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CHARLES BAILLAIRGÉ'S INTERPRETATION OF THE GOTHIC REVIVAL AND THE "CATHEDRAL" OF BEAUPORT, QUEBEC

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FIG. 1. VIEW OF THE THIRD CHURCH OF THE PARISH OF LA NATIVITÉ DE NOTRE-DAME, BEAUPORT, C. 1885. CHARLES BAILLAIRGÉ, ARCHITECT (BUILT 1849-1852). | UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER. ARCHIVES DE LA VILLE DE QUÉBEC, FONDS MICHEL BÉDARD, P110-200-2-2-N083233.

The third church built for the parish of La Nativité de Notre-Dame in Beauport, near Quebec City (fig. 1), was designed by architect Charles Baillairgé [1826-1906] in 1849, and built from 1849 to 1852.¹ It is a historically significant building for several reasons, among which the fact that Baillairgé came from a family of artists, architects, and builders that played a major role in defining how neoclassicism was interpreted in Lower Canada during the first half of the century.² The dates of conception and construction also make it one of the earliest catholic churches in the neo-Gothic style in the Quebec City region, and the first with a certain level of sophistication in its design.³ In this project, Baillairgé embraced the Gothic Revival barely one year after the Wesleyan Methodist temple, designed by Edward Staveley [1795-1872], and recognized as the first serious neo-Gothic church in the city (fig. 2). Even though Baillairgé's building is no longer extant, destroyed by fire in 1890 (fig. 3), it can be argued that it constitutes a crucial link in the development of religious architecture in Quebec during the second half of the nineteenth century, at the beginning of a tendency to treat any new church as a potential "cathedral," architecturally speaking.

GOthic INCLINATIONS

The construction of Baillairgé's church in Beauport began in a very typical manner, with the parishioners petitioning the bishop of Quebec for the permission to rebuild their hundred-year-old temple, considered too small and too costly to repair. In January 1849, its towers were



FIG. 2. WESLEYAN TEMPLE, QUEBEC CITY (BUILT 1848-1849), EDWARD STAVELEY, ARCHITECT. [TODAY PART OF MAISON DE LA LITTÉRATURE, BY CHEVALIER MORALES ARCHITECTS, 2016.] | MARC GRIGNON, 2016.

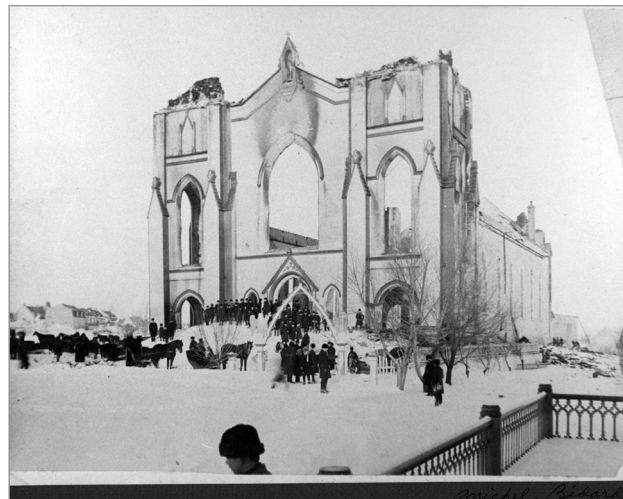


FIG. 3. RUINS OF THE THIRD CHURCH OF THE PARISH LA NATIVITÉ DE NOTRE-DAME, BEAUPORT, 1890. | UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER. ARCHIVES DE LA VILLE DE QUÉBEC, FONDS MICHEL BÉDARD, P110-200-2-2-N083235.

