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Report of the Annual Meeting

## The Parish and Church of L'Acadie

E. R. Adair and Eleanor S. Wardleworth

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## THE PARISH AND CHURCH OF L'ACADIE

By E. R. ADAIR AND ELEANOR S. WARDLEWORTH.<sup>1</sup>

There have been many parish histories written for the province of Quebec and certain faults are to be found in almost all of them. Some of these faults are the result of lack of adequate technical knowledge on the part of their authors: they never seem to think, for instance, that their works are worthy of decent indexes and consequently they are little short of maddening for the hisitorian who wants to find out anything from them. But many of their defects are the consequence of a bad sense of perspective. Far too often, for example, they devote a very disproportionate amount of their space to tracing the history of religious institutions founded in the parish during the nineteenth century, and while such institutions may be important in themselves, they have an inevitable tendency to stand apart from parish life and therefore to be really of very little importance in parish history. Then again these local histories are only too commonly cumbered with a great deal of genealogical and biographical detail about ecclesiastic and leading citizens. This may be vitally fascinating to friends and relatives, it may even be interesting in itself, but it tends to break the history of the parish up into a series of little episodes, into a series of unimportant biographical essays, it tends to destroy any feeling of unity, to obscure the slow steady current of local life.

Where then can one find the thread which can bind together the history of the parish in this province? The answer can be given without hesitation: in the history of the parish church. For in a very special way in the province of Quebec is the parish church together with the curé who serves that church the centre of parish life. The church was built by the labour of the parishioners, it has been adorned by their loving care, to the habitants it represents the zenith of their aesthetic life and it is something which they can constantly cherish and constantly enjoy. Their church is their one emotional escape from a life which no doubt possesses its little evanescent jollities, but which is, when viewed over a space of years, inevitably monotonous and uneventful. The curé, as curé rather than as individual, is their guide and usually their friend—not always, for every parish has its records of bitter strife between curé and parishioners; but these quarrels are, on the whole, mere bubbles upon a relatively placid sea of mutual confidence and understanding.

The life that centres in the church is a microcosm of the life of the whole parish. There you see the various local artisans plying their crafts for the church's maintenance, and their names, their labour, and the amounts that they were paid for it are all set forth in the church records; the habitants pay their church obligations in minots of wheat, in eggs, in

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<sup>1</sup> In so far as it is possible to divide the labours of two collaborators, it can be said that Miss Wardleworth did most of the work of copying the parochial and notarial records, while I am responsible for examining other sources of information and for the actual composition of the paper. We should like to tender our sincere thanks to M. Paiement, the curé of L'Acadie, for the interest he has taken and the kindness he has shown to us in our consultation of his church records.

bacon, in beef, in candles, even sometimes in soap, and the quantities and the prices they brought are also to be found in the church records. And these prices reflect the influences, sometimes almost instantaneous, sometimes very gradual, of every war, every disturbance, of famine and of good harvests. We need hardly point out what an admirable source for economic history and especially for the history of prices in the province, is to be found in these records, but that is an aspect of the question that we do not intend to deal with now, for sound conclusions could be based only upon the study of far more sets of church accounts than we have as yet had time to examine.

Here we are merely going to try, in a very tentative manner, to demonstrate the way in which the history of a parish may be viewed from the standpoint of its church, and the unity of interest and development which this standpoint can assure. For this purpose we have selected the parish of L'Acadie. We might have wished that this parish had been old enough to show you the habitants meeting together to work out the plans and then building their church with the labour of their own hands—as was the case, for example, at Pointe-aux-Trembles on the Island of Montreal. L'Acadie, however, dates only from the latter half of the eighteenth century; but notwithstanding its relatively modern origin, we believe that it is a fair selection to have made, because it is essentially typical of the normal Quebec parish, quiet, agricultural, unindustrialised, and lacking in any series of exciting developments such as might be expected in those parishes that have come under the influence of the larger centres of population; and yet it is close enough to Montreal to feel the march of progress to as great a degree as any rural Quebec parish is likely to do.

It has long been the tradition that some of the French Acadians expelled from Nova Scotia in 1755 came in the course of their wanderings to the Barony of Longueuil lying across the St. Lawrence from Montreal, and settled upon the shores of the Petite Rivière de Montréal, a pleasant stream which flows into the Richelieu at Chambly Basin. Whence they came is not entirely certain but it seems most probable that they belonged to that portion of the Acadian people that had been landed upon the coast of the English colonies and thence had gradually worked their way through New York and down Lake Champlain to the province of Quebec.<sup>2</sup> Some appear to have arrived as early as 1764 but it was not until 1768 that they are said to have settled there in any number; in consequence the little village that they established was named La Nouvelle Cadie. La Petite Cadie or more simply La Cadie—or as it is spelled today, L'Acadie. All this may well be quite true for we find families settled there in the late eighteenth century that bear names still familiar among the French in Nova Scotia. But it seems certain that these Acadians were not the only people to realise the fertility of the soil along the banks of the Petite Rivière; nor were they even the first to do so, for from 1753 onward several concessions were granted to French-Canadians, natives of new France and not of Acadia.<sup>3</sup> To these were added after the war of 1812, a considerable number of Irish families—all Catholics—and a few English and Scotch Protestant ones,

<sup>2</sup> Rameau de Saint-Père : *Une Colonie Féodale en Amérique* (Paris 1889) Vol. II, p. 212-213.

