

“Women of the North, Ministering in the North”: Understanding the Sisters of St. Joseph Through Memory and Space, 1940-1980

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Nuns tobogganing? The surprises of this image captured on the shores of Lake Nipissing in an intriguing photograph from 1958 raise questions about our understanding of vowed women's lives in the years surrounding the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Who were these women, and what were their experiences? How do their stories fit with or challenge dominant understandings of women religious in the mid-twentieth century? Using interviews and an extensive community archive, this article explores the social history of the Sisters of St. Joseph in North Bay, Ontario. By examining the place of these women in the history of the North, their collective and individual identities, as well as their clothed bodies, it shows how space shapes the stories we tell.

Des religieuses en train de faire de la traîne sauvage? Cette image surprenante prise sur les bords du lac Nipissing en 1958 soulève des questions au sujet de notre perception de la vie des femmes consacrées à l'époque du concile Vatican II (1962-1965). Qui sont ces femmes et quelles expériences ont-elles vécues? Comment leur histoire concorde-t-elle avec l'image dominante de la religieuse au milieu du XX^e siècle ou remet-elle cette image en question? S'appuyant sur des entrevues et sur les abondantes archives de la communauté, le présent article analyse l'histoire sociale des Sœurs de Saint-Joseph à North Bay (Ontario). L'analyse de la place de ces femmes dans l'histoire du Nord, de leur identité tant individuelle que collective aussi bien que de leur costume révèle comment l'espace façonne le récit que nous racontons.

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TOBOGGANING on snow-covered hills has long been a source of winter amusement for people living in northern Ontario. An archival photograph taken on the shore of Lake Nipissing in 1958 captures just such a moment, though the women standing on the hill's crest and flying down its slope were not your typical tobogganers. Much like ubiquitous images of rebel-nuns on greeting cards, this picture of the Sisters of St. Joseph caught our attention by defying expectations. The women were shown with habits flying, smiles wide on their faces—certainly not the picture of regulation and dour conservatism understood to have existed in the years before the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) initiated revolutionary change in the daily lives of vowed women.¹ With its suggestion of frivolity and freedom, the image challenged us to reflect on the social history of religious women in these years to better understand the world in which they lived and the stories they tell about it.

The photograph was discovered in the extensive archive of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie, along with other materials that include yearbooks, photographs, memorabilia, scrapbooks, and sister-authored histories. While this archive tells us much about the lives, goals, and achievements of a religious community of women, interviews conducted with thirteen Sisters reveal individual memories and lived experiences not often captured within the confines of documentary sources.² Their memories are used in ways that “[speak] back to the archive” and add individual uncertainty, regret, pride, and ways of remembering, as well as community narratives, to our understanding of the lives of women religious in the second half of the twentieth century.³ As scholars have established, in spite of important expansion in the field, our understanding of professed religious women remains surprisingly limited, shaped by stereotypes

1 Tobogganing, Photo Album, Novitiates, Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie Archives [SSJA], North Bay, Ontario. While the Sisters of St. Joseph gave us permission to copy and work with the images in their archive, due to privacy issues they did not agree to publication. We respect their decision. Originally meant to state the general principles of adaptation and renewal, “Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life *Perfectae Caritatis*,” proclaimed by his holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965, became a source of revolutionary change in religious communities around the world. See http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html [last accessed April 25, 2012].

2 Jennifer Hough Evans conducted 13 interviews during the summer of 2007. She had just graduated with her undergraduate degree from Nipissing University and was about to start her Bachelor of Education. Encouraged by colleagues and community members to record the histories of the aging Sisters of St. Joseph, Katrina Srigley hired Hough Evans through a research grant to conduct one-on-one interviews and archival research in the community archive of the Sisters of St. Joseph, North Bay. Neither author is a practising Catholic. In interviews conducted at the Motherhouse or the additional Sister residence, Bethany House, Hough Evans asked each participant life-course questions as well as specific questions about their roles in, impact on, and understanding of their northern community. Names have been changed in accordance with the wishes of some of the participants.

3 Ann Laura Stoler and Karen Strassler, “Casting for the Colonial: Memory Work in ‘New Order’ Java,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 42, no. 1 (January 2000), pp. 4-9 and 36-39. On memory narratives, silence, and life review, see Thomas Klubock, “History and Memory in Neoliberal Chile: Patricio Guzman’s Obstinate Memory and the Battle of Chile,” *Radical History Review*, vol. 85 (2003), pp. 272-282; Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, eds., *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990); Joan Sangster, “Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History” in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 87-100.

and powerful institutional narratives that do not give life, humanity, or dimension to the history of Sister communities.⁴ The photograph described above, as well as stories of hiking up habits to play basketball and swimming in nun-appropriate swimsuits, suggests religious women's lives were about far more than vows of "poverty, chastity, and obedience."⁵ They were women who had fun. They struggled with change, missed their families, and questioned their life choices as much as other women. They joined an all-woman community in a small northern town at an average age of 19 and found something different from the homes they had left behind. Some came from poor families, but most lived in households that were solidly working class in the towns and cities that dot northern Ontario. They were the daughters of loggers, teachers, miners, and railway men. When they entered the Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie Motherhouse located in North Bay, Ontario, they fulfilled a call from God, the only respectable alternative to marriage for young Catholic women in these years. While sharing a religion, they varied in their Scottish, Irish, English, and French-Canadian backgrounds. All of these women became teachers and had lengthy careers across northern Ontario. Their memories provide a particular window into their experiences in and stories about the North in which they lived.

Placing the Sisters of St. Joseph in the Historiography

There are plenty of historiographical contexts from which to build an exploration of Catholic women. The photograph that started this discussion is one piece of a larger archive belonging to the Sisters of St. Joseph. Mandated as records of the "good work" of Catholic communities, the archive served as a form of community building for the congregation. It allowed them to document their successes, reflect on their community's religious journey, particularly "the role of providence in history and in the lives of their orders," and educate new arrivals.⁶ Women committed details about the origins of the order to memory, through years of study

- 4 Elizabeth Smyth, "Changing Habits: Introducing the Collection of Essays" in Elizabeth Smyth, ed., *Changing Habits: Women's Religious Orders in Canada* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2007), pp. 7-20; Rebecca Sullivan, *Visual Habits: Nuns and American Postwar Popular Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). See also Renée Bondy, "Roman Catholic Women Religious and Organizational Reform in English Canada: The Ursuline and Holy Names Sisters in the Diocese of London, Ontario, 1950-1970" (PhD thesis, University of Waterloo, 2007) and "Roman Catholic Women Religious and Organizational Renewal: Telling Stories of Change," *Oral History Forum/ Forum d'histoire orale*, vol. 26 (2006), pp. 52-63; Heidi MacDonald, "Doing More With Less: The Sisters of St. Martha Diminish the Impact of the Great Depression," *Acadiensis*, vol. 33, no. 1 (Fall 2003), pp. 21-46, and "The Sisters of St. Martha and Prince Edward Island Social Institutions, 1916-1982" (PhD thesis, University of New Brunswick, 2000); Bettina Bradbury, *Wife to Widow: Lives, Laws and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Montreal* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011), chap. 10.
- 5 Elizabeth Smyth, "'Much exertion of the voice and great application of the mind': Teacher Education within the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, Canada, 1920-1951," *Historical Studies in Education*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1994), p. 102.
- 6 Beverly Boutilier and Alison Prentice, "Introduction" in Beverly Boutilier and Alison Prentice, eds., *Creating Historical Memory: English-Canadian Women and the Work of History* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), p. 12. On the use of these archives, see Renée Bondy, "Get Thee to a Nunnery! Uses of English Canadian Convent Archives across Feminist Disciplines," *Atlantis*, vol. 34, no. 1 (2009), pp. 142-148.

and exercises such as a four-player game of flash cards that asked questions such as “In what year was the Congregation of St. Joseph founded?”⁷ This memory work certainly allowed the women interviewed to recall, with uncanny specificity, the origin narrative of their Order.⁸ Given this archival mandate and the strength of such stories, historians have often been inspired to work with sister communities.⁹ In the Canadian context, Ruth Compton Brouwer, Rosemary Gagan, and Elizabeth Smyth have been especially important in opening up discussion about religious communities outside French Canada.¹⁰ As Smyth herself notes, since the mid-1990s, increased access to community archives has inspired more scholarship on women religious.¹¹ This development has expanded our understanding of the role of these women in fields such as education, health care, and social work and put veiled women, their history and their contributions, on the historical map.

