

**The Coming of the Basilians to
Assumption College
Early Expansion of St. Michael's
College**

by

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Assumption College was founded in 1855 when Father Pierre Point, S.J., pastor of the Church of the Assumption in Sandwich, Ontario, began construction of the first building. Little is known of the circumstances in which the project was undertaken but the cornerstone was laid on Sunday, June 17, 1855. *The Detroit Free Press* carried the following announcement in the issue of June 15 of that year:

“The foundation stone of l’Assumption College, at Sandwich, is to be laid on Sunday next at 11 o’clock A.M. The Bishop and other distinguished speakers will deliver addresses. The main building is to be 90 by 50 feet, three stories high with a wing of the same saise on each side. It will be built entirely by subscription. Boats will be running every hour between Detroit and Sandwich.”¹

The building thus begun in the Spring of 1855 was completed in December 1856 and opened on February 10, 1857 to 26 boarders and 60 day-students.² Between the laying of the cornerstone and the opening of the College the new dioceses of Hamilton and London were established. London was erected February 21, 1856 and entrusted to Pierre Adolphe Pinsonneault, priest of the Seminary of St. Sulpice, who took possession of the new See on June 29, 1856.³

¹ *Detroit Free Press*, June 15, 1855. A similar announcement appeared in the same newspaper on June 14. Though Sandwich belonged at this time to the Diocese of Toronto, the Bishop referred to was likely the Bishop of Detroit.

² From “A History of Assumption College, with Special Reference to its Relations with the Communities of Windsor and Sandwich.” I know neither the author nor the authority for this disappointing account, but it is to be found in the archives of Assumption College.

³ John F. Coffey, *The City and Diocese of London*, London, 1885, p. 10. See also Cyprien Tanguay, *Répertoire Général du Clergé Canadien*, Montreal, 1895, p. 16.

We have very little information about the College between its opening in February 1857 and the coming of Father Malbos in October or November of the same year. The teaching seems to have been done by the Jesuit Fathers and the institution was conducted under the patronage of Bishop Pinsonneault. The College housed not only its own students but those of the Common or Grammar School of Sandwich as well.⁴

One of the few references to these first months of the history of Assumption College is to be found in a query presented to the Minister of Education in March 1857 by the Reverend Edward Dewar, Rector of the Anglican Church in Sandwich. After explaining that some Protestants of Sandwich were in the anomalous position of having either to pay their rates to a Catholic school or send their children to an institution in which the teaching of their own religion was forbidden, he went on to say:

“The Roman Catholics have lately erected and opened a College, which is, of course, under the direction of the priests. A large edifice has been built, in which boarders are received, as well as a large number of day-scholars; and, which is the important point, they have made the Common School the Preparatory Department of this College; there is no teacher [he means, of course, in the Common School] but a native of France.”⁵

Mr. Dewar’s protest makes it perfectly clear that Assumption College was in operation in March 1857.

Something of the academic policy of the new institution is to be inferred from an advertisement of the College which appeared in the *Toronto Mirror*, July 31, 1857. English and French, it is stated, are placed on the same footing; courses are offered in three departments, primary, classical and mercantile; and the College is “under the patronage of His Lordship Right Rev. Dr. Pinsonneault, Bishop of London.” Although instruction in the College seems to have been given by the Jesuit Fathers, it is not impossible that some of Bishop Pinsonneault’s ecclesiastical students were on the staff as they certainly were for many years after this time. The College remained under the direction of the Jesuits for about seven months, that is, until November 1857 when the Bishop transferred the office of Superior to Father Joseph Malbos who had for five years served as economer or treasurer of St. Michael’s College in Toronto. It is with this appointment that the Basilian Fathers became associated with Assumption

⁴ The Common School of Sandwich Section was Catholic, the Separate School was Protestant.

⁵ J. G. Hodgins, *Documentary History*, xiii, 177. See also Henderson, Kelly, Pigott, Saint-Jacques, *Historical Sketch of The Separate Schools of Ontario and the Catholic Separate School Minority Report* (Published by the Hope Commission on Education in Ontario, 1950), Toronto, 1950, p. 36.

College and that relevant information begins to appear in the general archives of the Basilians in Annonay.

