

History of RND

Regiopolis-Notre Dame has had a very prominent role in Catholic education in Kingston - even on a national scale. As Canada's oldest English Catholic high school, RND has undergone its fair share of change over the years. Read along to follow the development of the school we have today from inception over 170 years ago.

Regiopolis CollegeThe Diocese of Kingston was established in 1826 with Alexander Macdonnell as its first bishop. As an Auxiliary to the bishop of Quebec for Upper Canada, he had set up a small college and seminary in his parish at St. Raphael's. When he moved to Kingston, he was determined to have such an institution here.

In 1837 he secured from the government of Upper Canada the incorporation of the College of Regiopolis. On June 11, 1839, he laid the cornerstone of the College, a five story stone building which is now Sydenham Street wing of Hotel Dieu Hospital. The Building opened for classes 1842 and functioned as a secondary school, college and seminary until 1869. Several priests, including two later Bishops of Kingston, were ordained from there. In 1886 the government granted university status to Regiopolis.

Financial support for the institution was always in short supply and in 1869 the situation became impossible. An entry in a diary kept by one of the seminarians, Charles McWilliams, after reporting on the year-end graduation exercises on June 23, states: "And thus closed the grand old College of Regiopolis."

It remained for Kingston's first Archbishop, James Vincent Cleary, to bring about the resurrection of Regi. In 1892, under his leadership, it reopened in what had been the Merchant's Bank building on King St., now part of the Empire Life complex. From that time on, it functioned as a secondary school.

Because its facilities were seriously overcrowded, the decision was made under guidance of Archbishop M.J. Spratt to construct a facility on the present Russell St. site. It opened in 1914.

During the regime of the Rev. J.F. Nicholson as Rector, an experiment with a small boarding school was conducted from 1920 to 1924, in temporary quarters. In 1923 the high school course was extended through Upper School (Grade 13). In 1926 a second stone building was constructed to house a larger boarding school. A staff residence called Spratt House was also opened. Up to this time, the College had been staffed almost entirely by diocesan priests, supplemented by a few laymen. But in 1931 the Jesuit Fathers of Upper Canada took over the College and operated it for the next 40 years. They hoped to develop the institution to make use of its university charter; in 1941 and 1942 they graduated six Bachelors of Art. However, small numbers and limited facilities forced them to abandon their project. {mospagebreak title=Notre Dame Convent}

Notre Dame Convent

Bishop MacDonell was ahead of his time. He believed in educating women. While the founding of Regiopolis was under way, he made overtures to the Congregation of Notre Dame in Montreal to come to Kingston and undertake the education of Catholic girls. At the time of his death, the CND had been unable to comply with his request; his successor, Bishop Remi Gaulin, followed it up. On Nov. 21, 1841, two Sisters arrived in Kingston; four days later they opened classes in temporary quarters on the second floor of what now is the Whig-Standard building on King St. The next year they moved to a large house on Earl St.

In his will, Bishop Macdonell had bequeathed to the CND his residence on the corner of Bagot and Johnson streets, a site now incorporated into Kingston Public Library. The sisters took possession of it in 1846 and remained there for the next 123 years. In 1867 the Sisters took over Hawthorne Cottage on King on King St. W. as a boarding school. However, because it was "too far out of the city", it did not prove feasible; the Sisters of Providence later took over property, and it is now the east section of St. Mary's of the Lake Hospital.

The 1890's brought major developments for the Congregation. The Ontario Department of Education set higher professional standards for teachers and provided summer courses to enable current teachers to obtain the necessary qualifications. The Notre Dame Sisters were among the first to take advantage of this development, many of them receiving degrees through Queen's Summer School. Secondly, with their new qualifications, they established a complete high school (to grade 12). Thirdly, because of drastic overcrowding, they built an extension on their Bagot St. building, south along Johnson St. But almost immediately the school was overcrowded. In 1914 another wing was added, providing classrooms, a library and auditorium. The availability of full high school courses attracted a larger influx of boarders from around the diocese, along with the city girls. In 1916 Notre Dame added Grade 13. In 1951 the Cathedral School was opened to accommodate Grades 7-10 for the City. It was staffed by Notre Dame Sisters, too. This relieved the congestion in their own high school by siphoning off the grade 9 and 10 girls. By 1961 the CND decided to close their boarding school because of declining enrolment and deterioration of facilities.