Among women’s and gender historians interested in categories of identity and the manner in which they have intersected to shape histories in various contexts, there has been an interesting silence around religious women. Scholarship has certainly expanded since the 1990s, but discussions have not moved far beyond questions of feminism and opportunity raised by Marta Danylewycz in her landmark publication, *Taking the Veil*.¹² In Canada, this is certainly due to the strength of Marxist feminist approaches to historical analysis when women’s history took off in the 1970s and 1980s. These scholars neither focused on white women privileged by academic training and steady work nor engaged with religion as a significant identity in relation to class and gender.¹³ The spiritual side of religious women’s lives rarely contributed to analysis. It was an imprecise, perhaps even an inexpressible, historical force for many secular scholars. In the United States, historians Carol Coburn and Martha Smith point to the “double

7 Sisters of St. Joseph Archive [hereafter SSJA], Flashcards.

8 On the history of the Order, see Smyth, “‘Much exertion of the voice,’” p. 102.

9 Rosa Bruno-Jofre, *Vision and Mission: The Missionary Oblate Sisters* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005); James Cameron, *And Martha Served: History of the Sisters of St. Martha Antigonish, Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Nimbus, 2000); Elizabeth Smyth and Linda Wicks, eds., *Wisdom Raises Her Voice: The Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto Celebrate 150 Years* (Toronto: Transcontinental Press/Sisters of St. Joseph, 2001).

10 Bondy, “Roman Catholic Women Religious”; Elizabeth Smyth, “The Culture of Catholic Women’s Colleges at the University of Toronto, 1911-1925,” *CCHA Historical Studies*, vol. 70 (2004), pp. 111-130, and “‘Much exertion of the voice,’” pp. 97-113. See also Ruth Compton Brouwer, *Modern Women Modernizing Men: The Changing Missions of Three Professional Women in Asia and Africa* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002) and *New Women for God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and Indian Missions, 1876-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); Rosemary Gagan, *A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881-1925* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992).

11 Elizabeth Smyth, “Writing the History of Women Religious in Canada (1996-2001),” *International Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2001), pp. 205-211.

12 Ruth Compton Brouwer, “Transcending the ‘Unacknowledged Quarantine’: Putting Religion into English-Canadian Women’s History,” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 27 (Autumn 1992), pp. 47-61; Marta Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil: an alternative to marriage, motherhood and spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1920* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987).

13 Mark McGowan, “Life Outside the Cloister: Some Reflections on the Writing of the History of the Catholic Church in English Canada, 1983-1996,” *Historical Studies*, vol. 63 (1997), pp. 123-133, and “Coming Out of the Cloister: Some Reflections on Developments in the Study of Religion in Canada, 1980-1990,” *International Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 1-2 (March 1990), pp. 175-202.

bind of gender and religious marginality” to explain historiographical gaps.¹⁴ The excellent contributions of Lynne Marks, Myra Rutherford, and, most recently, Bettina Bradbury, however, provide important stepping-stones in discussions of women, religion, and social power.¹⁵ They, like Coburn and Smith in the United States, join a growing number of scholars working in the field who want to uncover religious women’s “lives and activities as complex and varied and interesting as other women” and to move beyond stereotypes that continue to shape our understandings of the role of religion in women’s lives.¹⁶

This article builds upon all of these contexts, acknowledging the need for more scholarship on religious women that considers the dynamics of identity and social power, as well as the complexities of “lived religion.”¹⁷ By studying women living in a region that is understudied in Canadian history, it also brings the dynamics of space and place to the forefront. Though historians have documented the manner in which immigrant men forged their identities in the lumber camps and mining towns of northern Ontario, they have spent less time exploring the ways in which women negotiated identities and relationships in this context, particularly not from the perspective of the women themselves.¹⁸ Much like the contributors to *Placing Memory and Remembering Place in Canada*, we believe place is made meaningful by memory.¹⁹ Our sense of place is imbued with positive and negative memories of individual and collective pasts, memories that express our relationships to our physical surroundings and to other people, to make sense of our past and present behaviours and to try to understand our self-identities.²⁰ Feelings of place, or subjective, intimate, and emotional connections to a particular environment, are not

14 Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, p. 3.

15 Bradbury, *Wife to Widow*; Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Myra Rutherford, *Women and the White Man’s God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002).

16 Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, p. ix. See also Leslie Woodcock Tentler, “On the Margins: The State of American Catholic History,” *American Quarterly*, vol. 45 (March 1993), pp. 104-127.

17 We take inspiration from Robert Orsi’s explanation of “lived religion” as an approach to religious history that focuses on the lives of people in a particular time and place rather than the history of the Church or denomination and also that understands “lived religion” as existing at a “conjuncture of two lived worlds,” the past and the present. See “Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion” in David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 7, 10, 18.

18 Kerry M. Abel, *Changing Places: History, Community and Identity in Northeastern Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005); Karen Dubinsky, *Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880-1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Nancy M. Forestell, “Bachelors, Boarding Houses and Blind Pigs: Gender Construction in a Multi-Ethnic Mining Camp, 1909-1920” in Franca Iacovetta, Paula Draper, and Robert Ventresca, eds., *A Nation of Immigrants: Women, Workers and Communities in Canadian History, 1840s-1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp. 251-290, and “Women, Gender and the Provincial North” in Kerry Abel and Ken S. Coates, eds., *Northern Visions: New Perspectives on the North in Canadian History* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2001), pp. 107-109; Varpu Linström-Best, *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Immigrant Women in Canada* (Toronto: Multicultural Society of Ontario, 1988); Ian Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Rutherford, *Women and the White Man’s God*.

19 James Opp and John C. Walsh, eds., *Placing Memory and Remembering Place in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010).

20 Abel, *Changing Places*, pp. xx-xxi.

always positive and homelike attachments because spaces, as is made clear in the stories of these women, are also powerful sources of doubt, pain, and exclusion.²¹ In defining place, it is important to be mindful of human geographer Michael Lansing's cautionary note that scholars too often "write place into containers of nature filled space without considering how place-making involves the container itself."²² The Sisters' individual and collective memories reflect what it meant to be a "woman of the North, who ministered in the North." They provide access to the spaces in which the Sisters lived and worked, uncovering them as rewarding and challenging places to fulfil their call from God through teaching and later in their careers through charitable works. They highlight the Sisters' imagined North and the ways in which they mobilize myths of this place in the telling of their stories. They demonstrate that Sisters' clothed bodies shaped interactions within the contours of religious and secular spaces.

Placing the Sisters of St Joseph in Northern Ontario

Local and community contexts tell us much about the settings these women entered on joining the Sisters of St. Joseph. In 1936, Bishop Ralph Hubert Dignan purchased 35 acres of former parkland in North Bay, Ontario, for the price of \$6,300.²³ He planned to build a new Motherhouse and college, a project deemed necessary after the separation of the diocese of Sault Ste. Marie from that of Peterborough. In North Bay, the Sisters of St. Joseph remained under the direction of the Bishop in Peterborough until 1936, when a dramatic and emotional breakaway of the northern region under the leadership of Dignan severed this connection. As Sister Jackie O'Brien explained it, by 1936 "the church was growing in small mining communities and lumbering communities up around Lake Superior" and Dignan, who oversaw the region and observed this growth, saw this as an impetus for "women of the North, to minister in the North."²⁴ Dignan argued that the distance between northern regions and Peterborough limited the local care available to northern communities. The exact progression of events remains unclear, and an official letter from Rome rejecting Dignan's initial request was never made public. Dignan went on to appeal Rome's decision, successfully receiving recognition of the new congregation on November 5, 1936 and opening a novitiate at St. Joseph's College in North Bay in February 1937.²⁵ The Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie became the sixth congregation in Ontario, along with those in Hamilton, London, Peterborough, Pembroke, and Toronto. The women interviewed for this study were certainly familiar with this foundational narrative, often repeating it in interviews and describing the links

21 Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 7, 43.

22 Michael Lansing, "Different Methods, Different Places: Feminist Geography and New Directions in US Western History," *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 29, no. 2 (2003), p. 231.

23 SSJA, Sisters of St. Joseph, *Community History Prior to 1937*, p. 24, and Souvenir Booklet: St. Joseph's College, 1939, p. 2.

24 Sister Jackie O'Brien, interview with Jennifer Hough Evans, North Bay, Ontario, August 14, 2007. Unless otherwise noted, all interviews were conducted by Hough Evans in North Bay.

25 Veronica O'Reilly, CSJ, "Writing a Congregational History: The Insider Problematic" in Smyth, ed., *Changing Habits*, p. 195.

between the creation of their community and their northern environment. Though the break-up of the Peterborough community caused “a lot of heart-aches” and “soul-struggles,” as Sister Shirley Anderson recalled, “one hundred and twenty one Sisters came from Peterborough to form” the new community.²⁶ She reflected, “it was a very difficult decision I am sure for some of them.” In some cases, it broke family bonds when one sibling stayed in Peterborough and the other elected to join the newly formed community.²⁷ There were practical and metaphysical elements to the decisions these women made: some chose the Sault Ste. Marie diocese because it was where they had longed to work and, despite vast distances and separation from family, they felt a real connection to the North. The Sisters described it in ways not dissimilar from a call to God. They were meant to be in the North, irrespective of the sacrifices required.²⁸

Situated just inside the city limits of North Bay, the property purchased by Dignan for these Sisters in 1938 was well known for its sandy beach, which extended across 3,000 feet of Lake Nipissing shoreline.²⁹ A history written by the Sisters recorded their first impressions of this apparently untouched landscape. They were struck by the “winter scene fit for the brush of an artist.”³⁰ Most of the Sisters interviewed accentuated the northerly setting, recalling the splendour of the lake, rocky terrain, and green space—although they were also careful to note they had been unable to appreciate this scenery in their early training days as novices because of demanding and full schedules.³¹ The new Motherhouse and college in North Bay gave the Sisters of St. Joseph access to the quickly growing population of the region.³² St. Joseph’s College, with its boarding school, was seen as filling an imperative need by providing “advanced secular education with religious culture to the young ladies of northern Ontario.”³³ Drawing students from

26 SSJA, Sisters of St. Joseph, *Community History, 1650-1967*; Sister Shirley Anderson, interview, May 26, 2008.

27 Anderson, interview.

28 Emotions were so strong about these events that public discussion of the division did not occur until nearly 60 years later. To date, narratives of the division are shaped by place, with Dignan cast as a villain in southern Ontario, but celebrated in the North of the province (O’Reilly, “Writing a Congregational History,” p. 193).

