



# Two Myths in New France Education

## Abstract

**This article breaks with two traditional beliefs about early Canadian education by suggesting that girls' education equalled or surpassed that of boys and that the male Recollets were little involved in learning.**

In deference to the principle that history is constantly being reviewed and reinterpreted, this presentation seeks to challenge two conventional beliefs about education in New France. Those who have written on education in seventeenth and eighteenth century Canada hold to the view that learning was more widespread among males than females and that the male religious order known as the Recollets was active in education. It is my contention that New France was an exceptional society in which the learning gap between the sexes was much less wide than believed or that existed in other lands.(1) Indeed, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that, in terms of basic literacy, females surpassed males in early Canada by the eighteenth century. It is also suggested that historians have been guilty of exaggerating the educational role of the Recollets. A review of the evidence shows that the Recollets, in contrast to the Jesuits and Sulpicians, were little involved in formal education, either as teachers or administrators.

## Questions raised by Gosselin's writings

Dating from Amédée Gosselin's (1911) pioneering work on New France education, historians have subscribed to the view that schooling was greater for males than females in early Canada.

Ironically, Gosselin's declarations in favour of male learning were in reply to the comments of the nineteenth century historian Garneau, who had written glowingly of female education during the period. Gosselin reproached Garneau for having been extravagant in his praise of female learning, which he claimed was not supported by the documentary evidence. Gosselin's downgrading of female learning and his defence of male learning took the form of two arguments. First, he said that in eighteenth century Quebec and Montreal there were as many boys' as girls' schools. And while he admitted that girls' schools seemed to have enjoyed a numerical advantage in the country districts, he was quick to add that the institutional difference was balanced by the existence of lay school-masters, who wandered from parish to parish giving lettered instruction to boys. Second, Gosselin argued that the greater provision for boys' education was borne out by literacy rates as derived from signature counts. He said his own study of marriage and baptismal registers in selected parishes near Quebec confirmed his suspicions, that in every case males showed a higher signature rate than females (Gosselin, 1911, pp. 147-149). And while he was prepared to admit that the number of cases examined was not sufficiently representative to warrant a firm conclusion on the question, he was convinced it was indicative of the general condition in the colony.

Before dealing with the issues under review, it behooves us to say a word about the documentary sources of New France. At first glance they seem overwhelming, even intimidating. Faithful to the Gallic love of the written word, the early Canadians were in the habit of recording their intentions and actions on paper. In fact, the period abounds in government correspondence, official reports, laws and directives, which are seconded by a substantial clerical literature. Unfortunately, data on education are fragmentary and incomplete. Like the Romans, the early Canadians demonstrated a flair for census taking, but as with the ancients their enumerations did not include detailed information on the state of learning. The censuses of New France, dating from 1666, provide a demographic record of people, livestock, foodstuffs and buildings; on the other hand, they are largely silent as regards the learning achievements of the population. The absence of educational data is, however, neither surprising nor unusual. What must be remembered is that education was a marginal activity in earlier times, under private auspices and intended for a limited clientele. In New France as elsewhere there was little sense of education as a public enterprise, reflected in the absence of an education ministry or state apparatus, one of whose duties would be the collection and publication of statistics on learning. Failing the existence of official data on learning the educational historian of New France is at the mercy of incomplete and imperfect sources of information.

### Some clues to literacy and learning

One of the most frequently used methods of determining the spread of learning in pre-industrial societies is to inquire into the literacy of the people, the assumption being that a person's ability to read and write is an index of schooling. As was noted above, the censuses and official records of New France are largely silent as to the lettered condition of the population. In the absence of direct evidence, we are forced to look elsewhere for clues to literacy and learning. An alternative method is suggested by the work of social historians, who have turned to signature counts in the belief that a close association exists between the capacity to write one's name and the ability to read and write.<sup>(2)</sup> The argument is that if a person could write his name it is probable he could write other things; and if he could write he surely could read. A recent study in France found a strong positive correlation between the written signature and the ability to read and write. Researchers concluded that signature counts drawn from marriage registers in nineteenth century France corresponded closely with literacy tests given to military conscripts (Furet and Ozouf, 1977).

