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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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## THE BAROQUE REVIVAL IN QUEBEC

VICTORIAN ECLECTICISM appears to have had almost as much sense of direction as the styles of earlier, more settled centuries. This principle is particularly well illustrated by the Baroque Revival or more properly perhaps the Late Italian Renaissance Revival, of the mid-nineteenth century in Quebec. On the surface, this movement appeared to complete the ruin of Quebec's traditional style which the Gothic Revival of the 1820's had begun; actually, neither the Baroque nor the Gothic Revival in Quebec was really alien in spirit to its traditional architecture, both were simply manifestations of that same spirit in forms suitable to nineteenth-century taste.

The history of the Baroque Revival in a curious way repeats the essential process whereby the Quebec tradition was originally formed. That tradition, as it developed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, represented a fusion between "academic" and "craft" elements. On the one side were the "academic" ideas of men who were theoreticians and amateurs in architecture, and often clergymen such as Bishops Laval and Saint-Vallier, and Chaussegros de Léry; on the other was the practical adaptation of these ideas to the Quebec climate and resources by builders trained up in "craft" traditions — Claude Baillif, Jean Maillou — and local artisans of all sorts. It was in precisely this way that the Baroque Revival developed. Two clergymen — Bishop Ignace Bourget of Montreal and Father Félix Martin — and John Ostell, and English architect, provided the literary and theoretical ideas behind it; an artisan trained up in the native craft idiom, Victor Bourgeau, made the necessary adaptation of these ideas to the older Quebec tradition to give the new style its practical vitality.

The story begins in 1842 when Mgr. Bourget, a Canadian born at Lévis in 1799, became

second Bishop of Montreal. Eager to embellish his new diocese with buildings suitably expressing its fast-growing wealth and population, the bishop looked about for a suitable advisor and discovered Félix Martin, a thirty-eight year old Jesuit from Brittany, who arrived in Montreal in May of 1842. They at once became and remained the closest of friends. By the standards of mid-nineteenth-century Quebec, Father Martin was exceptionally well informed on architectural matters; he had travelled and studied all over France and Spain and acquired a much more than dilettante command of archaeological scholarship.

Father Martin's interest in architecture, however, was largely incidental. His basic turn of mind was antiquarian, showing a rather indiscriminate interest in old things simply because they were old. Associative and romantic qualities in architecture, rather than practical problems of form and structure, concerned him most. But in Martin's case, this typically nineteenth-century attitude was precisely what made him such a key figure in the Baroque Revival of Quebec—for not only could he talk to Mgr. Bourget about architecture in terms the bishop could best appreciate, but his romantic interest in antiquities soon led from an earlier interest in Gothic to the older Québécois tradition. Martin became a leading authority in this field and in turn brought Mgr. Bourget to an appreciation of it. And through the Québécois tradition Mgr. Bourget was prepared to move towards a revival of Baroque from original sources.

Two churches best illustrate Father Martin's eclectic interests, and their influence on Mgr. Bourget: St. Patrick's in Montreal, opened in 1847, and the parish church of Caughnawaga, completed in 1845. St. Patrick's, a large city church, was in "purest thirteenth century Gothic design," and famous as a model of Gothic throughout the province. Caughnawaga was a small parish church in what Martin considered Quebec's traditional style. In them,

Martin presented Mgr. Bourget with an opportunity to consider the merits of two contrasting styles for the church architecture of his new diocese. By 1849, apparently, the bishop's mind had been made up. In that year a wing of the new Seminary of St. Sulpice and his new Episcopal Palace were both begun in Baroque, and thenceforth Baroque was Mgr. Bourget's chosen style. It seems a sudden and somewhat surprising decision. What influenced the bishop's thinking? Records are lacking, but perhaps it is not too hard to reconstruct what happened.

The Gothic Revival, when it first appeared in Quebec in 1824 with Notre-Dame in Montreal, had many strong points in its favor. By 1850, these were considerably diminished. O'Donnell's theatrical Gothic had much the same feeling as Older Quebec churches of the



▲  
Église de Caughnawaga, par le Père Félix MARTIN, architecte, 1844.

