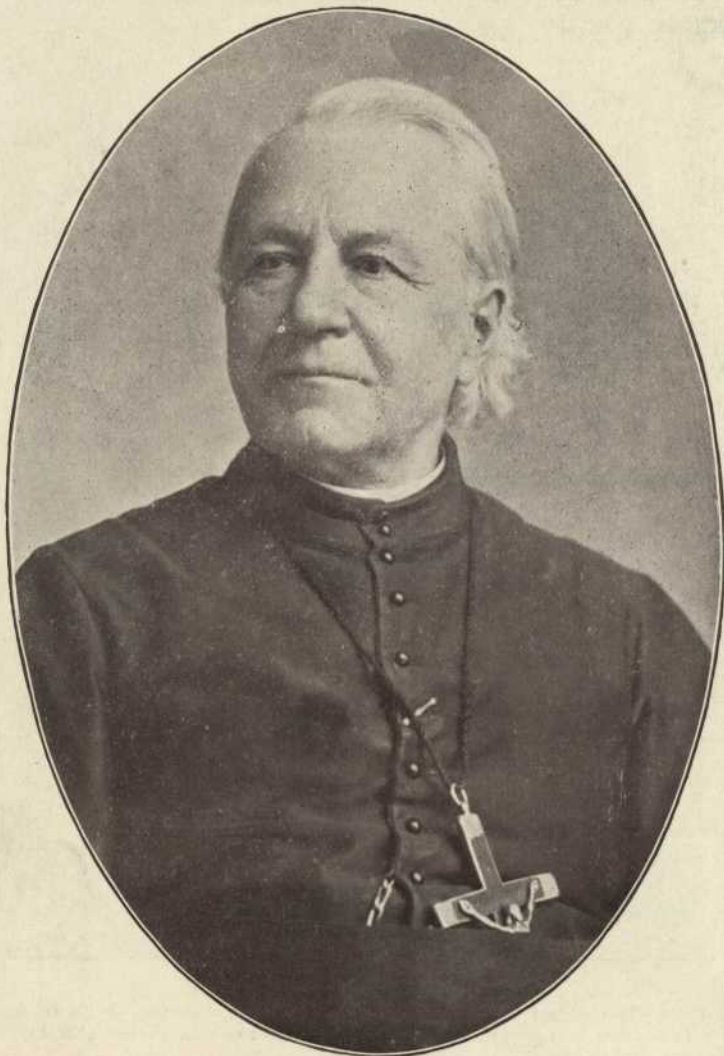




FATHER LACOMBE, O.M.I.

PIONEER MISSIONARY AND BUILDER
OF THE CANADIAN WEST.

