

CENTENNIAL OF THE VISUAL ARTS BUILDING

Michel Prévost, University of Ottawa chief archivist

Built between 1893 and 1894, the visual arts building, known for a long time by the name of *Juniorat du Sacré-Coeur*, is the oldest building at the University of Ottawa. The centennial is an opportunity to look back on the history of the building, which is located at the corner of Cumberland and Laurier.

In 1893, the Oblates awarded Joseph Bourque from Hull a \$28,000 construction contract for a building to house the *Juniorat du Sacré-Coeur*, which offered classical studies to young men who wanted to prepare for a religious life and join the congregation of Oblates.

Construction began in November of that year, and work was completed at the end of 1894. Built of stone, the building stands out because it resembles a castle, with 60-cm-thick walls and prominent turrets. A cross (no longer on display) dominated the façade. Inside were classrooms and a chapel, as well as a refectory, dormitory and bedrooms, since students and their professors lived in the building.

Use of the building began in early 1895. There were 39 students at the time, but that number quickly rose, surpassing 100 at the turn of the century. In 1937, the growing number of students forced the *Juniorat* to expand. The new section blended seamlessly with the old building, such that an untrained eye would not be able to tell the old from the new. The building could now accommodate 135 aspiring oblates.

In 1968, the last students left the building. The University rented part of the building, and another was reserved for the Oblates to use as a residence. In 1970, the University of Ottawa bought the building for \$1,120,900. The agreement allowed the Oblates to continue using the premises for another year.

In 1972, the Department of Theatre and Visual Arts moved into the building. Following an arson in the spring of 1975 that seriously damaged the building's performance hall, the *Comédie des Deux Rives* and the Drama Guild relocated to the old chapel of the *Juniorat* for the 1975-1976 performance season.

In 1978, the theatre section became an independent department and left the old *Juniorat*. Since then, the building has housed the Department of Visual Arts. With luck, this will remain the case for a long time to come, as the building adds a special charm to our campus.

To learn more about the history of our institution, contact University Archives. Address: 100 Marie Curie Private. Phone number: 613-564-3285.