

**THE SHORT-LIVED
ADVENTURE OF THE
FIRST BROTHERS
IN THE UNITED STATES
(1817-1822)
(2/2)**

Br. Herve Danielou

Epilogue

The Institute opened another establishment in the New World, in French Guyana, in 1823. It lasted only 9 years and was closed in 1832 for political reasons this time, following the 1830 revolution. It was only in 1837 that the Brothers of the Christian Schools settled permanently in America by opening a house in Montreal. It was not long before they spread to the United States. They opened schools successively in Baltimore (1845), New York (1848), St. Louis (1849), etc. In the latter town the work of the Brothers spread rapidly: people probably still remembered the St. Genevieve pioneers. One day, Brother Patrick, the director of the school and future Assistant to the Superior General, had a memorable meeting which he described in a memorandum written in French and now kept in the Generalate archives.

«In the month of February 1854, at a time when I was director of St. Louis College, our house in Missouri, USA, a gentleman came up to me and asked if he could make a retreat in our house. Apart from the fact that we were not in the habit of offering accommodation to outside retreatants, we were also short of room. I told the gentleman I was sorry but I could not offer him lodgings.

The gentleman was very insistent and finally admitted that he too had been a Brother like me and that, seeing that his life was coming to an end, he wanted to have

this final consolation. He told me that he had been chosen with two companions to go with Mgr Dubourg in 1817 and found a school in his diocese. He said:

"When I arrived in America, Monsignor chose to send me to work at The Barrens. One of my companions was sent to New Orleans and the other to St. Genevieve. Our objections were not listened to and there was no one we could turn to for help as journeys took so long in those days. As we were not trained for this kind of life the result was a return to civilian life. I settled down near The Barrens. I learnt later that my companion in New Orleans had become a merchant, but I never did hear what became of the one at St. Genevieve".

As a proof of his identity he had brought along his community prayer book, his office book and the Collection. He gave these to me and I left them in the St. Louis community.

I could not get the good old fellow to tell me more because I was in the middle of packing for my trip to Paris where I was due to take part in the General Chapter in March. And so I left him making his retreat.

When I returned to St. Louis in April, I learnt that the poor old fellow's family, on learning where he was, had made him return home, and that he had died shortly afterwards».

By checking a few things, Brother Patrick was able to discover that the old man was Br. Aubin, the former director of the St. Genevieve community. There was less trace of his two companions although we do have some information about them.

The first piece of information comes from Brother Bardas who was at St. Louis at the same time as Brother Patrick. He wrote as follows:

"I remember hearing that one of the Brothers of St. Genevieve had lived for a long time in New Orleans where he had become very rich on account of his involvement in the Mississippi Navigation Company. People said also that a part of the town and a street had been named with this former Brother's surname. Finally, they said that when he was about to die, he had asked to be buried in the Brothers' habit which he had always kept in his possession".

We do not know whether the ex-Brother in question was Fulgence or Antonin, because all attempts have failed to find a street called Javaux or Murailac in old plans of New Orleans.

The last piece of information comes from a certain Brother Gerardus who at the time of his death (1945) was one of the oldest Brothers in the United States. He had the following to say:

"When I was a young Brother in Buffalo (in about 1878), we used to go to the French church of Our Lady of Lourdes for evening vespers. We used to see there a very old sacristan. Our sub-director, Brother Pompain, who was usually well informed, told us that this old man was one of the Brothers who had been sent to St. Genevieve".

And so the personal reminiscences of certain Brothers added to written sources, have enabled us to reconstruct in broad outline the story of these three pioneers who 175 years ago brought the Institute of St. La Salle to the American continent. While this

venture proved to be short-lived, it was also the prelude, however sad, to a marvellous expansion of the Institute in the New World in the years that followed.

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