<sup>3</sup> S. A. Moreau; *Histoire de L'Acadie*, (Montreal, 1908), pp. 80-81.

while at Grande Ligne a little to the south, a small colony of Swiss had established themselves.<sup>4</sup>

By 1782 the settlement was large enough to feel the need of a church, those of St. Joseph de Chambly and of St. Philippe which they were accustomed to attend, being at an inconvenient distance. Consequently they petitioned Mgr. Briand, Bishop of Quebec, to grant them permission to build one and he sent M. Brassier, Director of the Seminary of St. Sulpice, and M. Filiou, curé of La Prairie, to fix its site.<sup>5</sup> This presented little difficulty as M. Jacques Hébert had already offered to give 17 arpents of land on which to build a church and a presbytery, and lay out a cemetery, on condition that he should be exempt from contributing to the cost of erecting the church and the presbytery and be allotted during his life and that of his wife a pew in the church free of all charges. At the same time Jean Baptiste Cire promised the land necessary for the making of a road 40 feet in width from the main highway to the door of the church. These lands were legally transferred to the parish in September, 1782.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile M. Brassier had drawn up a plan for a presbytery, as the building of a church was too ambitious a scheme to be proceeded with at the time, and four syndics were elected to supervise the work. An assembly of 62 of the habitants was held on March 10th, 1783, in the house of Honoré Landry, the election of four new syndics was confirmed and the building of the presbytery officially sanctioned.<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that the relatively small number attending was said to be in consequence of the fact that the rest were "absents pour le service de Sa Majesté"—the war of American Independence had not yet come to an end.

Already on September 30th, 1782 the syndics had entered into a contract with Basile Proulx, "entrepreneur" of Montreal, for the building of a stone presbytery 56 feet long by 40 feet broad, the specifications for which were laid down with considerable care. Proulx was to be permitted to quarry all the stone and sand and to cut all the wood that he needed for this work, from the lands of the habitants without any payment; the habitants were to cart the cut stone for the chimneys from Montreal during February, 1783; if they wanted a cellar, they were to dig it themselves and they were to provide 10 "veltes" of rum "en commençant la maçonnerie." Proulx was to receive 16,000 livres in four instalments, the last being paid in October, 1783, when the building was to be handed over "aux dits habitants, fait et parfait, la clef à la main et conforme aux devis cy dessous."<sup>8</sup>

The presbytery was duly finished and the upper floor was dedicated as a church; and on Sunday, October 17th, 1784 the first curé, M. Charles Chauvaux, summoned an assembly to elect the first marguilliers of the new parish; a week later, on October 24th, Pierre Noël Terrien, Paul Sénécal and Amand Bro were chosen for that office.<sup>9</sup> The new parish had already

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 72.

<sup>5</sup> *Livre des Comptes*, Vol. I, pp. 153-4. Copy of M. Brassier's report, August 5th, 1782.

<sup>6</sup> *Livre des Comptes*, Vol. I, pp. 151-153. Copies of notarial acts of September 2nd, and September 16th, 1782.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 154-157. Copy of declaration made before notary Grise of Chambly. The four syndics were Julien Piedalu, Laurent Loy, Benjamin La Bécace and Joseph Cire; La Bécace and Cire replaced Jacques Sénéac and Dominique Bonneau.

<sup>8</sup> *Livre des Comptes*, Vol. I, pp. 157-160.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 1.

received a name: it lay mainly in the Barony of Longueuil and by his marriage with Mlle Lemoyne, David Alexander Grant of Blairfindie had acquired both the land and the title. The Bishop of Quebec, anxious to pay a gracious compliment to the seigneur, found a Scottish saint in Ste. Marguerite to whom to dedicate the new church and parish and to her name he added that of the place from which Grant's family took its origin; and as Ste. Marguerite de Blairfindie the parish was officially known certainly as early as March 1783.<sup>10</sup>

But from the very beginning the parish had to face serious difficulties: bitter quarrels split it asunder during the period from 1784 to 1787, and twenty years later Mgr. Plessis recalled regretfully the "peu de foi, peu de zèle pour la religion, peu d'encouragement à s'en instruire, beaucoup d'orgueil et de suffisance, beaucoup de résistance et d'indocilité" which had marked Blairfindie in its early years.<sup>11</sup> Consequently the money to pay for the presbytery came in very slowly: some of the parishioners were discontented because it had not been built nearer to their farms and the Vicar-General, M. Montgolfier, in introducing M. Lanctot as the second curé, wrote on October 10th, 1785, condemning this pettiness of spirit and suggesting "que ceux que la Providence a placé dans une proximité plus commode se fassent un plaisir de donner un coup de mains à leurs confrères, pour leur faciliter les chemins."<sup>12</sup> Still the money did not come: the parish was poor and as Montgolfier wrote a year later, the present distress of the inhabitants made them unable to pay the amounts levied upon them.<sup>13</sup> Finally Proulx took legal action to obtain payment and in this extremity the marguilliers were authorized to hand over all the church money in their possession even though that might mean delay in buying the church ornaments that the parishioners desired. Though this drastic measure was not sufficient to pay off all the debts, Proulx appears to have been patient and stayed execution against the Fabrique, and as late as February, 1788, the marguilliers were still being authorized to lend money to the syndics from the church coffer in order to assist in meeting the final payments, on condition of course, that these loans were repaid as the amounts levied on the habitants were received.<sup>14</sup> Even, however, in 1796, there were still complaints that there remained some people who refused to pay what they owed for the construction of the presbytery.<sup>15</sup>

Notwithstanding this poverty, however, the parishioners gradually purchased all that was necessary to equip the upper room of the presbytery which was to be their sole church for the next twenty years. In 1783-4 they procured a tabernacle for 200 livres, a chalice for 240 livres, a censer and an incense box for 24 livres 4 sous and 3 chasubles for 124 livres and all this in addition to a considerable outlay for hangings, planks and other

<sup>10</sup> See two letters of March 20th and March 28th, 1783 so naming it (*Livre des Comptes*, Vol. 1, pp. 160-1.) Moreau (op. cit. p. 37) states that the name was granted on October 27th, 1782 but gives no authority for this.

