

THROUGH HISTORY OF THE HÔTEL-DIEU OF QUEBEC
- PIERRE-GEORGES ROY

LEVIS 1939

"A Hôtel-Dieu is a holy house built by God, who often takes the form of a benefactor, or God, hidden in the form of a poor patient, is greeted by Him, or hidden in the guise of the Virgin. "- Msgr Paul Bruchési

A SELECTION OF TEXTS – KATERI CENTER

A VALUABLE MANUSCRIPT

Stored at the Hôtel-Dieu de Québec is a small manuscript, which, in spite of its size has great historical interest. It is anonymous and entitled: ***"The servants of God that I believe are in Heaven and who were full of zeal for the good of the church in Canada and which God used to establish it."*** Among those that the author believes in Heaven, we note the names of the Bishop Laval, Abbott Queylus, Mr. Bourdon, Father Olier, Mr. Lauzon, Mr. Guiotte, M. de Bernières, Mr. Dudouyt, Mr. Morel, Mr. Certain, Mr. Beaudoin, Mr. Deschambault, M. Thury, Mr. Fillion, Mr. Petit, the Fathers Brébeuf, and Father Gabriel Lalement, Fathers Jerome and Louis Lalement, Father Coton, Father La Colombiere, Father Garnier, Fathers Le Jeune and Ragueneau, the Fathers of Chastelain and the Fathers of Le Mercier, Father Callot, the Fathers of Chaumonot and Dablon, Fathers Fremin, Crespieul and Monin, Fathers Dalmas and Pierron, the Fathers of Bouvart, Father Isaac Jogues and Father Antoine Daniel, Brothers Bonnemere and Juchereau, Madam and foundress, Mother Mary of St. Ignatius, the Mothers of St. Mary, St. Bonaventure, St. Joseph and St. Paul, Catherine the Mother of St. Augustine, Mother Giffard of St. Ignatius, the Mothers of the Nativity, Guillemette of St. Augustine, Mary of the Sacred Heart, Mrs. Ailleboust, Mrs. Eliot, the Mother St. Joseph and the Mother of the Incarnation, the Mother St. Ignatius, the Bourgeoys sisters, and Sainte-Anne Tardif, Mr. Ailleboust, M. de Maisonneuve, Jeanne Mance, Mr. Dauversière, ***Catherine Takawittia***, etc. "

THE LITTLE (INDIAN NAMED) LOUISE

In 1649, from the beginning of the year, four Indian women with six children asked to spend the rest of the winter in the Hospital. One of these women had with her a little orphan named Louise whose mother died three days after her birth. This child had no relatives and was abandoned. When she entered the Hôtel-Dieu she was so thin and so weak, despite her eighteen months, that the nuns did not give her more than three or four days to live. The nuns fed her and saw that she swallowed everything presented to her with such eagerness, it was clear that hunger had tortured her for several weeks. She clung immediately to the nuns and wanted to follow them everywhere. Little Louise so won the love of the nuns, that they begged the woman who had brought her to give her over to them for care. The nuns took heart in the sight of the young girl. Shortly after, the child became seriously ill. She was then consecrated to St. Magdalene de Pazzi and she returned to perfect health. But without doubt she was wanted in Heaven, for five or six months later a second disease ravaged her and took her from the nuns in days. She left her guardians with a sense of her knowledge of God.

A HURON HOSPITALLER

During the course of the year of 1657, Hôtel-Dieu lost its first Canadian and first Huron vocations. Agnes Skannd'haron, the daughter of a Huron chief, was given to the nuns of the Hôtel-Dieu in May 1650 at the age of eight or nine. She learned French in less than a year and served as interpreter to the Hurons who were staying at the Hôtel-Dieu. She also learned to read and write in no time and soon surpassed all of her Canadian classmates in the subjects she was taught. She was very pious. She resisted all attempts of her parents and Huron countrymen to get her out of the Hôtel-Dieu and follow after them in their errant ways. Agnes made her first communion with fervour and surprising faith. She was deeply convinced that the Lord had visited her, and she gave herself to Him fully, praying that He give her the grace to be religious. The superior of the Hôtel-Dieu found such perfection in this girl of the woods that she was given the religious habit. She was anointed on the day of the Annunciation of the year 1656. But soon after a slow fever began to overtake her. The Superior of the Hôtel-Dieu did not hesitate to perform the Last Rites. She died November 3, 1657, at the age of fifteen. Little Sister Agnes Skannd'haron left us in a predestined way.

MORE ABOUT OUR HURON SISTER

Little Sister Genevieve Agnes Skannd'haron, known as the Sister of All Saints, received great honour after her death. The Mother Superior of Jesus St. Bonaventure, of the Hôtel-Dieu, wrote a circular letter to all community sisters to let them know of her virtues and merits. We would like to mention this edifying letter in full. The end we will provide here, telling of the illness and death of the Sister of All Saints; “The pain is increasing, she saw the nurse on October 4, and immediately after requested a crucifix, and ever she continued to pray ... If sometimes the nurse told her to stop saying her rosary, she gently obeyed; shortly after she would assure her that it was but a distraction... On Saturday, November 3, I asked her if she would not make her vows. ‘O my dear Mother, she said, now please, don’t wait, I expect I’ll die soon.’ I sent for the whole community, and in the presence of all, she took her vows, and after she made a thousand beautiful confidences to Our Lord and His Blessed Mother, she felt the approach of death. She requested the last absolution of Mr. Bey, our chaplain, and he gave it to her. Afterwards, she said prayers for Madame our founder, for Mr. and Mrs. Bodeau, of Paris, who had adopted her as their daughter, and for the conversion of her compatriots. She gave her soul over to He who had created her for His glory on November 3, at fifteen years old.

