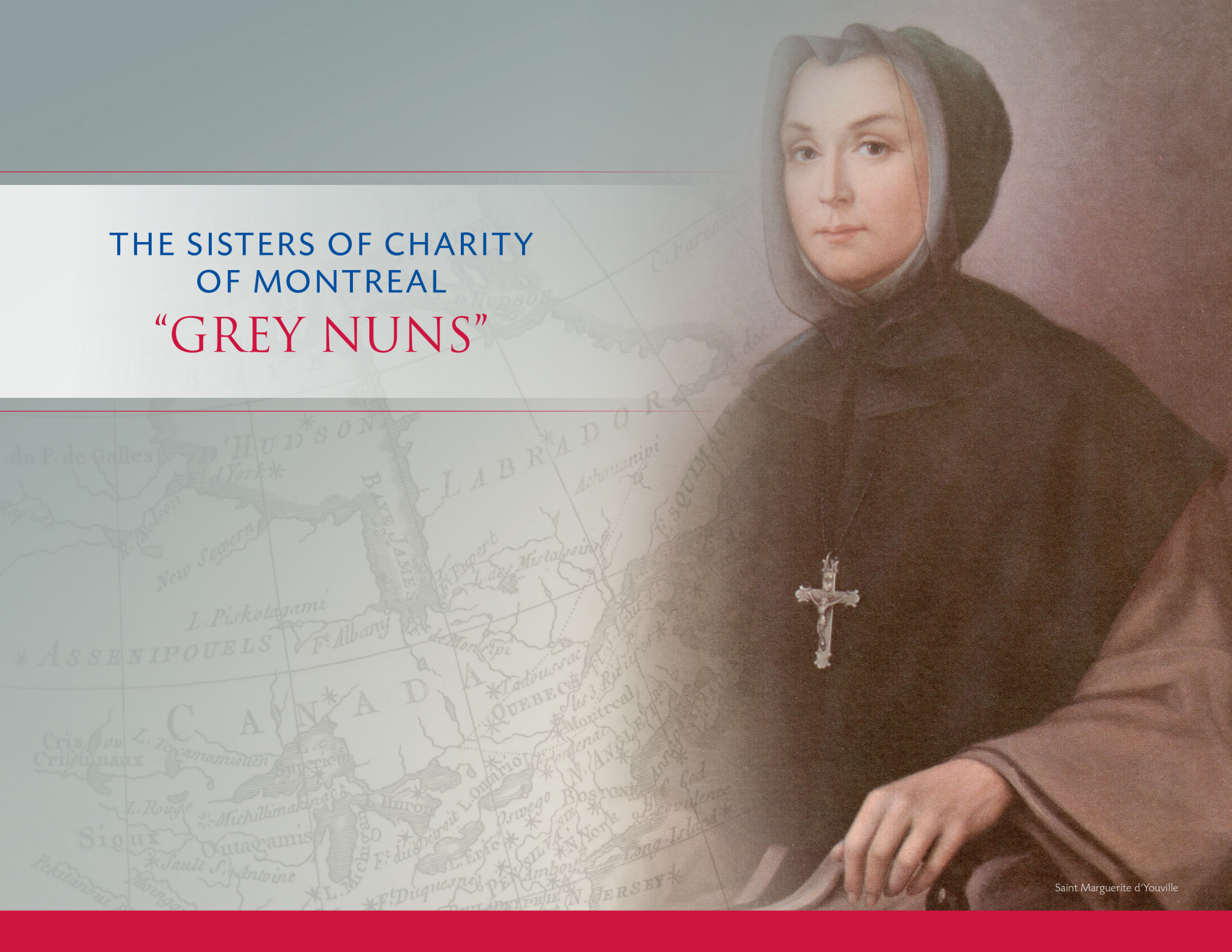



THE SISTERS OF CHARITY  
OF MONTREAL  
“GREY NUNS”



**THE YEAR IS 1844.** Imagine yourself as a young woman living in Montreal, barely out of your teens. You have given your life to God and are devoted to responding to the needs of the poor, the sick, the illiterate and the disadvantaged.

You volunteer to be of service in the Red River Settlement in Manitoba. Your journey begins with you stepping into a birch bark canoe – 40 feet long and 5 feet wide – with three other young women. Your lives are in the hands of the Hudson Bay Company voyageurs and fur traders who will steer your vessel from your home in Montreal, thousands of miles west.

The journey takes 59 perilous days. Along the way, you describe the travelling conditions in your journal:

An open, antique journal with handwritten text on the right page. The paper is aged, yellowed, and shows signs of wear, including creases and discoloration. The handwriting is in a cursive script. The left page is mostly blank, showing the texture of the paper and some faint markings.

