860-1920, (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1987); Mary Ewens, O.P., The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth-Century America: Variations on the International Theme, (New York: Arno Press, 1978); Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, Women and Religion in America, Vol. I, II and III, (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1981, 1983, 1986); Sr. Frances Jerome Woods, CDP, "Congregations of Religious Women in the Old South" in Catholics in the Old South. Essays on Church and Culture, Randall Miller and Jon Wakelyn, eds., (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1983), 99-123.

⁷ Many communities have produced their own histories but, though documenting the development of the order, these rarely offer much scholarly analysis. Two historians of note, Barbara Cooper and Elizabeth Smyth, are working on religious orders in English-Canada, but there remain extensive gaps in the historiography. See Barbara Jane Cooper, "'That We May Attain to the End We Propose to Ourselves...': The North American Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1932-1961", (PhD Thesis, York University, 1989); and Elizabeth M. Smyth, "The Lessons of Religion and Science: The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph and St. Joseph's Academy, Toronto 1854-1911", (Thesis for Degree of Doctor of Education, University of Toronto, 1989).

several time periods. The first centres on the establishment of religious life in the North American colonies. Women such as Marie de l'Incarnation, Jeanne Mance and Marguerite Bourgeoys became Canadian heroines for their energetic devotion to the success and development of the colonies. Recent works have been invaluable in placing these women in the context of their day and realistically evaluating their achievements.⁸ The second period of significant scholarly attention, and perhaps the one which, to date, has the richest historiography, is that encompassing the rise in vocations between 1850 and 1960.⁹ The third period involves the decline in vocations beginning in the 1960s. The last, so far, has

⁸ Examples of this include: Elizabeth Rapley, The Dévotes. Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1990); Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson, Naomi Black, Canadian Women. A History, (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988); Patricia Simpson, CND, Marguerite Bourgeoys: Daughter of Troyes, Mother of the Colony, (Montreal: Congregation of Notre Dame, 1984); Sr. Rebecca McKenna, "Marguerite Bourgeoys: Project Realized or Deferred?", (unpublished paper, 1991).

⁹ For historical works see: Marta Danylewycz, Taking the Veil. An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood, and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1920, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987); and Cooper, "That We May Attain". Significant non-historical works include: Suzanne Campbell Jones, In Habit. An Anthropological Study of Working Nuns, (London: Faber and Faber, 1979); Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh, Out of the Cloister. A Study of Organizational Dilemmas, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977); Sara Harris, The Sisters. The Changing World of the American Nun, (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Co., 1970); Marc-Andre Lessard and Jean-Paul Montminy, "Les religieuses du Canada: âge, recrutement et persévérance", Recherches Sociographiques, VIII, 1 (January-April 1967), 15-47; Sr. Helen Francis Small, SSND, "Changes in Traditional Norms of Enclosure. A Study of the Secularization of Religious Women", (PhD Thesis, McMaster University, 1973).

attracted more attention from academics in other disciplines, but important historical questions need to be asked about this sudden, though perhaps not surprising, decline in women's interest in religious life.¹⁰

This thesis focusses on the second historical period, that of the rise in vocations. Between 1851 and 1961 communities of religious women proliferated in Quebec, bringing the number of vowed female religious from 650 to 35,000.¹¹ The Catholic hierarchy, which prior to the mid-nineteenth century strictly limited the numbers of entrants religious orders could accept, responded to the new challenges and opportunities of the changing Canadian society by encouraging communities to accept more entrants and by creating new religious orders. Initially this took place predominantly in Quebec where the Catholic church exerted tremendous social and political power, but other provinces soon followed suit. By the 1850s the three Maritime provinces were in a position to begin supporting religious orders of teaching and nursing sisters.

¹⁰ For examples see: Fuchs Ebaugh, Out of The Cloister; Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh, Women in The Vanishing Cloister. Organizational Decline in Catholic Religious Orders in the United States, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1993); Marie Augusta Neal, Catholic Sisters in Transition: From the 1960's to the 1980's, (Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1984); Lucinda San Giovanni, Ex-nuns: A Study of Emergent Role Passage, (New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1978); Bernard Denault and Benoit Levesque, Éléments pour une sociologie des communautés religieuses au Québec, (Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montreal, 1975).

¹¹ Marta Danylewycz, Taking the Veil, 17.

Beginning in the late 1840s, the ideology of ultramontanism took hold in the Quebec hierarchy and influenced the bishops' attitudes towards religious congregations of women. The essence of ultramontanism centred on two main principles: the restoration of papal authority as the supreme Christian authority, and the establishment of the supremacy of religion over secular society, that is, the supremacy of Church over state.¹² Religious orders of women and men - though the latter were never as numerous or as large as the women's orders - were very useful tools in the pursuit of ultramontanist goals. The leading exponent of ultramontanism in Quebec was the Bishop of Montreal, Mgr. Ignace Bourget. He and others encouraged existing congregations to expand, both in membership and in number of missions, invited foreign orders to establish houses in Quebec, and worked to establish new orders to meet newly identified social and religious needs.¹³ If the church was going to claim authority in dealing with social welfare

¹² These themes are explored in Nadia Fahmy-Eid, Le Clergé et le pouvoir politique au Québec. Une analyse de l'idéologie ultramontaine au milieu du XIXe siècle, (Montreal: Editions Hurtubise HMH, 1978); Philippe Sylvain and Nive Voisine, Histoire du Catholicisme Québécois, tome II (1840-1898), (Montreal: Editions Boreal, 1991); Roberto Perin, Rome in Canada: The Vatican and Canadian Affairs in the Late Victorian Age, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); Fernand Dumont, Jean-Paul Montminy, Jean Hamelin, Idéologies au Canada Français, 1800-1900, (Quebec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1971).

¹³ Denault and Levesque, Eléments pour une sociologie des communautés religieuses au Québec, 76.

concerns and demands it also would need the personnel to carry out the claim.

One of the primary battlefields in the propagation of ultramontanist ideas was that of education. According to the Church, the objective of education was the proper development of both the spiritual and temporal aspects of the individual, the spiritual being of greatest importance. The traditional involvement of religious orders in education took on renewed vigour and the proportion of vowed religious, male and female, involved in education soared.¹⁴ As sisters moved into new localities and taught more and more children, in particular more girls, an increasing number of young women had the opportunity to meet religious women and learn about religious life on a first hand basis.

The proportion of vowed religious involved in education soared not only because Church leaders encouraged communities to reach more children, but also because they, along with secular leaders, did little to make teaching a viable career choice for lay women. Female teachers received significantly less pay than their male counterparts and generally could teach only prior to marriage. In rural areas, female teachers

¹⁴ In 1853 11 percent of teachers in Quebec Catholic schools were nuns, brothers or priests. This increased to 22 percent in 1874, and rose again to 48 percent in 1887. Vowed female religious composed the larger part of this group. Brian Young and John A. Dickinson, A Short History of Quebec: A Socio-Economic Perspective, (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, Ltd., 1988), 154.

faced all the ramifications of isolation: loneliness, lack of professional contacts and the danger of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Moreover, their fortunes often depended on the prosperity of the parish in which they were employed. So, if a lay woman wished to pursue a teaching career outside of a religious community, she faced the prospect of a life of poverty and uncertainty. Sisters who taught at least would have the company of other sisters and were assured of the necessities of life.¹⁵

Accompanying this development was a general Church-led promotion of various means of expression of popular faith and devotion for Catholics of all ages. These took the forms of pious organizations, pilgrimages, novenas and organizations aimed at specific social concerns, such as temperance. Church leaders fostered an atmosphere of popular religious culture which made religion accessible to all social classes and provided acceptable means of religious expression for all Catholics, regardless of age or sex.¹⁶

Though Quebec was the epicentre of Canadian

¹⁵ The experience of lay female teachers is presented in: Prentice, et. al., Canadian Women. A History, 129-130; Danylewycz, Taking the Veil, 57-63; Marta Danylewycz, Beth Light and Alison Prentice, "The Evolution of the Sexual Division of Labour in Teaching: A Nineteenth-Century Ontario and Quebec Case Study", Histoire Sociale-Social History, XVI, 31 (May 1983), 81-109; Alison Prentice, "The Feminization of Teaching", in The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History, Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice, eds., (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 49-65.

¹⁶ Danylewycz, Taking the Veil, 38.

ultramontanism, Catholics in the Maritime provinces were not immune to these ideas. Maritime Catholics faced difficulties and realities of life quite different from those of their French-Canadian counterparts however. Catholicism was not the predominant religious tradition in the Maritime provinces generally, though certainly there were areas where Catholics outnumbered Protestants. Anti-Catholic sentiment had been known to run high in the region, especially around the issue of education, and Catholics were careful not to arouse these feelings unnecessarily.¹⁷ Generally however, an atmosphere of religious tolerance prevailed, and though there was little chance that the Maritime Church hierarchy would ever gain the influence and control of educational, social and political realms in the provinces achieved by the Quebec hierarchy, certain prominent Catholics exerted significant influence.¹⁸

In the mid- to late-nineteenth century the Maritime Church was in a position to support the establishment of permanent missions of religious women, predominantly in the fields of teaching and health care. Religious women, sisters

¹⁷ For more detailed discussions see Peter Toner, "The New Brunswick Separate Schools Issue 1864-1876", (MA Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1967); Ian Ross Robertson, "Party Politics and Religious Controversialism in Prince Edward Island from 1860 to 1863", *Acadiensis*, VII, 2 (Spring 1978), 29-59; Ian Ross Robertson, "The Bible Question in Prince Edward Island from 1856-1860", *Acadiensis*, V, 2 (Spring 1976), 3-25; Michael Hatfield, "H. H. Pitts and Race and Religion in New Brunswick", *Acadiensis*, IV, 2 (Spring 1975), 46-65.

¹⁸ The Archbishop Thomas Connolly of Halifax is one such example. Perin, *Rome in Canada*, 16-17.

or nuns, were not new to Maritimers but prior to this era their presence had been sporadic and of short duration.¹⁹ Once the basic institutional infrastructure (parishes, diocesan boundaries, churches, rectories, regular recruitment of priestly candidates) was in place, Maritime bishops turned their attention to establishing opportunities for proper Catholic education for the faithful. On a diocesan level, the pre-eminent need was the creation of Catholic institutions of higher learning to ensure that suitable candidates could be trained for the priesthood. Bishops and local priests supported, and encouraged parishes to support, Catholic schools instead of public schools. Bishops began extending invitations to existing orders and creating their own religious orders, though this was a rare occurrence in the Maritimes, to meet the educational needs of their flock.

Following the example set by their counterparts in Quebec and the Eastern United States, bishops enticed religious communities to send sisters to the Maritimes, and subsequently, religious women from various locations arrived in the Maritimes in the late-nineteenth century. Beginning in 1856, the Congregation of Notre Dame, based in Montreal, sent sisters to all three Maritime provinces. Halifax received

¹⁹ Members of the Congregation of Notre Dame were present in Louisbourg between 1727 and 1758. A.J.B. Johnston, Religion in Life at Louisbourg, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984), 86-109.

Sisters of Charity from New York in 1849²⁰, as did Saint John in 1854²¹. The Sisters of Saint Martha in Antigonish, a community created by John Cameron, the bishop of Antigonish, began work in 1900²². As a result of the arrival of these and other sisters, Catholics who previously may not have known sisters directly now were exposed to them. Sisters were role models of religious life for young women who perhaps had considered the possibility of religious life only on an abstract level. A state of life only talked about or vaguely heard of now was present in a number of parishes. An alternative to marriage or single life presented itself more directly to young Catholic women.

Sisters coming from other areas inevitably brought with them the practices, beliefs and assumptions found in their native localities and this had an important impact on the parishes in which they now found themselves. The Montreal motherhouse of the Congregation of Notre Dame, for example, had close connections to the proponents of ultramontanism and

²⁰ Sister Maura, The Sisters of Charity Halifax, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1956); Sr. Marianna O'Gallagher, SCH, "The Sisters of Charity of Halifax - the Early and Middle Years", Canadian Catholic Historical Association, 47 (1980), 57-68.

²¹ Sr. Estella Kennedy, SCIC, "Immigrants, Cholera and the Saint John Sisters of Charity: The First Ten Years of the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception, Saint John, NB 1854-1864", Canadian Catholic Historical Association Study Sessions, 44 (1977), 25-44.

²² Sarah MacPherson, CSM, "Religious Women in Nova Scotia: A Struggle for Autonomy. A Sketch of the Sisters of St. Martha of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, 1900-1960", Canadian Catholic Historical Association, 51 (1984), 89-106.

the sisters actively promoted various types of popular devotions in their schools. This practice continued in the Congregation's Maritime schools.²³

Parish demand for the sisters' services was keen. Clearly the laity believed that sisters offered an advantage for the children and for the parish as a whole. Parishes in a financial position to establish a convent school eagerly sought the bishop's permission to do so. For religious communities this increased demand necessitated increased numbers of sisters and as communities moved into new locations success often was measured, in part, by the number of vocations to religious life that arose. Congregations responded to invitations to found new missions out of a desire to serve the people of God, but were not unaware of the new possibilities for recruitment that accompanied such establishments. An often unspoken reciprocal arrangement was assumed.²⁴

So, the institutional Church sought ever greater numbers of entrants to religious life as part of its religious and social goals in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Religious women were an efficient and inexpensive labour force in education, health-care and other areas of social welfare. Married women and mothers could be involved actively in this work only to a limited degree, if they hoped to remain proper

²³ Danylewycz, Taking the Veil, 46-50.

²⁴ Danylewycz, Taking the Veil, 118-119.

and acceptable in the eyes of the religious and cultural authorities. By contrast, single women, within the confines of a religious order, had much greater freedom to respond to emerging opportunities for involvement in the public sphere. The fact that such involvement could be respectable only if carried out by religious communities, and sometimes not even then²⁵, is a very important consideration. The Church hierarchy wanted women to be active, but very clearly also wanted to be in control of women's activities. Despite the advantages and opportunities offered to them during the rise in influence of female religious communities, women were tools for achieving an overall policy and the builder, in this case the Church hierarchy, must always be in control of his tools.

The control the Church desired over women's work in the field of social welfare is evident especially in its disapproval of organizations founded by lay women. Such groups usually were coerced into becoming official religious communities of vowed women under ecclesiastical direction. Quebec's Sisters of the Misericorde are a typical example of the process of a lay women's group coming more directly under the control of the Church. Rosalie Cadron-Jetté had been working with unwed mothers for some time before Bourget convinced her to establish a religious order to do this work. In so doing she left her children (she was a widow) and home

²⁵ Sisters involved in some fields of social welfare work, such as work with unwed mothers and their children, struggled to maintain social and ecclesiastical approval for their work.

for a life of extreme poverty.²⁶

Historians of religion have shown little more than passing interest in the rise in vocations of this period. They mention the rise, and comment on how it was both a result of expanding mission locations and a factor which enabled further expansion, but do not question why the increase occurred or attempt to measure it in any way. Nor is it clear in this literature that the increase was unusual or an aberration. Neither does this literature consider the rise in vocations from the perspective of the women involved, other than to make brief general statements about their being blessed with a vocation, or chosen for the holiest of states by God. From this perspective the only possible reasons for entering the convent are spiritual ones with no connection to more worldly realities. A recent study of entrance trends during the 1930s negates the argument that spiritual openness was the sole determining factor in the decision to enter the convent, however.²⁷ The religious historiography also neglects the question of who the entrants were in terms of age, class, ethnicity and geographic origin. These issues are

²⁶ Sylvain and Voisine, Histoire du Catholicisme Québécois, tome II (1840-1898), 46-47; Clio Collective, Quebec Women. A History, trans. by Roger Gannon and Rosalind Gill, (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1987), 171-172.

²⁷ Barbara J. Cooper, "In the Spirit: Entrants to a Religious Community of Women in Quebec 1930-1939", (MA Thesis McGill University, 1983). Cooper argues that the Depression had a measurable impact on women's decision to enter religious life.

irrelevant to the religious historian whose focus is almost always the institution and not the individual. When individual women are the focus of study it is because they are members of the leadership ranks of their orders and even then their personal origins receive only passing mention.²⁸

Family origin and socio-economic background are important though, if one wishes to consider the question of status in and among religious communities and whether the rise in vocations was an experience shared by all socio-economic and ethnic groups. Danylewycz examines the socio-economic origins of entrants in the Congregation of Notre Dame and the Sisters of the Misericorde to identify which classes of women were attracted to which religious order. The literature clearly shows that just as women tended to marry within or above their social class, women entered religious orders whose status was appropriate to their origins. The large selection of communities available meant that there was a suitable order for women of almost every socio-economic class.

Cooper, studying a slightly later period, emphasizes the lived experience of women (including contact with sisters, and educational challenges) as the greatest motivational

²⁸ See, for example: Therese Lambert, Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre Dame, vol. X and XI, (Montreal: Congregation of Notre Dame, 1969, 1974); Sr. Mary Theodore, SAA, Pioneer Nuns of British Columbia, Sisters of St. Ann, (Victoria: The Colonist Printing and Publishing Co., 1931); Sister Maura, The Sisters of Charity Halifax; E. Mitchell, SGM, L'Essor apostolique Soeurs de la Charité de Montreal, "Soeurs Grises" 1877-1910, (Montreal: STM, 1981).

influence, rather than strictly economic factors. She also undertakes an innovative exploration of the role of power, collective and individual as well as internal and external, in the dynamic of religious orders. There is tremendous potential for further exploration of this theme in relation to religious communities of women.

Secular historians, especially social and feminist historians, have been very interested in the reasons for the rise in vocations, both from the perspective of the Church and from that of the women who entered. Were the intentions of the Church and the motivations of the women the same, or did the Church merely offer an option which women turned to their own advantage? In essence, did women enter for the reasons the Church thought they did?

Danylewycz suggests that women turned the opportunity of religious life to their advantage. In the nineteenth century it was the only sphere in which women could advance their education and career opportunities while maintaining public approval. Few women would have cited career aspirations as the motive for their entrance to religious life, yet most would not have been unaware of this potential. Given the tremendous abilities of some sisters it is reasonable to argue that these women knew their talents would have been frustrated in secular society, and chose instead to enter religious life in hopes of using their skills to their full potential. The biographical information of the Maritime entrants suggests

that they too saw opportunities in the convent that were not available elsewhere.

Where historians of religion focus completely on the spiritual aspect of women's choosing religious life, secular historians struggle with reconciling the seemingly separate spheres of spiritual and socio-economic reasons for entering the convent. Historians often seem ill-at-ease with the notion of vocation, as defined in spiritual terms, because it seems, to some degree, outside the grasp of the methods of historical study. For many years secular historians hesitated to examine religious institutions and the individuals within them, perhaps because they too were influenced by the perception of other-worldliness that surrounded such communities. Once sisters were free to have greater contact with laity, some of the myths about religious life and the individuals within it were dispelled and sisters became "real people", open for historical study. In the emerging historiography some historians simply ignored the issue of spiritual call as a factor influencing entrance.²⁹ Most acknowledged, in passing, that a spiritual foundation responsive to the notion of vocation and an awareness of at least the basic elements of religious life were pre-requisites to a woman's choosing to become a sister. Though the notion of vocation must be accepted, because many women cite it as the reason they entered, it cannot be held in isolation from

²⁹ The Clio Collective, Quebec Women. A History.

other factors. Believing one had a vocation did not necessarily guarantee the possibility of pursuing it; other conditions needed to be in place as well. The biographical data of the Maritime entrants to the CND often points to the belief in vocation, and though one could argue that the notion of vocation was fairly personal, pursuing a vocation to religious life often was delayed due to family obligations. As well, many women entered religious life believing they were blessed with a vocation, but then were unable to fulfil their vocation due to poor health.

The trend in the historiography has been to focus on a variety of factors, rather than on one specific motivational factor, which may have influenced women to enter religious life. Danylewycz points to the religious climate in Quebec, career opportunities in the convent and women's desire to pursue a life outside of marriage and motherhood as strong motivations for entrance.³⁰ Cooper, although her study considers the role of the Depression in forming motivations, points, in a more general way, to the possible role of economic factors in determining a woman's choice.³¹ Vaccaro argues that family origin, family size and geographic location contributed to women's proclivity to choose religious life in

³⁰ Danylewycz, Taking the Veil.

³¹ Cooper, "In The Spirit: Entrants to a Religious Community of Women in Quebec 1930-1939".

certain areas of Quebec.³² While the conclusions reached by Vaccaro may not be applied to English Canada as easily as those offered by Cooper and Danylewycz, they do merit some consideration. Other influential factors, such as exposure to sisters in convent schools and having immediate family members in religious life, present themselves in most historical works. The historiography suggests that in choosing to enter religious life, as with any other life-altering decision, many factors were taken into account. The Maritime data bears this out. Entrants often pointed to a combination of factors including vocation, family situation and health, as influential factors.

This study will add to the limited historiography on Canadian female religious communities outside of Quebec, while building on the Quebec research, since the motherhouse and administrative centre of the Congregation of Notre Dame are located in Montreal. It approaches the topic in the Maritime provinces in much the same way as Danylewycz³³ approached rising entrance rates of Quebec women to the CND, so some comparisons between Maritime and Quebec entrance rates to the community can be made. As well, focussing on the socio-economic origins of Maritime entrants will show that, as was the case among Quebec entrants, the CND attracted women of

³² Maria Vaccaro, "L'Origine familiale: un facteur indicatif de la vocation des religieuses au Quebec (1901-1971)", (MSc Thesis, Universite de Montreal, 1987).

³³ Danylewycz, Taking the Veil.

fairly high social status. For the most part, these were educated women who had some amount of work experience.

The historiography points to a variety of factors which influenced women to enter religious life. In their autobiographies, Maritime women also point to various influences that led them to religious life. Spiritual motivation clearly is presented as the basis for entrance in many cases, and when it is not explicitly mentioned it is assumed to be present. However, more worldly factors, such as family responsibilities, interacted with spiritual motivations to determine when, if ever, a woman could pursue a vocation to religious life. In fact, the main motivational factors cited by Maritimers are not unlike those presented in the research on their Quebec counterparts.

The presence of the Congregation of Notre Dame in the Maritime provinces had a direct impact on many Maritime families and shaped, in part, the religious history of the region. Several hundred Maritime women chose to enter the community between 1880 and 1920. They made a considerable contribution to the success and prosperity of the CND and this should not be ignored, either out of religious humility or simple neglect.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONGREGATION OF NOTRE DAME

The beginnings of the Congregation of Notre Dame of Montreal can be traced to the experience of the Counter Reformation in seventeenth-century France. That was the milieu in which the foundress, Marguerite Bourgeoys, developed the spiritual attitudes and beliefs which led her to the mission of Ville Marie. Traditionally, historians have dated the moment of inspiration for the foundation of the Congregation from her arrival in New France¹, or even later², though recent work has begun to explore the link between

¹ Traditional accounts of the order are found in: Pearl of Troyes; Sr. Saint Ignatius Doyle, CND, Marguerite Bourgeoys and Her Congregation, (Quebec: Garden City Press, 1940); Yvon Charron, Mother Bourgeoys (1620-1700), Sr. Saint Godeliva, CND, trans., (Canada: Librairie Beauchemin, 1950); C. della Cioppa, Daughter of Light, Sr. Saint Gabriel de l'Addolorata, CND, trans., (Montreal: Battaglia, 1964); Sr. Saint Rita of Jesus, CND, A Grain of Mustard Seed. The Congregation de Notre Dame of Montreal, (Montreal: Congregation of Notre Dame Press, 1965); Helene Bernier, Marguerite Bourgeoys, (Montreal: Fides, 1974).

