

The Church in the Ottawa Valley

BY

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The story of the establishment of the Catholic Church in the Ottawa Valley is one of the great romance stories of Canada, and as such is of particular interest to every citizen of Canada.

In this day of ferment, when seemingly so many things in the social order are crumbling before one's eye, it is important that we should get down to fundamentals and recall to mind something of the great story of a strong permanent social order in this Valley and Canada.

Religion was associated with the first activities of Canada. It was given primary position along with settlement, defence and agriculture. Many glorious pages of the self-sacrifice, devotion and heroism of the early Fathers and Teachers cannot be separated, and never should be separated, from the colonizers and explorers. The early Fathers carried on the work of the Church side by side with the explorer, the settler and the soldier.

The process of penetration was of necessity slow in the first instance, but as the great Maisonneuve said on that memorable day when Ville Marie heard sung its first Te Deum in the wilds of the Isle of Montreal, when on every hand bitter and fierce Indian foes lurked eager for the killing of the Black Robes, as they called them – “Yes,” he said, “You are as a grain of mustard seed, but from your effort will spring forth millions of devoted people.”

Whenever a canoe or bateau left Quebec on the long trail of the St. Lawrence and then into the long tortuous unknown waters of the Ottawa, there you will find a goodly priest or brother bound hither on his Master's business.

Who can forget that day in 1613 when Father Caron passed this way, bearing the first Holy Missals of his office – the Host and the Cross. He had no white man to bear him company, but travelled alone with Indian companions, to become at length a practical slave of his companions. He said the first prayers ever to be heard in the Ottawa Valley, just above the falls, after having assisted in carrying canoe and supplies above the Chaudiere at a point we know today as Lazy Bay.

As the Bells in the Peace Tower sound forth their magic changes, one can see even today, as his gentle spirit passes below, the gleam of the golden sun on his Silvery Cross, harbinger of the glorious harvest of which he was the first sower of the fruitful seed. Then in glorious cavalcade, after he had sown the seed of religion in the heart of the Huron country, passed those beloved

heroes of Canada, the great martyrs – Father Jogues, Daniels, Lalement, Breboeuf, and scores of other heroic men.

Yes, every one of these first missionaries passed this way, up the Ottawa Valley to the Mattawa and on to Georgian Bay into the Huron Country to establish the Huron missions.

Canada is much the richer for their journey, although savage foes destroyed their missions, for through this the good work was carried on even to the great Soo and on through the Straits of Mackinac to Lake Michigan to find a first permanent home on the West Coast of Lake Michigan at Green Bay, in what is known today as Wisconsin. To this spot of the historic Ottawa trail came Joliet, Claude Allouez, Marquette, Nicolet, Dulhut, and many others – and out of it all came the discovery of the Mississippi, the establishment of flourishing colonies, and the erection of permanent religious centres.

Bitter toil, death, ravage, disease walked step by step with them as they journeyed up the Ottawa trail into the heart of the great lone lands of the North American continent. Never a moment did their hearts quail – not one of them foresook his ordained task. They stuck with their heroic brothers, the explorer, the colonizer, the trader, and out of it came our first West Land, and the Great West and Central Lands of the United States, Canadian history in the making, Canadian permanence being born. This happened three or four centuries ago.

Our Valley saw these faithful followers of our Blessed Lord passing by – and we the inheritors of this Valley can never truly appreciate our heritage unless we entwine in our love for it the glorious story of achievement which lies hidden today in the misty pages of records of that period from 1613 to 1816.

At this point we arrive at a modern period and as we go along we will embellish more fully with details our story.

Gradually the map of North America was pushed back by these intrepid explorers, traders, and priests so that the great lone lands unto the Pacific and the Arctic, heard the sweet sound of the Te Deum and heard the story of the Saviour.

As the explorer completed his work, the colonists came and here once more from the Mother Diocese at Quebec, Three Rivers and Montreal, the gentle fathers as guide, philosopher and friend journeyed also. The result was that little missionary chapels sprang up here and there extending their beneficent aid even to the remotest corners of settlement.

