

Mother Sainte-Anne-Marie, CND (1861–1937)

Marie-Aveline Bengle was born on October 15, 1861 in Saint-Paul d'Abbotsford into a family whose faith was solid and deep. From 1875 to 1879, she pursued her secondary studies at Mont Notre-Dame in Sherbrooke.

In 1879, she began teaching at the local school house. Feeling very drawn to religious life, in 1880 she entered the novitiate of the Congrégation de Notre-Dame. Shortly after, she took the habit and the name Sister Sainte-Anne-Marie. She pronounced her first vows in 1882 and began teaching at Mont Sainte-Marie in 1883. It was at this Montreal boarding school that Sister Sainte-Anne-Marie saw the glaring needs in the education of young French-speaking girls. In fact, even if the curriculum of private teaching establishments such as Mont Sainte-Marie was



distinctly better than that of public schools, the diplomas that were given there would not provide access to higher education. Classical colleges which, at the time, were the only means of reaching university were reserved for boys. In this context, only a teaching career could offer young women a professional opening on the job market but, here too, better training would need to be provided. A woman of vision, faithful to the educational mission of her community, Sister Sainte-Anne-Marie took up this double challenge: access to higher education and university for women and educational development for teachers.

Despite deep-rooted stereotypes about women and their role in society, she persevered and, in 1908, the first classical college for young French-speaking women was founded – l'École d'Enseignement Supérieur. In 1913, she became Dean of Studies for the Congregation. For years she pursued efforts with the ecclesial and governmental authorities to found an advanced teachers' training college. In 1926, the Institut pédagogique finally opened its doors.

When Sister Sainte-Anne-Marie died on March 13, 1937, flags flew at half-mast at Université de Montréal and the Montreal Catholic School Commission, where she was the first female member, and at hundreds of other teaching establishments. A state funeral was held at the Notre-Dame Basilica in Montreal, a final tribute to a very important figure in the world of education.

LINKS:



Cf. her biography (in French only): *La féministe en robe noire. Mère Sainte-Marie*, de Claude Gravel, Montréal, 2013, Libre Expression

http://www.cnd-m.org/100/pdf/f_r_n-en.pdf

<http://www.lapresse.ca/debats/votre-opinion/201303/27/01-4635378-mere-sainte-anne-marie-la-cinquieme-feministe.php>