

Oddities in religious architecture.

Bell-towers are among the most important architectural landmarks in Québec's countryside. Religion played a prominent part in the history of the province and this is evident in the number of churches - over 2000. The varying styles of this ecclesiastical architecture reflect a continual synthesis between the different religious legacies and architectural influences, firstly French and then English and American. In several respects, this heritage represents how people adapted to settling in a new world. It is also the expression of both ingrained and fragile traditions.

To travel through the history of Québec architecture is to discover phenomena which bear witness to a developing society. Some buildings have intrinsic qualities, others draw interest from their surroundings. There are also exceptional cases, oddities which teach us about particular social or cultural aspects.

Kinnear's Mills - different churches for different denominations



View of the village
Photo : François Brault

Kinneair's Mills is a small place north of Thetford Mines, in the Amiante area. The village lies in the heart of a mountainous region and comprises about thirty houses, a general store and four churches of different denominations. In spite of their simplicity, the bell-towers of these churches, two of which are surmounted by weathercocks, lend a picturesque quality to the village. They present a cultural diversity which is rather uncommon in such a small place. This is due to the unusual circumstances of its colonisation.

In the eighteen-twenties, the Scotsman James Kinneair was one of the first inhabitants to settle along the river Osgood. The village took its name from him. About twenty years later, a small hamlet formed around a sawmill and flourmill. The majority of the inhabitants were anglophone.

Although each church presents a different architectural language, they are all connected to a vernacular tradition. The four churches are built according to a simple rectangular plan. The windows in the façades are symmetrical and surmounted by pitched roofs. The exterior facings are made of wood or asbestos shingles.

Stylistic variations can be found in the form of the windows in the façades and along the side elevations. Candish Church, the Presbyterian church, is the oldest in the village and was founded in 1842. The present church, built in 1873, replaced the original chapel which was built of logs. Of the four churches, it is the one which comes closest in style to the traditional colonial churches. It is inspired by neo-classicism, with arched windows and a bell-tower corresponding to the classical style. The Methodist church is very similar to the Presbyterian church, except that it lacks of a bell-tower and has ogival windows in the case of the former. It was built in 1876.

In 1897 it was the Anglicans' turn to build a church. They kept to the character of the colonial churches but used an architectural vocabulary belonging to the neo-gothic style: pyramidal bell-tower, buttresses along the side elevations, ogival windows and a quatrefoil window above the entrance porch.

The present Catholic church was built in 1950 to replace the chapel of 1842 which had been demolished in 1896. While waiting for the church to be built, the Catholic community attended Mass in Leeds. The new church shows how modernism was beginning to affect religious architecture in the 20th century. The rectangular ground plan is traditional but other stylistic features illustrate the way forms were developing at that time: truncated bell-tower and dormer windows in the roof of the side elevations, for example. The modest character, the size of the construction and the use of local materials are in keeping with the three other churches.

In addition to bearing witness to the ethnic and religious diversity in the village, the layout of Kinnear's Mills helps us to understand how the colonialism developed from the time of New France until the time of British North America. The French regime would only accept Roman Catholic colonists. After the conquest, settlements became more diversified and several new religious traditions were established, especially in the Eastern Townships. This situation allowed for the development of the denominational nucleus of Kinnear's Mills which because of its concentration of churches resembles certain places in New England. This is an exceptional case in Québec, and it is for this reason that it is so important to preserve Kinnear's Mills.



Anglican church in
Kinnear's Mills
Photo : François Brault

The Judith Jasmin Pavilion at UQÀM (Québec University in Montréal) - a symbol of change in higher education from the religious to the secular

In 1975, UQÀM built a new teaching pavilion, the Judith Jasmin Pavilion, on the site of the Church of Saint-Jacques which was built in 1858. It was decided that the new building should integrate the bell-tower into the façade together with a transept of the former church. The design therefore had to unite traditional features with new ones while fitting into the urban grid of Downtown Montréal.

By way of retaining something of the flavour and style of the old architecture, it was decided to place the modern passageways on the site of the nave and former transept. Parabolic arches were designed imitating the structure of the former church to provide an exterior link between the buildings. This passageway is illuminated from light-wells providing the onlooker with glimpses of the architectural features which survive from the former church.

