

= Georges @-@ Antoine Belcourt =

Georges @-@ Antoine Belcourt (April 22 , 1803 ? May 31 , 1874) , also George Antoine Bellecourt , was a Canadian Jesuit missionary and priest . Born in Baie @-@ du @-@ Febvre , Quebec , Belcourt was ordained in 1827 . He established missions in areas of Quebec and Manitoba . On the frontier , he became involved in a political dispute between the local First Nations population and the Hudson 's Bay Company , the monopoly fur trading company .

At the urging of the Company 's Governor , Belcourt was recalled to Montreal . He was next assigned to Pembina , North Dakota . He established two missions in the 1840s to convert the local Ojibwe (also called Chippewa) and Métis to Catholicism . In 1859 , Belcourt left Pembina for Quebec , but was quickly redeployed to North Rustico , Prince Edward Island . He established the Farmers ' Bank of Rustico (the first community @-@ based bank in Canada) .

Belcourt retired from his post in 1869 to live out his life in New Brunswick , but was recalled in 1871 , this time to the Magdalen Islands . In May 1874 , Belcourt was forced to retire due to ill health . He died in Shediac , New Brunswick on May 31 , 1874 . He was designated a National Historic Person by the Government of Canada in 1959 .

= = Early life = =

Georges @-@ Antoine Belcourt was born on April 22 , 1803 at Baie @-@ du @-@ Febvre , Quebec to Antoine Belcourt and Josephte Lemire , who had married on February 23 , 1802 . His parents , devout Roman Catholics , brought their son up in the same faith , and the young Belcourt received his first Holy Communion in 1814 . At age 13 , Belcourt enrolled in Le Petit Séminaire de Québec to undertake a philosophical course of study , which he completed in 1823 . Belcourt studied to become a priest , and on March 10 , 1827 , Bernard @-@ Claude Panet , the Archbishop of Quebec , performed Belcourt 's ordination in the chapel at the Seminary .

Belcourt was appointed as an assistant at several parishes in the area , before becoming pastor of a parish at Sainte @-@ Martine , Quebec in 1830 . As he was bilingual and spoke English as well as French , he was able to minister to his parish of mostly Irish Catholic Canadians .

= = Early missionary work = =

During his time at Sainte @-@ Martine , the young priest aspired to do missionary work in the west of British North America and applied for it . In 1830 , Archbishop Panet requested that the young priest accompany him on a journey to Manitoba . Following an interview in February 1831 , Belcourt was enlisted to go on the trip . After spending two months learning the Algonquian language , Belcourt departed from his home town on April 27 of that year in a canoe of the Hudson 's Bay Company . On June 17 , the priest 's party arrived at Saint Boniface , Manitoba , and Belcourt was assigned as one of three priests there . He was to assist the Bishop at the town 's cathedral , and study the Anishinaabe language . He was to work with the Ojibwe people to convert them to Christianity . Although the language was not yet documented in written form , Belcourt made rapid progress . Within a year , he had learned enough to be considered ready to work directly with those whom he termed the " savages , " as was customary at the time .

In 1832 , Belcourt established the first native @-@ only mission west of Saint Boniface , but Gros Ventre raids forced its closure the following year . In 1834 , he established a mission at Baie @-@ Saint @-@ Paul on the Assiniboine River , where he instructed the local Aboriginal population in European @-@ style agriculture . The priest had a log chapel built , with smaller log cabins on the surrounding land to house the natives . The local bishop opposed his missionary work , as he believed the Aboriginal Canadians would not settle in one spot for long . Belcourt overcame this opposition , and in 1834 built a school at his mission , enlisting the assistance of a Chippewa @-@ speaking woman to serve as a teacher . In 1836 , the missionary admitted five natives to Holy Communion . He was discouraged by the Ojibwe readiness to return to their former spiritual practices after baptism .

In 1838 , Belcourt travelled to Rainy Lake to examine sites for a mission . He abandoned the plan after discovering that the First Nations people were unwilling to give up their Hudson 's Bay Company @-@ supplied liquor , as he required for conversion to Christianity . In August 1838 , the priest arranged to have a dictionary published in the Chippewa language , and returned to his mission at Baie @-@ Saint @-@ Paul . In the winter of 1839 , Belcourt carved 280 oak balusters and candlesticks for his log chapel .

In 1840 , the missionary established a mission among the Wabaseemoong Independent Nations , where he repeated his Baie @-@ Saint @-@ Paul design : a log chapel at the centre surrounded by small cabins for the local population , with outlying farms . The mission closed ten years later ; Belcourt blamed this on mismanagement by oblates he had entrusted with its management . In 1845 , Belcourt served as the chaplain to some buffalo hunters , but returned to his first mission at Baie @-@ Saint @-@ Paul to teach the Chippewa language to a group of oblates .