◀ MONTRÉAL — Église Notre-Dame-de-Grâce.  
John OSTELL, architecte, 1849.

Clichés *Inventaire des oeuvres d'art*  
La cathédrale de Montréal, Victor BOURGEOU et  
Joseph MICHAUD, architectes, 1858.



Baroque tradition; Martin's purest thirteenth-Century Gothic" obviously had no roots in the country. The "Frenchness" of Gothic had been attractive in Quebec when France was monarchical and Catholic; after the French Revolution of 1848, this was no longer an asset. O'Donnell's Notre-Dame had been pointed to as an example of truly Christian and Catholic building as opposed to Quebec's traditional style, allegedly derived from a "secular" and "pagan" Renaissance. By 1850, with English Protestants erecting Gothic churches all over the Province, the religious symbolism of Gothic was far less impressive to Mgr. Bourget.



*Cliché Inventaire des oeuvres d'art*

Eglise de Sainte-Rose (île Jésus).  
Victor BOURGEOU, architecte, 1852-1855.

On the other hand, although Martin's "revival" of the traditional Québécois style at Caughnawaga was a small building, it contained great hints of what might be done in this style. Basically, Mgr. Bourget wanted in his church architecture what the builders of Notre-Dame had wanted before him—a dramatic symbol of the Catholic Church of Quebec triumphant in the face of Protestant settlement in Montreal. Gothic no longer seemed to provide it. But the dramatic emphasis of the traditional concave Quebec roof-lines at Caughnawaga, the way Martin boldly projected the tower from the façade, the fact that no Protestant builders utilized the Quebec style—here infinitely impressive developments seemed possible. Best of all, as Jesuit Father Martin could easily point out to the bishop, the roots of the traditional Quebec style lay not so much in the "pagan" Renaissance as in the Baroque style of the Counter-Reformation. In short, if you wanted a style at once traditionally Canadian and dramatically Catholic, that style was no longer Gothic, it was Baroque.

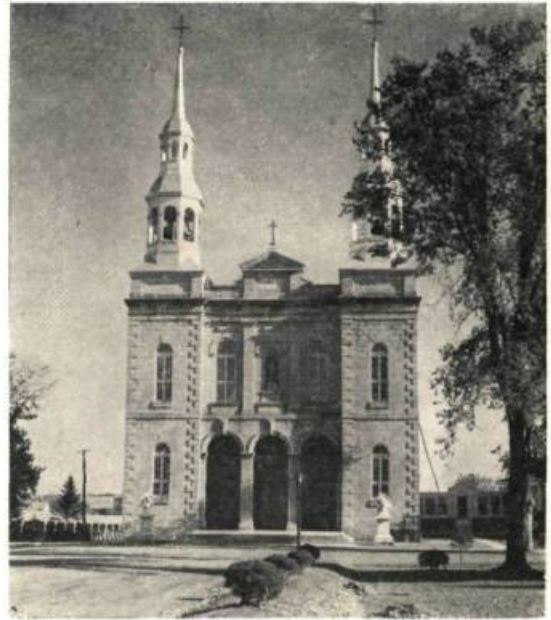
But not necessarily the native Baroque of Quebec. On this point Mgr. Bourget followed typically nineteenth-century logic: once decided upon Baroque, he could not be content with any provincial variants, but only with the "pure" or "original" style of sixteenth-century Italy. However—and fortunately, as it proved—the bishop could not go so far all at once; circumstances forced the Baroque Revival in Quebec to go through a "native revival" stage first. For Father Martin, after his first few years of active interest in architecture, became increasingly preoccupied with antiquarian and historical research, and the first two men Mgr. Bourget found to replace him lacked both the interest and the competence to reproduce the Baroque style of Italy. Their contribution was instead to build upon the Baroque tradition of Quebec, and it was a vastly more important contribution in the long run.

