

2003-4

**BROTHER ANDRÉ
AS PERCEIVED BY RELIGIOUS WOMEN:
A DIVERTIMENTO**

**Presenter:
Cecile Charette, CSC
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To Sister Liliosa Shea, CSC, one of the great artists of our Community, who so graciously sent me pictures of her lovely paintings of Brother Andre and of Mother Leonie, my sincere thanks.

To Sister Leonie Turgeon, p.s.s.f., for sending me all information concerning Blessed Mother Leonie, Founder of the Little Sisters of the Holy Family, I am so very grateful.

To Sisters Laurette Daoust, Collette Cousineau, Emilia Beaulieu and Cecile Guyot – now members of our Golden Age group in Holy Cross – for their willingness to be interviewed when I spent time in Canada. Their memories of Brother Andre were simply delightful to hear.

To Sister Lise Durocher, CSC, for information gleaned from her experience of Music at Saint Joseph's Oratory, and for lending me the CD we will have a chance to listen to at the end of this presentation, my deep appreciation.

To Sister Rollande Bastien, CSC, for her encouragement and kind words that lead to this research, and to bring to this Conference a bit of "Canada" – sincere thank you!

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OUTLINE

Part I:

Brother André and Women Religious

- A. Mother Léonie, Foundress of the Little Sisters of the Holy Family
- B. "Les Soeurs de l'Espérance"
 - Soeur Marie Camille
 - Soeur Marie de la Présentation
- C. The Sisters of Presentation
- D. Sisters of Providence
 - a. Soeur Marie Leblanc
- E. Hospitalières de Saint- Joseph
 - a. Soeur Marie de l'Eucharistie
- F. The Marianites
 - a. Mère Marie de Saint Matthieu
 - b. Soeur Marie de Saint Charles
- G. Sisters of Holy Cross
 - a. Mère Marie de Sainte Maximilienne
 - b. Soeur Marie du Christ-Roi
 - c. Others

Part II:

Brother André and his trips to New England

His influence in different cities in the following States:

Vermont
Massachusetts
New Hampshire
Connecticut
Rhode Island
New York
New Jersey

As a musician, it is always important for me to use a musical term to put a point across in anything that I write. A Divertimento, known in French as a Divertissement, is an instrumental chamber work in several movements, meant to entertain. It usually has a light vein, is relatively short, and is often used as an entr'acte. I hope this presentation might be just that – something entertaining – and short...

I would like to begin this presentation with a quote gleaned from the Prologue of the book written by Brother Laurent Boucher, CSC: **Brother André, the Miracle Man of Mount Royal.**

I quote:

As travelers approach Montreal, they notice in the distance atop Mount Royal, the protruding dome of Saint Joseph's Shrine. There are pages in the history of this famous Temple that are astonishing to understand them with the limitations of human wisdom. When viewed in the light of faith, it is clear that the hand of the Divine Architect has established on Mount Royal a Church which is far from ordinary.

There is so much that has been written about this extraordinary Brother known as Brother André. What I wish to present today deals with **how was** he, or **how is** he perceived by Women Religious. My first thought was to explore how was he perceived by the Sisters of Holy Cross. As I began my research, I realized that other communities were touched by him as well, and were moved by his deep faith, by his fervor, by his great devotion to Saint Joseph and by his prayer life.

It was quite a challenge to find information on the relationship that existed between Brother André and the different Women Religious. Insights were gleaned from events that took place in families, or through lived experiences remembered by those Religious who took pride in inviting

Brother André to their home for one reason or another. All the anecdotes mentioned in this paper are part of the reality of knowing Brother André through others – family members, close friends and other people who met him along the way or even witnessed healing of the sick during services held at the Oratory.

A Divertimento often takes the form of a mini Dance Suite, and that is the way that I chose to connect each anecdote I wish to present here. Therefore,

Divertimento I – Courante (Corrente)

The first religious woman to meet Brother André was Mother Léonie who founded the Little Sisters of the Holy Family. She met Brother André in 1875 – she was then 35 and he, 30. She had come to the Notre Dame School, in Montréal, en route to Saint Mary's, Indiana, where she was to receive her first novices. Eight young women had arrived a month earlier, and were given the use of the Brothers' community room for their convent. (1)

When Mother Léonie entered the Community of Marianites in Saint Laurent, the Sisters, Brothers and Priests still belonged to the same community. She and Brother André had many things in common. The Superiors in Saint Laurent hesitated before accepting her into the congregation because she was so frail, much like Brother André in his community, but Father Moreau, seeing her sincerity and great desire to serve in whatever capacity, allowed her to make her vows and to become a member of Religious Community in Saint Laurent. The year was 1857. Mother Léonie spent the rest of her life, collaborating with and serving priests and brothers in both parishes and seminaries.

Brother André and Mother Léonie knew one another for thirty seven years, from 1875-1912. Their friendship was one of deep spiritual encounters. Every time she visited her Sisters, she also

met with Brother André. As a matter of fact she founded a convent at the Oratory only a few months before she died in 1912.

Mother Léonie and Brother André shared the same Holy Cross heritage. Their devotion to the Holy Family was also shared by the priest who had founded the Brothers of Saint Joseph in 1820, Father Jacques Dujarie.(3)

Brother André and Mother Léonie had a deep devotion to the Passion of Our Lord, as well as to Our Lady of Sorrows (better known as Our Lady of Compassion), the patroness of the Congregation of Holy Cross. Their great devotion to Saint Joseph was also a heritage shared with Father Moreau, the Founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross.

Like their Foundress, the Little Sisters of the Holy Family had their share of encounters with Brother André. One of the Sisters, Sister Hilaire of Rome, had written to Brother André concerning the health of her sister who also was a religious. Someone replied in the name of Brother André and asked the simple question: "Do you have faith?" "When it is a matter of Saint Joseph, my faith is one that can move mountains", she wrote. She was healed immediately through the prayers of Brother André to Saint Joseph. The power of prayer!!!

Another sister was on mission at the school of Notre Dame at the time Brother André was the door keeper. Upon her return from an absence of a few months, due to illness, she decided to pay him a visit. Seeing her, he asked: "What are you doing here?" "I am still unable to work, she replied. "I told you that it would come little by little..." Five years went by and she often wondered how come she had been healed since she really did not believe. One of the sisters simply told her: "He truly wanted to strengthen your faith..."

Most sisters that met with him considered him to be a miracle worker – but for Brother

André, it was just a matter of spreading the devotion to Saint Joseph. **If only you could have faith as small as a mustard seed!**. When dealing with sisters, and women in general, Brother André expected a strong faith to emerge. As we speak with people who knew him and who remember him, we realize that he was not always gracious – good, but difficult to deal with at times.

