

Brother Ptolemeus, 1909-1911

Brother Ptolemeus' provincialship could be divided into two periods. Both came at very important times in the development of the Canadian and American provinces. During his first administration (1909-1911) he formulated the plans for the establishment of two distinct Marist provinces in North America. During the second (1911-1914) he was the first provincial of the newly organized Province of the United States.

Brother Ptolemeus was born Lucien Marthouret at Talencieux (Ardeche), France on November 5, 1864. He entered Notre Dame de l'Hermitage Novitiate in 1878. On February 2, 1879 he was given the Marist cassock and the religious name of Brother Ptolemeus. His first assignments in France starting in 1879 brought him to Perigenus (1879-1880), St. Romainen-Jaret (1880-1881), Valbenoite (1881, 1889-1903), Mars (1881-1882) and Charlieu (1882-1889).(35.) In 1903 he was sent to study English at the Marist school at Dumfries, Scotland. The following year Brother Ptolemeus crossed the Atlantic, and arrived in New York City. There he was appointed director of St. Ann's academy, where he remained until his appointment as provincial in 1909.

During his first administration the silver jubilee of the arrival of the first Marist Brothers in Canada was celebrated in 1910. It was an occasion of great rejoicing over the accomplishments of the past twenty-five years, and over the promises of the future. However, in looking over the finances of the province Brother Ptolemeus' main concern was financial improvement of the province. Two hundred and forty brothers, novices, and Juniors in the six houses of studies were a heavy drain on a limited budget, which had to cover other ordinary and extraordinary expenditures. These included the purchase of property, interests on loans insurance charges, traveling expenses for brothers coming from Europe and those attending the Second Novitiate in Italy. So the building of a proposed provincial house at Iberville became impossible. As a temporary solution to the problem, the Iberville juniors were transferred to St. Hyacinthe, and the Iberville Juniorate became a provincial house. (36.)

Another feature of Brother Ptolemeus' administration was a program of consolidation. To implement this program three boarding schools in Canada were closed. The brothers from these three schools became salaried staffs at St. Paul School in New York City; at St. Boniface College St. Boniface, Manitoba, Canada, and at three other schools in the Quebec area. Money then became available for the building of a chapel at the boarding school at Beauceville, Canada. Lastly he transferred the scholastic from St. Ann's Academy in New York City to a permanent site at St. Ann's Hermitage in Poughkeepsie, New York.

Brother Ptolemeus' efforts to raise the scholastic level prompted him to affiliate the Province to the University of Montreal. To Brother Dacianus he confided the charge of drawing up a program of studies for the training centers in Poughkeepsie. This program in a modified form was followed for many years.

In this history, the end of Brother Ptolemeus' first administration in 1911 serves as the conclusion of the Pioneering Period of the Institute in the United States. What follows is the account of the negotiations for the division of the single Province of Canada and the United States.

On the occasion of the visitation to America of Brother Superior General the Very Reverend Brother Stratonique, and of his assistant for the North American Province, Reverend Brother Angelicus, in August of 1910, a formal request was made to them by the Provincial Council for the division of the Province. Within six months, the Superior General and his General Council approved the proposal. After the approbation was received from Rome, he wrote a circular letter announcing the canonical erection in North America of a separate Canadian and American province. The circular was dated March 30, 1911. The official document, which reached America on March 17th, designated Iberville, P.Q. as the headquarters for the Canadian Province, and Poughkeepsie, New York for the American Province.(37.)

This separation had been thought necessary for many reasons, by both local and major superiors. The original Province, covering vast distances from New York to Quebec and Manitoba, proved to be very taxing on the Provincial, who had to make annual visitations to the widely separated thirty-six communities. Regional consciousness moreover had developed different mentalities. Different requirements in the two countries gave

rise to two different educational programs for the brothers. Although supervisors were appointed to coordinate the two programs, it was felt that it was far from what was needed. The solution proved to be the erection of two distinct provinces, which could provide local management on a more efficient and sympathetic basis.(38.)

Brother Ptolemeus, who had been the Provincial of the North American Province since 1909, was given charge of organizing the American Province. Brother Cesidius was named Provincial of the Canadian Province and was entrusted with two hundred and twenty-nine brothers assigned to twenty-four schools in the Province of Quebec. (39.)

To the American Provincial who had not been blessed with a centralized provinces a dual task was entrusted. From the nucleus of one hundred and forty-eight brothers scattered in twelve American and Canadian schools, he was to organize a United States Province, and in the process prepare also for the erection of a province in Manitoba Canada.(40.) The undertaking was a difficult one, and as will be shown, the latter project ended in failure. At the time there was only one community assigned to the Manitoba district, whereas there were ten in the New York-New England area. A twelfth school was situated in the city of Montreal.

The United States Province owned only two properties: St. Ann's Hermitage in Poughkeepsie, New York; and St. Ann's Academy in New York City. Fortunately, the three needed houses of studies had been established before the erection of this new province. The major problem in Poughkeepsie was the enlargement of the existing buildings to care for the ever increasing number of recruits. For the time being, the Provincial House community remained in the Juniorate building. All the other foundations in the Province were owned by the respective parishes where the brothers taught.

There were two school systems in the Province. In four schools in New England the use of French was necessary. In New York, and in Canada (Manitoba and Montreal) classes were taught in English. The problem of training brothers for both systems was only partially met, and finally became unnecessary thirty years later when the brothers were withdrawn from the French-speaking grammar schools.

It must be noted that in 1911 the brothers were predominantly French, French-Canadian and Franco-American. One reason for this is the fact that between 1885 and 1911 three hundred and seventy-four European brothers had come to America. Another reason is that most of the three hundred and sixty-nine vocations that had entered the Institute in the original Province came from thirty or more Canadian or Franco-American schools.

Financing the new province was a major problem. In this reorganization period, the Provincial struggled to secure funds necessary to erect a Provincial House and to accommodate the growing number of local vocations entering the houses of studies. It is for these reasons that Brother Ptolemeus negotiated with the pastors and other employers for a substantial increase in the salaries of the brothers in 1910. Although it was an unpleasant request, Brother Ptolemeus obtained the increases.

What follows is a brief history of each Provincial administration during the twenty years of the newly erected United States Province.