<sup>11</sup> Mgr. Plessis à M. Cherrier, February 21st, 1792 (*Rapport de L'Archiviste de la Province de Québec*, 1930-1, p. 262); Mgr. Plessis à M. J.-B. Batién, February 18th, 1810 (*Ibid.*, 1927-8, p. 270); Mgr. Plessis à Mgr. l'évêque de Teimesse, February 19th, 1822 (*Ibid.* 1928-9, p. 132).

<sup>12</sup> Book of Copies made by Abbé Lapierre, pp. 16-18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20. October 18th, 1785.

<sup>14</sup> Book of copies made by Abbé Lapierre, pp. 20-22. Letters of February 8th, 1786 and February 12th, 1788.

<sup>15</sup> Mgr. Denaut à Mgr. Hubert, Longueuil, January 19th, 1796 (*Rapport de l'Archiviste de la Province de Québec*, 1931-2, p. 131).

minor needs.<sup>16</sup> In 1785, 268 livres were paid for labour in making the pews, the wood for which cost 93 livres, 12 livres were paid for a banc d'oeuvre, 12 livres for a lectern, 9 livres for a confessional and 18 livres for a cupboard with 2 doors.<sup>17</sup> The year 1786 saw only normal routine expenses, but in 1787, the parish purchased a remonstrance for a very considerable sum of 300 livres, a ciborium for 136 livres and paid Mr. Cruishank, presumably a silver-smith of Montreal, 96 livres for gilding the chalice.<sup>18</sup> In 1788, Mr. Cruikshank received 48 livres for a pair of candlesticks, probably silver ones, and 1932 livres were paid to Mr. de Lisle for two large plain-song books; in the same year the staircase to the church had to be repaired by Jean-Baptiste Cire at the cost of 130 livres, a considerable expense in so new a building.<sup>19</sup> In 1789, an altar frontal and other furnishings cost 321 livres 9 sous and Mr. Cruikshank again received 134 livres for silver vessels and plate.<sup>20</sup> But all those items sink far into the shade compared with the cost of the bell which was bought in 1790 for 2100 livres; bringing it across from Montreal where it may have been cast, to Laprairie cost 6 livres 15 sous and on June 9th it was solemnly installed under the name of Marguerite in its belfry, which was probably separate from the presbytery and for the roofing of which 9 livres 6 sous were paid in the same year; to hang so heavy a bell in a bell turret on the presbytery roof would have been difficult.<sup>21</sup> When the church was finally built the bell was hung in the steeple and it can still be seen there, with the date 1790 clearly set forth in the middle of the band of pleasing ornament that runs round the outside of the bell. The only other purchases of interest during the time that the church occupied the upper floor of the presbytery were a silver box for the sacred oil for 120 livres in 1793, a holy water stoup for 100 livres in 1798 and 2 pairs of silver plated candlesticks in 1799 and 1800 for 108 livres.<sup>22</sup>

In 1800-1801 the great change came. Already in February, 1795 the habitants had petitioned the bishop to send a representative to decide upon the site for their proposed church and on March 25th he appointed to perform this task his coadjutor, M. Denaut, who was also curé at Longueuil. Finally, on May 28th, M. Denaut visited the parish, selected the site and suggested that the church should be 120 feet long, 50 feet broad and 22 feet high.<sup>23</sup> On September 2nd, 1800, M. Louis-Amble Prévost, curé of St. Philippe, blessed the first stone of the new church; under the care of Jacques Odelin, the master mason, its progress was rapid and on December 23rd, 1801 it was ready to be solemnly consecrated by M. Prévost.<sup>24</sup> But the parish which it was to serve had already suffered the first of those dismemberments which have reduced it to its present proportions. As soon as it appeared certain that the church was to be

<sup>16</sup> Livre des Comptes, Vol. I, leaf pasted in between pp. 1 and 2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 8-4.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 19-20.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 22, 161.

<sup>22</sup> Livre des Comptes, Vol. I, pp. 56, 58, 62, 66.

<sup>23</sup> Mgr. Hubert aux habitants de Sainte Marguerite de Blairfindie, March 3rd, 1795; Mgr. Hubert à M. Denaut, March 27th, 1795; Procès-verbal from M. Denaut, May 28th, 1795 (*Rapport de l'Archiviste de la Province de Québec*, 1930-1, pp. 313, 314, 316).

<sup>24</sup> Livre des Comptes, Vol. I, loose-leaf at commencement of book.

built on its present site close to the presbytery, the habitants who dwelt on the shores of the Richelieu in the northwest corner of the parish began to petition for a separation and for a church of their own, on the ground of the distance they had to traverse in order to attend service at L'Acadie; probably, also, they were anxious to avoid paying the levy for the erection of the church at L'Acadie and so be the more able to build one in their own immediate neighbourhood. This petition to the bishop of Quebec they had already made some time before October, 1796; they reiterated it in 1798 and commission was issued for the settling of the site; the whole matter was then suspended by the authorities, to be taken up once more in May 1799 though this time it was decided to give them at first merely a presbytery which could also be used as a church; permission was granted in July, 1800 for the purchase of the necessary land and by September a plan for the presbytery had actually been drawn up. The presbytery was built and the new parish was created under the title of St. Luc, but they were not to obtain their church for more than twenty years.<sup>25</sup>