Divertimento II - Sarabande

In Saint Laurent, the Sisters of Hope, better known as “les Soeurs de l’Espérance” had a very modest hospital. It was small, no large rooms, very simple but very comfortable. In 1912, it had first served as a novitiate by les Soeurs de l’Espérance. In 1922, it was converted into a hospital. One of the sisters, Soeur Marie Camille, who took care of Brother André in his last illness, wrote: “André wanted to come to our hospital because our house was poor, very simple and modest. He felt that, for him, it would be a place where he could remain hidden and peaceful. Soeur Marie Camille highly respected his wishes, his attitude and his silence. From her office, which was just across from his room, she supervised her special patient. This is where he chose to come for his last journey. When Sister Camille realized that his condition was worsening, she contacted the doctor who prescribed the use of oxygen. Knowing Brother André, we can surmise that this was against his wishes.

Soeur Marie Camille remembered her novitiate days in 1919 when all the novices would come to the Oratory to spend time in prayer. Each one would speak to Brother André, begging him to pray for their vocation and especially for their perseverance. All of them, touched by his sincerity and his love of God, later served and helped in the healing of the sick, always remembering Brother André as a healer.

Divertimento III – Allemande

After Brother André was orphaned at the tender age of twelve, he was to go to live with his aunt, Marie-Rosalie Foisy who was married to Timothee Nadeau. His uncle had very little affection for the nephew who was so frail – no love lost there. Their home was in Saint Cesaire, a small town located at the foot of Mount Rougemont and Saint Paul d'Abbotsford. To the south of the town was the Yamaska River – to the west, the road which led from Montreal to Sherbrooke. Previously, the area had been an exceedingly dense forest, the soil of which was fertile and rich for farming.

In 1857, a Boarding School was opened in Saint Cesaire. The sisters who had been invited to take charge of the school were the Sisters of Presentation of Mary who came from Bourg Saint Andéol, France. They had been asked by Mgr. Ignace Bourget, then Bishop of the Diocese of Montreal, to open a school in order to educate the youngsters of this area. When school opened in the Fall of 1857, 150 students were greeted by the Sisters. Many vocations stemmed from this particular and special school. (My sister was one of them, in 1935.) The Sisters were the first ones to introduce the devotion to Saint Joseph in that parish. Both, the convent and the chapel were dedicated to Saint Joseph

These were marvels that were accomplished during the absence of our young Alfred Bessette. How delighted he must have been upon his return to find that the Congregation had such a devotion to Saint Joseph that they dedicated their ministry to him.

As a young man, Alfred attended the school that had been established by the Brothers of Holy Cross in Saint Césaire – occasionally visiting the convent that was situated across the street from the Brothers. He found the devotion to Saint Joseph a powerful influence in his life – thus, his desire to spread this devotion throughout the world.

Later, in Montreal, the Sisters of Presentation came to know Brother André quite well and realized how saintly he was. At the time, everyone wanted a relic of this holy man. They went so far as to cut a bit of the tassel of his cincture to have a relic of the "saint" they knew as Brother André. Upset about this "thievery", Brother André complained to one of the priests, Father Clement. "Where is their vow of poverty?" he asked. He never realized that many other people followed their example and tried to collect any piece of clothing that had touched him in one way or another.

In 1919, the Superior General of the Marianites, Réverende Mère Marie de Saint Matthieu, had come from France to visit her sisters in Louisiana. She was invited by the Superior General of the Sisters of Holy Cross in Saint Laurent, then, Mère Saint Julien, to come to Canada for a very important meeting. Of course, a pilgrimage to Mount Royal was organized (what was already in place as the first shrine). Brother André, aware of what had happened to Father Moreau, in France, in all his simplicity, wanted to compliment Mère Marie de Saint Matthieu, said to her: "You know, at the foot of the Cross, only a few holy women were there. It was exactly the same with our own Father Moreau!" In fact, as we all know, the Marianites assisted Father Moreau in his last journey. They believed in him and took care of him until his death in 1873.

That visit with Brother André impressed Mère Marie de Saint Matthieu very deeply and she carried his message of love to her Community at Le Mans, France.

Divertimento IV - Partita

Another anecdote that I would like to talk about concerns a young woman who felt that she was called to serve the Lord by entering community. She was but 17 years old, the twelfth child in a family of fourteen children. Her mind was set upon becoming a religious, but she had health problems.

Three times, she applied and was refused. She went to see Brother André who was very sympathetic to her. He simply told her not to worry, and advised her to try again. He told her that she would be accepted and she would lead a very happy life. At the age of 20, she finally entered the "Hospitales de Saint Joseph", and took the name of Soeur Marie de l'Eucharistie. She was a joy to live with and she ministered to the sick for many years. Brother André again had been a beacon of light for a young woman who had lost hope of ever living her dream.

A Sister of Providence by the name of Soeur Marie Leblanc was put in charge of a very delicate situation at the hospital of Cartierville near Montreal. There was an epidemic of typhoid fever and quite a few people had already died, numbering four of the sisters who were taking care of the sick. She communicated with Brother André. According to the text found in Etienne Catta's book, **Brother André 1845-1937**, the following advice was given to Sister Marie:

At the center of the hospital, prepare an altar and place the statue of Our Lady of Seven Dolors – which was one of Marie's devotion – decorate the altar with flowers. Make sure that songs and prayers may be sung and recited in honor of Our Lady of Seven Dolors. On Wednesday, let there be a procession throughout the hospital, inviting all Sisters and personnel who are able to participate, to share in these songs and prayers. Recite the chaplet of Our Lady of Seven Dolors with great fervor. The procession should be followed by the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The following week, on Wednesday, decorate the altar anew and place the statue of Saint Joseph – process again as the previous Wednesday ending again with the Benediction.

This ritual was done according to Brother André's instructions, but the Sisters also added fervent visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and praying the Way of the Cross. No other

sister suffered from the fatal disease. No other death was reported. Might I add that the Sisters at that hospital renewed their faith and considered Brother André to really be an angel of God.

Sister Leblanc's mission was to visit the sick at home and in the hospitals. Many times, she would accompany the very ill to the Saint Joseph's Oratory. She listened to Brother André speak to the sick and witnessed his compassion for human suffering. She offered to leave and to let the sick speak freely but Brother André wanted her to be there. He insisted upon her staying. The Gospel was his message to all people – he lived it so well himself. Sister Leblanc cherished those moments – there was a common bond between them because of their love for the disabled.

Divertimento V - Adagio

As for the Sisters of Holy Cross in Canada and in New England, I interviewed a few when I went to spend some time in Canada delving into our Archives for information. Some of them knew Brother André personally - others had stories to relate about their parents who had known Brother André more intimately while they were growing up or in their young adult lives.

