

The Ursuline Sisters and Ste. Marie School

By Fr. Jose Montepeque



The alumni of the Sainte Marie School during the years of 1950 to 1962 gathered on Saturday, July 23 and Sunday, July 24 to renew acquaintances and reminisce. The year of 1962 was the last year of high school in Bruxelles. Many of the students that attended the school came from different provinces. The main reason this school was chosen was that the Ursuline Sisters were excellent teachers, and had very good discipline in this school.

The Ursuline Sisters of Tildonk arrived from Belgium to Bruxelles, Manitoba on August 27, 1914. By December 7, 1914 an eight room convent had been built, and enlarged in 1916. The large brick building was completed in 1918, which included several more classrooms, and a chapel on the second floor. A large dormitory on the third floor was for grades 1 to 9. The basement was the recreation room for students grades 1 to 8. There were separate washrooms for boys and girls, as well as the laundry room. The ground floor level was a recreation room for girls of grade 9 to 12, the laboratory for doing experiments, and the grade 1 and 2 classroom

Pupils that boarded there totalled about 60 per year, and were allowed to take piano lessons for \$3/month their clothes were washed and ironed for \$2/per month. Sewing lessons were taught for \$3/month. The students were allowed to go home once a month in 1950, but several years later it was relaxed and they could go home every weekend.

Going to school at Sainte Marie had special rules: one could not talk or run in the halls. When wanting to go upstairs, one had to ask permission from the Sister in charge. Permission was also needed to leave the yard or to go to the store. Boarders had to rise at 6:30 am, attend Mass at 7:00 am. Breakfast was at 7:30 am, dinner at 12:00 noon. After school there were study periods at 5 to 6:30 pm. Supper was at 6:30 pm with another study period from 7 to 8:30 pm. Bedtime was at 8:30 pm with lights out at 9:00 pm. *“In spite of the rules, a half a dozen of grade eight girls - that were supposed to be in bed already - and when the Sister that supervised the dormitory went downstairs, got into a water fight! The beds and blankets were soaked, but they slept in their beds that night.*



In the 1950's, Father Hubert Heynen gifted the school with everything required to have full length movies. This was provided in the ground floor recreation area. The two buildings were connected by a hallway on all levels, and a fire escape on the third level, which accommodated both buildings.

The boy boarders slept in a house across the street, which was named “Brescia.” This house is still there today in Bruxelles but remains empty. The first building built in 1914, contained a large kitchen, a children's refectory, the Sister's refectory, two music

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parlors for lessons and practice on the ground floor. The second floor provided 9 to 12 classrooms, as well as the Sisters' bedrooms. The third floor was the girls' dormitory for grades 10 to 12 girls and extra sisters' bedrooms.

The children from the Bruxelles area also attended Ste. Marie School. They were referred to as "Villagers." *"One year, at the beginning of September, a city boy about eight years old came to Ste. Marie School as a boarder. He could have played the "Dennis the Menace" character. There was a livery stable in town that several villager students came to school with buggy or cart and tied their horses there. Well, this little city boy went to the barn, somehow got on a horse and was going home! The horse headed east as that is where his home was. The Sister that had this boy in class missed him. There was immediately a search for him. People around Bruxelles were good and helped the Sisters in these situations. The boy eventually fell off the horse and was found about three miles away!"*

Besides the school subjects, the students were taught folk dancing, choir, poetry, as well as gymnastics. Ste. Marie School participated in festivals in neighbouring towns and received some of the highest marks. *"One year there was a large crock, maybe ten gallons or bigger behind the kitchen stove. The large stove was in the middle of the kitchen. The Sisters were making wine! After the wine was bottled, the raisins used for fermentation were saved and put in bread pudding. The pudding had a unique flavor!"*

May 4, 1954, after the school was destroyed by fire, a new modern building was started immediately and opened for classes after January 1, 1955. Classes resumed within a week of the fire. High school students attended classes in a vacant house. It was named "Marion Hill," being on the top of the hill. The grades 1 to 8 went to

classes in the parish hall. *"Another good memory was that on June 21st which was the Feast of Saint Aloysius, and as Mother Aloysius was the Sister Superior, each student received and enjoyed an ice cream cone!"*



Several years later - 1970 and 1980 - some of the Ursuline Sisters moved to Winnipeg for health reasons and others were transferred to teach at city schools. The last four Sisters left Bruxelles in 1989. The building was sold and for several years was occupied by different folks and finally was vacant. It was destroyed by fire on November 12, 2007.

Special Thanksgiving Mass for this happy event, was celebrated on Saturday July 23 at 11:00 am in St. Gerard Majella Church, in Bruxelles by Fr. Jose Montepeque, Pastor of the Holland Catholic Center

Special thanks and my deepest gratitude to Mrs. Myrtle Hutlet for her kindness, compassion and enthusiasm in sharing the history of the Ste. Marie Ursuline Sisters School and the stories shared in this article. Myrtle, your memories are still alive and so do our Church! Fr. Jose