CHURCHILL - HUDSON BAY DIOCESE

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THE GREY NUNS

OF

CHESTERFIELD INLET, N.W.T.

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HEALTH SERVICES AND EDUCATION

1931 - 1988

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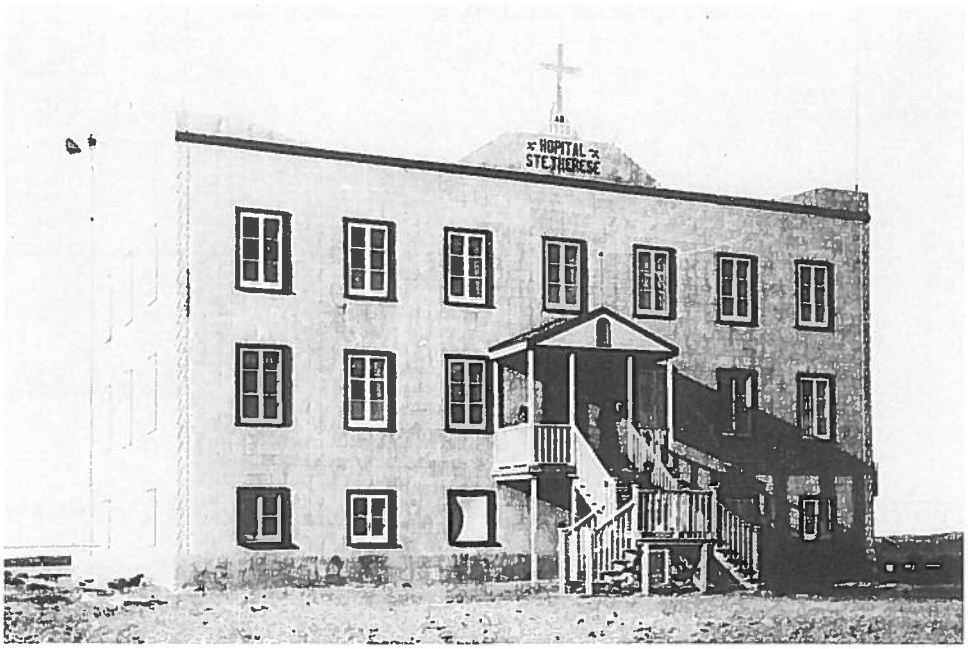
Bishop A. Turquetil, o.m.i.
c. 1932-33



St. Theresa Hospital c. 1937-40

CHURCHILL - HUDSON BAY DIOCESE

THE GREY NUNS

OF

CHESTERFIELD INLET, N. W. T.

HEALTH SERVICES AND EDUCATION

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HUDSON BAY INUIT

In September, 1912, Father Arsène Turquetil (1876 - 1955), Oblate of Mary Immaculate, sent out by Bishop Ovide Charlebois,O.M.I., Bishop of Keewatin, came to establish the first catholic mission among the Inuit of Hudson Bay at Chesterfield Inlet, N.W.T.

On July 2, 1917, feast day of "Our Lady-of-the-Délivrande", patron saint of the new mission, the first Inuit converts offered their foreheads, and their souls, to the mysterious touch of the Baptismal waters, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. That step in faith is without doubt due to the miraculous intervention of Little Theresa of Lisieux.

Father Turquetil became known to them as their "Grandfather", in whom they had complete trust. He studied their language, familiarized himself with their customs and ways of life, shared the joy of a successful hunt, as well as the anxiety of families whose men were carried adrift on the moving ice sometimes never to return. He enjoyed the whiteness of a newly built snow house; however, when necessary, he willingly settled himself in an old igloo whose nauseauting odour and icy walls reflecting the smoky flame of the seal oil lamp made of it a den hardly worthy of a human being.

It was not so bad when the Inuit were in good health, but, in times of illness, or famine, or accident, what could one do to help them, without medicine, without food or far away from any assistance? Should the Inuit be blamed for feeling apprehensive, fearful and turning to the magic world of Spirits? Should they be kept accountable for believing that the shaman, wearing his ceremonial

harness, beating the drum all night long or imposing strict taboos on anyone, but especially on vulnerable young mothers, could pacify the spirits? Certainly Father Turquetil and his companions wanted to bring them the Gospel, but they were also eager to improve as much as possible the desperate plight of the sick person, the rejected woman, the abandoned old man, the abused orphan.

Appointed Apostolic Prefect in 1925, Monseigneur Turquetil multiplied the mission posts. From the Canadian Government, he received pills, syrups and ointments used against common ailments such as running ears, snow blindness, toothaches, painful abscesses, persistent dysentery due to a diet of rotten meat, prolonged anemia of babies breast-fed by an undernourished mother, a list as endless as the good will of these improvised missionary doctors.

At that time, the real doctors of medicine boarded only once a year the governmental icebreaker going north to assert, against floes and icebergs - and foreign ambition - Canada's rights on arctic sovereignty, or they sailed the M. S. Nascopie, bearing the flag of the Honourable Company, and delivering yearly supplies in all the trading posts spread along the Hudson Bay shores.

Early November, with the first snow covering the ground, the Inuk prepared his sled, whipped his dogs and went to set his traps, hoping to lure in their deadly jaws the crafty little white fox.

Then going to the trading post he exchanged the precious fur for tea, tobacco, flour and, above all, the ammunition necessary for hunting the seal or the caribou. The trapline became the frontier of his territory, the trading post his vital centre. The nomadic king of the Arctic gradually became a hero of the past.

Since the beginning of its northward penetration, the Anglican Church associated itself closely with the Hudson's Bay Company. This position of superiority gave the Reverends certain rights which they thought exclusive even in the area of public health. Monseigneur Turquetil, originally from Normandy, and stubborn as a Norman, was not a man to accept easily this situation; he knew how and when to pull the strings of diplomacy. He addressed himself directly to the Honourable M. Stewart, Minister in charge of the Territories, and exposed the facts to him. The Minister immediately revoked an edict of his deputy-minister which forbade Catholics to initiate any project among the Inuit without Government approval. In the future, the Bishop was free to act without any fear of official rebuke.

NEED OF A HOSPITAL

Truly, the need of a hospital at Chesterfield Inlet was felt more and more with every passing day. Old Peter Maktar was slowly dying in a hovel constructed of boards and moss. One of the Fathers visited him daily and changed his dressings. The old Silu had

breathed her last alone in her tent while her sons were lost, body and soul,in a wild dance organized by the traders. Hospitalized, she would have died with dignity and perhaps would have become a Christian. Epidemics such as malignant influenza, food poisoning, and other calamities annihilating sometimes entire camps, leaving the corpses to the ferocity of wolves and dogs could have been more easily controlled in a hospital situation.

Monseigneur knew the possible objections which could be brought into play against his project. At Ottawa, the Department of Northern Affairs was also making a study of the health services in the North. Many shared the opinion of Dr. F. G. Banting who, after his Arctic voyage in 1927, maintained that the white civilization could bring no good whatever to the Inuit and that consequently, it would be better to leave them alone. Others hesitated to take a stand and favoured the idea of an itinerant doctor rather than the erection of permanent hospitals.

The Church of England had decided to build its first hospital on Baffin Land. In 1931, St. Luke's Hospital opened its doors at Pangnirtung, one of the most picturesque locations on Cumberland Sound, where in 1923, Dr. Leslie Livingstone on board the C. G. S. Arctic, the wooden ship of Captain Bernier, examined several Inuit patients. Livingstone, an excellent surgeon, was also a fearless dog sled traveller, an experienced prospector, a skillful hunter.

By 1928, he was considered the top medical officer of the Department of Health in Ottawa. These almost prophetic words are attributed to him: "Unless the distribution of free aid to the Eskimos is strictly controlled, they will inevitably be doomed to degeneration."

In 1929, in Chesterfield Inlet, under the supervision of the local trader, a building was constructed which would serve as headquarters for visiting or resident governmental agents. Livingstone would be the first to live in it for a few months at the beginning of 1930. He found a local population small in number, drawing only a minimal part of its subsistence from the sea and consisting mostly of older men and women. That situation was undoubtedly bound in a short while to create a problem.

Mgr Turquetil had in his plans anticipated this problem and in the hospital of his dreams, he had reserved a special corner for the old and destitute. He had learned by experience how in the Inuit culture, still pagan and primitive, old age was powerless to continue the struggle of a lifetime against the elements, and often surrendered, leaving oneself to freeze to death or passing around one's neck the noose that would end all misery. Without judging these suicides severely, Mgr Turquetil wanted to substitute for this mentality of despair rooted in their customs, the more humane and consoling Christian vision of an Eternal Father, the Creator,

the "Nunaliurti" opening His beautiful Heaven which was more inviting than a hunting ground with thousands of caribou.

In the same summer of 1929, once the administrative difficulties smoothed out, Mgr Turquetil with a keen sense of business bought all that was necessary for the construction of his hospital. Unfortunately, no one ever knew why in July the ship left Montreal for her northern voyage, leaving behind on the dock all the building material. The project so dear to the Bishop's heart had to be postponed for one year.

In the meantime, an epidemic fell upon Chesterfield Inlet. Father Armand Clabaut went from one tent to the next distributing pills and cough syrup to the victims of the grippe. Katulik, an old woman covered with tattoos, already suffering from advanced tuberculosis, died well-prepared and resigned to her fate. There was nothing complicated for her funeral; a box provided by the trader but which was much too large for her shrivelled body served as a coffin. Considering the pagan mentality of her family and the weight of the crate, Father suspected that someone had slipped in, near the corpse wrapped in a caribou skin, the old stone pipe of the deceased, a few tobacco leaves, a bit of tea, and maybe even a few needles and a hand of caribou sinew so that the eternal idleness would be less boring, not to mention an old alarm clock whose tick-tock would outlive her for a few hours, before entering in its turn into the great silence of the kingdom of the dead.

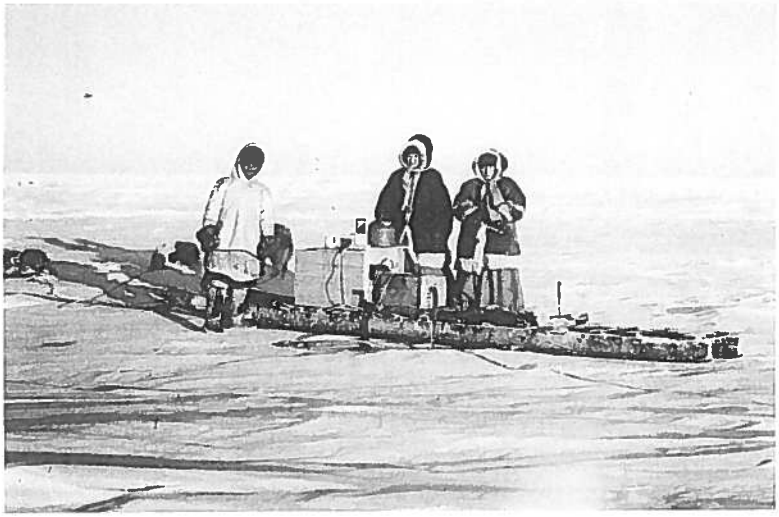
Alluding to the traders and prospectors, Bishop Turquetil often repeated in his sermons: "It is not the pelts nor the precious stones which are of interest to us but rather the Eskimos themselves and their souls that we desire to lead to Heaven." Even poor Peter Maktar, who languished in his old shanty, had heard these comforting words thanks to "Mikilar", alias Father Lionel Ducharme, who had installed for him a loud speaker connected to the church's amplifying system.