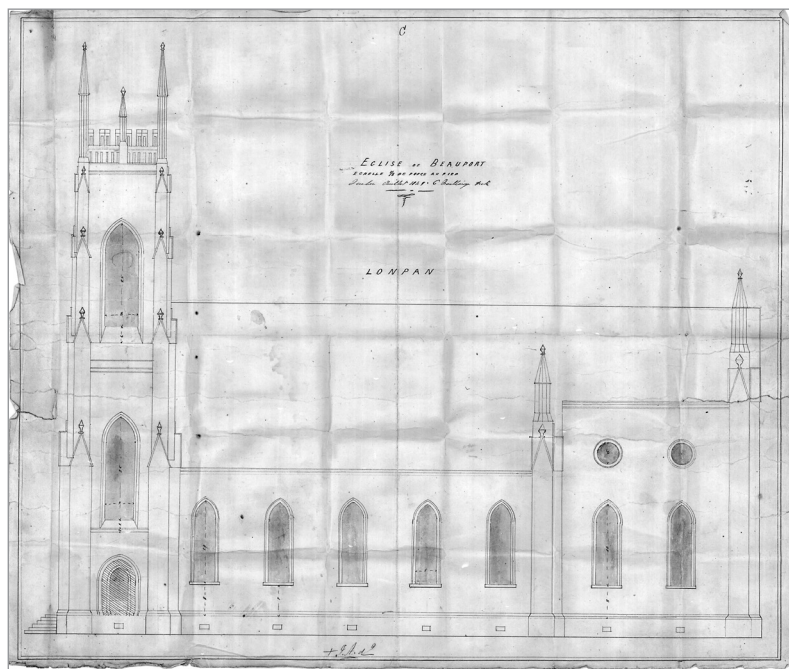


FIG. 4. PROJECT FOR THE CHURCH OF LA NATIVITÉ DE NOTRE-DAME, BEAUPORT, SIDE ELEVATION (DRAWN 1849). CHARLES BAILLAIRGÉ, ARCHITECT. | BANQ, COLLECTION CENTRE D'ARCHIVES DE QUÉBEC, FONDS COUR DU BANC DU ROI POUR LE DISTRICT DE QUÉBEC, TL18,S2,S51,D2016B.

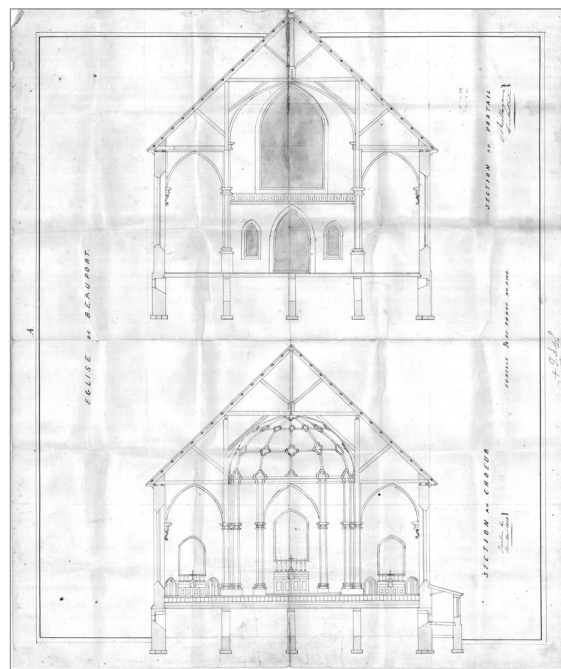


FIG. 5. PROJECT FOR THE CHURCH OF LA NATIVITÉ DE NOTRE-DAME, BEAUPORT, CROSS SECTIONS (DRAWN 1849). CHARLES BAILLAIRGÉ, ARCHITECT. | BANQ, COLLECTION CENTRE D'ARCHIVES DE QUÉBEC, FONDS COUR DU BANC DU ROI POUR LE DISTRICT DE QUÉBEC, TL18,S2,S51,D2016C.

inspected and declared to be in very poor condition, and it was immediately decided to demolish them.⁴ The parishioners' petition, dated June 18, was soon followed by Bishop Joseph Signay's decree ordering

the construction of a new temple, a sacristy, and a *chemin couvert*, namely a covered passage connecting the main body of the church to the sacristy, by-passing the sacred space of the choir.⁵

The way in which the events have succeeded one another during the summer of 1849 gives a clear impression of readiness: on June 29, the Bishop's representative Charles-Félix Cazeau visited the parish

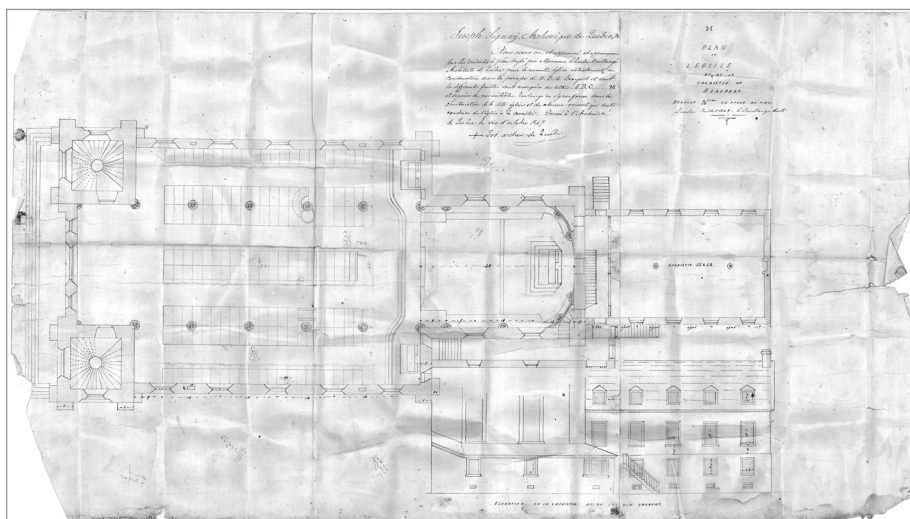


FIG. 6. PROJECT FOR THE CHURCH OF LA NATIVITÉ DE NOTRE-DAME, BEAUPORT, PLAN (DRAWN 1849). CHARLES BAILLAIRGÉ, ARCHITECT. | BANQ, COLLECTION CENTRE D'ARCHIVES DE QUÉBEC, FONDS COUR DU BANC DU ROI POUR LE DISTRICT DE QUÉBEC, TL18,S2,SS1,D2016D.

