

Mother Mary Greene

Mother Mary Greene began Calgary's first school.

She taught music, drawing and French. English was the language of instruction, and her students were both Catholic and Protestant.

Greene was no shy novice but a well-traveled woman who had taken her vows in Paris. In 1883, she responded to Bishop Vital Grandin's call to teach in Canada's northwest.

Forty years old when she left Europe for creaking wagons and austerity, Greene knew that the wooden boxes the sisters used to pack their goods would have to serve as tables and chairs. When she asked about linen, Bishop Grandin admitted, "My dear Sister, I do not think that there are a dozen sheets in the whole diocese."

In Calgary, the nuns raised a storm of industry and, before the plaster on the walls was dry, opened St. Mary's School. Thirteen students began in September 1885, but that number grew quickly with the nuns soon introducing high school classes.

Mary Greene "kept her powder dry" and drove hard bargains. She was a gracious nun, but not one to be thwarted.



Mother Mary Greene

A Prairie School with an Air of Culture

Students at St. Mary's School were taught the basics – reading, writing, arithmetic, history, and geography. But a well-trained intellect was only a part of the preparation they needed for life in a community loaded with opportunity and challenge. A St. Mary's education also offered more practical classes – knitting and sewing for girls, as well as training in the habits of neatness and cleanliness for all students. These were offset by courses in arts and crafts, as well as French and music.

Busy hands worked to learn calligraphy, illuminating, and china painting. Squeaking instruments and raised voices emanated from the classroom during music class. As one nun recalled, "Nothing could be more admirable than the sight of those many little fellows...looking you squarely in the eye and singing a patriotic British song with all the enthusiasm imaginable."

Each day at St. Mary's began with a prayer and a song for Queen Victoria. By day's end the room was once again quiet and reflective as students recited a closing prayer.

Born: August 15, 1843 – Died: October 2, 1933

Additional Resources

- **Dictionary of Canadian Biography**
http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/greene_mary_16E.html

Our Collections

Glenbow Museum

<https://www.glenbow.org>

Glenbow Western Research Centre | Glenbow Library and Archives

<https://libguides.ucalgary.ca/glenbowlibraryandarchives>

Glenbow Library and Archives | Digital Collection

<https://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca/asset-management/2R340826N9XM?WS=PackagePres&Flat=1>