Of the details of the actual erection of the church of Ste. Marguerite de Blairfindie we know very little, for the supervision of the work was entrusted to specially elected syndics and their documents have not survived. Nor do we know the total cost, though the church accounts record that the syndics received 7000 livres from the coffer in 1800 and the whole receipts of the Quête de l'Enfant Jésus (equal to about 900 livres) in 1801; the rest of the cost would be met by a special levy assessed by the syndics on the parishioners.<sup>26</sup> But this was merely for the building of the church; its decoration and equipment were paid for from the parish funds. As it seems likely that services continued to be held occasionally in the upper room of the presbytery, the altar and tabernacle were almost certainly left there and not transferred to the new church; therefore in 1802 an altar had to be purchased for 802 livres 8 sous and 19 livres were paid for its carriage, while in 1803, a tabernacle cost 600 livres and 28 livres 8 sous were charged for carriage.<sup>27</sup> These payments were made to Jean George Finsterer who is described elsewhere as "sculpteur, Residant en la Paroisse" of Ste. Marguerite de Blairfindie,<sup>28</sup> and who was probably a member of the small Swiss colony mentioned above. As he was carrying out a good deal of wood-carving for the church about this time, it might be natural to suggest that this altar and tabernacle were his work; this is not at all likely. In style both altar and tabernacle appear to have come from the workshop of Quevillon at St. Vincent de Paul; though the finely shaped tombeau of the altar does not have his characteristic ear of corn, it has at the bottom the scroll and vine ornamentation and at the top the graceful and boldly carved swags of roses so commonly found in his work. The tabernacle is

<sup>25</sup> Mgr. Denaut à Mgr. Hubert, October 12th, 1796; Documents dans le registre F de Mgr. Denaut, October 22, 1796 à Septembre 20, 1800 (*Rapport de l'Archiviste de la Province de Québec*, 1931-2, pp. 133, 152-3). Mgr. Plessis à M. Demers, November 2nd, 1820; Mgr. Plessis à M. Demers, January 7th, 1821; Mgr. Plessis à M. Boucher, January 7th, 1821; Mgr. Plessis à Mgr. Lartigue, October 22, 1821 (*Ibid.*, 1928-9, pp. 134, 137, 147).

<sup>26</sup> Livre des Comptes, Vol. I, pp. 67-69. The Church also paid 36 livres for 4 gallons of rum for the workmen in 1801 (p. 70), and 54 livres for 6 gallons in 1802 (p. 74); compare the similar custom during the building of the presbytery.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 74, 75, 78.

<sup>28</sup> Marriage contract of his son, Daniel Finsterer, June 29th, 1812 (No. 1158, in the Greffe of Decoigne in the Notarial Archives of St. Johns).

also very good with its light scroll work on the grade and its central niche flanked by two rows of columns supporting an impressive canopy. Finsterer was most probably perfectly capable of carrying out the ordinary and more routine carving needed for wall or ceiling decoration though even here he may have been aided by designs prepared in the Quevillon workshop; but when it was a question of the finer pieces of work, he acted merely as the entrepreneur, who bought and installed them. So in 1804 we hear of the purchase of a pulpit for 1190 livres and again there is a charge of 20 livres for carriage.<sup>29</sup> Though this is not very typically Quevillon in its style, it probably came also from his workshop. It is hexagonal in shape and is surmounted by an hexagonal sounding board; the carving is rather heavy, but there is a really fine and vigorous representation of a vine upon the side of the staircase leading up to it. Two altars were acquired later, one purchased in 1811 by the curé on behalf of the parish, at a cost of 360 livres and the other procured in 1812 from Daniel Finsterer; this together with some repairs to a tabernacle cost 700 livres;<sup>30</sup> these may well be the rather uninteresting altars in the two side chapels.

Meanwhile George Finsterer must have been responsible for a good deal of the wood-work in the new church, for between 1800 and 1809 he was paid by the Fabrique 7492 livres 14 sous over and above the special amounts already enumerated.<sup>31</sup> This work almost certainly included the erection of the gallery, as pews were being rented in it as early as 1802;<sup>32</sup> with its very graceful curved front and its pleasing proportions it is a decided addition to the beauty of the church.

Messrs. Neveux and Ménard received 234 livres in 1801 for painting the woodwork in the body of the church and a very considerable quantity of leaf gold for the decoration of the carving was purchased in 1803 from M. Séguin at a cost of 912 livres.<sup>33</sup> During 1801-2 Joseph Nolette was making the pews for which he was paid 648 livres, the wood being provided at a cost of 222 livres 9 sous, and in 1803 Jean-Baptiste Paradis was employed at a cost of 340 livres to repair those already in use, probably some transferred from the presbytery; finally in 1811 what must have been a splendid Banc d'oeuvre "peinturé et doré" was bought for 1300 livres;<sup>34</sup> this no longer survives. In 1809 the sacristy, the choir and the railings were painted at a cost of 366 livres.<sup>35</sup>

In 1812, what seems to have been the real decoration of the church was commenced. It was placed in the hands of Louis Daniel Finsterer, the twenty year old son of George Finsterer; he probably had been working for some time with his father and in 1812 he married and set up for himself.<sup>36</sup> He also is described as "maître sculpteur, demeurant dans la paroisse de Ste Marguerite de Blairfindie,"<sup>37</sup> in that part of it which in the early

<sup>29</sup> Livre des Comptes, Vol. I, pp. 82, 85.

<sup>30</sup> Livres des Comptes, Vol. I, pp. 110, 113.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 67, 70, 78, 82, 93, 97, 102.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, p. 73.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 70, 78.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 70, 74, 78, 110.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, p. 102.

<sup>36</sup> No. 1153 in the Greffe of Decoigne in the Notarial Archives of St. Johns.