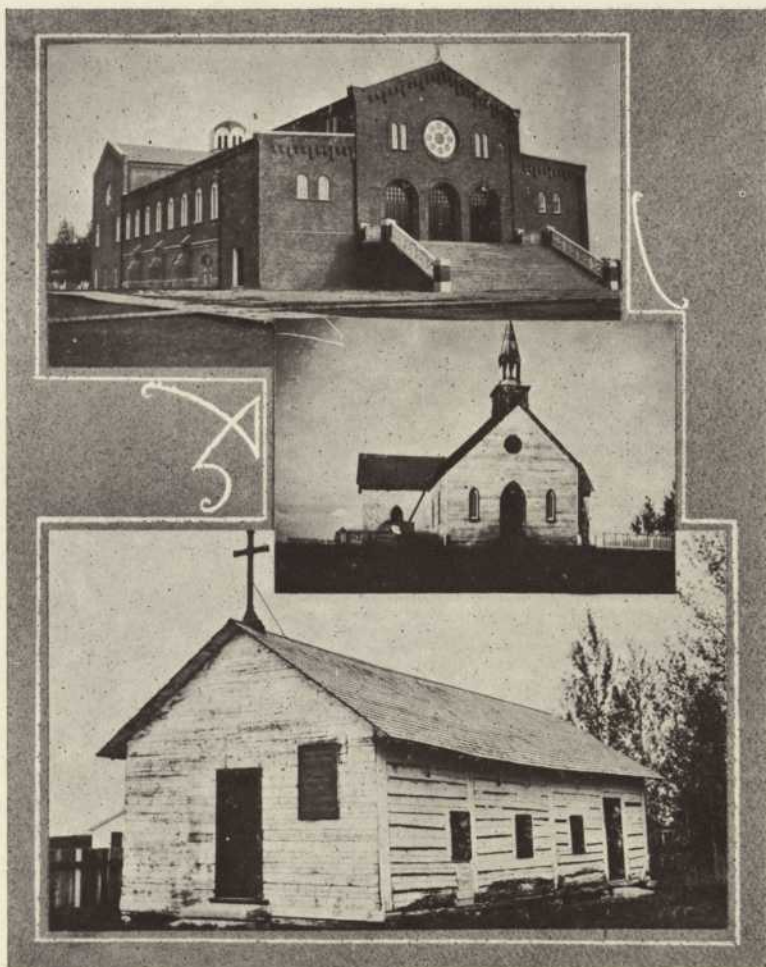


Souvenir Booklet

Price 25 cts. Proceeds to Restore the First Cathedral
Built by Fr. Lacombe in 1861.

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THE GROWTH AND PROGRESS OF FATHER LACCMBE'S
RELIGIOUS WORK AT ST. ALBERT.



BOTTOM—The oldest existing church in Western Canada, built in 1861.
Plans are being made to restore and preserve this sacred and historical building.

CENTRE—Second church built in 1870, and destroyed by fire in 1917.

TOP—Present church completed in 1922.

NOTE:—The churches of 1861 and 1870, were built by the Missionaries. The logs and shingles being cut and finished by hand.

L. J. C. et M. I.

FATHER LACOMBE

INTRODUCTORY

Seeing the ranks of his zealous secular clergy rapidly thinned by death, Mgr. Bourget, of Montreal, decided to call in a religious Order able, not only to fill the present gaps, but also to assure his diocese of a continuous supply of priests. In 1841 he applied to the Founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, who had but recently been raised to the See of Marseilles. As the Oblates had been founded only to preach missions and to direct seminaries, the Founder first consulted each member of his Order, and then, when they all begged him to give a favorable reply to the Canadian Prelate, he immediately sent six Oblates to Montreal. The Bishop of St. Boniface, who had only four secular priests, had also applied to the Oblates for help. In 1845 Frs. Aubert and Tache were dispatched to the new field of labor, and then others; until nearly all the missions of the West were manned by members of this Order.

Of all these missionaries, Fr. Albert Lacombe is the best known. Born near Montreal a hundred years ago, he as a child, expressed his determination to be "either a priest or a voyageur." Having completed his studies at Assumption College and at the Bishop's Palace, he begged permission to devote his life to the Western Indians. Unwilling to lose so valuable a priest, the Bishop at first hesitated, but finally consented, and in 1849, Fr. Lacombe, still a secular priest, set out for the Red River. Travelling was not a luxury in those days; the oxen, sent to take him to his destination, arrived half dead, and the caravan was halted and pillaged by Indians.

THE INDIANS

Fr. Lacombe's first post was Pembina. Here he endeared himself to his flock by making himself one of them, by following them in their hunts and wanderings, by helping, teaching and baptizing them. They were then, he tells us, "a beautiful, fervent race." He returned to Pembina. Winter came, and with it, want and loneliness. Without companions, without books, the young missionary fought against this loneliness, but was overpowered. Having prayed for light, he decided to return to Montreal, and, so as to have companions in his Western exile, to join the Oblates, who had already begun to work amongst the Indians.

Bishop Ireland once said: "I have known three great Statesmen, Leo XIII, Gladstone and Mgr. Tache." Tache was one of the first Oblates to reach the West. He had been made coadjutor of St. Boniface. In Montreal he met Fr. Lacombe who expressed his desire of joining the Oblates, and together both set out for the West.

