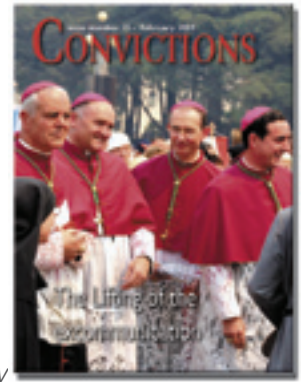
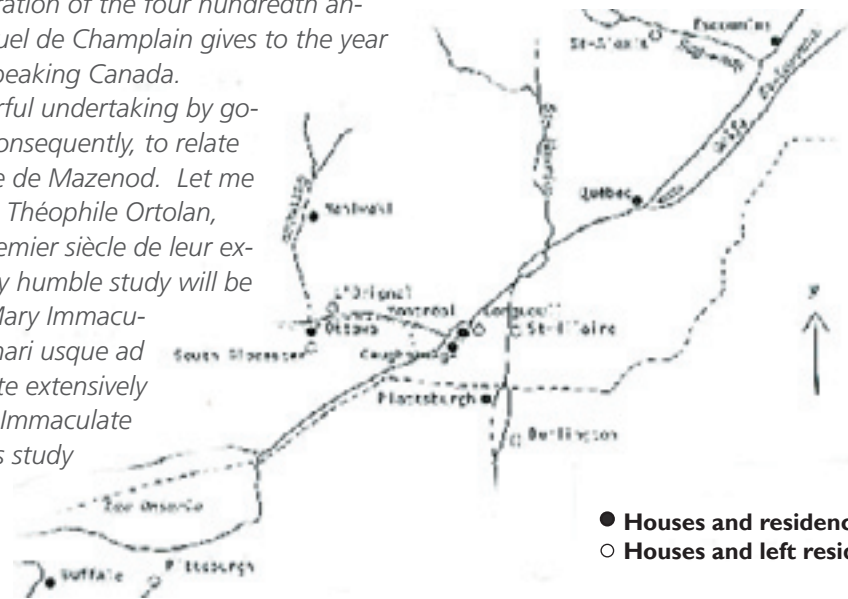


# The Oblates of Mary Immaculate



During this year of the one hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady at Lourdes, under the title of the Immaculate Conception, it seemed to me to be perfectly fitting to look at the history of the religious congregation in Canada that is proud to be named after this very special title of Our Lady. Moreover, the commemoration of the four hundredth anniversary of the foundation of Quebec City by Samuel de Champlain gives to the year 2008 a special meaning for the history of French-speaking Canada. It would be good to begin the story of that wonderful undertaking by going back to the foundation of that congregation; consequently, to relate its origins and the life of its founder, Bishop Eugene de Mazenod. Let me recommend to my readers the excellent work of Fr. Théophile Ortolan, o.m.i., *Les Oblats de Marie Immaculée durant le premier siècle de leur existence*, Paris, 1914-1932, 4 volumes. As for us, my humble study will be limited first to the implantation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Canada, then to their wonderful growth a mari usque ad mare up to the 1950's. For this purpose, I will quote extensively from *The History of the Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate – Toward a synthesis*, from Fr. Donat Levasseur. This study was published in two volumes in 1983.



Rev. Fr. Roger Guéguen

## Implantation in Canada

We owe the coming of the Oblates to Bishop Ignace Bourget, the second bishop of Montreal. On May 3, 1841, Bishop Bourget, then 41 years of age, burning with zeal for the good of his diocese and for the entire Church in Canada and North America, made a trip to Europe seeking religious help for his diocese. While passing through Marseilles, he providentially met with the founder of the Oblates, Bishop de Mazenod. He explained to him his urgent need for missionaries, and made a request for at least four Oblates to evangelize the faithful and the Indians. There is a long story about the challenges and struggles he went through before receiving a favourable answer from Bishop de Mazenod, but let me be brief. The founder of the Oblates chose one of the first volunteers, Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat, to be the superior of the new mission. To him he associated Fathers Adrien Telmon, Jean Baudrand, Lucien Lagier and Brothers Basile Fastray and Louis Roux. The Oblates left Marseilles on September 30th and arrived in Montreal on December 2nd. Then, on December 7th, they left the Bishop's residence to take possession on the morrow — the feast-day of their Patroness — of the parish of St-

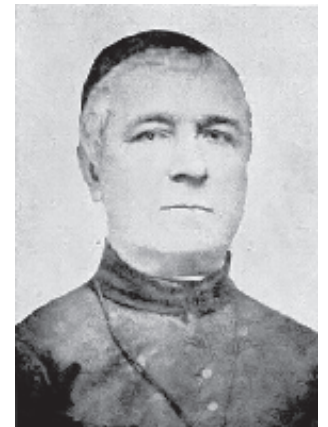
Hilaire on the Richelieu, which was entrusted to them. This parish was also responsible for a place of pilgrimage located nearby, on Mount Beloeil, dedicated to the Cross.

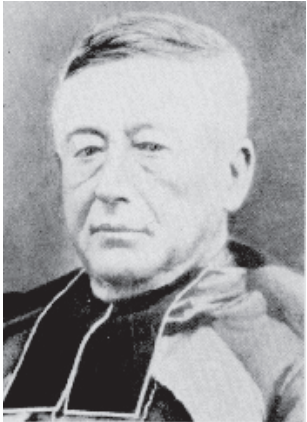
## First Activities: Longueuil, Montreal

To begin with, there was the diocese of Montreal. Right away, the Oblates undertook to preach three missions, one at St-Hilaire itself, another at Beloeil and the third at St-Vincent-de-Paul. From the time of their arrival, the Oblates began giving itinerant missions to serve French and Irish Catholics scattered over a vast region dominated by Protestants and deprived of religious assistance: these areas were called the Eastern Townships. Father Lucien Lagier gave the first mission there on January 24, 1842.

