



heritage walking tour

17. Convent of Jesus and Mary - Highway 43 and Athabasca Street

Dedicated to the education of youth, the religious community of the Sisters of Jesus and Mary were founded in 1816 in Lyon, France. The first Canadian foundation was made in 1855 in St. Joseph de Levis, Quebec. Father Gravel's long time aspiration had been to bring this order to Gravelbourg as teachers, and finally in 1915, they arrived to replace the lay teachers who had been teaching at the public school since 1908. The sisters taught at the little chapel house known as the "Maison Blanche" until they moved into the newly built convent on August 3rd, 1918.



Convent of Jesus and Mary

During that era, the sisters were not permitted to visit the homes of families within the community. As a rule the families had to come visit them at the convent - gathering in the large parlor on the second story of the building. The fourth floor of the convent was vital area of the building, housing the music studio comprised of eight small cubicles. The cubicles were designed so that the sound of the pianos didn't disturb the other student's close by. The girls who attended the convent of Jesus and Mary received a very high level of education, as the sisters were themselves educated in universities in New York and Massachusetts. An emphasis was on music, drama and the sciences.

In 1926, two additional wings were added to the main building, which became known as the Thevenet College. The College Thevenet became affiliated with the University of Ottawa in 1929 (in collaboration with College Mathieu) and the first convocation was held seven years later when six Sisters graduated with Bachelor of Arts degrees. Like a number of other religious communities in Saskatchewan, the Sisters of Jesus and Mary were persecuted to some extent under the Anderson Government. In 1920, the Saskatchewan legislature adopted a law prohibiting all religious emblems and religious teachings in public schools. The Sisters were forced to abandon their religious robes and began teaching the children in what became known as the "Anderson Robes".

During the years of the depression, the School Board found it impossible to afford the salaries of teachers, however, the Sisters of Jesus and Mary did not abandon their young students and continued to teach, accepting promissory notes instead of pay. In 1964, the school attendance had nearly doubled under the directorship of Mother Saint Rogdrigue, making it necessary to build a brand new modern high school to accommodate some of the 697 students.

After dedicating 55 years to teaching young girls and boys, the Sisters decided it was time to sell the Convent to the Gravelbourg School Board in 1970. Not yet ready to leave Gravelbourg, the Sisters of Jesus and Mary purchased the former home of Judge Alphonse Gravel and continued teaching catechism. Due to aging, sickness and the decrease of vocations in the younger generations, the Sisters of Jesus and Mary left Gravelbourg on December 13th, 2000 after 85 years of pure devotion.

The Convent is now a multipurpose education center housing the Gravelbourg Elementary School, the Chinook Regional Library and the Cypress Hills Community College. Of particular interest is the former chapel (now the Chinook Regional Library), which holds a statue of the Holy Mother made in Italy. The library also holds a collection of paintings (reproductions) of masters of the renaissance period.

Close