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1854 — ST DUNSTAN'S COLLEGE — 1954

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St. Dunstan's College, although it is nearly one hundred years old, was not the first Catholic institution of higher learning in Prince Edward Island. When Bishop MacEachern received independent control of the diocese of Charlottetown in 1929, he was faced with many problems, one of which was the scarcity of priests in the territory entrusted to his spiritual care. There were only three priests in P. E. I. and assistance from foreign parts could not be obtained. Upon the advice of the Archbishop of Quebec that a college should be built for the training of young men for the priesthood, Bishop MacEachern called a meeting in the summer of 1830 of the principal men of the diocese to devise ways and means to educate the youth—"not only for the Church, but also for any other secular employment." The next year Bishop MacEachern visited New Brunswick, then part of his diocese. He went from there to visit the Bishop at Halifax where he met Rev. Edward Walsh, an Irish immigrant who had some previous experience in teaching in Irish colleges. After some discussion between the two Bishops and Father Walsh, the latter consented to come to P. E. I. and become Rector of the new college. The building which was considered by Bishop MacEachern for the college was his own private residence at St. Andrews, a building described by him as follows: "The house I live in is 38x30 feet, two stories high, with good cellar, and, with the exception of one room and bed, may be used until something on a better plan can be made." Here on the feast of St. Andrew, 1831, St. Andrew's College, the first Catholic institution of higher learning on P. E. I. and the predecessor of our present St. Dunstan's College, was formally opened. From this humble institution with its meagre equipment and faced with almost insurmountable obstacles came forth a brave group of men who were the first of an unending succession of Island youth who consecrated their lives to the cause of Christ. In all, two Bishops and twenty-two priests are numbered among the alumni of St. Andrew's College.

About twenty students were enrolled the first year. The curriculum comprised Greek, Latin, French, and Mathematics and the subjects taught in a commercial course. A Board of Trustees was appointed for the College and incorporated by an act of the Legislature. The Legis-



lature later voted the sum of fifty pounds annually for the support of the College. Father Walsh was succeeded by Rev. Charles MacDonald (1835), Rev. James Beady (1838) and Rev. Pius MacPhee (1843).

In 1844 Bishop MacDonald closed St. Andrew's College. The discipline at the College had become very lax and not in keeping with the ideals which should prevail in such an institution. To replace the old college the Bishop decided to build a larger, more up-to-date institution near Charlottetown. Earlier His Excellency had purchased a farm about one and a half miles from the city on the eastern side of the Malpeque Road with the intention of erecting a college. Consequently in 1845, tenders were called for the erection of a new college on the site of the present St. Dunstan's, which site was a small hillock then called Mt. St. Bernard. It is from this position atop a small hill that the college received in later years the appellation "The College on the Hill".

Building the new college proved to be a very difficult task and for nine years the struggle continued. The Catholic people of the province, because of their own poverty, were able to contribute little towards this work. Father John MacMillan in his **History of the Catholic Church in Prince Edward Island** tells us: "Sometimes a whole year would pass with little or no sign of advancement; but at the time of which we write, enough had been done to attract the attention of the public, who were forced to admit that much had been accomplished by the Bishop with the scanty means at his disposal." However, donations were received from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in France and the work was pushed forward as rapidly as possible. "The Royal Gazette" of the day had this to say: "The Catholic college which is nearly completed, is an imposing structure three stories high, with a cupola intended for an observatory, and is situated in the Royalty, on the Malpeque or Princetown Road, about a mile and a half from Charlottetown. The rooms are lofty and spacious, and from the size and number of the dormitories, is capable of accommodating many students. There is a most extensive view from the observatory, and the building itself is a conspicuous object in the landscape for many miles in the interior." The building was of wood and with the exception of the Colonial Building, was the most magnificent structure in the colony.



During 1854 Bishop MacDonald began to make preparation for the opening of the new college which was now nearing completion. On September 21, 1854, he issued a pastoral letter announcing the opening of the college. In this letter, he wrote, "We address you with an affectionate interest on a subject which must be gratifying to you. From the time we were charged with the spiritual care of this destitute diocese, we fully comprehended that a regular succession of clergy could not be maintained without a diocesan Seminary, however humble in its pretensions. To effect so desirable an object, we hesitated not some years ago to give the savings of many years, being all we possessed, to purchase a piece of land in the vicinity of Charlottetown, on which has since been erected, entirely by means of successive donations received from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith established in France, a magnificent building in which it is intended to give a **literary, moral and religious** education to all who choose to avail themselves of it." After making reference to the delay in completing the building, Bishop MacDonald continues his pastoral, "We therefore seize this occasion to announce to you, that it is our intention to open the college for the reception of pupils on or before the first of January next."

