

# **The Church of Saint-Grégoire de Bécancour**

## **And the dissemination of the art of the school of Quévillon**

### **The influence of the school of Quévillon**

At the end of the 18th century Louis-Amable Quévillon was one of the most prolific architect-sculptors in the Montréal area. He was also a skilful carpenter and he quickly trained a group of specialised workers to satisfy the demands in the field of religious architectural interiors. Between 1790 and 1850 he put together a team with whom he shared the sculptural work and church interior projects for many churches around Montréal. As a result, the disciples of Quévillon disseminated their master's art and produced ornamental interiors of a high quality. The art of Quévillon and his disciples was of a different style to that of Thomas Baillairgé who worked mainly in the Québec area.



Façade  
Photo : Germain Casavant

Quévillon's style derived its inspiration from the baroque. This style uses a repetitive motif and covers the surfaces of the ceilings and walls almost entirely. It was this ornamental character which was criticised by the supporters of Baillairgé's style which conformed to the more highly-structured methods of the neo-classical style. This style gives balance and symmetry to the décor as well as in the organisation of the available space. Like Quévillon, Baillairgé also trained apprentices who then spread his particular methods.



Choir  
Photo : Germain Casavant

### **The Church of Saint-Grégoire de Bécancour - a good example of how Quévillon's style was disseminated**

The interior of the Church of Saint-Gregoire de Bécancour is decorated in the style of the school of Quévillon. A few years after the first church was completed in 1806, the churchwardens commissioned Louis-Amable Quévillon to embellish the interior of their new church. Unfortunately he was busy working on the interior of the first church of Notre-Dame de Montréal, and could not accept the project.

Brother Louis Demers, a Recollect from Montréal, knew what the parish of Saint-Grégoire needed and offered to sell them the reredos and tabernacle of the Recollect's former church. The church council bought them in 1811 and commissioned Urbain Brien, one of Quévillon's disciples, to install them and design the décor for the sanctuary. In 1812, Brien was therefore asked to create a décor which would integrate the reredos from the Recollects. The reredos was composed of two columns and four pilasters surmounted by an arched pediment.



Interior  
Photo : Germain Casavant

Brien carved a cornice to continue that of reredos into the choir and side chapels. He produced identical copies of the pilasters for the sanctuary wall. In addition to the ornamentation in the choir, Brien designed and carved some of the liturgical furnishings, including the altar-stone for the high altar, the side altars and the churchwarden's seat.

Although Brien derived inspiration from the reredos and tabernacle bought from the Recollects, the richness of the ornamentation is more in keeping with the school of Quévillon. However, it is not a typical example of the style of Quévillon as can be seen in the Church of Sault-au-Récollet, for example. Brien has adapted the style so that his work can be in keeping with the reredos (which is the principal feature) as well as being able to retain its distinctive baroque flavour.



Detail on pulpit  
Photo : Germain Casavant

### A neo-classical style church

The new façade of the Church of Saint-Grégoire de Bécancour between 1850 and 1855. It was greatly influenced by Palladian architecture. It is a monumental structure composed of a central portico surmounted with four columns which support a triangular pediment. Two side towers with belfries flank the central part.

The reconstruction of the façade was carried out after the nave had been widened.



High altar  
Photo : Germain Casavant

The church was based on a Latin cross design and the parish decided to carry out renovations in order to enlarge it which was common with this type of plan. The walls of the transepts were continued as far as the towers which were erected in front of the portal of the original church. The interior also underwent a transformation. Side galleries supported by a colonnade were built where the original nave walls had been, and a new coffered ceiling covered the new nave and choir. Several other restoration projects took place between 1891 and 1909.

**Katia Tremblay**

Text translated by Rachel Tunncliffe

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