

St. Patrick's Parish – Quebec

by

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The life of a parish resembles very closely the life of its parent, Holy Mother Church. As the branch is like the vine whence it draws its sap and vitality, similar characteristics are seen in the lives of Mother and Child – a modest birth, struggle for existence, oppositions and progress, finally expansion, and stability – marks of the Divine blessing and protection. In the history of a parish as in the history of the Church, the human element is very much to the fore. We see a clash of interests frequently the result of the greatest trouble-cause in the life of man – misunderstanding. On the other hand, we have nobility of purpose and action, selflessness and sacrifice so that we easily recognize the component elements that characterize human nature.

When asked by our Historical Association to write “Something on Quebec” as our Annual Meeting was to be held here, I could think of no other subject more fitting than – St. Patrick's Parish, Quebec – which has been the centre and citadel of Irish Catholic life in the ancient capital for these past hundred and sixteen years.

The Irishman is ubiquitous. We find him in every land. Not that he didn't love the land of his birth, but cruel necessity forced him to find liberty of life and worship elsewhere. We find him in Lower Canada in the early days of the Colony. There is a record of a Mary Kirwin having died as a nun in the Hotel-Dieu in 1687. Béchard in his *L'Ancien Québec* mentions a Nicholas Canahan, a merchant, living on Rue Cul de Sac in 1716. John O'Farrell, advocate, in an address to Saint Patrick's Society, Montreal, in 1872 claims he has proof records that of the 2,500 families in Lower Canada at the close of the 17th Century, nearly 100 families were natives of Ireland. We know that at the time of the conquest, 1759, quite a few Irish soldiers were found in the ranks of the French opposing England. Fearing reprisals of the English Government many of them gallicized their names. They settled in, country districts avoiding the City of Quebec. Many Irish names were changed by the simple process of mispronunciation on the part of the French population. For example, a Sullivan became a Sylvain, a Leahy a de la Haye, and a Daly a Dalais. However, it was in the nineteenth century that Irish immigration poured into Quebec and Ontario. From 1792 to 1833 alone 102,264 Irish immigrants landed on our shores. Altogether between 1829 and up to and including 1847 – 349,181 came to Canada. Naturally, all did not stay in Quebec City, or in the Province of Quebec, but we find Irish settlements strung out through the country to the Western limits of Ontario

and into the West. Many found their way to the United States.

The first record of an organized religious meeting of Irish Catholics on any scale was in 1819. This took the form of a religious celebration of Saint Patrick's Day. A High Mass was sung in the Chapel of the Congreganistes on the Esplanade Hill. Father Michael Dufresne, who took a fatherly interest in the temporal and spiritual affairs of the Irish Catholic immigrants then arriving in Quebec, preached the sermon. From that year on, the celebration of Erin's Patron Saint in Quebec has been festive and holy. It was in the year 1822, that ecclesiastical authorities became cognizant of the fact that the growing Irish population needed religious attention. They were formed into a separate congregation under the temporary charge of Father Simon Lawlor. He was then replaced by Father Henry McKeagney, who in October of the same year, 1822 was succeeded by a priest whose name is still held in loving memory among us – Father Patrick McMahan.

The Irish Catholics of the city now attended the French Cathedral or the Parish Church as it was called. They were allotted the eight o'clock Mass. At nine o'clock a Pontifical Mass was held for the French congregation. At once, you can see the difficulty – one hour was too short an interval for the Irish Catholic to get into Church, attend Mass, hear a sermon, and length was an norm of excellence in those days – and get out again before the French congregation arrived. Father McMahan, who was pastor of his flock during these difficult days from 1822-25 was changed from Quebec to Saint John, N.B., as a missionary. Great was the dismay of the people. Reading between the lines, his change was not for reasons of health. He was a blunt out-spoken priest when there was question of the rights or good of his people. For the next three years, the Rev. Father Paisley was the spiritual head of the Catholics speaking the English language.