So great was the need of priests in the West that Mgr. Tache, instead of letting his young friend begin his novitiate, asked him to devote himself to the Indians around Fort Edmonton. Fr. Lacombe submitted, and within a short time, was learning Cree at his new post. Finding that most of the Indians lived near Lake St. Anne (a mission founded in 1842 by Fr. Thibault, a secular priest), Fr. Lacombe made this settlement his headquarters, from which he ministered to the Indians within a radius of 150 miles. Later on in 1861 he established a settlement at St. Albert. This enabled him to get in touch with the Blackfeet who traded at Fort Edmonton. Such was his zeal at Lake St. Anne that Mgr. Tache later declared he had nowhere else seen Indians so good and fervent. By special indult, Fr. Lacombe was allowed to make his novitiate at Lake St. Anne, where he finally took vows and became an Oblate.

To attempt a description of Fr. Lacombe's work among the Indians would be impossible. For fifty years he travelled from Saskatchewan to the Rocky Mountains, and from the American border to the Athabasca. At times he followed the Indians, eating, sleeping, living, suffering as they did. At other times he journeyed from camp to camp, and such was his zeal that he often exhausted, not only his first but also his second guide. And Oh, how he suffered! He went almost without food or drink for one, two, three weeks in succession. He was nearly drowned, almost eaten by a bear, caught in a prairie fire from which he saved himself by plunging into a lake and remaining there for hours. How often his weary feet bled! How often his hands and feet and face were frozen! How often his eyes were tortured by the snow! He was often brought to the brink of the grave, as he, priest and physician, ministered to the Indians dying in hundreds from scarlet fever, smallpox, dysentery, erysipelas or typhoid fever. When his small stock of medicine or medicines ran out, he used to make the sick and dying drink Holy Water. This, and his faith, miraculously as it seemed, saved many from death. With his Indian knife, he performed more than one operation, and such was his success that many were converted, and those who remained pagan ran their hands over his head and body so as to absorb from him "some of the medicine that made him great." He often contracted his patients' diseases, but he had an infallible cure; he used to drink painkiller, take a brisk run, and then roll himself up in his blankets and sleep. The next day he would be up, helping and instructing the living, and burying the dead.

No wonder that the Indians called him "The Man of the Good Heart!" No wonder that he acquired such influence over them, that a word from him saved Edmonton, Calgary and C.P.R. employees from massacre. No wonder that his influence alone kept the powerful Blackfeet from joining in the unfortunate Riel rebellion. No wonder that the cry of the Blackfeet, "You have killed the

Priest," put to flight the Crees, who, unaware of Fr. Lacombe's presence in the enemy's camp, had attacked it at midnight. So well did he and other Oblates control the Indians during the Insurrection of 1885, that, in England, Sir John Macdonald publicly declared that they were "The finest moral police force in the World."

Knowing that alone it could not conclude a treaty with the Northern Indians, the Federal Government called upon Fr. Lacombe for help. He joined the Royal Commission, and the Treaty was satisfactorily made.

Evil days had come upon the Indians. "The proud pale-faces" had over-run their lands, and had confined them to Reserves; their spirit was broken; the buffalo had disappeared, and the Indians were starving; American rum had done its worst and unscrupulous men had taught the Indians corruption, of which they had not dreamed. The man of Good Heart saw this and wept. He obtained relief from Ottawa, was instrumental in getting the Mounted Police, built Industrial Schools and a Hospital, and engaged men to instruct the Indians in farming. In their pride and glory he had been their friend, in their want and misery he did not desert them.

