

The Church of Sainte-Luce

A Thomas Baillairgé interior adapted to regional tastes



Reredos of high altar
Photo : Germain Casavant

A year after the inauguration of the parish in 1829, a request was sent to the bishop for a church to be built. In 1836, after many negotiations, the prelate accepted with a recommendation that the parish should employ the services of the architect Thomas Baillairgé. Baillairgé immediately dispatched a set of four plans which were approved by the vicar-general Jérôme Demers.

However this did not take into consideration the expressed wishes of the parishioners of Sainte-Luce: they had noticed certain features in other rural churches and wished their own church to reflect the characteristics which they particularly liked. Therefore the nave and height of the walls were to be similar to the church of Saint-Germain de Rimouski, but the choir, however, was to be narrower, more like that of Saint-André de Kamouraska, to allow for two small side altars.



Pulpit
Photo : Germain Casavant

No doubt sensitive to the expectations of the parishioners, Baillairgé decided against his usual design of a building with transept and side aisles based on the Jesuit plan. Instead he chose the Recollect plan which would provide the church with a single nave lengthened by a choir ending in a semicircular apse. However, this concession was not enough. The parishioners insisted on a flat chevet as making for "greater convenience inside and presenting less difficulty for all the walls outside". Again they referred to the church of Saint-Germain de Rimouski, which Jérôme Demers and Thomas Baillairgé had built in 1822. From the point of view of construction, the flat chevet had clear advantages: it simplified the construction by positioning a rectangular shaped sacristy within the choir and, at the same time, enabled the three components comprising the nave, the choir and the sacristy to be covered by a single pitched roof.

Modifying the plan was not the only change that Baillairgé had to make to his original project. The gabled façade, which gives an idea of what the interior of the church looked like, included a Doric portal with a niche on either side for statues; a second tier with a Palladian window and oculi in line with the lower openings; and the gable also had a round window. Corbels surmounted with urns were intended for the base of the gable above the upper oculi, creating a couronnement like that at the church of Saint-François-de-Sales in Neuville.



Interior
Photo : Germain Casavant

A photograph from before 1914 shows that the project was only partially completed: the façade was not nearly so articulated, including only two niches and a central portal beneath two oculi. The bell-tower had been replaced in 1875 by a new structure based on that of the church of Saint-Charles de Bellechasse.

In 1914 the architects Ouellet and Lévesque designed a new façade for the church of Sainte-Luce. It was lengthened by one bay and given a central tower open on three sides. It supports a heavy bell-tower composed of a square drum beneath a lantern covered by an polygonal onion-dome roof.

The church has been listed as an historic monument since 1957.

The interior was produced by André Paquet, between 1845 and 1850, after plans by Thomas Baillairgé. He also made the pulpit and the churchwarden's seat which are part of the architect-designed furnishings. The pulpit is reached by a spiral stairway because in the absence of a side chapel it was impossible to install a discreet banister.

The vaulting, reredos and entablature were inspired by the churches of Charlesbourg and Sainte-Croix de Lotbinière. This was because the parishioners wanted to have a flat chevet in place of a semicircular apse. Due to the narrow choir, the architect had to shorten the sides. This gave more prominence to the reredos which included a painting by Antoine Plamondon (1842) representing Saint Lucy praying at Saint Agatha's tomb for her mother to be healed. Plamondon was well known because of the many copies of European religious paintings he produced, but this was his first original sacred work.

Denyse Légaré

Text translated by Rachel Tunncliffe

Bibliography:

- Noppen, Luc. *Les églises du Québec(1600-1850)*, Québec et Montréal, Éditeur officiel/Fides, 1977, p. 222-225.
- Roy, Guy-André. *Les chemins de la mémoire*, t. I, Québec, Les Publications du Québec, 1990, p. 514-515.
- Roy, Guy-André. *Trésor de l'église Sainte-Luce, comté de Rimouski*, Québec, ministère des Affaires culturelles, 1975, 262 p.