² Gustave Lanctot, Montreal under Maisonneuve, Alta Lind Cook, trans., (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Co. Ltd., 1969), 89. Lanctot points to 1658 when Marguerite implemented an educational program for girls over school age, teaching them religion and household skills as the beginning of the Congregation.

Marguerite's experience in France and her work in the colony³.

The Counter Reformation, the Catholic Church's response to the Protestant Reformation, provided the backdrop for the events in seventeenth-century France. It involved a call for the rechristianization of society and unleashed a great energy and enthusiasm, especially among women who viewed the Counter Reformation as an opportunity to explore more apostolically-oriented forms of religious life. While the official Church struggled to keep pace with the reform, the dévotés⁴, women predominantly from the upper classes, were quick to give organized expression to their religious fervour. Some organized themselves into uncloistered groups active in teaching religion, aiding the poor, providing care for the sick and performing other service work. Such new bands of religiously motivated women challenged the Counter Reformation's image of religious life for women, which demanded strict clausura (cloistered separation from the

³ Elizabeth Rapley, Les Dévotes. Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1990); Lorraine Caza, CND, Marguerite Bourgeoys and the Congregation of Notre Dame, Catherine Ann MacDonald, CND, trans., (Canadian Religious Conference, 1977). In this booklet Caza states that Marguerite Bourgeoys considered October 1640, the time of her true conversion, to be the start of her work (p.6). Simpson, Marguerite Bourgeoys: Daughter of Troyes, Mother of the Colony; McKenna, "Marguerite Bourgeoys: Project Realized or Deferred?", (unpublished paper, 1991).

⁴ Dévotés have been described as "deeply religious women, very often unmarried and with time and leisure to devote themselves to the exercise of piety". Rapley, The Dévotes, 6.

world). Some hailed the congrégées⁵, as the women of the groups were called, as representatives of a new form of religious life.⁶ The Gallican tridentine Church refused to accept this modification of religious life and aristocratic society protested the involvement of upper class women in such public activities, so by 1631, under ecclesiastical and social pressure, the uncloistered communities faced the choice of disbanding or accepting the cloister.⁷ This did not extinguish women's desire to play a more active role in the salvation of souls, it simply forced them to adopt a different approach.

After several years of quiescence, the groups re-emerged in the 1640s, but this time they avoided any semblance of official religious communities. The filles seculières, as they were now called, differed from the earlier groups in that they were largely composed of lower class women⁸ and did not speak of themselves as nuns or sisters, or wear garb or symbols that distinguished them as a religious group, and quite often they did not live together as a community.

⁵ Rapley defines congrégées as women "living in community without taking solemn vows". The term was used in the early-seventeenth century but later disappeared. The Dévotes, 204.

⁶ Rapley, The Dévotes, 93.

⁷ Rapley, The Dévotes, 41.

⁸ The groups were able, if they wished, to waive dowry demands, making it possible for lower class women, who could not afford the dowry requirements of traditional orders, to join them. Rapley, The Dévotes, 187.

Generally, they were secular volunteers occupied with simple acts of charity and good works. They performed tasks which were of service to society but which did not threaten the position of the Church or exceed acceptable social limits for women.⁹ The success of these communities was assured because their work was useful without being a burden to civil authorities and because of the manner in which they dealt with the religious nature of their collective undertaking. Where the congrégées of the early seventeenth century desired to modify religious life as it existed, this new generation of dévotes sought to make secular life more devout and religious. The lower class composition of the latter group proved more socially acceptable as well. Marguerite Bourgeoys, a woman "without birth and without property"¹⁰, was well served by her firsthand knowledge of the success and value of these new communities.¹¹

Born into a middle class family of Troyes in 1620, Marguerite grew up steeped in the atmosphere of the Counter-Reformation. She received a rudimentary education typical of that offered to young women of her day. Though raised in a devout family, she explained that her true spiritual awakening took place in 1640 when she experienced some type of vision as

⁹ Rapley, The Dévotes, 93-4.

¹⁰ Rapley, The Dévotes, 100.

¹¹ Mary Anne Foley, "Uncloistered Apostolic Life for Women: Marguerite Bourgeoys's Experiment in Ville Marie", (PhD Thesis, Yale University, 1991).

she gazed upon a statue of the Virgin Mary during a religious procession. At this point she underwent a noticeable change in personality and attitude, resulting in a new-found desire to devote herself to God and to the service of others.¹² Marguerite joined an extern congregation, a group of uncloistered, unvowed young women who taught the girls of the city, under the direction of the Congregation of Notre Dame in Troyes, an order which, since its inception in 1626, had maintained an interest in organizing secular women in groups to work among the laity.¹³ Marguerite was the prefect of this group for many years, becoming an experienced teacher and sharpening her organizational and leadership skills. The ideas of Father Antoine Gendret, the extern congregation's

¹² In Marguerite's own words:

....there was a statue in stone above the door. And glancing up to look at it, I found it very beautiful. At the same time, I found myself so moved and so changed that I no longer recognized myself. When I returned home, this was apparent to everyone....From that moment, I gave up my pretty clothes and withdrew from the world to give myself to the service of God.

Sr. St. Damase de Rome, CND, ed., The Writings of Marguerite Bourgeoys, Sr. Mary Virginia Cotter, CND, trans., (Montreal: Congregation of Notre Dame, 1976), 163.

¹³ Rapley, The Dévotes, 61-72, 101; Simone Poissant, CND, Marguerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700), Frances Kirwan, CND, trans., (Montreal: Les Editions Bellarmin, 1982), 17.

The Congregation of Notre Dame in Troyes, devoted to performing corporal and spiritual acts of mercy, especially educating young girls, was part of an order begun in 1597 which, after 1615, spread rapidly throughout North Eastern France. The Church forced the community to accept the cloister in 1628.

spiritual director, had a tremendous impact on Marguerite.¹⁴

A strong advocate of many of the new spiritual teachings of the seventeenth century, Gendret developed a plan for implementing the notion of a third state of religious life for women based on the journeying example of Mary, the mother of Jesus.¹⁵ During the Counter-Reformation, this notion joined the already existing states of the recluse in imitation of Mary Magdalene and the cloistered women serving their neighbours in imitation of Martha. Several young women, including Marguerite, responded enthusiastically to Gendret's plan and formed a small uncloistered community under his direction. The group of three dissolved shortly after its inception: one member died and another married, so Marguerite returned to the extern congregation but remained convinced of the merit of the type of group Gendret envisioned.¹⁶

The religious revival of seventeenth-century France also expressed itself through missionary zeal. The group associés de Notre Dame pour la conversion des sauvages de la Nouvelle France en l'île de Montreal appeared in 1640 for the purpose of establishing a Christian farming colony on the island of

¹⁴ Damase de Rome, The Writings of Marguerite Bourgeoys, 88, 163-4; Rapley, The Dévotes, 101; Foley, "Uncloistered Apostolic Life for Women", 28.

¹⁵ La vie voyageère includes the ideas of journey, reflection and the transitory stages of life. The English translation of "the journeying example of Mary" fails to capture the fullness of the concept. Foley, "Uncloistered Apostolic Life for Women", 184-188.

¹⁶ Poissant, Marguerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700), 18-19.

Montreal, complete with a seminary, a school to train native and French girls and a hospital. The committee appointed one of its members, Paul Chomedey de Maisonneuve, to be the founder of the colony at Ville Marie, known later as Montreal. Maisonneuve, along with his recruits and volunteers, arrived at the post in 1641 and set about the business of building and converting.¹⁷

Maisonneuve had two sisters living in Troyes whom he visited upon his second return from the French colony in 1652. One of these was Sister Louise-de-Sainte-Marie, director of the extern congregation of Notre Dame of which Marguerite was a member. Sister Louise urged her brother to take several of the sisters of her cloistered community to Ville Marie to provide an education for the children of the colony. Maisonneuve refused on the grounds that a cloistered order was beyond the financial resources of the colony and unsuited to the needs of the settlers. He could only bring one woman back to Ville Marie and she could not possibly be limited by the cloister. Such being the case, his sister recommended Marguerite Bourgeoys to him as a woman of integrity and ability who might be interested in his proposal. After much prayer and advice-seeking Marguerite resolved to accept the

¹⁷ John Irwin Cooper, Montreal. A Brief History, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1969), 2-3; Lanctot, Montreal Under Maisonneuve, 19; Robert Rumilly, Histoire de Montreal, tome I, (Montreal: Fides, 1970).

offer despite the hardship and scandal it would entail.¹⁸

Upon her arrival in 1653, Marguerite discovered that it would be several years before the number of children in the colony would warrant opening a school, so she turned her attention to other matters. She was a driving force behind re-erecting the cross on the mountain and plans for building a chapel, in addition to her assigned duties of keeping house for Maisonneuve and doing sewing and laundry for the soldiers.¹⁹ Her purpose in these early years, as in the years to follow, was to provide service in response to the needs of the colony. She realized from her knowledge of uncloistered congregations in France and her conversations with Maisonneuve that she and the community she hoped to build would have to provide useful, beneficial service without being financially burdensome to the colony if they were to remain a part of Ville Marie.

The children of the colony were numerous enough in 1658 for a school to be opened and Marguerite returned to France in search of women to join in this task. Three women who had been members of the extern congregation with her and who believed in the work of the filles seculières, Catherine

¹⁸ The idea of an unmarried woman accompanying over 100 men on an ocean voyage remained rather scandalous despite the improving social attitudes towards women's active involvement in religious and social service. Poissant, Marquerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700), 21-27.

¹⁹ Poissant, Marquerite Bourgeoys, 28-9; Rapley, The Dévotes, 103.

Crolo, Edmee Chatel and Marie Raisin, agreed to return to Ville Marie with her. So four women with a common background and experience of religious activity set out to establish a secular congregation financed through their own paid work, primarily sewing, in New France.²⁰ A subsequent visit to France in 1670 yielded six more recruits to the group. Within a few years of this the colony itself began to provide new members for the Congregation.²¹

Though the basic idea for the type of community she wished to establish had been clear from the beginning (a group of uncloistered, active women bound by simple vows, as Gendret advocated), as the group grew there was a need to formalize the principles Marguerite envisioned for the Congregation. First and foremost the Congregation would be dedicated to and formed in imitation of the Virgin Mary, towards whom Marguerite held a great devotion.²² The sisters would live in community under the counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, wear simple dress, practise proper mortification and devote themselves to going out in service to their neighbour, especially in the area of educational needs, as this was closely related to the salvation of souls. Dowries would not be demanded since Marguerite, as a result of her

²⁰ Poissant, Marguerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700), 31-2.

²¹ Foley, "Uncloistered Apostolic Life for Women", 50-52.

²² Damase de Rome, The Writings of Marguerite Bourgeoys, 47, 67-73.

experiences in France, placed greater emphasis on the interior disposition to religious life than on the financial resources of young women.²³ She envisioned a group of women suffering the hardships of even extreme poverty for the glory of God.²⁴ A good number of women seemed to share her vision. Designs for the Congregation were not made in isolation however. Marguerite continued to consult with ecclesiastical superiors and congregations in France that held similar ideas about new religious communities.²⁵

The concept of education to which this new congregation subscribed was very broad in its application and had as a basis a response to the needs of the people. The school established in 1658 to meet the educational needs of the children of the colony (in the initial years the sisters taught boys as well as girls) was just the beginning, as the sisters also set out to educate those women past school-age, calling them together on Sundays and feast days to instruct

²³ Damase de Rome, The Writings of Marguerite Bourgeoys, 142.

²⁴ Damase de Rome, The Writings of Marguerite Bourgeoys, 97-8.

²⁵ Damase de Rome, The Writings of Marguerite Bourgeoys include letters to Remy, the ecclesiastical superior of the community (p.15), and to Tronson, the superior of the Saint-Sulpice in France (p.141-6, 153); and reference to Mme. Miramion, the foundress of a congregation of uncloistered women in France (p. 42). Rapley, The Dévotes, 109. Rapley mentions Marguerite's contacts with Mme. Miramion and les filles de la croix in France. Foley, "Uncloistered Apostolic Life for Women", 95.

them in the rudiments of religion.²⁶

Once the Congregation counted a few more members and new needs developed it added other programs of education to its mandate, including a home to train the King's Wards when they arrived from France (1659)²⁷, the vocational school La Providence (1663) where crafts and domestic skills were taught, a mountain mission school for native children (1680) and a boarding school for the daughters of prominent colonists (1681).²⁸ The community financed these developments through the property they now owned, thanks to the careful investment of their own resources, and through the generous support of benefactors in the colony and in France.²⁹

The Congregation enjoyed great support from all social levels in the colony. The eventual success and perpetuation of the group could not have occurred without this support. When the sisters began to work towards ensuring the preservation of their endeavour by soliciting royal and ecclesiastical approbation the colonists were quick to endorse a petition to the King asking that letters patent be granted to the

²⁶ Poissant, Marquerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700), 30; Rapley, The Dévotes, 103.

²⁷ Marguerite's decision to live with these women after they arrived caused some dissension in the Congregation. Damase de Rome, The Writings of Marquerite Bourgeoys, 178.

²⁸ Poissant, Marquerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700), 36-38, 45-47.

²⁹ Rapley, The Dévotes, 105-108.

Congregation³⁰. Louis XIV signed his approval in June 1671 with the understanding that the women in the Congregation would not take vows of any kind which would suggest they were attempting to be nuns. The influence of the Sulpicians³¹ and the members of the associés... in the Court went a great distance towards convincing the Minister of Finance, Colbert, to advocate on the sisters' behalf.³²

The approbation of Church officials proved more difficult to obtain. Whereas the King judged the Congregation favourably primarily on the basis of the lack of financial burden it imposed on the Crown and its promotion of social stability, the Church had more complex issues to consider. There was the whole question of the forms of religious life that would be considered acceptable in the colony, a debate carried over from the situation in France. The Church hierarchy of the French colony was well aware, however, of the popular support enjoyed by the Congregation and the valuable social and spiritual service it offered.³³

³⁰ Rapley, The Dévotes, 107.

³¹ The Sulpicians were a well-established and influential male religious order in France to whom the "Associés..." had transferred seigneurial rights of the Island of Montreal in 1663. The Indian mountain mission involved both the sisters and the Sulpicians and the latter were strongly supportive of all the Congregation's endeavours.

³² Margaret Mary Drummond, The Life and Times of Marguerite Bourgeoys (The Venerable), (Montreal: D and J Sadlier and Company, 1907); Rapley, The Dévotes, 107-9.

³³ Rapley, The Dévotes, 107.

In 1676 Bishop Laval extended his support for the community by officially approving the Congregation of Notre Dame of Montreal as a community of secular women, a community of filles seculières.³⁴ He refused, however, to approve the Rule inspired by Gendret, under which the group had been living, because of his reluctance to accept uncloistered women as true members of religious life. For years the Congregation worked towards the official approval of a community Rule. It sought the advice of clerics who supported the concept of uncloistered communities, met with the Bishop on the matter and continued to entrench itself in the social and educational structures of Ville Marie and the missions.³⁵ Finally the community and the bishop reached an agreement on the Rule. The sisters would be bound by four simple vows: poverty, chastity, obedience and teaching young girls³⁶, but would not be bound by the cloister. To finalize the agreement, the community accepted the possibility of demanding a dowry of all entrants, though was not officially required to do so until 1722.³⁷

³⁴ Poissant, Marquerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700), 35-36.

³⁵ Poissant, Marquerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700), 36-41.

³⁶ Church officials in New France initially demanded a vow of obedience to the Bishop as part of the agreement but the Congregation successfully avoided this stipulation. The fourth vow, teaching young girls, was dropped in 1863 when the General Chapter revised the Rule.

³⁷ Foley, "Uncloistered Apostolic Life for Women", 125, 206.

Marguerite and the women who joined her succeeded in establishing an uncloistered teaching order, and fulfilled Gendret's hope that the type of community not possible in mid-seventeenth-century France would be possible in late-seventeenth-century New France.³⁸ In spite of the disappointment provoked by the dowry concession, the 24³⁹ sisters of the Congregation of Montreal joyfully pronounced their official vows publicly, for the first time, on June 25, 1698 and turned their attention to other matters.⁴⁰

At the time of Marguerite's death in January 1700 the Congregation was fairly well established in Ville Marie and the surrounding areas. The community counted 48 professed sisters based in the mother house in Ville Marie but working in over eight missions.⁴¹ The community continued to expand, adding 40 missions by 1855, and though Church officials urged the sisters to expand the order in 1806, the sisters chose to limit their numbers to a maximum of 80 until 1843. And so, for nearly 150 years the Congregation operated on a system of

³⁸ Doyle, Mother Bourgeoys and Her Congregation, 39-40.

³⁹ Six additional sisters made vows two months later, as they were in Quebec at the time of the initial profession. Florence Quigley, CND, In the Company of Marguerite Bourgeoys, (Ottawa: Novalis, 1982), 97.

⁴⁰ Poissant, Marquerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700), 58-59.

⁴¹ Pearl of Troyes, 345-346; Poissant, Marquerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700), 68. The exact number of missions is difficult to determine because many of the Congregation's records of the period from 1690 to 1703 were destroyed by fire.

a waiting list, admitting women only when membership fell below 80.⁴² This rate of expansion pales in comparison to the development that occurred after 1855.⁴³

Beginning in the 1840s the Canadian Catholic Church experienced a revival of sorts, a dramatic resurgence and expansion of influence, religiosity and in the number of individuals vowed to service in the Church. The most important driving force behind the revival was the emergent ultramontanist doctrine that reasserted the power and importance of the papacy, promoted a policy of centralization within the Church, and rallied the faithful to the fight against liberalism, individualism, materialism, Protestantism and all other influences thought hazardous to a true Catholic faith. The Canadian Church hierarchy, for the most part, eagerly seized upon the ultramontanist ideology propounded by Rome at this time.⁴⁴ The influence of the ultramontanes was perhaps strongest in Quebec⁴⁵ where the Church was one of the

⁴² Doyle, Marquerite Bourgeoys and Her Congregation, 213.

⁴³ Between 1855 and 1900 the Congregation founded 90 new convents. Poissant, Marquerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700), 69.

⁴⁴ For more detailed discussions of ultramontanism see Nadia Fahmy-Eid, Le Clergé et le pouvoir politique au Québec. Une analyse de l'idéologie ultramontaine au milieu du XIXe siècle, (Montreal: Editions Hurtubise HMH, 1978); Philippe Sylvain and Nive Voisine, Histoire du Catholicisme Québécois, tome II (1840-1898), (Montreal: Editions Boreal, 1991).

⁴⁵ The Bishop of Montreal from 1840 to 1876, Msgr. Ignace Bourget, a strong supporter of ultramontanism, gave the Canadian Church a flavour of ultramontanism that proved to be unequalled in any other country. Marguerite Jean, Evolution des communautés religieuses de femmes au Canada de 1639 à nos

main pillars of the social structure and maintained a stronghold on the province until well into the mid-twentieth century, but English Canada was also profoundly influenced by ultramontane doctrine.

In English Canada, where Catholics were a minority, ultramontanes sought to build separate and distinct Catholic cadres in order to preserve the faith. Assimilation was a great fear. To prevent it, the Church urged Catholics to establish separate schools, parish structures, social groups and associations such as temperance leagues, and called for a more fervent devotional life from its faithful. Attending Protestant religious services ceased to be acceptable, while various Catholic practices were popularized (novenas, praying the rosary, 40 hour devotions) and brought more order to religious expression.⁴⁶

Changing demographic realities also forced the Church to expand its role in many aspects of social service. As the population shifted to urban industrial centres, new social issues came to the attention of the clergy who responded by creating diverse programs and institutions to meet the needs of the Catholic population. The Church soon found itself responsible for the erection and maintenance of hospitals, orphanages, maternity hospitals, day care centres, food

jours, (Montreal: Fides, 1977), 77-78; Sylvain and Voisine, Histoire du Catholicisme Québécois.

⁴⁶ Jean, Evolution des communautés religieuses, 78.

depots, hospices, asylums for the indigent, elderly and insane.⁴⁷

Concerns about the need to provide children with a solidly Catholic education grew as provinces formulated educational policies in the mid-nineteenth century and bitter debates ensued over education legislation in most provinces. Catholic leaders realized education was an essential element in the successful dissemination and entrenchment of ultramontanist ideals among the faithful and so took an active role in the fight for denominational schools.⁴⁸ In Quebec, the Church controlled school administration and curriculum quite directly and forcefully by ensuring that vowed religious, sisters, priests and brothers, comprised the greater part of the Catholic teaching staff in the provincial school system. In 1853 only 11 percent of teachers in Catholic elementary schools were clerics or women religious, but by 1887 this percentage had risen to 48 percent.⁴⁹

Three simultaneous means emerged to supply this growing superstructure of schools and social service institutions with qualified staff and administrators: increasing the size of existing communities, creating new communities and introducing

⁴⁷ Brian Young and John A. Dickinson, A Short History of Quebec, (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1988), 157.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of this development see C.B. Sissons, Church and State in Canadian Education, (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1959).

⁴⁹ Young and Dickinson, A Short History of Quebec, 154.

European-based communities in Canada. From the time of the English conquest until 1840 only seven official communities of women religious existed in Canada⁵⁰ and these had not expanded to any noticeable degree during those years. The increase in the numbers of women's religious communities after 1840 is especially apparent in the diocese of Montreal where Bishop Bourget tirelessly sought to grant canonical existence (official status within the Church as a recognized religious order under episcopal control) to groups of women, for the most part groups that were already doing charity work of one sort or another. His efforts, coupled with the cooperation of the women involved, resulted in the creation of four new female communities in the diocese of Montreal in the 1840s.⁵¹ The effects of the developments in Quebec spilled over into English Canada and parts of the United States, where bishops were involved in the process of founding their own congregations and inviting existing religious communities of women to work in their dioceses.⁵² Religious women,

⁵⁰ The Congregation of Notre Dame was the largest of these seven with just over 80 professed sisters in 1840. Jean, Evolution des communautés religieuses, 65.

⁵¹ Jean, Evolution des communautés religieuses, 92.

⁵² The bishop of Halifax invited sisters from the New York Sisters of Charity community to his diocese in 1849. They became an independent order of the Sisters of Charity with their own mother house in 1856. Honoria Conway of the New York Sisters of Charity arrived in Saint John in 1854 after persistent invitations from the bishop. She became the foundress and first superior of the Saint John Sisters of Charity. In 1894, Bishop Cameron initiated the formation of the Sisters of Saint Martha in Antigonish in response to the

considered the most efficient source of a permanent stable organization to provide and administer educational and social services, were a valued asset in any diocese. The bishops of Halifax, Saint John and Antigonish established congregations in their dioceses between 1849 and 1894.⁵³

The women who founded or served as co-founders of the new religious communities often studied in the boarding schools of established communities, such as the Congregation of Notre Dame, prior to taking on the task of creating their own congregations⁵⁴. They were thereby familiarized with the

need for a stable housekeeping staff at St. Francis Xavier University. This group of sisters trained the women who became the Sisters of Saint Martha of Prince Edward Island in 1916. Sr. Marianna O'Gallagher, SCH, "The Sisters of Charity of Halifax - the Early and Middle Years", Canadian Catholic Historical Association, 47 (1980), 57-68; Sr. Estella Kennedy, SCIC, "Immigrants, Cholera and the Saint John Sisters of Charity: The First Ten Years of the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception, Saint John, NB 1854-1864", Canadian Catholic Historical Association Study Sessions, 44 (1977), 25-44; Sarah MacPherson, CSM, "Religious Women in Nova Scotia: A Struggle for Autonomy. A Sketch of the Sisters of St. Martha of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, 1900-1960", Canadian Catholic Historical Association, 51 (1984), 89-106.