THE METIS

The Metis sprang from the Fur Companies' employees and their Indian wives. At first they were excellent guides, faithful, honest, devoted, truthful, indefatigable and generous to excess. Unfortunately they were improvident and easily led by pleasure. Preferring freedom, they refused to be shut up on Reserves, and were given other lands to till. Unscrupulous real estate agents soon

got these lands for almost nothing and the original owners were face to face with direct poverty. A number of them, despised by the newcomers, lost all courage and initiative, became lazy and fell into vice. Fr. Lacombe again came to the rescue. "I will move heaven and earth to save them," he wrote. Years before he had foreseen this and had established a colony for them at St. Albert. Here, in opposition to certain officials of the Hudson's Bay Company, who sought to keep civilization at a distance, Fr. Lacombe had built the first bridge in the West. He had also erected the first mill and had built an orphanage and a school. He had taught the Metis how to till the land and had encouraged farming. He now planned a similar colony near the town now called, in bad French, "Saint Paul des Metis." The Governor General heartily approved the idea, and so Fr. Lacombe, now an old man, made journey upon journey to Ottawa, travelled and begged in Quebec, the United States and France, in order to secure funds to build an Industrial School, to engage farm instructors, to buy horses, cattle, implements and seed for his colony. No one will ever know what work and suffering he and Fr. Therien, O.M.I., director of the Colony, went through. And, so, few will realize their joy at the unqualified commendation given their work by the Government Inspector and by the Governor General.

The end was tragic. Boys set the buildings on fire. Nothing was left but heavy debts. There were no funds to carry on the colony and so it had to be abandoned. The blow struck Fr. Lacombe to his knees. . . . "God's Will be done," . . . such was his comment. On Fr. Therien's advice, a number of excellent French Canadian families were brought from the East. It was hoped that their example would encourage and save the Metis.

THE RUTHENIANS

When the C.P.R. opened the West to immigration, crowds of Ruthenian Catholics poured in. Unfortunately, priests of their rite did not accompany them, and non-Catholic sects sought to draw them away from the Catholic Church. Alive to the danger, the Bishops commissioned Fr. Lacombe to go to Austria for Ruthenian priests and for funds to build chapels for the newcomers. Fr. Lacombe, then over seventy, set out, and, travelling third-class for economy's sake, begged in Italy, France, Belgium, Germany and Austria for the Ruthenians. At Vienna he interested the Emperor and throughout Austria several Bishops. He finally secured a few Priests and Sisters, who, in spite of their zeal, have proved too few to cope with the situation. Their Primate, Mgr. Szeptytcki, came to Canada later on and personally thanked Fr. Lacombe for his successful efforts on behalf of the Ruthenians.

OTHER SERVICES

In this hurried sketch we have confined ourselves to Fr. Lacombe's efforts on behalf of the Indians, Metis and Ruthenians. We have said nothing of his labors in Winnipeg and Calgary, where he organized what are now cathedral parishes. Nor have we spoken of similar work done in Edmonton, Pincher Creek and twenty other places. We have not dwelt on his influence, which enabled the C.P.R. to build its main line through the West, impeded by suspicious Indians, nor by his being called by the Officials of that railway, to drive drunkenness and vice out of many construction camps, his giving such information to that company that no exploratory work was left for the engineers. As a token of gratitude he was made President of the C.P.R. for a day, and Honorary

President for life. He used his influence so as to get Edmonton the only bridge over the Saskatchewan which it had until 1912. We have spoken of his building the first bridge, mill, etc., in the West, and of his building schools, convents, chapels, a hospital and other institutions. When the war of 1870 cut off all resources from France, he again and again preached, pleaded, begged, in Canada, the United States and elsewhere to build up and maintain the parishes we now enjoy. He was also a coloniser and brought hundreds of families to the West. Whatever spare time he had, he devoted to composing dictionaries, hymns and prayers in Cree. His "picture catechism" for the Indians was highly commended by the Pope and by all who saw it.

THE END

This indefatigable missionary had often begged permission to prepare for death in his "hermitage" at Pincher Creek. This permission being at length granted, he repaired to Pincher Creek. Scarcely had he arrived, when the terrible Frank slide called him out. For weeks he helped, consoled and encouraged the surviving victims. After this, he was entrusted with important business and he had to leave the new "hermitage," which Mr. Burns had built for him.