To the great joy of the people, Father McMahan was returned to his beloved flock in 1828. Immediately, he began to seek a separate place of worship. A round number record claimed that the Irish population was now seven thousand. This estimate seems a little high for 1828. The increasing population, however, necessitated a change. Even during Father Paisley's charge several prominent members endeavoured to obtain permission from the Marguilliers or Church Wardens to build a church – but were refused. Some remedy was now given a critical situation by allowing the Irish to have use of the historic Church of Our Lady of Victories in Lower Town for Sunday Mass. It was somewhat of a remedy but insufficient. The Church was too small. Hundreds of the congregation had to attend Mass outside the Church in the little market square, many a Sunday in the rain, sleet or snow. This impossible condition could not continue to exist. We all know the love of the Irish for the Mass. They sacrificed all, they died for the Mass. In their native Ireland, they lost everything but the MASS-ROCK. They could never take that away. Descendants of that race, now in Quebec, determined to have

a' place of their own in which to worship God and attend in decorum the Holy Sacrifice. In 1830, a subscription of £2,500 was raised among the Irish to build a Church. A petition was drawn up addressed to Sir James Kempt asking for a lot which belonged to the Government. That lot is the very place where the Parliament Buildings now stand. What a magnificent site for a Church with its commanding view and sloped approach. The Bishop, however, declined to sign the petition. Other lots of ground in the city and suburb were examined. A communication from the Coadjutor Bishop and Church Wardens was to the effect that the Irish should continue their efforts to have a church built and that they should co-operate with the Committee. A Committee was formed to meet the Church Wardens. Messrs. M. Burke, M. Quigley, J. Stillings, I. Cannon, G. Horan were named to a Committee to meet the Wardens, They 'submitted their plans but received no satisfactory reply. An attempt now was made to purchase a lot belonging to Colonel Voyer on St. Joachim Street near Montcalm market. The Bishop was approached and requested to hold the land for them "in Trust." The Bishop refused unless the new church would be used in common with the French. Further meetings were held with the Wardens. At one of these meetings £500 annually were promised for three years. It was never authorized officially. The Irish Committee logically concluded that the Church Wardens had no real intention of allowing Irish Catholics to have their own place of worship. One convinced of that, what did they do?

They went ahead and purchased the lots on which the Church and Presbytery now stand on McMahon and St. Stanislas Street.

One may justly wonder why our co-religionists placed such and so many obstacles to the Irish having their own place of worship. The reason is ecclesiastical circles viewed with alarm the creation of what we could call a National Church. Again, the Marguilliers of the Fabrique considered a separate church to be an infringement of their rights. To explain the attitude of the Wardens, a little background of history is necessary. When Quebec capitulated in 1759, no change was made in ecclesiastical affairs. The immunities and rights which the Catholic Church enjoyed under the French Regime were guaranteed by the Treaty of Paris in 1763. The Catholic religion was not only free from the penal enactments directed against it in other parts of the British Empire, but it was in fact the religion of the country recognized by law so far at least as Lower Canada was concerned. The payment of tithes and other dues and the erection of churches when deemed necessary were enforced by law, and the Church temporalities were administered by Church Wardens called Marguilliers, who were elected by the laity, and who possessed very extensive powers. They were very jealous of these powers.

When the Irish Catholic settled in the Province of Quebec, they became subject to these laws. However, speaking a language that was different from

the rest of their co-religionists, they found it absolutely necessary to have a separate church of worship with full control over its temporalities. But this could not be accomplished unless the Church Wardens gave up some of their powers, which they persistently refused to do. They could not be induced to build a church for the exclusive use of the Irish Catholics. They did not realize that the peculiar position of the English-speaking Catholics rendered it necessary to make an exception to the general laws, so that the temporal affairs of the Church in the Province of Quebec should be left under their control. This will give a reason for the obstructionist tactics of the Wardens during the period preceding the purchase of the lots on McMahon Street.

