

Dress Code for Female Students, Montréal, 1690 (*Le plus ça change... The more things change...*)
Suzanne Boivin Sommerville

After inspecting the schools in Montréal in 1690, in particular the school for girls founded by *Sainte Marguerite Bourgeoys* and taught by the women of the *Congrégation de Nôtre-Dame de Montréal*, the bishop of Québec wrote this regulation:

Jean Baptiste de la Croix, bishop of Québec, having noticed in the visit we have made of the schools in this city, that in those for girls, vanity is beginning to show itself, such that there are some girls who, by their affectations [*air affecté*], negate all of the intentions of the instruction we give to the others about Christian modesty, we have decided we must make a regulation for the women school teachers [*maîtresses*] so that they will not tolerate anything from the girls in their care that is opposed to the maxims of the Gospel. We do not wish to prevent girls of quality from wearing items of clothing suited to their class, but we wish that they have nothing excessive in their head coverings [*coiffures*]. Thus, we desire that the school teachers hold the line [*tiennent la main*] so that their female students [*écolières*] do not have many rows and pleats of lace on their heads [*plusiers rangs et plusiers plis de dentelle à leur tête*] and that they will not permit more ribbons than are required to attach a *coiffe*. In summary, our intention is that we require them to eliminate all excesses [*superfluités*] that make them appear worldly [*mondaines*]. We also desire, for the benefit [*soulagement*] of the girls as well as for their teachers, that we give them their day off [*congé*] on Thursdays instead of Saturdays, so that the girl students will have the same schedule as the boy students [*écoliers*].

Made at Ville Marie, this 4 October 1690

+Jean, Bishop of Québec

From *Histoire de la Congrégation Nôtre-Dame de Montréal*, Première Partie, 1620-1700, I Volume, 1620-1693, Montréal, 1910, pp. 223-24, my translation.

Originally published in *Michigan's Habitant Heritage*, Vol. 27, no. 4 (October 2006): 162-163.