⁵³ Jean, Evolution des communautés religieuses, 77.

⁵⁴ Eulalie Durocher attended a CND boarding school in Montreal but was refused admittance to the community due to poor health. She went on to found the Soeurs des Saints Noms de Jesus et de Marie in 1843. Jean, Evolution des communautés religieuses, 81. Another aspect of this training process is evident in the arrangement offered by the Superior of the Congregation when approached to send sisters to Tracadie, Nova Scotia. She informed the bishop's representative that she was unable to spare CND sisters for the mission, but offered to train any women he wished to send in the fundamentals of teaching and religious life. Three women were sent to Montreal and returned after their training to form the nucleus of a community of Trappistines. D. J. Rankin, History of the County of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, (Toronto: The MacMillan

internal structures and daily observances of religious life. But perhaps more important, they became acquainted with the desire of the existing communities to increase in strength and subsequently become less vulnerable to and dependent on ecclesiastical authority. The new communities sought, wherever possible, to do the same. One of the most common methods of gaining this independence was to formulate constitutions that restricted ecclesiastical influence and then to seek papal sanction which would allow the community to deal directly with the Vatican instead of with local bishops.⁵⁵

Obviously, the decree limiting the number of sisters in the Congregation was out of step with the religious and educational needs of mid-nineteenth century Quebec. The community had been asked to ignore the limitation in 1806 but the Sisters, so used to functioning within the constraints of the limit, were slow to respond to the request, so slow in fact that the number of professed had scarcely risen above 80 by 1843 when Bishop Bourget urged them to increase their membership. Once the community accepted that an expansion was in its best interest and that it would be supported by the official Church, the flood gates opened.⁵⁶

Company of Canada, 1929), 65.

⁵⁵ Jean, Evolution des communautés religieuses, 221-237.

⁵⁶ Doyle, Marquerite Bourgeoys and Her Congregation, 255-256.

The rate of increase of professed sisters was overwhelming and the Congregation's ability to accommodate the number of entrants, especially during the initial phases of the increase, attests to its competence in administration and logistical planning. In 1841 the community counted 81 professed sisters; this number increased to 148 in 1850, more than doubled to 333 in 1863 and nearly doubled again by 1880 to include 600 sisters. By 1890, 1002 sisters were professed and at the turn of the century the Congregation recorded 1176 living, professed sisters. The rise in numbers continued until well into the twentieth century, with 1402 sisters in 1910 and 1898 in 1920.⁵⁷

The elimination of membership restrictions allowed the Congregation to pursue a rather aggressive, though always cautious, expansion policy. By mid century the community, regarded as the most prestigious women's teaching order in the country, received numerous offers to establish missions in various dioceses in both Canada and the United States.⁵⁸ As the Sisters moved into new geographical areas they successfully attracted young women to their Congregation and

⁵⁷ Doyle, Marquerite Bourgeoys and Her Congregation, 256; Therese Lambert, Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre Dame, vol. X, tome II, (Montreal: Congrégation de Notre Dame, 1969), 133-134; Poissant, Marquerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700), 68; and membership counts done by archivists of the Congregation of Notre Dame.

⁵⁸ Lambert, Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre Dame, vol. X, tome II, 133-134.

thereby fuelled the process of growth and expansion.⁵⁹

The infrastructure of the community remained solidly based in Montreal and the province of Quebec remained the most prominent field of the Congregation's activity as it established new schools, expanded existing institutions and broadened the scope of its educational endeavours⁶⁰, but beginning in the 1840s the sisters moved into four new regions where they were to have a tremendous impact on the education of young women. These regions were Ontario, the Middle United States, the Eastern United States and the Maritime Provinces.

The Congregation located its first English mission in Kingston Ontario in 1841⁶¹, then was invited to Williamstown in 1865⁶², Peterborough in 1867 and Ottawa in 1868. It continued to expand throughout Ontario for more than a century. As French Canadians emigrated to the United States, especially to Illinois and New England textile towns in the

⁵⁹ Marta Danylewycz, Taking the Veil. An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood, and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1920, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 19-20.

⁶⁰ The Congregation responded to the demand for increasingly diversified and sophisticated educational programs for women by developing various institutions, such as academies, boarding schools, écoles ménagères, a normal school and a woman's college. Danylewycz, Taking the Veil, 19.

⁶¹ The Congregation were the founding teachers in other Kingston schools in 1859, 1867 and 1876. Sr. Calista Begnal, "Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame, Nineteenth Century Kingston", Canadian Catholic Historical Association Study Sessions, 40 (1973), 27-33.

⁶² This mission closed in 1892. Sr. Saint Rita of Jesus, Grain of Mustard Seed, 32.

second half of the nineteenth century, the sisters of the Congregation followed to serve the educational needs of the emigrants. Providing French Catholic schools away from home, as part of the parish structure, enabled the French Canadians to preserve their language and religion and contributed to the maintenance of a strong community identity.⁶³

Fortress Louisbourg in 1727 was the Congregation's first exposure to the Maritimes, but this mission was linked with the fate of the fort and so after several deportations and countless hardships the community left the area in 1758.⁶⁴ A return to Nova Scotia occurred in 1856 when, upon the bishop's invitation, the Congregation sent five sisters to Arichat. From this modest beginning the Congregation went on to establish 22 missions by 1920, serving localities of

⁶³ Jay P. Dolan, The American Catholic Experience. A History from Colonial Times to the Present, (New York: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1985), 133-134, 178.

⁶⁴ The mission at Louisbourg proved problematic from the very beginning. The sisters had agreed to send several of their number to the fortress community, but due to delays of royal funding and other complications they postponed establishing a school in Louisbourg. However, Sister de la Conception by-passed her community superiors, sought and obtained the approval of Bishop Saint-Vallier to go to the colony. She arrived in 1727 with two lay women and proceeded during her six year stay to bring financial ruin to her endeavours. The court ordered her return to Montreal and three fully authorized CND sisters were sent to salvage the situation in late 1733. The sisters were deported to France in 1745 with the rest of the colonists, returned in 1749 and were deported again in 1758, never to return to Louisbourg. A.J.B. Johnston, Religion in Life at Louisbourg 1713-1758, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984), 86-109; Angus A. Johnston, A History of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nova Scotia, Vol. I 1611-1827, (Antigonish: St. Francis Xavier University Press, 1960), 47-51.

various ethnic backgrounds throughout Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick.

Maintaining the spirituality and spirit of the community became a serious concern as women of various backgrounds joined the order and as the sisters moved farther away from the motherhouse. The Congregation addressed the issue by training all entrants at the Montreal motherhouse, by ensuring that each sister held in her possession a copy of the Rule and the Coutumier⁶⁵ which detailed all aspects of community and teaching life and by strictly enforcing the idea that adherence to these guidelines was of primary importance to living the life of a true religious. The community also adapted administrative structures to meet the changing needs of the Congregation.

Traditionally, the community had been administered from the motherhouse by a council of sisters elected by their colleagues, but in the mid-nineteenth century the ultramontanist push for centralization and consolidation resulted in a formalization and restructuring of the

⁶⁵ The Coutumier was the document detailing the proper response and procedure for every situation the sister might encounter in the community. The process for entering, reasons for dismissal, how to run a classroom, and how to relate with students were all included. The original Coutumier was mis en vigueur in 1768, updated and printed in the same volume as the Rule in 1847 and in 1875 each sister was presented with her own personal copy of both the Rule and the Coutumier. Lambert, Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre Dame, vol. X, tome II, 44-45.

community's governing process.⁶⁶ In 1864 the Congregation created a generalate, a council with greater regional representation, with full authority over all houses of the Congregation and free from local ecclesiastical control, to direct its affairs. Three vicariates (districts of missionary territory) established as sub-governing divisions with elected leaders had some authority but were responsible to the generalate. Pontifical recognition, granted to the community in 1876, necessitated replacing the vicariate structures with six regionally-based provincial administrations in 1888.⁶⁷ Saint Joseph's Province, with its provincial administration located in Charlottetown (until 1971), consisted of the three Maritime provinces.

The early Catholic Church in the Maritime provinces suffered from the same problems the Church faced nearly everywhere in the colonies. The territory was vast, the missionaries few, and, though religion was always important, its outward trappings were not a priority in a situation where basic survival was the primary goal. Gradually, as the colonies moved into the nineteenth century the Church strengthened and became more structured, though the struggle for a Church that would be able to serve the needs of the

⁶⁶ Danylewycz, Taking the Veil, 19.

⁶⁷ Lambert, Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre Dame, vol. X, tome II, 32; Jean, Evolution des communautés religieuses, 241.

whole area was far from over.⁶⁸

The Church and clergy in the Maritimes were under the supervision and authority of the Bishop of Quebec until 1817 when mainland Nova Scotia became a vicariate under Bishop Edmund Burke in Halifax.⁶⁹ Rome further extended the level of local authority, at least tenuously, in 1819 with the naming of Angus MacEachern as bishop of the vicariate apostolic⁷⁰ of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. In addition to those two provinces, his authority encompassed Cape Breton and the Magdalene Islands. MacEachern remained under the immediate supervision of the Bishop of Quebec until 1829.⁷¹ These links to outside authority left the Maritime Church in a rather precarious position in terms of administrative procedures due to the problems of distance, travel and communication common to the time.⁷² By the mid-nineteenth century most Maritime areas had official diocesan structures in place. Diocesan centres included Charlottetown

⁶⁸ Terrence Murphy, "The Emergence of Maritime Catholicism, 1781-1830", Acadiensis, XIII, 2 (Spring 1984), 29-49.

⁶⁹ J. Brian Hanington, Every Popish Person. The Story of Roman Catholicism in Nova Scotia and the Church in Halifax, 1604-1984, (Archdiocese of Halifax, 1984).

⁷⁰ A vicariate apostolic is an ecclesiastical district in a missionary territory.

⁷¹ Murphy, "The Emergence of Maritime Catholicism", 49.

⁷² Johnston, History of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nova Scotia; Murphy, "The Emergence of Maritime Catholicism", 48.

(1830), Halifax (1842), Saint John (1842)⁷³, Antigonish (1844)⁷⁴ and Chatham (1860).⁷⁵

Once local bishops could exercise their full episcopal powers the process of development in each diocese accelerated and they generally implemented a three step development plan. Much of the first step began previous to the bishops' official appointments, as it concerned the establishment of parishes complete with churches and housing for clergy. The creation of this base allowed for the second phase of diocesan solidification. Every bishop was aware of the shortage of trained priests in his diocese and thus, the education of young men directed towards the priesthood took on monumental importance. Colleges were created, often initiated by the respective bishop, in Cape Breton, mainland Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick.⁷⁶ Once provision had

⁷³ The see of the diocese was originally in Fredericton but moved to Saint John in 1848 and was officially named the diocese of Saint John in 1859. The New Brunswick Catholic Directory and History, (1923), 65.

⁷⁴ This diocese was officially the Diocese of Arichat from 1844 until 1886 but, for simplification, is referred to as the Diocese of Antigonish throughout the thesis.

⁷⁵ Roberto Perin, Rome in Canada: The Vatican and Canadian Affairs in the Late Victorian Age, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 14-15.

⁷⁶ In 1831 Bishop A.B. MacEachern opened and administered a secondary school in his home at Saint Andrews, Prince Edward Island. In 1838 Fr. Colin Francis MacKinnon, later Bishop of Antigonish, founded St. Andrew's Grammar school in Cape Breton where many who were to become the leading figures of Catholic society received a classical education. He also opened a seminary at Arichat in 1853 which would become St. Francis Xavier University after its move to Antigonish in 1855.

been made for an emerging native clergy, bishops and parish clergy turned their attention to providing young women with a Catholic education. The arrival of the Congregation of Notre Dame and other teaching orders in the Maritime provinces began in the 1850s and 1860s. The sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame founded missions in three Maritime dioceses: Antigonish, Charlottetown and Chatham.⁷⁷ The process of creating a new mission followed a clear pattern. First the bishop of the diocese initiated the process by inviting the sisters to open a convent and school in a particular parish. The Congregation's generalate then either accepted or rejected the offer.⁷⁸ Practical matters had to be addressed before

Mainland Nova Scotia saw the origins of St. Mary's in 1838, largely due to lay influence, not episcopal prompting. Establishing a permanent college in New Brunswick took somewhat longer than in the rest of the region. Despite the fact that Bishop James Rogers opened a school for potential seminary students and an academy for boys in his residence in 1860 (these remained operative until 1880) it was not until 1910 that St. Thomas College came into being. Laurence K. Shook, Catholic Post-Secondary Education in English-Speaking Canada. A History, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 36, 58, 75-76, 113-114.

⁷⁷ Though the boundaries of these jurisdictions have changed throughout the time in question they are considered in the thesis to encompass the following areas:

Antigonish -- mainland Nova Scotia east of Pictou
and all of Cape Breton
Charlottetown -- all of Prince Edward Island
Chatham -- Northeastern New Brunswick

The sisters founded missions in other Maritime dioceses as the twentieth century progressed.

⁷⁸ Johnston, A History of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nova Scotia, Vol. II 1827-1880, 293; "Historical Record of St. Mary's Convent, Newcastle, N.B.", (1926), 1.

sisters would be sent off to new locations. The Superior and Council had to be certain that the missionary sisters would have a means of financial support, adequate housing and spiritual necessities, such as mass on a regular basis and access to a confessor. Often the initial living and teaching conditions in the missions were quite rudimentary but generally, the parishioners supported the sisters and the schools as much as they were able.⁷⁹ The Congregation maintained the right to withdraw its sisters from a location if this support was not forthcoming and the sisters were unable to live in reasonable conditions.

Bishop Colin Francis MacKinnon (1852-1877) of Antigonish extended to the sisters of the Congregation an invitation to return to the Maritimes. It was the first invitation to return to the area since the Louisbourg adventure. With a bit of prompting from Bishop Bourget of Montreal, the Congregation agreed to send five sisters to Arichat in 1856 to open a school which they expanded to a boarding school once larger facilities became available. Two sisters opened another school in Acadiaville, or Petit Arichat as it is also known, in 1863.

Under the episcopal rule of John Cameron (1877-1910),

⁷⁹ Brendan O'Grady, A Century in Education 1873-1973. The Congregation of Notre Dame in Prince Edward Island, (Charlottetown: 1973), 12-13; Mount Saint Bernard Centennial 1883-1983, Commemorative booklet, 18. Excerpts of the annals of the Mabou convent detail the various donations to the sisters; these ranged from butter to a piano. St. Joseph's Convent Mabou, Nova Scotia 1887-1987, 82-86.

MacKinnon's successor, the Congregation enjoyed much support and encouragement from the diocese resulting in the establishment of nine new CND convent schools, including Pictou (1880), Antigonish (1883), Sydney (1885, 1902), Mabou (1887), New Glasgow (1887), Port Hood (1887), Sydney Mines (1900) and Inverness (1904).⁸⁰ Most of these schools began as elementary schools and progressed to the equivalent of high schools. The most ambitious was the school in Antigonish where the sisters pushed for affiliation with St. Francis Xavier University, developed a program of higher education for women and established Mount Saint Bernard, staffed and administered by CND sisters, which became the first Catholic degree-granting women's college in North America.⁸¹

Soon after their return to Nova Scotia the sisters found themselves engaged in educating the young women of Prince Edward Island as well. Notre Dame Academy in Charlottetown, founded in 1857 on the land provided jointly by the bishop of Charlottetown (Bernard Donald MacDonald) and Senator David Brennan, became a gathering point for many of the young Catholic women who sought teaching licences at Prince of Wales College. The west end of the city saw St. Joseph's School established in 1863, though the sisters teaching there were not provided with a permanent convent until 1885. The

⁸⁰ Lambert, Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre Dame, vol. X, tome II, 53-55; vol. XI, tome II, 104.

⁸¹ Shook, Catholic Post-Secondary Education, 81; Mount Saint Bernard Centennial 1883-1983.

Congregation also served the educational needs of Miscouche (1864), Tignish (1868), Summerside (1868), Souris (1881) and South Rustico (1882).⁸²

In New Brunswick, the CND limited their services to the Chatham diocese, under the direction of Bishop James Rogers (1860-1902). Three sisters arrived in Newcastle in 1869. The primarily Acadian centres of Bathurst (1871), Caraquet (1874) and St. Louis de Kent (1874) were the locations of the other CND schools in the province.⁸³

Of course the situation surrounding the arrival of the Congregation's sisters differed in each location due to the various individuals involved and the particularities of each town or village, but some general statements can be made about the foundations as a whole. Local authorities accepted responsibility for providing living accommodations for the sisters and classroom facilities. Sometimes these were prepared and waiting for the sisters when they arrived, as they were in Tignish, Mabou, Antigonish and Caraquet⁸⁴; other times the sisters lived and taught in makeshift quarters for a time before more satisfactory accommodations were

⁸² Lambert, Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre Dame, vol. X, tome II, 53-55; vol. XI, tome II, 104.

⁸³ Lambert, Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre Dame, vol. X, tome II, 53-55; vol. XI, tome II, 104.

⁸⁴ Lambert, Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre Dame, vol. X, tome II, 364-365, 359-360, 353-354.

possible.⁸⁵

Local support, both public and clerical, was essential to the survival of the boarding schools. Government funding for Catholic schools could not be depended upon for much of the period in question and even when the government dispersed funds they were not enough to completely meet the needs of the schools. As a rule, each convent school sponsored regular bazaars and concert events to help raise funds, and to display the talents of the students as a testimonial to the effective teaching methods employed by the Congregation.⁸⁶ The sisters depended on prosperous local men and women to recognize the importance of a strong Catholic education for women and to become benefactors of these fine institutions. Without the full support of the Catholic community in each location the teaching efforts of the Congregation could never have been sustained.

Provincial education legislation remained a very contentious issue throughout much of the latter part of the nineteenth century in all three Maritime provinces and sectarian conflict rested barely below the surface for many years after this. The Congregation was conscious of the

⁸⁵ The house used initially as a convent in Acadiaville was reputed to be haunted. The sisters of the St. Joseph convent in Charlottetown lived in a room in the school for several years until a real convent was provided for them. Lambert, Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre Dame, vol. X, tome II, 343-345.

⁸⁶ O'Grady, A Century in Education, 17; Mount Saint Bernard Centennial, 20.

difficulties it might encounter in this arena but rarely took direct political action to promote its interests. The limits on women's public expression were rigidly set and the sisters were more likely to achieve results by working within them. Catholic elected officials and members of the Church hierarchy fought the school battle for all concerned.

With the school legislation acts of 1864 and 1865, the government of Nova Scotia put in place a system of free schools, non-denominational in character, supported by compulsory assessment. The Government did not deal directly with religious concerns in the school acts, preferring to leave such concerns to those appointed to administer the policy. Tensions between Catholics and Protestants certainly existed over the issue of education, but Nova Scotia was applauded for the "diversity and tolerance"⁸⁷ of its educational policies and rarely after 1870 did denominational conflict over education exceed municipal boundaries. The Congregation's schools generally functioned harmoniously within provincial guidelines once a compromise was reached on teacher certification.⁸⁸ Often local school boards rented school facilities from denominational groups who could in turn recommend the hiring of teachers of their choice.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Sissons, Church and State in Canadian Education, 303.

⁸⁸ Sissons, Church and State in Canadian Education, 321.

⁸⁹ Ronald J. MacDonald, "Separate School Question Across Canada and in Particular the Sydney Area", (MEd Thesis, St. Francis Xavier University, 1966), 22-23.

Prince Edward Island also established legislation for free, public, non-denominational schools with the 1852 Schools Act (revised to the Public Schools Act in 1877). Differences in opinion between Catholics and Protestants over the use of bibles in the classroom proved quite contentious for many years, despite the legislative resolution of the issue in 1860.⁹⁰ Initially, requests for government funding for convent schools were rejected. Gradually however, convent schools were included in the public school system, and thereby became entitled to receive government financial support for the institutions themselves and the teachers within them. The Government also agreed to by-pass Normal School training for sisters and license them without this pre-requisite.⁹¹

Of the three Maritime provinces, New Brunswick faced the most prolonged and most volatile sectarian conflict over school legislation. It overshadowed most other provincial issues for many years and left wounds not easily healed. The Parish School Act of 1858 provided for government-supported elementary schools and implicitly excluded religious teaching in these schools, though Bible readings, without teacher

⁹⁰ Ian Ross Robertson, "The Bible Question in Prince Edward Island from 1856 to 1860", Acadiensis, V, 2 (Spring 1976), 24-25.

⁹¹ Gordon D. Michael, "The Administration of Public Schools in Prince Edward Island to 1974", (MA in Education Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1975), 48.

comment, were permitted.⁹² The 1871 Common Schools Act created a system of free, non-sectarian schools supported by local taxation. Regulation 20 accompanying this law stipulated that religious garb, symbols and emblems were not to be worn by students or teachers in the classroom. Essentially, the government had forbidden sisters from wearing habits and teaching in New Brunswick schools. Catholics were outraged. Many refused to pay their school taxes. Bishops and politically prominent lay Catholics joined together to challenge the constitutionality of the law (it was upheld). To ease sectarian strife, Regulation 20 was amended in 1873 and sisters could teach legally in the province's government funded schools. After several unsuccessful attempts, the government and Catholic representatives reached a compromise of sorts in 1875 on the implementation of the Act.⁹³

⁹² Sissons, Church and State in Canadian Education, 227-228.

⁹³ They decided that an agreement would be negotiated with each school board. The local school boards would be permitted, though not obligated, to make arrangements to place children in religiously segregated schools. If segregation was agreed upon, the following conditions would apply:

1. Members of religious orders could be licensed without attending the Normal School
2. Textbooks would be edited in such a way as to be inoffensive to Catholics
3. In Catholic owned schools religious instruction could be given after regular school hours

Toner, "The New Brunswick Separate Schools Issue 1864-1876", (MA Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1967), 120.

Conflicts over education abated somewhat after this.⁹⁴

Though each school district in which the sisters taught set curriculum guidelines, the Congregation itself had tremendous influence in the pedagogical approach of its teaching sisters.⁹⁵ Part of the novitiate training in Montreal centred on forming competent, efficient teachers to be sent out into the field. The community had a valuable reputation to maintain, especially in times and areas where Protestant forces were on the alert for any weaknesses in the teaching abilities of these vowed religious. More importantly though, the whole concept of Catholic education revolved around the salvation and preservation of the souls of the students, so despite the fact that many novices had experience in the classroom, this added dimension had to be cultivated in their approach to educating young women: dispensing knowledge of the secular and profane subjects was definitely secondary to the goal of nurturing strong Catholic values and behaviour.⁹⁶

The exact teaching and curriculum possibilities in each

⁹⁴ Katherine MacNaughton, The Development of the Theory and Practice of Education in New Brunswick 1784-1900, (Fredericton: University of New Brunswick, 1946).

⁹⁵ Lambert, Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre Dame, vol. X, tome II, 468-475; vol. XI, tome II, 536.