Of those instances demanding a written signature or mark in early societies, the marriage register is generally acknowledged to be the most reliable source. It enjoys several advantages over other official acts calling for a signature, namely, wills, petitions, deeds, baptismal, and notarial records. First, the marriage register was in place in most European countries as early as the seventeenth century. In Canada the Ordinance of 1678 decreed that the bride and groom sign the register and that the presiding priest certify whether the couple was able to sign. Second, the marriage registers meet the test of universality, of embracing the bulk of the population since it is known that most adults married.

Yet there are problems. The early records have been found to be incomplete and in some cases unavailable. Demographers at the University of Montreal estimate that more than a quarter of parish acts (birth, baptismal, and marriage registrations) in seventeenth century Canada are missing, either through neglect, loss, or destruction (Roy and Charbonneau, 1976). They also admit to finding widespread neglect of the Ordinance of 1678, that in almost 40 percent of the marriages performed between 1680 and 1699 the priest failed to record whether the couple could sign the register (Roy, Landry, and Charbonneau, 1977, p.65). And while such evidence does not invalidate the marriage register as a source of information on literacy, it does alert us to its imperfections.

It behooves us to ask whether other and more recent studies of marriage registers in New France sustain Gosselin's belief in greater male literacy. One of the most complete profiles of early Canada is that provided by Marcel Trudel (1973, p.146) who

dissected the population of 1663. Of 1,244 persons of marriageable age, he found that 59 percent of grooms and 46 percent of brides wrote their name, which seems to confirm Gosselin's conclusions. However, there is a hidden qualification in the statistic. Of the 3,000 plus persons living in the colony in 1663 less than 40 percent were native born, which suggests that the signature rate was more reflective of literacy and learning in France than in the new world. A look at marriage registers later in the period should provide a truer picture. Researchers examining marriage registers for the period 1680-1699 estimate that 42 percent of grooms and 30 percent of brides could sign their name, which they add was a higher rate than that found in France for the same period (Roy, Landry, and Charbonneau, 1977, p.67). On the other hand, a study of marriage registers in Montreal between 1657 and 1715 breaks tradition by revealing an almost identical signature rate for the sexes, being 45.5 percent for grooms and 43 percent for brides (Dechêne, p.467). Clouding the picture even more, a study covering marriage registers in three rural parishes (Rivière-du-Loup, St-Ours, and Boucherville) and one urban parish (Trois-Rivières) for the period 1745-54, shows a slightly higher signature rate for brides in three of the four parishes cited, that of St-Ours being the exception (Greer, 1978, p.299).

What conclusions, if any, may be drawn from the above marriage register data? Being that the statistical data are both incomplete and contradictory, they do not lend themselves to firm conclusions. The most that can be said about the evidence is that it introduces an element of doubt into the reigning belief about the supremacy of male literacy in early Canada. On the other hand, it must be admitted that if a convincing case for female literacy and learning is to be made, it will have to be made on other grounds.

### **Clues from number of schools**

One obvious method of determining the extent of learning in a society is to count the number of schools in existence, a procedure that commends itself to New France since the sexes attended separate institutions. A frequently quoted statistic is that in the final years of the colony there were 44 **petites écoles** or elementary schools, including 25 for boys and 19 for girls. There were also a boys' **collège** run by the Jesuits and a seminary to train priests. Do these figures testify to greater educational provision for males? Not necessarily. The numerical distinction between boys' and girls' schools is not significant since it is known that schools of that era showed wide variation in enrolments and institutional durability. Some schools no more than appeared than they disappeared, done in by a lack of funds, a shortage of teachers or public indifference. Others like the Jesuit elementary school at Quebec had an unbroken existence

from 1635 to 1759. In addition, some schools had no more than a sprinkling of pupils while others were teeming with children. The boys' school at Château-Richer near Quebec limped along with a complement of five pupils in 1703. On the other hand, the school run by the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame in lower town Quebec around the same time reportedly had more than 100 girls in attendance. Thus while the available evidence confirms the widespread differences in school size and population, it is not sufficiently reliable or detailed to answer the more pertinent query, namely, whether on the whole boys' or girls' schools attracted more pupils.