It was a missionary father who came into this area even before Ottawa was Bytown. He came in with the military at the time that Colonel By came with his Royal Engineers to build the Rideau Canal, and many of them brought their families with them.

To appreciate the wonderful story of the church in the Ottawa Valley and Ottawa, one has to gain a mental picture of this territory as it appeared at the beginning of the 19th century.

The British Government, after the war of 1812-15, had decided on building a canal between Kingston and Bytown, as the Capital City was then called. The officer placed in charge of this work was an Englishman, Lieutenant Colonel John By of the Royal Engineers. Colonel By arrived in this district at Hull, the only settled portion of this district, on September 21, 1826. The British Government had purchased the land on the high banks of the river, where Major Hill Park and Parliament Hill now stand, and eastward to Lyon and Bay Streets on what is approximately the territory from the old Supreme Court Buildings along the river front to Lyon and Bay Streets and bounded on the south by what is now Wellington St. and all Lower Town.

Colonel By on arrival began to survey the property. Ultimately, in the midst of a forest a village sprang up which was called Bytown after the founder until 1855 and then Ottawa. The only clearing at that time was on what is now the site of the present city, and was that of Nicholas Sparks, who, as lone settler, was trying to eke out a precarious living by farming. However, there were squatters.

The first Roman Catholic Church in Ottawa was not built until 1831-32. Father Angus MacDonnell, nephew of the first great Roman Catholic Bishop in Upper Canada, was granted land upon which to build by Colonel By. It is a remarkable historical fact that the land upon which this first little wooden church (St. James) was erected is the very land upon which stands today Ottawa's lovely Basilica.

So when people gather and discuss the progress of the church in this area, this is the spot where the foundations of the church of the Ottawa Valley were first laid.

In 1842, on the same site, a more pretentious church was erected through the exertions of Father John Francis Cannon, a native of Quebec. This was a stone building which, by successive enlargements and improvements, has become the magnificent Basilica of Notre Dame of the Immaculate Conception.

But we have not yet glimpsed the importance of this accomplishment, nor have we grasped the historical romance that surrounds it, for this church is indelibly linked up with the life of the great Bishop MacDonnell, one of the most romantic and interesting characters in Canadian History, a man whose name shines brightly in its pages.

In Scotland he was the clergyman of the Glengarry Fencibles which regiment he had been able to bring into existence and which was the first Roman Catholic Regiment to be in the lists of the British Army since the Reformation. This was an accomplishment of more than ordinary merit and note. After the disbandment of the Glengarry Fencibles, he was able to secure

permission to have the men of his regiment emigrate to Canada and they were given lands in Glengarry where their kin had already located after the American Revolution as British Loyalists of the truest type. When he arrived in 1803, there were but two Roman Catholic Clergymen in the whole of Upper Canada. His parish was that of St. Raphael in Glengarry. His indefatigable efforts and ability won immediate attention and he was made Vicar General in 1807.

In 1812 he again took part in military life and helped to organize our Glengarry Fencibles who fought and distinguished themselves in the war with the United States in 1812-14. He received a pension for his war services for life and was then raised to position of Bishop and given a seat in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

Bishop MacDonnell can be, and should be, called the Father of the Church in Upper Canada (Ontario). By his untiring efforts in his Bishopric which comprised at first a great unknown, sparsely settled area extending from Lake Superior to the boundary of Quebec, five and thirty churches and chapels, great and small, were built. He spent £1300 of his own money in so doing, in this, what he called, "His great labor of love." At his death, whilst on a visit to Scotland on January 14, 1840, there were, as a result of his efforts, 34 priests in Ontario and 45 parishes or missions with churches or chapels.

As a patriot and a churchman, history records him as one of the greatest men that ever labored in Canada: men of his calibre are always very scarce. He was a great Canadian, a friend of all men – French, Irish, Scots. Even to Protestants, he was kind. He said in a pastoral letter (and this gives the very essence of the real heart of the building of the Church in the Ottawa Valley and Ontario) "No man will say that in promoting temporal interests I ever made any difference between Catholic and Protestant; and indeed it would have been unjust and ungrateful in me if I had, for I have found Protestants upon all occasions as ready to meet my wishes and second my efforts to promote public good as Catholics themselves."