Father Malbos invited to Assumption

The circumstances of Father Malbos' appointment to Sandwich were these. He had come from Annonay to Toronto in the summer of 1852 as a member of the first staff of St. Michael's College. He took up his duties as treasurer in the temporary quarters at Queen and Church Streets in what was then called St. Mary's Little Seminary. When the Little Seminary was moved to the Cathedral in February 1853 and became known as St. Michael's College, he continued to hold the office of treasurer.⁶ On his shoulders had fallen the heavy task of financing the construction of the new building opened three years later on Clover Hill, north of Toronto. He had experienced almost no difficulty in learning English and had, as a consequence, to bear not only the financial but the preaching burden involved in raising funds for the project. In the summer of 1857 Fathers Vincent and Molony returned to France, the former on a visit, the latter to remain as Professor of Theology and English in the Seminary at Privas where Bishop de Charbonnel planned on training a number of ecclesiastical students for Toronto.⁷ The Bishop also happened to be in Europe at this time on an extended tour in search of recruits and financial aid for his diocese.⁸ Father Malbos, however, remained in Toronto. He found himself involved in two controversies, one with Father Soulerin over the interpretation of the bursar's powers as laid down in the Constitutions of the Congregation, the other with the Vicar General, Father Bruyère, over the financial report of St. Michael's College and St. Basil's Church.⁹ Both Father Soulerin and Bruyère respected his talents. Neither they nor Bishop de Charbonnel wanted him to return to France, yet all three were anxious that he be replaced as bursar.

With matters standing thus a request came to the Superior General of the Basilians through Father Soulerin from Bishop Pinsonneault of London for a priest to take charge of the seven-months old College of the Assumption. To Father Tourvieille this appeared to offer an excellent solution to his perplexing

⁶ L. K. Shook, "St. Michael's College – The Formative Years, 1850-1853," *Report of the Canadian Catholic Historical Association*, 1950, pp. 37-52.

⁷ The correspondence of Father Tourvieille, Superior General, makes this very clear. "Mgr. de Charbonnel nous confiera les recrues qu'il pourra faire en France pour le Canada, et le cher confrère Molony leur apprendra l'Anglais." *Registre pour les copies des lettres de M. Tourvieille, 1855-1860*, Aug. 29, 1857, "à M. Soulerin," p. 146.

⁸ *Registre 1855-1860*, July 28, 1857, "à M. Molony," p. 144.

⁹ Copy of two letters of Bishop de Charbonnel to Father Bruyère, v.g., and to Father Malbos, Aug. 17 and 18, 1857; Archives of the Basilian Fathers, Annonay.

problem.

“Providence,” he wrote to Bishop de Charbonnel, “is coming to our aid. The Bishop of London is asking for a subject to be put at the head of an establishment ... [Father Soulerin] has informed me to-day that he has received a second letter from the Bishop of London on this matter of a new house ... Father Soulerin told him that he was awaiting word from me. I consulted Father Molony about it, and he replied conscientiously that it would be most advantageous to our house in Toronto to have the institution the Bishop is speaking of placed under the same management, because many students come from there to the College in Toronto. I am answering Father Soulerin, leaving the matter to his judgment.”¹⁰

Bishop Pinsonneault’s first and possibly only real contact with the Congregation prior to Father Malbos’ going to Sandwich came on November 16, 1856 when, at the blessing of the newly-opened St. Michael’s College and St. Basil’s Church, he sang the Pontifical Mass and presided over the ceremonies. His friend Bishop Farrell of Hamilton preached the sermon for the occasion and officiated at Vespers. Bishop de Charbonnel was ill at the time and unable to attend. The music of the Mass was provided by a choir of students and layfolk trained and conducted by Father Malbos whose musical prowess had won him quite a local reputation. Father Soulerin has left a full account of the social evening, which followed Vespers and supper.¹¹

It is more than likely that Bishop Pinsonneault was impressed by Father Malbos’ work with choir and theologians. When he later became conscious of the acute shortage of priests for college teaching and was looking about for replacements for the Jesuits who were so short of subjects for schools in Canada, he must certainly have recalled this memorable day in St. Basil’s and St. Michael’s. At any rate, he was most anxious to get Father Malbos when there seemed to be some possibility of his leaving Toronto.

Bishop de Charbonnel did not take kindly to Father Malbos’ going to Sandwich. He felt that the new college would curtail the work of his own foundation in Toronto. Since he was in France when he found out about it, there was little he could do save protest to Father Tourvieille, the Superior General, who had already instructed Father Soulerin to proceed with the affair as he thought best. The Bishop did protest Father Malbos’ appointment on the ground that it was helping to create the new establishment in Sandwich. Father Tourvieille’s reply is doubly interesting in that it not only reveals his fatherly

¹⁰ *Registre* 1855-1860, Sept. 30, 1857, “à Mgr de Charbonnel,” p. 150.