⁹⁶ "...les étudiantes sont formées non seulement dans l'acquisition des sciences humaines, mais pour devenir des personnalités chrétiennes au service de l'Eglise et de la société."(p.360) Lambert, Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre Dame, vol. X, tome II, 360.

school depended on the particular needs and resources of the location, but the sisters generally taught the following topics: religion, reading, writing, spelling, history (l'histoire sainte et l'histoire profane), literature, arithmetic, needlework, art and music.⁹⁷ The Coutumier provided uncompromising detail on the value of each subject and the time to be allotted to its instruction. The sisters on mission never lost sight of the fact that:

...selon l'esprit de la Congrégation de Notre Dame, l'idéal de chaque professeur est de former les élèves a des habitudes d'ordre, d'économie et de simplicité et d'inculquer l'amour du travail et la piété chrétienne qui font et distinguent la vraie femme.⁹⁸

The Congregation, known for its ability to produce refined Catholic women who embodied the ideal of womanhood at the turn of the century, also concentrated on teaching music and art. These subjects were important because once a sister knowledgeable in these fields arrived at a convent she often attracted many young women for private lessons, thereby increasing the revenue of the convent and promoting its reputation within the local community.

⁹⁷ Lambert, Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre Dame, vol. X, tome II, 478-480.

⁹⁸ Lambert, Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre Dame, vol. X, tome II, 509.

Teaching young women and girls was unquestionably the main occupation of the sisters of the Congregation wherever they were, but they also took up additional duties in the parish and in teaching. Initially the general council sanctioned the teaching of religion to and the sacramental preparation of young boys on Sundays if there was no one else to provide this training, but lay women were hired to teach the boys academic subjects.⁹⁹ It was not unusual for the sisters to be responsible for the direction of the parish choir and for sacristan duties in the parish. Their duties, teaching and otherwise, coupled with the demands and discipline of religious life itself made for a nearly overwhelming daily schedule and some sisters proved unable to withstand the pace for long periods of time. Most, however, did persevere, believing that the desire to serve God and save souls would sustain them.¹⁰⁰

By 1920 the sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame were a pillar in the Catholic educational structure of the three dioceses, and indeed in the three provinces, in question. With seven houses in Prince Edward Island, nine¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Lambert, Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre Dame, vol. X, tome II, 352-353, 365-367.

¹⁰⁰ This view is repeated in virtually every necrology. See necrologies of deceased sisters, Notices biographiques and Annales.

¹⁰¹ The Congregation chose to close the convent schools in Acadiaville and Arichat in 1894 and 1900 respectively due to a decline in the number of students. Lambert, Histoire de la Congrégation de Notre Dame, vol. X, tome II, 337-341, 343.

in Nova Scotia and three¹⁰² in New Brunswick few people were unaware of this community and its excellence in education. Soon after expanding into the Maritimes, the Congregation felt the reciprocal impact of Maritime women, as they entered the community in unprecedented numbers and enriched the Congregation with a distinctly Maritime flavour.

¹⁰² Citing the problems with school legislation, the sisters closed their schools in Bathurst in 1890.

CHAPTER THREE

WHO WERE THE ENTRANTS?

In discussing the characteristics of entrants to religious life several stereotypes immediately spring to mind: that of young innocent girls barely in their teens being sent off to the convent or perhaps that of the woman of more advanced years who seeks the solace of religious life after realizing that, although she dreams of marriage and children, the years when she might have them have passed her by. But these familiar images, though somewhat romantic and provocative, have little factual basis in the case of Maritime women. The picture presented through various criteria, including the entrants' age of entrance, ethnic background, birthplace, socio-economic status and level of education, shows that the Maritime women who entered the Congregation of Notre Dame tended to be educated young adults from well established families and many had some teaching or work experience prior to entrance.

The first Maritime woman¹ to enter the Congregation of

¹ The term "Maritime women" refers to women whose birth place was in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island or New Brunswick even though they may no longer have been residing in

Notre Dame did so in 1869 and was followed by other Maritime women in a somewhat sporadic fashion for the next several years. In time, Maritime women comprised an impressive component of the steadily increasing number of entrants to the community. Table I shows, by decades, the total number of entrants to the Congregation, the numbers of entrants who remained in the community and made perpetual vows, and the numbers of women from the Maritime provinces within each of these two categories.

Not only did the number of entrants from the Maritimes increase steadily during these decades but, as well, the percentage of Maritime women in the total number of entrants increased from decade to decade, as did the percentage of Maritime women in the total number of entrants who made perpetual vows.² A community that in 1870 was nearly exclusively composed of women from Quebec counted, by 1920, close to one fifth of its new entrants from the Maritime provinces. Obviously the Congregation made a marked impact on young women in the region, especially in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, as increasing numbers of them flocked to Montreal well into the 1960s to enter this prestigious

the Maritimes when they entered the Congregation of Notre Dame. The records of the community consulted in the research for this essay identify entrants according to their birthplace not their current place of residence, though from all indications most women remained at or near their birthplace prior to entering.

² Though the percentage in the latter category dropped slightly in the last decade.

community of religious women.

The group from Prince Edward Island is the most significant, in terms of size, among the entrants from the three Maritime provinces. Islanders outnumbered Nova Scotians and New Brunswickers, both among total entrants and among those who made perpetual vows. This is particularly significant as the provincial populations of the latter two provinces were several times greater than that of Prince Edward Island. Moreover, on the Island, the CND could be found in locations spread throughout the province, while in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick the order's presence was limited to fairly specific areas.

In keeping with the practice in many religious congregations of the time and in an effort to protect its reputation as a community of highly educated sisters³, the Congregation of Notre Dame implemented a policy of creating two different status groups within the community. The data in Table I includes both categories of sisters present in the Congregation of Notre Dame from 1888 to 1958, these being soeurs de choeur and soeurs converses. The soeurs de choeur enjoyed full rights under the Congregation's constitution once they professed perpetual vows and were the sisters involved in educational and administrative work. The soeurs converses were the women whose educational background, intellectual

³ Marta Danylewycz, Taking the Veil. An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood, and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1920, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 77.

TABLE I- ENTRANTS TO THE CONGREGATION OF NOTRE DAME BY
 DECADE, 1841-1920.
 (N.G. = not given)

| | TOTAL ENTERED | TOTAL STAYED | MARITIMERS ENTERED (%TTL ENT.) | MARITIMERS STAYED (%TTL.STAY) |
|-----------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1841-1850 | N.G. | 87 | 0 | 0 |
| 1851-1860 | N.G. | 188 | 0 | 0 |
| 1861-1870 | N.G. | 273 | 1 | 1 |
| 1871-1880 | N.G. | 342 | 31 (N.G.%) | 25 (7.3%) |
| 1881-1890 | 571 | 446 | 75 (13.1%) | 45 (10.1%) |
| 1891-1900 | 593 | 392 | 95 (16.0%) | 61 (15.6%) |
| 1901-1910 | 695 | 566 | 128 (18.4%) | 97 (18.8%) |
| 1911-1920 | 1013 | 720 | 195 (19.2%) | 125 (17.4%) |

Source: Marta Danylewycz, Taking the Veil, 75; Archives of the Congregation of Notre Dame, Registre générale, Cahiers 3-8.

ability or personal preferences prohibited them from being qualified to pursue the usual teaching activities of the Congregation's sisters. Such women still wished to enter the community and were permitted to do so with an inferior constitutional status, which prevented them from participating in the leadership of the order or in the selection of those leaders. Soeurs converses worked in the kitchen, infirmary and laundry room, and did any other manual tasks that needed tending to; the constitution of the Congregation reminded them

to "rejoice in their humble state"⁴. These legal differences manifested themselves physically through the modified habit and smaller silver cross of the soeur converse. In 1958, the last profession of perpetual vows by soeurs converses took place, and the community abandoned this dual status which was no longer seen to be in keeping with the traditions of the Congregation or with the needs and desires of religious life.

Although future studies are needed to determine the extent to which the experience of religious life differed between soeurs de choeur and soeurs converses, it is presumptuous to assume the differences were negligible. Did a woman with teaching experience, or at least a solid academic record, entering religious life in a community renowned for its excellence in teaching, face the same decision-making process prior to entrance as a woman who realized she could only aspire to house cleaning and cooking tasks within the same community? If the Congregation of Notre Dame attracted women due in part to its status among religious congregations, did this status extend to the soeurs converses as well? Such concerns have prompted the decision to limit the scope of this discussion to Maritime women who entered the community as soeurs de choeur.

⁴ Reglemens des Soeurs Séculières de la Congrégation Notre Dame, (Montreal: Bureau des Melanges Religieux, 1846), Article 7, III, 104.

TABLE II -- MARITIME ENTRANTS TO THE CND, BY PROVINCE AND DECADE, AS SOEURS DE CHOEUR OR AS SOEURS CONVERSES.

NUMBERS IN () INDICATE THOSE WHO STAYED TO MAKE PERPETUAL VOWS.

| | NS | | PEI | | NB | |
|-----------|--------------|----------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | CHOEUR | CONV | CHOEUR | CONV | CHOEUR | CONV |
| 1871-1880 | 11 (9) | --- | 14(11) | --- | 6 (5) | --- |
| 1881-1890 | 32 (20) | 0 | 26(15) | 0 | 16 (9) | 1 (1) |
| 1891-1900 | 23 (15) | 2(1) | 34(23) | 12 (7) | 13 (9) | 11 (6) |
| 1901-1910 | 38 (32) | 0 | 29(20) | 18(16) | 21(14) | 22(15) |
| 1911-1920 | 54 (39) | 2(0) | 63(41) | 22(16) | 3(21) | 21 (8) |
| TOTALS | 158 (115) | 4 (1) | 166 (110) | 52 (39) | 89 (58) | 55 (30) |

Source: Registre générale.

Nevertheless, a significant number of women from the Maritimes entered the Congregation of Notre Dame as soeurs converses. Table II provides an indication of the number of women who entered each division of the Congregation. Interestingly, very few women from Nova Scotia entered the community as soeurs converses and all but one left after doing so.⁵ Such was not the case with women from the other two provinces, however: one quarter of entrants from Prince

⁵ Though it is impossible to ascertain why this was the case without further research some possible explanations could include the creation of the Congregation of Saint Martha in Antigonish whose sisters carried out essentially the same tasks as a CND soeur converse would have, or perhaps the education system in Nova Scotia was such that more women received the training to be teachers.

Edward Island entered as soeurs converses, as did over a third of New Brunswick women. Clearly, both categories of membership within the Congregation enticed Maritime women.

Requesting admittance to the Congregation of Notre Dame was only one step on the road to full-fledged membership in religious life. A woman who wished to become a CND sister required a recommendation to the community from one of the professed sisters, documents certifying her Catholic credentials (baptism and confirmation certificates) and a dowry, though this requirement could be waived at the Council's discretion⁶. The woman requesting admittance to the postulate would go to Montreal and be interviewed by the Superior or her representative who would assess the candidate's "...esprit, son humeur, ses inclinations et sa santé"⁷ and then report to the Council where a final decision on admittance would be made. Generally, entrants spent approximately one year in the postulate, the initial training program, being introduced to the lifestyle and daily routine of the community. The women wore secular habits during their postulancy and through their training cultivated qualities of obedience, mortification and silence, and were initiated into the Congregation's teaching philosophy.⁸ The Superior assessed the postulant's progress at periodic intervals and if

⁶ Constitutions, Article 3, VI, VII, 90.

⁷ Reglemens, Article 35, I, 144.

⁸ Reglemens, Article 35, II, 146.

she deemed the woman capable of continuing the journey of religious life the woman would then be permitted to don the novice habit, a ceremony known as la vêtture, and advance to the novitiate, a more intense level of training.⁹

The novitiate was in Montreal and all entrants trained there under the direct supervision of the Mistress of Novices and the Superior General. As was the custom at the time, the members of the novitiate were isolated from the rest of the community; novices only had contact with the general community population at meals and prayer times.¹⁰ At the end of the usual two year novitiate experience the woman could, if she chose, ask permission to profess temporary vows in the community. Temporary vows were not binding in the sense that papal dispensation was not needed to release a woman from such vows. Sisters under temporary vows did not have an official voice in the administration of the Congregation and were expected to continue exploring the realities of religious life and discerning their suitability to such a lifestyle before professing binding perpetual vows, which were usually professed about six or seven years after temporary vows.

At every stage of the process to full admittance in the community both the woman in question and the Congregation itself could halt advancement. The woman was free to leave, after a period of discernment to determine if her decision was

⁹ Constitutions, Article 4, 92-94.

¹⁰ Constitutions, Article 1, II, 86.

the will of God or simply a temptation¹¹, or if she felt she did not possess a true religious vocation. Occasionally other circumstances, family problems for instance, would arise, leading a woman to decide to leave the community. The Congregation remained very careful in screening entrants and rejecting those women who could jeopardize the well-being of the order. The official Rule outlined the expected qualities of entrants and acceptable reasons for asking a woman to leave the community. And, as the Rule reminded those who admitted entrants, mistakes could be costly to the community.¹²

The Congregation expected the prospective entrant to be of respectable family origins. All entrants should display good judgement, a good disposition, flexibility towards superiors and good health.¹³ Health concerned the community greatly and those with physical deformities or a predisposition to illness were not accepted as entrants.¹⁴ The Congregation could not afford to become a haven for women of ill health: it was a self-supporting community that needed

¹¹ Reglemens, Article 36, I, 149.

¹² Reglemens, Article 35, III, 146.

¹³ Constitutions, Article 3, III, 88-89.

¹⁴ Annie O'Connell from Sydney, N.S. was determined to enter the CND despite her hearing impairment. As a last effort, after being refused entrance, she went to Montreal to prove to the admittance committee that her impairment would not prevent her from being a productive member of the community. She succeeded by showing the committee that she understood what was being said to her and was subsequently admitted as an entrant and later became Sr. Sainte Marie Delores I. Annales 1954, 179, 806-808.

every woman to contribute to the work at hand. Women who were seen to be too proud, inconsistent, rough or rebellious would be turned away unless the Superior believed these qualities could be overcome through the woman's desire to be a religious.¹⁵

Once a woman achieved postulant or novice status she could still be asked to leave or be "gently invited to ask to leave"¹⁶ for a variety of reasons. A postulant who suddenly fell ill might be urged to ask to leave, although a novice in similar circumstances likely would remain in the community. The amount of time the entrant had spent in the Congregation, her suitability to religious life, the severity of her illness and the prognosis for recovery all affected the decision about whether the entrant should remain in the community or return to her home to regain her health. Anyone who upset the peace of the Congregation through improper or hostile behaviour, lack of obedience or failure to adhere to community rules or vows could be dismissed, usually after several warnings and consultation with the community's priestly advisor¹⁷. The Superior always was conscious of the need to remove any elements that could prove hazardous to the Congregation; the

¹⁵ Reglemens, Article 35, III, 146.

¹⁶ Reglemens, Article 36, II, 150.

¹⁷ Every convent was assigned a priest to attend to its spiritual and sacramental needs.

survival and strengthening of the community reigned paramount.¹⁸

Keeping this process of formation in mind, the women who entered the Congregation as soeurs de choeur can be grouped into four overlapping categories: the total number that entered the postulate, those who then left the community prior to making any vows, those who professed temporary vows but left before making perpetual vows, and finally those who made perpetual vows and remained in the Congregation for the rest of their lives. Each group represents a level where an entrant was required to make a deliberate and conscious decision to advance to the next level; in fact, the whole process of achieving full membership in a religious community was designed to allow these very decisions to be made. Tables III to VI indicate the dispersion of Maritime women in these four groups, as a whole and by province.

Not all Maritimers who entered the Congregation stayed to profess perpetual vows, but the attrition experienced in the CND was not unlike that experienced in other communities of religious women. All religious communities experience a certain degree of attrition of entrants, although the rate of attrition from one order to the next may vary. Though the number of entrants involved in the 1871-1880 decade is smaller than in the next few decades, the percentage of this early group who persevered in the community is quite high. The high

¹⁸ Reglemens, Article 36 and 37, 149-155.

TABLE III--- MARITIME ENTRANTS TO THE CND AT EACH LEVEL OF COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP

| | TOTAL ENTRANTS (TTL.E.) | MADE NO VOWS | MADE TEMP VOWS ONLY | MADE TEMP AND PERP VOWS | %TTL. E. MAKING TEMP AND PERP VOWS |
|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1871-1880 | 31 | 1 | 5 | 25 | 80.6% |
| 1881-1890 | 74 | 19 | 11 | 44 | 59.5% |
| 1891-1900 | 70 | 21 | 2 | 47 | 67.1% |
| 1901-1910 | 88 | 17 | 5 | 66 | 75.0% |
| 1911-1920 | 150 | 41 | 8 | 101 | 67.3% |
| TOTAL | 413 | 99 | 31 | 283 | 68.5% |

SOURCE: Registre générale.

TABLE IV --- NOVA SCOTIA ENTRANTS TO THE CND AT EACH LEVEL OF COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP

| | TOTAL ENTRANTS (TTL.E.) | MADE NO VOWS | MADE TEMP VOWS ONLY | MADE TEMP AND PERP VOWS | % TTL.E. MAKING TEMP AND PERP VOWS |
|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1871-1880 | 11 | 0 | 2 | 9 | 81.8% |
| 1881-1890 | 32 | 6 | 6 | 20 | 62.5% |
| 1891-1900 | 23 | 7 | 1 | 15 | 65.2% |
| 1901-1910 | 38 | 3 | 3 | 32 | 84.2% |
| 1911-1920 | 54 | 13 | 2 | 39 | 72.2% |
| TOTAL | 158 | 29 | 14 | 115 | 72.8% |

SOURCE: Registre générale.

TABLE V -- PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND ENTRANTS TO THE CND AT EACH LEVEL OF COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP

| | TOTAL ENTRANTS (TTL.E.) | MADE NO VOWS | MADE TEMP VOWS ONLY | MADE TEMP AND PERP VOWS | % TTL.E. MAKING TEMP AND PERP VOWS |
|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1871-1880 | 14 | 0 | 3 | 11 | 78.6% |
| 1881-1890 | 26 | 8 | 3 | 15 | 57.7% |
| 1891-1900 | 34 | 10 | 1 | 23 | 67.6% |
| 1901-1910 | 29 | 8 | 1 | 20 | 69.0% |
| 1911-1920 | 63 | 18 | 4 | 41 | 65.1% |
| TOTAL | 166 | 44 | 12 | 110 | 66.3% |

SOURCE: Registre générale.

TABLE VI --- NEW BRUNSWICK ENTRANTS TO THE CND AT EACH LEVEL OF COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP

| | TOTAL ENTRANTS (TTL.E.) | MADE NO VOWS | MADE TEMP VOWS ONLY | MADE TEMP AND PERP VOWS | % TTL.E. MAKING TEMP AND PERP VOWS |
|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1871-1880 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 83.3% |
| 1881-1890 | 16 | 5 | 2 | 9 | 56.3% |
| 1891-1900 | 13 | 4 | 0 | 9 | 69.2% |
| 1901-1910 | 21 | 6 | 1 | 14 | 66.7% |
| 1911-1920 | 33 | 10 | 2 | 21 | 63.6% |
| TOTAL | 89 | 26 | 5 | 58 | 65.2% |

SOURCE: Registre générale.

retention factor perhaps reflected the high level of commitment on the part of the entrants. As firm links to the Congregation had yet to be made, these women regarded their decision to enter as their true moment of decision. In later decades, when links between the Maritimes and the Congregation were well established, women could view the decision to enter as more of a trial or test than as a definite decision. Of the 31 Maritime women who entered in 1871-1880 only six did not stay to profess perpetual vows; and only one withdrew from the order, the other five having died before being able to profess vows. Apparently entrants during this decade took their decision to go to Montreal and become a sister of the Congregation of Notre Dame very seriously.

The next decade in question, 1881-1890, saw a nearly 250 percent increase in total Maritime entrants, but the percentage of those remaining for perpetual vows dropped from 80.6 percent to 59.5 percent. Nineteen of the 74 women who entered chose to depart before taking temporary vows and reached this decision anywhere from two weeks to over two years after entering. Eleven entrants made temporary vows but subsequently left either for unrecorded reasons, as was the case for two women, or died prior to perpetual vows, as was the case for the others.¹⁹

The last three decades indicate a stabilizing trend in terms of the percentage of Maritime entrants remaining for

¹⁹ Registre générale.

perpetual vows. A noticeable increase in persevering entrants is evident in the 1901-1910 data but this overall increase is due specifically to the significant increase of Nova Scotians remaining for perpetual vows and is not reflected in the data from Prince Edward Island or New Brunswick in this 10 year period. The percentage of entrants taking perpetual vows from Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick follow a parallel trend throughout the entire 50 year period. Both are high in the 1871-1880 period, drop to the mid-50 percentage area in the next 10 year period, then stabilize in the 60 to 70 percent range for the following three decades.

Among the three Maritime provinces, Nova Scotia maintained the highest overall average of women remaining in the community. Only in the 1891-1900 decade did the percentage of remaining Nova Scotians fall below those of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, and even then it was only slightly lower. However, the percentage of Nova Scotians remaining for perpetual vows fluctuated more sharply during the 50 year period than those of Prince Edward Island or New Brunswick, although general decadal movements of increase or decrease were similar for all three provinces.

As the tables indicate, most women who entered and then chose to leave did so prior to making temporary vows. Reasons for departure were only described beginning in 1911. The reasons recorded after 1911 suggest that women left for three main reasons: poor health, lack of vocation, or because they

were deemed unsuited to the Congregation. In this last instance the Congregation itself initiated departure. A number of departures remain unexplained in the records even after 1911. The above-named reasons for departure may be applicable to the unrecorded cases, though it also may be that the cause of departure was left unrecorded for a specific reason or as an indication of a particularly sensitive situation.

Of the 13 Nova Scotians who left prior to temporary vows in the 1911-1920 decade, three did so for unrecorded reasons, five discerned that they did not have a vocation to religious life, four left due to poor health and one was not suited to the Congregation. For Prince Edward Island entrants in the same period six left prior to temporary vows for unrecorded reasons, six for health reasons, four cited lack of vocation and two were unsuited to the Congregation and/or to teaching. Ten New Brunswick entrants left prior to temporary vows: two for unrecorded reasons, four due to poor health and four discerned a lack of vocation.²⁰

No real pattern emerges in the data which might suggest a relationship between the reason for departure and the length of time a woman remained in the Congregation. Those who left citing health reasons stayed in the community anywhere from two months to over two years. For those who cited lack of vocation as a reason for departure, some realized very quickly

²⁰ Registre générale.

that they did not have a vocation to religious life while others came to this decision only after several years in the novitiate. Of the three entrants who later were deemed unsuited to the Congregation one from Nova Scotia left after five months but the two from Prince Edward Island remained in the community for over two years.

With so little hard data about reasons for departure, any conclusions are tenuous at best but it is clear that while the amount of time spent in the Congregation varied greatly among those who left prior to temporary vows (which entrants generally made two to three years after entering) the documented reasons for leaving remained constant.