<sup>37</sup> Obligation par Daniel Finsterer, May 2nd, 1815 (No. 1647 in the Greffe of Decoigne in the Notarial Archives of St. Johns).



twenties became the separate parish of St. Cyrien. Also like his father he was a farmer as well as a wood carver and contractor.<sup>38</sup> The work that he carried out must have been very extensive, because between 1812 and 1822 he was paid 32875 livres 11 sous by the marguilliers.<sup>39</sup> This included the specific sums of 1000 livres for making the two elaborate detached columns that form part of the retable immediately behind the altar, 1000 livres for the two large angels that stand on top of the retable and 1500 livres for constructing the vaulting, though this latter sum may not have been the complete payment.<sup>40</sup> What else did Finsterer do? He probably revaulted the nave and choir, ornamenting them with the narrow bands and the two circles of carved wood which decorate them today; he probably also painted this vaulting in imitation of the carving in order to make it appear more elaborate—a cheaper and rather unfortunate substitute which still exists; he repaired and painted the vaulting in the two chapels;<sup>41</sup> he erected around the sanctuary a really fine retable divided into panels separated by fluted Corinthian pilasters and decorated with carved garlands and scroll work; and finally he added an excellently designed cornice that runs round nave and sanctuary alike. All the work is executed in the style typical of the Montreal school of wood-carvers; the design being carved out of thin strips of wood which are then nailed onto a flat wooden background and the whole painted and gilded; there is even over the picture of Ste. Marguerite in the centre of the retable the two horns of plenty which Montreal carvers were so fond of introducing into their designs.<sup>42</sup> It appears that the church funds provided a great deal if not all, of the actual material needed for this work, the payments made to Finsterer being for labour. For instance, planks and wood for carving were procured at a total cost of 2363 livres 13 sous and in 1817, 108 livres extra were paid for scaffolding;<sup>43</sup> in 1823 Nolette was paid 1900 livres for carpentry work on the vaulting;<sup>44</sup> Gold leaf, mordant, paint and probably some of the labour in painting cost the very large sum of 15230 livres 10 sous<sup>45</sup> and in addition in 1812 the Grey Nuns of Montreal were paid 462 livres, most probably for gilding one or other of the altars, work for which they were famous.<sup>46</sup> Finally in 1819 a good deal of re-roofing seems to have been done at a cost of 364 livres.<sup>47</sup> Thus the parish had spent on the decoration of their church over 50,000 livres in the 12 years from 1812 to 1823.

One might have thought that this would have exhausted their resources, but on the contrary, they also expended considerable sums on the purchase of ornaments and vestments for the services of the church.

<sup>38</sup> Donation par George Finsterer à Daniel Finsterer, February 27th, 1824; vente de bled par Daniel Finsterer, November 16th, 1826 (Greffé of L. Archambeault, Notarial Archives of St. Johns).

<sup>39</sup> Livre des Comptes, Vol. I, pp. 114, 117, 120, 125, 128, 130, 132, 136, 138, 140, 143.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 123, 130, 132.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, p. 122.

<sup>42</sup> For example at Sault-au-Recollet and Ste. Jeanne de l'Île Perrot; see illustrated articles on these churches by Professors Traquair and Adair in the Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, December, 1927, May and June, 1932.

<sup>43</sup> Livre des Comptes, Vol. I, pp. 113, 130, 132, 136.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, p. 145.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 125, 128, 132, 135, 136, 143, 145.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, p. 114.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, p. 136.

In 1800, 250 livres were paid for 10 candlesticks of silvered wood together with a crucifix; in 1802 a processional cross cost 48 livres and in 1809 2 more pairs of candlesticks were purchased for 72 and 108 livres respectively, though these might have been of silver and not of wood;<sup>48</sup> it is much to be regretted that all the old carved wooden candlesticks which the church once owned have been disposed of or destroyed. A little case for the viaticum was bought in 1800 for 90 livres and another in 1809 for 72 livres,<sup>49</sup> a ciborium in 1807 cost 361 livres, and another small one 2 years later 140 livres;<sup>50</sup> a silver censer was purchased in 1807 for 576 livres, a chalice in 1808 for 398 livres, another chalice in 1824 for 744 livres, silver vessels and plates in 1809 for 222 livres, a silver holy water stoup in the same year for 360 livres, and another in 1825 for 408 livres, a silver crucifix in 1811 for 840 livres and another in 1842 which together with a silver plate cost 792 livres.<sup>51</sup> A lamp, probably the one hanging in front of the altar was bought in 1806 for 535 livres, and in the same year George Finsterer was paid 240 livres for a lustre which may have been a carved wooden candelabra which has since vanished, but is more probably the metal one with cut glass drops that still hangs above the communion rails.<sup>52</sup> In this year also Finsterer was paid 30 livres for making some little wooden animals for the Christmas crib and in 1813 his son Daniel was commissioned to carve some more, no doubt to replace those lost or broken.<sup>53</sup> Finally 800 livres were paid to M. Dulongprès in 1802 for the large picture of Ste. Marguerite which used to hang in the centre of the retable, while M. Michel Bouché received 59 livres for the frame.<sup>54</sup> Considerable sums were also spent on ecclesiastical robes; in 1800 two complete sets cost 416 livres; a chasuble was purchased in 1802 for 500 livres, in 1806 a cope for 132 livres 13 sous and another chasuble for 132 livres and a third chasuble in 1811, also for 132 livres.<sup>55</sup> This represents the very considerable total of roughly 8500 livres spent on church ornaments and vestments during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

The parish, however, seemed inexhaustible in its zeal; in 1817 the bishop had ordered that a door be opened in the wall under the pulpit stair and that from it a covered way be built to enable parishioners to go comfortably in winter time from the church to the sacristy without passing through the sanctuary.<sup>56</sup> In 1822 this covered way was constructed, 925 livres being paid for it in that year and the following one,<sup>57</sup> and though at first it was decided not to cut a door through the church wall this also was carried out in 1825.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Livre des Comptes, Vol. I, pp. 66, 75, 102, 108.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 66, 103.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 93, 103; the bishop in 1809 had ordered them to get this second ciborium (p. 99).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 93, 98, 102, 103, 110, 149; Vol. II, fo. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, p. 89; it is possible that this is only a part payment for the lustre purchased from Finsterer.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 89, 117.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, 75.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 66, 75, 89, 111.