and produced his official report on the requirements for the new church,⁶ and on June 30, Bishop Signay signed his decree. Charles Baillairgé completed his plans in the following weeks, and on July 31, a call for tenders concerning the masonry work was published in the local newspaper, *Le Journal de Québec*, and the plans made available for consultation in the architect's office.⁷ The masonry contract was awarded on August 12, and the agreements providing for the other parts of the work soon followed.⁸ We also learn from tenders preserved in the parish archives that Baillairgé had prepared two versions of the plans, one less expensive because of the smaller quantity of dressed stone required.⁹

Baillairgé's inclination toward the Gothic Revival is not a surprise in itself, since he is known for having a strong inquisitive mind from an early age, critical of traditional practices, as Christina Cameron shows in her 1989 book about the architect. Born to a French-Canadian father and an English mother, he felt at ease in both cultures. He abandoned the Quebec Seminary at 17, preferring to continue his

studies based on his own interests, while being apprenticed to his relative Thomas Baillairgé.¹⁰ Charles's curiosity for architecture, science, and technology is also demonstrated by the substantial book collection he began to accumulate in the mid-1840s. Cameron has been able to reconstitute a significant part of that collection, and she identified a number of publications relating to Gothic architecture, including the important *Specimens of Gothic Architecture* (1821) by Augustus Charles Pugin and Edward James Wilson.¹¹

But this background would be meaningless without a certain amount of interest on the part of the religious authorities. In the Quebec Diocese, the years 1849-1850 correspond to a difficult period at the end of Bishop Signay's mandate, while many were calling for his resignation.¹² The plans of the church were officially approved on October 6, 1849, during the last days of Signay's tenure as a bishop, at a time when he clearly had other issues on his mind (figs. 4-6). Moreover, Signay's right arm and designated successor, Pierre-Flavien Turgeon, was obviously open to the new style, since after he became

bishop one month later, he approved another of Baillairgé's designs, this time for the Sisters of Charity,¹³ in which a neo-Gothic chapel is set within a neoclassical ensemble. In other words, timing was right—especially because Bishop Turgeon changed his mind about the Gothic style soon afterward, when he saw the convent rise from the ground.¹⁴ Thus, in 1849-1850, the project for the Beauport church benefited from a momentary interest in the Gothic Revival in the Catholic Diocese of Quebec, at a time when opinions were not quite settled about it, and when Baillairgé's relation with the church was still unstained.¹⁵

The general form of Charles Baillairgé's design follows a model often used in the Baillairgé family. In a manner initially borrowed from Holy Trinity Cathedral in Quebec City, a large two-pitched roof covers the entire interior space, subdivided into three naves. This simple exterior shape, also featuring a continuous ridge line above the nave and the choir, reduces to a minimum the number of independent roof sections. The only parts that still demand distinct roofing are the sacristy and the *chemin couvert*, situated at lower level. In this way, there are no inward angles in the main roof—places where ice often causes damage—and no clerestory—where strong winds can hit and rattle the whole wooden structure.

The towers that frame the façade may be typical of medieval European cathedrals, but they can also be found in the church of Saint-Charles-Borromée in Charlesbourg, Quebec City, by Thomas Baillairgé and Jérôme Demers, dating from 1830 (fig. 7). Charles himself had drawn the twin spires of the Saint-Roch parish church, assisting Thomas Baillairgé in 1845-1847, and he used a very similar composition at Saint-Jean-Baptiste in 1847—his first major commission in Quebec (fig. 8).



FIG. 7. CHURCH OF SAINT-CHARLES-BORROMÉE, CHARLESBOURG (BUILT 1827-1830). THOMAS BAILLAIRGÉ, ARCHITECT, AND JÉRÔME DEMERS, PRIEST. | MARC GRIGNON, 2005.



FIG. 8. VIEW OF ST. JEAN AND ST. ROCH SUBURBS, QUEBEC CITY (PHOTO 1858) (WITH ST. JEAN-BAPTISTE CHURCH, CHARLES BAILLAIRGÉ, BUILT 1847). | SAMUEL MCLAUGHLIN, PHOTOGRAPHER. BANQ, COLLECTION CENTRE D'ARCHIVES DE QUÉBEC, COLLECTION INITIALE, P600,S6,D1,P109.

Thus, at La Nativité de Notre-Dame, Charles relied heavily on this established formula, enriched by the addition of Gothic elements taken from local models. He was undeniably impressed with Staveley's Wesleyan temple, since one of the building contracts specified that the dressed stone for the façade, the towers, and the apertures should be finished *"comme à la nouvelle église des méthodistes de Québec, le tout suivant le plan et second toisé qui en a été fait par Charles Baillairgé [sic]."*¹⁶ Also, the final version of the towers, whose height was increased at the beginning of the construction process, was most likely derived from Notre-Dame in Montreal (fig. 9). The peculiar succession of stages in the upper part of those towers, built in wood, seems difficult to explain otherwise.