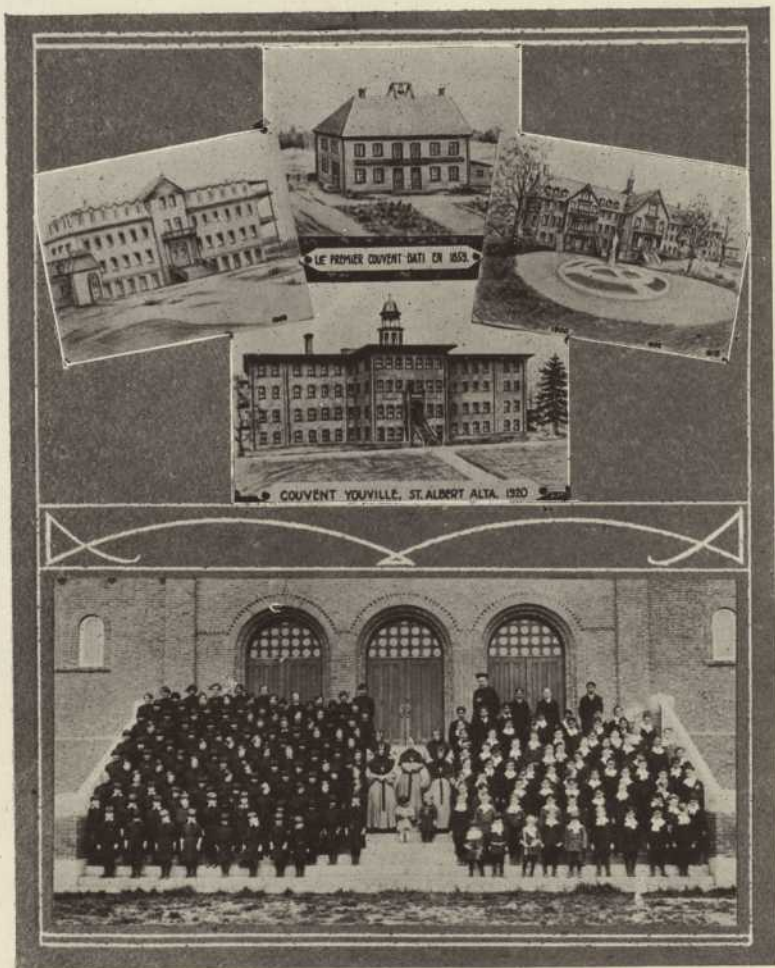
When he was over eighty, he had "the most beautiful dream" of his life: a Home at Midnapore for the aged and orphans. Thanks to Mr. P. Burns' generosity, his dream came true. Mr. Burns gave him 200 acres of rich land and money for this Home. The late Lord Strathcona and many other friends also contributed generously. The Sisters of Providence took charge of the Institution. It was here that Fr. Lacombe spent the last years of his life, among the poor, the wretched, the orphans, whom he soon

gathered around him, and whom he loved as his children. The Sisters could never do too much for the venerable priest and "his poor." Their devotedness was equalled only by his gratitude. He died, December 12th, 1916, shortly before his 90th birthday. A special C.P.R. train took the remains to Calgary and then to Edmonton. In both these places, and also at St. Albert, a funeral service was held. Everywhere the people flocked to get a last glimpse at the priest who had done perhaps more than anyone else for religion and civilization in the West.

Tributes to his worth and zeal were not lacking even during his lifetime. The Sovereign Pontiff heartily commended his work. Queen Victoria sent him her photograph. Cardinal Manning and countless other members of the Hierarchy more than once expressed their admiration at his work. Several Governor Generals, Sir Wilfred Laurier, Lords Southest, Strathcona, Mountstephen, Shaughnessy, Ladies Aberdeen and Minto, and the Presidents of the C.P.R., were among his warmest friends and admirers. The British hero, General Sir William Butler, proudly recalled how he had served Mass for Fr. Lacombe among the Indians. The Oblate Order conferred its highest mark of esteem on him by calling him personally to be present at the deliberations of a General Chapter. But the highest of all encomiums was that which he must have heard as he closed his eyes in death, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of thy Lord."