¹¹ Letter of Father J. M. Soulerin, Toronto, Nov. 23, 1856; Archives of the Basilian Fathers, Annonay.

attitude towards the Bishop of Toronto¹² but presents the details of Father Malbos' appointment and supplies the motives governing the whole affair:

"I beg of you, be persuaded that, after having twice refused the Bishop of Bordeaux a single subject to head an institution which he wanted to entrust to us, that I could not so much as think of helping to create one in London. I had not the least desire to leave Father Malbos in Toronto against your will; nor did I like to send him into a mission in Canada ... The wisest move seemed to be to leave the whole matter to the judgment, prudence and devotion of Father Soulerin ... I am sure, Monseigneur, that he shares my affection for you. In my long life, contradictions have often made me experience strong and vivid emotions. But age and reflection have, with the help of grace, made me more calm. I have become rather used to seeing God's will in events which come to pass contrary to my own human will... If we do any good in London it will be in what was once a part of your own diocese and which you still hold dear; and we shall together bless Divine Providence for using this means to carry out its designs."¹³

Sometime during October or very early November an agreement was reached between Bishop Pinsonneault and Father Soulerin. Neither the agreement itself, nor Father Soulerin's letter reporting it to the Superior General seem to be extant. But the General's reply¹⁴ to this letter mentions the following points which would seem to be the substance of the contract. 1) Father Malbos was to become Superior of Assumption College. 2) The College was to be operated "aux périls et risques" of the Bishop of London; that is, he was responsible for operating-deficits and entitled to any profits which might accrue. 3) The arrangements were to be regarded as exploratory and to be for one year.

The First Basilian Establishment in Sandwich

Sometime in November Father Malbos arrived at Assumption and assumed the duties and office of Superior. The history of the College during his administration has never been recorded, and only a small number of documents survive from his time, but from these, such as they are, a half-satisfactory story can be patched together. Three of these documents mark his arrival, though they do not give its exact date.

¹² Their friendship began when Armand de Charbonnel was a schoolboy at Annonay. The earliest of his letters to Father Tourvieille preserved in the Basilian Archives, Annonay, is dated Dec. 31, 1825 from the "Solitude de St. Sulpice à Issy" shortly after his ordination to the priesthood, Dec. 17, 1825.

¹³ *Registre* 1855-1860, Nov. 24, 1857, "à Mgr de Charbonnel au sujet du collège de Sandwich," p. 170.

¹⁴ *Registre* 1855-1860, "à M. Soulerin" p. 171.

The first is a letter to E. J. Heenan, ex-prefect of the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin in St. Michael's from James F. Ouelette, prefect of the Sodality in Assumption College, Sandwich, C. W., November 31, 1857. It makes the interesting revelation that it was Father Malbos who first set up the Blessed Virgin's Sodality at Assumption, and that in doing so he tried to establish the bond of friendship between the two Basilian colleges in Canada. A few brief excerpts from Ouelette's long and interesting letter will be enough for present purposes:

"Dear sir. I hope you will pardon the liberty I take in writing to you in the name of my fellow students as prefect of the Sodality of the Immaculate Conception ... Being under the guidance of the same Society as ourselves, we consider you as brothers, and as such demand the assistance of your prayers ... In all our reunions we will pray for you and for all the Confraternities that are under the direction of the Fathers of St. Basil... What we heard of you from our good Father Superior proves that you have profited by the instructions which have been given to you ... We owe to him the happiness which we enjoy, of having been formed into a Society under the most holy Virgin. We will ever bear in remembrance the day on which we were enrolled. This was the 29th of November which was the day appointed for our consecration ... Your devoted servant, James F. Ouelette."¹⁵

This letter indicated that among the first works undertaken by Father Malbos at Assumption was the establishing of this Sodality which has traditionally been so vital a factor in student life of the College.

A second document from this same period is an article in the *Toronto Mirror*, December 11, 1857. It is a statement of Father Malbos' academic policy which seems not to have differed from that of his immediate predecessors.

Mention is made of "100 pupils and 11 professors." The number of pupils would appear to be exaggerated, and certainly includes the children of the Common School of Sandwich.¹⁶ It is impossible to account for eleven professors.

¹⁵ This letter is copied from the first minute books of the Sodality of St. Michael's College, pp. 42-43. See also R. J. Scollard's privately circulated *Notes on the History of the Congregation of St. Basil*, II, pp. 71-75.