However, the hospital was soon to rise from the ground. In July, 1930, equipped with a small motorized cement mixer, Oblate Brothers and Fathers poured the foundations. Brother Anthony Kacl from Edmonton, but originally from Poland, directed the men at work. Brother Jacques Volant, later in charge of the Eskimo Museum in Churchill until his death in 1987, was among the builders.
Because there were many cases of pneumonia, Dr. Livingstone had imposed a period of quarantine, so the Inuit of Chesterfield, the "Igluligaarjugmiut", had to view the construction activities from afar. However they could hardly resist the urge to visit each other.

Assured that the exterior of the building would be completed before winter, and that doors and windows would be well sealed so as to prevent snow from entering, Mgr Turquetil felt at peace and left on board the <u>M. F. Thérèse</u> for Churchill, where, on his arrival,

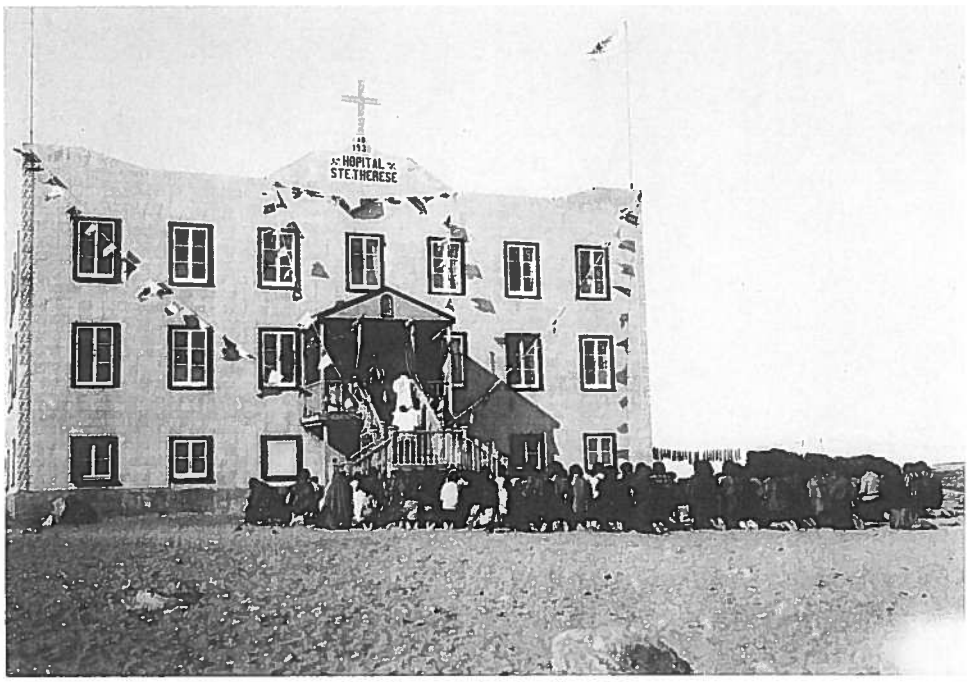
Hospital construction Fa. A. Clabaut, Fa. A. Thibert, Br. Katel, John Ayaruar

Founding Sisters:
Sr. M.A. Frechette, Sr. A. Fafard, (standing) Sr. St. Ignace, Sr. Theresa-of-the-Child-Jesus



Jean Ayaruar, Sr. A. Heroux, Sr. Y. Desilets c. 1938-39

The hospital and mission buildings of Chesterfield 1940



St. Theresa Hospital in 1937

he noted with joy that his humble residence was ready for occupation.

SISTERS OF CHARITY OF NICOLET

"Now," he wrote to Bishop Augustin Dontenwill, Superior General of the Oblates, "I must find a religious community of Sisters to take charge of the hospital." This was not easy. Already, he had contacted the Grey Nuns of Montreal; Mother General had welcomed him sympathetically but her Council had turned down his request. Disappointed but not discouraged, the Bishop prayed Thérèse of Lisieux for help. He promised to name the hospital after her. In the spring of 1931, he went to the Grey Nuns of Nicolet, then independent from the Sisters of Montreal. On April 26, he gave them a touching lecture which began with these words: "Since Easter, the day when little Thérèse obtained for me the great favour of your assistance and cooperation, I feel free to attend to the interests of the northern missions and see to the organization of the hospital now under construction." The Sisters of Nicolet had accepted the Bishop's plea!

Already, all the houses of the Congregation had been informed of this important decision through an official letter written by Sister Florida Doucet, superior general, April 7, 1931: "The holy day of Easter, April 5, has brought us a great joy. Just as Christ appeared to the Holy Women, and sent them forth to announce His

resurrection, so one of Christ's missionaries is sending us to a people still untouched by civilization where we will be witnesses of our faith through a life of complete dedication." On April 30, His Excellency Bishop Hermann Bruneault, Bishop of Nicolet, signed the official contract between the Apostolic Prefect of Hudson Bay and the Superior General of the Grey Nuns.

In view of the fact that "the Eskimo country is a desert which produces very little food, that the transportation of the essential supplies is extremely costly", the official document stipulated that all travel expenses and the upkeep of the four sisters would be absorbed by the Apostolic Prefect. He himself counted almost exclusively on the generosity of friends and benefactors to support his work. The salary of $1,080 dollars paid by the government to the registered nurse plus the daily allowance of $1.50 per patient were far from covering expenses.

Mgr Turquetil also committed himself to promote, as much as possible, the spiritual life of the Sisters under his jurisdiction, assuring them of the presence of a priest for daily Mass, weekly confession, and yearly spiritual exercises required by their holy Rule. No doubt, this act of self-sacrifice on the part of the Grey Nuns would bring down Divine blessings on their Congregation and be a source of numerous vocations to their Institute."

THE FOUR FOUNDRESSES

Bishop Turquetil could therefore expect four Sisters, but then came the difficult task of choosing the suitable candidates for such a difficult mission. Mother Doucet did not wish to impose such a painful nomination upon anyone, so she asked for volunteers. There were many, but the choice fell upon Sisters Marie-Anne Fréchette, Adelaide Fafard, St.Ignace-de-Loyola, and Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus. The first three already had some experience in the Missions of Alberta; two were still at work among the Indians.

Sister Fréchette (1886 - 1972) had been active in the Canadian West since 1924, as bursar at the "Blood Reserve" Hospital and as cook in the Indian Residential School at Cardston, Alberta. On May 16, 1931, the General Council of the Grey Nuns of Nicolet entrusted her with the direction of St. Theresa's Hospital at Chesterfield Inlet.

In the letter of obedience that Mother Doucet sent her, she compared the Inuit to diamonds who, thanks to her life of abnegation and devotion for the missionaries, would one day shine radiantly! Sister Fréchette was twice appointed as Superior. In 1940, she definitely left the North but her influence remained. As a token of gratitude, Bishop Marc Lacroix invited her to Chesterfield for the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the hospital in 1956.

Sister Fafard (1885 - 1972) left St.Anne Old Folks Home at Saint-Celestin for the Great North. "If I had only myself to rely on", she wrote, "I would be afraid of the sacrifice, but since the Lord calls me, He will not fail to strengthen my good will and sustain me in my weakness." Sister Fafard was a woman who could do everything; she had proved it during almost twenty years in the Indian missions. Cook, bursar, boys'supervisor, shoemaker, nothing was beyond her. It was said that she had even dug a well, swept chimneys, bled a calf and a pig in order to supply meat for her dear Indian children. What an appropriate training for the country of the "eaters of raw meat"! During 13 years she was the cook at Chesterfield Inlet. She knew how to improve frugal menus with good humour and a devotion which never wavered. On February 27, 1972, at the Hôtel-Dieu in Nicolet where she lay paralysed, she left this valley of tears with rosary in hand to knock at St. Peter's door.

Here is how Mother Doucet portrayed Sister Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus (Yvonne Désilets, 1906 - 1987) to Bishop Turquetil: "She is the youngest of the chosen Sisters. She was born on July 17, 1906 and was named after Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jésus. She is actually the same age as the great Little Saint of Lisieux at the time of her death. She will sing among the Eskimos the praises of the Lord."

Tirisikulu, as the Inuit named her, accomplished her mission well. Her whole life was a song of love and of joy. Her melodious voice,

her needlework, her artistic sense, all praised God infinitely. As sacristan, she worked wonders with the simplest things, decorating the chapel beautifully to the amazement of the Inuit; she could not tolerate ripped vestments or torn cassocks, and if by some misfortune the Infant Jesus of the Crib had a damaged finger, she would discreetly repair it before placing him down between the ox and the donkey.

Her soul, as her laughter, was crystal clear and when she left the priests'residence after a weekly cleaning, everything was shining. In 1961, her 30 years of total dedication amidst the hardships of the climate took its toll on her health. Sister Clarilda Fortin, her Provincial Superior asked her to return to Nicolet. "She accepted this sacrifice generously", say the Chronicles. "Vivacious and joyful, she left to those who had known her more intimately, unforgettable memories which they recalled with affection and gratitude." She knew how to approach the Inuit, both the young and the elderly, and she put them at ease. "Her life," wrote Sister Yvette Paquin on the occasion of her death on August 22, 1987, "was nothing else but a long YES of love."

Sister St.Ignace-de-Loyola, nee Anastasie Héroux, the only survivor in 1988 of the founding group, was born in Quebec on February 26, 1900. In 1924, after pronouncing her vows as a Grey Nun of Nicolet, she was sent to Biggar, Saskatchewan. In 1930, she completed her studies as a nurse in Saskatoon and was subsequently

assigned to the Cardston Hospital, where according to the local Chronicles, her good services and her happy disposition were deeply appreciated. To her, as to Sister Fréchette, "the same honour is given and the same sacrifice demanded, namely to go to Chesterfield." In May, 1931, she left Alberta for a brief visit to her family and then prepared for the long journey to Hudson Bay.

DEPARTURE FOR THE NORTH

On June 21, 1931, in the Cathedral at Nicolet before a large congregation, the four foundresses in travel costume knelt before the Mother General and received from her their official obedience. Mother Doucet invited them to thank the Lord, to rely on Him to save their own souls and to generously help to save others in a pagan country.

Bishop Bruneault repeated his admiration, and in the name of his diocese, sent them to the distant missions of the Canadian North. In his turn, Mgr Turquetil, in his most solemn attire, his face glowing with joy, also expressed his gratitude to God and to the Grey Nuns and asked the four chosen ones to meet him in Montreal, on Monday, June 29, the date arranged for the great departure.

The railway tickets had been bought, the berths reserved and paid for, and "besides there will be no difficulty if the baggage exceeds the regulation weight", added the Bishop with a smile.

What is most important is that the trunks and hand baggage be at the station on time because there is only one train a week to Churchill, and "it would be unfortunate," he wrote to Mother Doucet, "if the Sisters arrive there without any change of clothes."

