

**Oral History Interview with James Hammond**  
**Conducted by Angela Baker, July 22, 1993**

Transcribed by Alison Froese-Stoddard April 8, 2014

*Transcriber's note: Audio recording of interview is difficult to understand in many places. The transcript marks the most difficult passages with the notation [unclear]. This interview contains many unique anecdotes about the transition of governance of Saint Mary's from the Christian Brothers of Ireland to the Jesuits, under the leadership of Bishop O'Donnell and Archbishop McNally in the mid to late 1930s.*

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AB: State your full name and your date and place of birth.

JH: Well. James J. Hammond. 1914, I was born.

AB: And where were you born?

JH: Newfoundland.

AB: Newfoundland. Yeah.

JH: Like the Brothers.

AB: Like the Brotherhood, yeah.

JH: Yeah, I went to school here. I was at St. Pat's on Maitland Street – they had a big one then, it was 1919, and some cousin in the family decided why don't I take my last share. They had from kindergarten right up to grade 12, which was fine. When I was on the board, I was fighting to have this stupid nonsense of French immersion... However, I... [Interruption by unknown female voice]

JH: Someone had the sense to decide that I should take the last year at Saint Mary's. So maybe when you read some of these books. Tuition was 25 dollars to start.

AB: And what grade was this?

JH: This was college.

AB: College.

JH: Yeah, right through.

AB: So when did you start at Saint Mary's?

JH: Oh, I started in 1931.

AB: 1931.

JH: Yeah, I went through '36.

AB: So did you start in grade nine?

JH: No, I started in a different school. Saint Mary's only had a high school then.

AB: Oh, a high school.

JH: Started grade nine there, but I kept going to public school. So I went out there [to Saint Mary's] in 1931.

AB: And it was the Irish Christian Brothers then?

JH: Yeah, three of them.

AB: Three of them, only three?

JH: Well, three, four, five... Yeah.

AB: And who else was there besides the Irish Christian Brothers?

JH: I got a picture here that'll show the whole... [long pause, looking at photos].  
There's me now.

AB: There you are.

JH: That's the works.

AB: You were editor of the journal?

JH: Yeah. There's a picture right in front of the book, the archbishop.

AB: Oh the Archbishop, who was the Archbishop at the time? Oh, there's the pope...

JH: Anyhow... They had us going through, and that was 1936, but the Bishop John Thomas O'Donnell, he was bishop of Halifax. We called him "Chanty" [?] because you never know [unless] he's in Rome most of the time.

But he, what I don't know, and you might find out down there, that he came out and [the Irish Christian Brothers] had a pretty good iron-clad agreement to come from Ireland, and they were supposed to be taken care of, provided a building... I never saw the building of course, torn down long ago.

AB: Yeah.

JH: But the Bishop come in - I have this picture in front of all this stuff. But I guess the Bishop had a meeting with the Brothers, and told them to get out. Period. And I guess they had an agreement that told them they wouldn't be able to move. So instead the Irish Brothers carried on this till '36. I guess an agreement with the Bishop would never come near the school. He'd go to Dalhousie, praised it, said it was a wonderful educational institution - but not Saint Mary's.

AB: Oh.

JH: And that's Thomas O'Donnell.

AB: What was the problem between the brothers and the bishop?

JH: I don't know. I think the Jesuits... Somebody gave a lot of money to provide the Jesuits to take over the institution. The Brothers, they got money, well I guess they got money somewhere but they didn't normally give up anyhow. But the way the things were going... Finally they agreed to move. And of course John Thomas [McNally]... You know where Saint Mary's big building is on Robie Street?

AB: Mm-hmm.

JH: This was a private golf course across the street. And the bishop John Thomas [McNally], they told me at first he lived on a [] if you know the difference. He got millions. He put a debt on every parish in Nova Scotia to pay for it. One of the contractors said he had a ball. He said, you rolled out the plans, and they put a toilet in here - he said remove that toilet twenty times till the Bishop decided the next location. It cost them. [unclear] So I got there in 36... four years later, they drew it all. So it's never been the same since, I suppose.

AB: What were they like as teachers?