In 1846 , a dysentery epidemic swept communities along the Assiniboine River in Manitoba . On June 22 of that year , Belcourt left his mission at Baie @-@ Saint @-@ Paul to join a group of hunters on their journey south for the summer . The hunters carried the disease , infecting others , and 25 people died of dysentery by July 5 . On the worst days , eight people had to be buried . Belcourt and six of the hunters travelled south to the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in search of medicine , as the priest 's supply had quickly run out . With his medicine supplies replenished , the missionary headed back to the encampment of hunters before returning to his mission .

= = Arrival in North Dakota = =

In 1847 , in response to perceived discrimination against First Nations people by the Hudson 's Bay Company in the fur trade , Belcourt prepared a petition to Queen Victoria to seek redress . The petition was signed by 977 First Nations people , but the Colonial Secretary , Earl Grey , consulted with advisors who had little sympathy for the natives and took no action in the case . The Company criticised Belcourt for what it saw as his inciting discontent among the local First Nations . The Company administrators decided that the priest should not be allowed to remain in British North America . The missionary was arrested , but was released after the charges against him were discovered to be unfounded . At the urging of the Company 's Governor , the Archbishop of Quebec asked Belcourt to return to Montreal . Belcourt asked the Governor of the Company to retract the charges for which he was arrested . The Governor apologised for what he described as a mistake on the part of the Company 's chief Factors .

The Church assigned Belcourt to Pembina , North Dakota as a missionary to the Chippewa and Métis of the Pembina River basin , a tributary to the Red River of the North . Upon arrival at Pembina , Belcourt constructed a small log cabin of 20 feet long by 30 feet wide , which was not large enough for all of his congregation . On August 14 , 1848 , the missionary baptised his first person in Pembina , and held a Holy Communion class consisting of 92 Native Americans . Needing more resources , Belcourt wrote to the Archbishop of Quebec for money for food and building supplies . He also asked for another Canadian priest well @-@ versed in both French and the Chippewa language , as he noted there were more Métis than Chippewa in the Pembina area . Belcourt described the original territory of the Chippewa in the Pembina district as several hundred miles north to south , and east to west - much larger than the small reservation to which they were later assigned .

In November 1849 , the young and recently ordained priest Albert Lacombe arrived in Pembina and immediately started to learn the Chippewa language . Despite claiming to have to resort to manual labour to pay for his food , Belcourt supported a household that included a school teacher , a housekeeper , a Chippewa cook and several servants . Thirty miles to the west , he established a mission at Turtle Mountain to serve as a base for expansion toward the Canadian Rockies .

In 1853 , Belcourt moved to what is now Walhalla , North Dakota , and established a school and a church there . The priest envisioned a large metropolis for the area . He began to lay out a city planned in the European @-@ style of a grid , with wide streets and several open squares . Despite his having planned for ample water , and the natural advantages of fertile soil and resources in the

area , major development went elsewhere . Since the early twentieth century , agriculture has declined as a mainstay of family economies in the area . The town has 885 residents .

A strong advocate of prohibition of alcohol , especially among Native Americans and First Nations peoples , Belcourt petitioned the US Congress to prevent the illicit trafficking of liquor from Canada into the United States . In March 1859 , Belcourt left North Dakota to return to Canada .

= = Return to Canada = =

Belcourt returned to Quebec , but was quickly sent out to serve at a parish at Rustico , Prince Edward Island . Arriving there in November 1859 , the priest performed his first baptism among the local people the following month . Belcourt built a parish hall out of stone (which was used into the 1950s) and established the Farmers ' Bank of Rustico . He founded a high school , where he taught until recruiting a teacher from Montreal to the island . The priest created a study group , the members of which had to agree to be teetotalers . He established a parish library , built with the assistance of 1 @, @ 000 French francs a year from Emperor Napoleon III , nephew of Napoleon I. In October 1865 , Belcourt resigned from his position at the parish at Rustico , and returned to Quebec for some weeks .

He asked for reassignment to Rustico and returned to the island in November . In 1866 , Belcourt built and demonstrated a steam @-@ powered vehicle , considered the first automobile to be driven in Canada .

Belcourt remained pastor of his parish at Rustico until 1869 , when he retired . The priest intended to live on a farm at Shediac , New Brunswick , but was called back to the church in August 1871 . He was asked to pastor a parish on the Magdalen Islands . Ill health forced his retirement from there in May 1874 , and he returned to Shediac before dying on May 31 , 1874 .

= = Legacy and honors = =

The town of Belcourt , North Dakota was named after the late priest in honour of his efforts in the region .

In 1959 , Belcourt was designated a National Historic Person by the Government of Canada .