At the death of Bishop MacDonnell there were upwards of 60,000 Roman Catholics in Upper Canada out of a population of 321,145 – 4,765 at St. Raphael's, 3,221 in Bytown, 3,487 at St. Andrews, 2,554 at Longueuil, (Ottawa) 1,522 at Prescott and Brockville, 3,643 at Perth, 4,163 at Kingston, and 1,130 at Belleville. Each of these mentioned were centres or Mother Churches serving several townships.

To get a proper perspective on the work done by the Clergy in Canada, in terms of years of service, it is necessary that the fact that Canada, even today, is practically a young country, should be considered, particularly so when considered with old-world countries.

It is a fact that when Bishop Henri-Marie de Pontbriand on June 8, 1760 – just three months before the capitulation of Montreal – left the Canadian

Church for France, he left it in a most critical condition. The Roman Catholics of French origin, at that time, when the British were taking over control of Canada, could not have numbered more than 60,000 souls. At the capitulation of Quebec, in 1759, and Montreal, in 1760, the British conceded the free exercise of the Catholic religion; the right of priests, pastors and missionaries to discharge their duties, and the right of the chapter and grand vicars to administer the dioceses during the vacancy of the See. The election of a Bishop was held tentatively in abeyance in that there were legal difficulties that had to be considered and worked out, restrictions that had grown up owing to Great Britain's having distinctive laws prohibiting other than her Established Church to function.

The Treaty of Paris (1763) explicitly stated – “His Britannic Majesty agrees to grant the liberty of the Catholic religion to the inhabitants of Canada, and will in consequence give the most precise and most effectual orders that his new Roman Catholic subjects may profess the worship of their religion according to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church as far as the laws of Great Britain permit.”

The instructions sent to General Murray on December 7, 1763, with his commission as Governor-General, show that it was the intention of the British Government at that time to establish both the principle and practice of the Church of England in their new British possession (Canada). This was the situation in 1760 and it is related here to show clearly the evolution that occurred later, and made it possible for Bishop MacDonnell and other gallant churchmen to operate so successfully in the new province that had been created as a direct consequence of the arrival of United Empire Loyalists into Upper Canada in the years 1787 to 1791.

Before Bishop Henri-Marie de Pontbriand left Canada in 1760, on his advice several Vicars-General were elected; Father Jean-Olivier Briand, one of the keenest most intellectual minds of French Canada was placed in charge of that part of Quebec already in the hands of the British; Father Joseph-François Perreault was placed in charge of Three Rivers, still under French; and Father Etienne Montgolfier was placed in charge of Montreal.

These three were the guiding heads of the French Roman Catholics at the time of the British taking over the rule of French Canada.

Immediately when all the country became a British possession, these Vicars-General manifested great loyalty towards the new British Government, and in their letters to the Clergy exhorted them all to an entire submission, and public prayers were said in churches and the singing of the Te Deum was commanded for the King. This action was greatly appreciated by their new sovereign and helped to win for the Church greater liberty later on.

The See of Quebec is, as we have seen, vacant. To properly function as a vital free agent, a Bishop must be appointed by the Chapter and the Vicars-General and receive royal assent.

A petition had been sent to London 1763 to entreat the King for the full exercise of the Catholic religion in accordance with the terms of the Treaty of Paris.

In the meantime, however, the Chapter and the Vicars-General, relying more on the King's kindness than an clauses of a treaty, presented to His Majesty an address asking that the See of Quebec be filled. On September 15, 1763, two days after sending this petition, they elected as successor to Bishop de Ponthriand, Grand-Vicar Montgolfier. The new Bishop sailed a few weeks later for London to obtain the Royal assent.