A more promising approach points to the important role played by women, lay and religious, in the colony's social and educational development. What today would pass as a government department of health and welfare was largely the province of such heroic figures as Marie de l'Incarnation, Marguerite Bourgeoys, Jeanne Mance, and Marguerite d'Youville, which New France seemed to produce in abundant numbers. With the exception of Hôpital-Général in Montreal before 1747, females founded, staffed and administered the hospitals of the colony, caring for the ill, the poor, the elderly and the infirm. In the fashion of Lord Durham a century later the eighteenth century intendant Hocquart described the women of Canada as a bustling race, whose energies and talents carried them beyond the home (Hocquart, 1737, pp.40-62). The men of the colony came to depend heavily on the advice and assistance of their wives in commercial matters, and not a few women had a hand in business, managing the affairs of their husbands when they were away or deceased.

But it is precisely the active role of females in education that permits us to upgrade the learning achievements of girls in New France. Although it does not tell the whole story, indications are that there were more female than male teachers in the colony. The crux of the argument is that the bulk of known teachers in early Canada was drawn from the ranks of the religious orders; and in this regard the female orders enjoyed a distinct numerical advantage from the early eighteenth century. (The secular clergy, serving principally as parish clergy and preoccupied with pastoral duties, rarely performed as schoolmasters). In 1719 the colony numbered 236 female religious, including 106 Hospital Nuns, 68 Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame, 50 Ursulines and 12 others as opposed to 56 male religious, including 18 Sulpicians, 16 Jesuits, 12 Recollets and 10 Charon Brothers. On the eve of the British invasion of Quebec in 1759 the female orders continued to hold a healthy lead over their male counterparts. In that year there were 89 Hospital Nuns, 70 Notre Dame Sisters and 45 Ursulines as against 20 Sulpicians, 25 Jesuits and 24 Recollets (Trudel, 1956, pp.140, 222).

To be sure, the numerical gap between the male and female

orders requires a measure of qualification. Of the female congregations only the Notre Dame Sisters and Ursulines specialized in education. Still, the Hospital Nuns were not strangers to teaching. The hospital in New France sometimes doubled as learning centre as the nuns taught girls their letters and catechism. Indeed, thanks to a financial subsidy from Bishop Saint-Vallier, a boarding school was established at Quebec's Hôpital-Général in 1725. Between ten and fifteen girls were in residence annually and received instruction in reading, writing, religion and music (d'Allaire, 1971, pp.120-121). It may be wondered whether Hôpital-Général in Montreal under the Sisters of Charity did not also play an assisting role in education. In 1749 Madame d'Youville promised the Crown that if her order were granted recognition, it would not only attend to the poor and unfortunate but would provide for the instruction of girls (Ferland-Angers, 1945, pp.104-105). Whether this promise was fulfilled is not clear, though tradition suggests that the Grey Nuns taught letters to orphans under their care.

Even with the exclusion of the Hospital Nuns from the sample, the number of Ursulines and Notre Dame Sisters was almost double that of male religious in 1759. The numerical advantage of the female orders, with or without the hospital sisters, may be traced in the first instance to their willingness to recruit Canadians which cannot be said of the two leading male communities. The Jesuits and Sulpicians, who provided much of the male educational leadership in New France, always remained modest in number by reason of their preference for European members. The Recollets, on the other hand, actively recruited locals (17 of their 24 members in 1759 were Canadian). However, as will be shown later, the Recollets were little involved in educational pursuits, rarely serving as schoolmasters or taking the initiative in organizing schools.