However, Baillairgé's knowledge of Gothic forms undoubtedly runs deeper than these local references seem to suggest. The façade of the Beauport

church resembles that of English models, with a large pointed window in the centre, in contrast to the rose window more typical of French architecture. The composition seems in fact to derive from the west front of York Minster, especially when considering the 1849 drawings showing crenelated towers crowned with pinnacles on the corners. But the direct source of inspiration is more likely the Scotch National Church built in 1827-1828 on Regent's Square in London (UK)¹⁷—itself a derivative of York Minster—and reproduced in contemporary publications such as James Elmes's *Metropolitan Improvements* of 1828 and Minard Lafever's *Modern Builder's Guide* of 1846 (fig. 10). This connection, apparent in the numerous design similarities, is also supported by the fact that the Scotch National Church is the only Gothic-style church represented in the *Modern Builder's Guide*. Indeed, Baillairgé's familiarity with Lafever's most influential book is well established, as in the Cyrice Têtu

house in Quebec City—a building that belongs to the Greek Revival, for which Lafever is better known.¹⁸ It is therefore clear that in addition to the references immediately at hand, Baillairgé borrowed from European models which he knew through recent publications. He was thus able to produce a design that, from a formal point of view, constitutes an important milestone in the development of the Gothic Revival in Quebec, especially in the Catholic tradition.

AN EVOLVING PROJECT AND ITS PROBLEMS

When comparing photographs of the completed church (figs. 1 and 3) with Baillairgé's plans of July 1849 (figs. 4-6), it appears that the project evolved considerably during construction, and it is therefore necessary to examine the building process in more detail. In a manner that is quite typical of French Canada until the 1840s, the role of the architect in



FIG. 9. ÉGLISE NOTRE-DAME, MONTREAL (BUILT 1829). JAMES O'DONNELL, ARCHITECT. | MARC GRIGNON, 2016.

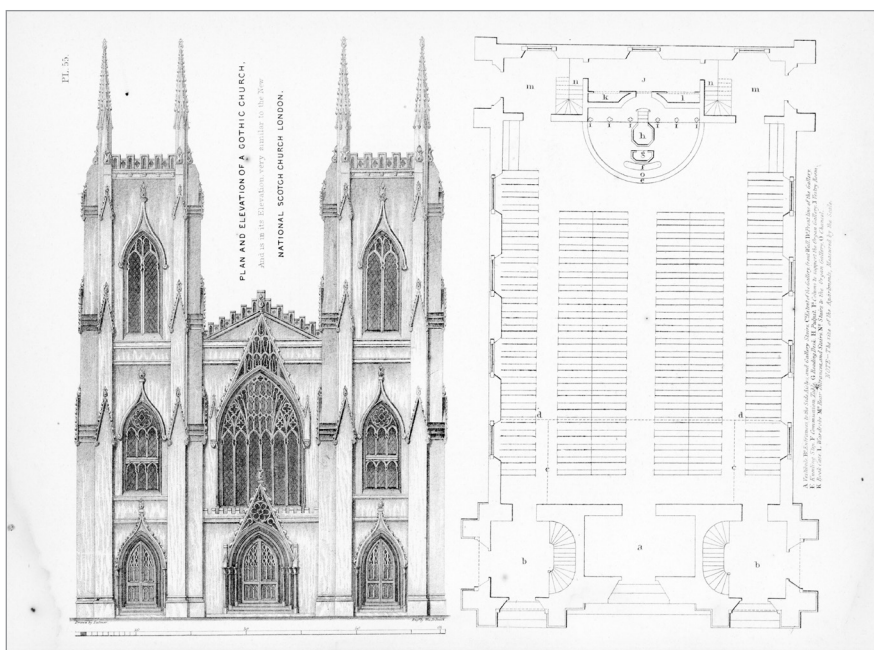


FIG. 10. SCOTCH NATIONAL CHURCH, LONDON, PLAN AND ELEVATION (BUILT 1827-1828, DESTROYED C. 1955). SIR WILLIAM TITE, ARCHITECT. | MINARD LAFEVER, *THE MODERN BUILDER'S GUIDE*, 1833. COLLECTION CENTRE CANADIEN D'ARCHITECTURE / CANADIAN CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURE, MONTREAL, QC.

this project remained limited to providing plans that the client could alter more or less as he pleased. In this case, however, the parish priest (*curé*) Louis-Théodore Bernard seemed particularly eager to secure his authority, since all the building contracts include a clause specifically meant to identify him as the main spokesman for the parish administration.¹⁹ In the agreement with Augustin Trépanier, it is specified that the stone-cutter “devra la soumission de son entreprise à Monsieur le Curé de Beauport, auquel les Syndics ont donné . . . le droit de surveiller l’ouvrage lui-même, sans cependant déroger ni diminuer le droit des Syndics de surveiller aussi eux-mêmes les dits ouvrages quand ils le voudront.”²⁰ This passage clearly states that the Syndics, or the administrators appointed to oversee the construction, accepted that Bernard shared this responsibility with them.

