



IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Monday, April 8, 2019

St. Mary's Academy Celebrates 150th Birthday on May 1, 2019

WINNIPEG, MB – Established on May 1, 1869, St. Mary's Academy, a Grades 7 to 12 Catholic girls' school, celebrates its 150th birthday on May 1, 2019.

In 1869, one year before Manitoba became a Province and four years before Winnipeg was established as a City, Maison Ste Marie (St. Mary's Academy) opened its doors to teach Catholic children on the west side of the Red River. The school opened at the request of Archbishop Taché and was operated by Sister Ste Thérèse and Sister Mary Jane McDougall, both belonging to the congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal (more commonly known as the Grey Nuns). Within the next five years several other Sisters 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 in attendance, both girls and boys. The opening of Maison Ste Marie came as a great relief to Catholic families living on the west side of the Red River as their children no longer had to cross the river to attend school. (See **The Sisters of Charity of Montreal, Grey Nuns** brochure for more details on the Grey Nuns).

By 1874, the Grey Nuns informed Archbishop Taché that they wished to return to their mission of health care and work among the poor. The Archbishop, in need of new teachers, reached out to a relatively new congregation of teaching Sisters from Quebec, the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary (SNJM). On August 22, 1874, four SNJM, Sister Superior Jean-de-Dieu and Sisters Marie-Florentine, Electra-du-Sacré-Coeur and Marie-Elie, arrived in Winnipeg to assume responsibility for St. Mary's Academy. All four sisters were between the ages of 21 and 27. The SNJM registered their first students on September 1, 1874—12 girls and 7 boys. (See **Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary** brochure for more details on the SNJM).

At its inception, the school was located in the former home of the Drever family near the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. The school would see three renovations and upgrades at that location before moving to its present day location at 550 Wellington Crescent in 1903. At the time the Manitoba Free Press questioned why the Sisters would build so far out on the prairies! In its present location the Academy has undergone extensive upgrades and expansions over the years (see **The Buildings of St. Mary's Academy** brochure for more details on the campus and its locations and expansions).

From a rented two-room schoolhouse in 1869 to a 140,000 square foot building situated on 11 acres in 2019, St. Mary's Academy has navigated many changes. However, one thing has remained the same—its Mission to educate in a faith-based environment. To date, over 62,000 students have graduated from St. Mary's Academy—a spirit, mind and body education has endured since the beginning.

Of significance over the years:

- During the foundation years, there were only two classrooms, juniors (Grades 1 to 6) and seniors (Grades 7 to 10). The curriculum included religious instruction, spelling, reading, writing, object lessons, behaviour, grammar, composition, history, geography, arithmetic, drawing, vocal music, mythology, needlework, logic and natural philosophy. Instruction was given in both English and French. As anglophone students began to out-number the francophones, English became the main working language. However, even after the French stream was phased out in the early 1900s, students were/are still able to study the French language.
- The school was coeducational from 1869 until 1875 when Christian Brothers opened a school for boys on Hargrave Street. Boys did not attend St. Mary's Academy again until 1915, when by special request from the Archbishop, they were accepted into Grades 1 and 2. By the early 1950s overcrowding forced the Sisters once again to restrict enrollment to girls.
- Initially St. Mary's Academy was considered a public school. With the passage of the Manitoba Schools Act in 1890 the denominational system of public education was abolished and a non-sectarian system established. St. Mary's Academy became an independent or private school operating with revenue from music and art lessons, boarding fees and donations until the Sisters could manage no longer and instituted tuition fees in 1901. Partial provincial government funding was restored in 1990. The average cost of tuition in 1901 was \$3.75 per month, in the 2018-19 school year the cost of tuition is \$7,555 per year.
- In the early decades of the school, when urban population was sparse and transportation undeveloped, St. Mary's Academy was a boarding school. For 90 years, boarders made a unique contribution to the character of the school and boarding school fees helped the school financially. By 1960 urban population growth, transportation advancements, and school bussing meant there was no longer need for a boarding school. The boarding school closed in June 1960.

