

## HISTORY

# A CERTAIN SEPTEMBER 11

by Bertrand Roy, p.m.é.

A memorable day at the St. Francis Xavier Seminary in Pont-Viau. On September 11, 1925, The Foreign Mission Society celebrates its first missionary sending off. They are three men to leave for abroad: Eugène Bérichon and Léo Lomme, two young men in their twenties, and Louis-Adelmar Lapierre, a priest with more experience from the diocese of Montreal.

Louis-Adelmar is among the pioneers of the new seminary for the missions founded by the bishops of Francophone Canada in 1921. Since four years, he contributes to that project with two priests from the diocese of Joliette: Joseph-Avila Roch, first superior, and Clovis Rondeau, first historian. Today, he opens up the way for generations of missionaries who will follow him on the route to Asia.

The three new missionaries are sent to Moukden. In that city in the north of China, they are expected by the apostolic vicar, Bishop Jean-Marie Blois of the Foreign Missions Society of Paris. He had heard about the opening of a seminary for the missions in Montreal and he invited the founding bishops to choose Manchuria as destination. The Canadian missionaries will find there a vast area of action and also a Nordic climate that will suit them, at least, that's what he thinks.

Today, Friday September 11, is the great departure. This morning, everything went smoothly with the solemn high mass in honor of the Sacred Heart. The ceremony of the sending off to the mission will take place at mid-afternoon in the small chapel of the seminary. We will then proceed to the Montreal archbishop's residence, where those leaving for the missions are the guests of Bishop George Gauthier for supper. And finally, they will rejoin their parents and friends at the Windsor Station close by for a last good-bye before boarding the train for Vancouver. That's the program...

## **Everything is planned, except...**

Early afternoon, a very strong storm hits the region of Montreal. Hail, the wind, lightning and rain cause much damage, as will be being reported by the newspapers. The bishop of Joliette, Bishop Guillaume Forbes, is expected at the seminary to preside the missionary sending off ceremony. He arrives just on time, thanks to the help of the people who remove the fallen trees from the road.

One of those leaving, Léo Lomme, caught by surprise in the city by the storm which paralyses the tramway services, is absent and only arrives for the final hymn of the Ave Maris Stella. According to Clovis Rondeau, chronicler of the event, some see in the storm the anger of the devil because of the departure of the first Canadian missionaries for Manchuria. Anyway, wind and rain do not stop the good course of the ceremony, and the farewell to the parents and friends where laughs mingle with tears and, at the beginning of the evening, the departure by train for the Canadian West.

A few days later, on September 17, Eugène, Léo and Louis-Adelmar embark on a boat in Vancouver to cross the Pacific Ocean. They arrive in Shanghai on October 4, but that is not the end of unexpected events. During the crossing, Léo suffers an appendicitis attack and is operated on his arrival in Shanghai. To cap it all, because of a phlebitis, he is laid up in his hospital bed for many months and can go to Moukden only in May of 1926.

Eugène and Louis-Adelmar are back on the road and arrive in Moukden on October 17. Without delay, they throw themselves into the study of Chinese, which is not a trifling matter. But things are not going well. Louis-Adelmar suffers from sporadic fevers that cannot be treated on the spot, so he has to go back to Shanghai to consult a specialist. He learns that he has malaria. After a few weeks of treatment, in January of 1926, Louis-Adelmar can go back to Moukden and go on with his study of Chinese.

Eugène fares better. In spring, he manages quite well in Chinese so as to be assigned as assistant priest at the cathedral of Moukden. His two companions, having recovered their health, follow his footsteps and begin their ministry in the fall. They are now ready to welcome a second group of seven missionaries whose sending off takes place on September 10, 1926, without any hail nor storm! Would the devil have finally surrendered?

## The first to depart



(From left to right) Eugène **Bérichon** (25 years old) was born in Montreal and he is a priest since one year. He will work in China up to 1945. Wearing his biretta, Joseph Geoffroy, director of the Seminary, accompanies for the picture the three who are departing. Born in Joliette, he will later on be a missionary in the Philippines (1938-41) and in Cuba (1948-53). **Louis-Adelmar Lapierre** (45 years old) is a diocesan priest of Montreal, his native city, since nearly 20 years already. He will be a missionary in China until his death in 1952. **Léo Lomme** (26 years old) comes from Worcester, Massachusetts USA, and has been a priest for three months. He will come back to Canada in 1930 and will teach Holy Scriptures and take care of the library at the Seminary in Pont-Viau.

## Hail, wind, lightning and rain vent

A storm of a rare violence came pelting down on the region of Montreal yesterday afternoon, and raged during twenty-five minutes. The sky suddenly became very dark and immediately a strong hailstorm pushed by a north-western wind began to break the windows. In a span of half an hour fell one half inch of water [...] The tramway services were paralysed a little and the company had to offer a service of lighter cars and diminish its number to the strict minimum because of the lack of electricity.

(*Le Devoir*, Saturday, September 12, 1925, p. 3.)