Realizing that many parents would be unable to defray the expense of sending a young man to the college, the Bishop asked the pastors to choose one or two boys of talent and good moral conduct and that their expenses be paid by annual collections or subscriptions in the parish. On the seventeenth of January, 1855, St. Dunstan's College was formally opened. Bishop MacDonald and a number of the clergy attended. Because of the scarcity of priests in the diocese there was not one available to take charge of the new institution. However, Mr. Angus MacDonald, an ecclesiastical student, accepted the responsibility and thereby became the first Rector of the College. His assistant was also a seminarian, Mr. James Phelan, who had come from Ireland a few months before. (Mr. MacDonald was ordained on November 11 of the opening year, and Mr. Phelan in August 1856). Eighteen students were enrolled the first time since this was all that could be accommodated at the college because it was not completed inside. During the summer of 1855 further accommodations were made and the enrolment began to increase gradually.

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On July 15, 1856, the College had its first public closing attended by Bishop MacDonald, Father Perry, Father Brady, the Solicitor General and other friends of the institution. A press account of the occasion reveals that great progress had been made by the students in the various phases of study. The system of public examination, which was in vogue at that time, showed marked proficiency in Virgil and Caesar's Commentaries as well as facility in French. This high standard of scholarship is in evidence in every examination report while this system of examination was used. Thus in 1858 we read that special commendation was extended to a class whose average age was "not more than twelve or thirteen", each member of which acquitted himself with distinction upon examination in two books of Virgil.

Accommodations at the new St. Dunstan's College during these early years were far from comfortable. The conditions were those of the pioneer; conditions which could be endured only by men with faith and courage. In the book by Father MacMillan cited above, we read of Bishop MacDonald driving by sleigh from Rustico to the College on a mid-winter morning, consecrating some altar stones and celebrating Mass, a ceremony of over three hours in a chapel that was entirely without fire. If His Excellency had to endure such, we may presume the students of the time had to endure equal hardships. One student related that he invariably left his shoe brush near his wash basin at night, for he needed it to break the ice in the morning. The scholastic year in those days extended from September until mid July without Christmas or Easter holidays and permission to Charlottetown was practically unheard of. The tuition in 1860 was twenty four pounds and in 1890 it had advanced to \$112. During 1860 and 1861 a vain attempt was made to obtain Government endowment which prompted much controversy and some political action that was far from being praiseworthy. Lack of funds was always a major obstacle which taxed the abilities of the authorities to the limit. Various methods were used to raise funds of which the most frequent and productive were tea parties. Various amounts from ninety to five hundred pounds were realized from these affairs.

In 1862 it was found that the College was in need of repair and the Rector, Father Angus MacDonald, decided that it should be attended to at once. The outer walls were removed piece by piece and replaced by solid walls



of brick. The excellence of the work done is evidenced by the fact that the same bricks are still there with few replacements. A monster picnic was held to help defray the cost of this work.

Father Angus MacDonald was relieved of the arduous duties of Rector in 1869 and was succeeded by Very Rev. James MacDonald, who bore the burdens and difficulties of the office for eleven years. During his time the enrolment varied from thirty-one to seventy-two. The same high standard of education was maintained as may be learned from the following excerpt from a newspaper account of the Commencement Exercises, June 25, 1880: "Professor Caven and Rev Dougald MacDonald examined the students in Caesar, Ovid, Cicero and Sallust; Dr. O'Brien examined classes in Livy, Metaphysics and General Ethics; Dr. Conroy in Natural Philosophy; and Rev. Charles MacDonald and Thomas Foley, Esq., in Homer and Euclid."

In 1880, the College was placed under the control of the Jesuits through the ardent efforts of Bishop MacIntyre, third Bishop of Charlottetown. However, at the end of the school year, June 1881, the Jesuits decided that conditions were not satisfactory to them. They withdrew from their recently undertaken charge and the administration of the College reverted to the diocesan clergy with Rev. Jean Chaisson as Rector.