The situation of women who left prior to temporary vows is quite different from that of the women who made temporary vows but left prior to making perpetual vows. The reasons for departure for this second group of women are documented more consistently throughout the entire 50 year period in question. Most died between temporary and perpetual vows. Among Nova Scotian entrants in this group three left for unrecorded reasons, one professed temporary vows on her deathbed and 10 made temporary vows but died before making perpetual vows. Prince Edward Island entrants show a similar pattern with two unrecorded departures, two deathbed professions of temporary vows and eight deaths prior to perpetual vows. New Brunswick entrants in this category count a total of five departures: two for unrecorded reasons, one deathbed profession and two

deaths. Among the total group of Maritime entrants between 1871 and 1920, of the 31 women who departed after temporary vows but prior to perpetual vows seven did so for unrecorded reasons, four professed their temporary vows in deathbed ceremonies and 20 of those bound by temporary vows died before they canonically were able to profess perpetual vows. When the reasons for departure or failure to make perpetual vows become clear, it is increasingly apparent that the majority of entrants to the Congregation who subsequently chose to leave made this decision prior to making any vows. The women who died as temporary-vowed members of the community most likely would have persevered, if they had lived, and professed perpetual vows when the appropriate time arrived.

An examination of reasons for departure among those who made temporary vows reveals that the death rate of such women decreased over time. Though the numbers of such women are too small to justify the calculation of percentages, they do provide an indication of the trend involved. Between 1871 and 1890, 13 of the 16 entrants who made temporary vows but did not make perpetual vows died before they were able to make their final vows. The two departures in the 1891-1900 decade did not involve death. The death rate among this category of entrant was three of four in 1901-1910 and dropped to four of eight in 1911-1920. Improved medical knowledge and better living conditions in CND mission houses likely account for the proportional decline in deaths, but the life of a sister

remained physically strenuous and many women proved unable to withstand the physical demands for extended periods of time.

Since only such a small proportion of entrants decided to leave the community after temporary vows and prior to perpetual vows and, of that number, only a few (the seven unrecorded reasons) could have made a free and conscious decision to leave, it seems that entrants viewed the taking of temporary vows as the most important decision-making threshold. The time prior to asking the community, through the person of the Superior, to accept the entrant as a vowed member was filled with intense discernment and character evaluation both by the entrant and the community. Once temporary vows were taken, the path towards becoming a fully vowed sister rarely was abandoned by choice. This point in the development of a young religious was also important in that once an entrant made temporary vows she would be named to one of the CND houses or missions. She would no longer be among her peers in the novitiate; rather she would be expected to take her place as a teaching member of the community, although she would still be under the close supervision of the local superior.

The entrance process and the attrition rate among entrants provide a general overview of the experience of Maritime women seeking admission to the CND, but do not address the question of who these women were as individuals. The personal characteristics of the entrants, their age,

education, work experience and socio-economic background give a more human face to the numbers presented previously.

The Congregation required entrants to be at least 16 years of age prior to entering the postulate. This requirement was in keeping with the canonical stipulation that temporary vows could be professed only by those women 18 years of age or older. Since the regular training period between postulancy and the taking of temporary vows was two years, it was logical to limit entrance to those 16 years and older. But few Maritime entrants to the Congregation of Notre Dame were of the minimum age. As Table VII illustrates, the majority of Maritime entrants were not in the 16-18 year old category. Moreover, the percentage of total entrants in this category decreased steadily in the four decades under study. A clear majority of total entrants, after the 1881-1890 decade, fell within the ages of 19 and 24. The Congregation seemed to expect most entrants to be 16 to 25 years of age, as the Superior's special permission for entrance was required by any woman over 25 years of age.²¹ When this data is separated into the total number of entrants from each province some different trends emerge.

²¹ Constitutions, Article 3, V, 91.

TABLE VII -- TOTAL NUMBER OF MARITIME ENTRANTS BY AGE GROUP AND DECADE OF ENTRY

The first column of digits in each decade indicates the number of entrants. The percentages listed in the second column indicate the percentage of entrants in the specified age group among the total number of entrants for each decade.

THE THREE MARITIME PROVINCES COMBINED

| AGE (IN YEARS) | 1881-1890 | | 1891-1900 | | 1901-1910 | | 1911-1920 | |
|-----------------|-----------|--------|-----------|--------|-----------|--------|-----------|--------|
| 16-18 | 20 | 27.0% | 16 | 22.9% | 15 | 17.0% | 22 | 14.7% |
| 19-21 | 28 | 37.8% | 31 | 44.3% | 33 | 37.5% | 59 | 39.3% |
| 22-24 | 16 | 21.6% | 17 | 24.3% | 24 | 27.3% | 40 | 26.7% |
| 25-27 | 5 | 6.8% | 5 | 7.1% | 10 | 11.4% | 15 | 10.0% |
| 28 + | 5 | 6.8% | 1 | 1.4% | 6 | 6.8% | 14 | 9.3% |
| TOTAL BY DECADE | 74 | 100.0% | 70 | 100.0% | 88 | 100.0% | 150 | 100.0% |

Source: Registre générale.

Nova Scotian entrants remained fairly evenly divided between those 21 and younger and those over 21 throughout the period. The number of 16-18 year olds decreased sharply after a high of 21.9 percent in 1881-1890 but it began to increase slightly but steadily after a low of 4.3 percent in 1891-1900. Over half of the entrants were 19-24 years of age though the percentage of entrants in this combined age category varied from 65.6 percent (1881-1890) to 78.3 percent (1891-1900). If the age of 21 is considered as the demarcation line between

young entrants and older entrants, Nova Scotian entrants, after 1890, would fall evenly on both sides of the line. Though 62.5 percent of Nova Scotian entrants were 21 or younger in 1881-1890 the percentage dropped to 47.8 percent in 1891-1900 then remained at 50.0 percent for the next two decades.

TABLE VIII -- TOTAL NUMBER OF NOVA SCOTIA ENTRANTS BY AGE GROUP AND DECADE OF ENTRY

| AGE (IN YEARS) | 1881-1890 | | 1891-1900 | | 1901-1910 | | 1911-1920 | |
|------------------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|---------------|
| 16-18 | 7 | 21.9% | 1 | 4.3% | 3 | 7.9% | 6 | 11.1% |
| 19-21 | 13 | 40.6% | 10 | 43.5% | 16 | 42.1% | 21 | 38.9% |
| 22-24 | 8 | 25.0% | 8 | 34.8% | 13 | 34.2% | 16 | 29.6% |
| 25-27 | 3 | 9.4% | 3 | 13.0% | 4 | 10.5% | 5 | 9.3% |
| 28 + | 1 | 3.1% | 1 | 4.3% | 2 | 5.3% | 6 | 11.1% |
| TOTAL BY DECADE | 32 | 100.0% | 23 | 99.9% | 38 | 100.0% | 54 | 100.0% |

Source: Registre générale.

Island women entered at more mature ages as the decades passed, but remained younger, on average, than their Nova Scotia counterparts. The percentage of 16-18 year old entrants decreased throughout the four 10-year periods. The decrease is quite substantial between 1881-1890 and 1891-1900 and again between 1901-1910 and 1911-1920. The majority of

entrants fell between 19 and 24 years of age though the percentage of 19-21 year olds in this combined age category fluctuated while the percentage of 22-24 year olds increased minimally prior to and after a doubling between 1891-1900 and 1901-1910. A dramatic shift between young and older entrants is evident in the 40 year span. In 1881-1890 the percentage of entrants 21 and under was 77.0 percent and this increased slightly to 79.4 percent in 1891-1900 but in 1901-1910 the percentage of young entrants dropped to 44.8 percent, a decrease of 34.6 percent from the previous decade, and this drop remained into the next decade when the percentage of entrants 21 years old and younger increased only minimally to 46.0 percent.

TABLE IX -- TOTAL NUMBER OF PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND ENTRANTS BY AGE GROUP AND DECADE OF ENTRY

| AGE (IN YEARS) | 1881-1890 | | 1891-1900 | | 1901-1910 | | 1911-1920 | |
|------------------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| 16-18 | 10 | 38.5% | 8 | 23.5% | 6 | 20.7% | 7 | 11.1% |
| 19-21 | 10 | 38.5% | 19 | 55.9% | 7 | 24.1% | 22 | 34.9% |
| 22-24 | 3 | 11.5% | 5 | 14.7% | 9 | 31.0% | 20 | 31.7% |
| 25-27 | 0 | 0.0% | 2 | 10.3% | 3 | 10.3% | 9 | 14.3% |
| 28 + | 3 | 11.5% | 0 | 0.0% | 4 | 13.8% | 5 | 7.9% |
| TOTAL BY DECADE | 26 | 100.0% | 34 | 100.0% | 29 | 99.9% | 63 | 99.9% |

Source: Registre générale.

The age trends of New Brunswick entrants were markedly different from those of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island entrants: after 1890 New Brunswickers entered at consistently younger ages. The percentage of 16-18 year olds among the total number of entrants from New Brunswick nearly tripled from 1881-1890 to 1891-1900, decreased in the next two decades, yet remained well above the percentages of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island 16-18 year old entrants in 1901-1910 and 1911-1920. In 1891-1890, 1901-1910 and 1911-1920 the majority of New Brunswick entrants fell between 19 and 24 years of age but in 1891-1900 over half of the entrants were between 16-18 years of age and in that same decade all the entrants were 24 years of age or younger. The age dispersal among New Brunswickers in this decade contrasts strongly with the results in the other decades and with the other provinces. The decadal trend for New Brunswick entrants 21 or younger was also quite different from that of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island where the percentage of entrants in this age category generally decreased from one decade to the next. Among New Brunswick entrants the percentage of those 21 and under increased from 50.1 percent to 69.2 percent to 76.2 percent then decreased by a barely noticeable 0.4 percent in the 1911-1920 decade. From 1901 to 1920 about half the total entrants from Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island were 21 years of age or younger but fully three-quarters of New Brunswick entrants fell into this age

category.

TABLE X -- TOTAL NUMBER OF NEW BRUNSWICK ENTRANTS BY AGE GROUP AND DECADE OF ENTRY

| AGE (IN YEARS) | 1881-1890 | | 1891-1900 | | 1901-1910 | | 1911-1920 | |
|------------------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|---------------|
| 16-18 | 3 | 18.8% | 7 | 53.8% | 6 | 28.6% | 9 | 27.3% |
| 19-21 | 5 | 31.3% | 2 | 15.4% | 10 | 47.6% | 16 | 48.5% |
| 22-24 | 5 | 31.3% | 4 | 30.8% | 2 | 9.5% | 4 | 12.1% |
| 25-27 | 2 | 12.5% | 0 | 0.0% | 3 | 14.3% | 1 | 3.0% |
| 28 + | 1 | 6.3% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 3 | 9.1% |
| TOTAL BY DECADE | 16 | 100.2% | 13 | 100.0% | 21 | 100.0% | 33 | 100.0% |

Source: Registre générale.

A variety of possible explanations exist for the age differences between New Brunswick women and those from Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Most New Brunswick entrants were of Acadian origin and the opportunities for higher education for French-speaking women in the province were limited. So, while Nova Scotia women attended teachers college or Mount Saint Bernard College, and Island women attended Notre Dame Academy and Prince of Wales College, New Brunswick women could attend the Normal School but French-speaking women were at a disadvantage in this English institution. This may have prompted New Brunswickers to enter

earlier than their other Maritime counterparts. As well, data on the average age of marriage for women between 1880 and 1920 indicates that New Brunswick women tended to marry at a younger age than women from Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, so it is reasonable that they would also make their decision to enter religious life at a younger age.²²

The preceding discussion of the age characteristics of Maritime entrants refers to the total number of entrants from the Maritime provinces. It is not necessarily reflective of the age distributions of the Maritime entrants who remained in the Congregation and made perpetual vows. Since this last group, those who persevered in the community, is the best documented in the Congregation's records it will be the focus of the remaining evaluation of the characteristics of Maritime entrants.

In comparing the age distribution of the total number of Maritime entrants to that of the entrants who actually remained in the community, can any generalizations be made about the attrition rate in relation to the age of entrants? The general trends of entrant ages for each province remained similar from total entrants to those who stayed in the Congregation. For Nova Scotia, the percentage of persevering entrants 21 and younger was higher than the percentage in this

²² Ellen Margaret Thomas Gee, "Fertility and Marriage Patterns in Canada 1851-1971", (PhD Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1978); and, "Marriage in Nineteenth-century Canada", Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, 19, no. 3 (1982), 311-325.

age category among the overall group of entrants from Nova Scotia. Thus, younger entrants did not prove more likely to abandon the idea of being a sister. In Prince Edward Island the percentage of persevering entrants in the 21 and under age category was lower than that of the total entrants; however the decrease was minimal in the 1891-1900 and 1911-1920 decades. The percentage was also slightly lower for New Brunswick entrants who remained in the community, with the exception of the 1901-1910 decade where the percentage of persevering entrants in the 21 and younger age category exceeded the percentage of that group among the total number of entrants by more than 15 percent.

The data in Table XI on the age of entrance for all Maritime entrants who remained in the Congregation to make perpetual vows (the persevering entrants) is similar to the data on the ages of the total number of entrants in Table VII. It is apparent that the majority of vowed entrants were not in the 16-18 year old category, although the percentage of 16-18 year old entrants equalled that of 19-21 year old entrants in 1881-1890, and the percentage of 16-18 year olds dropped consistently in each decade. The majority of entrants were still quite young however. Entrants 21 years of age and younger composed a majority in each decade but the percentage decreased from a high point of 68.1 percent in 1891-1900, after rising from 63.6 percent the previous decade, to 53.0 percent in 1901-1910 and 51.5 percent in 1911-1920. The

TABLE XI -- MARITIME ENTRANTS WHO MADE PERPETUAL VOWS, BY AGE GROUP AND DECADE OF ENTRY

| AGE (IN YEARS) | 1881-1890 | | 1891-1900 | | 1901-1910 | | 1911-1920 | |
|-----------------|-----------|--------|-----------|--------|-----------|--------|-----------|--------|
| 16-18 | 14 | 31.8% | 11 | 23.4% | 12 | 18.2% | 13 | 12.9% |
| 19-21 | 14 | 31.8% | 21 | 44.7% | 23 | 34.8% | 39 | 38.6% |
| 22-24 | 9 | 20.5% | 13 | 27.7% | 20 | 30.0% | 27 | 26.7% |
| 25-27 | 2 | 4.5% | 2 | 4.3% | 5 | 7.6% | 11 | 10.9% |
| 28 + | 5 | 11.4% | 0 | 0.0% | 6 | 9.1% | 11 | 10.9% |
| TOTAL BY DECADE | 44 | 100.0% | 47 | 100.1% | 66 | 100.0% | 101 | 100.0% |

Source: Registre générale.

number of persevering entrants in the 25 years of age and over category increased steadily in the last two decades.

Women from Nova Scotia tended to fall within older age categories as the decades progressed. The percentage of 16-18 year olds was 30.0 percent in 1881-1890, then dropped drastically to 6.7 percent in the next decade, rose to 9.4 percent in 1901-1910 and rose minimally to 10.2 percent in 1911-1920. The percentage of 19-21 year olds in each decade remained fairly constant while the percentage of 22-24 year old entrants fluctuated between 20.0 percent and 40.0 percent. Entrants 25 and older were never very numerous, but the percentage of these older entrants increased over time, and in the last three decades the number of 25-27 year old entrants equalled the number of 16-18 year old entrants. The

TABLE XII -- NOVA SCOTIA ENTRANTS WHO MADE PERPETUAL VOWS BY AGE GROUP AND DECADE OF ENTRY

| AGE (IN YEARS) | 1881-1890 | | 1891-1900 | | 1901-1910 | | 1911-1920 | |
|-----------------|-----------|--------|-----------|--------|-----------|--------|-----------|-------|
| 16-18 | 6 | 30.0% | 1 | 6.7% | 3 | 9.4% | 4 | 10.2% |
| 19-21 | 8 | 40.0% | 7 | 46.7% | 13 | 40.6% | 16 | 41.0% |
| 22-24 | 4 | 20.0% | 6 | 40.0% | 11 | 34.4% | 11 | 28.2% |
| 25-27 | 1 | 5.0% | 1 | 6.7% | 3 | 9.4% | 4 | 10.2% |
| 28 + | 1 | 5.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 2 | 6.2% | 4 | 10.2% |
| TOTAL BY DECADE | 20 | 100.0% | 15 | 100.1% | 32 | 100.0% | 39 | 99.8% |

Source: Registre générale.

percentage of entrants 21 and under dropped from 70.0 percent in 1881-1890 to roughly 50.0 percent in the remaining decades.

Prince Edward Island entrants followed the same general age patterns as those from Nova Scotia: the number in the youngest age group decreased while the number of older entrants increased. The percentage of 16-18 year olds was equal to that of 19-21 year olds in the first decade but declined steadily in subsequent decades. Until 1900 the majority of entrants, 66.6 percent in 1881-1890 and 78.2 percent in 1891-1900, were 21 years of age or younger but in 1901-1910 the percentage of entrants in this age group plummeted to 30.0 percent, though it rose again to 41.5 percent in the last decade. In the last two decades there was

definitely a shift towards older entrants from Prince Edward Island. Among Nova Scotia entrants the 19-21 year old age category maintained the largest percentage of entrants throughout the entire time frame, but in Prince Edward Island this age group ceased to comprise the largest percentage of entrants after the 1891-1900 decade.

TABLE XIII -- PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND ENTRANTS WHO MADE PERPETUAL VOWS, BY AGE GROUP AND DECADE OF ENTRY

| AGE (IN YEARS) | 1881-1890 | | 1891-1900 | | 1901-1910 | | 1911-1920 | |
|-----------------|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------|--------|-----------|--------|
| 16-18 | 5 | 33.3% | 5 | 21.7% | 3 | 15.0% | 5 | 12.2% |
| 19-21 | 5 | 33.3% | 13 | 56.5% | 3 | 15.0% | 12 | 29.3% |
| 22-24 | 2 | 13.3% | 4 | 17.4% | 8 | 40.0% | 14 | 34.1% |
| 25-27 | 0 | 0.0% | 1 | 4.3% | 2 | 10.0% | 6 | 14.6% |
| 28 + | 3 | 20.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 4 | 20.0% | 4 | 9.8% |
| TOTAL BY DECADE | 15 | 99.9% | 23 | 99.9% | 20 | 100.0% | 41 | 100.0% |

Source: Registre générale.

Contrary to the experience of its neighbours, New Brunswick sent larger numbers of younger entrants to the community between 1880 and 1920. As with the discussion on the ages of total entrants to the Congregation, New Brunswick marched to its own drummer in terms of the age of its persevering entrants. The percentage of 16-18 year old New

Brunswick entrants who made perpetual vows remained high in comparison to Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, and the percentage of 19-21 year olds increased dramatically after 1900. The majority of New Brunswick entrants who made perpetual vows were 21 years of age or younger, except in the 1881-1890 decade when only 44.4 percent were in this age category. As the percentage of entrants 21 and under in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island fell to 50.0 percent, 51.2 percent and 30.0 percent, 41.5 percent respectively in the last two decades the percentage for New Brunswick entrants rose to 92.9 percent and 71.4 percent for the same periods.

TABLE XIV -- NEW BRUNSWICK ENTRANTS WHO MADE PERPETUAL VOWS, BY AGE GROUP AND DECADE OF ENTRY

| AGE (IN YEARS) | 1881-1890 | | 1891-1900 | | 1901-1910 | | 1911-1920 | |
|------------------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|---------------|
| 16-18 | 3 | 33.3% | 5 | 55.6% | 6 | 42.9% | 4 | 19.0% |
| 19-21 | 1 | 11.1% | 1 | 11.1% | 7 | 50.0% | 11 | 52.4% |
| 22-24 | 3 | 33.3% | 3 | 33.3% | 1 | 7.1% | 2 | 9.5% |
| 25-27 | 1 | 11.1% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 1 | 4.8% |
| 28 + | 1 | 11.1% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 3 | 14.3% |
| TOTAL BY DECADE | 9 | 99.9% | 9 | 100.0% | 14 | 100.0% | 21 | 100.0% |

Source: Registre générale.

The data on the age of entrants indicates that women were not entering the Congregation immediately after completing their basic education. As entrant age trends rose, the percentage of women entering with work experience, usually teaching experience, increased. On average, slightly more than 40 percent of persevering entrants from Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island entered with prior teaching or work experience. Only about one quarter of New Brunswick entrants claimed such experience when they entered, which is to be expected given the comparably younger ages at which women from this province entered the Congregation.²³

The percentage of Nova Scotian entrants with work experience fluctuated throughout the 40 year period in question, rising to 71.9 percent in 1901-1910 from a mere 20.0 percent in the previous decade, then settling at 41.0 percent in the decade of the Great War. The sharp increase in work experience in the 1901-1910 decade does not appear to be a result of entrant age fluctuations, as the percentage of entrants 21 and younger did not differ significantly in the last three decades. So, though the entrants in this decade had more work experience, they were not significantly older than the women in the previous or following decades. Teaching experience was the most common background of Nova Scotia entrants with work experience and most of those had a teaching certificate of one level or another, often earned at the

²³ Notices biographiques, Annales.

Provincial Normal School in Truro for the later entrants. These women taught for several or more years before entering, a fifth of them had pursued studies at Mount Saint Bernard, and at least two had graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree prior to entering²⁴. The number of Prince Edward Island entrants with work experience increased steadily in each decade, and by 1911-1920 over 50 percent of persevering entrants had prior work, usually teaching, experience. The majority had teaching diplomas from Prince of Wales College and many boarded at the Congregation of Notre Dame's Notre Dame Academy in Charlottetown while pursuing their diploma. They then taught for as little as several months or, in one extreme case, as long as 16 years before entering²⁵. A few of the Island entrants without teaching experience had taken nursing or business courses and worked for a period of time prior to entrance.

New Brunswick entrants were by and large the group with the least work experience, which is not surprising given the relatively younger ages at which they entered. Only 13 of the 53 entrants who remained in the community had taught or held

²⁴ Florentia MacDonald, later Sr. Sainte Florentia I, was one of the first four women to be granted a Bachelor of Arts degree from St. Francis Xavier University in 1897. Annales, April 1955, 210-214, 331-337. The other St. Francis Xavier graduate was Mary Cameron who graduated in 1918. Notices biographiques, 6, 403-407.

²⁵ Christina Nelligan from Tignish taught for 16 years until the youngest daughter in the family was ready to teach and a brother returned home before she entered. Annales, January 1956, 75-81.

a business position prior to entering. Most of these only taught or worked two to three years before deciding to enter. It may also have been more difficult for New Brunswick women to pursue studies that would allow them to become teachers. Most New Brunswick entrants were of Acadian origin and may not have had the English language proficiency to be certified through the Provincial Normal School. Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island women, for the most part, would have experienced no such language difficulties²⁶.

It was not uncommon for women to delay entrance to religious life for several years, either on the advice of a spiritual advisor or due to family obligations. Eight of the persevering Nova Scotia entrants mention in their autobiographies that they delayed entrance. Three of these stayed to help care for ill family members. Another one had delayed due to her own fragile health. Two others helped support the family financially until all the children finished school, and two delayed entrance until their parents gave blessing to their vocational choice. Five of these entrants were over 21 before they were able to enter, though they had desired to do so several years earlier.²⁷

The situation is similar in Prince Edward Island where eight entrants also document a delay due to family

²⁶ Half of the Acadian entrants from Prince Edward Island had provincial teaching certificates prior to entrance. Notices biographiques, Annales.

²⁷ Notices biographiques, Annales.

obligations. In all but two cases women wished to enter religious life in their teen years but were unable to fulfil this dream until they reached their mid- to late- twenties or older.²⁸

Such occurrences were fewer in New Brunswick where only four entrants mention a delay, and two of these still entered in their teen years. One of the others waited until her brother had completed college before entering, at 30 years of age, and the last entrant was 26 when she finally received parental approval to enter the Congregation.