¹⁶ This Common School was maintained in the College until shortly before the coming of Father O'Connor who quotes a letter of the Vicar General, Father Bruyère as follows: "The different Superiors took charge of the school of their own accord. My impression is that you will have plenty to do with the boarders and day-scholars who will come in great numbers, from the towns of Windsor, Sandwich and Detroit. I repeat therefore that those who take charge of the College, will not have to provide a schoolhouse for the Parish. Hence the people are making, I believe some preparations to put up a building for the use of the Separate School, knowing that they are not to enjoy Assumption College much longer." Letter of Father O'Connor to Father Tourvieille, Oct. 29, 1868;

It is known that three diocesan seminarians were on Father Malbos' staff, including a Mr. Fauteux and a Mr. Murphy.¹⁷ It is not impossible that the three or four¹⁸ Jesuits stationed in Sandwich were also included in the number, and indeed may have been teaching for Father Malbos. Some of Father Tourvieille's letters to Fathers Soulerin and Malbos suggest this. In one letter Father Tourvieille remarks: "It would be a misfortune if they [i. e. the Jesuits] left Sandwich. Poor Father Malbos would be left there alone."¹⁹ Again he says: "On many an occasion, he [Father Malbos] will find the experience of the Jesuit Fathers extremely useful."²⁰ And when speaking of the difficulty of finding more staff for the coming year, Father Tourvieille writes: "Perhaps the Jesuit Fathers will stay on longer and thus give us time to be able to come to your aid."²¹ None of these is definite, but it is perfectly clear that throughout 1857 and 1858 Father Malbos was indebted to the Jesuits who still remained in Sandwich.

A third document dating from the end of 1857 is a letter written by one of the students, I. J. Amann to Master William Skinings of Goderich, C.W. Its chief contribution is a statement that immediately prior to the coming of Father Malbos, the Superior did not reside in the College.²²

Father Malbos' chief material achievement during this year seems to have been the erection of a large recreation room, a kind of closed shed which provided the students with playing facilities in winter and wet weather.²³ Father Denis O'Connor later described it as a "play room measuring 60x25 feet." By 1871, however, it had through neglect become unfit for use. It was taken down and replaced by another wooden structure consisting of two large rooms – a study-hall and a recreation room.²⁴

For the rest of the academic year, that is, from January until July 1858, there are no significant documents to be found. *The Canadian Freeman*, July 23, 1858, gives a brief account of the closing exercises for the year.

Archives of the Basilian Fathers, Toronto, Ont.

¹⁷ This information comes *viva voce* from His Excellency, Bishop Dignan. There was a Rev. J. Murphy ordained July 4, 1858 and a P. Fauteux, Dec. 16, 1859. J. F. Coffey, *The City and Diocese of London*, London, 1885, p. 61.

¹⁸ This number is approximate. In 1863 there were three Jesuits in Sandwich, according to *Scobie's Canadian Almanac*, Toronto, 1863, p. 57. I have not the figures for 1857.

¹⁹ *Registre* 1855-1859, Jan. 18, 1858, "à M. Soulerin," p. 188.

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, Jan. 18, 1858, "à M. Malbos, Sup. du Collège de l'Assomption à Sandwich," p. 206.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, Aug. 23, 1858, "à M. Malbos etc," p. 233.

²² Archives of Assumption College.

²³ Letter of Father O'Connor to Father Soulerin, Sup. Gen., Aug. 24, 1868. See R. J. Scollard, *Notes*, vi, pp. 131-132.

²⁴ Letter of Sept. 15, 1871; *Notes*, viii, pp. 63-64; see also p. 59.

The notice is accompanied by a long list of student-names. Of those who won prizes, six or seven are noted as being from Detroit, Michigan, one from Grand Rapids, and one from Peru, Indiana. The following issue of the *Freeman* carries the announcement for the next academic year²⁵ as well as an accompanying article expressing the opinion that 1858-1859 will be a banner year and that "all available spaces may be filled up."²⁶

During this same summer of 1858, August 16 to be exact, the College was incorporated by Act of Parliament 22 Victoria, ch. 136. The proceedings had been introduced at the beginning of the Session, that is, February 26, 1858 and were only completed in the middle of August. This means, of course, that Father Malbos was the first Superior of Assumption to hold office in the Corporation under the terms of the Act.²⁷

Father Malbos hopefully began his second year as Superior in September 1858. He remained in office only a month and a half or two months²⁸ of this second year, then left suddenly for France. Four factors explain his departure – failure to receive reinforcements from France, clashes with his staff, opposition from certain quarters within the diocese, and very strong opposition from Bishop de Charbonnel of Toronto. These in combination brought the first Basilian establishment in Sandwich to a sudden close.

The first of these difficulties, though unavoidable was disappointing to the Superior of Assumption. But the Community found itself quite unable to send him so much as one subject to share the burdens of his college mission. Father Tourvieille wrote that he was actually forced to close one house in France because of the acute shortage of priests.²⁹ He did, however, promise help for the following year 1859-1860 when the Community would have five additional priests.³⁰

There are indications too that Father Malbos had trouble with his staff, not entirely without blame on his part. Two passages in Father Tourvieille's letters suggest a clash of personalities. His last letter to Assumption urges upon Father Malbos the practice of patience: "What patience is necessary for one who is placed over others! Patience does not grow from our old nature which is full of vanity and self love, it comes from above: *a Domino patientia*."³¹ And when,

²⁵ July 30, 1858, p. 3, c. 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, c. 6.

