

The Church of Saint-Léon-le-Grand de Maskinongé

The end of architectural eclecticism



Lateral view of bell-tower
Photo : CPRQ

A wooden chapel built in 1798 was used by the parishioners of Saint-Léon-le-Grand until 1823, when a stone church was finally erected. The new church was about 34 metres long and 15 metres wide including a sacristy of about 10 metres by 7 metres. It conformed to the style of religious buildings erected at the beginning of the 19th century, with a nave crossed by a transept allowing for two side chapels and ending in a semicircular apse extended by the sacristy. An old photograph (IOA) shows a façade with three arched doors surmounted by windows over the side doors and two oculi over the central doorway. The octahedral bell-tower with double lanterns fits into the square base showing clearly defined groins.



Choir
Photo : CPRQ

The work on the interior began in 1820 and continued until 1840. Alexis Milette carved the pulpit, the churchwarden's seat and the reredos for the high altar. The reredos is composed of six finely-carved columns which support a richly adorned couronnement. It is a replica of the reredos in the Church of Sainte-Geneviève-de-Berthier, which was produced by the same artist in association with Amable Gauthier, in 1823.

The rest of the work was given to the contractors Joseph and Georges Héroux, who completed the interior we see today. The sanctuary is developed in quite a remarkable way due to the fact that the side chapels are integrated into the choir, and the monumental treatment of the side reredoses with an ogee-curved couronnement provides a link between the sections.

In 1914, it was decided to lengthen the church by about seven metres and give it a new façade. The architects, David Ouellet and Pierre Lévesque, from Québec, were commissioned for the project. An impressive central tower surmounted by a belfry was installed in front of the added bay. Three openings in the porch and two others in the façade give access to the church, and triple windows allow light to the nave. The size of the new bell-tower adds considerable dignity to the building.



Lateral altar
Photo : CPRQ

From 1910, many of the works produced by the firm of Ouellet and Lévesque would be the work of Pierre Lévesque, the adopted son and associate of the architect David Ouellet. This was because the latter had gradually reduced his professional activities up until his death in 1915. This period marks the end of architectural eclecticism, of which the chief characteristic was a conscious striving after visual and sculptural effects. The artists of the time made free use of motifs borrowed from various historical styles and combined them in such a way as to create attractive and particularly impressive church interiors.



Façade
Photo : CPRQ

Denyse Légaré

translated by Rachel Tunnicliffe

Bibliography:

- Noppen Luc. *Les églises du Québec (1600-1850)*, Québec, Éditeur officiel/Fides, 1977, p. 252-253. Text