Our Own Church at Last

In October 1831, ground was broken for the Church which was to be 146 ft. long and 65 ft. wide. The work progressed rapidly and favourably. June 11th, 1832 was set for the laying of the corner-stone. But the terrible cholera plague of 1832 broke out and the ceremony was postponed, though later in the Summer the corner-stone was laid without any public demonstration. Sunday, June 30th 1833, the last Sunday service for the Irish Catholics was held in the Lower-town Church. The next Sunday July 7th 1833, the new Irish Church, Saint Patrick's of Quebec, was dedicated at nine o'clock. The Bishop and his Coadjutor being absent, the Very Reverend Jerome Demon officiated. The Rev. C. F. Baillargeon was celebrant of the High Mass, and Father McMahon preached an eloquent sermon. The Irish of Quebec had their own church at last. The Church contained one hundred and sixteen pews. It was soon seen that it would not hold the large English-speaking congregation. Work was begun later on the commodious galleries on both sides of the Church, which were completed in 1836. In 1845, the Church was extended. A lot seventy feet broad and ninety-seven feet deep to the rear of the Church, on which stood at the time "The Royal Circus or Theatre" was purchased from Mrs. Henrietta Smith, widow of Chief Justice Sewell. On this lot, the large sacristy and later St. Patrick's Catholic Institute were erected. A strip of ground which provided a passage way on the Western side of the lot was acquired at the same time. Father McMahon could now look with pride and pleasure over his flock. Since he had been their pastor, the Irish of Quebec had made a great progress spiritually and socially. From the status of unwanted immigrants they now held an honoured position among their fellow citizens. In the trades, in the professions, in the merchant's offices they gained the respect and confidence of all. From Point à Carey to Sillery on the wharves and in the coves while the river was open from May to November the brogue of the thirty-two counties could be heard plying the trade of lumberman and stevedore, and as we would naturally expect from such a religious race their sons and daughters were found in the Canadian

sanctuary and cloister. Indeed, as Father McMahon addressed his congregation on the Feast of St. Parick in 1847, a pardonable pride was his. As to his heroic efforts during "Black '47" in aid of his countrymen, the poor fever-stricken Irish who landed in thousands at Grosse-Isle, thirty miles down the River from Quebec, we have written at length in another article. Suffice it to say here, he became the leader of all assistance spiritual and temporal for his beloved Irish. Father Patrick McMahon had accomplished a great work in life and now the Master was about to call him to his reward. He was contemplating greater projects for his parish which was now considered to number between ten and twelve thousand when he fell ill beyond recovery. Great was the grief and consternation of all to hear the beloved pastor was sick unto death. The measured toll of the Church bells on the morning of October 3rd., 1851 announced to the entire city the sad news that his great soul had gone to God. He was only fifty-five years old at his death but he had accomplished much, very much in a very short time. His funeral was one of the greatest expression of public esteem known in the city. Men of all creeds, from all walks of life joined in the tremendous cortege to pay tribute to his memory.

Father James Nelligan succeeded Father McMahon, and was pastor from 1851 to 1856. During his tenure of office, the hall in the rear of the Church was built and became the headquarters of Saint Patrick's Catholic and Literary Institute. This institute for many years was the centre of Irish intellectual circles in Quebec. Many a great orator including Thomas d'Arcy McGee lectured from its stage. It was the centre of the best amateur dramatics of the day. The Hall was also the meeting place of many Irishmen keenly conscious of the Home-Rule Fight in the Old Country. Many a meeting was held to discuss what they could do to help their own in the old land. In 1875, a division took place among the members of the St. Patrick's Catholic and Literary Institute. Some of the members separated themselves from the old Institute and were incorporated into a new independent Society called St. Patrick's Literary Institute.