Fr. Lacombe is buried in the Crypt of the Church at St. Albert—St. Albert, founded by and named after him. Close by, many other "Unwritten heroes of the Old Guard of the Oblates in Western Canada," lie at rest, after having spent their lives in the same battles, in the same labors, in the same sufferings as Fr. Lacombe spent his, and awaiting with him public recognition on The Last Day from the Master whom they served so well.

GROWTH AND PROGRESS OF FATHER LACOMBE'S
CHARITY WORK AT ST. ALBERT.



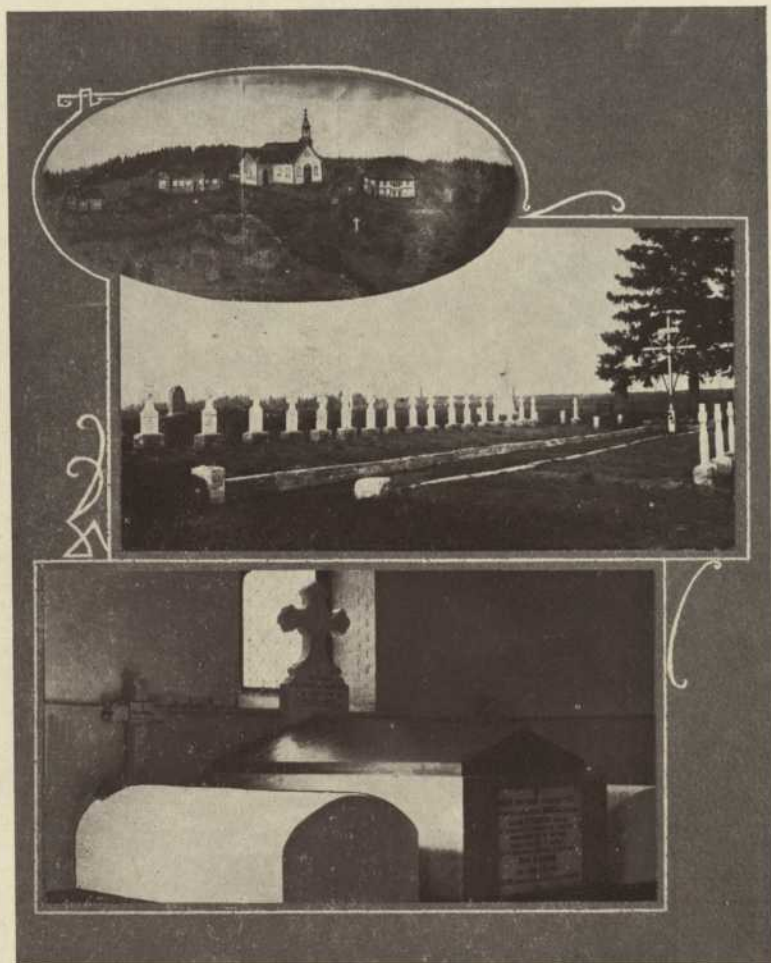
Top—Orphanage and School—showing the successive stages of progress from 1859 to 1920.

Bottom—Pupils attending Convent School in 1927, with Teachers and Pastor.

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Top—St. Albert in 1875. Cross in the foreground marks the spot where Father Lacombe camped in January, 1861, when he selected the site for St. Albert Mission.

Centre—The burial plot of the pioneer Oblate Missionaries in the cemetery of St. Albert.

Bottom—The crypt of St. Albert church showing the last resting place of Father Lacombe, O.M.I., and of Bishop Grandin, the first Bishop of St. Albert.