<sup>56</sup> Livre des Comptes, Vol. I, p. 126.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 143, 145.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 139, 147.

Meanwhile the presbytery had been showing the need of repair; between 1807 and 1811, 689 livres had been spent for general repairs and re-roofing,<sup>59</sup> but in 1820 the parish began to talk of putting up a new building and on September 20th, 1821, Mgr. Plessis, Bishop of Quebec, signified his assent to the proposal.<sup>60</sup> The work seems to have been commenced almost at once.<sup>61</sup> The new presbytery was erected on the site of the old one though it was considerably larger, and it is substantially the building as it stands today. Extensive repairs have been carried out on two or three occasions: in 1848-49 Jean-Baptiste Mailloux was paid 1008 livres; in 1866-69 when an expense of 4629 livres 15 sous was incurred,<sup>62</sup> and finally when various changes were made necessary by the handing over for the use of the curé of the public hall which had hitherto occupied one end of the building.<sup>63</sup> It is interesting to note that the construction of this new presbytery in 1822 resulted in a further dismemberment of the parish of L'Acadie, for the habitants of the southern part of the parish finding themselves a considerable distance from the church at L'Acadie and so wanting to erect one of their own, were very anxious not to have to share in the payments for the new presbytery; consequently they appealed to the bishop and received permission to set up a separate parish under the name of St. Cyprien, or as it is called today Napierville.<sup>64</sup>

This really ends the period of almost hectic activity in building and decorating the church and the presbytery; they still stand much as they were in 1825 and for the last 100 years it has been rather a question of keeping the buildings in seemly condition than of making any radical alterations or additions. In 1841-2 the sacristy was enlarged, the exterior of the church and the covered way repaired and the steeple re-roofed at a cost of 9,220 livres; as so often happens this appears to have amounted to considerably more than the original estimate. At the same time over 700 livres were expended on a new heating system.<sup>65</sup> In 1843 John McNeil was paid 296 livres for constructing the stone steps in front of the church, and in 1850 Jean-Baptiste Mailloux made a "trottoir" or wooden footpath leading to the church at a cost of 820 livres 10 sous.<sup>66</sup> Between 1850 and 1852 Mailloux was also paid 19721 livres for what is described as "les ouvrages de l'Eglise;" this must have meant a pretty thorough overhauling of the whole building.<sup>67</sup> But this was not the end of the parishioners' expenditure for 1074 livres were paid out in 1856, 888 livres in 1857 and 1410 livres in 1862, all for repairs to the body of the church; finally in 1874 \$524.97 was paid for the restoration of the steeple.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 93, 106, 110.

<sup>60</sup> *Rapport de l'Archiviste de la Province de Québec, 1928-9*, p. 145.

<sup>61</sup> S. A. Moreau; *Histoire de l'Acadie*, pp. 62-3.

<sup>62</sup> *Livre des Comptes*, Vol. II, fos. 56, 59, 59 (b), 133, 135 (b), 137 (b), 140.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, fos. 160-160 (b); Moreau; *Histoire de l'Acadie*, p. 63.

<sup>64</sup> Moreau; *op. cit.* pp. 39-41. In 1834 a third parish, that of St. Jacques le Mineur, was carved out of the south-western part of L'Acadie and in 1890 a fourth, St. Blaise, was created in the south-east of the mother-parish. (Moreau, pp. 41-43).

<sup>65</sup> *Livre des Comptes*, Vol. II, fos. 46-47, 49, 49 (b), 92 (b), 93 (b).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 52 (b), 75 (b), 84 (b), 85. Agreement between Mailloux and the Fabrique (No. 8867 in the Greffe of L. Archangeault in the Notarial Archives of St. Johns).

<sup>67</sup> *Livre des Comptes*, Vol. II, fos. 71, 71 (b), 75-77, 84, 84 (b), 85 (b), 96, 108 (b).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, fos. 106 (b), 109, 124 (b), 154 (b), 155 (b).

For the interior decoration of the church there was not much done after 1825. In 1829 a new chalice was ordered by M. Lartigue and this was purchased in 1831 at a cost of 480 livres; in the same year the sum of 648 livres was paid to Séraphin Bertrand for lustres and in 1838 another ciborium was bought for 360 livres.<sup>69</sup> In 1826, 1920 livres had been paid for the four pictures by Tessier that still hang in the nave of the church, two on each side, though as one of them is dated 1828 they were probably not finally delivered by the artist till that year;<sup>70</sup> they are bold and quite impressive pieces of work, far better than any other the church possesses.

In 1833 Daniel Finsterer received 201 livres 4 sous for repairs to the cornice round the interior of the church and 12 livres for two statues; what these were we do not know.<sup>71</sup> Three years later a "chemin de la croix" was installed at a cost of 256 livres, but Mgr. Bourget, Bishop of Montreal, ordered in 1842 that certain of the pictures "de chemin de la croix . . . soient retouchés, et qu'on en fasse disparaître tout ce que peut choquer la modestie". In 1854 it was stated that this had been done.<sup>72</sup> At the same time as he objected to the pictures of the "chemin de la croix," Mgr. Bourget ordered that the two angels on the top of the retable be replaced by two urns; the angels are, however, still there, and as they are rather quaint and charming pieces of work, it is very fortunate that the commande of this somewhat puritan bishop were not carried out.