Sister Laurette Daoust, who now lives in one of our convents in Saint Laurent and who has reached a young 88, told me about the lived experience of her father as a young man. He was very sickly and had such stomach problems that he could hardly eat anything. Thinking of his future, he feared that he would never be able to marry because of his ailment. Unable to do any hard work, he went to see Brother André who hired him to help in filling little bottles with oil consecrated to Saint Joseph. One day, a bottle broke and Mr. Daoust cut his hand. As he was bleeding profusely,

Brother André assured him that Saint Joseph permitted this, and that his blood would be renewed and his ailment would disappear. Mysteriously, that is exactly what happened. The young man started eating normally and the problem never recurred. He married in 1913 – he and his wife had a wonderful family of eleven children, two of which became Sisters of Holy Cross. (4)

I met with Sister Colette Cousineau, a friend of mine who is now living in our Infirmary in Saint Laurent. She and her family knew Brother André intimately. Her brother Laurent came down with a degeneration of the bones in his knees. The family doctor, who was a surgeon, wanted to operate knowing very well that it would deprive the young man of any circulation in his knees – but the procedure would surely bring some relief.

The father, Mr. Cousineau, invited Brother André to come to the house. Around 5:30 in the evening, Brother André entered the room of the sick young man and started rubbing his knees with the oil dedicated to Saint Joseph. During that time, the father was pacing the floor, reciting prayers while their mother prepared dinner. Silence reigned in the house and everything seemed so mysterious. The influence of Brother André created such an atmosphere.

Sister Colette was about 17 at the time, and as with all the members of her family, was deeply impressed by the presence of such a visitor. Around 6:00 o'clock, dinner was served – all was calm and everyone was eating in silence. The only word spoken during the meal came from Brother André who commented to Mrs. Cousineau: "This liver is too cooked", Brother André spoke very little and at times was a little too direct. Always good – he was not always diplomatic.

A snow storm was raging. Brother André had a meeting that night and it was important that the family bring him to his destination. Mr. Cousineau feared driving in the storm, so her uncle who was coming to spend the evening with the family, took it upon himself to drive Brother André home.

Her brother Laurent recuperated fairly well and was able to live a normal life. He once said: "Brother Andre did not heal me as I had wished (because he had to undergo surgery), but he surely helped me to grow in my faith." Her brother is very prayerful and lives close to God.(5)

The Sisters of Holy Cross lived their common bonds to the religious family of Father Moreau. We understand that they were among the first to bring their students to the Oratory. They were the first to come in groups, as a religious community. On June 14, 1911, 60 sisters came from the Mother House in Saint Laurent. They witnessed miracles at the Oratory as nurses brought along the sick, the disabled, the mentally impaired, and so many others. Schools took turns to offer music for the Liturgy or for the Benediction. Wednesday was a day consecrated to Saint Joseph – so pilgrimages were organized. When Brother André participated in the ceremony, it was special – the faith of many non-believers was awakened.

When Brother André visited our Normal School in Mont Laurier, it was a very special event. The Sisters of Holy Cross were happy to receive him, and he simply captured the attention of everyone. All students and faculty were summoned into the auditorium – classes were cancelled – the bell was ringing. Something great was about to happen. Brother André stepped onto the stage...

"He allowed us to take a good look at him, first of all. Upon the invitation of the Superior, he timidly addressed a few words to the audience and offered wishes of health and much happiness to all the personnel of the Normal School."(6)

When he left the hall, all eyes were set on him – but his only thought was to go out as soon as possible. The door was a long way out. In spite of his desire to return to his residence, he stayed to share dinner with everyone at the school.

While in Canada, I had the pleasure of going to our Infirmary, Pavillon Saint Joseph to

interview Soeur Emilia Beaulieu. Before entering Holy Cross Emilia worked at the Oratory with her mother. They had the opportunity to see Brother André daily – not necessarily to converse with him, however, because he was not very talkative. He would always go by their quarters, eyes closed, modest and prayerful. He was always occupied and very seldom had time to eat. Soeur Emilia's mother, Mrs. Beaulieu, would prepare small meals for him, often bringing him to her home to share meals together or she brought them to the Oratory to make sure he would eat.

One morning when Emilia was at home, Mrs. Beaulieu was preparing breakfast. Her mother left for the bathroom and just a few moments later, Emilia heard a moan – her mother had suddenly passed away. This was difficult for the daughter who had worked closely with her mother. Mrs. Beaulieu was being waked at home, as was the custom of the time. Brother Andre came to pay his last respects to the woman who had been so kind to him. It was a grace for the whole family because as Soeur Emilia learned, Brother André frequently visited the sick but he never went to wakes.

Soeur Emilia keeps fond memories of Brother André. Just a little while after her mother died, Emilia entered Holy Cross in Saint Laurent. At 93, she remembers Brother André as a modest and holy man, one who touched her life by his silence and his prayerful attitude. (7)

Not all sisters who met with Brother André and asked him to pray for a healing of some kind left with a positive answer. One of our sisters, Cecile Guyot, came to him one day. She was relatively young at the time and she was suffering from terrible migraines. As she encountered Brother André she asked him to please pray to Saint Joseph so that she could get relief as it was difficult to teach with such terrible headaches. He got very upset with her and angrily told her that as a Sister of Holy Cross she was meant to suffer. "Just go away and suffer those migraines, they are good for you." Up to this day, the poor sister has never received any relief – at 87, she still

remembers vividly what happened then. There are reasons for everything, I guess. Why did he react in that particular manner, no one will ever know.

Divertimento VI - Loure

There are sisters of so many other communities who had something to share about Brother André, but I had to make choices so that my presentation would not exceed the time allowed. The Sisters of the Congregation Notre Dame, the Sisters of Providence, the Sisters of Precious Blood, the Ursulines, and many others all had stories of their own to relate. Many experienced conversions, a strengthening of their faith and were impelled to live a closer relationship with God because of their encounters with Brother André.

Divertimento VII – Minuet

Before I bring closure to this talk, it is imperative that I mention Brother André's trips and the influence he had on so many people including students in the New England area. Vermont, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut and Rhode Island - also New York and New Jersey – all were graced by his visits at certain times of the year.

At the age of 18, Alfred decided to leave his homeland and come to New England in search of work. "It was unlikely that financial motives were the main reasons for Alfred to leave for the United States; he was never interested in money. More likely he left because he felt that he was a burden on his relatives and friends. By relieving them of his presence, he believed he would gain self-respect." (8)

Many members of his family also came to the United States in search for work in the different mills and to give a better life to their families. After he entered Holy Cross, Brother André visited

his family and through them, he met many people who became his friends. Churches and schools were most interested in this man of small stature who had such a great devotion to Saint Joseph and who had an extraordinary gift for healing, arousing the faith of these friends. He spoke about the work of Holy Cross at the Oratory. Pilgrimages were organized in schools as well as in parishes. Adults as well as children climbed the steps at the Oratory on their knees, asking Saint Joseph for special favors of healing for family or friends. To everyone, Brother André was an enigma, one who touched so many lives and strengthened the faith of so many who had strayed from their earlier beliefs.

