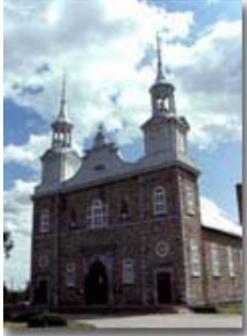


# The Church of Saint-François-Xavier de Saint-François-du-Lac The Recollect plan

Situated south of Lac Saint-Pierre, by the river Saint-François, Saint-François-du-Lac boasts a magnificent church. It was built in 1845 from plans by Thomas Baillairgé to replace the first stone church dedicated for worship in the town in 1735. Work continued until 1849.



Façade

Photo : Germain Casavant

## A typical Baillairgé façade

The church is endowed with an imposing and symmetrical two-tower façade. First impressions are of an restrained and disciplined design and this gives a clue as to the ordering of the interior. There are three separate entrances. The central doorway leads to the main nave and the two side doorways at the base of the towers lead.



View from the other side of  
the river Saint-François  
Photo : Germain Casavant

The storeys are defined by "the horizontal string-course [which] divides the elevation at the height of the wall plates". (Luc Noppen, *Les églises du Québec (1600-1850)*, Québec, Éditeur officiel/Fides, 1977, p. 230) to the side aisles. It was common practice in great French architecture since the 12th century to find some way of making a clear connection between the interior structure and the dominant sections of the façade. Baillairgé produced other such façades for Sainte-Croix-de-Lotbinière, Baie-du-Febvre (no longer in existence) and Grondines.

The stepped-style pediment was made of wood either in order to lighten the structure or for reasons of economy; the historians cannot agree on this. A similar feature is to be found in a few other churches in the area. Perhaps the existence of clayey soil might explain why the builders were fearful of placing a heavy stone structure in the top section of the façade.

## An interior inspired by the school of Quévillon

The interior was produced by Alexis and Michel Millette, contractor-sculptors from Yamachiche, between 1853 and 1860. They were trained by sculptors linked with Quévillon's studio, but were in this instance simply following plans by Baillairgé. The general scheme for the interior is that of the three-nave plan without clerestories as introduced into Québec architecture in the Anglican Cathedral of Québec. The décor reflects the style which was characteristic of Thomas Baillairgé at the turn of the eighteen-fifties. One only has to think of the interior of the church of Pierrefonds produced between 1844 and 1847.

The connoisseur will immediately be impressed by the pillars in the three buildings. To make up for the lack of the customary horizontal decorative entablature in the central nave, a curious square-shaped motif was added above the capitals which acts as individual entablatures. It appears to echo the horizontal string-course on the façade. Luc Noppen suggests that the general inspiration for the interior structure derives from a Dutch model of the end of the 18th century. Unfortunately this is difficult to check as the building in question is no longer in existence. One thing, however, seems clear: the idea of the individual entablature has existed in Renaissance Italy since the 15th century. Brunelleschi in San Spirito of Florence constructed pillars in exactly the same manner. The architectural quality together with the prestige of this artistic reference would have one believe that this distinctive motif was chosen in full knowledge of the facts, at least in the case of the Anglican Cathedral.



Choir

Photo : Germain Casavant

## The persistence of the Recollect plan in the middle of the 19th century

The Recollect design was one of the most widely-used available options for the building of places of worship since the beginning of the colony. It was still used in the middle of the 19th century in buildings as sophisticated as the church of Saint-François-Xavier. Its shape, however, was adapted to a more complicated division of space.



The nave towards the façade  
Photo: Germain Casavant



Pillar and pulpit  
Photo: Germain Casavant

The Recollects were the first members of a religious order to come to Québec in 1615. The English chased them out in 1629 and when they came back in 1670 it was to find their residence in ruins. In 1682 they laid the foundation stone for their church but only rebuilt the monastery buildings in 1692.

The design of this new church "made an indelible impression on religious architecture from the first half of the XVIII century. In fact, several parishes would construct churches based on this design, without a transept, and where only the narrowing of the choir leaves space for the interior chapels, and where a partition was often used to screen the interior sacristy from the rest of the church" (Luc Noppen, *Les églises du Québec (1600-1850)*, Québec, Éditeur officiel/Fides, 1977, p. 23) This plan was used in region of Québec for the churches of Sainte-Foy from 1698, and Saint-François and Saint-Jean on the île d'Orléans in 1734.

In the Montréal area, the church of the Montréal Recollects has the same characteristics except that the semicircular chevet was replaced with a flat one. This latter version of the plan can also be found in the surrounding countryside. Sault-au-Récollet dating from 1742-1749 is another clear example of this.

With the enduring traditional styles developed under the French Regime until the eighteen-twenties, the Recollect plan achieved a rather late reputation in buildings such as Saint-André-de-Kamouraska. In Pierrefonds and Saint-François-du-Lac the Recollect plan is necessary in order to develop the three-nave structure without transept.

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Text translated by Rachel Tunnicliffe

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