But the great event of these years was the installation of an organ. It was on July 22nd, 1832 that the marguilliers decided that "une orgue instrument de musique" should be purchased at the cost of 12000 livres, Jean-Baptiste Paradis being the single stalwart who stood out against the innovation. By July, 1833, the organ had been procured from M. Joseph Bourdon, the celebrated organ builder of Montreal. It had been set up, though Bourdon had still to complete the construction of the organ-casing, and the marguilliers formally accepted the instrument "prisé et reconnu d'accord dans tous ses jeux non par leur propre lumière et connoissance mais sur l'appui du rapport que leur auroit fait Monsieur M. Duff, célèbre organiste de la ville de Montréal, leur expert choisi et de celui de Monsieur Z. Gauvreau autre expert habile appelé par S. Joseph Bourdon."<sup>73</sup> The marguilliers had obtained, no doubt, a splendid instrument but their troubles were only just beginning. In the first place the organ seems to have needed constant small repairs and sums of money are recorded as being paid out for this purpose in 1834, 1835, 1836 1842 (this time 240 livres), 1850 (600 livres to Messrs. Jacotel and Cherrier) and again in 1851.<sup>74</sup> In its last years the organ was probably getting pretty decrepit for a harmonium appears to have been bought to take its place; finally a new organ was purchased in Montreal in 1869; its total cost is not recorded, but as the first payment amounted to 2700 livres, it must have been considerable.<sup>75</sup>

The second difficulty with which the marguilliers were faced in 1833 was to find someone to play the organ for them, now that they had bought

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, Vol. II, fos. 6, 16 (b), 17, 85 (b).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, Vol. II, fo. 4 (b).

<sup>71</sup> Livre des Comptes, Vol. II, fo. 20 (b).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, Vol. II, fos. 32, 48, 82, 91.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, Vol. II, fos. 14, 15 (b).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, Vol. II, fos. 25, 27, 80 (b), 49 (b), 76, 84 (b).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, Vol. II, fos. 141 (b), 148.

one. In 1833 and possibly also during part of 1834 they persuaded M. Gauvreau, the expert employed by Bourdon, to play for them. But this arrangement did not last long and from 1836 to 1849, if one can judge from the total absence in the accounts of any record of an organist's salary and from the very small amounts paid for labour in blowing the organ, it was very rarely played, probably only by someone specially procured for such an important occasion as the episcopal visitation. In 1840 the curé, M. LaRocque, wrote to Bishop Bourget, explaining that he had an excellent organ, but nobody to play it and asking permission to train some young lady of talent, so that she might fill the post. The Bishop, however, found the idea of a woman playing the organ in church not agreeable to his conscience and permission was not granted. Therefore, M. LaRocque had to fall back upon the occasional services of Mr. John Richardson, an English Protestant.<sup>76</sup> With the coming of M. Robert to act as curé, the question of an organist was again revived and in 1849 Mlle. Dubord was appointed, to be succeeded in 1850 by Mlle. Rousselle with an annual salary of 816 livres;<sup>77</sup> from this time onwards, a woman appears to have held the position, without any objections being voiced.

Of only one other item of expenditure need any mention be made; on June 14, 1840 the marguilliers received permission from the Bishop of Montreal to erect a calvary in the parish and in the same year Daniel Finsterer was paid 600 livres for the calvary itself and 300 livres for the Christ and other statutes that were necessary for its completion. In 1870 this calvary was repaired at the cost of 240 livres, but, unfortunately, it has since been destroyed.<sup>78</sup>

Happily the village of L'Acadie stands a little off the main road: therefore few changes have been made in the somewhat destructive name of progress and the church today looks very much as it did a hundred years ago. Externally it is a delightful example of the simpler type of Quebec church with a high-pitched roof and, rising from the summit of the gable on the main frontage, a very charming and graceful wooden steeple with the original bell still hanging in its place. Internally it is almost as Daniel Finsterer left it when he completed his scheme of decoration in 1825; the old altar and pulpit are still there, and the charm of the gallery is unaffected by the later addition of an organ; and there still survive two of the early nineteenth century chalices, one of which is particularly graceful in its lines.

The presbytery alongside of the church is the building of 1822, solidly constructed of stone and well proportioned; externally practically unaltered, though within, the old *salles des habitants* have been cut up into rooms for the curé's use. And church and presbytery still stand a little apart from the village within a sweeping curve of the Petite Rivière de Montréal.

So far the story of the parish of L'Acadie has been told very largely from the records of its church; and this is not inappropriate, for the church was, possibly to an even greater degree than in most parishes, the centre

<sup>76</sup> Moreau; *Histoire de L'Acadie*, p. 100.

<sup>77</sup> *Livre des Comptes*, Vol. II, fos. 58 (b), 59, 76 (b), 95.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, fos. 43 (b), 44 (b), 92, 148.

of its life. L'Acadie certainly had a seigneur, but he apparently took little part in parochial affairs and above all he was a Protestant. Consequently as early as 1851 the seigneurial pew was rented out just like any of the other pews.<sup>79</sup> L'Acadie was a very large parish and its outlying areas did not always feel as strongly as they might have done the influence of the church at its centre, but this difficulty was met, as has been mentioned above, by creating four new parishes, so leaving the nucleus of the old area as the present parish. L'Acadie appears, however, to have been decidedly prosperous; some idea of this prosperity can be obtained by observing the total sums expended at various times on the church buildings and equipment. Excluding all minor and routine items we find over 22000 livres spent between 1800 and 1812 and this does not include the cost of building the church itself, though it does that of decorating it. In the following fourteen years from 1812 to 1825, over 56000 livres were spent and this again does not include what must have been the very considerable sum expended on the new building of the new presbytery. These amounts are all the more striking when it is remembered that in 1803 the pewrents brought in only 3,071 livres 13 sous per annum; in 1825 they had risen to 3,600 livres, but even as late as 1860 they amounted to no more than 4,189 livres 5 sous and this year was rather better than the average.<sup>80</sup>

