

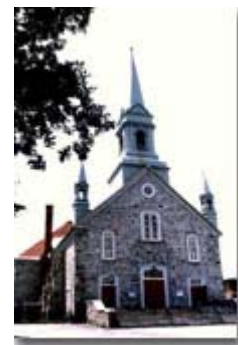
The Church of Saint-Elzéar de Beauce

A beautiful ceiling by Thomas Baillairgé

Erected on a hillock overlooking the village, the church of Saint-Elzéar is built of uncut field stones, red granite and black limestone. It is constructed in the form of a Latin cross with a single nave and transept providing two side chapels. From its position against the flat chevet, the sacristy is linked to the transept by a covered passageway on the graveyard side.

Although the building was commissioned in 1847, construction only began two years later following a design by Thomas Baillairgé. The architect had ceased practising by this time, so it is more than likely that the overseeing of the construction was entrusted to one of his successors trained in the school of Baillairgé. Pierre Fortier, master carpenter in Sainte-Marie de Beauce, asked Léandre Parent, Baillairgé's student, to take on the sculpting.

The façade is neo-classical in spirit and its design gives some idea of what the interior of the building will look like. The gable closely follows the roof outline and the lower part of the pediment where it joins the cornice is interrupted by apertures pierced immediately above the centre of the doorways. Until 1965, the central opening was linked to the window by an overhanging feature in wood carved in the Doric style. The top of this embellishment was convoluted in shape, giving a sense of importance to this particular part of the façade. The bell-tower was built towards 1893-1894, by the firm of Ferdinand Villeneuve of Saint-Romuald. It is composed of an open drum surmounted by a spire and flanked by two turrets which are identical copies of the spire.



Façade
Église de Beauceville
Photo : Germain Casavant



Transept
Photo : Germain Casavant



Exterior
Photo : Germain Casavant

In 1915 a weakness was discovered in one of the pillars of the bell-tower. Labbé and Roberge, from Sainte-Marie-de-Beauce undertook a major restoration project: concrete buttresses were built symmetrically along the side elevations to support the exterior walls as a means of counteracting the pressure exerted by the structure on top of the walls. It was decided to take advantage of this opportunity to carry out some other renovations: the bell-tower and roof were covered in galvanised iron, the windows were replaced, and a covered passageway was built between the church and the sacristy. Other work was carried out to strengthen the building in 1958: the wooden joists were replaced by metal beams under the supervision of Paul Voyer, an architect from Sainte-Marie-de-Beauce.



Interior
Photo: Germain Casavant

The sculptural work in the interior is a perfect illustration of the architectural principle of ornamentation developed by Thomas Baillairgé, according to which the transverse arches of the choir should rest on the corresponding pilasters.

The importance of the choir is emphasised by the continuous entablature which encompasses the sanctuary including the transepts. The reredoses in the transepts are reproductions of the one in the choir. They are carved in the Ionic style and surmounted by an interrupted triangular pediment.

The entablature continues into the nave where its ornamentation is treated in a lighter fashion. The only other ornamentation in this part of the church is the reproduction of the transverse ribs of the choir. The walls are left bare.

The Church of Saint-Elzéar is a good example of the influence of the style of Thomas Baillairgé on religious architecture in Québec, particularly in the east. The widespread use of his style had can be explained by his close collaboration with Father Jérôme Demers, the director of the Seminary of Québec and teacher of philosophy. Father Demers can be considered as the first theorist in architecture in Québec. He prepared the *Précis d'architecture pour servir de suite au traité élémentaire de physique*, which has been handed down to us by the transcription produced by his students. This program for the teaching of architecture was designed for the priests who would soon be taking part in the construction of parish churches.



Pulpit

Photo : Germain Casavant

To illustrate his teaching he used the examples of the Church of Saint-Joachim which is remarkable for its unity, the logic of its architectural design and the richness of its interior, and the Basilica-cathedral of Notre-Dame-de-Québec. Baillairgé's renown and his impressive number of contracts attracted to his studio a considerable number of apprentices wanting to learn about architecture or sculpture. Among the sculptors who trained under Baillairgé and produced interiors from his plans were Raphaël Giroux, André Paquet, François-Xavier Berlinguet and Léandre Parent to whom Baillairgé bequeathed his wooden 'tower' in his will by way of souvenir. The pulpit, baptistery and churchwarden's seat carved by Parent had been produced for the original interior. The same plant and floral motifs were used. The pulpit is fixed to the wall of the nave. The main body is oval in shape. It has carved wooden panelling at the back and a sounding-board surmounted by an elaborate carving. The churchwarden's seat faces the pulpit and its decoration repeats the neo-classical motifs of the choir. The panels of the font were also carved by Léandre Parent and depict the *Baptême du Christ* (Baptism of Christ).



Panel on the font
fonts baptismaux

Photo : Germain Casavant

The high altar was carved in 1803-1804 by Louis-Amable Quévillon for the Church of Saint-Henri de Lévis. Its altar-stone is decorated with flowers, foliated patterns and the heads of angels. It was acquired by the church council some thirty years after the interior of the church was completed, towards 1883. Although the bareness of Thomas Baillairgé's style is in complete contrast to the ornamental tendencies of Quévillon, the high altar is actually in complete harmony with the rest, emphasising the importance of this part of the sanctuary.

The Church and sacristy of Saint-Elzéar were listed as historical monuments in 1960.

Denyse Légaré

Text translated by Rachel Tunnicliffe

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