

Christ-Church of Saint-André-Est

A close relative of the churches of New England



Façade
Photo: CPRQ

The architectural ambition of the Reverend Joseph Abbott seems to have presided over the erection of the present Anglican Church of Saint-André-Est between 1819 and 1821. In all probability it was Abbott himself who chose and quite possibly drew up the plans for the building. He may have had assistance from the local seigneur, Sir John Johnson, who was known to have been well-acquainted with the United States where a great number of similar buildings are to be seen. Abbott, for his part, strongly insisted that a tower, inspired by the British tradition, be added in the façade. He actively promoted the idea that the clergyman himself should be closely involved in the designing of a church building. He was a university graduate and "came from an old, respectable English family whose members were well known for their professional and literary works." (J.-M. Palazzo. *Église Christ Church, Saint-André. Étude, relevés et analyse*, Québec, ministère des Affaires culturelles, 1982, p. 17). The fact that his son, John Caldwell Abbott later became the Prime Minister of Canada, and his daughter was the first female lecturer in the Faculty of Medicine at McGill University, serves to confirm the intellectual atmosphere which prevailed in this family.



Exterior view from graveyard
Photo : CPRQ



View towards choir
Photo: CPRQ



View towards façade
Photo: CPRQ

The parish was not inaugurated, however, until 1822, when the structural work of the church was completed. The bell-tower was finished in 1826 and the consecration of the building took place on 1 October 1829. The architecture of Christ Church clearly shows the influence which derives from the British background of Joseph Abbott and the close connections which Sir John Johnson had with the American loyalists.

"This tower is typical of the English baroque classicism of Wren. It has oculi which remind us of the European church-tower clocks. It is crowned with pinnacles and a balustrade and is surmounted by a picturesque spire which can vary from one church to another. This baroque effect is also achieved by the sharp contrast between the tower with all its ornamentation, and the great simplicity which characterises the ground plan of the rest of the church. [...] However, the Anglican Church of Saint-André-Est, contrary to the usual colonial practice, does not have ogival windows." (Luc Noppen, *Les chemins de la mémoire*, t. II, Québec, Les Publications du Québec, p.408.)

A church which belongs to an architectural trend from north-eastern America

"This development towards neo-gothicism was not in fact a particularly Canadian trait, but came from the United States during the same period. The second Church of the Holy Trinity in New York which was built between 1788 and 1790, is a genuine example of this style of building. It unites classical features, seen in the plainness of the composition of the triangular pediment, and gothic features, and in the ornamentation and the windows surmounted by cross-arches. [...] The small Unitarian church in Connecticut (1829) is a later vernacular version of the same model, with cross-arched windows and a large classical cornice surrounding the main body of the church. The tower, half integrated into the façade, incorporates some gothic elements. Another example, even closer to Christ-Church, is the Church of Saint-Luc in Massachussetts. Looking at the size of the building and the extent of its ground plan, it is very similar to the church of Saint-André-Est, except for the building material used and the absence of a triangular pediment in the façade. These examples help to show the existence of a significant religious architectural trend which is widespread in the north-eastern part of the North American continent." (J.-M. Palazzo. *Église Christ Church, Saint-André. Étude, relevés et analyse*, Québec, ministère des Affaires culturelles, 1982, p. 65)

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Text translated by Rachel Tunnicliffe

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