THE INDIAN NAMED CÉCILE GANNONDARIS

Mother Juchereau of St. Ignatius cannot conceal her admiration for a humble little Indian named Cécile Gannondaris, who died at the Hôtel-Dieu on February 6, 1669. “A lot of ladies, she said, came to visit the home and sent her refreshments which she received with great gratitude and humility, always rewarding those who visited with a few consoling words which carried them to God. Before she died, she left the most beautiful necklace she had to the Ladies of the Holy Family of Quebec on the condition that they give her mention in their devotions, as this was her sisterhood.” Mother Juchereau of St. Ignatius also said that immediately after Cécile’s death, Bishop Laval rang all the bells of the cathedral and held a solemn service in her name. He urged the Hurons not to forget their compatriot, who died in such beautiful sentiments. Their principal chief made his

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eulogy and urged his compatriots to remember Cécile Gannondaris. Even before entering the Hôtel-Dieu having fallen ill, the reputation of holiness of Cécile Gannondaris was well established, since Bishop Laval had been known to visit her cabin to offer her solace. Cécile took occasion to say that a religion that teaches influential and powerful people to visit poor, miserable creatures such as herself in their huts, was the only true religion.

DEATH OF AN INDIAN NAMED "PRECIOUS"

"Precious" is the name of a Native who died at the Hôtel-Dieu in Québec in June 1703. A Huron from the Great Lakes area, she was taken quite young by the Iroquois, the great enemies of her nation. Her captivity earned her a source of salvation. She met, in fact, among the Iroquois, the Jesuit Father Jacques Frémin, who taught her the Christian religion. She married twice. With her second husband, a great Christian, she came to stay in Loreto. "Precious" was known to the entire population of Quebec. She particularly despised the rich because, she said, it is much more difficult to attain salvation when you have such wealth. When "Precious" fell ill, she was taken to the Hôtel-Dieu in Québec. She died in feelings of extraordinary devotion, and, as it was all her life, she had served God, and we looked upon her as destined for eternity. Mother Juchereau of St. Ignatius said, "We have often invoked 'Precious' as our protectress, because she loved us very much." One of the sisters of Mother Juchereau of St. Ignatius was Mr. Aubert de la Chesnaye's wife, the richest man in the colony. The "Precious", making the comparison between the two sisters, told the nun: "You're much happier than your sister de la Chesnaye, you think only of God, you despise the goods of the earth, and it is in this material abundance that it is difficult to achieve one's salvation, we are so busy taking care of material things"!

THE ABENAKI MARIE

The nuns were given at Hôtel-Dieu, in 1709, an Abenaki, aged fifteen to sixteen, called Marie, who was an object of compassion. Covered with wounds, she suffered with so much patience and meekness that the religious vocations were devoted to treating her, without yet knowing the graces she had. She expressed her gratitude by telling those who cared for her not to worry, that she knew she would die soon. The nuns learned from the missionary who had brought her to the Hôtel-Dieu that this poor girl had fallen ill from exposing herself to excessive cold for several hours, rather than stay in a cabin where indecent things were being discussed. Crippled, gravely ill and suffering great pain without complaining, while she was still in her village she asked the woman who was caring for her to make her a hut near her own, where she could be alone to think more seriously about death. Indeed, she was set up in the cabin where her compatriot continued to give her care. It was while she was preparing for death in this hut that she had a dream that delighted her. An angel appeared to her and said, "You think you will die here, but you will not. You will die in twenty-eight days in the presence of nuns, dressed in white, who care for the poor. After your death, you will ascend directly to Heaven." Marie was taken to the Hôtel-Dieu in Québec and died twenty-eight days later, just as she had been warned in her dream.

THE DEATH OF A MALISEET CHIEF

Mother Juchereau of St. Ignatius speaks eloquently about an Indian chief of Maliseet origin who died at the Hôtel-Dieu in January of 1709. This leader, who had been instructed in Christianity, had remained extraordinarily pious, even after the departure of the missionaries from his village. He undertook to journey to Quebec, more than a hundred miles, for the sole purpose of going to confession and receiving communion. He did not speak French, but fortunately, in Quebec, he found a Récollet who spoke his language. He fell dangerously ill and was transported to the Hôtel-Dieu. The nuns witnessed his holy dispositions. To his son, who had accompanied him to Quebec, he spoke so touchingly that those present shed tears “before the Récollet father had even translated into French what he said.” Mr. Dupuy, a pious man, who was present, bore witness that the attitude of this Indian, his gestures and the tone of his voice, had made him understand what he had said to his son. He expressed to his son the understanding he had of our religion, his joy at having embraced a life of prayer and never having left it, and he encouraged him strongly to adopt it for himself. The Maliseet chief died a few days after receiving Extreme Unction. “He left us, says Mother Juchereau of St. Ignatius, well edified and full of gratitude and admiration of God’s ways on these poor natives among whom there are chosen souls who are loyal to Him and will glorify Him eternally.”