At the Guy Street Convent in Montreal, Sisters Fréchette and Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus paid a visit of filial devotion to the tomb of Mother d'Youville; then there was a prayerful visit to St. Joseph's Oratory after which they bade farewell and boarded the train for Ottawa where Sisters Fafard and St. Ignace were to join them. In the train, sleep was impossible; the heat was suffocating; open windows let in clouds of choking dust. "That is good," commented the Bishop, "because this way you will not regret civilization too much."

On July 4, after a stop at St. Boniface and another at The Pas, the train continued towards Churchill, advancing slowly in the middle of green spruce and white birchtrees. Here and there, alongside the tracks, a few delicate wild roses smiled at the exhausted passengers. The farther north they went, the longer the days and the cooler the air. Often, for no apparent reason, the train stopped, whistled and then painfully started again. Eventually, it came to a standstill at a small station and all passengers got off. Here, passing through a large number of Indian men and women and a cloud of famished mosquitoes, one could reach

the "Station Café" and have a sandwich before reboarding the train for the last few miles numerically indicated on small wooden poles along the tracks.

CHURCHILL

The Sisters arrived at Churchill on July 5 at about 10 o'clock in the evening. It was raining. The wind was so strong that it nearly carried away their coifs. Climbing on the mission's truck, the Sisters arrived at the Bishop's palace. But what a pretentious name for a simple wooden house situated on top of a hill dominating the harbour! The mission bell rang in their honour; some of the dignitaries of Churchill came to welcome them. After a short visit to the chapel, the cook, an oblate Brother, served them supper; "He was so embarrassed that he dropped everything," noted Sister Fréchette.

The Sisters took over the first floor where all was ready so they would feel at home, wash basins, candles, matches, two chairs, a bench, two tables against the partition, an inkstand, two statues and even nails in the walls to hang their dresses.

As for the Bishop, he had a room downstairs which served as a bedroom, an office and a living room. One stove, an empty barrel open at one end and resting on iron brackets, heated the whole house.

In spite of the bad weather, Churchill was humming with activity. Powerful boats dragged the river bed, surrounded by hundreds of seagulls crying and looking for scraps. Two thousand men were busy installing the shunting yard, or building the wharves for the Canadian National Railway, or constructing the grain elevator, or fixing the powerhouse. In other words, they were creating the town of Churchill amidst swamps and boulders. Women were not allowed on the premises, except the three nurses who shared quarters in the railway coaches bearing the sign: "Hospital Car".

The departure for Chesterfield scheduled for Monday, August 10, gave the Sisters enough time to explore the newborn town. They also took care of the Mission, cooking, scrubbing, washing, repairing all that was in need of mending, doing everything with joy and good humour. In their free time, they wrote to Nicolet letters filled with little anecdotes such as the episode regarding the young Father Massé hanging on to his overturned canoe and drifting with the current to be finally thrown on shore, safe and sound, but wet to the bone and yet ready to board the M.F.Thérèse en route to the North.

CHESTERFIELD INLET (IGLULIGAARJUK)

The M. S. Ungava left Churchill at the first streak of dawn on Tuesday, August 11; the four Sisters shared the same cabin and on

awakening found themselves at sea "sailing towards the land of their desire." The water was beautiful and calm. Alone on the deck, admiring the power and grandeur of God, the Sisters warmly wrapped in their mantles, prayed and sang. Wednesday morning, the jutting point of Baker Foreland was outlined on the horizon. Chesterfield Inlet was not very far. With his binoculars, the Bishop could distinguish the houses and even the hospital under construction. Towards the east, one could soon see, with the naked eye, and larger and larger as the ship approached, the white red-roofed buildings of the Company which were set on a rocky headland advancing into the Bay. In the centre, the Mission built between the sea and a soft water lake, dominated the sandy beach. West of the hospital, the doctor's house, and more to the left, on top of a grassy slope covering an eternal permafrost, the R.C.M.P. barracks, sheltering two constables and Sergeant Wight, whose wife and three boys were also on board the Ungava. Lastly, down towards the west side of the Bay, a forest of poles and cables indicating the radio station and its antennas tuned in to the ships sailing in the Hudson Bay, warning them of impending storms.

THE GREY NUNS AND THE INUIT

Once on shore, with their long grey habits sweeping the sand, the Sisters made their way to the Mission, gladly following the usual inuk protocol of shaking hands with everyone. The Inuit mothers, with a quick nudge, pushed out from the "amaut" their naked babies so they also could timidly hold out their tiny hands to the

Sisters, before disappearing again in the bag which served as a cradle on mum's back. A few older men and women, whose tents were farther away, arrived short of breath and sweating heavily to welcome the newcomers. The ringing of the bell had announced to all near and far that the "nayait" had arrived.

In Inuktitut, the word "naya", - in the plural, "nayait" - means blood sister - or sisters - in the family. This is a term in which one finds a subtle note of affection and service easily applicable to the Grey Nuns. When speaking of the Oblate Brothers, one would simply say "ikajurti", "the one who helps", specifying the trade, if necessary. Thus, Brother Gilles-Marie Paradis, newly arrived from Quebec, would be called "ikkumaliriji", "the one who has charge of the motors". At times, the observant Inuk who likes to make fun of people would find an appropriate nickname; Brother Jacques Volant, for instance, was designated all his life as "Pikku", "the man with a stoop."

The Inuit and the "nayait", with tears of joy in their eyes, entered the chapel, where Mgr Turquetil, praying in Inuktitut, confided the foundresses to God. Wholeheartedly, the Sisters renewed the offering of their lives to God for His glory and for the salvation of souls.

But where were the Sisters going to stay? The hospital was not yet completed. Never mind! The Fathers and Brothers were ready

to move in, in order to leave the Mission to the Sisters. There were eight Oblates in all: Mgr Turquetil, Fathers Ducharme, Clabaut, Kermel and Massé, and Brothers Kacl, Volant and Paradis, all now deceased. To this group let us add Mr.Gagnon, a layman from Montreal and plumber by trade.

In the evening, the Sisters took a walk to the cemetery, following the usual path between rocks and puddles, guided by the cross planted amongst the graves. Like docile puppies but a bit wild, a band of ragged children followed them, spying on the strange white women.

On September 5, the Beothic, a Newfoundland ship rented by the Government, threw down its anchor in the Bay. It carried 150 tons of materials transported free of charge for the new hospital. To facilitate the unloading, the Brothers had installed two rails between the shore and the building site with a little freight car rolling up and down moved by a winch. In this case at least, it was real progress and, for the children, nothing could surpass the fun ofjumping on board! In the pile of crates and boxes, the Sisters recognized the precious containers sent from Nicolet. During four days, even on Sunday, the unloading proceeded briskly, day and night, following the tides.

On September 14, 1931, news of the elevation of Mgr Turquetil to the episcopate came out. He did not breathe a word about it

himself, but a letter from Churchill, a bit indiscreet, had announced it. In February, 1932, the Canadian newspapers were to cover the grandiose celebrations in the Cathedral at Montreal. Such a happy announcement was worth a holiday! Next day, the Sisters organized an outing and went picking "catharinettes", small juicy fruit which grows in the moss and resembles a yellow-orange raspberry. The little Inuit girls, already at ease with the grey nuns, led the "nayait" to the good patches, short-cutting points of land, going around lakes, scaring a timid partridge here and there. The picking proved excellent. What succulent marmalade for the winter! Father Marcel Rio agreed; he had just arrived from Baker Lake and couldn't resist tasting it!

ST. THERESA HOSPITAL

On September 16, "a thick smoke coming out of the chimney" announced the end of the construction. The well insulated hospital would require very little coal for the winter. On September 20, the Bishop conferred the Sacrament of Confirmation on several newly baptized adults and children. Their hair was long and dishevelled; their clothing dirty and ragged and smelling of rotten fish, but all were very pious; listening with attention, they bowed their heads approvingly to their "Grandfather's" words.

Eight days later, the Bishop solemnly blessed the new hospital. To mark the event, the Inuit were invited to a banquet of baked

beans and dry biscuits which were washed down with plenty of tea, making them perspire abundantly, while the phonograph played a few popular jigs. Inuit etiquette demanded that nothing remain on the plate; when they left, they took care to carry away the leftovers. The Sisters found the evening all too short. Bishop Turquetil was leaving the following morning and he offered to take with him any letters they had time to write. At one A.M., he celebrated Mass, the very first one in the new hospital; the Sisters had decorated the chapel with artificial roses and multicoloured lights. After a quick lunch, attired in their long capes, the Sisters accompanied the Bishop to the shore. From there, a canoe took him on board the Thérèse. In the silence of the morning, they could hear the regular noise of the engine gradually decreasing. When the boat was out of sight, each one with heartfelt sadness went to bed.

Finally, on October 3, the Sisters moved for good from the Mission to St. Theresa's Hospital. Could they have chosen a more beautiful day than the feast of little Thérèse in order to open their door to all who would come asking for help? They felt secure in their wooden castle, even in case of fire, because in addition to the recognized protection of Mother d'Youville, there were also regular fire hoses properly connected to the water pipes.

FIRST PATIENTS

Only the first floor was completed. Sister St. Ignace, the nurse, had at her disposal two rooms for the sick, one with six beds for women and one with three beds for men, plus a small private room.

October 17, the first Inuk patient was officially admitted: "A good old lady named Lucy, paralysed, who shows us much trust and affection." The Sisters, alas! could not understand her as she knew only three English words: "good, good, all right". She remained hospitalized until June, 1932; then, feeling her last hour approaching, she begged to be permitted to go home and die among her dear ones.

On October 21, poor Marie-Anne, the blind widow of Pierre Maktar, came in with her small daughter, both were accepted as "needy". The local Police supplied them with food ration and the hospital offered them a welcome roof. Then, it was an epileptic girl and her mother, incapable of earning a living who asked for shelter.

The coming winter did not look very promising: caribou hunting was poor; fishing was not any better. At the beginning of November, Father Clabaut and Jean Ayaruar, his guide, went ice-fishing but came back empty handed. Luckily, the hospital pantry was stocked with enough canned food so that no one was afraid of starvation.

As for drinkable water, hundreds of ice blocks were piled near the entrance door of the basement; they were 35 centimetres thick, 40 centimetres wide, and approximately a metre long, cut right from the soft water lake. According to need, the Inuit hauled them in and slid them into a 13000-litre reservoir big enough to provide water for the whole building and installed near the furnace.

From time to time, like a ray of sunshine piercing the polar night, a message would come from the South. From Churchill, Bishop Turquetil announced that Mother Marie-Anne Cayer succeeded Mother Doucet as Superior General. That was a great joy for the Sisters, but they kept it low-key as they were in the middle of a triduum preparatory to the feast of the Presentation.

In the infirmary, all was quiet. Since there was no doctor, Sister Saint-Ignace was the only one responsible for health services. In December, old Qiniksi caused a good deal of commotion. Cancer was preying upon his neck at the base of the ear. Since he was a professional shaman from Eskimo Point, he remained rather defiant; he hardly ever smiled, continually brewing the idea of taking away his own life. One day, his suicidal tendency rather acute, he ran away from the hospital and asked anyone who lent him a listening ear to help him terminate his life. Sergeant Wight was notified of his escape but already the bitter cold of the night had caused the fugitive to reflect and on his own, he returned to the Sisters. Besides, God's grace was working, and Father Ducharme could

Chesterfield Inlet c. 1933-34

Bishop A. Turquetil and the Grey Nuns 1933

Young patients

The northernmost chicken coop on Hudson Bay
Sr. M. Provencher, Sr. A. Heroux, Sr. R. Girard,
Sr. M. Laramée, Sr. Y. Desilets, Pélagie, Sr. C. Bisson
1952

Sr. E. Piché, superior, Pélagie, baby, Ignace Kabluitok,
Sr. G. Proulx, Charlie Kabluitok, Rita N. 1946

Preparing fish for the hospital

instruct him sufficiently so that when the fatal bleeding occurred he received holy Baptism and died happily. What greater reward could the Sisters expect?

