

The Church of Sainte-Marguerite-de-Blairfindie de L'Acadie

The tradition of covered passageways

The ecclesiastical buildings and graveyard of Sainte-Marguerite-de-Blairfindie de l'Acadie are of exceptional value in the cultural heritage of Québec. All the important elements of traditional Québec architecture are to be found together in this single example. The church is built in a Latin cross style with a very small transept, an aligned sacristy, a covered passageway linking the sacristy, presbytery and church, and a graveyard surrounding the building according to the conventions of the time; and all these items come together as a complete unity.



View from the graveyard
Photo : François Brault

The history of this sort of 'religious complex' began with the legal constitution of the area in 1784. Colonists had been living there since 1753. About ten years later, the arrival of the Acadians, who had been deported by the English, completed this initial nucleus and explains the patronage chosen when the parish was formed.



Façade

Photo: Germain Casavant

A building in the French Regime style

The first building in the seventeen-eighties was a presbytery-chapel. The construction of the church began on 2 September 1800 with the blessing of the foundation stone by the priest of the neighbouring parish of Saint-Philippe, Louis-Amable Prévost. The stonework and framework were finished one year later and Mass was celebrated there on 23 December 1801.



Interior view towards choir
Photo : François Brault

The structure included characteristics from the French Regime and the layout reminds one of churches such as Saint-Paul-de-Joliette, Saint-André-de-Kamouraska, Saint-François-de-Sales d'Odanak , and Notre-Dame-des-Victoires de Québec or even the first chapel of the Sanctuary of Cap-de-la-Madeleine.

An interior by two talented artists

Once the structural work was well under way, the project for the interior was started. The first campaign continued until 1809 led by Georges Finsterer, a local builder. He produced the wooden vaulting, the panelling, the entablature and the four-pilaster reredos in the choir, and installed the high altar while his son took care of the two side altars in 1811-1812.



Pediment and garland on
the reredos by Finsterer
Photo : François Brault

A second project for the interior took place from 1850 to 1852 under the supervision of Jean-Baptiste Mailloux. He carved the panels in the sanctuary and supervised the extension of the balcony at the back of the church. The influence of de Cacouna). On sent dans cet ensemble décoratif l'influence de l'atelier de Louis-Amable Quévillon can be felt in this interior as in many of the buildings in the Montréal area. During this project to improve the interior, the magnificent painted medallions on the ceiling were produced. There is very little documentation about them and they merit a more in-depth study.

One of the most beautiful covered passageways in Québec

In spite of the fine quality of its detail and the simple beauty of its façade, the church of Acadie holds the visitors' attention because of its covered passageway which is interestingly developed. This walk-way generally serves as a link between the sacristy and the church to enable the faithful to go to confession etc. without crossing the choir or leaving the building. It follows closely the contour of the apse and comes out either at the entrance to the choir or on to the transept as in Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu.

This arrangement provides protection against inclement weather. With the Québec climate, such a precaution is in no way superfluous. Here, however, at Sainte-Marguerite-de-Blairfindie, the idea is developed even further. It was built in 1822 when the sacristy was lengthened and a new presbytery erected and it served as an architectural link between the church, the aligned sacristy and the priest's residence. The priest could therefore come to say Mass in winter without having to don his outdoors attire. Despite being incredibly simple, this small passageway must have greatly improved the working conditions for these hard-working people. There are no other such well-developed covered passageways in Québec. They are, however, frequently to be found linking the sacristy and the church.



Covered passageway between the presbytery and the church
Photo : Germain Casavant



Interior towards the façade
Photo : Germain Casavant



Medallions on the ceiling
Photo : François Brault

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