Governor Murray, however, had thought that the new Bishop was too rigid in the discharge of his duties, and not having been advised of the proceedings whereby the new Bishop was elected, he wrote strongly to the British Government opposing the granting of Royal assent to the new Bishop, with the result that the British Minister opposed the sanction and later Bishop Montgolfier resigned all the rights conferred upon him by the Chapter and suggested that Abbe Briand be elected in his place.

Governor General Murray favored the nomination and wrote to London speaking highly of him as one worthy of royal favor.

A year later in 1765, the British Government announced that they would not oppose his consecration and in January, 1766, he was consecrated Bishop. His return to Canada was the source of great joy to the Canadians, and marked a great milestone in the History of Canada, for he was the first of the noble line of Catholic Bishops under British Rule in Canada.

Jean Olivier Briand was one of the greatest Canadian bishops and his pupil, friend and secretary, Bishop Plessis, who was consecrated in 1801, later was destined to be the great leader to achieve the organization of the Canadian church. He too, like the great master, never renounced a right, yet acted so discreetly, and loyally that he never offended English feelings.

Bishop Briand was a remarkable man. It would do every Canadian good to study this great Canadian. He once said – "I know how to love, not how to fear; kindness renders me weak, rigour and insult find me manly and firm." Such was Bishop Briand. Respectful yet forceful, he enjoyed the confidence and respect of the new masters of Canada, and as a consequence he obtained freedom for his Ministry.

He formed new parishes, ordained priests and appointed pastors, and he did so freely because he dared to protest when he met opposition.

When the Americans invaded Canada in 1775, it was Bishop Briand who did much to maintain the loyalty of his flock, and his behavior at this time of stress and trial for the British Crown won the gratitude of the British Government and he was voted a pension of £200 and was given also rental of £150 for the use of the Episcopal palace which he had rebuilt, but did not occupy.

Under his guidance the Canadian church improved, but there were grievances that came about as a consequence of instructions received by the Governors from the British Government. It is not our intention to enlarge on these; but, to the student of religious liberty, they make interesting reading today.

By the operation of some of these instructions, many of the religious orders disappeared, greatly depleting the ranks of the Canadian Clergy. The secular priests were not numerous, only 180 in 1758, falling to 138 in 1766. Bishop Briand ordained 90 and by his efforts 118 parishes were established.

In 1794 the Bishop of Quebec sent to Upper Canada for the first time a priest with the title of Vicar-General, Father Edmond Burke, who had a great vision of the future for Ontario.

The province was a wilderness. He was stationed at Niagara in 1798, in 1800 at York and in 1801 at Kingston. His brilliant dreams of great accomplishments faded out with the result that he was appointed to a new congregation in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The population at this time did not exceed 20,000, and of these the greater portion were loyalists from the United States, and mostly Protestants. It was not until Scottish Catholics arrived that the Catholic faith began to progress in Upper Canada. Scottish Catholics, under their pastor Father McKenna, came from the colony of New York. They settled ultimately in Glengarry and were followed by the Rev. Roderick MacDonnell in 1785, serving at St. Regis.

Next year, the Rev. Father Alexander MacDonnell arrived, bringing with him another group of Scottish Catholics, and founded in Glengarry the parish of St. Raphael.

This can be called the real beginning of Catholic growth in Ontario and the impetus whereby a healthy establishment of the Catholic faith took place in the Valley of the Ottawa.

It is a remarkable and romantic fact that when Bishop Denaut, the Bishop of Quebec, visited Glengarry in the winter of 1802 and erected into parishes the flourishing establishments at St. Raphael and St. Andrews, he appointed, as their pastors, the missionaries, Fathers Alexander and Roderick MacDonnell. From a historical standpoint it is of interest as showing clearly the advance of the faith in Ontario, that on these two great occasions the Bishop confirmed upwards of 2000 people.

In 1803 the Scottish Highlanders of Glengarry received a new contingent which deserves special notice.

It has been stated previously that Father Alexander MacDonnell, later the great Bishop, had obtained lands for his Highlanders, the great Glengarry Fencibles, who settled in 1803 among their friends in Glengarry, when he, Father MacDonnell, succeeded his namesake Alexander MacDonnell, who had just died, as Pastor of St. Raphael, being appointed also by Bishop Denaut.

