

# Island's Catholic Parish celebrates 46th anniversary

In the October 11, 1979 edition of the *Nuns' Island Journal*, Catholic parishioner Omer Pouliot gave a brief history of the Catholic community here, from the beginning to when the Sisters of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame departed and of the tenth anniversary the church was celebrating that year.

If he was correct, then the 46th anniversary of the Island's Catholic community will be marked in two-days time, on October 14, 2016.

The rest of the story is his, as it appeared in the *Journal*.

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On October 14th, Nuns' Island's Catholic community will celebrate its 10th anniversary. The first mass was held on June 12th, 1969; and October 12th saw the first christenings that same year. To mark this occasion, the community was given the name "Marguerite-Bourgeoys Catholic Community", to honor the Congrégation de Notre-Dame's founder and its members who continue their work on the Island to this day.

## History

Saint-Paul Island, commonly known as Nuns' Island, has a strong link with the Congrégation de Notre-Dame. Despite there being no document to prove that Marguerite Bourgeoys set foot on the Island or planned to buy land here, the idea isn't far-fetched. Jeanne LeBer, who settled for a cloistered life at the Congrégation de Notre-Dame in 1695, had given seventeen acres of what she owned through her father's fief. She was friends with Marguerite Bourgeoys. Did they discuss a project between them? We don't know.

What is certain is that the congregation lived on Nuns' Island and worked the land to survive. A thousand memories are linked to the Island.

Fires caused great losses in 1918, 1921 and 1929. Thawing periods, flooding, employees drowning brought other problems. There were



Two Sisters of the the Congrégation de Notre-Dame kneel in prayer on August 18, 1955, two years before their departure from Nuns' Island.

Deux sœurs de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame en train de prier le 18 août 1955, deux ans avant leur départ de l'Île-des-Sœurs.

distinguished guests who benefited from the Sisters' hospitality: bishops, clerics, members of the Historical Society of Montreal, and students from various schools. Study sessions for the Sisters of the Congregation were held on the Island during summer vacation.

Nuns' Island belonged to the Notre-Dame Parish; the Sisters paid tithes. On the Island, the Sisters worked hard, but joyfully, in silence and through prayers. The first Eucharistic Procession was held during the Feast of Corpus Christi on June 14th, 1936 under the radiant skies of a marvelous setting.

The Congrégation de Notre-Dame sold Nuns' Island in 1956. There, it had spent 250 years, woven in praying and sacrifices, and it had turned a new page while maintaining a deep mystery to itself. Marguerite Bourgeoys's Sisters worked, studied, and helped further Faith in this region of exceptional beauty. After selling the land, the Cité de Rève organised itself around a series of residences, while the Sisters went

ahead to offer catechetical teaching, preached the Good News and helped with the responsibilities of the clerics. And so, Nuns' Island is still in communion with the Sisters, abstractly. The Island is still with those who are extending the presence of Marguerite Bourgeoys, Montreal's first teacher, who came here through the "Grande Recrue" (recruitment) of 1653. The renowned Catholic who originated from Troyes had come here to teach children; the flame of her passion influenced the work of schools in Montreal. Nuns' Island marks this.

## Memorial Mass

The Catholic community's 10th anniversary will be celebrated with a memorial mass presided by the Island's clergyman, Father Robert Pellerin, on October 14th at 10:45 a.m. at the Community Centre on Elgar Street. Members of the Congregation de Notre-Dame, civil and religious authorities, as well as many residents of Nuns' Island will attend the ceremony.