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

At Christmas, the Inuit arrived from the interior, children and belongings piled high on the sleighs. In no time, igloos sprang up everywhere like mushrooms in a hot bed. The Sisters were amazed and through the lightly frosted windows of the community room, followed all the outdoor activities with great interest. The women, their long skin robes trimmed with fringes that flapped against their calves, holding a child in one hand, and in the other, an ice chisel and a pail made of seal skin, waddled down to the lake, made a hole through the ice and with a musk ox skull drew their supply of water. As for the men, faces burnt by the wind and the cold, perspiring under their caribou clothing, they added a porch to the igloo or placed on top of the snow house the harnesses and traces beyond the reach of the dogs.

When the Sisters came down the outside stairway of the hospital to go to Midnight Mass, a magnificent moonlight brightened their way projecting their shadows far ahead of them. Crisp cold air surprised them, condensing their breath and filling their lungs with pure, dry air, strangely in contrast with the indefinable odour that overpowered them as they entered the chapel. Soon, the

"Kujannamik Jisusi annigmat" announced to the Inuit world the profound mystery of the newborn Saviour.

After the Mass, following a long established ritual, all, Whites and Inuit, made their way to the basement of the hospital for the "réveillon" or Christmas Eve dinner. On Christmas Day, in addition to the solemn morning Mass, there was the rosary in the afternoon, followed by various games. Father Ducharme immortalized these events by a few photographs using magnesium flashes that filled the hall with blinding lights and acrid smoke.

The next day, the Inuit, the men walking ahead, the women and children following a few metres behind, went to the store to trade their furs.

And so, the year 1931 came to an end. The Sisters spent its last hour before the Blessed Sacrament in earnest prayer of thanksgiving. They were happy. However, it did not prevent Tirisikulu, the youngest, so little that one evening she almost disappeared in a snow bank, to admit feeling a certain nostalgia at the thought of her two sisters Annette and Cécile. Both were also religious and Cecile would herself come north a few years later. "But I did not come here", she wrote, "to seek consolation but to work for the salvation of souls and it will be by sacrifice joyously accepted and fervent prayer that I shall succeed; let us go at it wholeheartedly." This sentence alone explains the entire

lives of these heroic women and gives St. Theresa's Hospital the only acceptable justification for its existence. A life of self-denial and because of it, a life full of joy and simplicity, in the silence of prayer as well as in the spontaneous laughter of innocent jokes, or card games where the theological virtues replacing the kings and aces, always won.

In the same vein, the Oblate Fathers knew how to entertain their neighbours by improvised concerts broadcasted over the local transmitter, making the Sisters believe the music originated in Quebec. "We almost died laughing," they said, and their ardour to look after the sick and the elderly increased tenfold.

TO SPEAK INUKTITUT

To efficiently take care of the Inuit confided to them, the Sisters felt the need to speak their language. They were trying hard to remember the most common words knowing how the Inuit appreciated their efforts. In the evenings, during visiting hours, nothing pleased them more than to hear the "nayait" jabbing away in inuktitut. In 1981, at the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation, Sister Juliette Thibault, who lived in Chesterfield from 1940 to 1956, admitted that "the Eskimo dialect had remained so distinct in her memory that she could yet converse intimately with them, about their joys, sorrows and expectations." And this after 25 years of absence!

And how much more interesting to pray and sing when one understands the words! Hence the necessity to have a written text! That poses no problem! Since the sick were not very numerous, the Sisters took time to mimeograph 150 copies of the prayer book in Inuktitut, about 100 in syllabics for the Inuit and the remainder in Roman characters for the Whites. A true community effort: Father Ducharme had the stencils prepared, Sisters Fréchette and St. Ignace did the printing while Tirisikulu and Sr. Fafard assembled the pages and bound them. "A great undertaking," they said, "which will banish loneliness for most of the winter."

In January, 1932, the thermometer stayed between 40 and 50 degrees below zero. However, the burning cold did not prevent the Inuit from attending Mass early in the morning, nor the Fathers from visiting the camps cheering up the sick or baptizing newborn children. On those occasions, the Sister in charge of the kitchen provided the grub for the trip.

THE FIRST BABY

It is worthy of notice that on February 4, the first Inuk baby was born at the hospital; the mother was that much happier because she had already lost two, born prematurely. The little boy was baptized the following day and was called Alphonse Naukatsik. His father was so proud!

RESIDENT DOCTORS

In February, Father Ducharme was confined to bed due to excessive fatigue; the Sisters cared well for him as they loved and respected "Mikilar", their spiritual director. By no means was he the first missionary to benefit from their devotion. Father Alain Kermel, before returning to Eskimo Point, had been hospitalized with a sore foot, the beginning of an ailment which would soon oblige him to definitely leave the North and spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair.

Many others would profit from the nurse's attentions. In 1938, Father Julien-Marie Cochard, evacuated from Arctic Bay by the "Flying priest", Paul Schulte,O.M.I., was cared for by Doctor Tom Melling, who resided at Chesterfield from 1936 till 1939. Doctor Tom was replaced by his brother Doctor Joseph Melling who looked after Father Joseph Buliard when he seriously froze his hands at Repulse Bay in the autumn of 1939. By radio, he gave Father Marc Lacroix the necessary instructions to combat the incipient gangrene; later, the Doctor demanded his evacuation from Repulse to Chesterfield but at the sight of his affected hands, decided to send Father Buliard immediately to St.Boniface Grey Nuns Hospital to receive more appropriate care.

The first doctor attached to St. Theresa Hospital arrived August 23, 1934, on board the Severn, a Hudson's Bay Company boat. Doctor Leslie Livingstone, whom we have already mentioned, was accompanied by his sister, Mrs. Elise Thompson, a kind widow whom the "nayait" would find "much to their liking." She prepared the Doctor's house in order to welcome Miss Mabel Anderson, her brother's fiancée, who upon her landing on September 26 was to become Mrs. Livingstone. Reverend William J. R. James, Anglican minister at Baker Lake, presided over the marriage ceremony in the living room of the Doctor's residence, uniting for life two staunch Presbyterians.

As much as the Sisters rejoiced for medical reasons to have their own doctor, they found him a bit strict for the admission of patients. The nurse followed the dictates of her heart; the doctor, on the other hand, the Ottawa written instructions. He alone would decide if this or that Inuk needed to be admitted as a patient; he alone fixed the hours for consultation; he alone gave or refused help to the indigent. As to the elderly who did not require medical aid, let them find another roof for themselves!

Informed of this, Bishop Turquetil did not see it that way and went directly to Ottawa to plead the cause of his dear natives. He was found right and from that time on, a wing of the hospital was reserved for the elderly, the mentally and physically handicapped, the abused, or the abandoned orphans. Later, a workroom would be added where, besides working hides, the women learned from the

Bernadette Okpik with Thomas and Eulalie early 1950s

Dr. Patry at the hospital

Medical evacuation of Fa. J. Cochard, Fa. A. Clabaut, Fa. J. Cochard

Dr. Corbett with Fa. C. Choque, o.m.i.

Sr. R. Girard with young patients

Sr. R. Girard and William Okumaluk, of Igloolik, N.W.T.

Sisters how to sew and knit, while the men, under the supervision of the Oblate Brothers, would assemble fishing nets or carve ivory, soapstone, caribou antler, or whale bone artifacts.

From 1934 to 1958, ten doctors followed one another at Chesterfield, each one with a different temperament, but all competent. In 1946, Joseph P.Moody, general practitioner and shrewd prospector, replaced Dr Noël Rawson; he eventually wrote his autobiography entitled "Arctic Doctor" in which he tells some of his most daring arctic experiences. Doctor W.E.P.Corbett, a confirmed bachelor, took his place in 1949. A squat little man, his face flushed partly at least from the cold, he liked to walk among the rocks, wearing a parka made of wolfskin. The head of the wolf, with the ears protruding dangerously, served as a hood. The last one was Dr. Jean-Charles Patry, of Victoriaville,P.Q. He spent four years in Chesterfield with his wife who gave him there his first two children. On February 1,1958, as he was returning home from a visit to the Rankin Inlet mining centre, the airplane caught in fog, crashed to the ground. No one was killed but Dr Patry was so badly injured that in April, he left the North for good. Feeling the need of keeping close contact with modern facilities and hearing about the most recent medical discoveries, very few doctors relished the northern isolation. Therefore, Chesterfield Inlet, situated as the crow flies, about 1,500 kilometres north of Winnipeg, will remain without a resident doctor.

SISTERS OF CHARITY

Perfect harmony between the Sisters and the Mission and courteous relationships between the personnel and the medical staff have always been the guarantee of the hospital's good functioning. The Bishop knew that everyone, White or Inuit, young and old, found in the Sisters an image of the charity of Christ, enabling all patients to accept their sickness and handicaps and perhaps, a discreet call to the true faith.

A hospital like the one in Chesterfield Inlet could not be understood except in the light of the Cross placed on top of the building, a powerful beacon for the Inuit lost in a blizzard, a mysterious attraction for the pagans of yesterday struggling in the night of their superstitions, a ray of hope for the leaders of today in charge of young communities of faith and prayer.

EPIDEMICS

Flipping through the chronicles of the hospital, one is struck by the frequency of epidemics. Often, the rattle of the ship's anchor lowered in the bay was also the signal of an imminent bout of flu among the natives on shore. Later, airplanes in turn were accused of delivering not only the mail but with it germs of influenza.

Undoubtedly, the Inuit, weakened by a long winter, had very little resistance to the diseases brought in by the Whites.

In July, 1932, it was necessary to set up additional beds on the second floor of the hospital to receive the sick due to a sudden epidemic which luckily was short-lived and not too severe. A few days later, all the flu patients were up, sufficiently recovered to welcome Mgr Turquetil and celebrate his recent consecration as Vicar Apostolic of Hudson Bay. To give a festive air to the place, flags, banners, and garlands waved in the wind.

In January, 1933, smallpox, commonly called "the Prickling Lady", visited first the children, and then with full force attacked the adults and the elderly. Too weak to resist, Mrs. Sipialak, a poor, miserable old woman who had regained her smile in contact with the Sisters died. After smallpox, came dysentery. The sick became so numerous that the Sisters gave up their dormitory to accommodate them. Sister St. Ignace visited the sick in the igloos close by, thus initiating herself into the pleasures of dog sled travel. In the gloomy atmosphere the only ray of sunshine was Jean Ayaruar returning from the hunt with eight caribou, the first fresh meat of the winter.

