

The Church of Saint-Georges de Cacouna

The beauty of double balconies at the back of the church



Exterior
Photo : Germain Casavant

Cacouna has been a vacation resort since the 19th century but was, at first, just a farming area. Its enviable position on a promontory jutting out into the Saint Lawrence river, with an exceptional view of the Charlevoix mountains across the river about twenty kilometres as the crow flies, explains the choice of this site for many anglophone holiday-makers.

The church which is built on the side of the hill not take advantage of the beautiful view, unlike its Anglican counterpart which was built to satisfy the needs of the summer community of anglophone holiday-makers. It appears, however, to be set in the heart of the agricultural francophone parish whose primary interest lies in the fertile land of the plain of Rivière-du-Loup.



Pulpit
Photo : Germain Casavant

A work of art inspired by Thomas Baillairgé

The façade, with its strict three-tier design, two-lantern bell-tower similar to that of the church of Lauzon (1832) and discreet ornamentation, shows distinct similarities with the work of Thomas Baillairgé. There is, however, no extant document which would allow us to attribute it with any degree of certainty to Louis-Thomas Berlinguet as Gérard Morisset and Luc Noppen suppose.

It was built in 1830 and includes a single nave, a chancel with a flat chevet obtained by narrowing the nave, and a sacristy placed in line with the sanctuary. The chancel could be considered as belonging to a regional tradition employed by Baillairgé in Sainte-Luce-sur-Mer and Saint-Germain de Rimouski.

The interior was the work of François-Xavier Berlinguet, son of Louis-Thomas Berlinguet. In fact, it was his father who vouched for his work. It was started in 1852 and finished six years later. He then added the three tabernacles to the altars in 1860 taking his inspiration from those of his father in Saint-Remi de Napierville. The end result was a work of great quality.

David Ouellet was an architect from Québec who was particularly active in the Bas-Saint-Laurent area at the turn of the 20th century. He was commissioned to transform the exterior appearance of the building in 1892. He lengthened the sacristy by 7.6 metres in order to include a chapel, and proceeded with the restoration of the openings by adding new stone frames and enlarging the lateral openings by 50 centimetres. It was also at this time that a turret was added to the chevet, the altars and the steps to the pulpit were re-fashioned, and the ornamentation of the ceiling was modified.



Detail of the choir
Photo : Germain Casavant

An interior with contrasting décor

The work of François-Xavier Berlinguet, aged 22 at the beginning of the contract, is surprising both for its finesse and its originality. The decorative structure generally corresponds to the style of Louis-Thomas Berlinguet and his associate Louis-Flavien Berlinguet. The reredos "is based on those constructed in Saint-Roch de Québec (1848) and Saint-Remi de Napierville (1845).... This heavy treatment contrasts with the characteristic flatness of the reredoses in the shape of triumphal arches by Thomas Baillairgé. Two such reredoses, made by André Paquet, can be found in Charlesbourg and Sainte-Luce.



Doubles tribunes
Photo : Germain Casavant

In the church of St Georges, the reredos introduces the monumental but outdated Neo-classic art of which F.-X. Berlinguet would be a fervent supporter in Québec until around 1900." (Noppen, *Les églises du Québec (1600-1850)*, Québec et Montréal, Éditeur officiel/Fides, 1977, p. 84).

The pulpit, however, and the magnificent double balconies are among the most beautiful examples of their kind in Québec. The tradition of double balconies represents one of the most attractive characteristics used by the French-Canadian church designers. The balcony appeared in Québec religious architecture at the end of the 18th century in the Anglican Cathedral of Québec. Builders adopted this idea and soon added a second storey in the aim of optimising space and allowing the installation of the organ at the back of the church.



View towards choir
Photo : Germain Casavant

In Cacouna, Berlinguet knew how to play with the contrasting effect gained by using both painted wood and varnished wood. With this device he was able to endow the church with a certain nobility. The addition of intertwined motifs on a frieze in well-defined sections of varying dimensions accentuates the dynamic appearance of the twin balconies which already appear to be encroaching on the chancel.

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Text translated by Rachel Tunnicliffe

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