

The Church of Saint-Antoine-de-Tilly

The Jesuit plan

The Jesuit plan - an example of centralised bureaucracy advocated by the first diocese in New France

On his arrival in New France, Monsignor de Laval was well informed about the architectural traditions of the Jesuits in Europe. The influence of this "Jesuit architecture" was to portray a united church with a centralised power-structure. The Catholic Church in New France was brought up in the Jesuit tradition. It therefore naturally chose the Jesuit model for the churches it was constructing for its growing numbers of worshippers. This was also to ensure that the parishes would feel the presence of a strong administration.



Façade

Photo : Germain Casavant



The reverse side of the façade

Photo : Germain Casavant

By means of imposing, with the strength of authority, a uniformity in church architecture, the French tradition became well-established in Quebec. At the end of the 18th century, documents relating to the construction of churches, including that for Saint-Antoine-de-Tilly, indicate that the bishop of Québec, Mgr Jean-Olivier Briand, favoured the use of the Jesuit model in order to preserve this uniformity.

The Jesuit plan and traditional architecture

Religious architecture was brought to New France by the missionaries. The Jesuits, who had developed a particular kind of ecclesiastical architecture in Europe, built their first places of worship in Québec based on those in France. The model they used in New France would serve as a reference for over a century and be copied by most of the architects in the country. It therefore takes its place in the history of religious architecture contributing to the forming of a traditional style.



Interior

Photo : Germain Casavant

Often used in a parish context, this pattern would be copied until the 19th century. A good example dating back to the French Regime is the church of Sainte-Famille of the île d'Orléans. This church reproduces characteristics of the church which the Jesuits built in Québec city in 1666. Its ground plan is that of a Latin cross, twice as long as it is wide, ending in a semicircular apse facing east. Two side chapels open onto the nave at the entrance to the choir and form a transept. The building is only one storey high with windows along the sides. If the Church of Sainte-Famille on the île d'Orléans is one of the rare examples of this layout dating back to the French Regime, there are rather more examples dating back to the period after the conquest. In fact, there are several parishes in the province of Québec with churches based on the Jesuit plan dating back to the second half of the 18th century, notably between 1760 and 1790, when with an increasing population it became necessary to build a great many new churches.

The Church of Saint-Antoine in Saint-Antoine-de-Tilly

The church in Saint-Antoine-de-Tilly was built in 1788. The style is traditional and the structure corresponds to the qualities found in the Jesuit model: Latin cross plan, semicircular apse, side chapels in the transepts and single-storey elevation. This type of plan is derived from Christian tradition and is characterised by its use of space. The church is divided into two parts of which one is sacred. This part, known as the choir, contains the sanctuary and altar and is reserved for those who lead the worship. The other part, the nave, is reserved for the people.



Pulpit
Photo : Germain Casavant

The interior was created in 1837 by André Paquet, a sculptor from the region of Bellechasse. Preserved in its entirety, this décor is the most complete produced by the sculptor. It is in line with the work of his master, Thomas Baillairgé. It keeps faithfully to the rules of classicism, reflecting the unity and harmony of that tradition.

A new façade

In 1902, the parishioners decided to modernise their church and planned a partial reconstruction. A Québec architect, David Ouellet, enlarged the church from the front by building a new façade. This practice, very popular at the turn of the century, concealed the traditional structure of the building.

The original wooden façade with its single portal only had one bell-tower with a double lantern. The new façade with a prominent stone tower is an example of the massive type of construction popular at the turn of the century.

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