

The Church of Saint-Paul de Joliette

Traditional Québécois styles continuing into the 19th century



Exterior
Photo : Germain Casavant

There was a general tendency to renew architectural forms at the end of the 18th century. This was mainly due to the European training of certain architects, for example François Baillairgé, who designed religious buildings in Québec. Despite this renewal, habits in building techniques were so firmly ingrained that the so-called traditional styles lasted until about 1830. It is important to realise that after the conquest the French-Canadians, although numerically in the majority, were in a minority situation with respect to their political and economic power. Consequently, it is understandable that they retained an abiding attachment to their cultural buildings. These became landmarks for their social identity as a united, living community.

Buildings such as the Church of Saint-Paul-de-Joliette clearly demonstrate just how persistent the traditional Québécois style was in the first decades of the 19th century.

"Traditional architecture [...] habitually follows the dictates of custom. Under the supervision of the bishop and his priests, such as Pierre Connefroy, the intention is to affirm this particular character of Québec, which has been developed for over a century. Because of this, the English influence will not succeed in altering religious architecture to any great extent: At the most, the new designs will be used as ornamentation." (Luc Noppen, *Les églises du Québec 1600-1850*, Québec et Montréal, Fides/Éditeur officiel, 1977, p. 39)



Vue de la nef vers le revers de la
façade
Photo: Germain Casavant

The main characteristics of these time-honoured traditions in architecture are particularly easy to identify in the structure of façades. Two side doorways are generally placed on either side of a main central doorway. Two windows stand either side of a central niche, aligned with the gable, on the second register, and an oculus crowns the façade. The bell-tower is usually octagonal with two tiers of openings and surmounted with a spire. Compositions with all or some of these features dating back to the early 19th century can be seen at Saint-Mathias de Rouville, Saint-André-de-Kamouraska and Sainte-Marguerite-de-Blairindie de l'Acadie.



Interior
Photo : Germain Casavant

The church which served as a reference for this style of architecture was Sainte-Famille de Boucherville, built in 1801 from a design by Father Connefroy, the local priest. This is why he is known as the father of this trend in conservatism.



Façade
Photo : Germain Casavant

An exterior from the beginning of the 19th century

The construction of the present church dates back to 1803-1804 when it was built to replace a wooden chapel which had been erected in 1782. It is based on the Jesuit plan including a projecting transept forming two chapels at the entrance to a semicircular choir. The choir conforms to the tradition started in the second half of the 18th century by ending in an aligned sacristy. A local stone, roughly hewn, has been employed here which imparts to the surface of the stonework a relatively smooth unarticulated surface. There is no noteworthy feature such as the framework around the windows or doorway to liven up the façade, despite the use of finer stone and the presence of Doric pilasters at the entrance.

An interior which was completely redone in the second half of the 19th century

The original interior, of which a few features remain today, was produced between 1821 and 1830. Most of the sculpting, however, was renewed sometime towards the end of the 19th century. It has been plausibly argued that this took place in 1889, even though, according to Luc Noppen, certain church council documents talk of "major repairs" being undertaken at this time. (Luc Noppen, *Les chemins de la mémoire*, t. II, Québec, Les Publications du Québec, p. 460)



Vaulting at crossing of
transept
Photo: Germain Casavant

A certain Chrysostome Perreault was commissioned for the first interior. The sculptor Pierre Guibord made some of the features designed by Perreault such as the cornice (still in place), the side altars and the candlestick for the Paschal Candle whilst Perreault himself took care of the pulpit and high altar.

It is believed that the present vaulting with its magnificent coffers, the pillars and the balcony at the back of the church are from the workshop of Victor Bourgeau like those at Saint-Alexis and Saint-Félix-de-Valois.

On the whole, rather than adulterating the inside space, this new interior bestows a certain dignity mainly due to the strictness of composition which characterises the neo-classical tendency in the architecture of the end of the 19th century.

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Text translated by Rachel Tunnicliffe

Bibliography :

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