In March, 1934, after a period of very mild weather followed by a sudden drop in temperature, a new grippe epidemic appeared, undoubtedly the one which, farther north around Depot Island,

carried away young Niakrudluk, whom Father Eugène Fafard had baptized by the name of Tirisikulu and whose admirable life and death he recounted in a book entitled: "Flower from an Icy Midst" "A Little Eskimo Therese" (1977)

In July, 1936, in spite of pleasant weather, the children were affected by a mild case of sore throat. In 1944, on the other hand, the young victims succumbed even before the Doctor had given a precise diagnosis. He operated on a few cases but without success. About twelve little angels took flight to Heaven to find the sunshine refused to a short northern summer.

In May, 1945, in the midst of small multicoloured balloons distributed to the children to celebrate the end of the Second World War, whooping cough swooped down on the settlement, marring the festivities; however, only one death resulted.

In 1948, when the Sisters were piously concluding their devotions in honour of the Seven Sorrows and the Seven Joys of St. Joseph to mark the Solemnity of his feast, once more the grippe drifted in like a nasty wind over the whole population. It began with a head cold and lasted about a week. Old Etienne Qimuksiraq died. Well prepared, comforted by the reception of the Sacraments, he desired wholeheartedly to see God. He left to the care of the Sisters his wife Philomène, a tattooed beauty, and their adopted daughter Sabine, who would pass her life at the hospital doing her best

helping with the housework. Qimuksiraq had, at first, obstinately refused to enter the hospital; then, on a fine day, he himself asked to be admitted. Sister Cécile Bisson, the headnurse, was on duty. She gave him his first bath. "By dint of patience, water and soap," she said with a big smile, "I managed to discover the colour of his skin." Life in the open air, under a tent, or in an igloo, did not of course facilitate frequent bathing. No wonder then that, from time to time, cases of scabies were found among the children as it happened in November, 1947.

The year 1948 will be marked in the Chesterfield annals first, by the visit on July 29 of Very Reverend Father Léo Deschâtelets, Superior General of the Oblates, accompanied by Bishop Marc Lacroix, and, secondly, on August 4, by the entry into the postulate of the Grey Nuns of Pélagie Pubvalerak from Eskimo Point, and thirdly, alas! by the tragic events of November, in which I was personally involved, having made the ominous discovery during a ministerial trip into the camp of old Johny Siudluk; five Inuit, all adults, had died within a few days. By measure of prudence, Doctor Moody, returning from Tavanee, immediately imposed a quarantine. An autopsy conducted on one of the corpses which we had brought in on our sled, led us to believe that the cause of death was a poison called ptomaïne, a very toxic alkaloid found in spoiled or rotten meat, rather than a contagious disease. Everyone knew that in days gone by, the Inuit relished meats slightly

tainted. Once the quarantine was lifted, everyone breathed more freely.

Not for long however. Sister Pélagie had hardly made her religious commitment and Father Henri-Paul Dionne had just returned to Eskimo Point, when poliomyelitis struck. Father Dionne was accused of spreading the virus. On February 21, 1949, three people died; on the 28, twelve more were dead. Outdoors, the thermometer indicated 43 degrees below zero. In the igloos, the morale was at its lowest. Alerted, Ottawa sent an epidemiologist and other specialists, who at the first lumbar puncture identified the polio virus. Several autopsies confirmed their verdict. A quarantine was decreed and included the whole Arctic region; Eskimo Point and Padlei were also affected.

On March 6, 13 patients were evacuated on stretchers. A skiplane taking off from the lake brought them to Churchill and Winnipeg. In spite of this, St. Theresa Hospital was full and the Inuit continued to arrive from the far away camps. Father Roland Courtemanche, director of the Mission, and the Oblate Fathers, helped the Sisters, consoled the survivors, encouraged the bed-ridden and buried the dead under the rocks. Gradually, however, the disease lost its virulence.

On April 26, Doctors Wood, Adamson, Croll, and Smillie, came to examine the survivors and plan their rehabilitation. Nurse

Constance Beattie, physiotherapist, gave them specialized treatments. The patients responded well to her efforts and made evident progress. Therefore, she could not understand Doctor Moodie's decision to evacuate them. However, she offered to board the amphibian Canso aircraft which on August 21, carried six of the most affected cases to Winnipeg. Alas! the plane never reached its destination. It crashed and burst into flames near Norway House in Manitoba, leaving no survivors. The memory of Nurse Beattie, a joyous, devoted, conscientious person, will remain alive a long time among the Inuit who loved her dearly. This tragedy weighed heavily on the entire North. For a long time, the sick refused to hear about an eventual evacuation.

Still, the epidemics occurred again: chickenpox, measles, and influenza, while tuberculosis began to wreak havoc in the entire North. On June 28, 1954, ten Inuit declared tubercular left for the south, beginning an exodus which, coming from all the corners of the Central Arctic, would for long years fill the sanatoria of Clear Water Lake, Brandon, and St. Vital, in Manitoba.

In August, 1940, the hospital at Chesterfield was endowed with the necessary equipment for X-rays. Frequently, at the same time, groups of specialists, by plane or by boat, criss-crossed the Arctic to track down the Koch bacillus. In 1954, a complete wing of the hospital became reserved for tubercular patients, to avoid all risk of contamination.

EDUCATION

The Apostolic Vicariate was in full development and yet, except the Mission schools, no educational arrangement for primary or secondary education had been initiated. In October, 1950, 28 young Inuit, eager to learn the rudiments of the English language and arithmetic, crowded into the Mission hall, called "Eskimo Hall", around Father Roland Courtemanche. The need for a locale apart from the Mission was being felt. The federal government, at the suggestion of Bishop Marc Lacroix, since 1942 the successor of Bishop Turquetil, accepted the idea of a school directed by a qualified teacher, male or female.

M. Roland Larivière, a bilingual catholic, originally from St. Eustache, Quebec, inaugurated in 1951 the new school building, erected by the Oblate Brothers with financial aid from Ottawa. However, Bishop Lacroix, who appreciated the devoted services of the Grey Nuns, desired to entrust the education of the Inuit youth to them.

In 1953, Sister Elizabeth Herauf, S.G.M., arrived from St. Boniface to succeed M. Larivière. Her position as principal of the school also gave her the role of Social Welfare agent to the Inuit. Upon her arrival, she set up evening courses to teach English to adults, a practice which would be continued by Mr. Kevin Travers in 1958.

In the autumn of 1954, a score of school age children came by plane from the surrounding villages and were housed in the old mission. Although the building was ancient and very cold, the smiling presence of Sisters Monique Provencher and Pélagie Pubvalerak gave it welcoming warmth. These boys and girls attended the Joseph Bernier School. All followed the classes of Sister Herauf, aided in her teaching duties by Sister Pauline Côté, who came from Nicolet. At the end of three months of teaching, Sister Côté suffered a cardiac attack and gave up her position in favour of Sister Thérèse Plante, a nurse turned teacher.

Until 1955, the teaching Sisters stayed at the hospital under the authority of Sister Jeanne Marcotte, Superior. On August 15, 1955, they established themselves definitely in the Sainte-Marie Residence, which had just opened its doors to 80 boarders brought in by Arctic Wings from the different Hudson Bay posts; with the children of Chesterfield included, the number of pupils rose to 114. Luckily, two new classes had been added to the original school. For many years, Emmanuel Kumasiutiqsak, better known as "Jimmy", was its janitor and trustful caretaker. Sister Monique Provencher became the first Superior of the Sisters concerned with the school. Her community was distinct from that of the hospital, and consisted of eight Grey Nuns, among whom were Sisters Geneviève Rocan, who remained until 1968, Denise Emond, Rollande Lavallée, Rosanne Lemaire, and Thérèse Beauchesne, the cook. In 1959, Sr

Beauchesne was replaced by Sister Gisèle St-Sauveur who during thirteen years devotedly worked in the kitchen preparing delicious fish or caribou meals, serving them cooked or sometimes raw. Brother Gilles-Marie Paradis looked after the good functioning of the building, which was solemnly blessed by Bishop Lacroix on August 16, 1956. At that time, St. Theresa Hospital also celebrated the 25th anniversary of its foundation. In the autumn of 1956, Sister Provencher, who had given herself totally for the education of the Inuit children and the good of her community, took sick with cancer of the lungs. She was transferred to Nicolet. Surrounded by the love of her Sister-companions, she died on April 5, 1957, at the age of 36. In October, 1957, the flu brought down two young pupils of the boarding school. In 1958, Sister Thérèse Chaput replaced Sister Herauf as principal of the school. The same year, the Sainte-Marie Boarding School became the property of the government and its name was changed to Turquetil Hall. As for he Sisters, they lasted as a distinct community until 1969, when Turquetil Hall was transformed into an educational centre for adults, before being later definitely demolished and replaced by a gymnasium. At the time of the closing of the Boarding School, Sister Thérèse Arcand, a great native lady, loaded with diplomas and experience, had been, since 1963, its principal. She went south. The school continued to accommodate the children of Chesterfield, under the direction of Sister Dolores Lussier, aided by Sister Lise Turcotte and other lay teachers. Sister Edna

Student, Maria Kunnuk from Igloolik
c. 1964-65

Helper Sidonie Kritersluk with school children
c. 1964-65

School children including Josepi Koluar and
Marcel Kappi c. 1964-65

Antoni from Repulse Bay, Joani from Igloolik
c. 1962

Louis Autut, Sr. G. St. Sauveur and Sonia Otuni
preparing a meal

Turquetil Hall c. 1963

Chabot, last Superior of Turquetil Hall, became the new Superior for all the sisters reunited in the Hospital as one community.

The boarding school was no longer in existence but its enduring influence on the arctic youth is still felt today. A look at the list of former pupils will tell what some of them have accomplished in their respective villages or for "Nunavut" in general, in politics, arts, sports, religion, or other domains. Thérèse Hébert, Superior, from 1959 to 1965, Thérèse Desaulniers, from 1960 to 1967, Laurette Allard, Simone Forest, Victorine Servant, and other Grey Nuns already mentioned, all proved to be perfect educators, but the creation of governmental schools in most of the northern villages didn't favour the existence of a boarding school and the sending of Inuit boys and girls to the higher grades in Fort Churchill, Yellowknife, and Iqaluit rendered it impossible.

In 1973, Sisters Lussier and Turcotte quit teaching in Chesterfield. The former went to St. Boniface, the latter took charge of the Diocesan pastoral office with residence at Churchill and, later, at Rankin Inlet, until her tragic death in November, 1986.

In 1988, the Grey Nuns took up again northern teaching with Hélène St-Amant at Chesterfield Inlet and, at least temporarily, Thérèse Vachon at Rankin Inlet.

CHANGES IN THE HOSPITAL

Since 1931, St. Theresa Hospital had undergone noticeable transformations: extended to the east in 1949, then to the west in 1956, it had been given a new look with an imitation brick facing. The following years brought other improvements: the electrical wiring was renewed, the heating system was converted from coal to oil, thanks to the skilled and unobtrusive labour of Brothers Gilles-Marie Paradis and Jean-Marie Tremblay. Brother Romeo Boisclair had the Post Office installed between 1962 and 1976 in a corner of the basement previously reserved for trading. There, also, was inaugurated the office of the newly formed cooperative. Means of communications were also improved; the telephone came in 1965 and the television in 1979, through the "Anik" satellite, "the little brother" circling around the Earth..

