

# The Church of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires in Québec

## Opposite the bust of Louis XIV on the Place Royale



Interior  
Photo : François Brault

A popular belief holds that the church of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires is the oldest in Québec. Although inaccurate, this notion is not far from the truth when one considers where it is located. It is, in fact, built partly on the foundations of the former 'magasin du roy', which was part of Champlain's residence in 1624.

In 1685, the Intendant, Jean Bochart de Champigny, gave the bishop a piece of land on which to construct a presbytery and a succursal church for the parish church in 'Haute-ville' (the upper town). He took advantage of the occasion to improve the 'place du marché' (market place) in 'Basse-ville' (the lower town) by installing a bust of Louis XIV. It then became known as the 'Place Royale'.

An ex-voto offering was suspended in the nave to commemorate le Brézé, a ship which came to Canada in 1664. Before the fire in 1759, this scale model adorned the nave of Cathedral of Québec.

Two years later, Claude Baillif, architect and master builder who had come from France to construct the Séminaire de Québec, undertook to build the two side walls and the rectilinear chevet using the stones which came from the ruins of the old store. However, he was forced to interrupt construction of the walls at about 15 metres from the chevet because the space in front of the church was not sufficient to complete the building. A temporary façade was built and the structural framework covered until the dispute about the ownership of the land bordering on the Place Royale had been resolved.

The church, built in a rectangular form, was not completed until 1723. The work was carried out by Jean Maillou, a student of Baillif, who had been taught by him about architecture and building. The nave was lengthened by almost 22 metres, and the façade was a simplified version of the 1687 project. It has a sculpted portal below an oculus with niches on either side. The bell-tower with double lanterns remained in its original central position. Meanwhile, the succursal church, originally dedicated to l'Enfant Jésus, was named Notre-Dame-de-la-Victoire in 1690, after the retreat of admiral Phipps, and then Notre-Dame-des-Victoires following the sinking of the British fleet in 1711 which was then under Admiral Walker's command. In general, the architectural characteristics of the building correspond to the development of a traditional Québec style.

In 1724, the chapel of Sainte-Geneviève, irregular in layout, was added on to the south wall along with a small house to lodge the sacristan. An annexe was built on to the chevet of the church in 1733 for the sacristy.

Notre-Dame-des-Victoires was not spared in 1759: only its burnt walls remained intact after the bombardments by the British.

The architect and master carpenter Jean Baillaigé decided to rebuild the church after the conquest. Its complete restoration was undertaken by his son, François, in 1816. The slope of the roof was reduced by lowering the angle of the gable and the stonework of the walls and gable were adapted to support a new framework. The niches were replaced by windows in order to allow more light into the interior, and the bell-tower was brought into the façade as would be done later with the Chapel of l'Hôtel-Dieu de Québec.

The new interior was created by the sculptor Raphaël Giroux assisted by other students of Thomas Baillaigé, but the building had to wait until 1854-1857 for this work to be done.



Exterior  
Photo : François Brault

The wooden false-vaulting was made to imitate the stonework. The transverse ribs rest on the entablature which really does act as a support here. The reredos is the most ornate feature: the semicircular pediment rises above the cornice up to the basket-handle vaulting. It succeeds the previous interiors which were by Noël Levasseur, in 1725-1730, and Pierre Séguin, from Montréal, in 1816. The tabernacle on the high altar was sculpted by David Ouellet in 1878.



Detail of the high altar  
Photo : François Brault

Between 1858 and 1861, the bell-tower was rebuilt and a parvis erected surrounded by a cast-iron fence based on the model of the basilica-cathedral of Notre-Dame-de-Québec, following the specifications of the architect Joseph-Ferdinand Peachy.

The church was listed as an historic monument in 1929. A little while after this the walls were strengthened and the flooring was replaced with flagstones under the supervision of the architect Raoul Chênevert.

In 1967, it was decided to give the Place Royale a 'New France' character. Consequently, the exterior of the church underwent major restorations. It was stripped of its roughcast, the doorway was re-constructed, the door was replaced and everything that had been added in the 19th century was removed including the partial cornice that suggests a complete pediment, the parvis and the cast-iron fence. In 1986, the structure was once again strengthened and the stone walls pointed to prevent leaks. A wooden floor was laid over the concrete.

Because of the illustrious occupant of the Place Royale, the buildings on all four sides of the square were expected to reflect the glory of the era which he represented. It was necessary, therefore, in their restoration, to obliterate all traces of the recent past.

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Text translated by Rachel Tunnicliffe

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