



## In Memoriam

FATHER FRANCIS BORGIA STECK, O. F. M.

(1884–1962)

The Reverend Francis Borgia Steck, O. F. M., Ph. D., L. G. J., died on July 5 at St. Mary's Hospital, Quincy, Illinois, at the age of seventy-eight. He was in the fifty-first year of his priesthood and the fifty-seventh as a professed Franciscan. A founder of the Academy of American Franciscan History and one of its most ardent supporters, the first to offer courses in Spanish American history and to hold a professorship in that field at the Catholic University of America, he well deserves to be memorialized in the pages of *The Americas*.

A native of St. Louis, Missouri, Father Steck was born on July 11, 1884. At the age of fifteen he began studies in St. Joseph's Seminary, Teutopolis, Illinois, and five years later, on June 22, 1904, he received the Franciscan habit. A year later he took his first vows as a Franciscan. After further college work at St. Francis Friary, Quincy, Illinois, and two years of philosophy at St. Augustine Friary, Chicago, and Our Lady of Angels Friary, Cleveland, Ohio, he took his theological training in St. Louis and was ordained a priest there on June 29, 1911. His first practical experience in the priesthood was gained in two rural parishes in Nebraska, but in 1913 he was recalled to the seminary in Teutopolis to begin his long career as a teacher. His interest in historical writing became apparent at once when as an assistant editor of the *Franciscan Herald* he contributed articles that were eventually published in his volume, *Franciscans and the Protestant Revolution in England*.

His initiation into Spanish American history began in 1919 with a two year's apprenticeship at Santa Barbara, California, under Father Zephyrin Engelhardt, O. F. M., who was writing his history of the twenty-one California missions. He next spent a year in Chicago as literary editor of the *Franciscan Herald* and two years as a teacher at Quincy College, where the milieu prompted him to take up a study of the Joliet-Marquette Expedition. With this in mind as a subject of a dissertation he entered upon graduate studies in 1924 under the direction of the late Monsignor Peter Guilday in the Department of History of the Catholic University of America. It was in the Guilday Seminar that the undersigned met him for the first time and was awed by the overwhelming sweep of his knowledge,

amused as he battled under the adroit prodding of Monsignor Guilday for the findings of his thesis. His subject seemed to bring out the warrior in him and he continued to battle over it through life.

Taking his doctorate in 1927 he returned to Quincy College for a six-year stint of teaching in American and European history and in Spanish. During this period he contributed to Preuss' *Fortnightly Review*, of which he became an associate editor.

In 1933 he accepted an invitation from the Catholic University of America to offer its first courses in Spanish American history, and for the next fourteen years he developed its program in that field. His sincerity and genial enthusiasm made him a favorite among his colleagues and his devotion to his students brought him their loyal devotion. He concerned himself especially with the history of Mexico and its Franciscan missions. He did research in Texas and Mexico, amassing materials on the early Franciscan schools in Mexico. One of his publications was a Spanish study on the first college in America, Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco. Largely because of his zeal the American Catholic Historical Association devoted its complete session in 1939 to papers on Ibero-American history.

Honors came to him. He was made a member of the Spanish Academy of History and his own Order conferred on him its highest academic honor, the title of Lector Generalis Jubilatus. Ill health, from which he later happily recovered, caused him to resign his position in Washington in 1947 and he retired to Quincy College, where he continued his research. In the founding of the Academy of American Franciscan History he saw the vindication of his dreams and ambitions for the firm establishment of Latin American studies under the auspices of the Franciscan Order. Many will no doubt remember the paean of joy with which he greeted its definitive establishment. A monument to his memory and name is the collection of more than 3000 books on Spanish American history which he ingenuously and with Renaissance flourish called the Biblioteca Fraborese. It is housed at Quincy College.

His body lies in Calvary Cemetery at Quincy. May his soul rest in peace.

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