Divertimento VIII – Gigue (Conclusion)

In general, how do we, women religious perceive Brother André? He was a simple human being, a man of God, a dreamer, a visionary, a builder, a friend., whose prayer life stemmed from the extraordinary. The sixth child in a family of ten, he remained close to his brothers and sisters and his visits always brought solace and comfort to his nieces and nephews. One of his grand nieces, who is a member of our community, Sister Jeannette Cayer once wrote: **“Our granduncle showered us with a great deal of attention. His twice a year visits were a source of much joy in our lives. Brother André manifested great compassion for my father, his nephew, Louis, since both were orphaned at an early age...”**(9)

There are so many other facts that could very well have been related here because Religious Communities of Women had such an admiration for this Brother whose faith was beyond human understanding. I highly recommend that all of us read the book written by Chanoine Catta **“Le Frere Andre, 1845-1937.”** I do believe that it has been translated in English. If not, I could take that as a project when I turn 90... It would be quite a task, but most interesting to do, you may be sure...

Audio – CD

Sanctus

from the **Requiem Mass** by **Gabriel Faure**

Performed by the **Choir Boys of Mount Royal...**

from **Saint Joseph's Oratory**

FOOTNOTES

1. Lafrenière, Bernard, CSC – **Brother André According to Witnesses**, p. 120, (1997)
2. Idem
3. Idem, p.121
4. Interview with Laurette Daoust, CSC, March 2, 2003
5. Interview with Colette Cousineau, CSC, March, 2003
6. Catta, Etienne, Chanoine Honorifique de Nantes, France – **Le Frère André (1845-1937)**, p. 810, 1963 – Communiqué graciously sent in by Soeur Marie du Christ Roi, Notre Dame de Sainte-Croix, Montréal, 1959
7. Interview with Emilia Beaulieu, CSC, Pavillon Saint-Joseph, March 3, 2003
8. Boucher, Brother Laurent, CSC – **The Miracle Man of Mount Royal**, p. 18, (1997)
9. Idem, p.188

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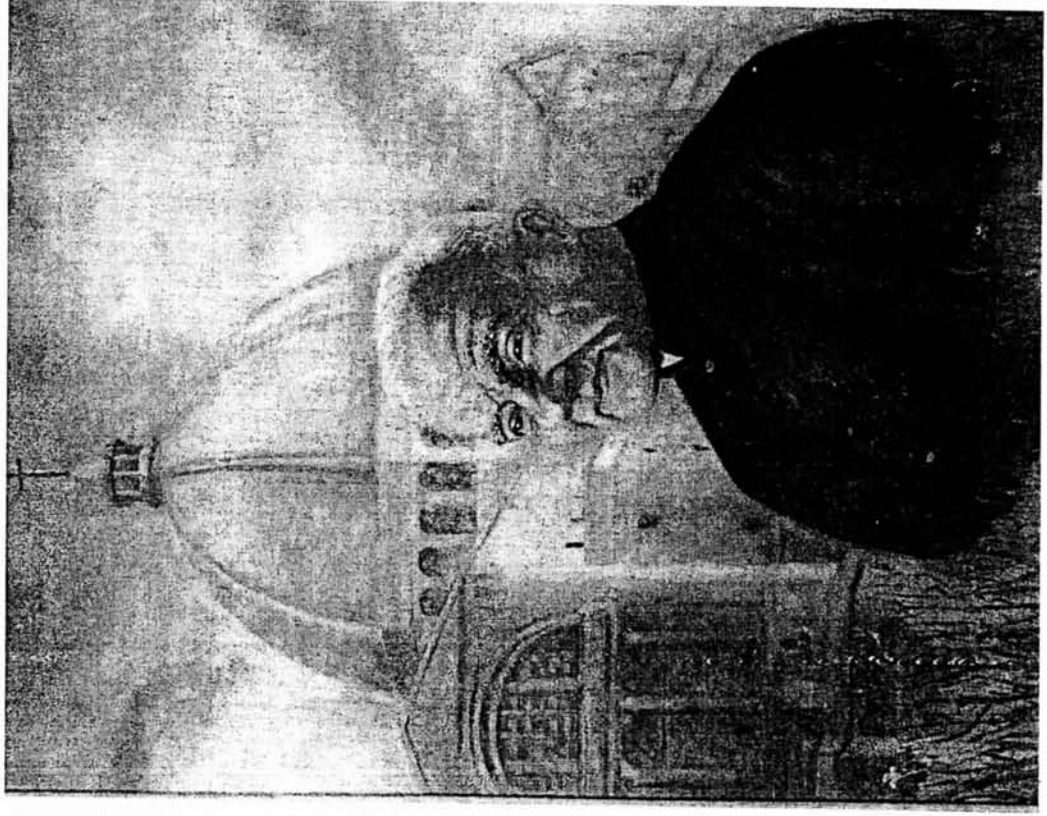
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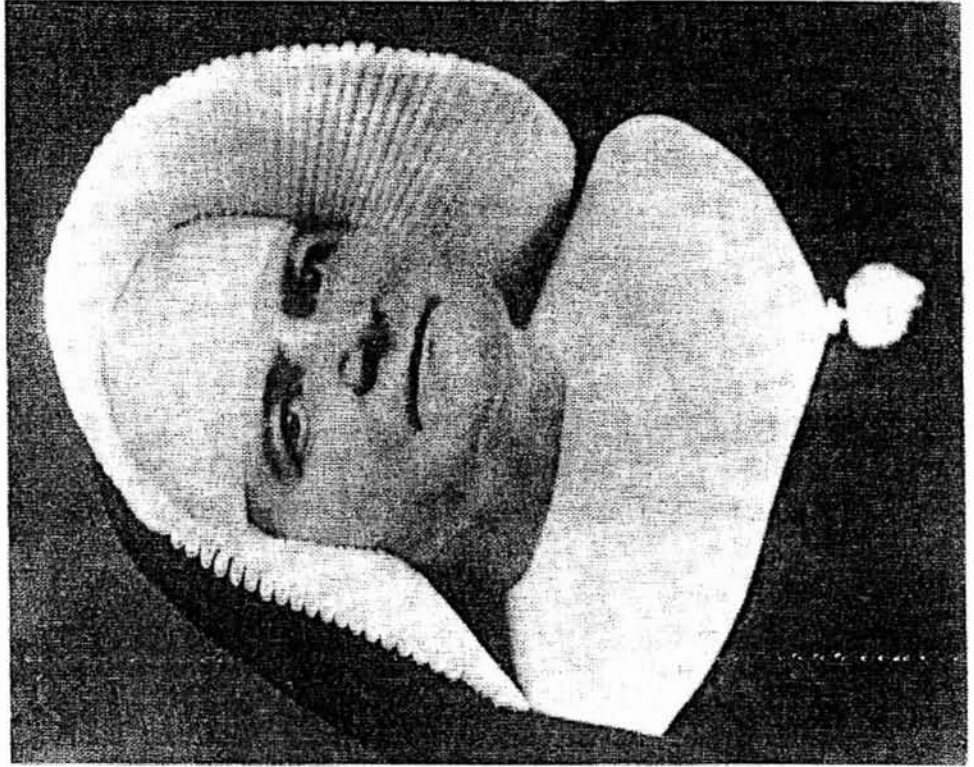
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Fondatrice des Petites Soeurs de la Sainte Famille,
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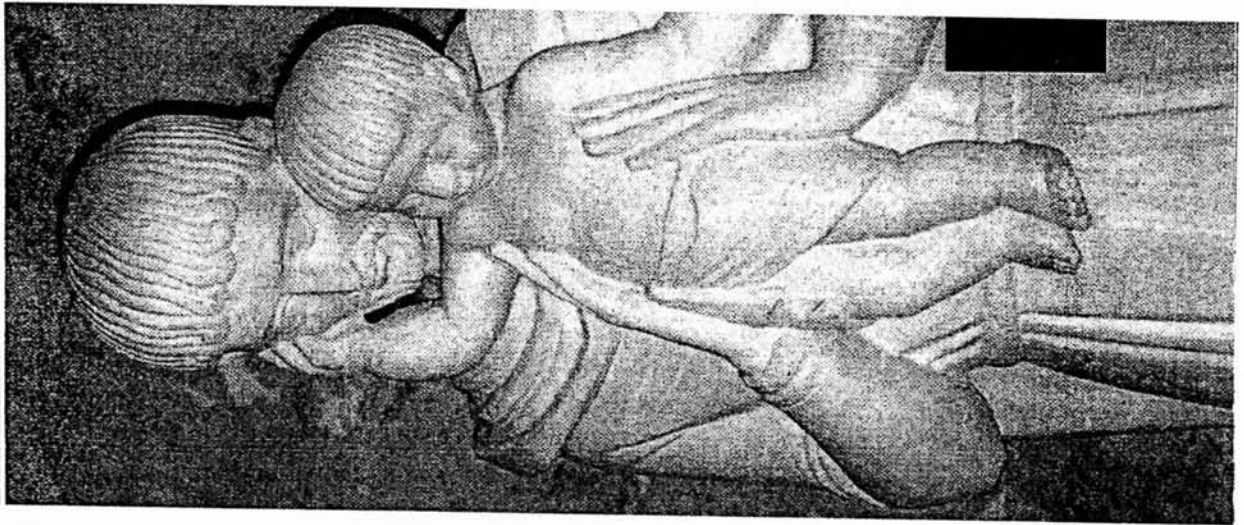
BROTHER ANDRÉ, CSC