He was made Vicar General in 1807; thus beginning the brilliant career which has meant so much to the faith in Ontario.

Bishop Plessis was a close friend and admirer of Bishop MacDonnell, for in 1816 he sent him to London in order to secure by means of his credit with the British Government, authority to create new bishoprics in Canada, and as a result of this great accomplishment, and in accordance with it, Lord Castlereagh asked the Holy See to erect two other vicariates-apostolic, one in Upper Canada, and one in the Maritime provinces; and in consequence Father Alexander MacDonnell was consecrated in Quebec on December 31, 1821, as Bishop for Upper Canada; and Quebec was raised to the rank of an archbishopric.

In 1826 Upper Canada was Created into an independent Diocese with Kingston as a See. This advance marks another milestone in Upper Canada history.

In 1819 the total population of Catholic faith had grown to over 14,915 with seven priests.

In 1827 Bishop MacDonnell found that Glengarry still had more of the faith than any other district, with Sandwich running second.

The years 1828 and 1829 saw the rise of parishes at Peterborough, Belleville, Prescott and Bytown.

Bishop MacDonnell was careful to secure by grant of Government, or by purchase, grounds for churches, priests' houses and cemeteries in every place where he saw a mission could be opened. He saw that the Catholic Church would grow, for the Irish Catholic influx was now beginning. From 1819 to 1825, 65,534 entered Canada. In a single year, 1831, 50,000 entered. The flow continued until the famine of 1848 and afterwards slowly decreased. These new comers sought in the new world, bread and liberty. The greatest proportion found it in Ontario.

In 1819 Bishop MacDonnell estimated the Irish Catholic population at Perth as 600 to 700, and to this, in 1822, 400 more families were added, numbering about 2000 souls, who settled at Peterborough. And so Bytown, considered once the "Hill of Canada", came into the fold as explained before. We now arrive at the beginning of the new day when things began to move fast and successfully in the Ottawa Valley.

It is a remarkable fact, that when the English came, the Church lost its place as a state Church, but it Consolidated its power between 1765 and 1829, and soon was more free from intervention than it had been under the French Crown. So now we have arrived at the great sowing period of the Church in Ontario.

Up to 1841 the congregation of Bytown had been served spasmodically by the neighboring clergy, Father Terence Smith of Richmond, Joseph Desautel of Aylmer, Pierre Lefavre of Longueuil, and John Brady of Buckingham. Now, seeing that this condition was not conducive to success,

by way of friendly assistance to the Bishop of Kingston, Bishop Bourget of Montreal sent his Vicar-General, Rev. Patrick Phelan, to Bytown.

Father Phelan stands out in bold relief as the builder and pacifier, for by his able and saintly work he mastered what was really a difficult situation in Bytown, and received from all men of good faith the support which he so well merited. He enlarged the Church and with the help of his assistant, Abbe Hippolyte Moreau, prepared for the visit that Bishop Gaulin in 1843 made to the country along the Ottawa valley, where several establishments had been formed and new ones were arising each day.

Father Phelan, through his good works and admitted ability as an administrator, was raised to the position of Bishop of Kingston and Bytown for a time. In 1844 he called to Bytown the Oblates of Mary Immaculate who in succeeding years have done such wonderful things for Ottawa and the Ottawa Valley.

Father Pierre Telmon was the first of the order in Bytown, which then (1844) contained 2,362 Catholics, of whom 1,298 were Irish and 1,064 French Canadians.

In 1845 an enactment took place whereby civil incorporation was granted to the Dioceses of Kingston and Toronto. In 1857 Bishop Phelan died and the Rev. John Horan became Bishop of Kingston. He found that Kingston, the Mother Church, had to strip herself for her children and so in the same year Bytown was erected into a Bishopric. This was the golden year for Bytown, or Ottawa, in that it became the great Mother centre of the counties of Prescott, Russell, Carleton, Northern part of Lanark and Renfrew, with 24,830 Catholics and, in Quebec, the County of Ottawa, then including Pontiac, together with a part of what is now the County of Argenteuil, the number of Catholics in these Counties being 14,106, making the total population (Catholic) of the Diocese of Bytown, or Ottawa, 38,936.