The first of Martin's successors was John Ostell. Born and trained in England, Ostell came to Montreal at an early age. He superintended the completion of Notre-Dame and in the 1840's was considered the leading architect around Montreal. It was Ostell who drew up Mgr. Bourget's Baroque plans for the Seminary and the Episcopal Palace (after his earlier significance to the Baroque Revival came in two churches begun in 1850 and finished in Gothic ones had been vetoed); but his greatest 1851, Notre-Dame-de-Grâce in Montreal, and the façade of the parish church of Sault-au-Récollet. For like Caughnawaga, both these designs are based—consciously, I think—on prototypes in the Quebec tradition.

The Jesuit-type façade of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce first appeared in the Province in 1722, with Chaussegros de Léry's design for the façade of old Notre-Dame in Montreal, and there are several later examples of it in Quebec under the old régime. The Sault-au-Récollet façade goes back ultimately to the same source, in all probability, but owes its direct inspiration to Thomas Baillargé's nearby church of Ste. Geneviève, Pierrefonds—and no one worked more profoundly in the Quebec tradition than

Baillargé. However, in Ostell's work there is less of the Quebec tradition and more direct drawing upon European sources than in these earlier prototypes. The Notre-Dame-de-Grâce façade is typically French Baroque and it is very probable that Félix Martin had a hand in it. Sault-au-Récollet, particularly in the details, strongly suggests Gibbs or Vanbrugh in England. To this extent, Ostell's two churches represent a step forward in the Baroque Revival in Quebec but not the final step. In them, Ostell only suggested what could be done with Baroque monumentality in the traditional Quebec style, but Ostell, an English Protestant, was not the man to do it. By training and outlook he could never be too sympathetic with Mgr. Bourget's architectural ideals. Although Ostell continued on as official diocesan architect until 1858, as early as 1853 he was superseded as the real leader of architecture in Montreal, and of the Baroque Revival, by a man his opposite in every way. This newcomer was Victor Bourgeau, a native Canadian, self-trained, and capable of making neo-Baroque principles a living force in the Quebec tradition.

Victor Bourgeau was a native of Lavaltrie near Montreal; his only formal education was a traditional Québécois apprenticeship with the Quévillon atelier. Entirely through astute study of books and imitation of what was going on around him, he raised himself to the status of an architect; his first really important commission came in 1851 for the church of St.-Pierre in Montreal. Like all his early work, this was a Gothic design, but in the course of it he evidently came into contact with Mgr. Bourget and Father Martin, perceived how the stylistic wind was blowing, and set himself to study Baroque. The first result of this effort was the church of Ste.-Rose (Ile-Jésus) begun in 1852 and finished in 1855. Its overall plan and particularly its façade are rather clumsy copyings of the church of Sault-au-Récollet and Baillargé's Ste.-Geneviève, Pierrefonds, and show little ability beyond that capacity for learning which was Bourgeau's chief asset. But the church brought Bourgeau to Mgr. Bourget's



Cliché *Inventaire des oeuvres d'art*  
Eglise de Saint-Barthélemy,  
par Victor BOURGÉAU, 1866.

attention at a peculiarly appropriate time, for it was while Ste.-Rose was under construction that the bishop finally decided upon his Grand Plan, which thenceforth became the leading theme of the Baroque Revival in Quebec.

In July of 1854 a spectacular fire completely destroyed the St.-Laurent quarter of Montreal and along with it Mgr. Bourget's Episcopal Palace and cathedral. Two months later the bishop announced, to the general surprise, that the new cathedral would be built in the western part of the city near the new railroad station (now Windsor Station) "...fearing that this fine and rich quarter would become entirely Protestant, he wished to affirm there the glory and fecundity of the Catholic church." He announced its architectural style some months later but in 1849 he had approved designs for his Episcopal Palace by John Ostell which called for a dome inspired by St. Peter's in Rome, and a trip to Europe begun in August 1854 only confirmed his intention. "Mgr. Bourget visited several churches, but St. Peter's in Rome inspired him so profoundly and vividly that... he conceived the audacious project

of reproducing Michelangelo's masterpiece of genius... He communicated his enthusiasm to others." From 1854 on, then, the Baroque Revival in Quebec was in view of its ultimate objective : establishing Italian sixteenth-century Baroque in the Province.