29 *Community History, 1650-1967*; “Girls College to Rise on Lions Park,” *North Bay Nugget*, March 11, 1938.

30 *Community History Prior to 1937*, p. 25.

31 On the connections among land, identity, and memory, see Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters and Social Imagination* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005); Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002); William Turkel, *The Archive of Place: Unearthing the Pasts of the Chilcotin Plateau* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007); Sister Aline Lavoie, interview, July 3, 2007; Sister Norah Murphy, interview, June 27, 2007; Sister Rose Barrett, interview, July 19, 2007.

32 In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) made North Bay a divisional point, the Grand Trunk Railway had extended to North Bay, gaining access to the CPR line, and the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario railway had made North Bay its headquarters and southern terminus. This railway network, combined with a mining boom as silver was discovered in Cobalt and gold in Kirkland Lake and Porcupine, resulted in North Bay being well positioned to develop into an entryway for all points in northern Ontario. See Françoise Noël, *Family and Community Life in Northeastern Ontario: The Interwar Years* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), pp. 16-19.

33 *Community History, 1650-1967*, p. 33.

across the province, especially those connected to North Bay by the railway, the college was believed to have a combination of instruction, landscape, and a new, modern building that would create “the perfect set-up for the healthy out-door growing young Canadian girl.”³⁴ These imaginings also mobilize the language of the frontier, so common in white settler societies, of empty spaces and adventurous and pioneering “women of the North” living in the untamed geography of the boreal forest.³⁵ Despite the relatively southern location, in geographical terms, of North Bay and the regions of northern Ontario where these women lived and worked, for them it was the North, an imagined space in which meanings of place were created and contested.

St. Joseph’s College was eventually completed on this parkland site at a cost of \$300,000 in 1938.³⁶ The architectural design of this five-storey building was planned to satisfy the multiple needs of the newly formed religious community (see Figure 1). The west block served as an administrative centre as well as a Motherhouse and novitiate for the training of “aspirants to the religious life”; the east block was designated as a college for the education of young women, with eight classrooms and 100 private boarding rooms. Day pupils were drawn from North Bay and area, while boarders came from across northern Ontario and, in later years, from as far away as Mexico and Guatemala.³⁷ While the majority of boarders were Euro-Canadian Francophone and Anglophone girls, boarders also included Anishinaabe girls drawn from Nipissing First Nation, Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve, and other areas along the Canadian Pacific Railway line.³⁸ Some Inineu girls travelled from communities on the James Bay Coast.

34 “Claim College is Unexcelled in Ontario,” *North Bay Nugget*, January 14, 1939.

35 On frontiers, see Elizabeth Furniss, *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth in a Rural Canadian Community* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999); Kathryn McPherson, “Was the ‘Frontier’ Good for Women? Historical Approaches to Women and Agricultural Settlement in the Prairie West, 1870-1925,” *Atlantis*, vol. 25 (Fall/Winter 2000), pp. 69-86; Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), and “From ‘The Hot-Bed of Vice’ to the ‘Good and Well-Ordered Christian Home’: First Nations Housing and Reform in Nineteenth Century British Columbia,” *Ethnohistory*, vol. 50, no. 4 (2003), pp. 587-610; Mary-Ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900-1950* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998); Jordan Stranger-Ross, “Municipal Colonialism in Vancouver: City Planning and the Conflict over Indian Reserves, 1928-1950s,” *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 89, no. 4 (2008), pp. 541-580; Victoria Freeman, “‘Toronto has no history!’ Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism and Historical Memory in Canada’s Largest City,” *Urban History Review*, vol. 38, no. 2 (Spring 2010), pp. 21-35.

36 SSJA, The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Diocese Sault Ste. Marie, 1881-1941, novitiate pamphlet. In 1961, an \$800,000 addition was made to the original building.

37 In 1939, the opening year of the school, enrolment rates reached 104 students, and by 1985, the year of the school’s closing, enrolment had climbed to 425 students. The majority in these closing years were day students, and there were only 45 boarders in 1985. See SSJA, “School Enrolment Rates.”

38 After World War II, the Canadian government moved slowly and unevenly towards a policy of educational integration. Political action on the part of Indigenous communities, the National Indian Brotherhood’s report “Indian Control of Indian Education” providing a central example, as well as reports of the 1948 and 1971 Parliamentary Committees on Indian Affairs, helped force this change. Up to and in some cases after the 1960s, Indian Agents determined when and where Indigenous children attended school. In theory, policy changes after this period gave agency to parents and communities to determine which schools their children attended, as well as control over funds transferred each year from the federal government. Unfortunately, in many contexts then and now, funding was and remains inadequate to create appropriate infrastructure, forcing young people to leave their communities and cultural contexts to attend

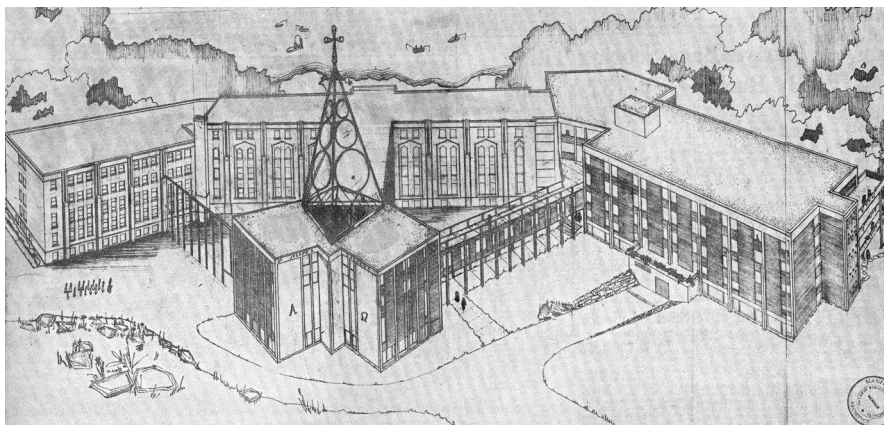


Figure 1: “\$800,000 St. Joseph’s College Addition Starts By April 1,” February 1961 (SSJA).

The Sisters also welcomed international students who were there to learn English and were able to afford tuition and board, which ran from \$1,250 for a private room to \$1,000 for a dormitory-style room by 1969.³⁹ The central unit of the Motherhouse was a chapel dedicated to Sacred Heart, designed in a Tudor gothic style with pointed windows, high arched ceilings, oak beams carved with a rosette design, all described as a “gem of architectural beauty.”⁴⁰ Set among the trees and overlooking the lake, this building and its surrounding landscape entered the consciousness of the Sisters who lived there, becoming part of their spiritual connection to this place and shaping how they understood their “good work” in the North. These memories of the place and space of St. Joseph’s College capture it in ways that elide the colonial realities of the Anishinaabe land on which the college sat and of the Indigenous girls who boarded there. Understood another way, the architectural design of the Motherhouse, as well as other buildings connected to the church and state, “transmitted” meanings far removed from brush strokes of colour and inspiration.⁴¹

school. For more information, see Fran Couchie, Director of Education, Nipissing First Nation, personal correspondence with Katrina Srigley, August 2013; Verna Kirkness, “Aboriginal Education in Canada: A Retrospective and a Prospective,” *Journal of American Indian Education*, vol. 39, no. 1 (Fall 1999), <http://jaie.asu.edu/v39/V3911A2.pdf> [last accessed August 23, 2013]; John S. Milloy, *A National Crime: the Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999), pp.259-306; Report of the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, *Reforming First Nations Education: From Crisis to Hope* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2011).

³⁹ Sister Carolyn Schan, interview, August 13, 2007; SSJA, “School Syllabus: Note to Parents or Guardians of Prospective Students.” Indeed, while boarding had been a popular option in the 1950s and 1960s, reaching its peaks in 1953 with 180 boarders, by the closing year there were only 45 boarders (SSJA, “School Enrolment Rates”).

⁴⁰ SSJA, Souvenir Booklet, pp. 1-6; “Claim College is Unexcelled in Ontario,” *North Bay Nugget*, January 14, 1939.

