Wilfrid BEAULIEU (1900-1979)

Wilfrid Beaulieu was born in Lowell, Massachusetts on October 16, 1900, but his family returned to their native Québec very soon after his birth. He received his primary school education in Trois-Pistoles and his secondary education at the Séminaire de Saint-Alphonse in Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, the Collège Bourget in Rigaud, and the Collège Saint-Laurent in Montréal.

At the age of 21, he made his debut in journalism at Montréal’s Le Devoir, where for four years, he was able to closely observe the fierce fight to preserve French in the Ontario schools. In 1924, he returned to the United States, where he successively became head of news at La Sentinelle (Woonsocket, Rhode Island), editor at L’Étoile (Lowell, Massachusetts), and editor-in-chief at L’Opinion Publique (Worcester, Massachusetts), until this last paper ceased publication in 1931.

In the meantime, he experienced what he called “the honor” of excommunication for his role in Rhode Island’s “Sentinelle Affair” (1923-1929), for defending parochial autonomy against the proponents of diocesan centralization.

On September 10, 1931, the first issue of the newspaper that was to be his life work was published: Le Travailleur, named to honor the memory of Ferdinand Gagnon (1849-1886), the founder of French Catholic journalism in New England. Wilfrid Beaulieu was the lifelong faithful student of this revered master, founding publisher of the first Travailleur (1874-1892).

From the beginning, the owner-editor-founder of the new weekly outlined a course of action from which he would never waver. Le Travailleur would be a militant newspaper, dedicated to the defense of the Catholic faith, the French language, and French and Franco-American traditions in America. It would also be a journal of ideas aimed at the elite rather than the common people.
Within a few years, *Le Travailleur* managed to attract the attention of the international Francophone community. Thus, in 1937, the International Congress of the Alliance Française in Paris awarded him its grand silver medal for his role in preserving French language and culture. In 1939, the Académie Française gave him the Richelieu Medal to recognize his impeccable writing and efforts to spread the French language in the United States. In 1946, he received the Reconnaissance Française medal, and the following year, the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques of Paris granted him the Audiffred Prize “because of the documents of high historical value” published in *Le Travailleur*. In 1961, he was named a chevalier of the French Legion of Honor, in 1973, an officer of France’s National Order of Merit. In the United States, the University of New Hampshire awarded him an honorary doctorate in 1976.

In August 1941, Wilfrid Beaulieu married Oda McClure. They had two girls together.

During the Second World War, Wilfrid Beaulieu became one of the first Gaullists in the United States, publishing the writings of General de Gaulle and defending a point of view that few Americans understood. He was vice-president of the regional committee of France Forever and vice-president of the Alliance Française of Worcester, Massachusetts.

He was one of the founding members of the Comité d’Orientation Franco-Américaine in 1947, but he soon left this organization in order to maintain his independence. In 1949, he became an honorary member of the Association de la Presse de Langue Française in Paris.

A pilgrim of the absolute like French writer Léon Bloy, who is remembered for his rancor and vociferousness, Wilfrid Beaulieu fought for *la survivance* (the preservation of French Catholic heritage) and against assimilation, with the same ardor that reactionary French writer Charles Maurras (whom he liked to talk about) had put into his bitter struggle for order and against disorder. For Wilfrid Beaulieu, *la survivance* was a kind of absolute in pursuit of which he devoted all his
tempestuous energy for over half a century. His commitment to this cause was total, and his career boiled down to this: a lifelong devotion to values inherited from New France: faith, language, and traditions.

In this struggle, his favorite targets were mainly Anglo-Americans and Irish-American assimilators, some Franco-American leaders whom he considered “cowards” or “pushovers,” and all those in the Franco-American community who let themselves be anglicized or assimilated. To assimilate, for Wilfrid Beaulieu, was a disgrace, as it was failing a duty that he considered inviolable: to keep one’s ancestral heritage intact and to transmit it intact to new generations. This absolute commitment shows how deeply rooted he was in the heritage of Canada before the Conquest of 1760 and France before the Revolution of 1789.

Steeped in an undeniable historicism, Wilfrid Beaulieu worked as a historian in two ways: First, by printing texts of historical interest as soon as they appeared, for example, texts calling to mind Beaulieu’s absolute veneration of the Québécois Patriotes who rebelled against the English government in 1837-1838, or his worship of Louis Riel. Second, by making his newspaper a reflection of Franco-American intellectual and cultural life over the forty-eight-year period of its existence, from 1931 to 1978.

A publicist for French-Canadian and Franco-American history, Wilfrid Beaulieu also contributed significantly to promoting Franco-American literature by publishing the writings of distinguished collaborators. In fact, the finest works of the Franco-American intelligentsia are found in the pages of his newspaper, along with high-profile collaborations from France, Canada, and all over the French-speaking world.

Quite paradoxically, Wilfrid Beaulieu built a lasting body of work by taking full advantage of what is essentially an ephemeral genre.
Wilfrid Beaulieu died on May 18, 1979 in Linwood, Massachusetts.

Armand CHARTIER

WORKS


BIBLIOGRAPHY


- The Wilfrid Beaulieu Collection at the Boston Public Library contains Wilfrid Beaulieu's papers (1900-1979). There is also correspondence between Beaulieu and several Québécois and Franco-American writers including Lionel Groulx, Rémi Tremblay, Ferdinand Gagnon, etc. as well as over a hundred manuscripts of pieces destined for publication in *Le Travailleur*.

- The French Institute of Assumption College owns Beaulieu’s bound copy of the newspaper *Le Travailleur*.

English Translation by Oumou Diallo, Salem State University