Painting – Sr. Liliosa Shea, CSC



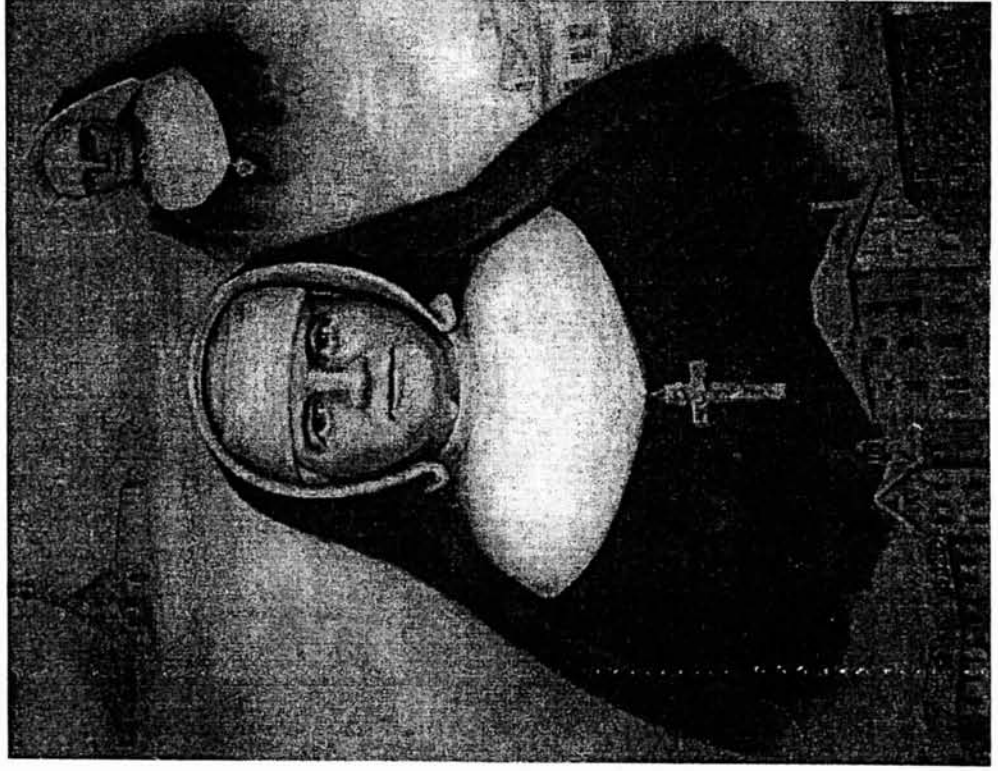
MÈRE MARIE LÉONIE, CSC





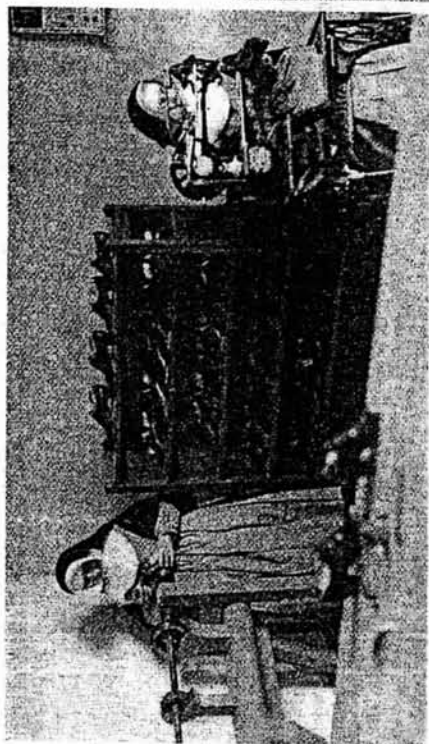
MÈRE MARIE LÉONIE

Painting – Sr. Lilia Shea, CSC

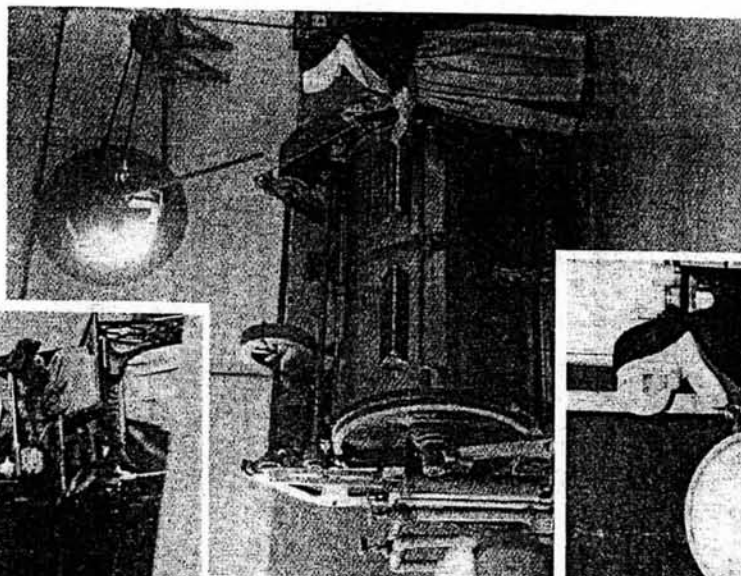


MISSION

TÂCHES D'HIER...