²⁷ *Statutes of the Province of Canada passed in the first session of the sixth Parliament of Canada*, pp. 728-729.

²⁸ The last letter written to Father Tourvieille from Sandwich is dated Oct. 8, 1858.

²⁹ *Registre 1855-1860*, Oct. 12, 1858, "à M. le Sup. de Toronto," p. 240.

³⁰ *Registre 1855-1860*, Nov. 13, 1858, "à M. Malbos," p. 247.

³¹ *Registre 1850-1860*, Nov. 14, 1858, "à I. Malbos," p. 247.

shortly after, he was informed of Father Malbos' departure, he wrote: "It is evident that Father Malbos had a great deal, perhaps too much to do. He thought he could subdue his subordinates, and he was wrong; and this happens ever so often."³² A year later, when Bishop Pinsonneault wrote a long personal letter to Father Malbos now in Annonay, he strongly urged that if a colony of Basilians was to be sent to Sandwich, Father Malbos be one of them, but that he come as bursar or professor rather than as Superior.³³

More serious than either of the preceding reasons for Father Malbos' departure is the opposition he had to face within and without his diocese. Without the solid support of all groups, lay and clerical, in the diocese it was impossible to attract students in sufficient numbers to assure the success of the College. Evidence of the exact nature of this opposition is wanting, but later on, when Father O'Connor was appraising the prospects of Assumption he regards the disappearance "of the opposing elements which existed in the time of Father Malbos"³⁴ as a hopeful sign.

Equally serious was the opposition of Bishop de Charbonnel to the Basilians going to Sandwich. He protested several times to the Superior General, and his mind on the matter was no secret to Bishop Pinsonneault. When the latter was going ahead with his plans to install the Basilians in Sandwich on a fuller scale, he asked Father Soulerin under no condition to reveal them to Bishop de Charbonnel.³⁵ It is not strange, then, that in the face of all these difficulties, Father Malbos concluded that the time for the full establishment of a Basilian house at Sandwich was not ripe, and thus came to a close his valiant attempt to organize Assumption College. The College, of course, continued to operate throughout the rest of 1858-1859 without Father Malbos. On February 2, 1859, Bishop Pinsonneault secured a Pontifical Brief authorizing him to transfer his residence and See from London to Sandwich.³⁶ It was some time until the change was fully carried out; but in October 1859, the Jesuits left the parish of Sandwich and the Bishop took possession. This brought about still another reorganization of Assumption College, now described as "the Diocesan College of Sandwich."³⁷ The new advertizing stated that "this institution has been recently reorganized under the immediate direction of His Lordship the Bishop of London, and is now under the superintendence and presidency of the Rev. C. Frachon, late of St.

³² *Registre* 1850-1860, Nov. 22, 1858, "à M. Soulerin," p. 249.

³³ Letter of Bishop Pinsonneault to Father Malbos, Sept. 21, 1859; Archives of the Basilian Fathers, Toronto. See Notes, VI, pp. 109-110.

³⁴ Letter of Father O'Connor to the Superior General, Aug. 24, 1868, Archives of the Basilian Fathers, Toronto; see Scollard, *Notes*, vi, p. 129.

³⁵ Letter of Bishop Pinsonneault to Father Soulerin, Sept. 28, 1858; Archives of Basilian Fathers, Toronto; see Scollard, *Notes*, vi, pp. 99-102.

³⁶ J. F. Coffey, *The City and Diocese of London*, London, 1885, p. 13.

³⁷ *The Canadian Freeman*, Oct. 28, 1859, p. 2, c. 3; see also p. 3, c. 5.

Thomas.”³⁸ The history of the College from this period until 1870 does not concern the Basilians directly, nor does it fall strictly within the scope of this paper. We shall only follow it in outline as it is reflected in the correspondence of Fathers Soulerin, Vincent and O’Connor. In general, there are three stages: the diocesan organization just described, the attempt made by the Benedictines, and the regency of Theodule Girardot.

Father Soulerin and Assumption

It is important to pay special attention to Father Soulerin’s rôle in twice bringing the Basilians to Assumption. It is only too easy to ignore it or to misinterpret it completely. A careful examination of all the correspondence dealing with the two attempts of the Basilians to organize the College serves to show that his was perhaps the leading and decisive part.