"We nearly always had bad weather. We have hardly slept since we left. Serpents and snakes camp with us. The portages are long and tiring. We have to climb steep slopes, make our way through bushes, walk through ravines and dead trees. We cannot go back.

Upon arrival at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, you are taken to a freezing cold log house; no home has been prepared for you. Thankfully, it is a temporary lodging; you will soon be moved to a more habitable place to begin what you came here to do: teach.

## NEED FOR TEACHERS IN THE RED RIVER SETTLEMENT

The women who made the journey from Montreal to the Red River Settlement (what was to become the City of Winnipeg in 1873) belonged to the congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal, more commonly known as the Grey Nuns. The Grey Nuns were founded in 1737 by a young widow, Marguerite d'Youville, to minister to the poor and sick of Montreal.

Bishop Joseph-Norbert Provencher had been searching for a religious congregation to educate the young people of his diocese in the Red River Settlement. Although the Grey Nuns were predominantly a nursing congregation, upon hearing Bishop Provencher's request, seventeen of the Sisters volunteered to be of service as teachers. The four who were selected arrived on June 21, 1844 and began teaching in a French language school on the east side of the Red River (the Grey Nuns would also go on to teach in other French language schools on both sides of the River). Their first students were twenty-seven girls and forty-four boys. To attend school, Catholics living on the west side of the Red River had to cross the river by ferry in the summer or on the ice in the winter.



Sister Ste Thérèse



Sister Mary Jane McDougall



Maison Ste Marie (St. Mary's Academy)

## MAISON STE MARIE

On May 1, 1869, two Grey Nuns, Sister Ste Thérèse and Sister Mary Jane McDougall, opened "Maison Ste Marie" (St. Mary's Academy), the first Catholic school to serve Catholics on the west side of the Red River. This came as a great relief to the Catholic families on the west side of the river, as their children no longer had to cross the river to attend school. Within the next five years Sisters Celina Allard, Mary O'Brien, Mary Curran and Marie-Xavier also taught at the school. Records from this time period are limited however, it is known that in the 1871-1872 school year there were 34 students enrolled.

# KIDNAPPING AT SCRATCHING RIVER

Sister Ste Thérèse, loved and respected for her nursing care, was recalled to Ottawa in 1860 but was intercepted at Scratching River (present day Morris, MB) by 15 Métis on horseback, who blocked the way and insisted she return to the Red River Settlement. She agreed to turn back, and the incident came to be known as the “Kidnapping at Scratching River.”

## NEW BEGINNINGS

In 1871, Sister Ste Thérèse opened a small four-bed hospital on the east bank of the Red River – this was the humble beginning of the St. Boniface Hospital. Shortly after, the Grey Nuns expressed their wish to focus solely on healthcare and charitable works.

The Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary (SNJM), a teaching congregation in Montreal, was recruited to replace the Grey Nuns. Sisters Jean-de-Dieu (Superior), Electa-du-Sacré Coeur, Marie-Florentine and Marie-Elie arrived in 1874 to assume responsibility for Maison Ste Marie.

Bishop Ignace Bourget of Montreal sent a letter to the SNJM who were departing for the Red River Settlement. In his letter he remarked on the sacrifices and contributions of the Grey Nuns at Maison Ste Marie:

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*“Mindful of the rules of prudence and discretion, bind yourself by a holy friendship with the Grey Nuns, your forerunners in a country that they have cleared at the sweat of their brow; respect them, love them, imitate them in the practice of the virtues which they never cease to exemplify.”*