We cannot forget the precious help given by the Inuit to the hospital, some supplying for the patients fresh caribou, seal, fish, or even the delicious "maktaq" or white whale blubber, others maintaining motors, boilers, and other household appliances, providing water or ice, replenishing the coal bin or pumping the fuel oil; also performing work that no one likes, namely, the emptying of garbage of all kinds. Since the sudden death of Brother Boisclair in November 1979, the Inuit employees had on their shoulders the whole responsibility for the material functioning of the hospital. Leonard Putulik has been on call for

40 years. Let us also mention in particular the presence of Hugo Bendotti, since 1981 an Oblate Associate, a strong man, a skillful and excellent gardener; the lettuce and the tomatoes of his hothouse bear witness to his green thumb.

The Sisters did not devote themselves exclusively to the Inuit; they welcomed a great number of visitors from the medical world, doctors, dentists, psychiatrists, social workers, health service administrators; and in fact anyone who on arriving did not know at whose door to knock.

MERGING OF MONTREAL-NICOLET

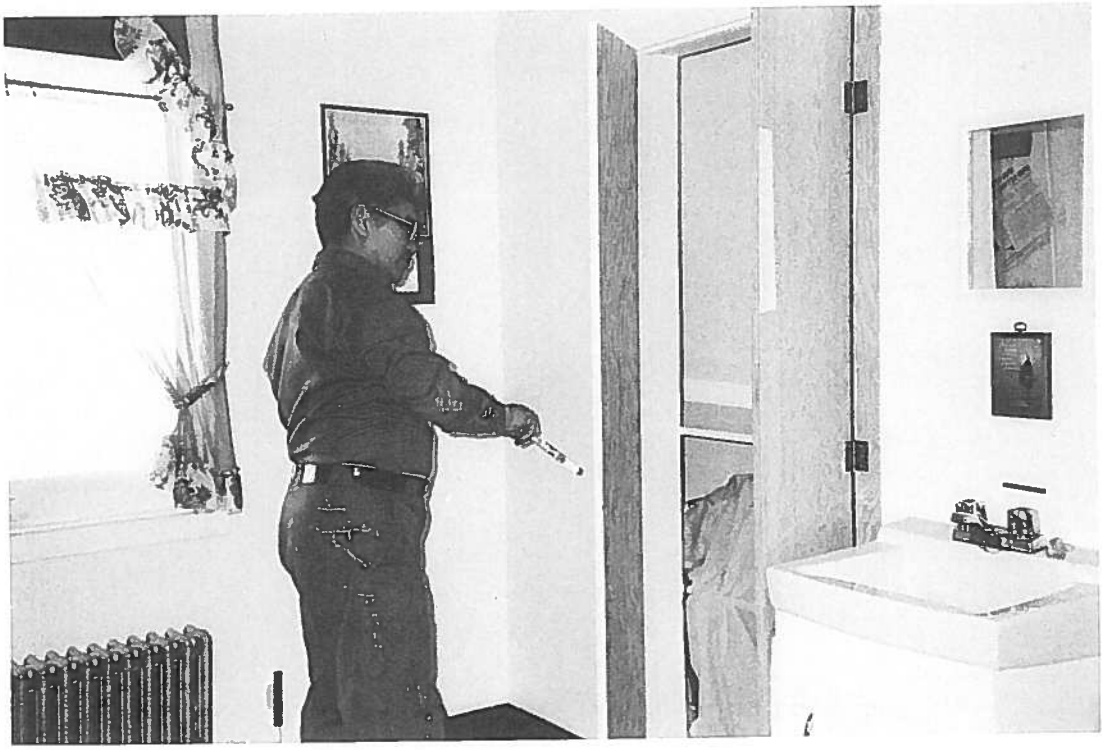
Where did the Sisters draw the courage to smile to so many human miseries, to so many strangers? The Inuit themselves were not deceived. They knew that the "nayait" were women of prayer. It was enough to tell a somewhat noisy child: "nayait tuksiartut", "the Sisters are praying", and immediately he would lower his voice and wait patiently for the end of the service; then he would run and throw himself into the enfolding arms of "Ananatsiar". Without fear of exaggeration, one can affirm that during the first years of its existence, the Community of Chesterfield was a bit like a miniature replica of the one in Nicolet, with the same spiritual exercises, the same exact timetable, the community bell, the traditional recreations, and the obligatory silence favourable to recollection and to the listening of the Divine Spouse.

On July 22, 1940, Mother Marie-Anne Cayer, Superior General, came to make her official visit, accompanied by Sister Eva Piché, the new local Superior, and Sister Juliette Thibault. Tears and laughter mingled in a Magnificat of welcome!

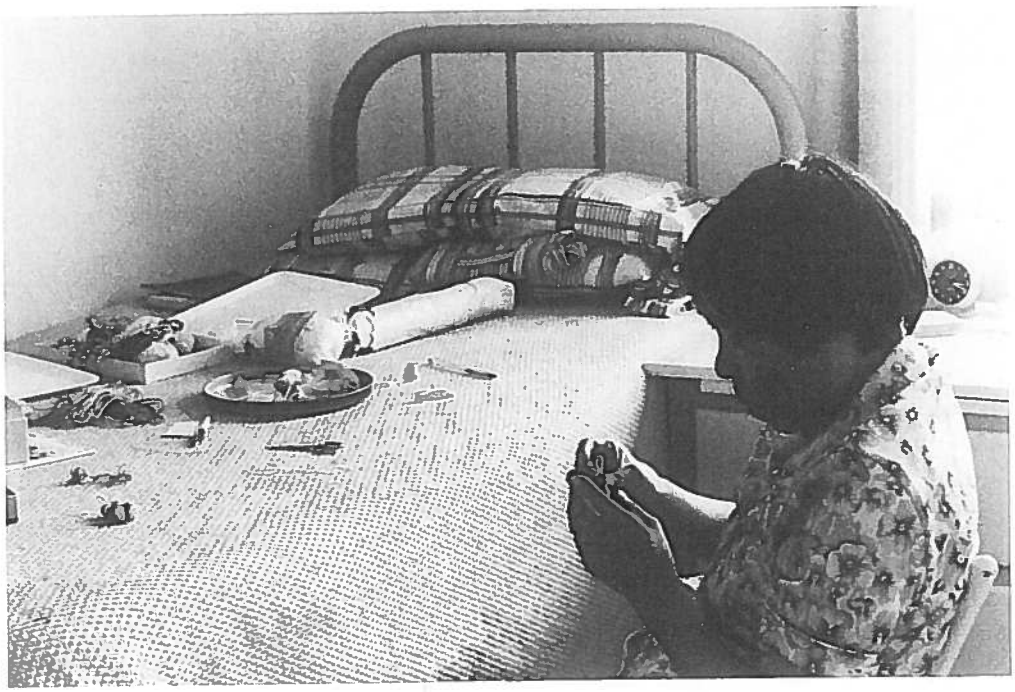
On March 1, 1941, the Grey Nuns of Nicolet and of Montreal merged, all henceforth to be called "Sisters of Charity of Montreal". Nicolet became a province of the Montreal Institution, just like St. Boniface and St. Albert. In 1944, Mother Evangéline Gallant, Superior General, came to Chesterfield to bring the comfort of a maternal visit to her daughters, taking advantage of a free seat on the plane at the disposal of Father Anthime Desnoyers, Assistant General of the Oblates. In Chesterfield, Mother Gallant heard the sad news of the sinking of the M.F.Thérèse. This total loss of the ship supplying the Missions deeply affected the Sisters; they sympathized wholeheartedly with the Bishop, and then, "adoring the designs of Divine Providence," together they pronounced their "Fiat". Mother Gallant could be proud of her daughters. Mother d'Youville would not have reacted in any other way.

In May, 1954, Mother Flora Ste-Croix, Superior General, made a canonical visit to Chesterfield. There, she saw and even entered into several igloos well preserved by particularly cold temperatures.

Leonie Putulik, ([redacted]) Nanaut, Evelyne and Louis Autut 1981



Leonard Putulik 1989



Marikuluk Angiok sewing kamiks 1981

Hugo Bendotti, Oblate Associate 1989

In 1962, Sister Clarilda Fortin, Provincial Superior at Nicolet, undertook the long voyage to the Hudson Bay. It was a time of change in religious life. The Grey Nuns simplified and modernized their habit. On March 24, Sister Marie-Ange Laramée, the expert and devoted cook at the hospital, returned from her vacation wearing the modified version. A few days later, Sister St.Ignace, Superior, followed her example. The Inuit had a difficult time to recognize her!

Luckily, the habit does not make a nun any more than a monk! Mother Georgette Leduc, who had come to assist at the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Eskimo Missions, reminded the Sisters of it, inviting them to always walk in the steps of Mother d'Youville as she presented to them the film of the beatification of their Foundress.

FROM NICOLET TO ST. BONIFACE

Six years later, in 1968, Mother Leduc was again at Chesterfield, always in her role as Superior General. Sister Cécile Maurice, Provincial Superior for the province of St. Boniface, accompanied her. An important event in the history of Chesterfield was in effect taking place; the community of the hospital had been officially joined to the Manitoba branch of the Grey Nuns. Availability of English speaking subjects, and also a greater

geographical accessibility were the two main reasons put forward to motivate the transfer.

Concurrently, the Roman Catholic Mission had changed directors; Father Roland Courtemanche had ceded his position to Father Joseph Meeus, a Belgian Oblate, simply called "Josipi" by the Inuit. His sense of humour -and a few notes on his guitar - would help the Sisters to joyfully accept their transfer to St. Boniface, as well as the great evolution affecting them and the whole Church following Vatican II.

In April, 1969, Sister Thérèse Isabelle, a Manitoban, replaced Sister Liliane Bradette at the infirmary; after ten years of service to the sick, Sister Bradette heard the call to a life of seclusion and joined the contemplative Sisters of St.Clare at Rivière-du-Loup, Quebec. In November, Sister Isabelle was recognized as a Public Health nurse. In this capacity, she regularly visited Repulse Bay. On May 21, 1970, she represented in the cathedral of Winnipeg the community of Chesterfield at the episcopal ordination of Father Omer Robidoux, O.M.I. Bishop Robidoux succeeded Bishop Marc Lacroix who resigned for reasons of poor health, at the end of 1968.

BISHOP OMER ROBIDOUX

Bishop Robidoux was eager to get acquainted with the Inuit missions. On July 12, he made a brief stop at Chesterfield in the company of the Honourable Jean Chrétien, Minister of Northern Affairs. He awakened everyone, not only spiritually as he would continue to do later, but this time, in the literal sense. As it was early Sunday morning when the Twin Otter landed, the village was still asleep. At the end of High Mass, the Bishop had just enough time to rush through the hospital, here to greet the handicapped, there to promise a longer visit to the Sisters. No sooner had the plane taken flight towards Repulse Bay that it started to rain heavily.

COMMISSIONER'S AWARD

Sister St. Ignace remained at Chesterfield until May, 1974, except for a two year stay at Pelly Bay (1970-1972) where she kept Sister Victorine Servant company. In March, 1971, for her years of service to the Inuit, she received the " Northwest Territories Commissioner's Award". At the time of her final departure, the whole population wanted to express its gratitude. Sister Rosanne Lemaire assured her of the affection of all the Sisters. An old friend, Victor Sammurtuq, leaning on his crutches, offered her two lovely ivory carvings. Victor died on March 9, 1981, leaving many

descendants. In his memory, the local school, of which we have previously spoken, was called "Victor Sammurtuq School".

