

# Bourdeau, Augustin Cornelius (1834–1916)

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A. C. Bourdeau, a French-speaking pastor-evangelist, was a pioneer of the Adventist cause in the American state of Vermont, in Quebec, Canada, and in a number of European nations.



Augustin C. Bourdeau, c. 1880s

Photo courtesy of Center for Adventist Research.

## Early Life and Ministry

Augustin C. Bourdeau was born in the village of St. Armand, Lower Canada (now Quebec), in 1834. Around 1839, his parents converted to the Baptist church and shortly thereafter, moved to northern Vermont, where their little hamlet, near West Enosburg, came to be known as Bordoville. From 1851 to 1854, Bourdeau attended the French Baptist school at the Grande Ligne Mission, Lower Canada, where he prepared himself to be an evangelist. In 1854, he married Charlotte Saxby (1836-1883) and together had five children: Arthur, Mary (died 1875), Sarah (married to Rodney S. Owen), Cornelia (married to E. Chinnock), and Jesse.<sup>1</sup>

Following his studies at the Grande Ligne Mission, Bourdeau began working as a Baptist evangelist in towns near his home in Vermont, until a visit from his brother-in-law, William L. Saxby in 1855 convinced him to become a Sabbatarian Adventist. The following spring, Augustin visited his brother, Daniel, who taught at the Grande Ligne Mission, and persuaded him to observe the Sabbath. Soon after, Augustin and Daniel Bourdeau began preaching their new faith in nearby towns.<sup>2</sup>

## Vermont and Quebec

Along with his brother Daniel and Alfred Hutchins, Augustin Bourdeau was instrumental in organizing many churches in northern Vermont and Quebec in the 1860s and 1870s. He served as president of the Vermont Conference from 1865 to 1870. At the request of the General Conference, the Bourdeau brothers spent a few months in Iowa in 1866 to help strengthen the church after the defection of the Marion Party, and continued to hold meetings in the Midwest for about a year.<sup>3</sup>

Once back in Vermont, Augustin worked as an evangelist and church planter. In 1875, He began working with his son-in-law, Rodney S. Owen, in the eastern townships of Quebec and organized the South Stukely church in 1877 which is currently the oldest Seventh-day Adventist church in Canada.<sup>4</sup> In 1880, he became president of the Quebec Conference, the first conference organized in Canada.

As Bourdeau was completing the construction of the church building in South Stukely in 1883, Charlotte who had been ill with tuberculosis for some time, died on November 26.<sup>5</sup> A couple of months earlier, Bourdeau had invited Ellen White to visit South Stukely for the church dedication and to encourage his wife. Unable to do so, she wrote Charlotte a touching letter in which she encouraged her to put her trust in Jesus who loves her and her family very much and would meet her again on the day of resurrection.<sup>6</sup>

## Europe

In 1884, Bourdeau went to Europe where he helped establish the work of Seventh-day Adventists in France, Italy, Romania and Switzerland. While in Europe, he remarried to Martha Andrews (1842-1901), widow of William Andrews (brother of John Andrews) and younger sister of George I. Butler, on December 2, 1884.<sup>7</sup>

Ellen White, also working in Europe at that time (1885-1887), appreciated Bourdeau's many sacrifices for the work of the church. She also appreciated the fact that he and his brother were among the few experienced pastors who could speak French. Her personal acquaintance with him led her to write some candid letters regarding his character defects, and what she perceived as indolence and lack of consecration in his work. She felt that he was not making good use of his time, and spending too much time at home taking care of little family matters.<sup>8</sup> Feeling his sermons were dull and lifeless, she appealed to him to be a better preacher by becoming a diligent student of the Scriptures and not to rely on the opinions and writings of others.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, Ellen White sympathized with Martha, who she described as "fine gold" and a great support to her husband, greater than he was to her.<sup>10</sup> According to Ellen White, Augustin's self-centeredness and overbearing personality seemed to have discouraged Martha.<sup>11</sup> Martha had two daughters with William Andrews: Edith, who helped her uncle John Andrews in Switzerland, and died also of tuberculosis in Basel; and Sarah.

## Final Years

Returning to the United States in 1888, depleted of energy and disabled by illness, Bourdeau worked for the church in various areas for short periods of time. Despite his limitations, he raised new churches in Vermont and Quebec, as well as Michigan, Pennsylvania, Dakota, Manitoba, California and Mississippi.<sup>12</sup> His second wife, Martha, died on August 25, 1901 after contracting tuberculosis in unfavorable living conditions while working in Montreal in 1900.<sup>13</sup>

On October 1, 1902, he remarried to Catherine (or Katherine) A. (née Gillespie) Fraser (1839-1929). Bourdeau's last years were lived in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He died on July 7, 1916 and was buried in the Oak Hill Cemetery in Battle Creek.<sup>14</sup>

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## SOURCES

"A Faithful Worker Fallen." *ARH*, September 10, 1901.

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Morse, G. W. "The Passing of the Pioneers." *ARH*, July 13, 1905.

Secretariat Missionary Files, RG 21. Record 114881. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Archives (GCA), Silver Spring, Maryland.

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## NOTES

1. S. B. Horton, "Another Pioneer Laid to Rest," *ARH*, August 17, 1916, 16-17; GCA, Secretariat Missionary Files, RG 21, Record 114881, Augustin C. Bourdeau Biographical Information Blank, September 5, 1905.
2. Augustin C. Bourdeau Biographical Information, GCA.
3. Ibid.
4. Denis Fortin, "The Quebec Seventh-day Adventist Church Association," *Adventist Heritage* 14, no. 3 (Winter 1992): 16.
5. M.E. Kellogg, "Charlotte Bourdeau obituary," *ARH*, December 18, 1883, 797.

6. Ellen G. White to Charlotte Bourdeau, September 3, 1883, Letter 28, 1883, Ellen G. White Estate.
  7. Augustin C. Bourdeau Biographical Information, GCA; Horton, "Another Pioneer Laid to Rest," 16.
  8. Ellen G. White to A. C. Bourdeau, January 25, 1886, Letter 20, 1886, Ellen G. White Estate.
  9. Ellen G. White to A. C. Bourdeau, February 27, 1886, Letter 33, 1886, Ellen G. White Estate.
  10. Ellen G. White to A. C. Bourdeau, March 18, 1886, Letter 37, 1886, Ellen G. White Estate.
  11. Ellen G. White to Martha Bourdeau January 1, 1887, Letter 31, 1887, and February 6, 1887, Letter 35, 1887, Ellen G. White Estate.
  12. Augustin C. Bourdeau Biographical Information, GCA; Horton, "Another Pioneer Laid to Rest," 16.
  13. "A Faithful Worker Fallen," *ARH*, September 10, 1901, 598.
  14. Augustin C. Bourdeau Biographical Information, GCA; Horton, "Another Pioneer Laid to Rest," 16-17.
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