

# The Church of Saint-Charles-Borromée de Charlesbourg

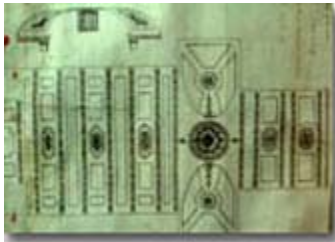
## The integration of parcellated land unique in North America

### The church - the institutional heart of the village

The church of Charlesbourg is a remarkable example of the presence of the church in community life. Situated in the very centre of the town, the church is mainly surrounded by various institutional and commercial buildings. This places it at the heart of the people's daily life. Considering how much concern has been expressed over the years about conservation, this church offers a wonderful example of unity and coherence.



Façade  
Photo : Germain Casavant



Original plans for the ceiling from the parish archives  
Photo: François Brault

Vieux-Charlesbourg (Old Charlesbourg) was laid out by the Jesuits in 1626 during the time when the lands of New France were first being granted by King Louis XIV. In 1666, when they decided to establish a village at the seigneurie of Notre-Dame-des-Anges (Vieux Charlesbourg), the Jesuits had to respect the decree passed by the King in 1663 requiring populations to be grouped in market towns. In order to meet with these demands, they created a radial plan for apportioning the land.



Original plans from the parish archives  
Photo : François Brault

This plan was composed of a square called Trait-carré whose perimeter defined the limit of the trapezoidal-shaped plots thus forming parcels of land in the shape of a star. The Jesuits built the church in the middle of the square, the institutional heart of the village.

Three places of worship have occupied this site. The first, a wooden church, was built in 1666 and was replaced in 1694 by one of stone not long after the parish had been officially constituted. The last, rather more noteworthy church dates back to 1828 and was built to meet the needs of a growing population. The plans were drawn up by the architect Thomas Baillairgé assisted by Father Jérôme Demers.

### Outside influences come into play

The church was consecrated in 1830 and is of a neo-classical style, widely used by Baillairgé at that time. The typical neo-classical façade shows a balanced, symmetrical composition with classical features such as the pediment and pilasters for ornamentation. In spite of its affinity with the tradition of French Classicism, the composition is generally novel. The oval window in the centre of the pediment and the triple (Palladian) windows are features which have been borrowed from English Classicism (Palladian style) which appeared in Québec after the conquest.



Choir  
Photo : Germain Casavant

This building therefore shows Thomas Baillairgé's capacity to assimilate a few outside influences and integrate them into his own compositions while at the same time conserving the harmony sought after by Classicism.

The composition of the plan is otherwise rather unusual. It is in the form of a Latin cross, with a nave crossed by a transept and ending in a narrower choir. The main peculiarity is with the chevet. Baillairgé's choice of a flat chevet rather than a semicircular one is not at all usual for him. It can also be found in certain churches on the south shore such as in Sainte-Luce-sur-Mer and Saint-Germain de Rimouski.



Reredos  
Photo : Germain Casavant



Pulpit  
Photo : Germain Casavant

### A homogeneous interior

The interior ornamentation is also remarkable. The sculpted features were created by André Paquet, Thomas Baillairgé's student and disciple, using his master's designs. This interior is characterised by the uniform treatment given to it. In 1833, André Paquet was commissioned to create the cornice and coffered ceiling with carved horizontal beams.

About ten years later, the decoration of the sanctuary was entrusted to the same team. The project included the interior of the choir) three reredoses, the pulpit and the churchwarden's pew.

These were carved governed by the rules of the classical style in the same way as would be used for architecture. The logical design of the main reredos is a good example of this. The three domes, pediment, niches and balustrades also followed the classical pattern indicating their creator's loyalty to the artistic tradition which had already taken root.

### Originality

The interior was entirely constructed from plans by Thomas Baillairgé and is a good example of the evolution of architectural forms in Québec. Baillairgé introduced new outside influences which he happily integrated into the already established classical tradition. The work of his disciple Paquet also shows the same predilection for classical unity and harmony.

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Text translated by Rachel Tunnicliffe

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