

The Loveliest Church in the North

Curé Antoine Labelle dedicated boundless energy to the creation of the first parish of the Grand-Brûlé mission and Abbot Samuel Ouimet, who admired him greatly, knew his projects well. The young abbot, proud to have been named the parish pastor, already knew in his heart the names of his two first parishes: Saint-Jovite and Saint-Faustin, the names of two martyred brothers.

During the two years that followed, Curé Ouimet worked with great goodness and energy on his missions in the Rouge River valley and the Diable River valley. His devotion caused him to seek funds quite doggedly to build his presbytery-chapel. He took advantage of his trips to Montreal and surroundings to collect money in the old parishes.

A large two-storey log house, 30 by 40 feet, begun in 1878, became this longed-for chapel in February 1880. Right from the start, Curé Ouimet moved in on the ground floor with his parents, while the upper floor was used for services. He carefully chose the religious feast-day of martyred brothers Jovite and Faustin, on February 15, to celebrate his first parish mass in the huge, barely finished room where planks placed on upright sawn logs functioned as pews.

The new parish developed quickly. In 1882 there were already 150 families and the chapel rapidly became too small.

The following year, Monseigneur Thomas Duhamel gave Curé Ouimet permission to erect a larger church. He insisted that it be built of stone, "similar to those in the old parishes of the St. Lawrence River valley".

But the money had to be found! The Fabrique – the parish corporation – therefore sold one hundred arpents (about 84 acres) of land to François Léonard for \$1200, and this latter agreed to saw, free of charge, the wood needed to build the church. In 1887, the work was officially started and contractors Martineau and Fauteux built the church for about \$20,000.

On December 19, 1889, before a large crowd that had gathered from all corners of the Rouge and Diable valleys, Curé Labelle – delighted, and proud of his flock – solemnly blessed the new church. It was a moving ceremony which represented, for the new "Monseigneur", the consecration of the enormous task to which he had devoted heart and soul: colonizing the North. For their part, the parishioners were very proud of the achievement. They had managed to build a church of stone, the symbol of prosperity, only fifteen years after the arrival of the first settlers. But the work was not completely finished. The sacristy was completed during the following year and the interior finishing was done in 1896.

The building met the needs of the parish until 1930, the year in which transepts were added in response to a lack of space due to the increasing population. Twenty years later, under the cure of Monseigneur Rodolphe Mercure, major construction was undertaken: extension of the nave, construction of a parish room in the basement and

creation of areas for recreational pursuits. The new church of Saint-Jovite could, from then on, accommodate some 1,200 of the faithful.

In 1997, in an initiative of the Chevaliers de Colomb (Knights of Columbus) and the Société du Patrimoine Sopabic, some spaces formerly occupied by confessionals were converted into a religious museum open to the public. The museum showcased various religious objects, liturgical garments and themed exhibitions.

In 2004, to properly celebrate the 125th anniversary of the parish, the building was refurbished. The interior colour was changed to wood tones for a lighter, more natural and sober effect. The benches were re-varnished and the sanctuary was enlarged to be better adapted to an additional role: the presentation of concerts.

Research and writing: Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC, heritage society

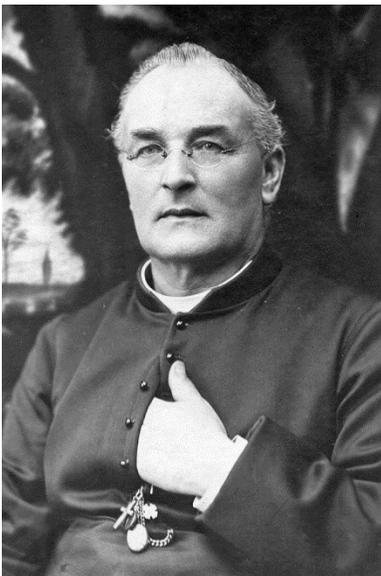
Translation: Anne Johnston

Other days, other ways...

The families were not rich, but they were happy to erect a handsome stone monument: a beautiful parish church worthy of their faith and their courage. They sacrificed much to achieve this.

With citizens experiencing difficulty in paying both the school taxes and the contribution destined to help pay for building the church, the board members decided to lighten the citizens' tax burden by cutting expenditures right at the source: they closed the schools for a year!

It was a simple equation: no schools, no taxes!



Legend: Curé Samuel Ouimet.

Source: collection of the Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC



Legend: Curé Ouimet with his parents, François Ouimet and Aurélie Desjardins.
Source: collection of the Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC



Legend: The church circa 1889.
Source: collection of the Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC