

# **The Church of Sainte-Agnès**

## **The only wooden church by Thomas Baillargé still in existence**

### **Sainte-Agnès - one of the oldest colonies of eastern Charlevoix**

The county of Charlevoix can be divided into two parts: Charlevoix-Est (eastern Charlevoix) and Charlevoix-Ouest (western Charlevoix). It was named in memory of the Jesuit, Pierre François-Xavier de Charlevoix (1682-1761) who stayed in New France on several occasions and who wrote a book about the history of the colony at the King's request.

The parish of Saint-Agnès, founded in 1830, was one of the first main settlements established in the hilly area of Charlevoix-Est. At this time it was called the 'parish of the Three Churches' because the territory included the parishes of Notre-Dame-des-Monts and Saint-Aimé-des-Lacs and all three were served by the same priest.



Exterior of choir and  
sacristy  
Photo : Germain Casavant



Facade

### **A simple church**

In 1833, after the official inauguration of the parish, an ambitious project was put forward by Monsignor Bernard-Claude Panet for the construction of a church in Sainte-Agnès. He started work on an average-sized stone church. However, during construction, the population were faced with certain financial constraints and decided to stop the work. They thought that the costs for such a project were too high for the church council's budget, especially as the materials, stone and limestone, were difficult to come by. However, only a few years later the parishioners planned a more economical project. With the authorisation of the bishop, in 1841 the church council commissioned Antoine Boucher-Belleville, master carpenter from La Malbaie, to undertake the construction of a wooden church based on plans by the Québec architect Thomas Baillargé. This church was built on the foundations of the original project.



Interior view towards choir  
Photo : Germain Casavant

### **The only wooden church by Thomas Baillargé still in existence**

Thomas Baillargé, was very prolific between 1820 and 1850. He had been established in his architectural practice since the beginning of the 19th century and he quickly became the diocesan architect for the diocese of Québec. He was therefore involved in the projects for the majority of religious edifices built in the middle of the century in his diocese. Of the many buildings he constructed, the church of Sainte-Agnès is the only wooden one which is still in existence

Throughout his career, Baillargé tried to renew traditional forms by adapting the Neo-classic style of architecture. In Sainte-Agnès, he used the traditional forms already in use in the majority of parish buildings. He was asked by the church council to base his ideas on the church of La Malbaie, built in 1805. Guylaine Lévesque, in *Les chemins de la mémoire*, provides us with the information that the specification mentions that "the windows and doors must be similar to those of the church of La Malbaie, along with the false-vaulting of the nave, choir and chapels including their cornices".



Ensemble extérieur vu du cimetière  
Photo : CPRQ

The design is in the form of a Latin cross and the apse is finished with a flat wall to which a sacristy attached. The dearth of ornamentation on the façade and the modest aspect of the wood contribute in giving to the building a rather plain and austere character. The interior, dating back to 1842-1844, is classical in style like those of Baillairgé, although the strict classical proportions are not strictly adhered to.

Apart from the addition of a balcony in 1850 and a covered passageway linking the left transept to the sacristy, this church has seen very few alterations. Although it is not one of Thomas Baillairgé's major achievements, this church remains an important part of the history of Québec architecture.

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Text translated by Rachel Tunnicliffe

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