Curé Bernard obviously played a central role in the evolution of the project, and

the first important changes were brought in the spring of 1850, when it was decided to add two bays to the length of the church and to displace the façade accordingly.²¹ Interestingly, we learn more about these changes in the papers relating to the ensuing legal dispute opposing the mason Joseph Parent to the parish administration in 1851-1852. In this legal case, Parent—who contracted the general masonry work in 1849 and who also had to take over part of Trépanier’s more specialized tasks—claimed that he was not properly paid for the additional work demanded of him. Experts were appointed, including Charles Baillairgé and Pierre Gauvreau [1813-1884], measurements were done, contested, and redone, witnesses were interviewed, and the dispute persisted for a few years, until it was settled in favour of the plaintiff. The most interesting testimony is that given by Curé Bernard himself, when he had to clarify how decisions affecting Parent’s work had been taken. Bernard began by

explaining how his position was officially established in the building contracts: “*Les Syndics de la nouvelle église de Beauport m’ont en ma qualité de curé de Beauport favorisé de la conduite des travaux faits à l’Église . . . et cela est entré non seulement dans le marché de Parent le demandeur en cette cause mais dans tous les autres marchés.*”²² And he continued by describing how he managed the changes to the initial project, consulting the Syndics only for specific questions:

*J’ai obtenu de la majorité des Syndics leur assentiment pour les changements et ouvrages extras quand ils devaient les payer de leur bourse. La majorité des Syndics ont ratifié mes faits. Je ne puis produire d’écrits de ces ratifications, les choses se sont passées verbalement. Les Syndics n’ont pas été informés d’élever de quatre pieds plus haut les deux tours du portail, je l’ai fait à leur insu car je m’en suis rendu responsable et c’était pour éviter le trouble avec la paroisse.*²³



FIG. 11. VIEW OF AVENUE ROYALE, BEAUPORT (PHOTO C. 1870). | J.L., PHOTOGRAPHER BANQ, COLLECTION CENTRE D'ARCHIVES DE QUÉBEC, P1000,S4,D59,P101.

Bernard, as we can see, sought the Syndics' approval only when changes had financial implications for the parish: he obtained their approval for lengthening the nave, but he acted alone in increasing by four feet the height of the towers. Since he decided to pay for that work himself, he felt no obligation to discuss it with the parish administrators overseeing the construction.

But the changes were not limited to the masonry work. Changes were also brought to the carpentry, and this probably happened around the same time, that is before the beginning of the building season in the spring of 1850: as old photographs show, the towers, as built, were topped with two wooden stages and a pointed steeple above the masonry (fig. 1). This carpentry work, making the church considerably more visible in the landscape (fig. 11), is mentioned in the contract awarded to Régis Audet dit Lapointe on May 26, 1850, which otherwise seems to refer to the original plans

of July 1849. Indeed, Audet's contract mentions several items not represented in the plans, most importantly the construction of wooden structures over the towers, to be painted in a manner imitating stone, wooden crenellations above the gable, an undefined number of "*flèches*" (pinnacles?), and the roof over the thirty-six-foot addition to the nave. New plans were in fact drawn, but only later, after another dispute which led to the firing of Audet dit Lapointe and the hiring of François and François Normand, father and son, to finish the carpentry work.²⁴

There is every reason to believe that these new plans, which cannot be found today, were also prepared by Charles Baillairgé, just before the Normands were hired. First, the elongated polygonal shape of the spires that we see in the photographs resembles the work of Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin in England, and therefore suggests a certain familiarity with European models. And second, during

the dispute with Audet dit Lapointe, a meeting between the contractor, Curé Bernard, Baillairgé, and a second architect was held in Baillairgé's house to evaluate the cost of the changes to the plans.²⁵ Thus Baillairgé was still involved in the project at that time, and he most probably prepared another set of drawings during the summer of 1851. The general result is an interesting transformation of the original design, since, with the addition of two bays to the nave, and spires on top of higher towers, the appearance of the church was significantly closer to Catholic models.

In all these modifications, however, one can sense that the driving force is Curé Bernard, and that it is mostly him who wanted to make the church bigger than originally planned. This desire may have been prompted, at least in part, by a critique published in *Le Journal de Québec* immediately following the laying of the cornerstone held on September 3, 1849. After reporting the ceremony and giving

a brief idea of the project, the unidentified author argues that the church should be made higher and bigger, since *"les temples ne sont pas faits pour une génération."*²⁶ Is it possible that these words were suggested to the anonymous author by Bernard himself? This we cannot know, of course, but the coincidence between the article and the modifications to the project is striking.²⁷

The financial impact of these changes to the project probably explains one more crucial modification to the masonry work: at one point, it was decided that the structure of the towers should be reduced from a regular four-sided plan to simple projections in the walls, thus transforming them into false towers. This modification—which eliminated the interior walls in each tower—was most likely introduced to compensate for the additional expenses implied by the lengthening of the church, and it looks very much like a compromise between Bernard and the Syndics. But, in the documents, we only learn about this new modification some time later, when structural problems start to appear.²⁸ Since this transformation did not increase the amount of masonry work, it did not come up as such in the legal dispute between Parent and the parish administration.

