

The Church of Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce

A good example of coffered vaulting



Façade
Photo : Germain Casavant

The Church of Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce is part of an institutional group which was classed as an historic site in 1985. This site comprises five buildings which are grouped together in the heart of the town and include: the church and graveyard, the presbytery (1890-1892), the convent (1889, now occupied by the Marius-Barbeau Museum and the Société du patrimoine des Beaucerons), the orphanage (1907-1908) and the school Lambert (1911, extended in 1947).

The Church of Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce was erected between 1865 and 1868 to replace the previous church which had been destroyed in a fire. It dominates the institutional group of buildings. Following the example of the Law Courts, which were built a few years earlier on the same street, it faces the river Chaudière. The town was built up around these two main buildings, and all the institutional buildings then decided to face the river.

The presbytery was no exception to this rule. Even though it was built on the south side of the main street, it had two identical façades, one facing the street and the other facing the river. François-Xavier Berlinguet, from the school of Thomas Baillairgé, drew up the plans for the church and was involved in producing some of the interior such as the galleries, the pews in the nave, the chapels and the confessionals.

The height of the church stands out overlooking the valley, on a level with the old iron bridge which crosses the river. The narrowness and height of its façade is emphasised by having the central part standing out from the rest and surmounted by a tower which becomes a bell-tower further up and is then crowned with a tall, thin spire. The symmetry of the openings keeps the building in line with strict tradition. However, the superposition of the different parts of the façade serves to give it its own particular character. The three doorways on the façade are adorned with architectural ornamentation and the central doorway, more developed than the others, establishes a link with the semicircular, twin lancet window above it.



Interior towards façade
Photo : Germain Casavant

At the beginning of the 20th century, the architect David Ouellet drew up plans for a porch. This gave an added feeling of solidity to the structural work of dressed rubble-stone. The screen façade partially conceals a three-nave building covered with a pitched roof. The semicircular vaulting is supported by pillars composed of thin columns and twisted colonnettes opening up the side aisles with their high windows. At the back of the church, two superposed balconies 'cling' to the pillars of the first bay.

The interior was produced according to the plans of the architect Joseph-Ferdinand Peachy. Louis and Francis Dion, sculptors from Saint-Michel, carried out the work between 1871 and 1876.

The continuous entablature around the choir and nave supports a barrel vault divided by lunettes. Contrary to the conventional architect Jesuit plan, the form of the Latin cross is only hinted at by the slight projection of the last bay in the nave (near the choir).



Choir

Photo : Germain Casavant

The interior of the choir is punctuated by compound columns supporting a highly moulded entablature.

The coffered ceiling which adorns the side chapels and side aisles imitates, in a simplified version, the decoration of the vaulting. It is enhanced by the absence of side galleries. Its simplicity of form, heightened by a discreet colouring, adds a certain intimacy to the subsidiary chapels. The altars and reredos were produced by the sculptor Louis Dion.

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