⁴¹ Sarah De Leeuw, “Intimate Colonialisms: The Material and Experienced Places of British Columbia’s Residential Schools,” *Canadian Geographer*, vol. 51, no. 3 (2007), pp. 344, 343. Interviews with residential school survivors reveal much about the challenges of re-entering residential school buildings as well as any Euro-Canadian institutional building of a similar design. See also: “Intimate Colonialisms”; Dian Million, “Telling Secrets: Sex, Power and Narratives in Indian Residential School Histories,” *Canadian Woman Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2 (Summer 2000), pp. 92-104; Jody Woods, “I Remind Until I Fall: An Examination

On the other side of the Motherhouse, set apart from the school, other young women climbed the steps of the building to the space where they would begin their lives as vowed women. These women started their education as postulants in their late teens and early twenties, between 1940 and 1960. This initial period of formation lasted between six months and a year. Like vowed women before them, they were drawn to the Sisters of St. Joseph because of companionship, economic security, and career opportunities, though ultimately all emphasized a “call from God” as the most significant factor in their decision, a call that was sometimes against the wishes of their families and the women themselves. Their religious commitment is crucial to our understanding of the women who joined this congregation. It helps to explain their decisions to persevere during times of great personal sacrifice and gives meaning to their ways of remembering. The Holy Spirit called Sister Rose Barrett. “That’s the element of faith,” she explained, hearing the call and answering it.⁴² Sister Doreen Campbell was matter-of-fact about her decision to take vows. She just knew. When asked whether it was a calling, Campbell clarified, with practicality in her voice, “I didn’t hear any voice or something. It was just something that I wanted to do.” She did not have any “difficulties with making the decision.”⁴³ For other women, stories of struggle and heart-wrenching sacrifice were common. Sister Rosemary Carroll recalled that her decision broke her Protestant grandmother’s heart, and she never heard from her grandmother again after entering. Her mother struggled too, hoping her only daughter would marry and have children. She made Carroll promise not to shave her head. As Carroll explained, “that was the Protestant idea [of what] Nuns did.”⁴⁴ When asked to explain why she had decided to take vows, Sister Jackie O’Brien replied, “I hardly know except that I felt impelled.” This force did not provide clarity for O’Brien as it had for Campbell. Instead, it made her cry. She had to work hard to reconcile her calling with her desire “to date and dance” and live a secular life.⁴⁵

Once their postulancy was completed, the young women became novices. This stage involved multiple years of prayer, study, and work before becoming a “vowed religious” or full Sister.⁴⁶ The formation process had many “ups and downs,” demanding sacrifice, patience, and great physical exertion—and it was not for everyone. As Sister Betty Mitchell remembered, she was the only one

of Space, Memory and Experience at the Coqualeetza Residential School and Indian Hospital, 1935-1950” (MA thesis, Department of History, University of British Columbia, 1998). On Canadian residential school experiences, see Marlene Brant Castellano, Linda Archibald, and Mike DeGagné, “From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools” in *Report Prepared for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation* (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008); Agnes Grant, *Finding My Talk: How Fourteen Native Women Reclaimed Their Lives After Residential School* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2004) and *No End of Grief: Indian Residential Schools in Canada* (Winnipeg: Pemmican Press, 1996); J. R. Miller, *Shingwauk’s Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Milloy, *A National Crime*; Brent Stonefish, *Moving Beyond: Understanding the Impacts of Residential Schools* (Owen Sound, ON: Ningwakwe Learning Press, 2007).

42 Barrett, interview.

43 Sister Doreen Campbell, interview, March 21, 2008.

44 Sister Rosemary Carroll, interview, July 5, 2007.

45 O’Brien, interview.

46 SSJA, “You – A Sister of St. Joseph?,” recruiting pamphlet.

left from her cohort.⁴⁷ Rather than condemn women who decided to leave, Sister Cecilia Morin said they were “brave enough to say this is not for me.”⁴⁸ Just before she was to take her final vows, Sister Jackie O’Brien’s mother died. She then had to make a final decision, to stay in the community or go home to look after her father and brother. The choice was terribly difficult. “When I look back,” said O’Brien, “I still think God wanted me here. It was a terrible, terrible suffering for all of us really.”⁴⁹ No matter the nature of their spiritual calling, the decision brought the women interviewed to the east block of the Motherhouse and kept them in this space.

The world these women entered was highly structured in the years before Vatican II to ensure they fulfilled the requirements of their vocation. As young novices, they committed themselves to years of training and study in northern Ontario. During interviews, the separation between sacred and secular spaces emerged as an important theme in the Sisters’ memories of this time. This division was supposed to give young women the space for reflection as they contemplated religious life. Sister Carolyn Schan surmised that novices were barred from having informal interactions with college students to prevent them from being unduly distracted as they took steps to making final vows.⁵⁰ This separation of space continued when they left the Motherhouse to attend Normal School in downtown North Bay. Sister Doreen Campbell remembered, “Whenever there were breaks they had a room there for us, just for Sisters because we didn’t socialize with the rest of the students.”⁵¹ Despite these efforts, the Sisters did have social lives that could be challenging to compartmentalize, blurring lines between secular and spiritual spaces in ways that could “muddy” their vocation. Sister Jackie O’Brien recalled a fellow postulant travelling by train to North Bay a week early, so she could break up with her boyfriend before entering religious life.⁵² These young women still held strong memories about the lives and relationships they had given up and questions about the new life for which they had sacrificed these attachments.⁵³ In a similar and even more difficult sense for some, postulants and novitiates had very limited contact with their families. Sister Jackie O’Brien could not attend her mother’s funeral.⁵⁴ Sister Norah Murphy missed her family terribly, recalling Christmas as one of the most difficult periods of time during the year.⁵⁵ The east block of St. Joseph’s was a step on their religious journey, but also a tremendously challenging space of limitation designed to control the influence of the secular world on their lives.

The space inside the Motherhouse was demarcated by clear hierarchies and rules, though as novices the young women found ways to challenge constraints

47 Sister Betty Mitchell, interview, August 17, 2007.

48 Sister Cecilia Morin, interview, August 16, 2007.

49 O’Brien, interview.

50 Schan, interview.

51 Campbell, interview.

52 O’Brien, interview.

53 Carroll, interview.

54 O’Brien, interview.

55 Murphy, interview.

placed on their space and time. Most of the Sisters interviewed recalled the penetrating sound of the bell that marked out their lives, for the 5:30 wake up, breakfast, prayer and meditation, work, and free time.⁵⁶ As novices they contributed to the community through daily chores in the kitchen or garden, through sewing, laundering, or cleaning. They even made their rosaries. When a student “stole the bell and buried it down in the lake,” Sister Norah Murphy recalled, “almost everybody knew about it, and nobody said a word. Nobody.”⁵⁷ The novices were happy to be rid of it, if only for a short time, and did not tell the Sisters or Mother Superior about its location. Aside from the sound of the bell, silence predominated in these years, which some of these women remember as challenging. “We couldn’t talk in the hallway, don’t ask me why,” remembered Sister Cecilia Morin. Instead, Morin explained, they stopped in doorways to chat with one another, creatively interpreting the rules to satisfy their need for conversation.⁵⁸ Other young novices were more openly rebellious. During Sister Evelyn Walsh’s first six months, she fought “constantly” with her superior, “not fist fight[s], but word fight[s].” The other novices would kick her “under the table” and tell her to be quiet; one was not supposed fight back. “I’d shut up,” said Walsh; “she’d think she’d won, but I knew she hadn’t.” Threatened that she would not be allowed to take her vows, Walsh remained defiant. She did not care if they kicked her out because she was so unhappy. In the end, Walsh made first vows and “thanked God for her vocation,” but in this early period it was not at all clear to her that she should join the community.⁵⁹ As their memories suggest, women dealt with their loss of autonomy differently, some finding space to challenge control both quietly and in more openly resistant ways. In any case, their decisions to join the congregation and their experiences of religious life in these early years were hardly straightforward.

Once these women had taken vows, their work extended into the east block of St. Joseph’s College as well as schools across northern Ontario.⁶⁰ As teachers, the women in this study understood their work to be life-long. It was not about “economic independence or social advancement; teaching was the actualization of their vocation” to serve God and neighbour.⁶¹ Until 1967, Catholic School Boards paid women religious 75 per cent of the wages of other qualified teachers.⁶² Despite pay inequity, they had opportunities unavailable to most women in Canadian society at that time. Sister Betty Mitchell noted that, as a young girl, she realized that her relatives who were Sisters had different, and from her perspective, better opportunities than other women for education and travel.⁶³ Sister Norah Murphy fondly remembered travelling to North Africa where she was photographed sitting

56 Mitchell, interview; Lavoie, interview; Schan, interview; Morin, interview; Campbell, interview; Sister Mary Comerford, interview, June 20, 2007.

57 Murphy, interview.

58 Morin, interview. Bondy discusses this pattern of rule bending in “Roman Catholic Women Religious and Organizational Renewal,” pp. 59-60.