The condition of the College was now precarious indeed. The number of students was small, debt was piling up year by year and the possibility of carrying on seemed doubtful. Many were so discouraged that they advised the Bishop to close its doors. But here it was that the vigor, foresight and determination of Bishop MacIntyre came to the fore and saved the institution from extinction. His famous reply to the discouraging advice was: "Close my eyes first, then close the college." In an effort to improve the conditions, Rev. J. C. MacDonald was appointed Rector in 1884. The enrolment rapidly increased from twenty-five in 1883 to one hundred in 1885 and indeed it never again sank to its former low ebb. The College motto, "Ex eodem fonte, fides et scientia", was composed about this time by two members of the staff, Dr. P. J. O'Ryan and Rev. J. A. MacDonald. Rev. A. P. MacLellan was appointed Rector in 1891 but remained only one year and was succeeded by Rev. James Morrison, later Bishop of



Antigonish. Through the energy and executive ability of Dr. Morrison, St. Dunstan's was affiliated with Laval University which affiliation is maintained to this day. The first degrees were conferred in 1893; those receiving the degrees of Bachelor of Arts were Messrs. Terrence Campbell, Frank Murphy and William McKenna. In 1895 Rev. Peter Curran was appointed Rector which office he held for three years. During his tenure of office the first rink was built and the running track which used to encircle the field where the gym now stands was constructed. When Rev. A. P. MacLellan became Rector in 1895 the enrolment reached one hundred and twenty. The accommodations were very inadequate for such a large group so the Board of Governors decided that a wing should be built. This work was completed in time for the opening of the College in 1899. This provided, besides ample room, the modern conveniences of steam heating, sewerage and electric lights—veritable luxuries in those days. An annex was built in 1903 as a residence for a Community of Sisters from France who took over the domestic work of the house. These Sisters remained six years when they were replaced by a Community from Sherbrooke, Quebec, who in turn were succeeded in 1915 by the Sisters of St. Martha who have most diligently performed the domestic work and many other duties since that time.

In 1917 the Board of Governors of the College was incorporated under the name of St. Dunstan's University and the power to confer degrees was granted by the Provincial Legislature. This faculty, however, was not used until 1940. Through the splendid munificence of Sir Charles Dalton a much-needed residence building, appropriately named Dalton Hall, was completed and opened in 1919. The new residence was much needed since the influx of students following the World War raised the enrolment to the high peak of two hundred and ninety-two. In 1924 and 1926 the present handball alleys and the rink were built as well as a cold storage plant. On August 7 and 8, 1929, St. Dunstan's observed with due celebration the seventy-fifth anniversary of its founding. During the 1930's the serious depression which pervaded the country had its effects upon the College. Enrolment dropped noticeably and little expansion took place. Since 1939, however, and especially during the past decade, great strides in the building program have taken place. In 1939 the Science Hall was built which contains lecture rooms and laborator-



ies for Chemistry, Physics and Biology. Memorial Hall was erected in 1946-47 as a residence building. A unit containing a chapel, dining room, infirmary, kitchen and convent was completed in 1950. A Central Heating Plant and Laundry was also erected at the same time. The Alumni Gymnasium-Auditorium, the newest building on the campus, was presented to the College by the Alumni Association in 1951.

St. Dunstan's was founded as a liberal arts college and remains predominantly so today. However, various other courses have been added during the years. In 1885 a commercial course was opened which has been continued without interruption to the present. A course leading to a Bachelor of Science degree was begun in 1940 with the first graduates receiving degrees in 1944. The four year Commerce course was started in 1947. Pre-dental and pre-medical courses have been provided in the past decade.

The first college publication was the **Collegium**, which appeared in 1886. This first attempt lasted only a few years; it was revived in 1892 and continued until 1896. **Red and White** was begun in 1910 and has continued without intermission since.

The Extension Department of St. Dunstan's College was founded in 1935 and was designed to promote the work of adult education on P. E. I. Since that time, the Department has expanded to include many other activities especially in the work of Credit Unions, Co-operatives and aiding fishermen.

To provide higher education for the young Catholic ladies of the diocese, St. Dunstan's became co-educational in 1942.

The past hundred years have seen many changes in St. Dunstan's, yet its location, its aims, its policy of devotion and sacrifice remains the same. Its accommodations which were pioneer are now modern; its curriculum is wider and more suited to present-day requirements; and its staff, which at first consisted of two ecclesiastics, has grown to a total of twenty six. In the evolution which has been described in these pages, St. Dunstan's College has progressed from a small, diocesan college designed to meet the immediate needs of the pioneer days to an institution which is revered at home and honored abroad.

—John Mullally '53.