The new pavilion at UQÀM occupies the quadrangle formed by Rue Sainte-Catherine, Rue Saint-Denis, Rue Berri and Rue Ontario. By facing the building in red brick as well as by his treatment of the corners, the architect has achieved a stylistic integrity which makes no concessions to any idea of preserving continuity with the earlier buildings. This course of action is very much in line with the new tendency in architectural conservation which favours the use of contemporary materials with the explicit intention of allowing the new architecture to make its own distinctive contribution.

The site of the Church of Saint-Jacques has an eventful history. It was engulfed by flames three times during the hundred and ten years of its development. It began by being the site for the Cathedral, the Episcopal palace of Montréal and a building serving as a college in 1822. This complex was destroyed by fire in 1852 and was rebuilt elsewhere. The Sulpicians decided to erect a new parish church there instead. Plans were drawn up by John Ostell, the church was consecrated in 1857, and it burned down in 1858. Victor Bourgeau, the diocesan architect, was then commissioned to reconstruct the building. He preserved the façade and the original walls

by Ostell, and sixteen years later, added a spire to the tower on Rue Saint-Denis. In 1888 it was decided to enlarge the church. A transept was constructed towards the south end by moving the main entrance to the new façade on Rue Sainte-Catherine.

In 1933, a third fire destroyed the main body of the church. The two façades were, however, left intact. The church was rebuilt, but was demolished in 1975 to make way for a new university pavilion which would integrate the two façades into its contemporary structure. This preservation of original features illustrates a certain desire to re-cycle the religious heritage in the context of a growing metropolis where traditional religious values are gradually giving way to the secularism of today's society. The Judith Jasmin pavilion at UQÀM has become the symbol of the changing face of higher education which, from the time of the foundation of Laval University in Québec until now, has been the responsibility of the various religious communities.

Christ Church Cathedral and the astonishing Underground City in Montréal



Exterior

Photo : Germain Casavant

Christ Church Cathedral is today totally integrated into the urban surroundings of Downtown Montréal. It is intriguing for several reasons. Surrounded by huge buildings, it has lost its pastoral environment of the 19th century. It was originally built on a lush piece of land at the foot of Mount Royal outside the urban sprawl. This was often the way preferred by the British. The contrast between the original setting and its present situation has made the Cathedral the symbol of the feverish urbanisation of the metropolis.

It was gradually surrounded by commercial buildings, then skyscrapers, office towers and social seats of various companies. Its rural setting was gradually immersed in a noisy, cosmopolitan environment. Then, in the nineteen-sixties, with the construction of the metro, an underground city was developed which spread out into over thirteen kilometres of passageways which linked together businesses, cinemas and access-points to key buildings in the city centre: Place Ville-Marie, the Desjardins Complex, the Place des Arts, etc. So there it stands, a Cathedral literally engulfed by an asphalt, steel and concrete universe. What a surrealist spectacle it was to behold this majestic construction held in the air on fragile stilts while the underground complex of the Promenades de la Cathédrale was under construction.

Fortunately its English gothic style still fortunately distinguishes it from its immediate environment. The British architect, Frank Wills, drew up the plans in 1859. His use of gothic is particularly noticeable in the repetition of the ogival form for the three arches in the façade and the windows on the side elevations, the buttresses supporting the side aisles, and the flat chevet pierced with a high window.

In the 20th century, several architects were involved in the completion of the interior. The three main divisions, central nave and two side aisles, are separated by a colonnade whose ornamentation in fact dates back to the origins of the building. The ceiling with its exposed beams, the chapels, and the communion table were all added in the 20th century by the architects Percy E. Nobbs and Phillipp Turner.



Tower at crossing

Photo : Germain Casavant



Transverse view of the nave
Photo : Germain Casavant

Finally, a modern addition to the building is also worth a mention. In 1927, the spire of the bell-tower at the crossing of the transept had to be dismantled. There was a risk of the tower collapsing under its weight. In 1940 it was reconstructed almost identically by the architects Ross & Macdonald.

Katia Tremblay

Text translated by Rachel Tunnicliffe

Bibliography:

- Archambault, Diane, *Les chemins de la mémoire (Tome 2)*, Québec, Les Publications du Québec, 1991, pp. 81-83.
- Gauthier, Raymonde, *Les chemins de la mémoire (Tome 2)*, Québec, Les Publications du Québec, 1991, pp. 91-92.
- Genêt, Nicole, *Les chemins de la mémoire (Tome 1)*, Québec, Les Publications du Québec, 1990, pp. 421-422.