L'Acadie was then on the whole a decidedly prosperous parish and though it was so close to Montreal it appears to have pursued its life relatively undisturbed by the excitements that swayed the city and the province. Of course certain events which moved the village deeply left no mark upon the church records. Though these records give no evidence of the fact, the parish was, for instance, in the heart of the rebellion of 1837; Sir John Colborne for a brief time made it his headquarters. Three of its residents were condemned to death for their share in the revolt but had their sentence commuted to deportation, while two others, the notary Pierre Théophile Decoigne who had spent his earlier days in L'Acadie, and François Nicolas, the schoolmaster at Ruisseau des Noyers, were executed at Montreal early in 1839. Doctor Côte, who did much to urge the parish to take part in the revolt, saved himself by fleeing to the United States.<sup>81</sup> Thus civil war had, for the first time, really disturbed the parish from the even tenor of its way, but characteristically enough it was the church that provided the second great excitement in its history. In June, 1841 Mgr. Charles de Forbin-Janson, primate of Lorraine, Bishop of Nancy and Toul preached during a great retreat held in L'Acadie; people flocked to hear him from all the surrounding parishes, the church was crammed, the gallery threatened to collapse and finally the Bishop had to preach from the verandah of the presbytery; it has been estimated that some 7000 people were present on the last day of the retreat, packed into the little square in front of the presbytery to listen to the Bishop's final sermon.<sup>82</sup> Even in the church accounts the retreat has left its record, for not only were 600 livres set aside for its expenses but 16 livres 8 sous were later paid "Pour mastic, vitres brisées à l'église, aux salles, etc., pendant la retraite, rem-

<sup>79</sup> Moreau; *Histoire de L'Acadie*, p. 60, n.I.

<sup>80</sup> *Livre des Comptes*, Vol. I, pp. 77, 149; Vol. II, fo. 117.

<sup>81</sup> Moreau; *op. cit.* pp. 92, 94, 115-117.

<sup>82</sup> Moreau; *Histoire de L'Acadie*, pp. 84-85.

placées."<sup>83</sup> But beyond these two great events, the history of the parish is the history of peaceful hard-working habitants, certainly at times inclined to be litigious, at times thriftily loath to pay their share of assessments levied upon them, but on the whole contented and prosperous. Their prosperity came from the fruits of the farms: they had no manufactures; beyond the sale of their produce in Montreal, they were not affected by trade, though they lay only a bare two miles away from the main high road between that city and St. Johns, and though today they have two railway stations, one on the Canadian Pacific and one on the Canadian National. Therefore as might have been expected, they were a distinctly conservative community and it is interesting to note that in the church accounts the marguilliers never adopted the English currency of pounds, shillings, and pence at all, but adhered to the livres and sous of the French régime right down to 1872 when they changed to dollars and cents.<sup>84</sup>

It was a community to which the parish priest was not only a stern guardian of religion and morals, but also the leader, the advisor, and the friend in time of trouble and distress; a community which had some experience of self-government, though in the earlier days it was of rather an oligarchic nature; for down to 1843 the marguilliers were elected solely by the ancient marguilliers—men who had already held that office—and the marguilliers along with the curé had control over the finances of the church. Sometimes their meetings must have revealed vigorous differences of opinion for there can still be found for July 7th, 1833, a memorandum setting forth the proper procedure to be followed. "A chaque assemblée le Marguillier en charge exposera le premier ses demandes ou réflexions, et à la suite le Curé, comme Président, développera ses remarques et ses avis, succéderont les autres Marguilliers qui tous avec les respect le plus marqué mettront au jour leur opinion, chacun à son tour, sans troubles ni confusion de part et d'autre, à peine par celui qui ne voudra pas se conformer aux présentes d'être retranché des assemblées jusqu'à reconnaissance de sa faute." This was agreed to by all those present, with the exception of one marguillier who sturdily refused to abide by such formal methods of discussion and declared himself, again to quote the memorandum, "opposé à tout ce qui dessus mentoinné et . . . n'a pas voulu signer."<sup>85</sup> It was a community, too, that had not only some independence, but a certain amount of education. It is said that a school was maintained in the presbytery as early as 1810 and it is certain that in 1828 a schoolhouse was built alongside of the presbytery, to the construction of which the church contributed 1439 livres; this building was apparently for the girls, while the school for the boys continued to be held in the *salle des habitants*. In 1838 the curé, M. Crevier, was able to write that he had seven schools in his parish of which the most important were the two already mentioned, together with the one at *Ruisseau des Noyers*, which just then lacked a master since Francois Nicholas had been executed at Montreal for treason, and the one at *Grande Ligne*; to the construction of a new schoolhouse at *Grande Ligne* the church gave 529 livres 10 sous in 1842.<sup>86</sup> Of course it

<sup>83</sup> *Livre des Comptes*, Vol. II, fos. 46, 46 (b).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, fo. 149.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, fos. 14 (b), 15.

<sup>86</sup> Moreau; *Histoire de L'Acadie*, pp. 87-88; *Livre des Comptes*, Vol. II, fos. 9 (b), 49, 98 (b).

is not suggested that the education given in these schools was very profound, but it meant that in the early nineteenth century at least some of the younger habitants could read and write; in this connection it is interesting to note that both George and Daniel Finsterer were unable to sign even their own names.

And so, in the history of L'Acadie, as in that of so many other parishes in the Province of Quebec, the church stands in the centre of any picture that one can draw of the habitants' daily life; the church and its history is to a very considerable degree the history of the parish, of its hopes and its disasters, and of the sacrifices which it has made to contribute to the beauty of the building which is a permanent memorial of its faith and of its devotion.