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La buanderie.



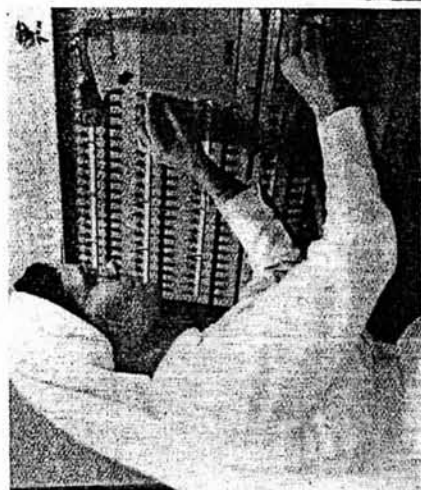
La salle de couture.



La cuisine.

MISSION

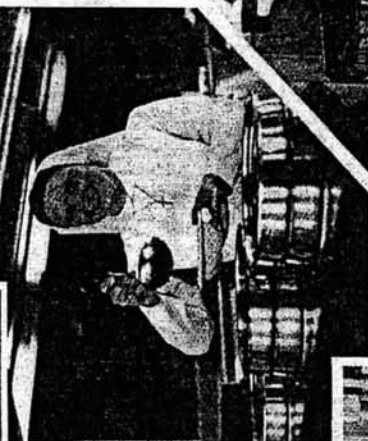
... TÂCHES D'AUJOURD'HUI



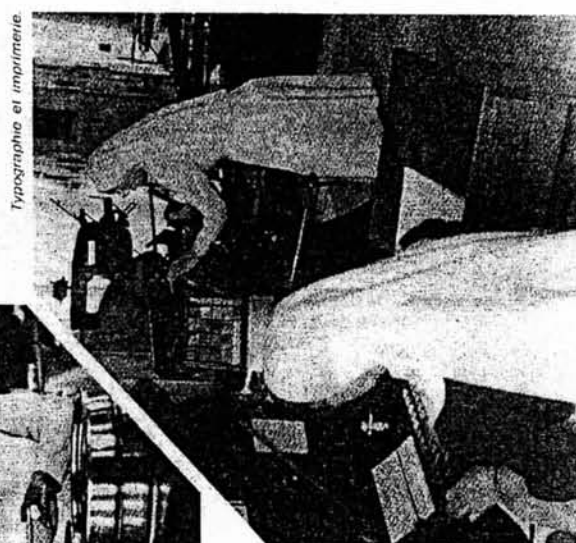
Communications électroniques.



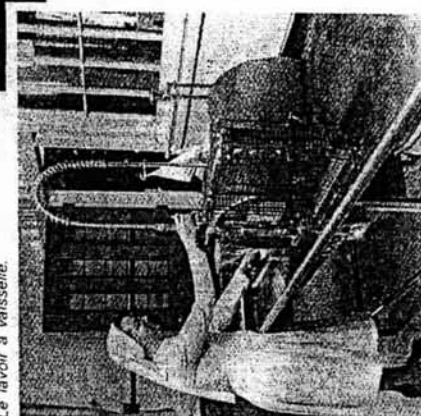
A la réception.



La cuisine.



Typographie et imprimerie.

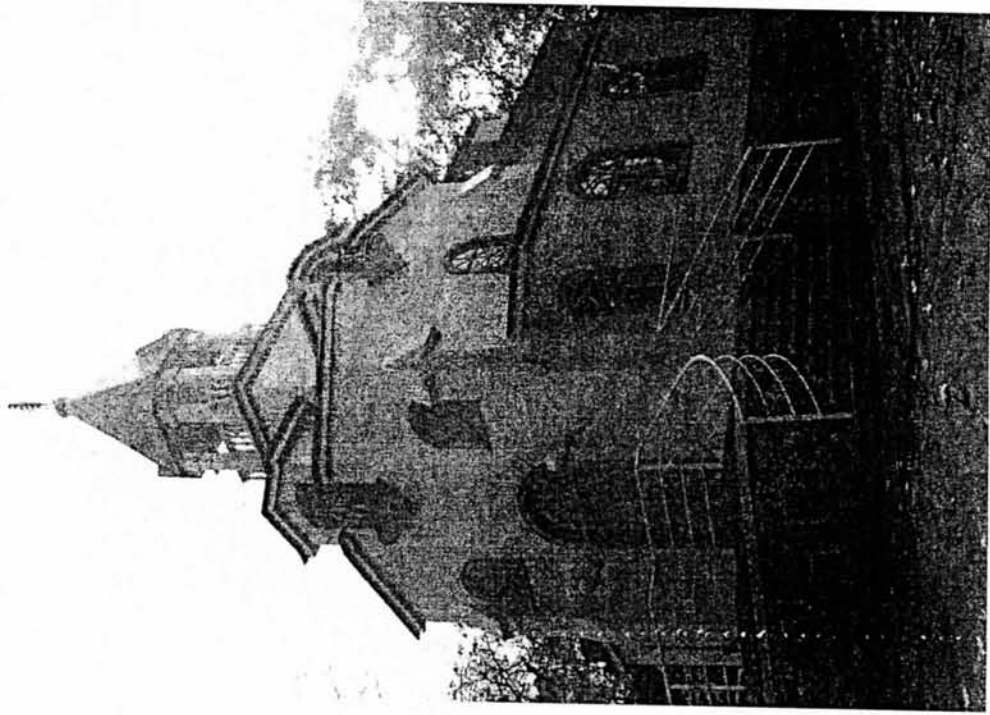


Le lavis à vaisselle.