59 Sister Evelyn Walsh, interview, August 7, 2007.

60 Smyth, “‘Much exertion of the voice’,” pp. 105, 107.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 112.

62 Morin, interview.

63 Mitchell, interview.

on a camel in full habit.⁶⁴ All of the women in this study had completed high school, and almost half of them held MA or MEd degrees; this academic achievement was significant at a time when the vast majority of women were lucky to complete high school.⁶⁵

These opportunities were not without limitations, however. “Happiness and contentment are the lot of those who feel they are doing God’s will, no matter what work they are assigned,” read a pamphlet designed to recruit young women to the religious community.⁶⁶ Perhaps this message, couched in religiosity, was meant to prepare newly entered women for disappointment. Both Sisters Cecilia Morin and Aline Lavoie wanted to become nurses when they entered the convent, but they neither had the choice nor questioned it in those early years. As Morin said in a sombre tone, back then “we were never told why we did a lot of things.”⁶⁷ In the years before Vatican II, the Mother Superior determined each Sister’s avocation and the location of that work. On August 15 every year, remarked Sister Jackie O’Brien, each woman discovered a sealed envelope on her bed that “either said ‘Sister your obedience for this year is to return to the school you were in ... blah blah blah.’ Or ‘this year you will teach grade 3 in Blind River.’” That was how the Sisters learned what they were doing (and where), as “there was a lot of movement from year to year.”⁶⁸ Changes often meant leaving behind relationships with students and fellow Sisters and severing community ties to move great distances to work in entirely new locations. For example, Sister Evelyn Walsh taught in Schreiber, Blind River, White River, Thunder Bay, Red Lake, North Bay, and Capreol during her teaching career of more than 30 years.⁶⁹ Sister Shirley Anderson, who had grown up in North Bay, remembered her reaction when she found out where she was going to teach her first year. “I couldn’t believe I was going to Wawa,” she said. “I thought I was going to the end of the world.”⁷⁰ For Anderson, whose point of reference was North Bay, Wawa seemed very far away and very far north. While entering into vowed life gave the Sisters educational opportunities they might not otherwise have had, any decision-making power, including what they learned and where they worked, was out of their control.

All of the Sisters have fond memories of the many students who passed through their classrooms. They understood their role as providing a Catholic education and training their students to be good, Canadian women. In these spaces, students learned traditional gender messages about morality, marriage, and motherhood central to good Catholic families. They also received training and inspiration to step beyond these boundaries.⁷¹ Within the sanctuary of St. Joseph’s College in North

64 Murphy, interview.

65 Smyth found that 98 per cent of women religious in Canada had a high degree of professional qualification. See “Professionalization among the Professed: The Case of Roman Catholic Women Religious” in Elizabeth Smyth, ed., *Challenging Professions: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Women’s Professional Work* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 245.

66 “You – A Sister of St. Joseph?”

67 Morin, interview; Lavoie, interview.

68 O’Brien, interview.

69 Walsh, interview.

70 Anderson, interview.

71 Lesley Erickson, “‘Bury Our Sorrows in the Sacred Heart’: Gender and the Metis Response to Colonialism –

Bay continuity was envisioned between the unspoiled wilderness outside and the life lessons going on inside, as the “exterior beauty” was “in perfect harmony with the noble work to which it [was] dedicated.”⁷² Just as the environment was pure and wholesome, so were the messages taught to young women. Sister Rosemary Carroll described an ideal young woman as “some[one] who has poise, manners, and consideration for others.” She noted that this young woman was beyond materialism, caring more about the person than looking at hair or clothes.⁷³ Sister Shirley Anderson pointed to respectfulness as an important quality: “Be grateful, respect yourself, respect your body, pray.”⁷⁴ Sister Aline Lavoie continued with this theme of respect, extolling “a young woman with integrity, sensitivity—not only sensitivity to people but a sensitivity to nature and things.”⁷⁵ These young women were expected to carry white, Christian ideals with them, “lead[ing] a Mary-like life” in the outside world and guarding against “a wrong or careless move [that] could cause all for which you have worked to crumble.”⁷⁶ The outside world, with all its moral pitfalls, temptations, and complicated racial dynamics, did not provide the seclusion and protection apparently found at the college, sheltered as it was among the untouched pines on the city’s outskirts. It was hoped the lessons the girls had received in good womanhood would serve them well when they crossed out of this space.

The Sisters’ memories of interactions with Indigenous students point to the ways in which unspoken but powerful colonial dynamics structure their stories of teaching in the North. Most of the women religious recalled that young Indigenous women “just fit in with the rest of us and were just part of the group” and that the trick was to “never ma[k]e any differentiation” between them and non-Indigenous students.⁷⁷ Sister Rosemary Carroll noted apologetically that Indigenous students, “were not prepared” for high school. They had a “hard, hard time” academically and tended to stick together speaking “Indian.” Asked about her interactions with these students, Carroll remembered, “They hardly put their hand up. There was just very little communication.”⁷⁸ Sister Rose Barrett vigilantly said that St. Joseph’s College “wasn’t like a residential school, it wasn’t that type of school” when the subject of Indigenous students arose during her interview. She noted, “they didn’t strike me as being unhappy,” adding, “I noticed that they were quieter by nature.”⁷⁹ This quietness was a reoccurring theme in the Sisters’ memories. They attributed it to academic preparedness, language, and culture. Though the Order did run a residential school in Thunder Bay, St. Joseph’s College in North Bay was not a residential school. It is important to note, however, that irrespective

The Case of Sara and Louis Riel, 1848-83” in Sarah Carter, Lesley Erickson, Patricia Roome, and Char Smith, eds., *Unsettled Pasts: Reconceiving the West Through Women’s History* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), pp. 26-27.

72 “Prospectus,” Souvenir Booklet, p. 6.

73 Carroll, interview.

74 Anderson, interview.

75 Lavoie, interview.

76 SSJA, Carmen Grenier, “Tribute to Graduates,” *Academy Times* [St. Joseph’s College yearbook], 1963.

77 Sister Anne Williams, interview, July 11, 2007.

78 Carroll, interview.

79 Barrett, interview.

of intentions and the historical context in which they worked, the school did not mobilize the language, culture, or educational traditions of most of the Indigenous students, but rather the culture of the settlers who had taken Indigenous land and through their education systems worked to destroy their languages and cultures.⁸⁰ In this way, schooling more generally in the years between 1940 and 1980 contributed to assimilation and colonization. Inside and outside religious communities, people are beginning to see the importance of acknowledging and understanding this history as a means for making reconciliation possible today. As such it is important not to ignore the complicated place of Indigenous students in the narratives of the Sisters of St. Joseph. This is clear in women's memories. They were hesitant to talk about this part of their history. It is also evident in the archive where loosely collected photographs such as one of a young Indigenous girl, standing on a dock having her hair brushed by one of the Sisters, have no apparent place. The image is reminiscent of the before-and-after photographs so tightly connected with residential schools, which staged the transformations of young Indigenous bodies.⁸¹ Left in unmarked envelopes, nameless and dateless, photographs such as this one do not fit easily into the scrapbook histories that neatly line the shelves of the archive.

Placing and Place in Identities

Whether these Sisters were shooting down a snowy hill in full habit or standing at the front of a classroom, they did not view the North just as a physical space where they lived and worked. It also informed their individual and collective identities and, in their case, a sense of their pioneering or frontier spirit.⁸² Ideas about the North as a frontier space and their goal to bring education into remote, unrefined communities were captured in a binder dedicated to the Sisters' educational efforts in northern Ontario. "Like all true pioneers," it recorded, these women religious "'made do' with whatever came to hand, teaching with the scantest of materials in the meanest of situations." In spite of these obstacles or "maybe because of all the obstacles," these women produced many "fine citizens, fine Christian men and women."⁸³ Language and stories told and retold of their efforts in northern Ontario cast these women as brave and courageous, bringing education and "civilization" to hostile environments.⁸⁴ Sister Jackie O'Brien recounted a story she had heard about the Sisters in the North during the early part of the twentieth century. As the Sisters of St. Joseph had arrived in Thunder Bay to teach, so too did miners and construction workers to extend the CPR line. O'Brien recalled that, when an accident with explosives left a man with "his two legs blown off," bystanders

80 The Order ran the St. Joseph's Residential School in Fort William (later Thunder Bay, Ontario) between 1870 and 1966. See Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre: Sharing, Healing, Learning, archives.almogau.ca/drupal6/taxonomy/term/ [last accessed June 18, 2012].

81 "Just Washing Hair," Native Apostolate (SSJA); De Leeuw, "Intimate Colonialisms," p. 352; Milloy, *A National Crime*, pp. xi-xii.

82 Abel, *Changing Places*, p. 361, xiv; Forestell, "Women, Gender and the Provincial North," pp. 107-109; Suzanne Morton, "Gender, Place, and Region: Thoughts on the State of Women in Atlantic Canadian History," *Atlantis*, vol. 25, no. 1 (2000), pp. 119-120.

