Alfred Bonneau, born in 1862 in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Québec, was no exception to the general trend that most editors of Franco-American newspapers were extensively involved in the community affairs of fellow immigrants from Québec. Bonneau was an active leader in civic affairs and Franco-American societies and social movements and, like many, did everything in his power to promote the survival of the cultural and religious heritage of French-Canadian emigrants living in the United States.

Bonneau first studied at the elementary school of the French Christian Brothers, then at the seminaries (high schools) in Sainte-Thérèse and Saint-Hyacinthe, where he received a bachelor’s degree in 1881. He studied law and became an accountant before his strong interest in politics led him to accept the position of Assistant Clerk of Committees in the Québec Parliament in 1887. A steadfast opponent of Québec’s participation in Canadian Confederation, he left Canada in 1889 out of frustration with the situation. In his view, confederation was essentially a form of English domination.

From April 1889 to August 1893, Bonneau was editor of the L’Étoile in Lowell, Massachusetts. He then went to Biddeford, Maine to run L’Observateur. His marriage in 1895 to Anna Tétrault, daughter of an influential Biddeford businessman, Narcisse Tétrault, contributed greatly to Bonneau’s connection to the city.

Bonneau’s whole family, his parents and sisters who had followed him to Lowell, continued to live in Massachusetts. The year after his marriage, Bonneau founded La Justice of Biddeford, a weekly activist publication of which he was the owner-publisher until his death in 1920.
Bonneau’s emigration to the United States did not change his opinion of the Anglo-Saxon “race” in North America. In his newspaper, he railed against this “race” which, according to him, descended from criminals, indigents, and prostitutes who had prospered through rape, spoliation, slaughter, the slave trade, sale of rum to Native Americans, and smuggling. Despite these forceful attacks, Bonneau was known throughout New England for his political speeches in favor of candidates of the Republican Party, a party dominated by Yankees, Anglo-Saxons, and Protestants.

*La Justice*, under Bonneau’s direction, had three aims: to give Bonneau’s personal interpretation of historical facts; to keep readers up-to-date on the news; and above all to ensure the survival of French-Canadian culture by acting as the cultural voice of the Franco-American population. Almost every issue up until Bonneau’s death, more than a thousand in all, contained either an exhortation on the importance of maintaining one’s language, faith, and culture or an appeal to Franco-Americans to be proud of their heritage. Bonneau was in favor of repatriation to Québec but encouraged those who remained in the United States to be naturalized.

Bonneau’s social philosophy was conservative. He insisted fervently on the ideas of duty and responsibility in personal actions. He praised the value of work and often returned to the “Jansenist” point of view that life is hard, and every individual has their cross to bear. He gave advice freely and profusely in the columns of his newspaper and in his editorials. Although never a father, Bonneau encouraged parents to be strict with their children. He offered plenty of advice to women, whom he exhorted to do their duty as wives and mothers. He wanted girls to stay at home. “Young girls, stay at home,” he wrote, “so you will be ready to keep a home later.” Bonneau clearly believed in the doctrine of the housewife.

*La Justice* was a quasi-religious publication in that it gave an important place to the activities of the Pope and his statements, as well as to those of the Canadian and American clergy.
Bonneau himself was a practicing Catholic. His stentorian voice was heard every Sunday in the choir.

Bonneau’s relentless pursuit of *la survivance* led him to rage constantly in his newspaper columns against the Irish bishops in Maine, whom he saw only as cruel assimilators. Bonneau was not afraid of any accusations, and nothing was considered unfit for publication. He accused the Bishop of Maine, Monsignor Louis Walsh, of scandal, financial mismanagement, corruption, despotism, and hating his “French” flock, their churches, and their schools.

Upon his death in 1920, Bonneau was praised for his service to the City of Biddeford as a member of the school board and clerk of public assistance. He was also honored for his service to his parish as a faithful Catholic, to his country as a member of the Republican Party, and to Franco-Americans for his efforts to naturalize French-Canadian migrants. He was said to inspire admiration among his fellow ethnics through his loyal membership in the Conseil Chagnon of the Union Saint-Jean-Baptiste d’Amérique, the Société Historique Franco-Américaine, the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Bienfaisance, and the Société des Artisans. His eulogist especially applauded Alfred Bonneau’s commitment to instilling Franco-American pride in readers who had immigrated from Québec, as well as his relentless opposition to the Irish Catholic hierarchy, whose stated goal was to Americanize French-Canadian Catholics.

Michael J. GUIGNARD

French translation by Claire QUINTAL

**WORKS**

- His journalism in *L’Étoile* (Lowell, MA), *L’Observateur* (Biddeford, Maine), and especially *La Justice* (Biddeford, Maine).