Even those who entered religious life in the Congregation of Notre Dame at a somewhat older age than the norm had experienced a desire to be a sister long before circumstances permitted them to enter the community of their choice. Again it is apparent that these women did not choose religious life as a last resort, but rather they persevered in their goal to be a religious once they fulfilled their family duties.

Neither did women choose to enter religious life by default, that is, only after opportunities for marriage had largely evaporated. As Table XV and XVI demonstrate, the typical Maritime entrant was received by the Congregation of Notre Dame well before the average age of marriage. This provides an indication that the decision to enter was not conditional upon the failure to find a marriage partner. Though by the last decade the gap between average age of

²⁸ Notices biographiques, Annales.

entrance and average age of marriage was decreasing, a discrepancy of two to four years still existed.

TABLE XV -- AVERAGE AGE OF MARRIAGE FOR MARITIME WOMEN, BY PROVINCE AND DECADE.

| | 1881 | 1891 | 1911 | 1921 |
|--------|------|------|------|------|
| N.S. | 25.9 | 26.4 | 25.7 | 24.8 |
| P.E.I. | 26.9 | 27.9 | 27.8 | 26.5 |
| N.B. | 25.4 | 26.3 | 25.4 | 24.3 |

Source: Thomas Gee, "Fertility and Marriage Patterns in Canada 1851-1971"; and "Marriage in Nineteenth-century Canada". Data for 1901 is unavailable.

TABLE XVI -- AVERAGE AGE OF ENTRANCE FOR MARITIME WOMEN, BY PROVINCE AND DECADE

| | 1881-1890 | 1891-1900 | 1901-1910 | 1911-1920 |
|--------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| N.S. | 20.0 | 20.5 | 22.1 | 22.4 |
| P.E.I. | 20.4 | 21.3 | 23.4 | 22.4 |
| N.B. | 20.8 | 22.2 | 19.8 | 21.4 |

Source: Registre générale.

When the Congregation of Notre Dame established missions in the Maritimes it concentrated its efforts in areas which corresponded to the dioceses of Antigonish, Chatham and Charlottetown. It is therefore reasonable to believe that the

Maritime women who chose to enter the Congregation originated from areas where the Sisters of the Congregation were present and active in the field of education. This is indeed the case for most of the women.

In Nova Scotia, the CND first located its missions in Richmond county, then, at various intervals, in the counties of Pictou, Antigonish, Inverness and Cape Breton. By 1885 at least one mission was active in each of these counties. The Congregation closed both missions in Richmond county by 1900 and did not reopen them. During the time frame under study, Pictou county had two CND missions, one in Pictou (1880) and the other in New Glasgow (1887). Mount Saint Bernard (1883) and its associated elementary and secondary schools remained the only CND establishments in Antigonish county, while in Inverness county the mission at Port Hood (1884) was soon joined by those of Mabou (1887) and Inverness (1904). The missions in Cape Breton county included several schools in Sydney (1885 and 1902), Sydney Mines (1900) and New Waterford (1912).

Most entrants from Nova Scotia originated from the counties of Inverness, Antigonish and Cape Breton and, with the exception of 1881-1890, Inverness county provided the greatest number of recruits among these three counties in each decade, sending 44 during the period. Inverness was one of the smallest and poorest of the counties, but prominent families in this Scottish area strongly supported the

Congregation, and religious vocations in general, and helped to create a social and cultural atmosphere where sending a daughter to the order was accepted and rewarded. Richmond county counted two entrants in 1881-1890, both from Descousse, but none after this decade. Pictou county was more prosperous than most of its neighbouring counties, but vocations to the CND did not flourish in the area. It only had one entrant during each 10-year period. Halifax, Guysborough and Victoria counties, though they did not have any CND schools or missions, still sent women to the Congregation. One entrant in 1881-1890 and two in 1911-1920 originated from Halifax county, while Victoria county also sent one in 1881-1890, two in both 1901-1910 and 1911-1920, and Guysborough county sent two in 1911-1920. Some of the women from these counties had experienced CND education in their youth.²⁹

In Prince Edward Island the Congregation was present in all three counties by 1881; however Queens and Prince counties were the main centres of activity. Queens county had three CND mission schools: two in Charlottetown, Notre Dame Academy (1857) and St. Joseph's (1863), and one in Rustico (1882). Prince county also had three schools: one in Miscouche

²⁹ Of the 10 entrants from counties in Nova Scotia where the CND was not present, only four are not known to have studied with the Congregation prior to entrance. The necrologies of three of these sisters (#2574, #2692, #1511) do not indicate how the women came into contact with the sisters of the CND but the fourth woman met the Congregation when her family moved to Sydney Mines, after her education was complete. Notices biographiques, Annales.

(1864), one in Tignish (1868) and one in Summerside (1868). The lone Kings county mission was opened in Souris in 1881. As expected, the majority of Island entrants originated in Prince and Queens counties. Queens county, the most populous of the three counties, sent the most entrants in 1881-1890 and 1911-1920, while Prince county entrants formed the majority in the middle decades. Kings county sent one entrant in 1881-1890, three in 1901-1910 and four in the last decade.³⁰

The Congregation located its four New Brunswick missions in Northumberland, Gloucester and Kent counties. Northumberland's Newcastle mission was opened in 1869, Bathurst (1871) and Caraquet (1874) were opened in Gloucester county, and Saint Louis de Kent (1874) completed the Congregation's pre-1920 foundations in New Brunswick. Gloucester county maintained a steady flow of entrants to the Congregation despite the fact that the Bathurst mission was closed in 1900. Northumberland and Kent counties had sporadic entrant patterns, with Northumberland sending two in 1881-1890, four in 1901-1910 and two in the last decade, and Kent sending one in 1881-1890, four in the next decade and four again in 1911-1920. Westmorland county also had a small but steady flow of entrants to Montreal and during the four decades in question sent as many as did Northumberland county. York, Restigouche and Madawaska counties also sent a few

³⁰ Registre générale.

entrants to the Congregation.³¹

Not all women who eventually entered the Congregation received their education from CND sisters but most did. More than nine out of 10 Maritime women who persevered in the Congregation of Notre Dame were educated for some length of time by the sisters of the Congregation. Some, including Mary Murphy of Port Hood, Mary Callaghan of Charlottetown, and Marie Richard of St. Louis de Kent, originated from towns where the Congregation was present and pursued their entire education with the CND sisters. Most, however, could only attend convent schools for part of their school years as families would often send each girl to the convent for a few years because they could not afford to send all the girls there for their full education.³² Preparation for first communion and the last few years of school were the most common times for a young girl to be sent to the convent school, either as a boarder or as a day student.³³ Even the

³¹ As was the case with the entrants from the Nova Scotia counties where the CND was not present, these New Brunswick entrants from counties without CND schools either went to CND schools in other counties (#2955, #1376), or met the sisters of the Congregation after completing their education (#2672). The Congregation's records do not indicate how the remaining two women (#2054, #3028) came to know the Congregation. Notices biographiques, Annales.

³² Notices biographiques, Annales.

³³ The daughters of Jean and Juliette Arsenault of Prince Edward Island all attended the Miscouche convent school for six months prior to their first communion. They later returned to complete their education. Notices biographiques, XVI, 159-164.

girls who did not have a CND school in their immediate area often attended a CND school in a neighbouring county at these important times. The sisters prepared Mary Fraser of Antigonish for her first communion and she later attended Holy Angels school in Sydney. Lucie Doiron of Hope River, Prince Edward Island, spent three months with the CND in Rustico preparing for her first communion and she also returned there later for her final few years of education. Others, such as Agnes Rankin of Cape Breton, Mary McCarthy of Tignish and Demerise Blanchard of New Brunswick attended local public schools but completed their education at CND schools. Many women from Nova Scotia, including Annie Campbell, Jane Gillis and Mathilda McIntyre, had the advantage of attending Mount Saint Bernard College in Antigonish for the finishing touches of their education or, as in the case Florentia MacDonald, to pursue a higher degree. As mentioned earlier, Notre Dame Academy in Charlottetown also provided those finishing touches, but perhaps more importantly served as a boarding residence for the Island's young Catholic ladies studying at Prince of Wales College. In some cases it remains unknown whether the entrant was educated by CND sisters but most of those who were not students of the Congregation's schools, especially among the New Brunswick entrants, received their education from other religious orders in their area. Marie Daigle studied with the Hotel Dieu sisters and the Daughters of Wisdom in Edmundston before going to the CND's convent

school in St. Louis de Kent. Mary Hachez and Mary McManus both studied with the Sisters of Charity in Bathurst. Anne Gaudet also studied with the Sisters of Charity in Memramcook before going to St. Louis de Kent at age 14 to study with the CND.³⁴

Not surprisingly the ethnicity of entrants to the Congregation is reflective of the ethnic composition of their localities or provinces. Ethnic origin becomes more difficult to establish positively for women who entered after 1911 but prior to that, ethnicity usually can be identified. Most entrants were Scots, Irish or Acadians. The ethnic proportions varied markedly from province to province.

Nova Scotian entrants throughout the period remained predominantly Scottish, seconded by a much smaller number of Irish women and an occasional Acadian woman (never more than two per decade). The proportion of entrants of Irish origin decreased drastically after the 1881-1890 decade, when it equalled that of the Scots, to only about one quarter the proportion of Scots in each decade after that. Many strong family connections were present among these Scots, as will be discussed in the following chapter.³⁵

Women of Irish origin composed the majority of Prince Edward Island entrants in the first two decades, but by 1901-

³⁴ Notices biographiques, Annales.

³⁵ Notices biographiques, Annales. Canada census 1871, 1881, 1891.

1910 the combined numbers of Acadian and Scottish entrants surpassed the Irish and that trend continued into the 1911-1920 decade when the numbers of Irish, Scottish and Acadians were nearly equal. Acadians did not constitute a very large percentage of the Island's population, but their relatively high representation among entrants to the CND is reflective of the important role the Congregation played in Acadian communities like Miscouche and Rustico, and the French nature of the order.³⁶

New Brunswick Acadians flocked to the Congregation of Notre Dame in much larger numbers than their Irish or Scottish counterparts. In 1891-1900 all of the New Brunswick entrants were Acadian, but in the other decades there were a few Irish entrants, mostly from the Newcastle area. Only one entrant can be confirmed as being of Scottish origin and last names of those of unconfirmed ethnicity do not suggest any additions to the Scottish contingent.³⁷

The social origins of the entrants are often difficult to assess in terms of fixed, measurable criteria that illustrate the status or prestige of a particular family within a given community. As a means of providing some insight into social origins, Tables XVII to XX identify the occupational groups of the fathers of Maritime entrants by decade and province.

³⁶ Notices biographiques, Annales. Canada census 1881, 1891.

³⁷ Notices biographiques, Annales. Canada Census, 1871, 1881, 1891.

While occupational groupings cannot be equated with social status they do offer some indication of the standing of a particular family, due to the occupation of the head of household, in the community. Since a detailed study of the relationship between occupation and status in the Maritimes has yet to be done for the 1880 to 1920 period, for the purposes of this thesis, the occupational categories established by Michael Katz will be used to assign socio-economic status to the entrants' families.³⁸

For all three provinces, with the exception of the 1901-1910 data for New Brunswick, agriculture constituted the largest single occupational group for entrants' fathers. After 1890 Prince Edward Island maintained, by a significant margin, the largest percentage of entrants from agriculturally based families among the three provinces. Nova Scotian entrants with farmer fathers hovered around the 40 percent mark of total entrants for each decade. By 1901 New Brunswick was moving away from entrants with agricultural origins. Unfortunately, without substantial amounts of further research it is not possible to determine the relative prosperity of these farming families and to use this information as an indication of the amount of influence or respect each family may have commandeered in their locality. Suffice it to say that a large group of entrants, perhaps 40 percent in all,

³⁸ Michael B. Katz, The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid Nineteenth-Century City, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

originated from farming families.

Given the distinct economic bases of the three Maritime provinces though, some differences among fathers' occupational groups is to be expected. The CND schools were located in the centre of industrialized Nova Scotia, while Prince Edward Island remained an agriculturally based society. The areas of CND activity in New Brunswick were also primary product areas based on the fishing and lumber industries. Each province would have had a different social community based on these economic and industrial differences.

The number of entrants from professional/merchant and white collar occupational groups is significant, given the context of the Maritimes. Though some CND schools were located in cities and towns, such as Charlottetown, Pictou and Newcastle, few of the entrants originated from geographic locations that could be considered urban centres. Most were from small communities where professional and white collar jobs were scarce. So, for a group composed almost exclusively of rural-dwellers to include such a relatively high percentage of families from professional/merchant and white collar occupations is indeed significant. As shown in Tables XVII to XX, the percentage of entrants in each of these groups remained fairly stable for Nova Scotian entrants over the four decades but the percentage of New Brunswick entrants from these groups almost doubled between the 1891-1900 and 1901-1910 decades, though the percentage decreased again in the

last decade. With the exception of the 1881-1890 data, the percentage of Prince Edward Island women originating from professional/merchant and white collar groups was low in comparison with the other two provinces. Prince Edward Island maintained a much stronger rural base for much longer than did Nova Scotia or New Brunswick, and the origins of the entrants are reflective of this.

Among Nova Scotian entrants, women with fathers in the professional/merchant group (doctors, lawyers, businessmen, entrepreneurs) formed the second largest single percentage group in 1881-1890 and 1891-1900, but by the last two decades the percentage in this occupational group dropped to be more in line with the percentages in the white collar (clerks, station masters, mine inspectors) and skilled labour (carpenters, blacksmiths, machinists) groups. In the last two decades Nova Scotian entrants represented a more broadly-based socio-economic group than in previous decades, although the number of entrants with fathers in the unskilled labour grouping remained very low. Entrants from Nova Scotia, for the most part, originated from the equivalent of upper or middle class families and not from lower status occupational group families.

That the Congregation of Notre Dame was attractive to women from well-placed Nova Scotian families is further indicated by a consideration of some of the family connections of the individual women who entered the community. Three of

the grand daughters of Peter Smyth, businessman and member of the Privy Council and great benefactor of the sisters of the CND in Cape Breton, entered the Congregation³⁹. The mother of two of the women was Mary MacNeil, sister to both Neil MacNeil, who would become the Archbishop of Toronto and Dan MacNeil, a member of the provincial government and a county court judge. The MacNeil family counted several members in the Congregation of Notre Dame over several generations.⁴⁰ The daughter of the Honourable C.F. MacIsaac, judge and successful federal and provincial politician, also entered the Congregation,⁴¹ as did Margaret Lydia Cameron, the daughter of Hugh Cameron, local doctor and M.P. for Inverness, and the grand daughter of the Honourable John MacKinnon.⁴² These well-respected families regarded the Congregation of Notre Dame as a prestigious order, supported the establishment of its schools in Nova Scotia and proudly sent their daughters to

³⁹ The three women were: Mary Beatrice Smyth, Eleanore Theresa Smyth and Margaret Winnifred Smith. Annales, July-August 1940, 427-32; January 1955, 81-84; May 1964, 242-50; J. L. MacDougall, History of Inverness County Nova Scotia, (Ontario: Mika Publishing, 1972), 92.

⁴⁰ Notices biographiques; Annales; MacDougall, History of Inverness County Nova Scotia, 24-26, 609-612.

⁴¹ Annales, December 1963, 556-67; Raymond A. MacLean, ed., History of Antigonish, Volume I and II, (Antigonish: The Casket Printing and Publishing Company Ltd., 1976), 89.

⁴² Annales, 1960, 211-4; MacLean, History of Antigonish, 100.

become members of the community.⁴³

Without more research into the prosperity of the Prince Edward Island farmers it is difficult to determine status or community influence, but several factors offer insight into the standing of some of these farmers. Women who furthered their education and became teachers tended to originate from relatively prosperous families; the daughters from less prosperous families would be more likely to work as servants than teachers. Another indication of relative prosperity was the employment of servants or hired hands on the farm. Census records show that several dozen of the entrants from the agriculture occupational group lived on farms that employed one or more domestic servants. Usually these were male; however, in cases where two domestics were listed in census records, as a rule, one was male and the other female.⁴⁴ Other than the white collar group in the 1881-1890 data, fathers of Island entrants had only token representation in occupational groups other than agriculture up to the 1911-1920 decade. After 1911 there was greater distribution among professional/merchant, white collar and skilled labour groups. None of the Island entrants, in any decade, had fathers in the unskilled labour group.

⁴³ Colin Francis MacIsaac, for instance, proudly showed his daughter, Sr. Sainte Helene Marie, off to members of the political elite, including the Governor General. Annales, December 1963, 556-567.

⁴⁴ Canada Census 1871, 1881, 1891.

New Brunswick entrants were mainly from farm families before 1901. After that there was a sharp decrease in the percentage of entrants with fathers in this occupational group while entrants from professional/merchant, white collar and to a lesser degree skilled labour families increased. Notable entrants from New Brunswick included Louise Hachez, Elizabeth Bourgeois and Anna Mabel Pelletier who were daughters of justices of the peace; Mary Loretta McManus whose father was a member of the House of Parliament; Marie Apolline Richard, niece to Mgr. Marcel Francois Richard; and Anne Poirier, niece to Pascal Poirier and daughter of a reasonably successful businessman.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Notices biographiques; Annales; Sheila Andrew, "The Development of Elites in Acadian New Brunswick 1861-1881", (PhD Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1992).

TABLE XVII -- OCCUPATIONAL GROUP OF ENTRANTS' FATHERS BY PROVINCE FOR 1881-1890 DECADE OF ENTRY

| FATHER'S OCCUPATIONAL GROUP | NOVA SCOTIA | | P. E. ISLAND | | NEW BRUNSWICK | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|--------|--------------|--------|---------------|--------|
| | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| FARMER | 8 | 40.0% | 6 | 40.0% | 5 | 55.6% |
| PROFESSIONAL / MERCHANT | 5 | 25.0% | 1 | 6.7% | 1 | 11.1% |
| WHITE COLLAR | 1 | 5.0% | 5 | 33.3% | 1 | 11.1% |
| SKILLED LABOUR | 3 | 15.0% | 1 | 6.7% | 1 | 11.1% |
| UNSKILLED LABOUR | 1 | 5.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 1 | 11.1% |
| UNKNOWN | 2 | 10.0% | 2 | 13.3% | 0 | 0.0% |
| | 20 | 100.0% | 15 | 100.0% | 9 | 100.0% |

Source: Notices biographiques, Annales, Canada Census

TABLE XVIII -- OCCUPATIONAL GROUP OF ENTRANTS' FATHERS BY PROVINCE FOR 1891-1900 DECADE OF ENTRY

| FATHER'S OCCUPATIONAL GROUP | NOVA SCOTIA | | P. E. ISLAND | | NEW BRUNSWICK | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|--------|--------------|-------|---------------|--------|
| | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| FARMER | 6 | 40.0% | 19 | 82.6% | 6 | 66.7% |
| PROFESSIONAL / MERCHANT | 4 | 26.7% | 1 | 4.3% | 2 | 22.2% |
| WHITE COLLAR | 2 | 13.3% | 1 | 4.3% | 1 | 11.1% |
| SKILLED LABOUR | 3 | 20.0% | 2 | 8.7% | 0 | 0.0% |
| UNSKILLED LABOUR | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% |
| UNKNOWN | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% |
| | 15 | 100.0% | 23 | 99.9% | 9 | 100.0% |

Source: Notices biographiques, Annales, Canada Census.

TABLE XIX -- OCCUPATIONAL GROUP OF ENTRANTS' FATHERS BY PROVINCE FOR 1901-1910 DECADE OF ENTRY

| FATHER'S OCCUPATIONAL GROUP | NOVA SCOTIA | | P. E. ISLAND | | NEW BRUNSWICK | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|--------|--------------|--------|---------------|--------|
| | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| FARMER | 15 | 46.9% | 13 | 65.0% | 3 | 21.4% |
| PROFESSIONAL / MERCHANT | 5 | 15.6% | 1 | 5.0% | 4 | 28.6% |
| WHITE COLLAR | 4 | 12.5% | 2 | 10.0% | 5 | 35.7% |
| SKILLED LABOUR | 6 | 18.8% | 1 | 5.0% | 2 | 14.3% |
| UNSKILLED LABOUR | 1 | 3.1% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% |
| UNKNOWN | 1 | 3.1% | 3 | 15.0% | 0 | 0.0% |
| | 32 | 100.0% | 20 | 100.0% | 14 | 100.0% |

Source: Notices biographiques, Annales, Canada Census.

TABLE XX -- OCCUPATIONAL GROUP OF ENTRANTS' FATHERS BY PROVINCE FOR 1911-1920 DECADE OF ENTRY

| FATHER'S OCCUPATIONAL GROUP | NOVA SCOTIA | | P. E. ISLAND | | NEW BRUNSWICK | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------|--------------|--------|---------------|--------|
| | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| FARMER | 13 | 33.3% | 28 | 68.3% | 6 | 28.6% |
| PROFESSIONAL / MERCHANT | 7 | 17.9% | 4 | 9.8% | 5 | 23.8% |
| WHITE COLLAR | 6 | 15.4% | 3 | 7.3% | 4 | 19.0% |
| SKILLED LABOUR | 7 | 17.9% | 6 | 14.6% | 3 | 14.3% |
| UNSKILLED LABOUR | 3 | 7.7% | 0 | 0.0% | 1 | 4.8% |
| UNKNOWN | 3 | 7.7% | 0 | 0.0% | 2 | 9.5% |
| | 39 | 99.9% | 41 | 100.0% | 21 | 100.0% |

Source: Notices biographiques, Annales, Canada Census.

So then, who were the Maritime entrants to the Congregation of Montreal? And what were the differences among the entrants from the three provinces? Contrary to popular stereotypes, entrants to the Congregation did not fall into the under 19 age category for the most part, especially after the 1881-1890 decade. The majority of Maritime entrants were between 19 and 24 years of age when they entered. New Brunswick entrants, though, proved quite an exception to this rule as they were entering at a younger age while entrants from Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island were getting comparatively older.

Coupled with this, entrants from Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island were more likely to have gained teaching or other work experience prior to entering than were New Brunswick entrants. Numerous women fulfilled family obligations or waited for parental approval or the sanction of a spiritual advisor before entering, although many of them had wished to enter much earlier. Pursuing a vocation to religious life was not a decision these women reached without regard for the impact their choice would have on their families.

In comparing average age of entrance to the Congregation with average age of marriage among women from each Maritime province it is clear that women did not opt for religious life as a means of future security once their opportunities for marriage had evaporated. Women chose to enter several years younger than they could expect to marry; they deliberately chose one lifestyle over the other.

Predictably, the Congregation received almost all entrants from geographic areas with CND schools and missions. Most entrants attended these schools, but rarely did they complete their entire education there. Rather, families tended to send their daughters to the sisters' schools at important moments in their education, such as the time for first communion preparation and the last year or two of studies, and to send them to local public schools the rest of the time. This way each daughter could receive some education

from the sisters. A good number of Nova Scotian women took advantage of the location of Mount Saint Bernard College to pursue higher studies prior to entering. And Island women working towards their teaching diplomas often lived at the Congregation's Notre Dame Academy in Charlottetown.

The Congregation of Notre Dame proved attractive to women from all three major Catholic ethnic groups in the Maritimes: Scottish, Acadian and Irish. There did not seem to be any perception among Maritimers that the Congregation catered to one particular ethnic group, despite the fact that all postulate and novitiate training took place in French. Obviously Acadian women would have an advantage in this situation but Irish and Scottish women apparently did not feel impeded by the language barrier.