83 SSJA, "Education," binder.

84 SSJA, "Women of Courage," recruiting pamphlet.

turned to the Sisters to “do something.” Putting him on a sleigh, the Sisters “hailed him” to their convent, where they nursed him back to health. A sleigh in this context was not used for winter fun, but rather as an instrument to perform good works and navigate the snowy, winter terrain. Afterwards, these Sisters wrote to Peterborough requesting nurses in the region and, according to O’Brien, that “was the beginning of healthcare in Thunder Bay.”⁸⁵ In teaching in northern Ontario, these women religious travelled into remote regions where they remember basic living conditions. The Sisters in Elliot Lake lived in a trailer, and those first sent to Manitowadge were given a “teeterage” with just “the bare necessities, like a kitchen, a living room, and bedrooms not much else. A furnace hopefully that worked.”⁸⁶ In Schreiber, Sister Ceclia Morin remembered the women had one chair and had to scrounge for beds.⁸⁷ With few other educational options, many communities needed and relied on these women religious to teach their children and yet were only able to afford the most basic of provisions for them. O’Brien, Morin, and other women repeat these foundational stories about the Sisters of St. Joseph and their pioneering work in northern Ontario to relate their connection to the North and establish their origins as a northern community. As they do so, they frame themselves as performing good works to bring positive improvements to this growing, harsh, and unforgiving region.

Why, however, was it necessary to have “women of the North, to minister in the North?” How did women religious see themselves as being from the North? The women interviewed came from all over northern Ontario, and, as Sister Carolyn Schan remembered, the fact that they did so was important. Schan grew up in Fort William, now a part of Thunder Bay, and believed her northern identity was very important to working in the North as a woman religious. “We northerners are a hardy people,” she said proudly. Schan believed that, while the Sisters were not “fierce outdoors people,” being from Ontario’s North meant that they had “learned to deal with the weather and cope with things.” This experience, she thought, resulted in an identity of “adventurism,” adding, “We’re survivors.”⁸⁸ She also thought that, as northerners, they pictured themselves as a group of women able to tolerate, cope with, and survive the cold northern climate while they carried out their work in this region. Remembering winters spent working in Manitowadge as “much more severe than in southern Ontario,” Sister Cecilia Morin, having grown up in Killarney, echoed similar sentiments about surviving the cold climate: “the North has made us hardier I think. Our community is more daring to do things.”⁸⁹ Without the chill of winter months, the North is only a point on a compass.⁹⁰ As historian Carl Berger has pointed out, the adjective “northern,” with its connection to cold climates, over time came to symbolize “energy, strength, self-reliance, health, and purity, and its opposite, ‘southern,’ was equated with

85 O’Brien, interview.

86 Mitchell, interview; Morin, interview.

87 Morin, interview.

88 Schan, interview.

89 Morin, interview.

90 Kenneth Coates and William Morrison, “Winter and the Shaping of Northern History: Reflections from the Canadian North,” in Abel and Coates, eds., *Northern Visions*, p. 24.

decay and effeminacy, even libertinism and disease.”⁹¹ Women incorporated these understandings of the North into their identities as they entered small northern communities.⁹²

Along with these physical markers of the northern Ontario environment, the women interviewed believed there was a free, rugged spirit that connected those living in the North. Sister Doreen Campbell, who had moved from Inverness, Nova Scotia, to North Bay in 1952, reflected, “Living in the North, there is a certain spirit among the people in the North that is different from the South for example. So when we live here, we work with the people and we are part of them.”⁹³ When northern women helped northern people, they developed a kinship with one another and a shared northern spirit, which allowed them to become a part of the community and distinguish themselves from Sisters in southern Ontario. Sister Jackie O’Brien recounted a terse exchange she had with a man after arriving in Cobalt: “‘Have you ever lived in the North?’ ‘Oh yes, I grew up in Thunder Bay and we’d have 40 below for a couple of weeks.’” From her vantage point, the conversation proved that “we belonged. They had to know I could be rough enough, you know.”⁹⁴ Working in small communities, O’Brien called on shared northern identities and experiences to foster relationships and feelings of belonging. Sister Shirley Anderson’s work in these small communities was very much connected to the northern identity and landscape, as well as the spirit of her religious community. Anderson referred to their “more staid counterparts” in London and Toronto, saying that the “ruggedness” of northern Ontario created a “pioneer spirit” and “freedom” among the women and an attitude that “If that’s where God is calling us lets go and see ... what will happen.”⁹⁵ Prefacing her remarks with “the Toronto Sisters might not appreciate me saying this,” Anderson clarified later in her interview what she saw as the difference between those working in northern and southern Ontario. “I mean they’ve lived in the big city, we’ve lived in Wawa and White River and places. So there is a, and I don’t mean this is a negative way, but there is a ruggedness or there is a freedom, I think more because of where we found ourselves.” She added, “And it is different when you live in downtown Toronto with fifty Sisters or you live in White River with three others and try to serve the needs of the people in that area.”⁹⁶ The smaller, less developed communities shaped the nature of their work; whereas Sisters in Toronto were more settled and set in their ways, and maybe in some aspects confined by their urban space, the women religious in northern Ontario experienced greater flexibility and a willingness to travel into remote areas. They went there, not sure what they would find but with an openness to help where they were needed, an attitude Anderson saw as connected to their northern environment.

91 Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 129. See also Dubinsky, *Improper Advances*, chap. 6.

92 Kerry Abel, “History and the Provincial Norths: An Ontario Example” in Abel and Coates, eds., *Northern Visions*, p. 128; Coates and Morrison, “Winter and the Shaping of Northern History,” p. 24.

93 Campbell, interview.

94 O’Brien, interview.

95 Anderson, interview.

96 *Ibid.*

Certainly being from the North did not guarantee acceptance into northern Indigenous communities. These narratives of the North employ a definition of space that mobilizes ideas of nature and an empty landscape common in white settler societies, which comfortably removes any mention of the Anishinaabeg and Inineu peoples to whom this land belonged. They also tell us how resistance shaped interactions in and narratives of these northern spaces. When asked whether Indigenous students spoke English in their schools, Sister Rose Barrett responded, “Oh yes, I don’t know if they were allowed to speak anything else.”⁹⁷ Sister Carolyn Schan remembered there were Francophone, Mexican, and Indigenous students at St. Joseph’s College, observing, “each one stayed together.” While the Sister teachers were not “harsh about it,” she explained, “they weren’t supposed to speak their own languages in school only because their parents sent them there to learn English and get an education.”⁹⁸ But they did. Staying together or breaking bans on language were common strategies young women used to maintain a connection to their culture in this space. In specific reference to Indigenous girls, Jody Woods, in her MA thesis, conceives of these moments as “spatial crimes,” a sometimes subtle but powerful disturbance created by Indigenous students in hallways, dormitories, and other school buildings.⁹⁹ In another narrative of resistance, Sister Norah Murphy noted that young Indigenous girls, particularly from Attawapiskat, went through an “incredible culture shock” when they arrived for the school year in Sault Ste. Marie: “What happened was they were put in homes throughout the city,” but had a tremendously difficult time adjusting. Murphy explained that often other young Indigenous women from nearby Garden River “insisted” on helping these students “who came from far away and needed some support systems.”¹⁰⁰ From the observations of this outsider, young women created informal networks of support and friendships with each other, bringing comfort and combatting feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Other women religious like Cecilia Morin and Evelyn Walsh remembered language and cultural barriers when they taught in Indigenous communities. Morin recalled teaching primary grades when she “was moved to an Indian village called Garden River outside of Sault Ste. Marie.” Morin explained it was difficult trying to figure out whether the students were learning. “And that was very interesting because you never knew if they were hearing or observing because they didn’t speak very much. I had a heck of time trying to figure out whether they learned anything or not.” When asked if this was due to language barriers, she responded, “No they could speak English perfectly they just chose not to speak it.” She continued “While they could talk you know. And they spoke as little as they could.”¹⁰¹ The students’ voices are not present in the archive; however, it is clear that Morin, who would have been dressed in full habit, was not accepted initially when she went to this school. The students could speak English, but chose

97 Barrett, interview.

98 Schan, interview.

99 Woods, “I Remind Until I Fall,” p. 6.

100 Murphy, interview.

101 Morin, interview.

not to do so with her. In her interview, Sister Evelyn Walsh related a similar story of tensions. In the early 1970s, Walsh was teaching Indigenous students in Blind River. She recalled that the community “wanted to have children learning their own language but nobody knew how to teach it.” So she asked, “if I learn it, would that be okay?” It was not. “And they said no, they didn’t want to wait to have somebody teach them their language.” As a result, Walsh “got a fella from Fort Francis, and he came and taught them Ojibway.”¹⁰² There were limits placed on what Walsh could teach Indigenous students. She was from the North, but she was also a linguistic, racial, and cultural outsider in this community.