Sister Pélagie, the only Inuk to date to become a Grey Nun, was no longer a member of the community. In 1970, she chose to return among her own at Eskimo Point. Eventually, she married Marc Nanaut and raised a family. Sister Isabelle had also left Chesterfield in 1972 to take charge of health services at Pelly Bay. At the end of 1975, there remained only six Sisters at Chesterfield.

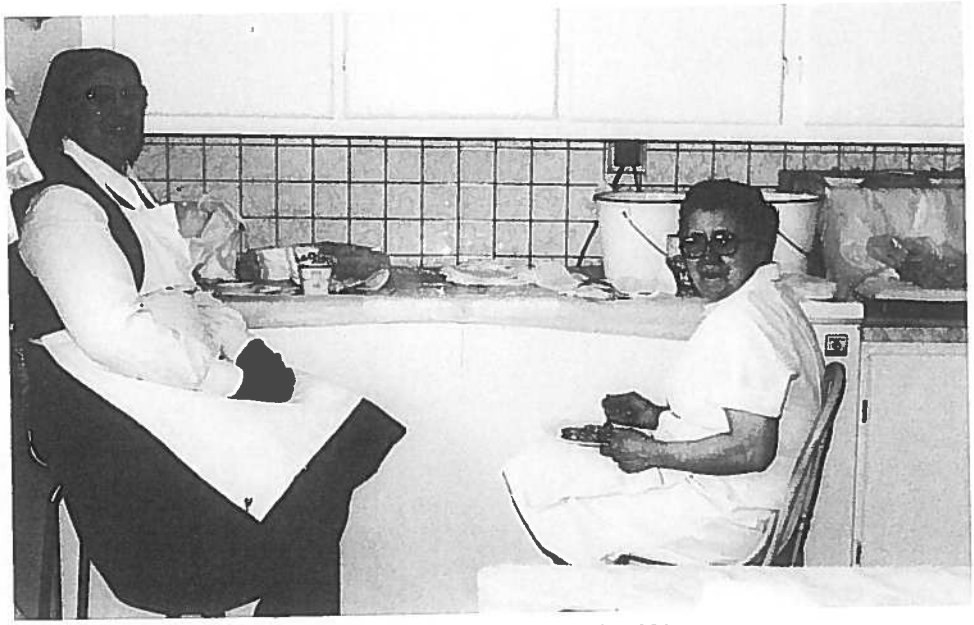
In November of the same year, 1975, after having been present in Rome at the beatification of Bishop de Mazenod, founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, and after having toured the Holy Land, Father Roland Courtemanche crossed again from Frobisher Bay to Chesterfield Inlet, replacing Father Rogatien Papion, now assigned to Coral Harbour. Father Courtemanche found the Mission house much too big for one man. He closed it and settled himself on the first floor, in the west wing of the Hospital, where from 1962 to 1968, the big boys of the boarding school had resided under the paternal supervision and spiritual guidance of Kajoaluk, Father Pierre Henry.

THE MUNICIPALITY OF CHESTERFIELD INLET

At Christmas, the traditional banquet was held in the Recreation Centre located in the old Turquetil Hall sold to the Inuit for the

Lucie Nanuat, kitchen assistant 1989

Sabine Kautak 1989



Sr. T. Arcand, Sr. T. Paquin 1981

Sr. R. Lemarche, Gemma Anartornerk,
Marikuluk Angiok 1989

Sr. Rita Fifi in the community room with young Inuit 1989

symbolic sum of one dollar. Sister Bernadette Poirier, Provincial Superior of St. Boniface, had the joy to be present and to taste the native food, $2.50 a plate, or $5.00 per family. The following day, she saw several caribou crossing the lake. In the course of her brief stay, she noted with pleasure that the village of Chesterfield Inlet was very much alive and taking its own destiny at heart. On April 1, 1980, Chesterfield Inlet rose to the status of municipality. However, in the midst of this evolution, a question came to mind: what was the hospital's future? This question was one Mother Denise Lefebvre, Superior General, had already asked herself at the time of her visit to Chesterfield the preceding July. The Government had, in effect, decided to build an independent clinic, reserving to St. Theresa Hospital the sole care of the handicapped.

In June, 1976, the Government conducted a survey of the handicapped in the Territories. In July, a social worker came to study "the physical and social needs of the handicapped children in the hospital at Chesterfield Inlet." In August, Bishop Robidoux and the Department of Health got together to elaborate a new contract destined to replace previous agreements. This contract would define the type of admissible patient, the procedures to follow for admission, and the criteria for the evaluation of progress observed in the hospitalized. On this occasion, Doctor J. A. Hildes, deceased since, then Medical Director for the North, proved to be a sympathetic correspondent with Bishop Robidoux.

NON-RESIDENT CLINIC

In July, 1977, after many delays, the new clinic opened its doors. Sister Marie Boulet accepted its direction. On call twenty-four hours a day, she established her residence there, but she took her meals with the other Sisters and assisted at all community gatherings. In May, the Sisters enjoyed listening to a talk on religious life after Vatican II by Father Fernand Jetté, Superior General of the Oblates, who was accompanying Bishop Robidoux on a visit to a few Inuit missions. Sister Alice Gauthier, who replaced Sister Boulet in the department of the handicapped, was nominated the new community animator, remaining at all times in close touch with St. Boniface.

ALCOHOLISM

On the 9th of the same month of July, the funeral of Helena Krisuk, who died in a Winnipeg hospital took place. Albino, she had been welcomed at a tender age by the Sisters. Very often, she tried their patience, swallowing pins and even her rosary, but, at the same time, she endeared herself to them by rendering many small services. Helena was not laid to rest under a vault of flat rocks as were her ancestors but buried in the new cemetery beside one of her friends who had died after drinking, in the course of an orgy, a mixture of beer and methyl alcohol. Polio and tuberculosis had

been conquered thanks to vaccines, but alas! another plague just as serious had invaded the North: alcoholism, source of murders, suicides, wounds and broken families. The Clinic became the refuge of neglected children banging at its door at all hours of the night.

In 1980, Sr Marie Boulet stricken with cancer was asked to return to St-Boniface. She fell asleep in the Lord on September 6, 1982. After Sister Boulet, Sr Thérèse Isabelle and an impressive list of nurses followed one another at the head of the Clinic.

PARISH LIFE

It is certain that the Sisters of the hospital kept as their first priority the care of the physically or mentally handicapped, but they also wanted to spread out their apostolate outside the walls of their residence and take active part in parish life; discussions with pupils on various topics such as the meaning of vocation, vocation to a Christian life or specific vocations of the People of God. The Sisters themselves profited much more fully than before of spiritual or professional resources by attending many sessions organized by their major superiors, or by the Association of Catholic Hospitals. All these meetings required long and expensive trips and often long absences. Even if the landing strip was kept in perfect condition, unfavourable weather often delayed

the flights. Up until February, 1981, meteorological reports were transmitted to the planes by the imported personnel of the Ministry of Transport, then, after the move of the radio station to Rankin Inlet, by a young well initiated Inuk.

RENOVATION OF THE HOSPITAL

At the end of 1978, the hospital building went once more through major renovations: walls, ceilings, and doors were covered with fireproof gyprock, in accordance with the fire prevention regulations. The work was completed in six weeks. In December, Bishop Robidoux expressed his satisfaction for a job well done, as well as Sister Poirier, Provincial Superior, when she arrived the day after Christmas. In 1981, under the capable management of Mr. Omer Robidoux, nephew of Bishop Robidoux, the 60 windows of the hospital were replaced by thermal glass. Henceforth, frost will no longer form between the panes, and even in mid-winter, the Sisters will be able to glance at the outdoor activities, because new Constitutions of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity, promulgated July 28 by their Superior, Sister Georgette Charette, did not forbid it! In 1984, the sewers and the water system throughout the whole house were renewed. Messrs Joseph Robidoux, another nephew of the Bishop, and John Drewniak, both from Manitoba, supervised the work with competence and swiftness.

GOLDEN JUBILEE

The most outstanding event of the year 1981, was, without doubt, the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the hospital, from May 26 - 29. For the occasion, many moving articles were written in magazines and newspapers, all dominated by the sympathetic figure of Sister St. Ignace-de-Loyola, happy to bring "home" with her Sister Jeannette Gagnon, Secretary General of the Grey Nuns of Montreal. Bishop Robidoux, accompanied by Bishop Maurice Baudoux, representing the Archbishop of St. Boniface, presided the Thanksgiving Mass. In his homily, Bishop Robidoux depicted the work of the hospital as "the pillar of his diocese and a challenge to the conscience of our times." On the evening of May 28, in the course of the caribou banquet, Bishop Robidoux delivered to Sister St. Ignace and to Brother Gilles-Marie Paradis celebrating the 40th anniversary of his religious profession, a beautiful parchment conferring on them a special blessing from His Holiness John Paul II. Senator Willie Adams, in his talk, emphasized the fact that the Inuit owed the Grey Nuns and the Oblate Fathers the consciousness of their identity and the courage to claim their legitimate rights.

Truly, the Chesterfield hospital could be compared to a large family; in it, all shared joys and sorrows. For instance, when on November 23, 1981, Cyrille Nanaut was crushed by a truck with which

he delivered fuel oil to the village, everyone sympathized with his wife, Marie Evangeline Pupupuk, a hospital employee.