JH: They were one of the best. Brother Cornelia, he was the principal. Same as my sisters' order, they were all there six years and they had to go back. Teaching kindergarten was bad enough for their mother.

AB: Oh yeah.

JH: Yeah. Brother Cornelia, he was on the board of directors of Canadian [general] and some of these other big places. He had more degrees than... So, right from the start, they had grade one first of all, and then they dropped it out and just kept the high school. In high school they went and they.. the people then wanted to take engineering. The Brothers taught engineering. And they got, today it would be the Bachelor of Science, [but] they didn't give the Bachelor of Science - they wanted to make sure you just get what they want from everybody...

So they had the engineering... They only had the Arts, there were no Masters degrees. Because it was a small school, [unclear], so they couldn't give the masters degrees. But they agreed with Dalhousie that they would not, and in return they would take the graduates. Because I know I went there, to Dalhousie. They didn't even have a B.Ed in those days. I said I was gonna be a teacher. He said "who taught you history?" I said Brother Cornelia, and he says "You're in."

AB: Yeah.

JH: It was pretty good.

AB: Was it a heavy work load?

JH: Yeah, well then nowadays, since I know from being a teacher. I think I had nine subjects. People nowadays have about five. And they think they're killed... They go out to their dear mummy and tell them... And dear mummy comes to me, and she had a telegram. She took her daughter to a psychologist and said she never had any troubles until she came to you people. I said I'll tell you what to do: YOU go to a psychologist and leave the kid alone. And she'd go, alright. So we reported it to the Principal of course, and when she closed the door we had a laugh about it.

AB: Where did you teach?

JH: I didn't, funny thing... When I get out to start here, there were no jobs. So I have a Bachelor of Arts. That wasn't even a B.Ed, you'd go to Dalhousie and get the education, which I did. Later on Dalhousie, ever on the make for money, they said you write a couple of papers for the B.Ed., and we'll give you a red or a green. If you see there, there's one for Education ... So where was I...?

AB: You were talking about where you taught after you graduated...

JH: Oh yeah well, I just went in to the high school. When you go to teach...you're not gonna teach I guess, are you?

AB: Maybe, yeah.

JH: Well it depends on... By the time I get there, I had two masters degrees there and I know of course, it's only a paper. But this fella had been Principal for 30 years and I was just looking. And he said, I just want to tell you, don't bring any silly ideas from school. He says, this is the way I've been doing it for 30 years, and it worked fine, so just keep them to yourself. So, I went out to get a job like the other people and, absolutely no way. So I had put my name in with the school board – we all were. And one day I got a chance to do 21 days substituting. That's all I ever got.

And I got a call from – oh, I had done civil service exams in 1940, and writing in those days [unclear]. Anyway, I finally got a letter saying there's a job for me. So I went down to the school board first, because that's the job I really wanted. But I never really got it—and then I got a shock because I was offered a job in the government for 90 dollars a month. I had started with the school board, but it started paying, oh 90 dollars a month. [unclear]. So I said, you better take it. All I had was Bachelor of Arts, and B.Ed, nothing else. Only education. And so I walked in, and the guy said, we hope you're a sorter. And I said, your hopes are shot, Brother, but I'm better than you, anyway. But he was a Colonel. That one really wasn't a good way to start! But he said you can't do anything about it, you had the job. And he said the war was coming, it was '38, and he said we're busy getting ready for it, and you're going to be the officer in charge of all stores - guns and everything else, do the accounting. I said well you might as well take the good news all together and it came with a pension. I don't know if we can make some mark if we fanned out, and you want me to take the job. He said I can't do anything about it, you take it. So I went back to Saint Mary's at night and I got a Bachelors of Commerce. I never got back to teaching till 194-...

AB: So there were part time courses at Saint Mary's then?

JH: No, but you never heard of Baisley, of course?

AB: A what?

JH: A young man named Baisley, he was a bad cripple.

AB: Oh yeah.

JH: But he graduated same year I did, and he stayed there as a teacher and I would see him at night. He lived in Dartmouth. I had to go over to his house for two years back and forth and they granted me the degree. Bachelor of Commerce.