If Bernard was the driving force behind all of these changes, the final decisions clearly resulted from the interaction between the different actors involved in the project, so that the Curé cannot be made to bear alone the responsibility of the ensuing problems. But taken as a whole, the wisdom of the transformations brought to Baillairgé's plans of July 1849 is obviously questionable, and it is not surprising that the structural problems appeared a few years later, after Bernard's departure.²⁹

In 1856, when architect and building contractor François-Xavier Berlinguet [1830-1916] signed for the interior decoration of the church, he was also required to erect two sections of masonry wall inside the towers in order to strengthen them.³⁰ And this was far from being sufficient: in 1863, it was decided that the presbytery, which needed to be rebuilt, would be moved away from the church, whose proximity to one of the towers was considered a threat for the people living in it. . . .³¹ And a few years later, in 1867, a committee of experts was appointed to evaluate the stability of those towers, because alarming cracks had appeared in the masonry.³² The committee, which included Charles Baillairgé, was of the opinion that the towers should ideally be rebuilt, but less costly measures were also proposed, such as the addition of iron bars binding the different wall sections together. This second option was chosen, and that was sufficient to save the towers until the 1890 fire, although they remained a constant source of worries.

The 1867 report is also interesting for other reasons. In one passage, the committee celebrates the audacity of the Curé and the Syndics in their project, and it underlines their *"nobles efforts pour s'assurer une cathédrale digne de l'importance toujours croissante de la place."*³³ This comment hints toward a peculiar understanding of the Gothic Revival in Catholic Quebec, which would be anathema in an Anglican context. Indeed the idea of erecting a church resembling a cathedral in a rural parish such as Beauport would be immediately condemned by anyone concerned with church architecture, at a time when the influence of the Ecclesiologist Movement was at its peak in British culture.³⁴

I will come back to this point at the end of the article, but, keeping with the

chronology of events, the main part of Berlinguet's contract of 1856 provided for the interior decoration, treated in complete separation from the exterior of the church, in keeping with the common practice in Lower Canada at the time. In this contract, Berlinguet agrees to prepare and to install the altars, the pulpit, the confessionals in the nave, the stalls and a baldachin in the choir, in addition to decorating the arches of the wooden vault, over a six-year period.³⁵ This is one of Berlinguet's earliest commissions, and it seems that he prepared the plans and drafted the specifications himself, since Baillairgé's name never appears in relation to this work.³⁶

Once again, work was overseen, and the plans could be modified by the parish priest and the parish administrators, who were also authorized to appoint an architect of their choice if they so wished.³⁷ Many passages in the specifications suggest the richness of effect that was intended, and the wording of the text is quite interesting: *"Sur chacune de ces moulures saillantes sera posée une dentelle sculptée, qui, au centre de la voûte se croîsera avec retombée terminée par un fleuron tel qu'indiqué dans le plan."*³⁸ These wooden ornaments appear in two archival photographs showing the interior of the church in the 1870s and the 1880s. In the first one, the church is empty, and one has a good view of the Gothicized baldachin in the choir (fig. 12). In the second one, a priest stands in the pulpit, and the church is filled with people (fig. 13); it is ornamented with garlands hanging from the vault, and the decorative painting done in 1885 is visible in the arches and on the columns.³⁹ In both photographs, one can see the pointed arches underlined with crocket motifs, creating a strong visual animation all through the nave and into the choir. Interestingly, these ornaments have more to do with



FIG. 12. THIRD CHURCH OF LA NATIVITÉ DE NOTRE-DAME, BEAUPORT, INTERIOR VIEW (PHOTO C. 1880) (INTERIOR DECORATION BY FRANÇOIS-XAVIER BERLINGUET, ARCHITECT, BUILT 1856-1862). | UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER. BANQ, COLLECTION CENTRE D'ARCHIVES DE QUÉBEC, FONDJS J.E. LIVRNOIS LTÉE, P560,S2,DZ,P11510.

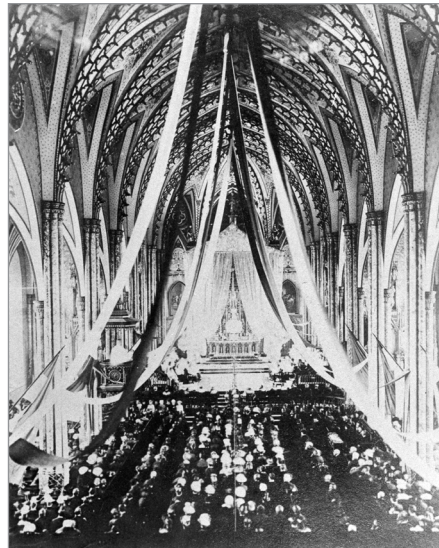


FIG. 13. THIRD CHURCH OF LA NATIVITÉ DE NOTRE-DAME, BEAUPORT, INTERIOR VIEW DURING A CELEBRATION (PHOTO C. 1880) (INTERIOR DECORATION BY FRANÇOIS-XAVIER BERLINGUET, BUILT 1856-1862). | UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER. ARCHIVES DE LA VILLE DE QUÉBEC, FONDJS MICHEL BÉDARD, P110-200-2-2-N083234.