The first Bishop of the new See was chosen from the Order of the Oblates, who had been in charge of the congregation. Their provincial superior, the Rev. Father Joseph Eugene Bruno Guigues was elected in 1847 and consecrated in 1848. He had spent one year in studying English because his Diocese had an Irish Catholic population by this time of 23,690 Irish out of a total population of 38,936 Catholics. In 1848 he mentions in his report that he had in his Diocese three stone churches, three frame ones and twenty-three log chapels, the only presbytery that at Aylmer. Bytown then had a population of some 7,700, souls of whom 4,798 were Catholics.

In 1854 Bytown became Ottawa. In 1857 it was chosen by Queen Victoria as the capital, the population then being 14,669, of which 8,267 were Catholics.

It was a big task that confronted Bishop Guigues, but, like those great Bishops who had preceded him, he was equal to the task. Through his activity, with the hearty and unceasing support of the oblates and the devotion

of his secular clergy, flourishing institutions sprang into existence as convents, churches and parishes – the Cathedral consecrated by Monsignor Bedini, the papal envoy, the seminary and the college to become the University of Ottawa in 1866, churches in the city and suburbs, the hospital, the orphanage and the magnificent Mother House of the Grey Nuns who had arrived in Bytown from Montreal in 1845. In 1847 these noble sisters did great and heroic work in aiding the Oblate Fathers to care for the poor typhus stricken Irish Immigrants. This work stands out as one of the noblest in the History of the Capital City of Canada. Bishop Guigues obtained their independence from their Mother House in 1854 and they took the name of Grey Nuns of the Cross in 1885. By 1912 this order numbered 700 sisters, distributed on their errands of mercy and grace among 17 Dioceses in Canada and the United States.

From Ottawa the Bishop sent out missionaries to the country North of Ottawa following the pathway of the missionaries of the Far West, who had done their noble work among the Indians, trappers and traders in the days when Canada was French. As early as 1836 many missions had been established in these far hinterlands. In fact Father Francis Cannon and Paschal Brunet were directed by the Bishop of Montreal to visit the posts in Upper Ottawa, which they did and found there many Catholic families. These two journeyed as far as Fort Coulonge whilst Father Louis LeFebvre de Bellefeuille went with Father Baptiste Dupuis to preach to the Indians on Lake Temiskaming.

In 1845 these Northern missions were entrusted to the Oblates and they visited posts on the Abitibi and Hudson Bay, ministering to the ignorant Indians and trappers. Under Bishop Bourget, the missions and parishes continued to open up and to increase in number and importance. To mention some: the parishes of Montebello, Grenville, Buckingham, Portage du Fort, Fort Coulonge, St. Alphonsus of Allumette, St. Alexander of Calumet, St. Stephen of Chelsea, St. François de Sales of the Gatineau and St. Joseph of Carleton.

When Bishop Guigues took charge he founded in the new settlements at Renfrew, Arnprior and Pembroke new churches and parishes. He founded and entrusted to the Oblates the famous mission of Maniwaki in 1851. So great was the need for workers, he obtained on his journeys to Rome priests from Europe, including 40 secular priests from Ireland. In 1874 when he died the Diocese of Ottawa contained 55 parishes, 33 missions, 26 regulars, 4 religious communities and 13 convents; the Catholic population having become 96,548 souls of whom 56,474 were Irish and 40,074 were Irish and English.

His work stands out as a grand work. It marks the effort of a man who at all times placed the work of His Saviour before that of man. He was truly a

builder of the Ottawa Valley – and one whose life should be intimately studied by all, regardless of faith.

His successor, Bishop Joseph Thomas Duhamel (1874) continued the great work and stands with him as one of the great builders of the faith in the Ottawa Valley.