The occupational grouping of the fathers of entrants varied fairly widely, but almost all of these men belonged to groups considered to be upper or middle class, very few fell into unskilled occupational groups. A strong agricultural background is also evident. Prominent families, especially in Nova Scotia, sent daughters to the Congregation of Notre Dame and indeed were often important benefactors of the Congregation in the Maritimes. Strong family connections existed between several Maritime entrants and future bishops and archbishops, connections which would not be overlooked or undervalued by the Congregation. A number of Nova Scotian women originated from some of the province's most prominent

families, though prominent family origins can be identified for at least a few women in each province. Pride was taken in having a daughter, sister, aunt or niece in this community of educators.

In many ways then, the Maritime women who entered the Congregation were members of a fairly elite group of women of solid education and background that served them well as members of a religious community as prestigious as the Congregation of Notre Dame. Though the elite are most notable in Nova Scotia, there is some indication that some of the women from the other two provinces were also socially well-placed. These entrants served the Congregation well as it sought to maintain its reputation as one of the highest status religious communities in the country. As Maritime women began to constitute an increasing proportion of the community, they actively helped to preserve the high quality of entrants to the CND, by virtue of their family status and solid education.

CHAPTER FOUR

MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS OF MARITIME ENTRANTS

As the previous chapter illustrated, women from the Maritimes entered the Congregation of Notre Dame in increasingly greater numbers as the decades wore on. Although approximately a third of all entrants left the Congregation prior to making perpetual vows, the majority persevered in their chosen lifestyle for the rest of their days. Perhaps some of those who remained in religious life were not contented with their choice, but opted to stay in the Congregation anyway out of fear of returning to the secular world, or for other reasons. Nevertheless, the information gleaned from biographies and necrologies suggests that most Maritime entrants thrived in their chosen vocation and did not regret their choice.

What then motivated these women to choose religious life rather than marriage or single life, and why was the Congregation of Notre Dame the order to which they chose to commit themselves? Most seem to have had a disposition of openness towards religious life and reached their decision to enter in a context that placed such a choice within a sphere

of normalcy. It was a viable and acceptable option for young Catholic women, and they were expected to at least consider the possibility of a religious vocation. This spiritual predisposition formed the basis of any decision to enter a religious community, but other factors also played an important role and without these external validations the choice of religious life likely would not have been made.

Historians have generally approached the question of personal motivation in choosing religious life with trepidation. The source of this anxiety seems to lie in the rather ambiguous role of religious or spiritual urgings towards the state of poverty, chastity and obedience. How does an historian prove or precisely evaluate the strength of a spiritual "call" to religious life? And, is this call sufficient by itself to explain a woman's desire and subsequent decision to enter, or is it only a small, albeit necessary, element in the range of factors that move a woman to choose religious life?

Those who have attempted to wrestle with these questions tend to agree that a spiritual attraction to the convent and to devoting oneself to God are prerequisites to understanding the decision to enter. Beyond this, the role of external factors in the carrying out of such a decision is still a matter to be explored.

Danylewycz, Cooper and other historians emphasize the social factors that influenced women's entrance to religious

life. Danylewycz examines the social and religious context of Quebec and argues that the number of entrants increased throughout the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries in response to the lack of other available options for women who wished to avoid marriage and motherhood, and because much in society made it seem quite natural and desirable for women to gravitate toward the convent. Society had little to offer women who wished to pursue a career and ascend to positions of power in the field of education, but religious life offered the possibility of assuming administrative positions and some degree of career security. Religious life was an obvious consideration for women who were constantly reminded, by the Church, of the pre-eminence of the virtue of chastity and the graces to be obtained through the imitation of Mary, the most holy of virgins.¹ Cooper presents economic factors as influential for women who entered religious life during the Depression, and proves that, in this case, economic factors had a direct impact on entrance patterns.²

The difficulty arises, though, when the historian tries to come to precise conclusions about which factors are the most influential and which are only of minor importance. The most an historian can do is to identify factors or situations

¹ Marta Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil. An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood, and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1920*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 38-46.

² Barbara Cooper, "In the Spirit: Entrants to a Religious Community of Women in Quebec 1930-1939", (MA Thesis, McGill University, 1983).

which circumstantial evidence suggests probably influenced a woman's decision to enter. It may not even be possible to rank these in any meaningful order of significance, although any discussion about religious vocations must assume that an active faith and a belief in the value and importance of this lifestyle were important motivating factors in most cases.

Accompanying the problem of identifying the factors that influenced a woman's decision to enter religious life is the question of consciousness. Are the only influential factors those which the woman consciously articulates? Might there not be factors which she does not articulate, either for personal reasons or because she is not fully cognizant of them herself? The major sources concerning motivation have certain limitations. The autobiographies of persevering entrants, written at the request of the Congregation and submitted to the Superior before the entrant was accepted as a vowed member of the community, offer the most insight into motivational factors. Entrants would be careful to offer comments and biographical details that would be acceptable to the community. Nevertheless, within these parameters a woman could present an accurate account of her journey towards religious life. Necrologies face similar limitations in that they were written by other members of the community upon the death of a sister and their tone and content reflect that fact. Usually they incorporate information from the woman's autobiography, speak of personal characteristics and review

the woman's career as a sister of the CND. Despite their limitations, these sources present valuable information about the families, childhood experiences, characteristics and careers of each woman. They also give each woman a voice to discuss the motivational factors of which she was aware.

The historian can identify the religious and social atmosphere of the day to provide the context of each woman's decision, study the woman's own words about her decision to enter (if they exist), and be mindful of the fact that it is impossible to know all the relevant information that went into the woman's choice but, in the end, must recognize that each woman who entered did so for reasons particular to herself. She would be abundantly aware of some, and only minimally of others, yet undoubtedly a variety of factors and reasons combined to bring the woman to the point of requesting admission to a religious community. Despite the individual nature of the decision to enter a religious order, certain common factors are evident in most cases.

This chapter will explore factors which could be identified as possible influences on women's decisions to enter religious life, including family, priestly influence, the example set by the CND sisters in Maritime localities, the recruiting efforts of the Congregation, the status attributed to religious life in general and to the Congregation of Notre Dame in particular, and the influential role of Church groups and sodalities.

The notion of vocation is a difficult one to define precisely. It has been described as an unrelenting message of love from God³, a burning hunger or thirst for God⁴, and as a call given by God to a soul⁵. But regardless of the definition, the Maritime women who joined the Congregation of Notre Dame often spoke quite clearly about the meaning of vocation for them, at whatever stage in their lives it first appeared. Direct reference to the moment she knew religious life was meant for her is not mentioned in each sister's biography or necrology, but many did address this issue. For some, the calling occurred at a specific moment, while for others it was more of a process of discerning the possibility of a call to vowed life as a sister.

The religious climate of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was very favourable to the promotion of vocations to religious life for both men and women. As the Catholic population of Canada increased⁶, the Church focused on the development and expansion of social service activities

³ Margaret Wescott, film director, Behind the Veil: Nuns (Canada: National Film Board, 1984).

⁴ Monica Baldwin, I Leap Over the Wall, A Return to the World After Twenty-eight Years in a Convent, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), 12.

⁵ Donald Attwater, ed., The Catholic Encyclopaedic Dictionary, Vol. XV (USA: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1951), 498-9.

⁶ The population of Catholics in Canada increased from 1,532,471 in 1871 to 3,389,626 in 1921. M.C. Urquhart, ed., Historical Statistics of Canada, (Toronto: MacMillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1965), 18.

including schools, hospitals, orphanages and work with the poor, and needed people to staff such institutions and programs. Equally important, the bishops, after 1840, were engaged in the creation of a distinctly Catholic culture in the areas of education and social structure. Priests and teachers urged Catholic youngsters to think and pray about their vocations, to listen intently to God's calling. A vocation to the priestly or religious way of life was presented as the highest calling one could receive, despite the Church's concurrent emphasis on the virtues of family life. The Church expected faithful Catholic families to produce an abundance of young men and women eager to answer the call to vowed service.

For many, a vocation to religious life was something which occurred in childhood. Catholic children grew up with the understanding that choosing to enter religious life was an acceptable decision in the eyes of Catholic society. Such messages were not without impact on the young and impressionable. The time of first communion, which usually occurred in childhood, was an important milestone in the initiation into the Catholic faith and a time when many women recount receiving, or at least praying for, a religious vocation. Mary Catherine Gillis mentions in her biography that the priest told her to pray for her vocation at first communion and although she was unclear as to what he was

talking about she did it anyway.⁷ Mary Ethel O'Brien had a somewhat more dramatic experience of a calling to religious life. One day after her first communion she heard a voice telling her: "You will become a nun. Do not question how or when. Only leave all to me".⁸ Many others also attributed the origins of their religious vocation to their childhood years, and for a rare few this idea arose even before they had direct contact with a sister. At five years of age, Mary Ann O'Brien (no relation to Mary Ethel apparently) told her mother she would become a sister, but she did not lay eyes on a sister until she was 16.⁹ Clearly, for these women the attraction to life as a religious sister came early and, though future situations and experiences might have served as affirmations of this attraction, they viewed their choice to enter the Congregation as a religiously or spiritually motivated one, originating in their youth. Only about half of the necrologies document the moment at which the woman accepted the possibility of a personal vocation to religious life, but among the post-1890¹⁰ entrants who do pinpoint a moment, an average of 17.6 percent of persevering entrants indicated that they experienced a call to religious life in

⁷ Annales, May 1936, 303-307; Annales, June 1936, 366-370.

⁸ Notices biographiques, vol. IX, 49-54.

⁹ Annales, September 1929, 377-380.

¹⁰ Prior to 1891 only one entrant indicated an awareness of having a vocation to religious life in childhood.

childhood. The proportions of women in this group remained fairly consistent among provinces during the last three decades, with the exception of New Brunswick in the 1911-1920 decade when the proportion of women who noted childhood awareness of their vocation dropped to 5.0 percent.

A second life stage where women recounted an awareness of their call to religious life was the teenage years, a time which found many in convent boarding schools and sodality groups. These women rarely identified a precise moment when the attraction to vowed life made itself known, describing instead, a process of evaluating their suitability to religious life at the suggestion of teachers and priests. In the course of the four decades, an average of 18.6 percent of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick entrants indicated that the teen years were significant in their decision to enter, and many of them specifically mention sodality retreats as the moment when they decided to enter. Prince Edward Island entrants also mention the importance of the teen years, but less often than the women from the other provinces, especially in the early decades. By 1901 however, the proportion indicating entrance decisions in their teen years was more in line with the average of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick women.

Similar numbers indicated that they only developed a desire to enter the Congregation in their twenties. A few reached this conclusion after being hired as lay teachers at Congregation schools or after renewing friendships with women

who had entered, as in the case of Catherine Wilson.¹¹ And some just tired of resisting, as Sarah Beaton admitted in her autobiography: "After my school life was completed I grew greatly attached to the amusements of the world. I avoided the sisters who always told me I had a religious vocation. However, in the midst of my enjoyments an inner voice kept prompting me to renounce the world. I tried ... to drive those thoughts away but my resistance was in vain".¹² The proportion of Prince Edward Island women who indicated that they accepted the notion of a personal vocation at this moment in their life consistently outnumbered that of the women from the other Maritime provinces throughout the four decades, although the proportion of women in this category increased to an average of 15.5 percent among all three provinces in the 1911-1920 decade.

Acknowledging that one had a vocation to religious life was the major step to entering a religious community, but it also was extremely important to choose a community that was suited to one's own desires, goals and personality. Though ostensibly quite similar, each religious community, through the influence of its founder or foundress and the work for which it was created, had a unique spirit which may be difficult to define, but was nevertheless apparent to those within the community. The Maritime women who eventually chose

¹¹ Annales, April 1970, 113-116.

¹² Notices biographiques, vol. 21, no. 26, 231-34.

to join the Congregation of Notre Dame were well acquainted with this idea, although a dozen or so entered only after discovering that they were not suited to another community. Most who entered the Congregation wanted to teach, so entering this prominent teaching community seemed quite logical, but there were many other religious communities committed to educational goals, and thus the CND was not the only choice for a woman who wished to be a teaching sister. Celine Nadeau entered the Grey Nuns of Montreal, but "did not feel at home" and decided to join the Congregation of Notre Dame shortly thereafter.¹³ Similarly Viola Gratton left the nursing Hotel Dieu sisters in Chatham after several months as a postulant and later decided to enter the CND.¹⁴ Mary Beatrice Ryan deferred her plans to enter the Good Shepherd Order and when the time for entrance arrived she opted for the CND instead.¹⁵ Both the Sisters of Charity in Halifax and the Congregation of Notre Dame interested Mathilda Agatha Prendergast, but after much prayer she chose the CND.¹⁶

The influence of family on a young woman's decision to become a sister took many forms, both subtle and overt.

¹³ Annales, January 1950, 41-48.

¹⁴ Annales, October 1944, 555-560.

¹⁵ Notices biographiques, no. 3, 389-93.

¹⁶ Notices biographiques, vol. 22, no. 27, 249-253. Examples such as these give one cause to wonder how many of the entrants to the Congregation of Notre Dame who left prior to taking vows actually rejected the lifestyle and how many just moved on to other religious communities.

Parents recognized their responsibility to provide workers for the Church's activities, but some were less than eager to see their own daughters embrace this lifestyle. Though the records do not indicate that any parent ever forbade a daughter from entering, they do indicate clearly that parents often asked their daughters to delay their entrance. Separation from family proved a very painful experience for both entrant and family members. Women realized that, upon entering, all further contact with her family would be extremely limited and forever changed. The Congregation became the woman's new family and she celebrated special occasions within the community. Sisters knew they would miss celebrations and moments of crisis with their families once they entered.

In a number of cases the influence of parents seems to have been decisive. Several entrants attested to the fact that their parents, particularly their mothers, actively prayed that they would become sisters. Mary O'Brien who, as mentioned, declared her intention to become a sister at age five, did so to please her mother, who hoped one of her girls would become a sister.¹⁷ Annie Graham and Mary Ann McManus both related how, from their earliest recollection, their mothers prayed they would enter religious life.¹⁸

¹⁷ Annales, September 1929, 356, 377-380.

¹⁸ Annales, May 1929, 244-8, 264-266; Annales, April 1925, 141-144; Annales, May 1925, 194-195.

On occasion, parents' deathbed communications included wishes about a daughter's future. Sarah O'Keefe recounted that on his deathbed her father talked about how happy he would be if all his daughters became sisters; only Sarah fulfilled his wish.¹⁹ Marie Emma Leger credited her vocation to her mother's dying wish.²⁰

Two Maritime women expressed in their autobiographies the sense that they were called to religious life to fulfil the dreams of close family members. Her mother had wanted to be a Congregation of Notre Dame sister but eventually married instead, so Mary Florida Pitre entered in the place of her mother.²¹ Sr. Saint Charles Spinola died after temporary vows, so her sister, Mary Jean McIsaac, "knew she must take her place".²²

The hopes and dreams of parents and other close family members must have made a strong impression on women who were raised in a church that not only promoted the option of religious life, but also instructed the faithful to obey their parents. Though a relatively small number of entrants specifically document direct parental or family influence, the presence of such accounts remains consistent throughout the four decades.

¹⁹ Notices biographiques, vol. XIV, 235-238.

²⁰ Annales, January 1946, 61-64.

²¹ Annales, November 1949, 544, 588-590.

²² Notices biographiques, vol. XV, 363-67.

By the turn of the century, what had seemed an exceptional act became a normal, often expected, response and families became increasingly familiar with the entrance process, as more and more daughters and sons went off to the convent or seminary. Having one of its members in religious life was an honour for any family, and some Maritime families were known for the large numbers of vocations they spawned. The data on the Maritime women who joined the Congregation of Notre Dame suggests that in the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a large proportion of entrants had close family members (aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, first cousins) in the Congregation, in other religious orders or in the priesthood. Among CND sisters from Nova Scotia 46.2 percent had close relatives in one type of vowed religious life or another, the majority of whom (36.5 percent) counted relatives in the Congregation itself. Prince Edward Island entrants showed similar family patterns with 44.4 percent of them having close relatives in the convent or priesthood, including 30.0 percent with relatives in the Congregation. New Brunswick followed suit with 43.3 percent of persevering entrants claiming family relations with other priests or sisters, 30.2 percent being related to sisters in the Congregation. For over one third of the Maritime women who remained in the Congregation of Notre Dame, joining the community entailed a connection with a relative, perhaps a sense of family away from home. Certainly if one family

member enjoyed a degree of success in the Congregation other relatives pondering a vocation to religious life might be encouraged to consider following in the footsteps of the one already in the community.

Several families from the Antigonish diocese were notable in terms of the proliferation of vocations within them. In the course of three generations, Bishop Neil MacNeil²³ counted one sister in the Congregation of Notre Dame, as well as six nieces and at least one grandniece. Likewise, John Cameron, named titular bishop of Titioplis and co-adjudicator to the bishop of Arichat in 1870, had five nieces and a multitude of grand and great-grand nieces in the Congregation. The sister and several nieces of Colin Chisholm, a prominent priest in the Antigonish diocese, entered the CND as well. This is to say nothing of the numerous priests who originated from these families. In a tribute to Annie Campbell, a CND sister and one of Colin Chisholm's nieces, Monsignor M.M. Coady spoke about the connection between certain families and an abundance of vocations: "The families from which she sprang made precious contributions to the spiritual life of this county. The Notre Dame Order in particular is indebted to these people."²⁴ Such strong family connections are not as readily

²³ Neil McNeil became the Vicar Apostolic of St. George's Newfoundland in 1895, was named St. George's first bishop in 1904 and later received appointments to the position of Archbishop in Vancouver and Toronto.

²⁴ Annales, February 1952, 106.

apparent in the other provinces, though several nieces and cousins of Msg. Marcel Francois Richard in New Brunswick entered the community.

It would be unfair to say that the Congregation targeted the young female relatives of important clerics, but the teaching sisters who knew these girls through the convent schools could hardly have been unaware of the advantages in attracting such well-connected women to their community. Though free from direct diocesan control, the Congregation, like all communities of religious women, was controlled at least indirectly by ecclesiastical authorities, and maintaining favourable relationships with bishops was an important means of preventing possible problems. Integrating family bonds into the fabric of the community served this purpose nicely. In fact, some of the birth sisters of bishops, including Mary Catherine Thompson²⁵, rose to important levels of leadership and achievement in the community and were the ones who dealt directly with ecclesiastical superiors. This is not to say that these women ascended the ranks due to their family connections, but it is undeniable that having women from such recognized families as members lent the community a good deal of status and prestige, something it had always sought to achieve and maintain.

Close family links to priests and members of the Church

²⁵ Annales, February 1914, 450, 464.

hierarchy served another important purpose. As discussed in the preceding chapter, women often sought advice and affirmation from their parish priest or confessor while discerning their vocation to religious life. A priest who had close relatives in the Congregation of Notre Dame might prove more receptive to a young woman's intent to enter that particular community than another one. If the woman was undecided as to which congregation to enter and sought the advice of the priest on this matter, the priest's knowledge of the Congregation, either through intimate connections or by reputation, might lead him to present the option of entering the CND in a favourable light and thereby influence the woman's decision.

While these family links may be quite impressive, they only detail the relationships that are documented in the Congregation's records and a few other limited sources. It is quite likely that many family connections went unmentioned by the community's chroniclers and only time consuming and exhausting genealogical research could present the full picture of the extent to which Maritime women in the Congregation were related to other sisters and priests.

Another important theme in the sisters' autobiographies is death. The death of parents, in particular, seems to have had an impact on the decision to enter religious life for some women. In some cases the death of one parent caused the woman to delay entrance for a time because she felt unable to leave

the remaining grieving parent²⁶, or, particularly in cases where the mother died, the woman's help would be required at home until the father remarried or the younger children could assume household duties.²⁷ Several women recount that they entered shortly after the death of their remaining parent²⁸; they do not go so far as to say that they entered as a result of this, but it must certainly have been a consideration for them. In these cases women may have found themselves questioning how they would provide for their future without imposing themselves on siblings. Likely the thought of entering had occurred to them earlier in life, but perhaps the loss of parental security made the idea of religious life seem more attractive. In some cases, the release from caring for elderly or ill parents may have allowed the woman the freedom to pursue her dream to become a sister.

Still another motive for seeking the religious life has been suggested by Maria Vaccaro, who argues that family size was an important factor in women's decision to enter religious

²⁶ Mary Bell McGillvray, stayed with her mother for five years after the death of her father because she could not bear to leave her. Annales, September 1938, 520-523.

²⁷ Elizabeth Vautour, cared for her family for five years after the death of her mother. Annales, May 1936, 285-287. Annie MacAulay, also cared for her family for several years after her mother's death. Annales, October 1942, 465-469.

²⁸ Two women who entered under this circumstance were Catherine Elizabeth Bolger, and Mary Loretta McManus. Annales, April 1954, 282-287; Notices biographiques, vol. 5, 195-199.

life. In her study of Quebec-born female entrants to religious orders she discovered that more entrants consistently came from families of six or more children, even though the majority of Quebec families had five children or less. For women from these large families, communal living would not have been a very new concept in that they would have experienced lack of privacy, hard work and serious responsibilities at home. They would also have been well aware of the realities of marriage and motherhood, and religious life may have seemed a propitious escape from the lifestyle their mothers endured.²⁹

Maritime women who entered the CND also tended to come from very large families. Information on family size for all Maritime novices is not available, but enough is known to show that the Maritime context is somewhat similar to the situation Vaccaro found in Quebec. Among Nova Scotia entrants from 1881 to 1920 the family size of 38 women is unknown, but of the 68 of known family size, only seven originated from families of three children or less, 21 came from families of between four and seven children and the remaining 40 women came from families of eight or more children. Fully 58.8 percent of Nova Scotia sisters with known family sizes, or 34.8 percent of all persevering entrants, had seven or more siblings. The percentage of women from families with eight or more children

²⁹ Maria Vaccaro, "L'origine familiale: un facteur indicatif de la vocation des religieuses au Quebec (1901-1971)", (MSc Thesis, Université de Montreal, 1987), 54-56.

decreased steadily from decade to decade, dropping from 50.0 percent in 1881-1890 to 30.8 percent in 1911-1920. The situation in Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick women is even more striking. The family size of 26 Prince Edward Island women is unknown, but of the others only three came from families of three or less children, 23 came from families of four to seven children and 47 - 64.4 percent of entrants of known family size, 42.7 percent of total persevering entrants - came from families of eight or more. In contrast to the Nova Scotia situation, the percentage of total Prince Edward Island entrants from large families was quite low, 26.7 percent, in the first decade, but averaged just over half in subsequent decades. Finally, of the 41 New Brunswick entrants whose family size is known, two came from families of three or fewer children, nine from families with four to seven children and the majority, 30 women, 73.1 percent of those whose family size is known, or 51.7 percent of all entrants, came from families of eight or more children. The percentage of New Brunswick women from this size family remained consistent at approximately 55 percent during the 40 year span, with the exception of an increase to 66.7 percent in the 1891-1900 decade. The number of New Brunswick women from very large families may offer a clue as to why New Brunswick women tended to enter at a younger age than their other Maritime counterparts: these women may have been under pressure to leave the family home to ease the demands on space and

resources. To echo Vaccaro, these entrants would have been quite accustomed to living with a large number of people in minimum privacy and sharing the responsibilities of providing for the family.