FIG. 14. VIEW OF THE FOURTH CHURCH OF LA NATIVITÉ DE NOTRE-DAME, BEAUPORT (PHOTO C. 1916). FRANÇOIS-XAVIER BERLINGUET, ARCHITECT (BUILT 1890-1892, DESTROYED 1916). | UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER. BANQ, COLLECTION CENTRE D'ARCHIVES DE QUÉBEC, FONDJS RAOUL CHÉNEVERT, P372,D44,P1.

domestic architecture and the picturesque movement than with church architecture as such. The repetitive motif underlining the arches in the vault finds its origin in publications such as *Cottage Residences* and *The Architecture of Country Houses* by Andrew Jackson Downing (dating from 1842 and 1850), and could be seen in the bargeboards decorating the gables of local houses, for example the Spencer Cottage, built in Sillery, Quebec, in 1849. These references may appear a little out-of-place to our eyes, but they are in tune with the numerous other decorative elements mentioned in Berlinguet's specifications, such as the gilded tabernacles, or the coloured glass in the triangular openings set above the arches in the choir. This last detail is particularly meaningful because, while the roundels in the arches along the nave were blind, those in the choir corresponded to the windows visible in Baillairgé's side elevation, thus further enriching the choir with a kind of supernatural light (fig. 4).⁴⁰

INTERPRETATIVE RECONSTRUCTION

The third church of La Nativité de Notre-Dame in Beauport was unfortunately destroyed by a violent fire on January 24, 1890, and very little was saved apart from the perimeter walls (fig. 3). But discussions about the reconstruction provide another kind of insight into the spirit according to which the church had been originally built. Minutes of the churchwardens' meetings emphasize that "*c'est le désir des paroissiens de Beauport de reconstruire ces bâtisses dans les mêmes proportions et suivant le même style*" as the old ones. A decision in this sense was adopted on February 9, when a parish assembly authorized the parish administrators to proceed with the reconstruction of the church and sacristy. It was specified that the new buildings should reproduce "*autant que possible, [les bâtisses] qui ont été détruites, sauf tels changements que les*

agents et architecte trouveront nécessaires ou utiles."⁴¹ It is François-Xavier Berlinguet, then at the summit of his career as architect, who was put in charge of this reconstruction. For the main body, erected in 1890-1891, he re-used the masonry walls that were still standing, generally preserving the volumes of Baillairgé's church and respecting its distinctive Gothic vocabulary, in accordance with the wishes of the parish administrators. However, the new façade had to wait until 1898-1900 to be built, and the local limestone originally intended was replaced by the greyish-red granite that can be seen today.⁴² Occupying a new bay added before the original façade of Baillairgé's church, its new towers actually recuperated the walls of the old ones, which can still be seen inside today (figs. 14-17).

These decisions—including the choice of Berlinguet as architect—strongly disappointed Charles Baillairgé, who would



FIG. 15. NORTH TOWER SHOWING A SURVIVING PIECE OF WALL FROM BAILLAIRGÉ'S CHURCH (1849-1850). CHURCH OF LA NATIVITÉ DE NOTRE-DAME, INTERIOR VIEW. | MARC GRIGNON, 2017.



FIG. 16. FOURTH CHURCH OF LA NATIVITÉ DE NOTRE-DAME, BEAUPORT, INTERIOR VIEW (PHOTO BEFORE 1916). FRANÇOIS-XAVIER BERLINGUET, ARCHITECT, BUILT 1890-1892, INTERIOR COMPLETED 1914, DESTROYED 1916. | UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER; GARNEAU, J.P., PUBLISHER. BANQ. CENTRE D'ARCHIVES DE MONTRÉAL, POSTCARD COLLECTION, CP 029035 CON.



FIG. 17. FOURTH CHURCH OF LA NATIVITÉ DE NOTRE-DAME, BEAUPORT, INTERIOR VIEW (PHOTO C. 1912). FRANÇOIS-XAVIER BERLINGUET, ARCHITECT, BUILT 1890-1892, INTERIOR COMPLETED 1914, DESTROYED 1916. | UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER. ARCHIVES DE LA VILLE DE QUÉBEC, FONDS MICHEL BÉDARD, P110-200-2-4-N083246.