During his regime several orders were established here: 1883 the Fathers of the Society of Mary; 1884 the Dominicans in charge of St. John the Baptist's Church; 1890 the Capuchins who served St. Francis of Assisi, Ottawa; 1892 the Brothers of the Christian School; 1879 the Sisters of Mercy; 1887 the Sisters of the Precious Blood; 1901 the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

New Townships were opened and new parishes established and by 1881 the Catholic population of the Ottawa See stood at 127,993 – 82,264 French and 45,669 English speaking. Soon Ottawa became too cumbersome and the Diocese of Pembroke was formed in 1898 with the Vicariate-Apostolic a bishopric. The new Bishop being the Right Reverend Narcisse-Zephyrin Lorrain. The Vicariate-Apostolic of Pontiac was also separated from Ottawa and by 1911 the Catholic population of Ottawa, Pembroke, Temiskaming, had become 226,884 served by 190 secular priests, 175 regulars, with two colleges, 241 churches, 17 hospitals and homes, 242 parishes and missions, one university, 26 religious communities, and 23 convents ; and in what was a wilderness, in the space of less than 100 years the Cross of Redemption had been venerated and a great and noble citizenry had been built in the Catholic Faith, all on account of the noble work done by the great Canadians we have briefly mentioned. Surely the grains of mustard seed sown by Bishops Briand, Plessis and MacDonnell have been fertile and powerful, for from their work a great harvest has sprung.

From early days Ottawa was known as “the Pointe”, “Rideau Place”, and later as “Richmond Landing” because the principal road from here ran to the Richmond Military Settlement in Gloucester Township. Everyone passed through “the Landing” and the settlers from Richmond came here to get their mail and meet their friends.

In 1818 the 99th Regiment of Foot, famous in the Napoleonic wars, was disbanded at Quebec, and on the 20th of July a number of Officers and men set out to found a military settlement at what we know today as Richmond, 20 miles southwest of the Chaudiere Falls. These were the first permanent settlers in Carleton County, and here also with the pioneer settlers, as always, was established a Catholic chapel.

The first Rev. Father Heron was Catholic priest at Richmond between 1822 and 1827. In 1827 Bishop MacDonnell sent him to Bytown. Pierre Desloges built him a house near the corner of Victoria and Kent Streets, almost on the spot now occupied by the Supreme Court. For a time he held services in a frame house directly below at the water's edge, just at the North

end of Bank Street. For two years he did noble work in this parish. The famous Ottawa poet of those days, William Pitt Lett, leaves a happy picture of Father Heron. This was his description of him:

“His country one can scarcely miss, Such pure Hibernian brogue is his,
A merry twinkle in his eye, Not sanctimonious, nor yet sly.”

The next father to serve in Bytown carried on from 1829 to 1831. He was the Reverend Angus MacDonnell, nephew of Bishop MacDonnell. This Highland Scottish parish priest held services in the upper part of the Market building on George Street in Lower Town, and in Upper Town in a little frame church near the corner of Elgin and Sparks Streets.

In 1831 the Rev. Father Lawlor, who succeeded the Rev. Angus MacDonnell, purchased with the authority of Bishop MacDonnell, three lots of ordinance land on the East side of Sussex Street and on one of these lots erected a small wooden chapel.

The first terrible cholera epidemic broke out in 1832, and during the months whilst this dread scourge raged Father Lawlor did noble work among the stricken Catholics and Protestants alike, sacrificing himself to such an extent that his health became impaired, and, unfortunately for Bytown, he had to leave. On the 2nd of November the villagers gathered in sorrowing crowds to bid the dearly beloved and noble Father farewell. His name stands high in the ranks of the noble men who served Bytown in her early formative years.

He was succeeded by the Rev. Father J. Cullen who for two years devotedly served this lovely settlement in the midst of the wilderness.

During the period of the Most Reverend Angus MacDonnell he was assisted by the Rev. John Cannon, who himself took complete charge of the Bytown parish in 1836 and served in the little chapel, that had been erected by Father Lawlor and added to by the Rev. Father MacDonnell, until 1842. Father Cannon was a man of great moral force, and spoke fluently in both English and French. During his incumbency the little chapel, in which Fathers Lawlor and MacDonnell had done such noble service, was moved across the street to make room for the beautiful cut-stone Basilica built by Antoine Robillard of St. Eustache and Terrebonne.