The size of entrants' families of origin is reflective of the rural origins of the majority of families and may also be indicative of the religiosity of the families. Couples who devoutly followed the Church's teachings on birth control perhaps would be more likely to have large families. Such religious devotion also may have led parents to actively encourage their children to consider entering religious life.

If the family served as the earliest influence directing the child towards religious devotion and the option of life as a sister, educational facilities, especially convent or sister-run schools, certainly followed closely behind, and nine out of 10 entrants were educated in convent schools for some length of time. Boarding students at convent schools received an immediate initiation into life in the convent, because convent dormitories followed daily rules and routines and provided hierarchical structures which were nearly identical to those followed by the sisters. The structures of silence, prayer, restraint and Church-defined womanly virtues adopted by the Congregation were imposed on the students in the name of providing solid Catholic education for the young women who would become the mothers of the next generation of Catholics or who would follow in the footsteps of the sisters

to become the servants of the Church and educators of the young.

Boarders were to be supervised at all times by at least one sister and their day was scheduled in strict accordance with that of the convent. The girls were not to be idle but always engaged in pious exercises, work or recreation. The Rule instructed the sisters to teach the girls to work "pour mettre fin par là au plus ordinaire désordre de ce pays, qui est l'oisiveté des personnes de leur sexe"³⁰. All aspects of the boarders lives fell under the watchful eye of the sisters; friendships, reading material, visitors and mail, both incoming and outgoing, received vigilant scrutiny.³¹

Not only did convent school structures have an impact on young students, but the influence of the teaching sisters was significant as well. The Rule for Teachers, a section of the general Rule of the community, stipulated the acceptable limits on the relationship between students and teachers. The relationship was to be a professional one, with no more than the necessary amounts of friendship between the two, and no favouritism or familiarity. The Rule discouraged long-term links between sisters and students, stating that sisters must not concern themselves with students once they were no longer in their charge.³² In actual convent school situations these

³⁰ Reglemens, Article 27, IV.

³¹ Reglemens, Article 28.

³² Regle des Maîtresses, Reglemens, 168-178.

guidelines seem to have been interpreted quite loosely by many of the sisters. Former students recall the importance of a relationship with a special sister, and a number credit a particular sister with providing them with the inspiration and determination to become a sister themselves.³³ Such powerful experiences obviously surpassed the boundaries of a purely professional relationship.

Other Maritime women recalled specific interchanges with sisters that led them to religious life. Julie Anne Arsenault, tells in her autobiography how, after she joined the Sodality of the Children of Mary, the superior of the convent took her aside, placed a cornette on her head and said "vous allez faire une soeur...".³⁴ On the suggestion of one of the sisters, Ann Katie McKay offered to become a sister if God restored her ailing mother to good health. Her mother was cured and Ann became Sr. Saint Catherine.³⁵ Cecilia Dalton provided a very succinct response to the question of the origin of her call to religious life: "My teacher told me I

³³ These include Mary Gertrude McIsaac (Annales, December 1963, 556-567), Marie Henriette Joyce (Annales, October 1953, 678-682), Catherine MacDonald (Annales, July-August 1936, 441-445), and Mary Agnes MacKinnon (Annales, 1943, 86, 151, Annales, April 1944, 219-227) of Nova Scotia; [Janet] Maria McDonald (Annales, 1940, 65-67; Annales, April 1941, 206-209) and Catherine McAuley (Notices biographiques, vol. XVI, 223-237) of Prince Edward Island; and Mary Alma Landry (Annales, December 1965, 350-353), Marie Rose Comeau (Notices biographiques, vol. 18, no. 3, 15-20) and Marguerite Leger (Annales, October 1947, 594-595, 646-654) of New Brunswick.

³⁴ Annales, February 1955, 166-177.

³⁵ Annales, September 1936, 488-490.

had a vocation".³⁶ Obviously it would take more than these messages of direction and affirmation to sustain a woman's motivation and desire to become a sister, but for girls who constantly were being reminded to be on the look out for God's invitation to religious life and who perhaps aspired to this lifestyle, but had not mentioned their interest to anyone, having a sister confirm one's suitability to religious life must have been a powerful experience. Some women acted on these messages of encouragement by entering as soon as possible; for others such moments became experiences to ponder over several years before agreeing that religious life was indeed a path they wished to travel.

There is no indication that the sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame deliberately set out to attract large numbers of their students to the community, though the Congregation remained very conscious of the opportunity for recruitment their work presented.³⁷ In the early years, in order to take advantage of the rapidly growing needs presented at the end of the nineteenth and in the early decades of the twentieth century, the Congregation recognized the need to continue to attract more women to the order. As a community with access to youth, it was in a good position to show, through example and more formal means, the benefits and attributes of religious life. Being a source of inspiration

³⁶ Annales, December 1942, 588-93.

³⁷ Danylewycz, Taking the Veil, 118-122.

to students who chose vowed religious life was not only a measure of a devout sister, but also was considered the mark of a good teacher. Necrologies of the sisters highlight this characteristic as one truly worthy of praise and admiration, and sisters from the Maritimes were occasionally mentioned as being particularly effective. Hannah Hogan, from Tignish, who entered in 1893 and spent most of her career in Charlottetown, received ample praise for her ability to cultivate vocations: "perhaps no single member of our dear Congregation has been more active in fostering vocations...".³⁸ Certainly the Congregation viewed the large numbers of entrants from the Maritimes as a measure of its success in the region.

Young girls and women often viewed the sisters with a sense of awe and mystery. Mary Belle McMaster recalls the following impression from her first encounter with the sisters: "I gazed and gazed at the Sisters before me. Were they really human beings? They looked so strange and apart from the world"³⁹. The religious dress of the sisters successfully enforced the impression that these were not ordinary women, but rather very distinct beings in terms of both dress and comportment. There was an element of secrecy about these women that proved quite enticing to many young girls. Boarding students usually lived in the same building as the sisters, but the living quarters and recreation areas

³⁸ Annales, March 1941, 154.

³⁹ Notices biographiques, vol. I, no. 1, 221-226.

of the religious were strictly off-limits to the students. Constant supervision of designated student areas by one or more sisters was the norm however.⁴⁰ For girls whose daily lives may have been short on mystery and drama, the idea of wearing a distinctive costume and being somewhat removed from the world and part of a group with secret practices and behaviours might have been quite appealing. Certainly the sister's routines and the social status they were accorded would have been unlike those with which the students would be familiar.

For women who received their education in convent schools, involvement in sodalities proved to be a significant factor in their decision to enter religious life. An integral part of the education of soul, mind and body adhered to by the Congregation, and indeed by most religious communities of educators, included the establishment and popularization of sodalities. The Children of Mary sodality, the one most closely associated with the CND, carried out several functions and activities. Primary among them figured religious devotion to the person of the Virgin Mary through various prayers and rituals. Membership in such groups also afforded young women the opportunity to develop skills in leadership as some would be elected to executive posts within the sodality. Works of charity and fund-raising undertaken by the members fulfilled

⁴⁰ Regle des Maîtresses, Reglemens, XXVI, 174.

roles in social development and teamwork for the young ladies.⁴¹

Most convent schools had sodalities for the students. Often parishes established sodality groups for adult women as well. Sodality procedures required each girl to apply for admission to the group and follow certain regulations for admittance. Annual or bi-annual ceremonies formally welcomed new members who, for the most part, were girls in their teen years. Several subsequent entrants to the Congregation mentioned acceptance into the sodality as the time when the idea of becoming a religious became a very appealing one.⁴² Indeed, some made the decision to enter during sodality-sponsored retreats.⁴³ Emphasis placed on imitating the example of the Virgin Mary could prove a powerful pull towards the notion of religious life. Imitating Mary involved practising a chaste, humble, poor, prayerful, obedient lifestyle and turning away from the frivolities and trappings of the modern secular world. Life in the convent would perhaps have seemed like the ultimate means of following

⁴¹ Danylewycz, Taking the Veil, 43-44; Micheline Dumont and Nadia Fahmy-Eid, Les Couventines. L'Education des filles au Québec dans les congrégations religieuses enseignantes 1840-1960, (Montreal: Boreal, 1986), 68-70.

⁴² These women included Leonie Arsenault (Notices biographiques, vol. X, 41-44), Jane Mary Gillis (Notices biographiques, vol. 12, 227-230), Winnifred MacDonald (Notices biographiques, vol. 22, no. 3, 127-130), and Mary Ellen McCarthy, (Annales, April 1924, 139-144).

⁴³ As in the case of Josephine Cecile Legere. Annales, January 1942, 646-650.

Mary's holy example, though this method deliberately ignored Mary's very real connection to family life and motherhood by transposing it to a purely spiritual realm. Though exact numbers of entrants previously attached to the Congregation's sodalities are unavailable, as records are scarce and the mention of such membership seems somewhat haphazard in the necrologies, evidence does suggest that a substantial number of women who received their education from the CND sisters joined sodality groups and, since the majority of future entrants had passed at least some time in the classrooms of these sisters, they undoubtedly also would have been familiar with the Children of Mary and the messages about the proper role of women promoted therein. The Congregation enforced a view of Catholic women which was in many ways quite traditional, but there also were issues in which the community challenged the notions of women's traditional roles.

The Congregation remained publicly supportive of the Church's views on the proper spheres of activity for women and often implemented programs to further the Church's aims in this regard. When the subject of higher education for women arose however, the Congregation often found itself internally divided and at cross-purposes with some clerical leaders.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ For specific cases of this see: Lucienne Plante, CND, "L'enseignement classique chez les soeurs de la Congrégation de Notre Dame 1908-1971", (PhD Thesis, University of Laval, 1971); Micheline Deschenes, "Les collèges classiques féminins: Produits et agents de changement", (MA Thesis, University of Laval, 1988); Danielle Juteau Lee, "Les religieuses du Québec: leur influence sur la vie professionnelle des femmes, 1908-

In these disagreements the sisters avoided direct confrontation, but sought to attain their objectives with the help and support of male Church leaders who agreed with the notion of providing Catholic women with the education to make them valuable assets to well-educated husbands. Collège Marguerite Bourgeoys and the pedagogical institute in Montreal and Mount Saint Bernard College in Antigonish are fine examples of the strides made by the Congregation of Notre Dame at the turn of the century in the field of women's education.

Maintaining the integrity and academic excellence of such facilities necessitated a well educated teaching staff and the community actively pursued degree programs for its members. Sisters were among the first Catholic women to be granted Master and Doctoral degrees in the areas of education and arts in the early twentieth century. Such women, in turn, became role models and examples of the possibilities of religious life for their students and all those with whom they came in contact.

Maritime women in the Congregation of Notre Dame proved equal to the task of furthering their personal education in order to teach others and to staff expanding educational institutions operated by the Congregation. Among the group that entered during the 1880 to 1920 decades, the great majority did not pursue university degrees until the 1930s or later, and most of those who did were among the entrants in

the later decades. The community could only afford to have a certain number of sisters involved in full-time studies, so most earned university degrees over a long-term program of summer study. They were, nevertheless, in the vanguard of Catholic women receiving university qualifications and making breakthroughs in education for women. The first woman in America to receive a Doctorate in Philosophy was a Congregation of Notre Dame sister and native Nova Scotian, Mary Catherine Thompson, who entered in 1886 and was the second daughter of a very prestigious family whose members included two other CND sisters⁴⁵, one of whom worked to affiliate Mount Saint Bernard with Saint Francis Xavier University in 1894.⁴⁶ Theresa MacDougall, who entered in 1893, was among the first group of the Congregation's sisters to learn Greek, an area of study newly open to women in the early twentieth century. She went on to an outstanding career as the Dean of English Studies at Marguerite Bourgeoys College for nearly 25 years⁴⁷. Likewise, Mary Annette McDonald entered in 1913, pursued a Masters degree in history at the Catholic University of America in the 1930s, then served on the faculty of Saint Francis Xavier University for over 30 years and was recognized by the university in 1961 with an

⁴⁵ Annales, February 1914, 450-464; Cahier 17, 82-83.

⁴⁶ Annales, April 1946, 286-292.

⁴⁷ Annales, April 1935, 210, 215, 217-219, 260-272, 317-318.

honourary degree.⁴⁸ Margaret Beaton also enjoyed a distinguished academic career after her entrance in 1913. After several years of teaching she received a B.A. in 1935, followed by an M.A. two years later and finally a Ph.D. in English in 1958. She actively encouraged the development of Gaelic studies and societies at Saint Francis Xavier University, a contribution which received recognition in the form of an honorary degree from the university in 1971.⁴⁹

Maritime entrants also distinguished themselves in administrative positions within the community itself, either as members of the General Council, the Provincial Council, as Superiors of individual convents or in upper echelon positions in the Congregation's educational institutions. Further studies need to be done on the composition of the administrative sector of the community, in terms of geographic and socio-economic origin, but presumably women from Quebec were overrepresented in the administrative positions in the Congregation due to the historical background and cultural composition of the community, and this would remain true even once the proportion of Quebec-born entrants started to decline. Nevertheless, women from the Maritimes occasionally achieved important positions within the Montreal power-centre of the community. Mary Ann McCarthy and Christina Ann Cameron both served terms as Second Assistant General on the

⁴⁸ Notices biographiques, vol. IV, no. 34, 393-396.

⁴⁹ Notices biographiques, vol. 6, 339-351.

Congregation's General Council, McCarthy in the 1930s and Cameron in the 1950s.⁵⁰ Nova Scotia's Mary Cameron served as Director of the Secretarial Course at Mount Saint Bernard College for 10 years before assuming the position of Director of the Secretarial School in Montreal, a position she was to fill for over 25 years.⁵¹

While the Congregation clearly valued education and a handful of sisters went on to senior academic and administrative positions, such impressive advancement was the exception to the rule. The vast majority of entrants remained in humble service positions in the community, either as teachers or lower administrative personnel. In terms of recruitment, given the emphasis on humility and the "the first shall be last..." mentality preponderant in religious life, ideas of "career advancement" and "positions of power" could not be presented openly to young women as reasons for choosing religious life; however, through example and informal discussion, such possibilities might have been known to those considering life as a sister. However, it is more likely that women became increasingly aware of the career possibilities after feeling called to religious life and learning more about the structures of the community. Either way, young women would have been quite aware that pursuing graduate degrees and

⁵⁰ Annales, November 1968, 355-378; Notices biographiques, vol. IX, 37-42.

⁵¹ Annales, April 1962, 194-207.

seeking career advancement would have been difficult, if not altogether impossible, as a single person or as a wife. Yet, entering religious life offered no guarantees that academic training and career advancement would be forthcoming. The abilities of a good number of Maritime women were recognized by the Congregation, but how many others simply went unnoticed? Only a limited number of administrative positions were available, so likely many capable sisters never assumed such offices.

Becoming a member of a religious community could bestow a great deal of status and prestige upon a woman. The Catholic Church of the day considered a vocation to religious life to be the most admirable among the possible vocations. Entrants surrendered personal power and authority in exchange for the collective power associated with membership in a religious congregation. They renounced material wealth and possessions to embrace poverty, surrendered their sexual freedom and reproductive possibilities for a life of chastity, and conceded personal autonomy and decision-making power to the will of their superiors and God. In return, they shared in the status of the community to which they belonged, and in the case of the Congregation of Notre Dame, entrants found themselves sharing in the power and prestige of a very highly esteemed group of women. The Congregation's high status was due to several factors, including their financial resources, their reputation for educational excellence, their longevity,

and their ability to continue attracting women from prominent families to their fold. As well, teaching was viewed as of greater status than were other activities traditionally associated with women religious, such as nursing, caring for unwed mothers, and housekeeping for priests. Women entering the Congregation of Notre Dame would have been aware of the fact that they were joining one of the most well-respected communities of sisters in Canada and sharing in its prestige.

From their testimonies it seems clear that most women were drawn to religious life through a combination of family and community influences and a sense of God's calling. However their memories had been shaped by their experiences in the order, it seems remarkable that no one mentioned social or economic conditions or career considerations or a desire to escape male domination, as reasons for entering. Such reasons are often put forth by academics, including Danylewycz and Cooper, to explain women's attraction to religious life, but the absence of direct mention of such comments does not necessarily invalidate this interpretation. Women may have been unable, in this period, to make a conscious or overt statement regarding their desire to avoid male domination, but this could have been a real factor of influence in a subconscious and unverbalyzed sense. Certainly, becoming a sister would remove a woman from the direct authority of men (fathers, brothers or husbands), but their escape from domination was by no means complete. Religious communities of

women wielded a great deal of collective power and autonomy; however, they still found themselves near the bottom rung of Church hierarchy and under the control of ecclesiastical authorities. Myriam Spielvogel has argued that religious sisters, as brides of Christ, were expected to meet many of the same expectations that married women were.⁵² If lay women were required to serve their husbands faithfully and with total devotion, how much more important it would be for a sister to show such devotion and faithfulness when serving God as her "husband". Despite this, of the range of options available to women who wished to remove themselves from direct male domination, entering religious life was among the most socially sanctioned and effective means of doing so.

The Maritime women who entered the Congregation of Notre Dame between 1880 and 1920 pointed to a variety of reasons for their lifestyle choice, including family influence and the inspiring CND role models they had as teachers, but all of these women grounded their decision in the spiritual realm. This starting-position of spiritual call became the base upon which additional social and personal factors were integrated and evaluated over the course of the woman's vocational discernment. In the final analysis, it is the combination and interplay of these various spiritual, personal and social

⁵² Myriam Spielvogel, "Religieuses et rapports de sexes: analyse du discours sur la féminité dans les textes à l'usage des communautés religieuses (1900-1970)", (MSc Thesis, University of Montreal, 1988).

factors that provide insight into why women chose to commit themselves to religious life as sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Between 1881 and 1920 nearly 500 Maritime women entered the Congregation of Notre Dame. Three hundred and twenty-eight of them professed final vows in the community, either as soeurs de choeur or as soeurs converse. By the end of this period Maritimers constituted almost 20 percent of total entrants to the order, and slightly more than 17 percent of those who took final vows in the community. What once had been an exclusively French-Canadian order now began to reflect the ethnic diversity of its far-reaching missions. This study contributes to the historiography of the Congregation of Notre Dame in three significant ways: it establishes, by raising the question of motivation explicitly, that the call to religious life was a genuine and informed one for the women who entered; it explores the ethnic realities of the Maritime entrants; and it presents a picture of the socio-economic origins of some of the non-Quebecoise women in the Congregation - a picture that is missing in the French-Canadian literature.

Women could enter the Congregation at the age of 16, but

the majority of persevering entrants from the Maritimes were between 19 and 24 years of age when they entered. In general, the number of 16-18 years olds decreased over the four decades, while the percentage of older entrants, those 25 and over increased. After 1900 New Brunswickers tended to be younger than entrants from the other provinces. In the 1911-1920 decade over 70 percent of New Brunswick entrants had yet to reach the age of 22, while only 51.2 percent of Nova Scotians and 41.5 percent of Prince Edward Islanders were in this age category.

As would be expected given the data on age of entrance, New Brunswickers constituted the group with the least work experience. The percentage of Nova Scotian entrants with work experience, usually teaching experience, fluctuated over the four decades, but was always significantly larger than that of New Brunswick. The percentage of Island entrants with work experience increased steadily in each decade, and by the last decade over 50 percent of persevering entrants had previous work experience. Many of the women who joined the CND had been single women in the work force; they knew what it was to have an income, however modest, and to make their way in the world. Nevertheless, they chose to forsake such independence, limited though it may have been, to live a life of personal poverty and obedience as a Catholic sister.

Most of the Maritime women who entered originated from geographic areas where CND schools were located. These women

were exposed to the sisters, knew a bit about their way of life and felt a desire to experience this lifestyle for themselves. What better way to build ties with a geographic area than to attract the daughters of local families to the Congregation. In some regions, families developed ties with the Congregation which endured for many generations.

All but a few of the Maritime entrants were educated by the sisters of the CND. Many note that their calling to religious life originated during their school years. Attending sodality retreats and meetings, living in the convent boarding school, being exposed to sister role models, and getting to know the sisters' routines provided young women with an opportunity to consider seriously the option of religious life. The sisters retained an air of mystery, but students did develop a familiarity with the structures and routines of convent life. While some would know immediately that life as a sister was not for them, others would ponder the possibility of becoming a sister for some time before reaching their decision, and the convent school provided a conducive atmosphere in which to do this.

Danylewycz's overview of total entrants to the CND showed that often women who entered had closely related family members in religious life. This proves true for the Maritime contingent of entrants, as over 40 percent had relatives in vowed religious service and a third counted relatives in the Congregation of Notre Dame. Some Maritime families,

especially some of the Scottish families of Cape Breton, were known for the proliferation of religious vocations within them.

Not only were women influenced by family members inside the convent, but family considerations outside the convent also played a role. Some women postponed their entrance plans because of family obligations, and others attributed their decision to enter to a particular family member, usually a parent or sister. The decision to leave the family circle to enter religious life was not made in isolation from family members. Evidence suggests that women consulted their families about this decision and women were conscious of the pain that separation would cause for both themselves and the family left behind.

Women who entered the Congregation tended to be from well-established middle to upper middle class Maritime families. This socio-economic background allowed the women to gain a solid education and some teaching experience prior to entering. This fits with the Quebec research which found that the CND tended to attract an overrepresentation of women from the upper and middle classes. Recruiting women of high status ensured that the Congregation's good reputation and relative high status among religious communities would be maintained.

Though change is noticeable from decade to decade for some entrant characteristics, such as age of entrance, socio-economic status, and years of work experience, others, notably

motivational factors, remained quite stable over the 40 year span. Women identified the moment of feeling called to religious life at several key points in their life: childhood, teen years and early adulthood. The key moments and the frequency with which they are mentioned are similar from one decade to the next. Family influence does not show any shift or change throughout the period. The reasons for choosing religious life do not change substantially between 1880 and 1920, despite the changing demographic characteristics of the women making the choice. Any social changes which modified the status of women in Canadian society seem to have had little effect on women's motivation for choosing religious life.

Though detailed study of the Maritime cohort within the general CND entrant group between 1880 and 1920 indicates that Maritime entrants shared many characteristics with their French-Canadian counterparts, including socio-economic and educational background, and family influence, there are also notable differences. Maritime entrants included significant numbers of Scottish and Irish women. These chose to enter a francophone order despite their Scottish or Irish Catholic identity. As well, it is not clear whether they shared similar experiences after they entered. The Congregation of Notre Dame reflected French-Canadian cultural and religious norms and values. Entrants native to this cultural milieu would perhaps have required less cultural adjustment upon

entering than entrants from Scottish, Irish or Acadian cultural milieus, though submersion in convent life would have been a major adjustment for all the entrants. There is also evidence to suggest that women from the Maritimes were somewhat less likely than their Quebecoise sisters to reach the higher levels of administration in the community.

Women from the Maritimes and other CND mission areas constitute a significant part of what, to date, has been viewed as the Quebec experience of the rise in vocations. Recruiting in areas beyond Quebec, notably in the Maritimes, altered the overall ethnic composition of the Congregation as women of diverse backgrounds flocked to the order. Though at first glance the historiography of women religious from English-Canada seems limited, upon closer examination one could argue that the history of the English-Canadian women who entered religious life may be hidden in the historiography of orders such as the CND, which, though based in Quebec, played a significant role in the lives of Catholic women outside that province. The history of the rise in vocations in the Congregation of Notre Dame must not be mistaken for the history of French-Canadian women exclusively; it is in fact the history of Maritime women as well.

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