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**“DIVINE PROVIDENCE WHICH ALWAYS  
SUPPORTS US WILL CONTINUE.”**

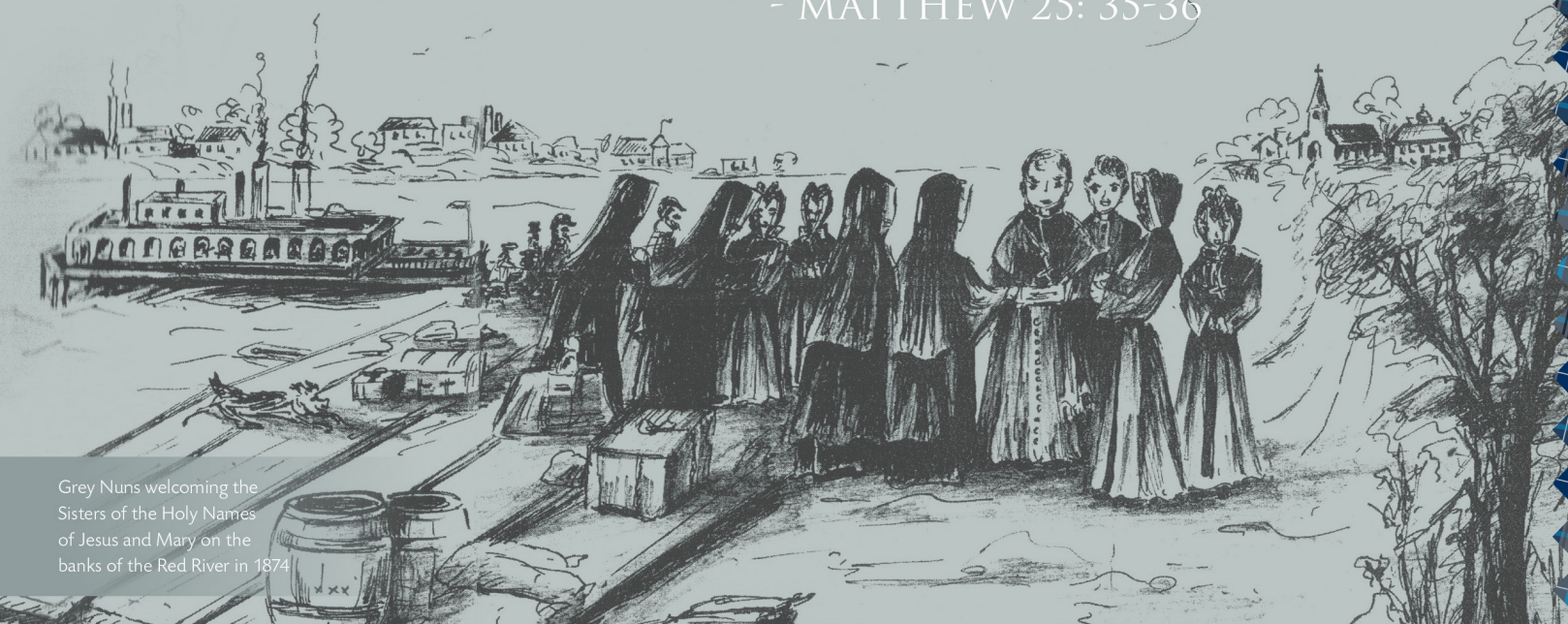
MARGUERITE D'YOUVILLE, FOUNDESS OF  
THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF MONTREAL, “GREY NUNS”



FOR I WAS HUNGRY AND YOU  
GAVE ME FOOD, I WAS THIRSTY  
AND YOU GAVE ME SOMETHING  
TO DRINK, I WAS A STRANGER  
AND YOU WELCOMED ME,  
I WAS NAKED AND YOU GAVE  
ME CLOTHING, I WAS SICK AND  
YOU TOOK CARE OF ME, I WAS  
IN PRISON AND YOU VISITED ME.

- MATTHEW 25: 35-36

Grey Nuns welcoming the  
Sisters of the Holy Names  
of Jesus and Mary on the  
banks of the Red River in 1874



IMPORTANT DATES:

**JUNE 21, 1844**

Four Grey Nuns arrive for the first time at the Red River Settlement.

**MAY 1, 1869**

Sister Ste Thérèse and Sister Mary Jane McDougall open the first Catholic school, Maison Ste Marie, to serve Catholics on the west side of the Red River, in what was to become Winnipeg in 1873.

**1871**

Sister Ste Thérèse founds St. Boniface Hospital.

**AUGUST 22, 1874**

Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary arrive to assume responsibility for Maison Ste Marie.

**THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF MONTREAL, “GREY NUNS”**

Since 1737, The Sisters of Charity of Montreal, “Grey Nuns,” have maintained their mission of love, respect, and compassion for poor and deprived people as it was defined by their Foundress, Saint Marguerite d’Youville. Throughout the centuries, the faces of the poor, the sick, and abandoned children have changed. However, poverty, loneliness, and exclusion transcend time. Thousands of Grey Nuns have dedicated their lives to the enormous task of bringing care and comfort to the largest number of these people they could. They vowed to “walk in the footsteps” of their Foundress, Marie-Marguerite Dufrost de la Jemmerais, the Widow Youville. [sgm.qc.ca/en/the-grey-nuns](http://sgm.qc.ca/en/the-grey-nuns)



IN 2019 ST. MARY’S ACADEMY CELEBRATES 150 YEARS AND REMAINS THE OLDEST CONTINUOUSLY OPERATING INDEPENDENT SCHOOL IN THE PROVINCE.



**ST. MARY’S ACADEMY**

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