Father Thomas Albert, son of farmer Vital Albert and his wife Marie Smith, was born in Saint-Hilaire in the county of Madawaska, New Brunswick, on June 17, 1879. He completed his secondary studies at the College of Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pocatière in Québec and won the very prestigious Prince of Wales Prize in 1900. He studied theology at the Grand Séminaire of Montreal (1902-1905) and was ordained in Chatham, New Brunswick in 1905. He then studied at the Propaganda Fide in Rome, where he received doctorates in theology in 1907 and canon law in 1908. He served as a vicar in several parishes in New Brunswick, notably Chatham, Pokemouch, and Bathurst, before becoming the pastor of Shippagan from 1909 through 1921. He then became the pastor of Gran-Sault, where he remained until he died on November 16, 1924. A renowned preacher and speaker, he published his *Histoire du Madawaska* in 1920.

In the introduction that precedes his *Histoire*, Father Albert is too modest when he declares that he is not a historian and that his book is only a sketch. It is rather Monsignor Dugal who is right when he states in his preface: “You have sorted through many threads, both judiciously and honestly, and you have woven them together masterfully so as to present them to the public in a truly attractive style.”

This history of Madawaska, on the border between Maine and New Brunswick, is well documented and relatively detailed. He begins with a geographical and geological description of the region before reviewing the origins, legends, traditions, and customs of the Maliseet, the first inhabitants of the region. He then recounts the role of the French missionaries and *seigneurs* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the time of the first attempts at colonization, and tries to define “the true inhabitant who is Madawaskan, Breton, and Normand all at once.” The early
concessions and the canonical foundation of St. Basile's parish receive the attention those facts deserve, as well as other episodes such as the famine of 1797. It was during this famine that the legendary Tante la Blanche appeared; thanks to her prowess as a healer, huntress, and strong woman, she was able to set straight the hardened, the people who swore, and even the “most chronic drunk who feared her more than a bishop!” Such colorful characters enhance the value of a text already useful by its general subject.

Father Albert also focuses on living conditions at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the creation of St. Luce and St. Bruno parishes, and conflicts at the Canada-U.S. border before finally arriving at the modern era, from the Civil war to the beginning of the twentieth century. He describes the great St. Basile Congress (1908), which brought together Acadians from all over America for the first time in a great while, and he concludes by reminding us that religion and patriotism are the “secrets” to the future.

Armand CHARTIER

WORKS


Translators: Sr. Thérèse Doucette and Dr. Francis Doucette. This work is also available online.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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