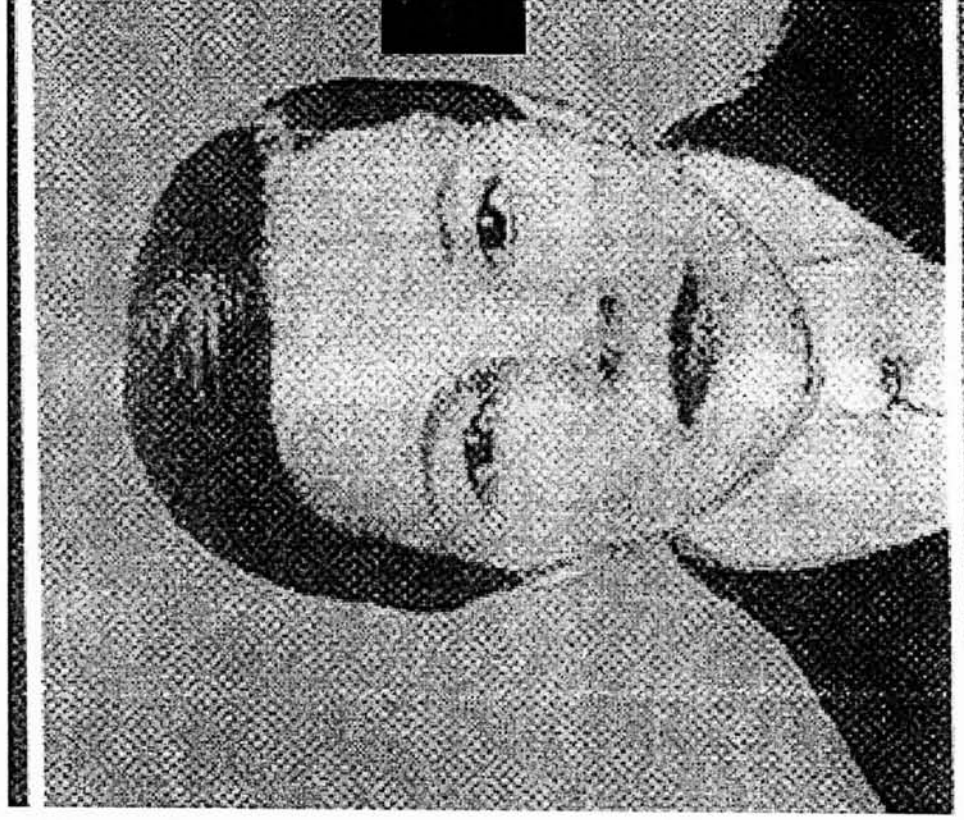
HÔPITAL NOTRE-DAME DE L'ESPÉRANCE



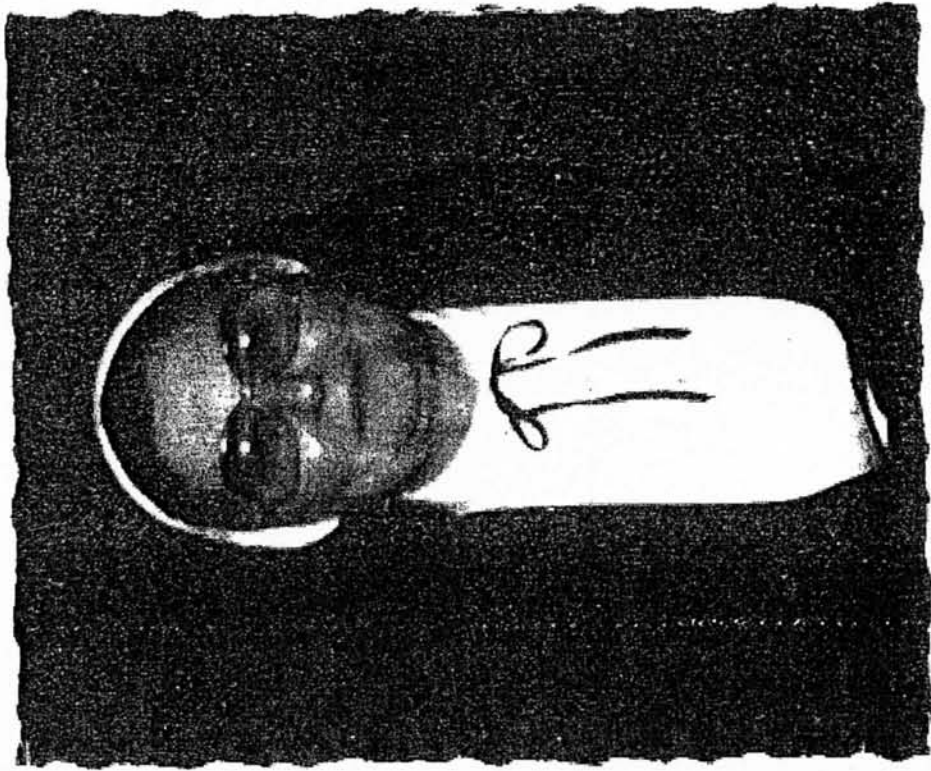
ORATORY – FIRST CHAPEL



BROTHER ANDRÉ – AGE 12

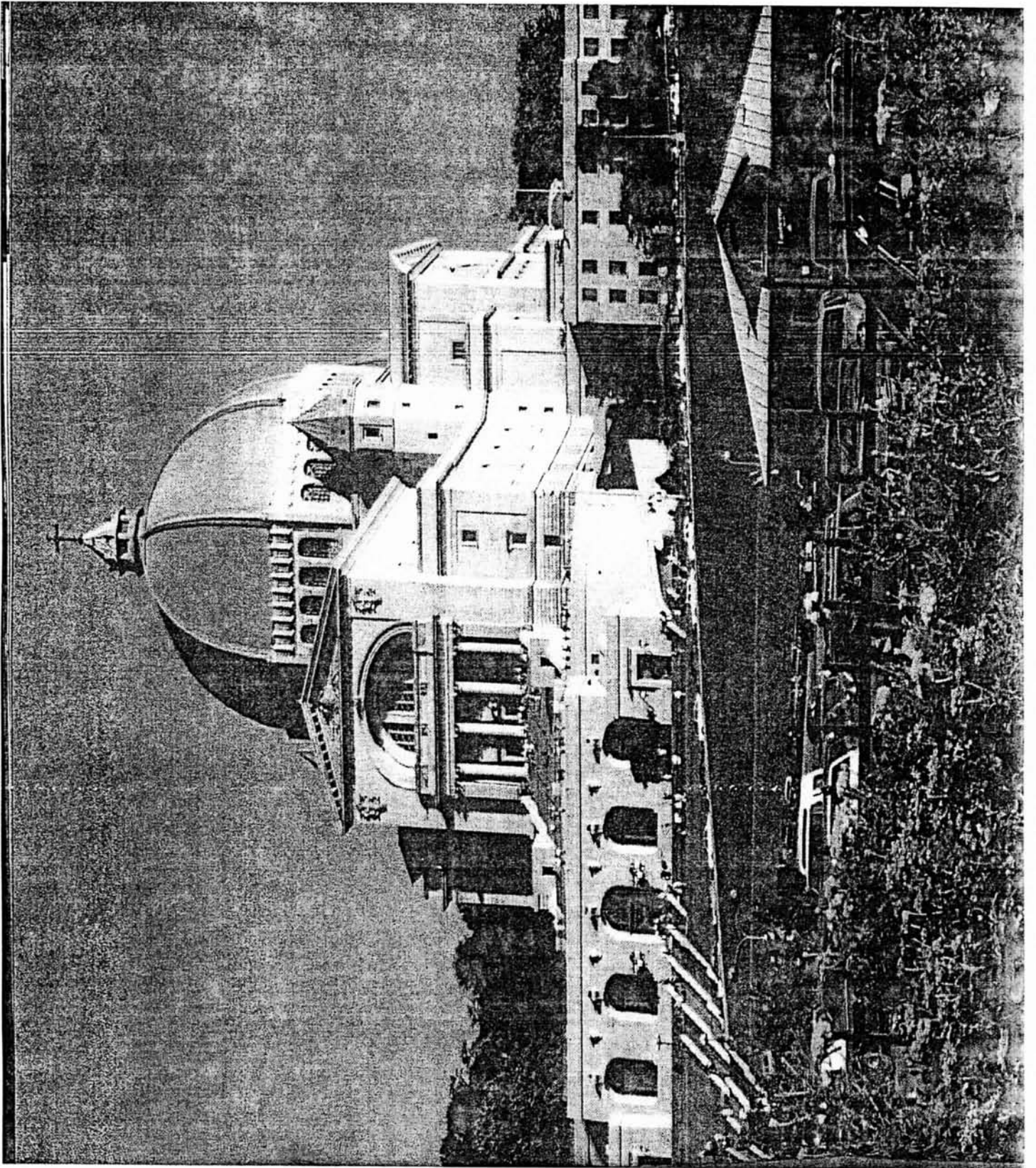


LAURETTE DAOUST, CSC

