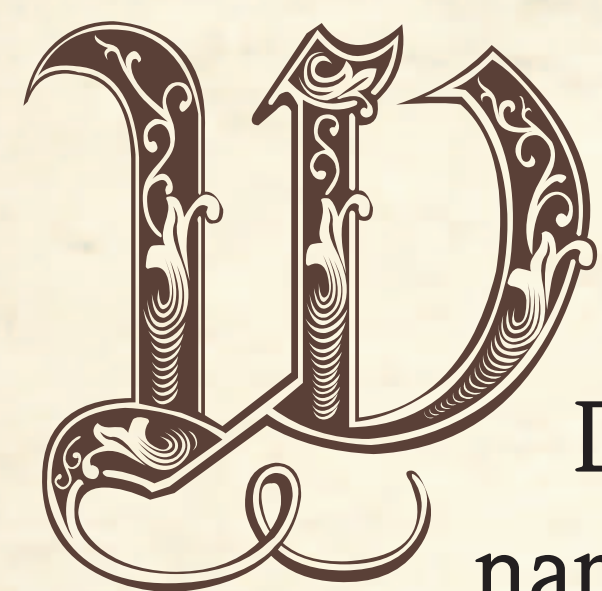


MOTHER MARIE-AGNÈS DUFRESNE, SNJM



Welcome to the Dufresne Building, named for Mélodie Dufresne, foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. Mélodie (later Mother Marie-Agnès) was born on November 9, 1809 in the small town of Beloeil, Quebec, located along the banks of the Richelieu River. She came from a prosperous and influential family with roots in Quebec dating to the seventeenth century. Mélodie helped her mother run the household and became skilled in domestic work and budgeting. She was educated in the village school and spent two additional years at boarding school with the Sisters of Notre Dame.

Mélodie grew up to be serious and austere. At the same time, she was blessed with artistic ability, a love of beauty and sincere piety. In 1833 she entered the Congregation of Notre Dame but soon returned home due to illness. Later she was invited by the pastor of Beloeil to live in the rectory with his sister Eulalie Durocher (later Mother Marie-Rose) to assist her in running the household and preparing the church for services.

Mélodie and Eulalie were kindred spirits, sharing a deep desire to enter religious life. In addition to their regular duties they visited the sick and taught catechism classes. They saw the need for more direction for girls and established a group for religious instruction and support called the Children of Mary. They dreamed of a school for girls directed by Sisters.

In 1843 Bishop Bourget of Montreal invited Mélodie and Eulalie to found a new religious community devoted to education. On October 28th they left for



Longueuil, situated across the St. Lawrence River from Montreal. With Henriette Céré (later Sister Marie-Madeleine) they founded the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. Mélodie received the name Sister Marie-Agnès and was put in charge of running the household.

Sister Marie-Agnès had pursued studies in decorative arts during her years in Beloeil. With her artistic training she was assigned to give art lessons to sisters and students. For twenty-five years

Sister Marie-Agnès taught sewing, drawing, spinning, weaving, embroidery, knitting, painting, and the making of artificial flowers and figures. She was an excellent art teacher. Her artistic and handwork skills also helped bolster the community's finances as she made vestments, altar linens, hosts and candles to sell.

Sister Marie-Agnès was head sacristan at the Longueuil convent chapel from 1843 almost up until her death. She especially loved to decorate the altar where her love of the beautiful could be completely indulged as she believed that nothing was too good for God.

Just before her death on December 22, 1881, Sister Marie-Agnès was granted the right to be called "Mother" by the bishop. Her eminent virtue was widely recognized, but the greatest gift that she left to the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary was her emphasis on creating beauty as a way to praise God. The Congregation's first art teacher, Mother Marie-Agnès set the standard of professionalism and excellence that Holy Names art teachers have followed since the 1840s.