



Heritage Notes

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The Congregation of Notre-Dame in 18th-Century Louisbourg

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First on Cape Breton Island, then in exile in France, the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame served the people of Louisbourg for many decades. Their aim was always to educate young girls, and in that they were an unqualified success. The Sisters' achievement was all the more remarkable in light of the many difficulties and hardships they had to overcome.

The story of the Congregation of Notre-Dame at Louisbourg reveals a great deal about the 18th-century fortified town. It also shows how the Sisters' commitment to duty, through perseverance, led to fulfilment and accomplishment.

The Congregation of Notre-Dame

The Congregation of Notre-Dame, like many of the religious orders and communities which helped shape society in New France, was founded in the 1600s. More so than the 18th century, the 17th century was a time of profound missionary zeal and fervour.

Marguerite Bourgeoys, born in Troyes (France) in 1620, was one of those who felt the religious call to action. She became motivated to come to North America and contribute in a practical way to the development of the France's overseas colony.

Marguerite Bourgeoys crossed the Atlantic for the first time in 1653. She was soon a moral and social force at Montreal (Ville Marie). She began teaching in 1658. In 1670 she received from Louis XIV the official letters patent for the Congregation of Notre-Dame, a



Marguerite Bourgeoys. Painting by Sr. St. Renée. Courtesy Centre Marguerite Bourgeoys, Congrégation de Notre Dame, Montreal. P.Q.

community of women dedicated to female education. The sisters took the same vows as many religious orders - poverty, chastity and obedience - yet unlike most of the rest, the Sisters of the Congregation remained a non-cloistered community. That is, they lived, worked and served in the day-to-day world.

The motherhouse of the Congregation was - and still is today - in Montreal. Yet the influence of the Sisters of Notre-Dame was felt far beyond that settlement on the St. Lawrence River. They established schools throughout New France. By 1731 there were sisters in no