In 1855, Archbishop Turgeon invited the Redemptorist Fathers to take charge of St. Patrick's Parish. Negotiations, began but soon fell through as the Redemptorist Provincial, Father Ruland, refused to accept the office under existing conditions in which the Committee of Management had full charge of all temporalities in the Parish leaving, only the spiritualities to the pastor and his assistants. The long struggle against Trusteeism in the United States was just coming to an end. It had proven that the division of authorities which brought on continual misunderstandings from difference of opinion and clash of interests was disastrous to the proper cure of souls. The Committee refused to give up their control of the temporalities of the Parish resulting in the Redemptorist Provincial declining the Archbishop's invitation to come to Quebec.

One of the final acts of Father Nelligan's pastorate was the purchasing of St. Patrick's Burying Ground on St. Louis Road.

Reverend Bernard McGauran.

Father Bernard McGauran succeeded Father Nelligan as Pastor in 1856, and continued in office for eighteen years until 1874 – that is to the coming of the Redemptorists. The crowning work of his life was the founding of St. Brigid's Asylum, now known as St. Brigid's Home, in 1856. From a humble beginning, it is now a large institution, a monument to the memory of this far-seeing charitable priest.

A society called St. Brigid's Asylum Association were the Trustees of the Home. A temporary dwelling was procured in 1856, but as the number of poor increased, the present-stone building fronting Grande Allée was bought. The building 60 x 40 feet on a 200 acre lot was purchased for \$4,000 from the Fabrique of Notre-Dame. Extensive alterations were necessary. In 1860, the first of three major additions to the Home was built. The second addition was a large building constructed; in 1920 during the rectorship of the Rev. Peter Costello, C.Ss.R. Again, in 1930, a third modern building was found necessary to house the large number of elderly people wishing to pass their last days in the peace and security of a well-regulated Catholic Home. Many of these pay a moderate sum for their care and keep.

To retrace our steps, in 1877, three years after the coming of the Redemptorists a parish meeting was held during which it was decided to invite the Sisters of Charity, called also the Grey Nuns, to take charge, control and management. Up to this a Miss Bradley was Matron of the Home. One of the stipulations was that the Grey Nuns send Irish Sisters, that is with the Quebec meaning of "Irish," speaking the English language, to take charge of the Home. Parishioners to-day still hold in grateful memory the Sisters of Charity or Grey Nuns who were in charge of St. Brigid's home from 1877 to 1944. They endeared themselves to all inside and outside the Home by their lives of unselfish devotion, selfless sacrifice and constant care for the poor, sick and orphaned of the Parish. The name of Sisters St. Patricia, St. Felix, St. Brigid, St. Amonde, and St. Francis, to mention only a few, are held in particular reverence by parishioners to-day.

Unable to supply English-speaking Sisters to the community of St. Brigid's, they were replaced in 1944 by the Sisters of Charity of Halifax, who are following the pattern and example of love and devotion for the needy, sick, orphans and boarders under their care. St. Brigid's Home is an institution unique between the two oceans of Canada – for one parish to support for a period of ninety-two consecutive years so large an institution numbering within its walls to-day some two hundred boys and girls, men and women with twenty-two sisters in charge, speaks volumes for the charity and

generosity of St. Patrick's Parish.

The Home is financed through the income received from the annual bazaar, charitable donations and parochial funds. Why have we not a magnificent superstructure on our basement church with its steeples pointing to the Blue of Heaven? The tremendous outlay of moneys over a period of ninety-two years which was necessary to take care of our poor, sick and orphans, a duty the parish has never shirked, is the answer. Many of our co-religionists outside the parish have said it and to God who blesses the giving of a cup of cold water, it must be more pleasing, the existence to-day of St. Brigid's Home is better than the most magnificent superstructure we could build.

The Coming of the Redemptorists.