- St. Mary's Academy started a Commercial Course in 1904, when many offices were opening in Winnipeg and there were few trained personnel available for the workforce. By mid-century the Commercial Course offered training in typing, shorthand, comptometer, bookkeeping, business practice, and business English. Graduates of the course were highly sought after by leading Winnipeg businesses. The Academy closed the Commercial Course in 1971 when the high school curriculum was revamped to place greater emphasis on preparation for post-secondary education.
- A University Course was taught at St. Mary's Academy beginning in 1908 but students had to register as an extra-mural to graduate from the University of Manitoba. In 1926 St. Mary's College became affiliated with the University of Manitoba, first through St. Boniface College, then in 1936, through St. Paul's College. At the time, St. Mary's College was the West's only Catholic institution where full college courses were offered to women. When St. Paul's College became co-educational, the need for a separate Catholic ladies' college was eliminated and St. Mary's College closed in June 1965, after 38 years of operation.
- Since the foundation of the school, students have followed catechism or religious education classes. In addition, students have opportunities to deepen their faith life through participation in sacraments, rituals, prayer and reflection, service learning and charitable outreach.
- Music has been an important component of Academy life since the beginning. By 1910 the school boasted a music department with 22 private studios. The Music Department was an examination centre for both the Toronto Royal Conservatory of Music (ARCT Diploma) and the Western Board of Music. For a time, violin, viola, violoncello, pipe organ, vocal, and orchestra were also offered at the Academy under the direction of the eminent musician John Waterhouse. The Academy's music students took part in annual recitals, the Winnipeg Music Festival and evenings of entertainment. The piano rooms were dismantled during the 1981 renovations to make room for more classrooms. At present the Academy has two choirs and a string club.
- Visual arts including painting, drawing, pottery and art appreciation have been offered consistently in the curriculum, and for many years in private lessons.
- St. Mary's Academy has always placed importance on physical activity, athletics and sports. In the early days a Sister was responsible for calisthenics and by 1888 the Academy employed a physical training instructor. For decades, the Athletic Club was a prominent student organization, and was presided over for many years by Sr. Rita Maureen after whom the gym was named. At present the Academy has over 26 athletic teams ranging from volleyball, hockey, basketball, cross country, track and field, golf, rugby, soccer and more.
- By 1970 the Academy's high school program focused on preparation for post-secondary education. At the same time, the school placed more emphasis on involvement in clubs, activities, sports and enrichment opportunities which were designed to nurture spirit, mind, and body. Extra-curricular clubs and activities led by students are now more than ever integral components of an Academy education.
- St. Mary's Academy was incorporated in the Province of Manitoba in December 1979. St. Mary's Academy, Inc. is governed by a Board of Directors whose members may include parents, past parents, alumnae, friends of the Academy, and Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. The Board provides vision, leadership, effective governance, and responsible stewardship.

- St. Mary’s Academy Foundation Inc. was established in July 1989 to support the Academy’s mission by raising and stewarding financial resources. The Foundation Board of Directors collaborates with St. Mary’s Academy Board of Directors to ensure the long-term financial health and sustainability of the school.
- In August of 2014 the day-to-day operations of the Academy were passed on to a lay administrator; however, the Sisters remain at the helm of the Academy providing direction and service as owners, members of boards and committees, volunteers and class prayer partners. Significantly, the Sisters establish the mission and purpose of the Academy, approve by-laws, elect directors, appoint the president and approve certain financial decisions.

“Looking back on 150 years and examining all that St. Mary’s Academy has navigated since its inception is truly awe inspiring,” says Connie Yunyk, President of St. Mary’s Academy. She goes on to say, “When the school began in 1869 most women had little place in society outside of the home, one of the exceptions was with women in Religious Congregations. It was these religious women, beginning with the Grey Nuns and then the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, who had tremendous faith, vision, commitment and courage who started a school that has gone on to graduate over 62,000 students. Many changes have taken place over the years however one thing has remained the same—the Academy’s Mission to educate in a faith-based environment.” Yunyk adds, “It’s both an honour and a privilege to be President of this organization at such a significant milestone. We have many celebrations planned to commemorate and honour 150 years of learning, faith, service and leadership and we hope people will join us in the celebrations.”

150th Celebrations:

150th Birthday Celebration Kick-Off

Wednesday, May 1, 2019

School day event for students, staff, SNJM and Grey Nuns (not open to the public)

Marian Awards For Excellence Brunch

Honouring the Sisters of Charity of Montreal, “Grey Nuns”

Saturday, May 11, 2019 at 10:00 a.m.

The Gates on Roblin

Tickets: \$75 each, purchase at www.smamb.ca/about/150th-birthday/

150th Birthday Picnic

Wednesday, August 28, 2019 from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

St. Mary’s Academy Grounds

Community celebration with food vendors. All SMA community members welcome (SNJM, Grey Nuns, students, parents, alumnae, board members (past and present) faculty and staff (past and present) and friends).

150th Birthday Gala

Celebrating the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary

Friday, September 27, 2019 at 6:00 p.m.

Victoria Inn

Tickets: \$150 each, purchase at www.smamb.ca/about/150th-birthday/

Homecoming

Saturday, September 28, 2019

Commemorative Years Brunch from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

For the Classes of 1939, 1949, 1959, 1969, 1979, 1989, 1994, 1999, 2009

Tickets: \$30 each, purchase at www.smamb.ca/about/150th-birthday/

Come Reminisce from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Tour the school, enjoy tea, dainties and visiting

150th Birthday Mass

Sunday, September 29, 2019 at 1:00 p.m.

St. Boniface Cathedral-Basilica

Everyone Welcome

Come and See – Mother Marie-Rose Week

October 5 to 11, 2019

SMA will host six SNJM Schools from Albany, NY, Alhambra, CA, Oakland, CA, Portland, OR, Seattle, WA and Tampa, FL. These SNJM Network of Schools will celebrate 150 years with ST. Mary's Academy. Each school will send a team of three students and one staff member. SMA will have one team participating. Groups will experience classes in the morning, a focus excursion in the afternoon and varied evening activities (not open to the public).

Feast of the Immaculate Conception Mass and Steeped in Tradition High Tea

Sunday, December 8, 2019

Mass at 2:00 p.m.

High Tea from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

St. Mary's Cathedral

Everyone Welcome

Media inquiries:

Gina Borkofski

Director of Communications and Marketing, St. Mary's Academy

gborkofski@smamb.ca

204-478-6046 (office)

204-479-1766 (cell)