

Grande Clairiere



In 1885, a 30-year-old priest named Jean Gaire decided to leave France for Canada and help others move to this new country.

By 1888, homesteaders from Eastern Canada, Great Britain and Europe had settled much of the land along the Souris River. Father Gaire, arrived at Oak Lake Parish on July 10, 1888 and set off in a southwesterly direction, in search of a suitable location to start a new community.

They found a large clearing that pleased the young priest. A few Metis families lived nearby, so he decided to settle and called the place "Grande Clairiere."

Father Gaire applied for a homestead.

He described his first church service in his memoirs: *"At 9 o'clock my three Metis families were there - 6 adults and 10 children. I have neither choir nor children to serve Mass; I say a low Mass, all the time admiring the simple, open piety of these brave people."*

Soon his new community had a few more Metis families and some settlers from Loire in France. The population tripled in three months!

By April 1889 settlers began to arrive. There were now 43 homes and close to 150 people!!

During the winter of 1889-1890, Father Gaire returned to France for a month as "Immigration Agent" for the Canadian Government. On March 23, 1890, forty French and Belgian immigrants came to Grande Clairiere.

By 1893, the community had a post office, a church and rectory; and had started building a school.

Father Gaire's dream was to have more than an ordinary school; he wanted a boarding school where children from distant missions, that had no educational facilities, could be accommodated.

In the spring of 1898, construction began on the first convent. The sisters arrived in Grande Clairiere on August 11, and the school opened on August 18 with 20 pupils registered.

In 1903, his dreams in Grande Clairiere fulfilled, Father Gaire requested a transfer to a new mission in Wauchope, Saskatchewan.