In 1873, ecclesiastical authorities again invited the Redemptorist Fathers to take full charge of St. Patrick's Parish, Quebec. Archbishop Taschereau through Father Sax, wrote the Redemptorist Provincial, Father Heimpraecht (who carried out the unsuccessful negotiations of 1855) that it was his desire that the Redemptorists come to Quebec and take full charge of the Parish spiritually and temporally. However, he stated that temporal control would not be given over immediately as the Committee of Management were still unwilling to yield the control of parochial properties and moneys which had been vested in them since the beginning of the parish. The Archbishop hoped this could be accomplished in a friendly manner, years later when the Fathers had become endeared to the parishoners. After much negotiation the Provincial came to Quebec and an agreement was drawn up with the Archbishop. When the news became known that Fathers from the United States were to take over St. Patrick's Parish and that a priest of an unpronounceable German name was to be negotiator – consternation and dismay swept the parishoners. In the *Quebec Morning Chronicle* an article appeared in which it was stated "An order of Foreign Gentlemen have been offered and have accepted the incumbency of St. Patrick's Church – The Nationality of the Good Fathers is least cherished by us or any other." A sentence or so of historical background may be in order here. At this period, the German Eagle was set flying and screaming through Europe by Bismarck. The causation of World War I was then in its early beginnings. An Anglo-German trade war was surely shaping up. A bitter Press attacked everything German in origin or name. The German was not popular. Were German names to replace as parish priests the beloved names of McMahon, Nelligan, and McGauran?

The Redemptorists arrived in Quebec on September 29th, 1874. The first Community consisted of Fathers Burke, Oates, Wynn, O'Connor and Brothers George, Phillip and Patrick. In writing history there is only one

principle following which is not always pleasant: “let the truth be told though the heavens fall.”

The reception the first Community received was very cold on the part of the Pastor and people. On the part of the Committee of Management it was even hostile. One can very easily understand the feelings of the Irish during these days. Some remembered personally the long struggle to obtain a place of worship of their own. Their children, now the backbone of the Parish, were well aware of all the details. How deeply they loved their Pastors, who gave their all for their spiritual and temporal good. Was their Church and temporalities now to be taken over by strangers? Little wonder then that the mat of welcome was not extended to the visitor – that the traditional Irish “Caede Mille Failthe” – the thousand welcomes, was missing in voice and smile. This did not last long however, and, soon the averted glance changed to friendly bows and smiles and we can suppose the Irish names and faces of the men of the new community did the good Fathers no harm at all.

The Committees of Management were still suspicious. They retained control of Church deeds and parochial property and moneys. Father Burke, the Superior, clearly saw that as regards running the parish the Fathers would be in the same helpless condition as obtained in the parishes of the United States during the day of Trusteeism. Under these conditions he refused to take charge of St. Patrick’s Parish. He told the people from the pulpit that if the Fathers could, not have control of the temporalities as well as the spiritual direction of the parish, the Community would return to the United States. Let the people of the parish decide. An election would be held. Ballots were passed out, and in the presence of the Archbishop, in St. Patrick’s Church, the people voted. It was overwhelmingly in favour of the Fathers having control of all parochial temporalities to be held in trust for the people. The actual balloting was about 2,000 to 19, some of the Committee themselves voting for the Fathers.

On January 25th 1875, a Bill was passed in Parliament dissolving the Committee of Management. The Bill “transferred all rights, privileges and powers to the Catholics of Quebec speaking the English language and to be vested in a Trust to consist of five members of the said congregation to be elected every three years, – the full and entire management, control, and administration to be vested in the Reverend Fathers of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. During the period the said Reverend Fathers shall have the care of the souls of the Congregation of St. Patrick’s Church.”

From that time to this, the Redemptorist Fathers have known and received nothing but love and generosity from the faithful parishioners. On their part, the Fathers have given their all – many their lives, as their well kept graves give proof in the service of the Parish.

Father Burke opened his incumbency of office as Pastor with a Mission. It was a three week mission. Father Joseph Henning, a great pulpit orator,

headed the Mission Band. 3,500 women and 2,500 men made the Mission. The Mission was the first in the history of the Parish and was a great success. It put the Parish on its feet spiritually.