They have all kinds of stuff from the old college you know. All I did when I went in, I finished this degree, there's no jobs again. So this time, Brother McNab - He's in charge, and he knew I'd been doing odd reading [in may]. They didn't offer pay, they said look, there's five thousand books here, strewn all over the place, and catalogue them according to Dewey Decimal. I knew Dewey Decimal, it turned out to be very easy, and I think it's the best. See, Dalhousie has the Library of Congress. But the first five thousand books at Saint Mary's, they're still under Dewey Decimal. Wasn't a hard job, but you had to do each book, and decide where it goes. And if you did it right, which of course, we were amateurs, if you did it right you couldn't have two copies of the same book except they're side by side on the shelf. You can never find a book, same book some other part of the library.

And that didn't give me much training, but I got in the civil service because war was just coming, and then I couldn't get out. I went on to the board, and I said all my class are going to enlist in the army. [unclear]. He said can I be called up, he said yes, I suppose you can be called up, or can I get an extension? No, you're in. Well, sure enough, I got called up, had to get a medical exam, all that.. I got the end of the line he says 'oh, did you ever hear a.. [unclear] No, he says, that you who worked with civil service cannot join the army. Period. So I was given deferment. That was fifty years ago. It still wasn't easy of course, going on so many fellas, and they all there in their army uniform you know, and we... however...

AB: So, let's go back to the time you were at high school there. What were the type of sports and other activities that went on?

JH: Well, believe it or not, when I got in there I wasn't the sporting type. But they had a hockey team and hockey won the provincial championship. And they had inter class sports. And the brothers were very much in favor of that kind of stuff. So and I'm just gonna remember, [unclear].

AB: So what were the brothers like, as people?

JH: Well it depends, before I got in to teaching, I know the home, you've never heard of it, where Eaton's is now, Quinpool road. And they had the boy, the Catholic boys were and on Chebucto road they had the industrial home boys, and there was nothing for the brother to use his fist. A guy got out of order? Pow. That kind of stuff. A lot of that went on I guess, but the brothers themselves were good, but they did rule pretty strict. They didn't take any nonsense, of course a lot of it they... Subservient is not exactly the word, but they had to act according to what the parish wanted also. So they had a good name for themselves and they never, you never saw their picture in the paper. And when I was editor, I decided I wouldn't put in the bishops picture. [unclear] I didn't know what to [believe], he said change your mind, he's going in, period. Like that, you never step out of line with the bishop. [unclear]

AB: So there were some boarders there at the school, were they?

JH: Oh yeah, well they had the boarding for twenty-five dollars a term. They divided into three terms and the boarders could stay there, and they take care of their board and lodging.

AB: Where did they come from?

JH: Everywhere. Anyone, the brothers home, they had to come from New York on the train, the young Brothers, and they were they [] to come in and the students were allowed to, well they just had to [unclear]. They started with the kindergarten, they gradually lost that, and then had grade nine to twelve, and then they had engineering, or science and engineering, arts. I graduated, and then went to Dalhousie.

AB: Let me see, so what were the family backgrounds of the students at the school when you were there?

JH: Just the average with 25 dollars a term, everybody could afford that pretty well. If they couldn't they must have been pretty far down, but ordinary— they only served the area which is why it was built. Yeah I suppose there were poor families, although you would be used to that. But they were given the building. It was very small and they took anybody. I think the tuition initially was about fifty dollars all year, if you were boarding.

AB: Was everyone there Catholic that went there?

JH: I guess they're supposed to be, although I don't think anyone was turned down cause there's no other school. Besides, they made such a fuss here in Halifax, they had the girls school, the boys school. But you see the feeling when I first became a teacher, but they built QEH, and across the street they had built St. Pat's. There was a job that came up, and my name came up, and they didn't know [unclear]

AB: Must have been QEH was it?

JH: I didn't get it.

AB: I see. What role did religion play when you were at Saint Mary's?

JH: Well for the most part, I was in the scholastic part. We were mostly [unclear] school as well. You know everybody had a job, you got paid about two dollars a week. The boys with the money come from another section you know, and the other section, the North End Halifax, Maitland Street, that was where we went. Well, we could sit out here all night, but there's a rivalry between these people and the schools further down. Always that way.