At first there was general approval of the bishop's idea and Victor Bourgeau's enthusiasm was particularly conspicuous. In 1855 Bourgeau added to the essentially traditional church of Laprairie a new sort of clocher, a miniature copy of the dome Ostell had designed for Mgr. Bourget's destroyed Episcopal Palace, which distant copy of St. Peter's was as close as he could get to the original. And the following year he was one of the founding members of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Montreal, the principal study of which appears at first to have been Italian Renaissance art and architecture. All this was not lost on Mgr. Bourget; he determined to encourage a native architect whose ideals were so evidently close to his own. Thus we read without surprise in the *Courrier du Canada* for February 20, 1857, that "Mr. Victor Bourgeau left last Monday on the *City of Baltimore* for Le Havre. The object of his voyage is to visit and study the principal monuments of Rome, especially the Basilica of St. Peter's, on the model of which the new cathedral of Montreal will be built."

Bourgeau's reaction was quite unexpected. He stayed only eight days in Rome and then returned home "very angry. How could Mgr. Bourget imagine reducing such a church to small scale ? He advised strongly against it." It was a most significant reaction for the history of nineteenth-century architecture in Quebec. Mgr. Bourget was not the sort of man to be discouraged from his set purpose, neither, apparently, was Victor Bourgeau. From this point we find the Baroque Revival in Quebec going two ways: in the direction of simple imitation of Italian Baroque, led by the Bishop of Montreal, and in the direction of selective adaptation of Baroque principles to the Quebec tradition, led by Bourgeau.

Bourgeau's position, evidently, was based

on a sense of appropriateness. All his personal eclecticism and the spirit of his age were not enough to deaden the feeling for proper proportion and the fitness of things which was the heritage of his training in the older tradition of the province. He had caught enough of Mgr. Bourget's vision to see Baroque as a fit vehicle for the Québécois tradition in the nineteenth century; he was enough of an artist, however, to realize that Baroque could be creatively used in the province only if it were adapted to the tradition, and not imported wholesale. The rest of his life was devoted to a demonstration of how this might be possible, and his demonstrations fixed the character of Québécois architecture in the second half of the nineteenth century as Thomas Baillargé had fixed it in the first half.

Of the very large number of churches built by Bourgeau between his return from Rome and his death in 1888 it will be useful to touch on only a few to indicate the general line of his development. It begins with his design for the church of L'Assomption in 1859 (constructed 1863—1865). Here the influence of Bourgeau's trip to Rome is clearly to be seen in a definite suggestion of the façade of St. Peter's. But L'Assomption is no simple imitation; rather, it is the old twin-towered tradition of the Montreal area to which intensified Baroque elements have given (as Bourgeau and his contemporaries would say) a dramatic Catholic symbolism appropriate to nineteenth-century Quebec. Revived Baroque as the symbol of Québécois Catholicism is better handled, however, in St.-Barthélémy, Berthier, built in the year 1866-1867. St.-Barthélemy is an interesting stylistic phenomenon; actually, it is the 1824 Gothic façade of Notre-Dame in Montreal metamorphosed into Baroque—the same triple-arched portico, niches, twin towers, and dramatic verticality, all transformed into the more "Catholic" style.

From this point, Bourgeau became attracted by the Romanesque style which was becoming popular in France and the United States. This was perhaps inevitable when work-

ing in a style which emphasized heavy stonework, round-headed windows and fairly simple shapes (as contrasted with Gothic). From exactly what source Bourgeau's knowledge of Romanesque came is difficult to determine. In its first appearance, however, in his home parish church of Lavaltrie in 1868, it seems more related to L'Abadie's work in France and significantly, perhaps, the style was usually called "Byzantine" in Quebec rather than Romanesque. This is most obvious on the interior with its ceiling decoration of pseudo-domes. Whatever its inspiration, Romanesque with Bourgeau and in Quebec generally never attained the dignity of a separate revival but remained a sort of variant of the Baroque Revival. Bourgeau's Romanesque soon melted, in his characteristic way, into the earlier ingredients of his style; the final result is seen in a church like St.-Cuthbert, begun in 1875, in which elements of the traditional Québécois style, Italian Baroque, and Romanesque are blended indiscriminately.