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Regiopolis-Notre DameThe high school in it's modern form was born, of necessity, from two landmark institutions in the city of Kingston. In the mid 1960's, both the Jesuit Fathers at Regiopolis College, and the sisters at Notre Dame Convent, were finding that the costs of Catholic secondary education were rapidly outstripping the available revenues. The buildings housing Notre Dame Convent, on Johnson Street, were beyond repair and it became obvious that a new location would have to be found for the Catholic high school girls in Kingston. Since Regiopolis College was facing similar financial difficulties a decision was made to consolidate the operation of Catholic secondary education on one site.

On April 8, 1967, Archbishop J. L. Wilhelm announced that the staff and student bodies of the two institutions would be combined, under the title of "Regiopolis-Notre Dame", in the Regiopolis buildings on Russell Street. Through this measure, it was felt that Catholic secondary students in the Kingston area would continue to have the opportunity to receive a full high school program taught and administered by dedicated Catholic educators. The first principal of the combined school was Reverend Paul Granville, S.J.; Edward Zarichny became vice-principal and Sister Kathryn Quigley, CND, a former principal of Notre Dame, became Director of Girls. This arrangement continued for four years and a new, exciting era on the high school scene in Kingston had begun. Indeed, before the new institution was three years old, the co-ed student body of Regi-Notre Dame won the "School Spirit" award at the local cheerleading competition.

But on November 20, 1970, the sad news was announced that the Jesuit Fathers were withdrawing from the operation of Regiopolis-Notre Dame in order to concentrate their personnel in missionary and other teaching activities. It was announced at the same time that the Frontenac Lennox and Addington County Roman Catholic Separate School Board would take over jurisdiction of grades 11, 12, and 13. The Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame would continue to serve as staff members and would play an increasing role in the direction of the school. The new administrative board, formed under the auspices of the Archbishop, would be comprised of representatives from the Diocese, the Separate School Board, the Congregation of Notre Dame, the staff at RND, the students of RND, and the Catholic community. The first chairman of the Administrative Board was Michael Carty. This board would be responsible primarily for the funding of the educational program for grades 11, 12, and 13 at Regiopolis-Notre Dame, and many fund-raising ventures in the Kingston area would form the basis of such funding. Regiopolis-Notre Dame continued under the new principal, Ed Zarichny, who remained in that position until June of 1994. By 1975 it became evident that the old buildings on Russell Street could no longer house the growing number of Catholic secondary students in RND. The Separate School Board and the Administration Board embarked on an ambitious plan to preserve Catholic secondary education by building a new, modern structure on the Russell Street site. Again, the Diocese and the Congregation of Notre Dame came forward to provide initial funding to get the project started. The remaining money was raised in a massive community building fund drive, under the chairmanship of Gelindo "Gee" De Re.

The grand plans were realised and the new "home" for Regiopolis-Notre Dame opened its doors to the students in September of 1977. The work of countless volunteers who spend hours knocking on doors for pledges, running bingos and organising bazaars, came to fruition with the new building on the old site. The official opening ceremonies were held on Sunday, October 30, 1977.

As Regiopolis-Notre Dame entered the 1980's, financial constraints continued to cause concern and efforts of sacrifice on the part of the students, staff and Catholic community. On June 12, 1984, however, many of these concerns vanished as then- Premier, William Davis, announced in the Ontario Legislature, that the provincial government would move to provide full public funding for Catholic secondary schools to the end of grade 13! This decision enabled the Separate School Board, over a three year period, to take complete jurisdiction over Regiopolis-Notre Dame. Tuition fees and major fund-raising efforts would no longer be a necessary part of the life of RND. Full funding also enabled the Separate School Board to relieve the overcrowded situation at Russell Street by opening a second Catholic high school, Holy Cross, in September of 1985. Regiopolis-Notre Dame also expanded with the opening of the new Pluard Library, the Cafetorium and Technology Wing, in September of 1993. Further expansion is scheduled for 2003-2004 with the addition of 9 classrooms and a full-size gymnasium on the former site of Ecole Marie Riviere.