By the 26th of October, 1842, the Parish had grown to such proportions that the Rev. Father Patrick Phelan came with the title of Vicar General. He was consecrated a Bishop and in 1843 was sent to Kingston.

For a time missionaries of the Oblate Fathers took charge to create and organize new parishes by following step by step the rapid progress of civilization, to convert the Indians and to strengthen the faith of the thousands of laborers abandoned in the lumber camps.

This gives a pen picture of the evolution of the early days. But it would be unjust not to draw a pen picture of perhaps one of the most picturesque

Fathers of these early days; the one who for 45 years served faithfully his flock in Old Corktown along the canal bank between the present Plaza Bridge and Waverly Street, the area where the Irish families settled in the early days whilst the canal was being built.

He and the beloved pastor of St. Andrews Presbyterian church, stand out as two of the most devoted, heroic men of the early Bytown days. These two gallant men worked harmoniously together in caring for the typhus-stricken immigrants passing through Bytown. The Rev. Mr. Durie took the disease and died in September, and Father Molloy heroically carried on the dangerous work, when helpers were all too few, and raised by his devotion the hearts and spirits of the devoted workers and the sick and dying.

There should be erected in this city two statues to commemorate the memory of Father Molloy and the Rev. William Durie; for theirs was a devoted, heroic and Christ-like service.

Father Molloy was spared for many years to live out a noble and useful life. Stern, devoted, he had a way with him that inspired his rough parishioners to respect and confidence. He was the terror of the evil doer. His kindness, his devotion, the anecdotes of his life were for many years the favorite topic of scores of homes in the Ottawa Valley. He stands out clearly as the beloved and devoted pastor of a very stormy period in the life of the Ottawa Valley.

In those terrible typhus-laden years the church played a noble part in the life of Bytown and Ottawa, and it would not be correct to pass over this period without mentioning the work of Bishop Phelan, who came to Ottawa during these terrible years and became so convinced of the necessity of a Hospital that he wrote the Sister Superior of the Grey Nuns at Montreal forcibly setting forth the urgency of nursing aid. As a result, on the 10th of February, 1845, Sister Elizabeth Bruyere, together with Sisters Charlebois, Roderiquez and Thibodeau and two young novices who insisted on accompanying them, bade a tearful farewell to the Mother House and set out for Bytown in a sleigh. That night they spent at Montebello (La Petite Nation) where they were the guests of Louis Papineau. On the evening of the 12th they were met three miles from Bytown by eighty vehicles filled with the most prominent people of Bytown, coming out to meet them, both Catholic and Protestant. The Oblate Fathers placed the Presbytery at the disposal of the Sisters of Mercy and on the 11th of March they entered the small frame building erected for hospital purposes, at 163-169 St. Patrick Street, and on the 10th of May it was formally opened and given a charter under the name of the General Hospital, beginning a career of devotion and service that stands out as one of the most beautiful and glorious achievements of the "Sisters of Mercy" in Ottawa. In 1847 a large frame building was erected on Water Street, near the site of the present building and in that summer from the 6th of June to the end of August six to eight typhus patients

were admitted every day and many tents had to be erected on the meadow lands nearby to accommodate the overflow.

It is a remarkable fact that every member of the heroic company of Sisters caught the fever, but all recovered and continued their grand work. The Reverend Father Molloy did everything in his power to assist and allay their suffering and bring spiritual comfort to these typhus-stricken people.

This work stands out distinctly as one of the most outstanding and heroic in Ottawa's history, and no story of Ottawa or the church could be complete with it left out.

Thus we have gained a sort of pen picture of the early days of the church of the early 19th century in Bytown, and it is a remarkable fact that its growth kept pace with the settlement being formed; and as each new settlement was formed, operations were initiated from Ottawa that assured success for the church in the new fields opening up so rapidly between that period from 1832 to 1860.