

# The Church of Saint-François-de-Sales de Neuville

## The choir and its baroque-style baldachin



Interior towards choir  
Photo : Germain Casavant

### The baldachin of the church in Neuville - a masterpiece of Québec's past artistic heritage

The baldachin in the church in Neuville is one of the masterpieces of Québec's past artistic heritage. On the one hand it bears witness to the church being a place which favours artistic expression, and on the other, it is one of the rare examples dating back to the French regime, which has survived to this day.

It is also rare to find an interior which has reached such a high level of completion in a parochial context where it was generally necessary to economise on both materials and labour costs. Neuville is therefore an exceptional case. "Mgr Jean-Baptiste de Saint-Vallier, bishop of Québec, exchanged this baldachin with the parishioners of Neuville in 1717 for wheat for the poor people of the town who were suffering from a food shortage. The prelate had commissioned it in 1695 for his Episcopal palace in Québec." (Madeleine Gobeil-Trudeau, *Les chemins de la mémoire*, t. I, Québec, Les Publications du Québec, 1990, p. 294)

The baldachin of Neuville is the only example of its kind still in existence in Québec. The other carved wooden baldachins which had been produced for the churches of Boucherville, Notre-Dame de Montréal, Trois-Rivières and Notre-Dame de Québec, have all disappeared. The baldachin of Neuville is of a baroque style and was inspired by that of Val-de-Grâce, in Paris, created in 1666 by le Bernin, a prestigious Italian sculptor. It is open to the nave and supported by six columns with cabled shafts and square bases. The Corinthian capitals serve as a support for an elaborate circular entablature which supports the couronnement. A cross is placed on the upper part of the couronne.



Nave  
Photo : Germain Casavant

### A new décor around the baldachin

The various phases involved in the restoration of the church of Neuville were complicated. The interior furnishings were begun when the parishioners decided to reconstruct the church after the conquest. Work began on the choir in 1761 which at that time included the side chapels, sanctuary and sacristy. In 1771-1772 the ornamentation of a chapel was completed, and in 1783, a new sacristy was built (replaced in 1835) in the extension of the choir.

The furnishings of the side chapels were commissioned in 1802 from François Baillargé, a sculptor from Québec. He also created the high altar when a few embellishments were added to the church in 1826. The decoration of the sanctuary and of the vaulting of the nave was undertaken by a team of three sculptors from Trois-Rivières. The contract mentions that the artists were to construct a new vaulting in the nave and side chapels, and to add a cornice at the base of the vaulting. The décor of the choir was to be undertaken the following year. The decoration of the sanctuary was inspired by the artistic accomplishment of Quévillon, and this shows the influence of the decorative practices prevalent in the Montréal area.

In 1854 the nave was demolished and rebuilt. This new section was the work of the school of Baillargé. It was divided by columns into three naves and the walls were finished in plaster. The pulpit was produced by Toussaint Vézina.

The interior of the church of Neuville bears witness to the great Québécois tradition in sculpture and architecture, the baldachin being the central feature. The altars by François Baillargé are also remarkable pieces of sculpture.

The nave, rebuilt in the neo-classical style advocated by Thomas Baillairgé, and the ornamentation of the choir in the artistic style of Quévillon, are clear examples of the two schools of architectural styles current in Québec in the 19th century.

**Charles Bourget**

Text translated by Rachel Tunnicliffe

Bibliography:

- Gobeil-Trudeau, Madeleine. « Sanctuaire de l'église Saint-François-de-Sales », *Les chemins de la mémoire*, t. I, Québec, Les Publications du Québec, 1990, p. 294.
- Noppen, Luc. *Les églises du Québec (1600-1850)*, Québec et Montréal, Éditeur officiel/Fides, 1977, p. 150-153.
- Porter, John. « L'ancien baldaquin de la chapelle du premier palais épiscopal de Québec, à Neuville », *Les Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien*, vol. I, no 2, p. 180-200.