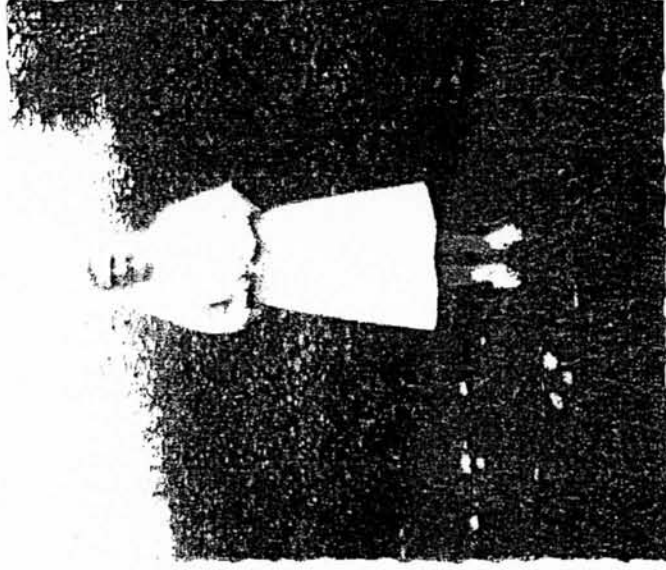


COLETTE COUSINEAU, CSC





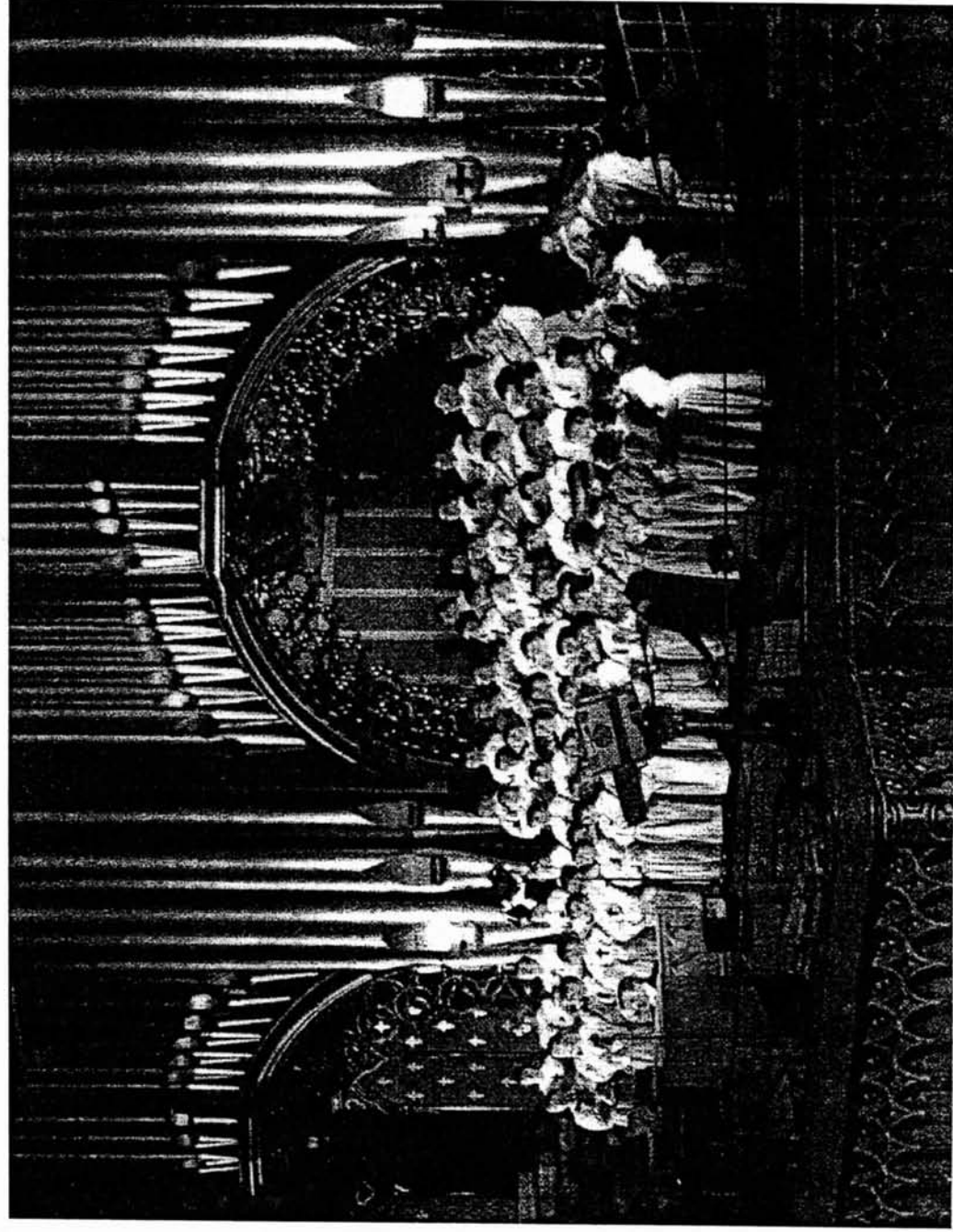
EMILIA BEAULIEU, CSC



CECILE GUYOT, CSC



PETITS CHANTEURS DU MONT ROYAL



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