As Superior of St. Michael’s in 1857, he was left entirely in charge of the affair by the Superior General. It was he who made all the official arrangements. And after Father Malbos had actually gone to Assumption, Father Soulerin had both to accept the responsibility for the appointment and bear the brunt of Bishop de Charbonnel’s annoyance. He was in the position of being able to show no enthusiasm in public for what was largely his own idea. But Bishop Pinsonneault was convinced that in his heart Father Soulerin was with him. “He prefers,” writes the Bishop, “to abstain from taking any active part in a new endeavor, having had too many disagreements already on this subject. But Father Soulerin tells me that he is far from being opposed to the project.”³⁹

His letters after 1859 show that Assumption College was never far from his thoughts. He felt at first that Father Malbos’ departure and the Bishop of Toronto’s opposition, had put an end to the Assumption affair, at least for the time being. He was even pleased not to be too directly implicated in the reorganization of the new Diocese of Sandwich. Thus he writes:

“As the Bishop of Sandwich has to be here next Friday or Saturday, I did not write him. I shall tell him far better *viva voce* what should he done in a case like this. It is the goodness of God which spares us from going to Sandwich in the present circum. stances. The departure of the Jesuits is causing much discontent there. Although we are outsiders in the unfortunate affair, some might think we were involved in it and receive us badly. Since you have no subjects for us, the question is settled.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Letter of Bishop Pinsonneault to Father Malbos, Sept. 12, 1859; Basilian Archives, Toronto. See Scollard *Notes*, VI, p. 113.

⁴⁰ Letter of Father Soulerin to Father Actorie, Sup. Gen., Oct. 12, 1859; Basilian Archives, Annonay.

Following Bishop de Charhonnell's resignation and withdrawal from Toronto in April 1860, Father Soulerin's tone changed. Once more is he stirred by the possibility of returning to Assumption:

"We have had recently," he writes in May 1860, "a visit from the Bishop of Sandwich who was on his way to Quebec. He promised to call in again on his way back. I am quite sure that he is looking for relief for his College. Unless he finds the necessary men among the numerous clergy of Lower Canada, I am inclined to think he will make another approach to us."⁴¹

In July of the same year he still had Sandwich on his mind but felt that unless Father Malbos or some other confrère came from France, the College would be too trying an undertaking.⁴² In August he reports that Bishop Pinsonneault was on the point of getting a society of priests from Lower Canada to take his College. "He was ceding them the building and property without debt. This looked rather good, especially with the government subsidy. But he wanted himself to select the members from the Community, and this spoiled everything. I am sorry about 'Sandwich."⁴³

For some time after this, Father Soulerin's letters fail to mention Sandwich. He was preoccupied with his own relations with Bishop Lynch, with the Civil War in the United States, and with the first addition to the building on Clover Hill. In February 1862, he notes that the Benedictines have taken over the College in Sandwich.⁴⁴ And in May 1863 he writes: "The Benedictines have left Sandwich. I am sorry we did not know their intention some months ago."⁴⁵

In 1865 Father Soulerin returned to France as Superior General of the Congregation. This placed him in a position to deal kindly with Assumption when once again it was offered to the Basilians. This offer came in 1868 when the College was under the direction of the faithful and beloved Théodule Girardot. It was Bishop Walsh who made the offer early in 1868, giving the Community a year to consider it.⁴⁶

This was the beginning of a long series of negotiations between the Bishop

⁴¹ Letter of Father Soulerin to Sup. Gen., May 28, 1860; Basilian Archives, Annonay.

⁴² Letter of Father Soulerin to Sup. Gen., July 21, 1860; Basilian Archives, Annonay.

⁴³ "Je regrette Sandwich." Letter of Father Soulerin to the Sup. Gen., Aug. 24, 1860, Basilian Archives, Annonay.

⁴⁴ Letter of Father Soulerin to the Sup. Gen., Feb. 18, 1862.

⁴⁵ Letter of Father Soulerin to the Sup. Gen., Sept. 10, 1863; Basilian Archives, Annonay.

⁴⁶ Letter of Father O'Connor to the Sup. Gen., June 17, 1868; Basilian Archives, Toronto. See Scollard, *Notes*, VI, pp. 121 and 186.

and the Community in order to determine the conditions of a lasting concordat. These negotiations were amicable throughout, but were carefully mulled over on both sides, on the Bishop's because he wanted to bring an end to the long period of instability which had prevented the College from developing, the Basilians because they were anxious to establish the College on a sound economic basis, having already learned at Sandwich and later at Louisville, Ohio, that hastily-drawn contracts do not make for successful institutions. Throughout all the negotiations it was Father Soulerin, so long the protagonist of Assumption who made the final decisions.

