

175 SISTER PROFILES:

Mother Mary Bonaventure Kennedy

Sister Kathleen Kull

The sub-title of the *Mother's Book* on Mother Mary Bonaventure Kennedy is truly appropriate: *A Far-Sighted Mother*. The daughter of Irish immigrants, Mary Martin and John Kennedy, Margaret was born on February 4, 1844 in Dalhousie, NB.

The Sisters of Charity opened Holy Family Convent in Bathurst West, NB in January 1864 in response to the request of James Rogers, the first Bishop of Chatham who knew us from his days as a parish priest in Halifax. His younger sister had been accepted into St. Mary School the first day the Sisters of Charity arrived in Halifax. She later entered and was known as Sister Martina.

In the summer of 1864 we opened a second New Brunswick mission in Newcastle. Though both schools prospered, we withdrew from Newcastle in 1870 and Bathurst Village in 1871, since our Sisters were not qualified to give French lessons as desired.



**Mother Mary
Bonaventure Kennedy**



CELEBRATING

175

YEARS OF JOYFUL WITNESS

1849 - 2024



First Sisters missioned to St. Patrick, Roxbury:

Mary Baptista Bauld, Mary Pauline Burns, Mary Xavier Mulvena, Mary Bonaventure Kennedy (Local Superior), Maria Hurley, Mary Sebastian Thibodeau and Mary Evangelista McNamara

These short-lived foundations had long-lasting influence. Three of the New Brunswick postulants later served as Mothers Superior: Joanna Harrington-Mother Mary Benedicta; Catherine Connors-Mother Mary Cleophas and Margaret Kennedy-Mother Mary Bonaventure.

Margaret Kennedy entered the Congregation in November, 1866. On February 2, 1867 she became a novice with the name Sister Mary Bonaventure. Since her formal education was meager, S. Bonaventure may have stayed

longer at the Motherhouse for further instruction before teaching at St. Patrick School in Halifax in 1870. The Sisters at St. Patrick School taught in the church basement and lived at St. Mary Convent until St. Patrick Convent opened in 1871. In 1872, S. Bonaventure was among the first Sisters who taught in the newly built St. Patrick School. Though community records are unclear, it seems she next taught at Mt. St. Vincent Academy from 1876-1878, then Sacred Heart Academy in French Acadian Meteghan from 1878-1882. In the

fall of 1882 S. Bonaventure, as local Superior, and two other Sisters were sent to Our Lady of Lourdes Convent in Stellarton, NS to staff a parochial school. The Sisters increased their income by opening a post office in the convent, concretizing St. Vincent de Paul's words *Inventiveness unto Infinity!*

S. Bonaventure, as Superior, and six other Sisters opened our first US mission in 1887 at St. Patrick Parish, Roxbury, MA. At the December 1889 election S. Bonaventure became the eighth Mother Superior of the Congregation. Her two terms were marked by unprecedented geographical expansion and interest in enlarging the Motherhouse. Mother Mary Bonaventure's predecessor, Mother Mary Cleophas, had twice refused the requests of Reverend Doctor James Bellord, chaplain to the forces in Bermuda, to send Sisters citing the great distance

from Bermuda to Halifax and the recent opening of the US mission. Fr. Bellord quickly approached Mother Bonaventure. After consulting Halifax Archbishop Cornelius O'Brien, Mother Bonaventure sent four Sisters to this far-away mission, including Mother Mary Cleophas as Superior!

The Congregation of Notre Dame, who replaced us in New Brunswick in the 1870's, withdrew in 1890. In response to Bishop Rogers' request we took charge of Sacred Heart School in Bathurst early in September of 1890 and resumed charge of Holy Family School in Bathurst West, both public schools under the law of New Brunswick. This return to New Brunswick led another postulant to follow in the footsteps of three of her New Brunswick predecessors. Mary Emma Meahan, who entered the Congregation in February, 1895,

would later serve as Mother General (1926-1944).

In 1891 a house was opened in Harbor Boucher, NS. With the purchase of property in Wellesley Hills, MA the Academy of the Assumption boarding school opened in 1893. That same year St. Joseph Orphanage in Halifax relocated to Quinpool Road, with accommodations for more children than previously possible. Sisters were sent to conduct a public school in St. Anne Parish, Glace Bay, NS in 1894.

Mother Bonaventure agreed to the 1894 proposal of Bishop John Cameron of Antigonish: that in return for sending candidates from the diocese of Antigonish for the institute of auxiliary Sisters, we would establish a convent of auxiliary Sisters in Antigonish. Congregational history shows this

did not work out as anticipated: eventually the Sisters of St. Martha became a separate Congregation; our short-lived experience of having auxiliary Sisters within the Congregation was recognized as a failure.

Classes to prepare novices and young Sisters as teachers had always been held at Mt. St. Vincent. On November 12, 1895, the Halifax Council on Public Instruction recognized our training school as a Provincial Normal School for Sisters. Though lacking in formal education herself, Mother Bonaventure was very alert to the need for the Sisters' professional training, sending them for higher studies at home and abroad. She seemed to appeal very strongly to educated people. Men, particularly, were drawn to admire her keen business instincts. Priests and doctors, with whom she came in contact, had great respect for her

judgments and became influential friends of the Congregation.

Upon completion of her second term as Mother Superior on December 8, 1895, Mother Bonaventure became Superior of the Academy of the Assumption in Wellesley, MA, a “successful manager of all she surveyed”. In 1906 Mother Bonaventure was influential in the start of a retreat movement for laity. Amazingly, this group known as the “A Kempis Circle”, still meets and provides retreat opportunities!

In 1910, Mother Bonaventure was relieved of her duty as Superior of the Academy of the Assumption and spent a year of rest and quiet at the Motherhouse, only to return as Procuratrix in 1911. She, along with Mother Mary Cleophas and Mother Mary Fidelis—her predecessor and follower—were honoured at this May

1912 joint celebration: the fortieth ordination anniversary of Father Joseph Gallagher, so influential in our first US mission, and the 25th anniversary of St. Patrick School, Roxbury.

Mother Bonaventure spent her last years at St. Margaret’s Convent, Dorchester. There her Golden Jubilee was celebrated on November 1, 1916. She died there on February 6, 1919. A Mass was celebrated in St. Margaret’s Convent prior to the funeral Mass and burial in Halifax.

What tremendous work Margaret Harrington-Mother Mary Bonaventure accomplished! Her faith and hope in God, the Congregation, herself were boundless. She was a great woman, a great religious, who gave herself a hundredfold, a Sister of Charity who truly was

A Far-Sighted Mother!