Clothed Bodies in the North

When the Sisters arrived for our interviews, they came wearing lay clothes adopted many years ago, dress that makes them indistinguishable from other modestly dressed Canadian women. This attire contrasts with how they dressed when first taking vows. A reminder of their clothed past is propped up in a corner of the archives of the Motherhouse: a female mannequin dressed in full habit. All but three of our interviews took place in this room, and the mannequin often became a third person in our interviews as the women used “her” as a point of reference; she served as a reminder of the religious apparel they no longer wear, but also as a tool to teach non-Catholics about the intricacies of this apparel. For many of our informants, who all eventually received the full habit after successful final vows, this material artefact acted as a ghost of the past locating their community at a particular point in their history.¹⁰³ With its stark black and white hues, as well as the sheer amount of cumbersome fabric, the habit separated women religious from secular society visually and physically. It marked their bodies spatially but also created place, as the Sisters’ modified habits, and later lay clothing, connected them and gave meaning to the spaces in which they lived and worked.¹⁰⁴

The habit located women religious in their physical geographies as well as in wider cultural consciousness. As the Sister-written *Community History* outlines, when they arrived in the city, the “dark robed Sisters were seen gliding through the streets of North Bay on their daily rambles trying the different stores to procure the necessities to make ready [their] convent home.” When the Sisters passed a group of children, they overheard one say, “Boys, the circus must be here,” to which the Sisters responded by joining the laughter.¹⁰⁵ The habit, or the combination of clothing and accessories that make up religious dress, has long been linked with the identity of women religious, at once distinguishing them from laywomen but creating a common uniform within their particular religious community.¹⁰⁶ It guided the public to apply stereotypes, often promoted in post-1945 popular culture.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Walsh, interview.

¹⁰³ Laurie Bertram, “Sweat Stains and Bullet Holes: Clothing, Memory and the Material Culture of Memory” (paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association, University of Waterloo, 2012).

¹⁰⁴ Lansing’s discussion of Theodore Roosevelt’s “cowboy outfit” in “Different Methods, Different Places,” pp. 240-241, helped us develop these ideas.

¹⁰⁵ *Community History Prior to 1937*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Kuhns, *The Habit: A History of the Clothing of Catholic Nuns* (Toronto: Doubleday, 2003), p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ On the habit and the various stages of dress for women religious, see Susan Michelman, “Breaking

Sister Shirley Anderson recalled being captivated by the Sister teachers she had as a young woman while attending North Bay's St. Theresa School. Describing these women as having "a bit of mystery" and "a sense of otherworldliness," Anderson explained that the habit "set them apart" and "marked them as good women who were living with a particular choice of life."¹⁰⁸ Sister Cecilia Morin shared similar thoughts about her time as a boarding student attending St. Joseph's College in the 1940s. As a boarder, Morin recalled that "everybody" tried to "see what they looked like when they didn't have their habits on." She explained, "We wanted to see if they had hair, and if they had legs," often leading the boarders to sneak over to the Sisters' separate sleeping quarters in the hopes of getting a glimpse.¹⁰⁹ As a powerful symbol of Catholicism, the habit, like the buildings in which the Sisters lived and worked, could also generate fear and hatred. In relating her mother's story of residential school survival, Rita Flamand, a Michif woman, shares the shock and horror her mother felt after knocking a headpiece off the head of one of the Sisters, so powerful was the symbol of the habit. Even more crucial to our understanding of this story is the fact that her mother had no idea she had hit the Sister. She was fleeing from three or four of them, jumping from bed to bed, in an effort to escape. For Flamand this story illustrates the emotional breakdown her mother experienced in these years.¹¹⁰ Whatever emotions they inspired, habits created a definite sense of otherness.¹¹¹ In the smaller city of North Bay, as in other locations, the Sisters' uniforms drew attention to their identity as women religious and outwardly indicated their difference to others.

Eventually, in the context of Vatican II, many communities of women religious, including the Sisters of St. Joseph, decided to change out of the habit. Under pressure because of declining numbers and citing archaic customs as the principle cause, the Vatican under Pope Pius XII initiated talks about change in the Catholic Church in 1950. Ultimately, it was a series of meetings between 1962 and 1965 that produced the decree "Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life."¹¹² The changes were wide-sweeping, ranging from naming, to clothing, to vocation and united in giving choice and agency to individual women and their communities.¹¹³ Some Sisters saw Vatican II as "a breath of fresh air"; some thought they might have "exploded" if change had not brought an end to the "medieval conditions" with which women were living.¹¹⁴ One of the biggest changes for Sister Margaret Avery, who lived in another religious community, was the structure of time. She too

Habits: Fashion and Identity of Women Religious," *Fashion Theory*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1998), p. 166; Marta Trzebiatowska, "Habit Does Not a Nun Make? Religious Dress in the Everyday Lives of Polish Catholic Nuns," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, vol. 25, no. 1 (January 2010), p. 55; Kuhns, *The Habit*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁸ Anderson, interview.

¹⁰⁹ Morin, interview.

¹¹⁰ Rita Flamand, "Truth about Residential Schools and Reconciling this History: A Michif View" in *Speaking My Truth: Reflections on Reconciliation and Residential Schools* (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2012), pp. 130-131.

¹¹¹ Michelman, "Breaking Habits," p. 166.

¹¹² Deborah Rink, *Spirited Women: A History of Catholic Sisters in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Sisters' Association Archdiocese of Vancouver, 2000), p. 240.

¹¹³ Anderson, interview. For more on these changes, see Bondy, "Roman Catholic Women Religious."

¹¹⁴ Anderson, interview; O'Brien, interview.

remembered the bells. “There were so many.... There were bells for everything.”¹¹⁵ One of the most visible changes for the public, as well as the women religious themselves, was abandoning the habit, a move adopted at a rate that the church had not predicted.¹¹⁶

Interviewees expressed conflicting opinions about the movement out of the habit to lay clothes. Part of the renewal efforts directed by Vatican II was a re-examination of the Order’s history and experimentation with “structures, roles, and relations.”¹¹⁷ When the women studied their founding documents, they discovered, unlike many of their counterparts, that the habit was not an historical part of their community.¹¹⁸ Both Sisters Jackie O’Brien and Doreen Campbell recalled that their founders dressed like widows because single women living in seventeenth-century France were not allowed to be in public without a man or an older woman. As Campbell explained, “it was never meant to be a habit—it was just to give us freedom to move in the city. But through the years it became a habit ... the holy habit.”¹¹⁹ Over time that “medieval stuff crept in,” explained O’Brien.¹²⁰ Their community made the decision to shift gradually, from full habit to modified habit and finally to the lay clothes they wear today. Some of the Sisters struggled with the change in apparel. While Sister Carolyn Schan, who entered in 1959, had only been wearing the habit for a few years, Sisters Mary Comerford and Aline Lavoie had been wearing it for well over 20 years, a much larger portion of their lives.¹²¹ Lavoie recalled she “loved the habit, and I hated to do away with it.” More so, she was uncomfortable wearing a modified habit and lay clothes, admitting, “I was kind of embarrassed because my legs were showing, my hair was showing.”¹²² After cloaking her body in black serge for over two decades, she found that revealing these body parts could be disconcerting and challenging to her sense of modesty. For Sister Betty Mitchell, the difficulty was more sentimental. As she declared her “love” for the habit, Mitchell explained, “I thought it was really beautiful.” Having grown up surrounded by two aunts who were Sisters, Mitchell said, “It was a bit of a tug on my heart when we decided to change, although I saw the need for change too.”¹²³ For reasons of body self-image, personal connections, and identities, some women found it hard to make this transition—although admitting it was necessary.

Other women readily embraced the change out of the habit. As Sister Cecilia Morin reminisced, “I guess all of us were enamoured, until we had to wear the habit.” “It all looked quite lovely and everything,” she explained, but it was “hot as hades in the summer ... lots of linen, serge.” To try and temper the warmth of this uniform, the Sisters often wore a white veil instead of a black veil, especially when

115 Smyth and Wicks, *Wisdom Raises Her Voice*, p. 207.

116 Rink, *Spirited Women*, p. 268.

117 Michelman, “Breaking Habits,” p. 177.

118 Trzebiatowska, “Habit Does Not a Nun Make?” p. 51; Michelman, “Breaking Habits,” p. 165.

119 Campbell, interview.

120 O’Brien, interview.

121 Michelman, “Breaking Habits,” p. 165; Schan, interview; Lavoie, interview; Comerford, interview.

122 Lavoie, interview.

123 Mitchell, interview.

working outside.¹²⁴ When Sister Evelyn Walsh put on the habit, which took her at least 20 minutes daily, she thought she “was back in the dark ages.” Moreover, the coronet physically bothered her temples and jawline. When discussing “the little holes” left by this headpiece, Walsh grabbed the hands of her interviewer, saying, “Just run your fingers along the edge of my jaw, do you feel it?”¹²⁵ While the habit held a sentimental value for some, as these women religious learned, it was also physically uncomfortable, leaving marks on the space of their bodies.