The Second Basilian Establishment in Sandwich

Eleven letters dealing with matters preliminary to the second Basilian establishment in Sandwich lay in the general archives of the Congregation in Toronto, and through them it is possible to follow the negotiations between Bishop Walsh and the Basilian Fathers in some detail. The first of these letters is dated June 2, 1868 and relays the Bishop's invitation to return to Assumption to Father Soulerin, Superior General.⁴⁷ Then follow a number of letters from Father Denis O'Connor describing his visit to Assumption in July 1868 and reporting the results of his careful examination of the buildings, property and prospects of the College. So thorough and conscientious are his reports that it is quite impossible to even summarize them, but the following passage provides a sample of the wealth of information to be found in his letters.

"In company of Father Vincent, I visited Sandwich College towards the end of last month [July, 1868]. We first went to see Father Bruyère, at present Administrator of the Diocese. He accompanied us to Sandwich, and was kind enough to take all possible pains to point out to us everything, and to give us the fullest information on every subject... The College is pretty well situated, but on the very same land a much better position could have been selected, but that is not to the point ... The building with the exception of the roof, is substantially put together. The roof was at first flat, but on account of leakage, another sloping one has been put on, and very badly. Instead of building up the gables with brick as should have been done, they were simply boarded like a barn, and through the roof itself the heavens are visible in a score of places at least ... The rooms are nearly all too large for private and classrooms, and too small for study hall, refectory and chapel..."⁴⁸

Thus Father O'Connor's letters go on, supplying fact after fact, each with

⁴⁷ Father Vincent to Father Soulerin, June 2, 1868; Basilian Archives, Toronto; Scollard, *Notes*, VI, pp. 114-118.

⁴⁸ Letter of Father O'Connor to Sup. Gen., Aug. 24, 1868; Basilian Archives, Toronto; Scollard, *Notes*, VI, pp. 128-144.

shrewd and constructive observation. The crucial matters of discussion were the disposition of Assumption Parish and the placing of responsibility for the mortgage of \$4,600.⁴⁹ In the course of this correspondence it became apparent that if the agreement went through, the new administration would have the support of the Bishop and most of the Diocese, that the College would henceforth be completely separate from the Common School,⁵⁰ and that the Government subsidies which had come in regularly since 1860 would be discontinued.⁵¹

The Concordat was at last drawn up Sept. 27, 1869. It was at first unacceptable to the Diocesan Council⁵² and for a few months it rather looked as though the whole affair might fall through. But in a letter of April 28, 1870, the Vicar General, Father Bruyère, proposed an amendment to the Concordat which was acceptable to all concerned. It should be noted that when this agreement was made, it was Father Soulerin's belief that Assumption could "never become a self-supporting institution."⁵³

Father O'Connor's work in his first year at Assumption, 1870-1871, can be best assessed against the preceding administration. Between the departure of the Benedictines in 1863 and the coming of the Basilians in the summer of 1870, the Diocese was directly responsible for the College. During most of this time it was administered by Théodule Girardot under the pastor of Assumption parish, who in 1869 at any rate was Father Laurent. It is impossible to be sure how much college work was actually kept up during all these years. The Government grants which began in 1860 were continued until February 1868. The payment of the final grant of \$1,500 was held up because it was reported to the Premier that Assumption College "consisted only of an ordinary School."⁵⁴ This charge does not seem to have been entirely true. Father O'Connor was almost certainly speaking of College students when in 1869 he wrote:

"At the present time there are 14 boarders and some day pupils. They are

⁴⁹ Letter of Father Vincent, June 2, 1868; Basilian Archives; Scollard, *Notes*, VI, p. 115.

⁵⁰ Letter of Father O'Connor to Sup. Gen., Oct. 29, 1868; Basilian Archives, Toronto; Scollard, *Notes*, VI, pp. 150-151.

⁵¹ Letter of Father O'Connor, June 17, Oct. 29, 1868, Jan. 25, 1869; Basilian Archives, Toronto; Scollard, *Notes*, VI, pp. 123, 153, 184.

⁵² Letter of Bishop Walsh to Father Vincent, Oct. 27, 1859; Basilian Archives; Scollard, *Notes*, VIII, p. 4.

⁵³ Letter of Fr. Soulerin to Fr. O'Connor, Dec. 25, 1868; Basilian Archives, Toronto; *Notes*, VI, p. 174.

⁵⁴ Letter of Father O'Connor to Sup. Gen., Dec. 1, 1868; Basilian Archives, Toronto; Scollard, *Notes*, VI, p. 155.

taught classics by an ecclesiastic of the Diocese.”⁵⁵

In the letter in which Father Bruyère made the final offer of Assumption to the Basilians, there is mention of fifty-two students, three ecclesiastics, Mr. Girardot and his family “under the superintendence of the Rev. Father Laurent, pastor and Superior of the College.”⁵⁶ The College picture, however, was not a very bright one. Mr. Girardot seems, according to the brief notes supplied by Miss Cécile Girardot,⁵⁷ to have been unhappy about his responsibility for boys preparing for the seminary. Moreover, the poverty of the institution was excessive, students having even to provide their own beds.⁵⁸ All who were directly concerned with the College, even Father Laurent who had reluctantly to give up the Parish of the Assumption, were greatly relieved when, in the summer of 1870, the College passed for the second time into the hands of the Basilian Fathers.