To respond to an urgent need for school teachers, the Oblates taught at St-Hilaire, and then at Longueuil; Father Telmon brought together in this latter place some ladies dedicated to teaching, under the direction of Eulalie Durocher, the future Mother Marie-Rose, founder of the congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. (cf. *Communicantes* #16)

To evangelize the faithful and the Indians the founder of the Oblates chose one of the first volunteers, Father Jean-Baptiste Honorat (1789-1862), to be the superior of the new mission.





**In 1847, Bytown became the seat of a new diocese of which the first pastor was Father Eugène-Bruno Guigues (1805-1874), chosen by all the Bishops from Canada.**

**The Oblates had scarcely been established at Bytown when Archbishop Joseph Signay of Quebec City asked them to serve the Indian missions of St-Maurice, the Saguenay and the North Shore of the St. Lawrence River. A new empire, indeed, was opening itself to the zeal of the Oblates. On October 15, 1844, a new residence was established at St-Alexis-de-la-Grande-Baie, in the Saguenay district. Here were found intrepid apostles like Flavien Durocher, Charles Arnaud. (1826-1914)**



St-Hilaire was rather far removed from Montreal and difficult to reach. That is why the Oblates did not hesitate in August of 1842 to proceed to Longueuil, where a benefactor, Mr. Olivier Berthelet, had given them a house. In 1848, Bishop Bourget settled them in a poor area of Montreal, the suburb of Ste-Marie, where they opened a public chapel dedicated to Saint Peter the Apostle. In 1855, Bishop Bourget also entrusted to the Oblates the Iroquois mission of Caughnawaga, near Montreal.

#### **Bytown, Indian missions, lumber camps**

Soon, an establishment of the Oblates was founded in Bytown, today Ottawa. Father Telson arrived in Bytown on January 24, 1844 and became responsible for a population of several thousand Catholics living in and around the city. Soon after, answering to his appeal, other Oblates came to join him and also some Grey Nuns of Montreal founded by Saint Marguerite d'Youville. In 1845, under the direction of Sister Élizabéth Bruyère, the congregation of the Grey Nuns of the Cross, dedicated to works of charity and education, was founded in Bytown.

In the month of May 1844, Bishop Bourget entrusted Father Nicolas Laverlochère with jurisdiction over the missions to the Indians scattered from Bytown up to Temiscaming and Abitibi. From 1847 onwards, he went even as far as Moose Factory, to James Bay, and, from 1848 onwards, he went to Fort Albany. In 1849, an establishment for the missionaries was opened at Maniwaki to serve not only the Indians of the North and of the Saint-Maurice region, but also the Indians and Whites from the surrounding areas.

In the beginning of 1845, the ministry to the lumber camps began. These were itinerant missions addressed to many groups of men who had come from the parishes of the south to work up north in the forest industry. They began in the lumber camps of the Gatineau, and then of the Ottawa River. In regards to these missions, special mention must be made of the legendary Father Louis Reboul.

#### **Diocese of Bytown**

In 1847, Bytown became the seat of a new diocese of which the first pastor was Father Eugène-Bruno Guigues, chosen by all the Bishops from Canada. In 1848, the new Bishop asked the Oblates to found the college of Bytown, and then to take on the direction of his major seminary.

Such works were permanently assigned to them in 1856, including the service of the church of St. Joseph and of the cathedral. Oblate residences were opened in the area: at South Gloucester from 1848 to 1855, and at Orignal from 1849 to 1855.

#### **In the diocese of Quebec, Indian missions, St-Alexis, Quebec**

The Oblates had scarcely been established at Bytown when Archbishop Joseph Signay of Quebec City asked them to serve the Indian missions of St-Maurice, the Saguenay and the North Shore of the St. Lawrence River. A new empire, indeed, was opening itself to the zeal of the Oblates. On October 15, 1844, a new residence was established at St-Alexis-de-la-Grande-Baie, in the Saguenay district. Here were found intrepid apostles like Flavien Durocher, Charles Arnaud, Louis Babel and others. In 1853 the Archbishop of Quebec City gave the Oblates the important parochial ministry of Saint-Sauveur, right in Quebec City. Consequently, the residence of St-Alexis was transferred to this new location.

#### **Missions and foundations in the United States**

From Longueuil, then from St-Pierre-Apôtre in Montreal, the Oblates preached a number of retreats and missions to Canadians who had emigrated to the United States. The urgent religious need of emigrants from Canada led the Oblates of Canada, at the request of the bishops, to take on the responsibility for French-speaking parishes at Plattsburgh in 1853, and at Burlington from 1854 to 1856. They also served several stations and outposts dependent on these parishes. In 1851 they accepted the English-speaking parish of Holy Angels in Buffalo, and in 1861 the French-speaking parish St-Pierre (today Our Lady of Lourdes) in the same city.

In concluding this article, let us report that Bishop de Mazenod, the founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, complained a number of times that a people as Catholic as the one of Canada was not furnishing enough vocations for the Congregation. As a matter of fact, from 1841 to 1861, there were only about 60 admissions to the novitiate and some 26 final oblations. If he were still living, what would he have to say now!

In an up-coming article, we will continue with the study of the implantation of the Oblates in the West and North of Canada.