While these women religious acknowledged practical reasons such as their level of physical comfort, there were much deeper reasons for the change in the habit. As Sister Jackie O’Brien saw it, the habit was “a strange costume” and a hindrance to her work. O’Brien noted that some lay people were wrapped up in the nostalgia of the habit; she often heard people say, “I wish you hadn’t taken off the habit,” to which she responded, “yes, so you could put us on a pedestal and leave us there and not deal with us as people.”¹²⁶ This language of pedestal came up in numerous interviews and speaks to the separation of space that many Sisters believed was created by this garment. In public spaces, the habit often reminded community members to “be on their best behaviour” around these women religious, undercutting the genuine and honest quality of their social interactions. Indeed, as Sister Norah Murphy explained, “we didn’t want people putting us up there, rather we wanted to be able to serve and minister to people within the church.”¹²⁷ Getting out of the habit helped many of these women religious to relate to people as people. Discussing Vatican II as a whole, Sister Shirley Anderson said it gave them “freedom of movement.” She clarified, “what it did was gave us an opportunity to focus on what was important in our life, and not be so hemmed in by the uniformity—everybody had to wear the same thing, everybody had to do the same thing.”¹²⁸ The change in clothing was indicative of larger changes going on in their community organization as a whole.

Interestingly, while the habit created conformity among women religious, there were also differences—or perceived differences—among those belonging to northern or southern communities. As gender historian Kathryn McPherson notes when discussing nurses, uniforms outwardly signalled a set of skills and responsibilities as well as behaviours and attitudes. “Playing the part wrong,” according to McPherson, could lead to social criticism.¹²⁹ When Sisters from the Sault Ste. Marie diocese visited their Toronto counterparts, discrepancies in dress and concern about proper behaviour shaped their relationships and their time spent there.

¹²⁴ Morin, interview.

¹²⁵ Walsh, interview.

¹²⁶ O’Brien, interview.

¹²⁷ Murphy, interview.

¹²⁸ Anderson, interview.

¹²⁹ Kathryn McPherson, “‘The Case of the Kissing Nurse’: Femininity, Sexuality, and Canadian Nursing, 1900-1970” in Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan, and Nancy M. Forestell, eds., *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 180-181.

Sister Jackie O'Brien recalled that the "North Bay Nuns" who went to Toronto to study in the summer were considered less "sophisticated." Lowering her glasses on her nose, she recounted some attitudes: "'Oh, these North Bay Nuns are they saying their prayers?' 'Do they have enough decorum?' 'Do they wear gloves when they go out?'"¹³⁰ According to O'Brien, there was a concern about whether northern Sisters had the refinement or general know-how to behave and dress properly in urban spaces. Sister Betty Mitchell related a similar memory. "We're wild!" laughed Mitchell when describing what was unique about the Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie. "We're kind of a looser group of women," Mitchell continued. "I think we have a freer spirit that comes from living in the North, than the people in southern Ontario." This freedom could be viewed in what the Sisters wore and what they chose not to wear. According to Mitchell, "Up here in North Bay, unless you were going to some special function, you didn't wear your mantilla and gloves."¹³¹ The North, so often characterized with its open outdoor space as a "man's country," was apparently not so hemmed in by the conventions of formal attire.¹³² Instead, women—including women religious—were supposed to be a little more practical, realizing that, in this unrefined, rugged environment, your white gloves would only get dirty and your mantilla in the way of your work. This conceptualization of northern space and clothing only became clearer when these women religious travelled south to Toronto for summer courses. As Mitchell recalled, the women lost much of this flexibility as dress, and lady-like behaviours in that dress, mattered and were criticized. Mitchell explained matter-of-factly that the "more sophisticated" Sisters from Toronto scrutinized "every move we made." Since these women donned the same habit, Mitchell reasoned that they feared passers-by might mistake them for one another: "if we were doing something that was just a little different [onlookers] would [assume we] were Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, which didn't go well with them."¹³³ Afraid that these northern women religious would resort to their "wild" ways and be mistaken for members of the Toronto convent, the Toronto women carefully monitored dress and conduct in public spaces. Sisters from the North were compelled to wear the mantilla and white gloves to play the part and live-up to expectations of their southern counterparts. Both these memories highlight that, while uniforms created similarity in dress, there were also disparities in what (and when) women wore the different parts of their uniform, shaped by the environment in which they worked. Their variations in dress were also an expression of their community identity and their sense they were a bit more "wild" than their more reserved and proper counterparts.

The sense of freedom these women religious embraced living and teaching in northern Ontario sometimes led to creative modifications in their dress that allowed them to enjoy the environment. Speaking about her experiences in the 1950s, Sister Evelyn Walsh remembered the cumbersome swimming outfits the

¹³⁰ O'Brien, interview.

¹³¹ Mitchell, interview.

¹³² Forestell, "Women, Gender and the Provincial North," p. 111.

¹³³ Mitchell, interview.

women had to wear to enjoy the fresh waters of Lake Nipissing. “We had to wear gym suits over our bathing suits, because nobody was supposed to know we were Sisters,” she laughingly explained, but, in reality, “who else but nuns would go swimming in their gym suits?”¹³⁴ A little subterfuge to maintain a public image could ensure that the women enjoyed some of the many normal daily enjoyments of life in northern Ontario. Indeed, along with swimming and tobogganing, the Sisters were also known to fish and dance, as well as play soccer, baseball, and basketball, all while wearing the habit. Sister Norah Murphy still enjoys fishing. “I have worms in the fridge right now,” she said. To participate in these activities, often with their students, these women had to make changes to their habits.¹³⁵ Sister Cecilia Morin recalled that, during baseball games, she used to pin up her habit to run the base path and “flip around her bib” so she could throw the ball. These slight alterations let her join in the fun with her students, as well as reminding them that she was “a human being—and that was important.”¹³⁶ In these instances, women religious made the most of their physical surroundings, as well as using their dress to shape positive interactions with their students and each other. Dress modifications played an important bodily and visual role in helping them construct their community identity.

Conclusion

The memory narratives of these Sisters, their stories of space and place-making in northern Ontario, animate our snowy 1958 photograph. Enlivened, these smiling women emerge as complex characters in the history of Catholicism and teaching in northern Ontario. These women imagined their individual and community identities as hardy northerners—a reflection of the geography and climate that surrounded them. For many who grew up there, it only made sense they would enter this religious community. As Sister Rosemary Carroll said, “I was fused to the North.”¹³⁷ Their work was also framed by a northern identity that created a kinship with other white northerners when they entered small isolated communities scattered across northern Ontario. It shaped their work in other ways, too, as they recalled that this geography meant they often lacked certain amenities that were maybe more accessible in urban cities, but they did not mind. From their vantage point, this very lack of development in the North meant they could be a “wild,” “looser” group of religious women, and their “pioneering” efforts fulfilled the imminent needs of northern communities offering education and health care. Their clothed bodies also shaped their sense of place. Originally intended to help them circulate more freely in seventeenth-century France, the habit was a hindrance to their work in the context of mid-twentieth-century northern Ontario. These black and white uniforms marked their bodies differently in the close community spaces they entered, and moreover were ill-suited for the rural exteriors they navigated and their desire, in many instances, simply to have

¹³⁴ Walsh, interview.

¹³⁵ Murphy, interview; Mitchell, interview; Walsh, interview; O’Brien, interview; Morin, interview.

¹³⁶ Morin, interview.

¹³⁷ Carroll, interview.

fun with their students. While these women imagined their northern landscape as giving them greater freedom of movement and change, real constraints were in place in the years before Vatican II. There was also resistance. Indigenous students and communities challenged and placed limitations on the lessons these women religious taught, reminding them that they were not wholly accepted in all northern spaces. Moreover, while understanding their “good work” and the good intentions behind it, as well as the opportunities sisterhood offered women, it is important to recognize that these women, like other settlers on colonized land, were part of the colonization process. To study them outside this context is to silence the people on whose lands this history unfolded.

With their identities so imagined as being part of the North, in many ways it is sad that today the women interviewed feel that northern Ontario and the city of North Bay have forgotten them. As one Sister surmised, “they didn’t even know we were still here, they thought we left when the school closed.”¹³⁸ Both St. Joseph’s General Hospital (1995; 2011) and St. Joseph’s College (1984), institutions originally established by the Sisters in North Bay, have closed or been torn down. Their sheer physical presence in the North is not as great because the number of active Sisters continues to decline. Sister Shirley Anderson said she believes “the call is there,” but with “so many distractions” and “other opportunities,” the “call gets lost.”¹³⁹ Women religious are also less conspicuous on their “daily rambles” through the streets of North Bay. No longer donning their unmistakable religious garb, these women, now retired and “much more an aging community,” continue to look for spaces to perform “good works,” volunteering for organizations such as The Gathering Place: North Bay’s Community Soup Kitchen and the Amelia Rising Sexual Assault Centre. Sometimes community members who know them greet a Sister with a “booming” “Hello Sister Norah!” Among those who do not, however, these women avoid “publiciz[ing]” their individual efforts—hesitating to even address each other as Sister when they are in volunteer spaces. As Sister Norah Murphy said, it is more important “people recognize that the [community] is making a major contribution to the city.”¹⁴⁰ In many ways, these women were and continue to be Sisters of the North. With good intentions and strong spirits, they brought education to northern communities, pushed boundaries, experienced loss and conflict, and built relationships with positive and negative legacies. They also had fun, sometimes on snowy afternoons shooting down the slopes that surrounded the Motherhouse.

¹³⁸ Walsh, interview.

¹³⁹ Anderson, interview.

¹⁴⁰ Murphy, interview.