### **Roles of religious orders**

The numerical distinction between male and female teachers becomes even wider when note is taken of the contrasting occupational roles of the orders. Female religious were more likely to specialize in teaching since they were limited in their occupational choices. As a rule, the Notre Dame Sisters and the Ursulines concentrated on teaching young girls while the Hospital Nuns devoted their time and energy to nursing and welfare. Male religious, on the other hand, were less likely to take up classroom duties because of the competition of other demands on their abilities. In addition to teaching, male religious were called upon to serve as parish priests, missionaries, military chaplains, and explorers. There is some evidence to the effect that pedagogy did not have as much appeal for the male as for the female orders.

One gets the impression that the Jesuits did not assign their best talents to the classroom, that the instruction of colonial boys paled beside the attractions of the missionary campaign. Teaching assignments at the Jesuit college in Quebec seem to have been reserved for novice priests or those in the twilight of their spiritual career. The latter tended to be older missionaries, some of whom were physically and psychologically spent from labouring many years in the field missions. In the words of a Jesuit historian, the teachers at the Quebec college included old missionaries "brisés par les années ou les travaux" (de Rochemonteix, 1896, pp.366-367). A representative figure is Father Claude Pijart, who after stints among the Nipissings, Algonkians, and Hurons, became in 1657 at the age of fifty-seven a teacher at the college, where he taught classes in rhetoric and philosophy until the age of eighty. Moreover, it appears that young clerics regarded the instruction of French boys as little more than a stopgap, something to tide them over to the real business of conquering Indian souls. If the Jesuits alternated between missionary work and teaching, the Sulpicians, who operated primarily in the Montreal region, became parish priests, missionaries, and schoolmasters. Teaching appears not to have been an occupational option for the Recollets, whose penchant for the active life made of them missionaries, military chaplains, and parish priests.

It is worth noting that the combined efforts of the three male orders could not match the educational reach of the Congregation of Notre Dame. Quite simply, the female congregation founded more schools in more places than any other authority in New France. In addition to running and staffing schools in Montreal, Quebec and Trois-Rivières, the Notre Dame Sisters maintained the only known school in the populous eighteenth century town of Louisbourg (Johnston, 1984). And had the Seven Years' War not intervened, chances are that the sisters would have answered a call to open a school in Detroit (3). Moreover, in the countryside of New France, where three-fourths of the colonial population lived, the Congregation was alone among the orders in bringing a measure of formal learning to the rural parishes from the second half of the seventeenth century, though the secular clergy established several boys' schools east of Quebec. The nuns' male competition in the rural districts came principally from the Charon Brothers, a lay teaching order based in Montreal. However, the brothers did not open country schools until 1721; and then they were unable to sustain their efforts for long owing to the collapse of the community before mid-century. As for the Notre Dame Sisters they continued their teaching duties in uninterrupted fashion up to and beyond the fall of New France.



### Lay schoolmasters

A possible equalizing element in the discussion is that the teacher corps of New France included a fair number of lay schoolmasters, for the colony always had a chronic teacher shortage. Prominent among this group were notaries, whose knowledge of letters and lack of clients steered them into teaching. The records show that the Jesuits and Sulpicians were not averse to employing lay instructors in their schools. Martin Boutet, who had a wife and two daughters, taught mathematics and hydrography at the Jesuit college in the late seventeenth century. He was succeeded in his post by another layman, the cartographer Jean-Baptiste Franquelin. Furthermore, the Sulpicians' most celebrated teacher was the layman Antoine Forget, who is credited with introducing Lasallian methods into Montreal classrooms.

That lay schoolmasters made an educational contribution in the French colony there can be no doubt; that their participation was such as to give an advantage to male learning is far less certain. What must be recognized is that in number and behaviour lay schoolmasters were a lesser breed. Teaching for them was less a calling or way of life than an occupation and consequently was marked by irregularity and impermanence. Rare was the lay *maître d'école* who adopted teaching as his life's work. And while the documents of the day fail to reveal the existence of lay schoolmistresses in New France, it does not necessarily follow that lay females were pedagogically inactive. There is evidence to the effect that in the murky area of informal learning females contributed to the dissemination of elementary literary skills. From an examination of parish histories we learn that lay women sometimes performed as volunteer teachers in districts without a school. In a seventeenth century seigneurie near Trois-Rivières the wife of the local notary and another married woman taught children to form their letters, invoking the image of the dame school of old England (Douville, 1946, p.92). Furthermore, there is reason to believe that when the teaching of letters occurred in the family circle, it was a female affair. Because most lay females in the colony were tied to the home, it was they rather than their footloose husbands who took learning initiatives. Marguerite Denys, whose husband was seigneur in Sainte-Anne de la Pérade near Trois-Rivières, instructed her children in reading and writing at the manor (Anon., 1895, p.7). And Madame Marie Bégon, whose letters constitute a lively record of polite society in eighteenth century Quebec, reportedly taught her daughter Latin, geography, and history.

