

Explosion Survivor Looks Back To 1917

By **GRETCHEN PIERCE**
Staff Writer

A survivor of the Halifax Explosion of Dec. 6, 1917 related her experiences yesterday during a commemoration ceremony at St. Joseph's School, Russell Street.

Mrs. Dennis Pulley, the former Delphine Stokes, was a grade one pupil at St. Joseph's the year the explosion rocked Halifax, killing thousands.

Civic officials decided that the fateful event should be observed annually with a special service. Yesterday more than 300 persons filled the auditorium of the school. Pupils of St. Joseph's School

District, teachers and parents attended the 51st anniversary, with special guests including Canon M. French, Rev. Lloyd Archer, Msgr. W. E. McCarthy, Dr. Maurice Keating, Mayor Allan O'Brien, Donald Fogarty, and D. O'Halloran, principal of St. Joseph's Junior High.

BOTH ATTENDED

Now a school teacher herself, Mrs. Pulley explained that one year before the explosion, the St. Joseph's Boys School on Young Street had burned down, making it necessary for both boys and girls to attend St. Joseph's Girls School on a part time basis.

On Dec. 6, 1917, it was the girls turn to attend.

The school had nine classes, grades one to eight, located on two floors and a basement. D. M. Matheson was principal.

"It was a fine, clear day," she said. "The 400 pupils had just finished morning prayers and were waiting for roll call."

Teachers were destined never to call the roll, for split-seconds later the French munitions ship Mont Blanc collided with the Belgian relief steamer Imo in Halifax Harbor.

"LOW MURMUR"

"Suddenly there was a low, murmuring sound," said Mrs. Pulley, "but nobody had an inkling of what was to happen." Then the screaming

sounds of woodwork ripping, glass shattering and staircases crumbling brought St. Joseph's School to ruins.

Vividly, she described what had happened to the individual classes and their teachers, sisters from Mount St. Vincent.

"Sister Mary Cecelia, grade eight teacher, was pinned to the platform on which she was standing. It descended clear through the floor and into the classroom below, killing two pupils there. The sister was able to escape with

her class through a window," she explained.

"In grade seven, Sister Agnes Gerald was knocked unconscious by the force of the explosion, but was carried to the schoolyard for emergency care. One of her pupils died," she told the attentive group.

"The section of roof over the grade six classroom blew off and landed on the next street, one girl was killed in the class," she said.

Grade two's teacher, Sister Rita, was temporarily blinded

by blood from a wound, but was led to safety by her class which escaped harm.

UNINJURED

"A grade three class and teacher with a broken wrist, climbed over a fallen staircase and out the front door uninjured."

Sister Cecelia Lawrence, grade four, broke her leg, but was carried out by pupils. She later became principal of the school, and died last year.

Chairman of the ceremony was alderman Mervyn Sullivan.



MRS. DENNIS PULLEY