The style so established whatever its faults, had at least the merit of consistency, and was, I think, a good expression of Québécois culture in the last half of the Victorian era. It remained the dominant style of the Province of Quebec for the next sixty years, and the reason was precisely that it represented no real break with the province's native tradition. Carried on by David Ouellet and Ferdinand Peachy in the Quebec City region and by numerous local builders everywhere, Bourgeau's style remained essentially Québécois. His churches were the embodiment of nineteenth-century taste for the picturesque and irregular, to be sure, but were still recognizably characteristic of Quebec in a way that Gothic churches, even Notre-Dame, were not. In that sense, Bourgeau's handling of the Baroque Revival made it a living movement—particularly by contrast with the last phase of the Revival under Mgr. Bourget.

After Victor Bourgeau's denunciation of his Grand Plan for the cathedral of Montreal, Bishop Bourget dropped it temporarily—but

only temporarily—until a more propitious time and a more amenable man should appear. That time came in 1868, when the pope was besieged in Rome by the armies of the new state of Italy and called for volunteers to defend him. An instant response came from the Province of Quebec, where a company of Papal Zouaves was recruited and sent off to Rome. In the general enthusiasm, the bishop again suggested that a replica of St. Peter's would be a suitable symbol of Quebec's loyalty to the Holy See, and this time he carried the day easily. He took no chances on his architect this time; Joseph Michaud, a Canadian member of the Brothers of Saint Viateur with some slight architectural experience, was commissioned as chaplain to the Zouaves and instructed to prepare plans for reproducing St. Peter's while in Rome. Preliminary work was commenced immediately, and as soon as Michaud returned from Rome after an eighteen-months stay, actual construction began. Since Michaud's practical knowledge of building was limited, Victor Bourgeau was called upon to assist him with technical details—a commission undertaken, we gather with no surprise, somewhat reluctantly. A model was prepared and plans drawn to the minutest detail; in 1885 the building stood completed.

Bishop Bourget died on June 8, 1885, in what then seemed the hour of his greatest triumph. Even before the cathedral was entirely finished, the rush to imitate it began. Of the host of heavy-handed designers in Italian Baroque we need mention only a few: Abbé Hercule Dorion, whose "Roman basilica" and crypt for the body of St. Eutychianus imported from Rome was begun at Yamachiche in 1873; Edouard Meloche, who added the famous "wedding cake" to the old church of Bonsecours in Montreal in 1885; Georges Tanguay who adapted the façade of S. Giovanni in Laterano to the old church of St.-Thomas, Montmagny, in 1889; and, of course, Joseph Michaud himself, who almost literally dotted the Montreal and Trois-Rivières region with variations on the Roman Baroque theme.

Of such works, perhaps the less said the better. It was an uninspiring finale to the Baroque Revival proper; nevertheless there was some lasting significance to the movement which should be noted. On the narrower local plane the Baroque Revival provided the vehicle for the survival of the architectural tradition of Quebec through the eclecticism of the nineteenth century. Through it, that tradition passed on into the twentieth century and gives modern church architecture in the province its peculiar vitality. It has several aspects of universal significance as well, I think. It can provide aspects of universal significance as well, I think. It can provide certain important insights into the nature of what we call the "tradition" of a country—how a given set of

tastes, predispositions, find expression despite all waves of outside influences and ideas. Most basically it points up some often-overlooked aspects of the basic process of artistic creation. For whatever real stylistic vitality the Baroque Revival had was due to a creative cooperation between practice and theory—that is, Mgr. Bourget's ideas raised the native builder Victor Bourgeau to the status of a creative architect while, conversely, Bourgeau's practical building gave Mgr. Bourget's ideas their only creative embodiment. When theory and practice parted company, as they did in the later Baroque Revival in Quebec, the result was sterility. It is, in short, a demonstration of which every age needs to be reminded.

Alan GOWANS

## PROVINCE DE QUÉBEC — PARADIS DU TOURISME

AVANT



APRÈS



Eglise de Saint-Léon (Maskinongé). Bâtie en 1823 d'après les devis de l'abbé Pierre CONEFROY, elle a été *défigurée* il y a une quarantaine d'années.