The point to be drawn from this discussion is that the female orders, thanks to their superior numbers and pedagogical inclinations, supplied more educational hands than their male counterparts, which, it is suggested, translated into greater

learning opportunities for girls in New France. In light of the evidence it is not unreasonable to conclude that by the end of the French period in Canada females approached or equalled males in basic literacy. Support for this assertion draws further strength from the post-war comments of British and Canadian authorities, who acknowledged the superior educational credentials of females. If in 1789 Chief Justice William Smith and the French bishop Hubert quarreled over the number of literate persons in each parish, they were in agreement that females were better educated than males (Upton, 1888, p.390). Finally, while it is indisputable that males as opposed to females achieved a higher quality of literacy during the time of New France by dint of their advanced learning opportunities and their dominant hold on the ruling and administrative positions in society, the companion notion that basic literacy favoured males is in need of revision.

### **Role of the Recollets**

We now turn our attention to the question of the educational role of the Recollets in New France. The Recollets, a branch of the Franciscan order, were the first missionaries to establish themselves in Canada, arriving with Champlain in 1615. Expelled from the continent by the English capture of Quebec in 1629, they would not return to the New World until 1670, by which time a French colony was in place. The Recollets were nothing if not active. The retiring life of the monastery did not suit their adventurous, temporal spirit, which saw them play a variety of roles. While initially committed to the evangelization of the Indians, they later expanded their interests and energies, becoming parish priests, confessors to civil and religious leaders, and military chaplains (during its tenure Lake Champlain's Fort Frédéric counted eleven chaplains, all of them Recollets).

Did the Recollets make an educational contribution in New France? To judge by the comments of nineteenth and twentieth century Quebec historians, from Garneau to Gosselin to Groulx, the Franciscans, in the fashion of the Jesuits and Sulpicians, were educationally active, performing as schoolmasters and maintaining schools. Although more circumspect than others in describing the Recollets as occasional schoolmasters, Louis-Philippe Audet, the dean of Quebec educational historians, joins with Gosselin and others in affirming the existence of a Recollet school in Trois-Rivières (Audet, 1951, p.5). Gérard Filteau, for his part, goes much further, claiming that the Franciscan order ran schools not only in Trois-Rivières but in Quebec and Montreal as well (Filteau, 1978, p.134). An English Canadian historian offers a similar assessment:

The Recollets had schools in Montreal, Trois-Rivières and Isle Royale, in addition to sponsoring and teaching in parochial schools when named to parish charges by

the bishops. When they assumed the chaplaincy duties at Fort Frontenac and Detroit, they opened some of the first schools for French and Amerindian children at posts in the upper country. (Jaenen, 1976, p. 102)

The thesis of this part of the presentation is that Recollet participation in New France education is largely a myth, sustained and nourished by succeeding generations of historians. Two arguments are advanced in support of the revisionist position. First, hard evidence is lacking to justify the prevailing view that the Recollets were educationally active in early Canada. Indeed, the traditional case for Franciscan participation seems to be based less on documentary sources of information than on assumption and unsupported declarations. It is charged that historians have fallen into the trap of concluding that inasmuch as the Recollets were regular clergy they must have followed in the educational footsteps of the Jesuits and Sulpicians. Second, in outlook and life style the Recollets were unlikely pedagogues and educational sponsors. Close to the common people with whom they identified and from whom they recruited members, most Recollets were not cut out for the republic of letters. To be sure, there were exceptions to the rule, but such persons tended to be French-born and products of the seventeenth century.<sup>(4)</sup> With the Canadianization of the Recollet order in the eighteenth century, a modest literary tradition all but disappeared, for the native-born members were little attracted to learning and its dissemination. Peter Kalm, the distinguished Swedish visitor to the colony in 1749, was perhaps not far off the mark when he described the Recollets as intellectually second rate, saying "they do not torment their brains with much learning" (Kalm, 1937, vol.II, p.453).