AB: So were there any type of prayers that went on in when you were in school?

JH: Any what?

AB: Any type of prayers, or...?

JH: Oh yeah well, no special prayer, we had apologetics was the name of it, the study of religion, and we have an inter class in that as well. And we all had that. In the public school when I was there, this question came up. People wanted to get some religion and we got together in the teachers room, and they wanted me to take the class. Well tell the kids if you don't want it, you go down the study hall and study if you want to stay here, we'll learn religion. And that worked out, I don't know how long.

AB: And that was when you were teaching yourself?

JH: Yeah. I was the first one who went back to see what it was like. So, now what else are you going to...?

AB: Let me see...

JH: I can make some copies of these...

AB: Besides sports, what other activities went on in the school?

JH: Well, hockey for sure and football. It wasn't football then it was the English type, soccer. They never had the American, what we call American football, with the helmets and all that. That came in when I was leaving. And they dropped the soccer all together. And we had a field right there just corner of Robie. That field was I think it was four times round the track for a mile, so we had a track built that way. And of course the hockey team, Brother Darby, he was the coach. And we had next door something called the Rorum. It was horribly built. It was a long building, very dark, it got to a point half the boys were told sorry, you cannot shoot the puck from the blue line, you shoot the puck and the next one comes down your eye. That kind of put the crimp on hockey a bit but, that's only for the home rink, you're not gonna bring in another team if they couldn't find their way around. So it got torn down.

AB: So what went on besides sports?

JH: Oh they had, as a rule the boys, if they didn't have dates, they'd date the girls from the convent. The convent [unclear]. I remember I didn't have a date, and I somebody to get a date fixed up, and I didn't even know how to drive a car.

AB: Where did you go on dates?

JH: Well sometimes they'd have... Last year they would be preparing for their closing their homeclosing, and they'd have a class whatever you call it, and then they'd be going around after that. And of course [] when they come in to the college. So they'd go to a school dance. That is a question of getting chaperons, you had to



have about two chaperons for every student. We had a pretty good social life. [unclear].

They didn't have the programs, we had we have programs here in Halifax, as a teacher. We would take the kids as they leave school and go to work, I don't know if you've ever heard of that or not. And they got paid for the practice. These were the kids we knew were not going to get through school, they just didn't have enough [unclear] and they were quite big ones, some of course what you read, what you've gone over cause his mother probably put all the money in a good suit so you don't have to work, but it's a gas company. [unclear]. It worked pretty well, no problems

AB: Were there any type of school societies or organizations?

JH: Yeah. Mine was Tau Gamma Sigma. Now if you want T G S, It was supposed to be the True Generals Society, but we called it The Great Seniors.

AB: Yeah,

JH: And then the Phi Sigma's, (the Freshman), and Delta Lambda Kappa, (commerce had their own). [unclear] they've been busy buying their rings for all that stuff, so..

AB: How many people were in your graduating class?

JH: That would be another thing there would be four graduating, I think there's only about ten or so, and I think nine of them went on to be priests

AB: Oh really!

JH: And the parents didn't like that because after all that schooling, you know they were following a good example and all that. So my class had 22, four went in. and every year there's some going in. And they were getting the name that if you send them to Saint Mary's he's gonna end up in the seminary.

AB: Yeah.

JH: Oh well.

AB: So where did your graduation ceremony take place when you graduated?

JH: In the brick building in Windsor street.

AB: Right there?

JH: The bishop wouldn't come.

AB: No?

JH: When you get the degree, you're supposed to put the hat, catch the hat on your head and towards the room. Brother Cornelia did that, but Dalhousie that's why I had to go there. [unclear] And after that I think they had some rule they would not, they would give a master degree, but only in English or something, they don't give a Master in Science or anything else, no. yes I mean they were starting to complain about people must support tech college and this college and so on you know, cause those are the private schools. [unclear] I had to go to Dalhousie for the masters degrees. The professors who had me saw your marks, no question of getting in.

AB: That's about all I wanted to talk about. Can you think of anything else you'd like to add?

JH: Well I would suggest I have seen, I don't know, but would you like to copy some of the historical [] of this? I can make copies from these, you see.

END OF TAPE