There is no time here to go into the work of Father O’Connor. He arrived at Assumption about the 1st of August 1870, and his first letter to the Superior General after his arrival is dated, appropriately, August 15. The letter describes the conditions of the house:

“There are in the College, belonging to it, about 45 bad bedsteads, 7 desks for the study, 4 tables for the refectory, about a dozen old chairs, and 4 or 5 stoves, and that is all ... There is no furniture in any of the master’s rooms, no mattresses, no bed clothes, no furniture for classroom, and so on for the rest.”

But the contract with the diocese over property, farmlands and parish was a good one, and more than this, the will to succeed was universal. Farther on in the same letter, we read:

“Now you will ask, what are our prospects. I answer candidly. I think they are good. If you except the little dislikes that persons generally have for change, priests and people received us well, and give us every encouragement both here and in Detroit.”

The College opened in September without fanfare but with sound economic and academic policies. There were at first six professors and about thirty-one boarders. Father O’Connor as Superior of the College was also nominally in

⁵⁵ Letter of Father O’Connor to Sup. Gen., Jan. 25, 1869; Basilian Archives, Toronto; Scollard, *Notes*, VI, p. 186.

⁵⁶ Letter of Rev. J. M. Bruyère, V.G., April 28, 1870; Basilian Archives, Toronto; Scollard, *Notes*, VIII, p. 10.

⁵⁷ Notes of Miss Cécile Girardot; Archives of Assumption College.

⁵⁸ Letter of Father O’Connor to Sup. Gen., Aug. 15, 1870; Basilian Archives, Toronto; Scollard, *Notes*, VIII, p. 30.

charge of the, parish, but he was provided with a priest to serve as rector, Father J. J. M. Aboulin, who was recalled from Louisville to serve in the Sandwich parish.⁵⁹

A letter of one of the young Masters, Robert MacBrady, written September 24, 1870, eleven days after the opening of the term, provides the first and perhaps most genuine account of these early days of the reorganized College. Young MacBrady had been summoned from his studies in France to join Father O'Connor's staff. He wrote back to France as follows:

“Very dear Superior I arrived at Toronto on the 12th of September in good health and spirits: from there I started for home where I remained only six days, and on the 21st I arrived at Sandwich, and on the 22nd in the morning I went down to class. All counted, we are six Masters in the house: Father O'Connor does duty as Superior and Econome: Mr. Scanlon teaches elementary English, and Mr. Quinlan 1st English, while I teach the would-be Rhetoric. Besides we have a study master who delights in the name of Monsieur Saint-Vincent.⁶⁰ I am quite happy here: it is true I have not had time enough to become lonesome: but no matter. I think I shall be able to live here perfectly well. For the present our accommodations are but few: as yet I have no table in my room: and I am writing this letter on a geography that I hold on my knees; however, we shall soon have any quantity of tables and book cases and fine one's they'll be: they are to be taken from the Bishop's palace which is full of abandoned furniture. But I have not said anything about my trip across the ocean ... But enough for the trip: let me talk of something that has the charm of actuality. We have already 31 boarders and the College is only open since a week ago last Tuesday: that is to say, it was opened on the 13th September. It is not a bad commencement ... Father Flannery says that we shall have any amount of pupils before the end of the year. May his hope be realized! I am going to commence my theology soon, and Father O'Connor says he won't let me lose my time. He wants to drive me through pretty fast and make a priest of me as quickly as possible ... Father O'Connor is awaiting the arrival of a priest with great impatience. Your affectionate child in Jesus Christ. R. MacBrady Assumption College, Sandwich.”⁶¹

The priest so impatiently awaited was for the parish; and he did arrive in the person of Father Aboulin. And with Father Aboulin in the parish, and men like Father O'Connor and Mr. MacBrady in the College, the Basilians could be said at last to have come to Sandwich, this time to stay.

⁵⁹ Letter of Father Vincent to Sup. Gen., Sept. 1, 1870; Basilian Archives, Toronto; Scollard, *Notes*, VIII, p. 22: “Nous avons conclu à retirer de Louisville M. Aboulin et de le donner au Père O'Connor, qui en fera un curé.”

⁶⁰ The sixth Master appears to have been James Mannix.

⁶¹ Letter of Mr. MacBrady to Father Soulerin, Sept. 24, 1870; Basilian Archives, Annonay.