When historians speak of the Recollets as schoolmasters they do not mean the members functioned as casual or part-time teachers, that is to say, as parish priests teaching a bit of catechism to boys. Such informal instruction was an outgrowth of the spiritual obligation and was practised by many clerics. Nor are they referring to the Recollets as missionaries, to the fact that the latter sometimes taught French letters as well as Christian doctrine to the Indians. Rather they mean that the Recollets performed as regular, full-time teachers, instructing colonial boys in the rudiments of reading, writing, counting, and religion in a formal school. If it is true that the Franciscans were schoolmasters as claimed, why is it that such persons cannot be identified? As far as can be determined, no historian has succeeded in naming a single Recollet schoolmaster in early Canada. Of 43 Recollets listed in the **Dictionary of Canadian Biography** between 1670 and 1760, only two are described as having pedagogical connections. Prior to being admitted to the Franciscan order in 1756, Leger-Noel Veyssière reportedly taught at a Sulpician school in Montreal for two years (*Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol.IV, p.752). Patrice René's biographer

credits him with opening a boys' school in Port Royal around 1708 (Dictionary of Canadian Biography, vol.III, p.552).

What may be said of the claim that the Recollets maintained schools in the towns of Montreal, Quebec, and Trois-Rivières during the French period? It should be noted by way of explanation that the religious order founded churches and religious houses in the three centres. But such establishments must not be confused with schools. Indeed, there is not a shred of documentary evidence to indicate that the Recollets sponsored schools in Quebec and Montreal. And as regards Trois-Rivières the evidence is circumstantial at best. As parish clergy of Trois-Rivières from 1617 to 1683 and from 1693 to 1777 the order was in a position to supply teachers and to provide a margin of educational leadership. Indications are that the Recollets left the task of teaching to others. The notary, Séverin Ameau, taught in the town in the 1650s as did another notary, Jean-Baptiste Pottier, who arrived in 1700 after having served as schoolmaster in Lachine near Montreal. During the 1720s and early 1730s two members of the Montreal-based Charon Brothers, Antoine de La Girardière and François-Simonet, performed as schoolmasters in the town, being succeeded by the soldier Pierre-François Rigaud who continued until 1738. One authority speculates that the Recollets assumed teaching responsibilities at this point and carried on to the end of the period, though he is unable to name names and to provide any documentary evidence in support of the claim (Jouve, 1934, p.283). Indeed, a more recent study of educational facilities in seventeenth and eighteenth century Trois-Rivières makes no mention of the Recollets, either as schoolmasters or educational administrators (Douville, 1969, pp.39-60).

Leaving the question of schoolmasters aside, did the Recollets of Trois-Rivières take educational initiatives? In other words, were they responsible for maintaining a school and engaging schoolmasters the likes of Ameau, Pottier, La Girardière, and others? The case for a Recollet-run school appears to rest on a single piece of documentary evidence, an 1822 petition addressed to Lord Dalhousie by the citizens of Trois-Rivières in which the petitioners declared that the Recollets "ont constamment entretenue une école gratuite pour les petits garçons en cette ville".(5) The statement is suspect on several grounds. First, it was made in the nineteenth century, some sixty years after the fall of New France. The passage of time has a way of dulling memories and transforming beliefs into facts. Second, and more significantly, it is unclear whether the petitioners were referring to Recollet involvement in education since the British takeover in Canada in 1760 or since 1670 when the order first arrived in the town. Moreover, it is difficult to reconcile the above with the fact that the Recollets died out in Canada before 1800. Until more reliable evidence is forthcoming, the conventional belief in Recollet participation in education in

Trois-Rivières during the French period cannot be maintained with conviction.

