

# The church of Saint-Joseph de Deschambault

## A church of unusually grand proportions



Aerial view of the chevet  
Photo : François Brault

The parish of Saint-Joseph de Deschambault is situated on the north shore of the Saint Lawrence river between Québec and Trois-Rivières. The village still bears the marks of its seigniorial origins. The seigneur, Jacques-Alexis de Fleury d'Eschambault, settled there in 1680. A parish was founded in 1713 and a manor, mills, and general store served the inhabitants of the fief.



Towards the choir  
Photo : Germain Casavant

In 1721, the heir to the seigneurie of Deschambault, Joseph de Fleury (esquire of la Gorgendière), asked the diocese of Québec for permission to build a church. The local inhabitants had had to go to the chapel of Saint-Antoine-de-Padoue in the neighbouring seigneurie (La Chevrotière) for mass. The diocese therefore gave their consent for a parish church to be built on cap Lauzon, which the inhabitants of both seigneuries would be able to attend.

In 1735, construction of the church and presbytery began and it became a new centre for parish activity. By the middle of the 19th century, Deschambault had grown. A new division in the land survey register was the reason for this new phase of development. From this time on, various community buildings were provided: the convent of the Sisters of Charity, the parish hall, the cemetery and a new church.

### The new church - a formal revival and a complex plan

To satisfy the needs of an increasing population, Deschambault acquired a new church. Thomas Baillairgé, a Québec architect, designed the plans in 1833, and the builder, Olivier Larue carried out the work. It was built near the old church on a promontory overlooking the Saint Lawrence river.

The new church was built in a Neo-classic style in line with the renewal of architectural forms advocated by Thomas Baillairgé in the middle of the 19th century. However, the design of the church of Saint-Joseph de Deschambault includes several features which differ from anything the architect had so far produced. The complexity of the plan renders it quite distinct from other churches by Baillairgé. As usual, Baillairgé chose a Jesuit style plan. However, he designed an apse which was a compromise between the classical forms in general use, i.e. the semicircular form or the flat chevet. In Deschambault the wall at the end of the sacristy is flat but the corners are rounded. In addition, the side chapels in the transepts are polygonal rather than right-angled. A further innovation is seen by Baillairgé's incorporating a covered passageway in the form of an ambulatory.

### A neo-classical façade of an unusual size

The façade comprises three parts. A projecting central section is enclosed between two lateral towers surmounted by belfries. The composition is covered with symmetrically organised, semicircular openings which provide a clue to the layout of the interior. According to the historian, Luc Noppen, the façade of the Church of Deschambault is clearly unfinished: according to Baillairgé's plans it should have been higher. The building "... was interrupted during the course of construction when it was at a level with the main body of the church because of anxieties about finance". In fact, the lack of height in the facade gives it a massive appearance which is quite uncharacteristic of this architect who nearly always respected the rules of proportion of the neo-classical movement. The gable of the central part is formed by a pavilion roof with a small pedestal incorporated in it which contains a statue of Saint Joseph.

Two levels of superposed windows of the same height can be found along the lateral elevations enabling the light to enter at both storeys. The lower set of windows are more luxurious with a central nave and side aisles, and the tribunes resemble attic storeys. This layout was originally used at the end of the 18th century in the Anglican Cathedral of Québec and in Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu although an elevation with a double storey of windows and without a side gallery is to be found from the middle of the century at Sainte-Famille de Cap-Santé. However, the effect produced in the latter example seems very different from that produced in Deschambault. Instead it seems to demonstrate that the architect is desirous of making the whole building more ostentatious with this attempt to reproduce an elevation like that of the basilican design of the newly rebuilt Cathédrale de Québec.



Aerial view of the façade  
Photo : François Brault

The interior ornamentation, produced by André Paquet between 1841 and 1849 based on Baillairgé's plans, clearly presents the layout of the various features. In 1873, the addition of a balcony by Frédéric Baril enabled a harmonium to be installed, and that same year, the architect, Zéphirin Perreault was commissioned to enlarge the sacristy.



Pulpit  
Photo : Germain Casavant

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