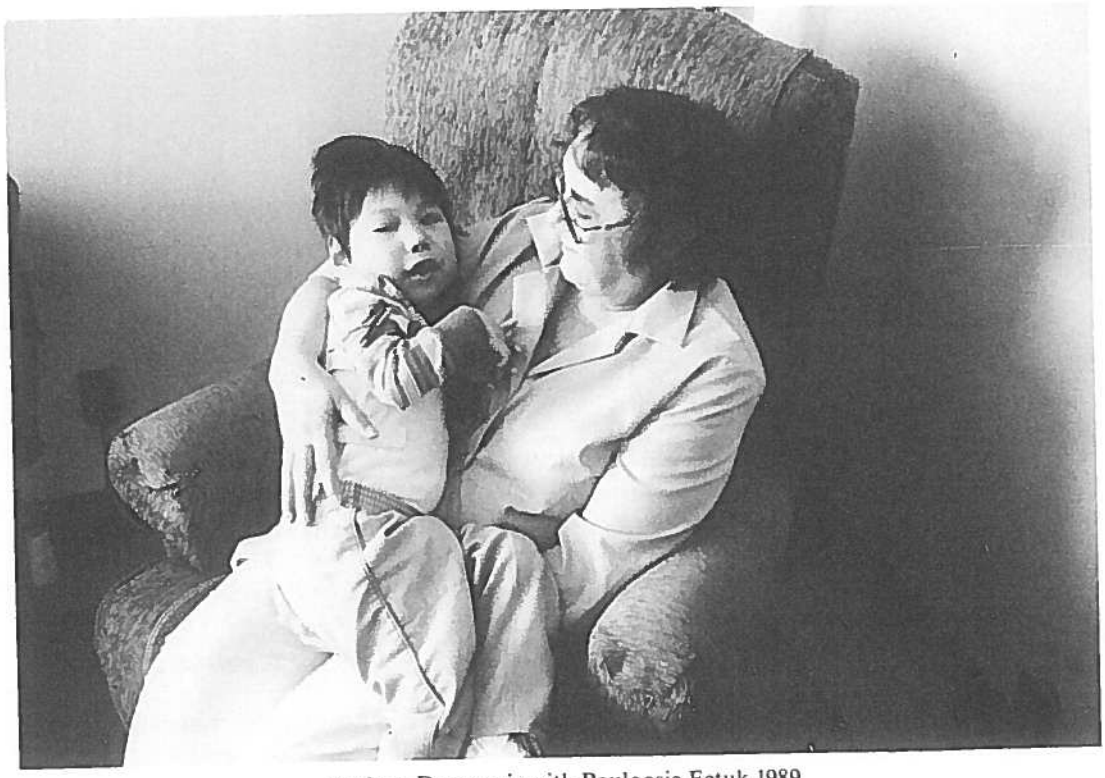
THE CHRONICLES

This short historical sketch would have been impossible without consulting the Chronicles of the community of the Grey Nuns of Chesterfield. Faithfully recorded since the beginning until today, they are a mine of unsuspected details revealing the hidden but always present secret of their consecrated life: the unabated charity of the Sisters towards the handicapped. There are about a dozen coming from Baker Lake, Eskimo Point, Rankin Inlet, or some other Arctic settlement - mentally retarded, partially paralysed, deaf, almost blind - who require care every minute. They are the permanent factor of the institution in the face of an ever moving and changing hospital personnel. Many times, lay volunteers have come to join the Sisters. Thus, in November, 1983, Mother Marguerite Letourneau, Superior General, arrived at Chesterfield with Marijke Desmet, a young lady interested in living a missionary experience for one year. Others have imitated her with generosity and determination. In 1988, Joanne Dionne, weathered by her long stay at Eskimo Point in the company of Miss Lynne Rollin, renewed her commitment to the Inuit missions for five more years, and came to Chesterfield, witnessing by her personal life and her contacts with the local youth that Christ is at work among them. The

Br. G.M. Paradis, o.m.i. 1981

Fr. R. Courtemanche, Bishop O. Ribidoux,
Archbishop M. Baudoux

50th Anniversary Mass 1981



Evelyne Desmerais with Pauloosie Eetuk 1989

Sr. Lucille Lampron with Pauloosie Eetuk,
5½ years old 1989

Vivian Kritagliluk 1989

friendship of Sister Rita Fifi, newly arrived, is a great support for her apostolate.

NEW SUPERIOR

On June 30, 1984, Sister Mariette Ste-Croix replaced Sister Georgette Charette as Superior of the community and as local administrator of the hospital. In 1987, with the departure of Sister Thérèse Isabelle, who had returned to take charge of the handicapped in 1984, Sister Sainte-Croix was assigned to the care of this very special kind of patients with the help of Sister Irène Prescott.

BEREAVEMENTS

In 1986, three deaths occurred among the patients: Lavenia Voisey, 24 years of age, who as a baby suffered with meningitis; Simon Puvalik, 16 years, who had a pulmonary haemorrhage, and Rosanne Sinisiak, who succumbed to a cardiac arrest when following treatments at the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg. As Rosanne had no relatives in Chesterfield, her funeral was held in the chapel of the Provincial House of the Grey Nuns in St.Boniface...."prettier in her coffin than when she was alive," said Sister Cécile Maurice, who accompanied her to the cemetery with Father Antonio Lacelle, O.M.I.

If the Inuit and the Sisters were saddened by these successive departures - "ajurnarmat" - "one can do nothing about it!" - they were grief-stricken, when on November 12, 1986, the plane of Keith Rawlings, having aboard Bishop Robidoux, Father Didier, Sister Lise Turcotte, and a friend of the pilot, Dave McVey, crashed at Rankin Inlet, killing all five. Bishop Robidoux, chief administrator of the hospital, had always shown delicate attention to the Sisters, bringing them fresh vegetables, fruit and meat, and at times, dainty titbits. As for Sister Lise, residing in Rankin Inlet with Sister Victorine Servant, she loved to spend days with the Sisters of Chesterfield; she brought them cheerfulness, while herself relaxing from her continuous trips in the service of the Diocesan pastoral ministry. Her goal was to involve the Inuit and the catechist couples as well as the parish councils and the Oblates in all pastoral activities. Many times, at Chesterfield, in the absence of the priest, the liturgical ceremonies were conducted by Louis Autut, or by his wife Evelline, or another Inuk just as devoted. At times, a visiting priest or an Oblate from Manitoba, would offer his services and come to assure Mass for the Inuit and the Sisters. The mission was renovated at the end of 1986, which gave Father Mascaret, succeeding Father Courtemanche in the summer of 1987, a comfortable home, and permitted the hospital to dispose of rooms until then reserved for the chaplain.

BISHOP REYNALD ROULEAU

On July 29, 1987, Father Reynald Rouleau became the fifth Bishop of Churchill-Hudson Bay, and was ordained where his predecessor, Bishop Robidoux, had lost his life, namely, at Rankin Inlet. The hospital found in his person a new general administrator. On July 30, Bishop Rouleau proceeded to Chesterfield to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Mission of Notre-Dame-de-la-Délivrande. He was accompanied by members of his family and by persons of distinction invited to his episcopal ordination. Bishop Rouleau, in his homily, compared the growth of the Church in the Hudson Bay Diocese, to a grain of mustard seed as was read in the Gospel of the day. At the end of the ceremony, the Bishop went to bless a commemorative plaque fixed to the wall of the first Mission recently renovated and conceptualized by Miss Lorraine Brandson of the Eskimo Museum in Churchill. Among the missionaries walking along with him, one noticed Father Marcel Rio, from Cap-de-la-Madeleine, cheerful in spite of his 87 years. Sister Jacqueline St-Yves, Provincial of Manitoba, was also at the celebration and prolonged her visit for several more days, much to the satisfaction of the Sisters.

Even if the institution is keeping its official name "St.Theresa Hospital", it is more a "Home", where in the radiating warmth of Christian charity, the unfortunate children find a smile, a "Home" where one believes in the dignity of every human being and in

respect for life. May this centre of love and self-effacement continue its mission for a long time! The Government subsidies could never foster a better cause!

Ottawa, March 19, 1989

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ALPHABETIC LISTING OF THE GREY NUNS

CHESTERFIELD INLET N.W.T.

1931 - 1988

Allard Laurette	1961-1969		Hostel	
Arcand Therese	1963-1969		Teacher - PR.	
	1970-1973		Iglulik	
Arsenault Louise	1972-1973		R.N.	
Beauchesne Therese	1955-1959		Hostel - Cook (ex.)	
Berube Rose-Anne	1975-1984		Hosp. - Cook	
Bilodeau Eugenie	1970-1972		Iglulik	+1989
	1984-1987		Night duty Hosp.	
Bisson Cecile	1947-1953		R.N.	
Boulet Marie	1973-1980		R.N. - Superior	+1982
Bradette Liliane	1956-1958	1964-1969	R.N. (Clarisse)	
Caners Florence	1981-1983		L.P.N. - Hosp.	
Chabot Edna	1968-1974		Hostel-Hosp. Sup.	+1985
Chaput Therese	1958-1962		Teacher - PR.	
Charette Georgette	1981-1984		R.N. - Sup.	
Choiselat Jeanne	1971-1972		L.P.N. - Hosp.	
Côté Pauline	1954-1955		Teacher	+1984
Daigle Mariette	1957-1958		Teacher	
Desaulniers Therese	1960-1967		Hostel supervisor	
Desilets M.-Berthe	1943-1950		Hosp. assistant	
Desilets M.-Cecile	1955-1960		Hosp. assistant	+1974
Desilets Yvonne	1931-1961	(Ste-Th.)	Foundress	+1987
Doiron Laurette	1965-1966		Hostel supervisor	
Dumont Fernande	1966-1969	1973-1974	Hospital	
Dupuis Heloïse	1972-1977		Hosp. - Cook	
Emond Denise	1955-1958		Teacher	
Fafard Adelaide	1931-1944		Foundress	+1972
Fifi Rita	1988-		Parish work	
Forest Simone	1958-1962		Hostel supervisor	
Frechette M.-Anne	1931-1940		Foundress Sup.	+1972
Gagnon Cecile	1962-1963		Teacher - PR.	+1972
Gamache Françoise	1965-1966		Teacher	
Gamache Lucille	1967-1969		Teacher	
Gauthier Alice	1977-1984		R.N. - Sup.	+1987
Girard Rollande	1950-1961		Hosp. & Hostel	
Guibord Gilberte	1974		Secretary	

Hebert Eliane	1961-1964		R.N.	+1975
Hebert Therese	1959-1965		Hostel - Sup.	
Herauf Elizabeth	1953-1958		Teacher - PR.	
Heroux Anastasie	1931-1972	(St-Ignace)	Foundress - R.N.	
	1972-1974		Pelly Bay	
Isabelle Therese	1969-1972	1980-1981	R.N.	
	1984-1987		R.N.	
	1972-1977		Pelly Bay	
Lamarche Rejeanne	1984-1988		R.N.	
Lampron Lucille	1974-1987		Nurses Aide	
Laramee M.-Ange	1943-1968		Hosp.-Cook	
Latreille Armande	1969-1970		R.N.	
Lavallee Rollande	1955-1958	1970-1971	Hostel & Hosp.	
Lefebvre Georgette	1962-1965		Hostel supervisor	
Lemaire Rosanne	1955-1988		Hostel & Hosp. - Sup.	
Lemire Claudia	1933-1943	(St-Esprit)	Nurses Aide	+1964
Levasseur Aline	1956-1969	1981-1981	Hostel & Hosp.	
Lussier Dolores	1969-1973		Teacher - PR.	
Marcotte M.-Jeanne	1965-1974		R.N. - Sup.	
Maurice Cecile	1982-1984		R.N.	
Paquin Therese	1977-1984		Hosp.-Cook	
Parent Eloïse	1969-1970		R.N.	
Piche Eva	1940-1947		Sup.	+1971
Plante Therese	1954-1957		R.N. - Teacher	
Ponton Gertrude	1977-1979		L.P.N.	+1986
Prescott Irene	1987-		R.N.	
Proulx Gilberte	1944-1947		Nurses Aide	+1977
Provencher Monique	1951-1957		Hosp. Hostel Sup.	+1957
Pubvaliraq Pelagie	1948-1970	(Inuk)	Hosp. & Hostel (ex.)	
Rene Simone	1963-1964		Teacher	
Rocan Genevieve	1955-1968		Teacher	
Rocheleau Jeanne	1960-1973		L.P.N.	
St-Amant Helene	1988-		Teacher	
Ste-Croix Mariette	1984-		R.N. - Sup.	
St-Sauveur Gisele	1959-1972		Hostel & Hosp. Cook	
Servant Victorine	1964-1972		Nursing	
	1972-		Pastoral-Rankin	
Signori Suzanne	1971-1973		Nurses Aide	
Trahan Louise	1981-1982		R.N.	
Thibault Juliette	1940-1950	1954-1960	Nurses Aide	
Trottier Melina	1973-1977		R.N.	
Turcotte Lise	1969-1973	1974-1986	Teacher - Pastorale	+1986
Vachon Therese	1988-		Pastoral-Rankin	