Father Joseph Henning, the Missionary, succeeded Father Burke as Pastor in 1877. Outstanding achievement of an active three years in Quebec was his purchase of sixty-six acres of villa lots for a cemetery in the Parish of St. Columba, Sillery. The lots belonged to James Gibbs, Esq., and were called "Woodfield." Father Henning personally supervised the planning and divisioning of the paths and driveways. He did an artistic job. To-day, overlooking the lordly St. Lawrence, the silver ribbon in the history book of Canada, the river road into the continent, are the graves of many, many parishioners, who themselves or whose ancestors stopped off at Quebec on their forced flight from the land of their birth, Ireland. Today, many a visitor has admired the beauty of our cemetery with the River at its feet, and the mountains in the distance.

Father William Lowekamp became Rector of St. Patrick's in 1880. In his first year he installed a new organ. He was a brilliant man, a scholar, administrator, and orator. He was loved by all in the city, French, Irish, Catholic and Protestant. His one great desire was to have a parochial school. His ambition was realized in 1884 when the new school for boys on McMahan Street directly across from the Church was blessed. The Christian Brothers of de La Salle opened up classes in the Fall. The Christian Brothers glorious record of teaching the boys of St. Patrick's goes away back to 1843 – to the Glacis Street School. In 1851 they opened a School in Diamond Harbour. From 1884 they taught our boys on McMahan Street till 1919 when the new School on De Salaberry Avenue was opened. They are still nobly and self-sacrificingly carrying on the great tradition of their illustrious founder St. John Baptist de La Salle, as educators, guides and friends of our youth of the Parish.

As for our girls, they received their education in various institutions and academies of Quebec. It was owing to the persistence of the present Rector of St. Patrick's, Father J. F. Coghlan, C.Ss.R., while he was assistant here from 1930 to 1935, that we have our girls under the roof of our own parochial school. After his departure in 1935, Father Patrick Gallery, C.Ss.R., carried on the fight, at times bitter and acrimonious, and their mutual efforts were crowned with success when on August 10th 1938, the corner stone for the new Girl's School – popularly called the Leonard School – was laid. The history of the struggle to obtain a school for our girls would fill a volume, and would not be all pleasant reading.

From the first decade of the twentieth century it was obvious Quebec was moving and expanding Westward. Around 1912, it was estimated 1,500 English-speaking Catholics lived in the vicinity landmarked by St. Brigid's Home. It was obvious a new church was a necessity. Father James Woods,

CSs.R., Rector from 1912-18 called a meeting of the men of the parish to discuss the bulding of a new church. It was moved and seconded at the meeting that the Trustees be empowered to have plans drawn up for the erection of a new church, the same to be built on the site facing Grande Allée. The Provincial of the Baltimore Province and the Vice-Provincial of our then Canadian Vice-Province came to Quebec and after looking over the ground gave orders to prepare plans for the building of a large basement church and presbytery. The corner stone was laid in 1914, and the new St. Patrick's Church blessed in 1915. Our English speaking Catholics are now served by two large churches and Diamond. Harbour Chapel or the "Cove Chapel" built in 1885.

We number some five thousand parishioners, many with French names who are most loyal parishioners of St. Patrick's. The ten to twelve thousand Irish who once inhabited our city have dwindled to one half that number. The major cause for the exodus of the Irish to other parts of Canada, and the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century was the death of the industries of lumbering and ship-building when steel and steam replaced wood and sail. Champlain Street facing the river – once a busy centre of shipping life is now a tranquil road beneath the Rock. A few loyal families of Irish descent still live there where once the brogue of the thirty-two counties was heard.

So, we end not a history but a few highlights of the life of the Parish of St. Patrick's Quebec, where Gaul and Gael live peacefully side by side in a land where the Fleur-de-Lys and the Shamrock found receptive soil.