### **A clue in Louisbourg**

Curiously, the key to unlocking the Recollet educational puzzle may lie not in Trois-Rivières but in the distant seaport of Louisbourg. The most intriguing aspect of the eighteenth century fortress town is that its only known educational facility was a girls' school, administered and staffed by the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame between 1727 and 1758 (Johnston, 1984). As a bustling garrison town filled with naval types, administrators, clerks, merchants, and other literate types and boasting a population of between 2,000 and 3,000 in the 1740s and perhaps triple the number on the eve of the British capture in 1758, Louisbourg was fertile ground for a boys' school. It is suggested that the answer to this incongruity may be found in the clerical situation. The parish clergy and military chaplains of Louisbourg and surrounding Ile Royale were Recollets, who in keeping with their simple ways did not attach much importance to the spread of learning. Their detractors, who included the town's civil and military leaders, accused them of ignorance, coarse behaviour, and neglectful of their spiritual duties. Bishop Saint-Vallier, who was personally responsible for sending the Notre Dame Sisters to Louisbourg to open a school, was severely critical of the parish clergy. In 1727 he wrote to the Recollet provincial in Brittany, asking for priests for Louisbourg who were "more learned and more reserved in their conduct, eating among themselves and not looking to dine and sup with ship captains and fishermen who think only of drinking" (Lemay, 1930). While the "ignorant" friars were the despair of the civil and religious leadership, they enjoyed the popularity and respect of the ordinary people, who praised them for their simple piety, frugal ways, and unpretentious behaviour. The Recollets of Louisbourg call to mind the worker priests of our own century.

In conclusion, if the Recollets were active participants in New France education, it is a well-kept secret. The available evidence does not support such a role.

### **NOTES**

1. Literacy studies for seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe have consistently revealed higher levels for males. In France, Louis Maggiolo's famous inquiry of the last century found that in the period 1686-90, 29 percent of the bridegrooms and 14 percent of brides across the country signed the marriage register. The figures for 1786-90 were

- 48 and 27 percent respectively. Recent French studies confirm the historical pattern. See especially François Furet and Jacques Ozouf (1977). **Lire et écrire: l'alphabétisation des français de Calvin à Jules Ferry**. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit. Even in colonial New England, acknowledged to be one of the world's most literate societies of the day, there was a pronounced difference between the sexes. Literacy rates for men and women in mid-seventeenth century New England were 60 and 30 percent respectively; in the eighteenth century 90 and 45 percent. Kenneth A. Lockridge. (1974). **Literacy in Colonial New England**, pp.38-39. New York: W.W. Norton.
2. See, among others, Michel Fleury and Pierre Valmary. (1957, janvier-mars). Les progrès de l'instruction élémentaire de Louis XIV à Napoléon III. **Population**, 12, 71-92; R.S. Schofield. (1968). The measurement of literacy in pre-industrial England, in Jack Goody, (Ed.), **Literacy in Traditional Societies**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; David Cressy. (1980). **Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and writing in Tudor and Stuart England**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  3. In the 1740s Bishop Pontbriand received several requests from the inhabitants of Detroit, asking for three sisters to come to their area to set up a school. Although the prelate approved the request, the worsening military situation compromised the project.
  4. Brother Gabriel Sagard, who spent most of his two years (1623-24) in Canada among the Hurons, recorded his impressions in **Le grand voyage au pays des Hurons**. Later he published a four-volume **L'histoire du Canada**, which traced Recollet activity in New France. Chrestien Le Clercq's twelve-year apostolate among the Micmacs is described in **Nouvelle relation de la Gaspésie**. A more famous work is **Premier établissement de la foy dans la Nouvelle-France** (1691).
  5. Several authorities, including Odoric-Marie Jouve and L.P. Audet, cite the 1822 document. See also Benjamin Sulte. (1932). **Mélanges historiques**, 19, p.21. Montréal: Editions Edouard Garand.

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