

Brother Felix Eugene, 1903-1905

Although Brother Felix Eugene's term as the first Provincial of the Province of Canada and the United States lasted only two years, he inaugurated long range plans which shaped the course of the growth of both the present American and Canadian Provinces. Seventeen years of experience as director of schools and mission districts made him an able administrator.

He was born Claude Lafond on November 20, 1860, in Pouilly-les Fleurs (Loire), France. In 1874 he entered the Novitiate at Notre Dame de l'Hermitage. One year later he was given his first assignment at Unieux, France. In 1877 he started seven years of teaching at St. Etienne, followed by three years at the Marist boarding school at Valbenoite, France. At the latter school Brother Felix worked with two prominent figures in the development of the future mission of North America, Brothers Stratonique and Zephiriny.

In 1886 Brother Felix answered the call to the missions, and traveled to Noumea, New Caledonia, where he served as director of the community. Ten years later he was in Australia for a year of study, namely the English language. Upon his return to New Caledonia he was appointed Vice Provincial of the New Caledonia district, which had been erected a vice province in 1897. Two years later he returned to Europe for his second novitiate studies. And then a great change took place in Brother Felix's life. Reverend Brother Stratonique, the Assistant General, decided to send him to New York City, where the need was pressing for brothers proficient in the use of English. There he was assigned to St. Vincent de Paul School. The following year, however, it was felt that his experience and talents would serve better on a higher level. He was, therefore appointed as provincial visitor to assist Brother Cesidius, whom he succeeded as Provincial in 1903.(22.)

Brother Felix Eugene had an outstanding council which included Brothers Cesidius, Angelicus, Pierre Chrysologue and Legontien. The major problems these faced were the care of one hundred and eighteen French brothers who arrived during his term of office, the needs of thirty-one novices, the professional advancement of the brothers, the opening of new communities, the purchase of property for future needs and the rebuilding of the Novitiate of St. Hyacinthe.

In order to help solve these problems, Brother Felix Eugene appointed Brother Joseph Emeric as provincial secretary and director of studies. The latter with Brother Zephiriny and Brother Louis Etienne, formed a committee to organize and supervise the studies of all the brothers. One of the first decisions was to establish a printing shop in Irberville in 1904. They edited a monthly publication, known as the Bulletin Des Etudes. Their ideas and directives thus reached every Marist school in the province. In the American Bulletin of Studies Brother Joseph Robert wrote of their work:

Together with ascetic and pedagogical directions this bulletin offered a monthly program for five courses of study, which would gradually prepare the young brothers to pass the examinations necessary to obtain the official diplomas for teachers.(23.)

To further Marist development in the United States, Brother Felix Eugene thought of purchasing property for an American house of studies. In 1905 he appointed Brother Zephiriny to locate a suitable site in New York State. To this plan Archbishop Farley of New York gave his blessing.(24.) With the help of the Jesuit Fathers at St. Andrew's-on-Hudson in Poughkeepsie, New York, Brother Zephiriny was able to negotiate the purchase of the thirty-five acres on North Road in that city.(25.) Several brothers were then sent there to adapt the buildings for the establishment of a juniorate to be opened the following September, 1906.

Several important schools were started during Brother Felix's short term in office: an academy at Baie St. Paul, situated on the St. Lawrence River; St. Agnes School in New York City and St. Joseph's Schc in Haverhill, Massachusetts. Other accomplishments of his term include the rebuilding of the novitiate at St. Hyacinthe and a ninety-nine year lease on property for the juniorate at Levis, P.Q.(26.)

In November 1905, Brother Felix was replaced by Brother Angelicus. Brother Felix was entrusted with the preparation of facilities for a juniorate at Poughkeepsie. In September 1906 he was assigned as master of juniors

there, until the arrival of Brother John Casimir from Europe 190. Before he retired in 1917 from administrative positions, he had been appointed to the directorships of St. Jean Baptiste School in New York City (1909-1913) and to St. Anne School in Lawrence Massachusetts (1914-1917.) For eleven years he also served as assistant treasurer at St. An Academy in New York City, and as sub-director of St. Joseph School in Lowell, Massachusetts. In 1932 he finally retired to the infirmary at the Hermitage in Poughkeepsie, where he died three years later.(27.)