

Motherhouse- Community Icon

The above title is taken from a long article by Bill Steer, "Backroads Bill", in the Thursday, December 14th issue of "North Bay Community Voices". Mr. Steer met with Sister Mae Kierans, our Archivist, in researching this article which begins:

For years and years and years you drive by, "It's where the nuns live" and "it was the girls' college" and "the recovering addicts live there". From a distance the sand faced, red bricks of this community landmark make it look like a building of reverence, and it is. It belongs to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie (SSM) It is a symbol of goodness whose principles go beyond the brickwork of this stately edifice. Over the decades the St. Joseph Motherhouse complex has adapted to the local current needs of the times.



First the Bricks

The Motherhouse will soon be 80 years of age, one of the remaining Elderly and intact buildings of northern Ontario; it is located on a 32 acre parcel of pristine, undeveloped shoreline on the north-west corner of North Bay. Where did the bricks come from?

"Backroads Bill" then goes on to describe tracking down a man who is the son and nephew of the Gomoll brothers, Fred and Rudy who owned and operated Gomoll Brick works in the 1930's where the more than 200,000 bricks needed to build the Motherhouse were made from locally sourced clay and purchased for \$3,732. 29 –likely their largest order in those depression years. The cornerstone was laid on the feast of St. Ignatius, July 31, 1938 and construction proceeded.

Sister Mae then proceeded to fill Bill in on the history of the Sisters from our beginnings in 17th century France to our arrival in the USA in 1836, to Toronto in 1851 and to our founding in North Bay in 1936 at Bishop Dignan's request. The Sisters of St. Joseph from Peterborough were already ministering in the Sault diocese which, at that time, extended from North Bay to the Manitoba Border and the Bishop invited them to become part of this new Congregation. The founding 121 Sisters of Sault Ste. Marie had originally been Peterborough Sisters.

In the next issue of "Connecting Threads" we will include more of this Bill Steer Article.

FRIENDS!!