have liked to oversee the reconstruction himself, even though he had become City Engineer in Quebec by then. In 1890, he wrote about the subject to François Parent, deputy mayor of the town of Beauport,⁴³ hoping that his friend would adopt his own views and try to convince the parish that his original design should be followed "à la lettre."⁴⁴ Baillairgé even offered to act as consultant for free, and condemned the choice of Berlinguet, claiming that the parish should select someone "*capable de faire autre chose que des tabernacles et des bébélles!*"⁴⁵ Baillairgé specifically argued that the buttresses along the side of the nave should never have been eliminated, since these elements were "*essentiels à la solidité de la maçonnerie comme au style d'architecture qui convient si éminemment au temple religieux d'aujourd'hui comme à celui du Moyen-Âge.*"⁴⁶ And he

clearly expressed his dislike of the interior decor, which he described as trivial ornaments, "*décorations . . . inconvenantes et sans goût dont on a affublé la voûte; je veux dire ces découpages accolés aux doubleaux qu'on n'aurait jamais dû introduire et surtout cette maigreur d'ornementation du baldaquin.*"⁴⁷

In spite of these remarks—and this is the most interesting aspect of his letter—Baillairgé totally endorsed the vision of the church as a cathedral, a point which becomes apparent when he explains that the façade, or "*le portail,*" as he says, was "*le seul du pays où les tours et clochers avaient la proportion voulue des vieilles cathédrales de France—le tiers de la largeur de la façade.*"⁴⁸ It is clear that for him, the Gothic style is loaded with religious associations, and that his ideal church is a European Gothic cathedral,

in line with what art historian Claude Mignot labels typological eclecticism.⁴⁹ The same idea comes across in a conference he gave at the annual convention of the Quebec Association of Architects three years later:

The old Beauport church already alluded by me, and of which the facade and the spire were over 200 feet in height, is a case in point, its towers like those of Notre-Dame, of Paris, Westminster, of London, York, Strasbourg, Amiens, Chartres, Tours, Bordeaux, Rheims, Orleans and others bore to the total width of frontage the due proportion and hence more pleasing to the eye; but the effect will now be destroyed in the restored structure by building the new towers . . . in a way to envelop the present ruins, thus increasing the distance between the towers without at the same time adding to their width.⁵⁰

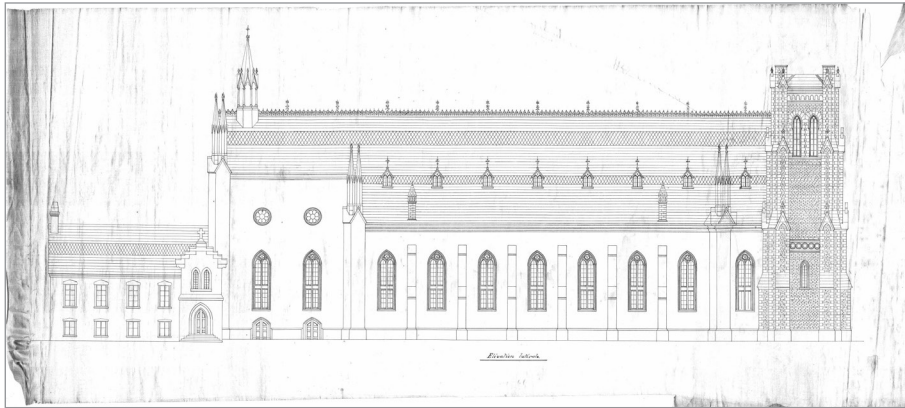


FIG. 18. PROJECT FOR THE CHURCH OF LA NATIVITÉ DE NOTRE-DAME, SIDE ELEVATION (DRAWN C. 1890). FRANÇOIS-XAVIER BERLINGUET, ARCHITECT. | FLNND, ARCHIVES DE LA FABRIQUE LA NATIVITÉ DE NOTRE-DAME DE BEAUPORT, QUEBEC CITY.



FIG. 19. CHURCH OF LA NATIVITÉ DE NOTRE-DAME, BEAUPORT (BUILT 1916-1918), EXTERIOR VIEW. TANGUAY ET LEBON, ARCHITECTS. | MARC GRIGNON, 2017.

CONCLUSION: THE CATHEDRAL IDEAL

To complete this argument, it should be said that Berlinguet's church was itself destroyed by a fire in 1916, and the building that stands in its place today—the fifth successive church built for the parish—was again conceived as a reconstruction of the previous one. Designed by architect Georges-Émile Tanguay [1858-1923], of the firm Tanguay et Lebon, it

reuses most of the old masonry, and we can distinguish in today's fabric elements from both Baillairgé's church—important sections of the perimeter wall—and Berlinguet's church—the façade and the two towers, diminished by the absence of spires, but otherwise preserved (fig. 18).

In fact, a thorough archeological study of the existing fabric remains to be done, but the continuity between the three successive designs was clearly guided by

the same "cathedral ideal."⁵¹ Many of the transformations brought with the reconstructions were clearly intended to develop this specific vision, and emphasized its most cathedral-like features. In Berlinguet's church, the most impressive part undoubtedly was the main façade, with majestic spires over the towers—regardless of Baillairgé's opinion about them (fig. 14). The interior decoration, completed in 1911-1912, included a new baldachin with more substantial Gothic details and fitted with electric light, which was conceived as essential to the decoration (figs. 16 and 17).⁵² Along the nave, natural light was brought to the circular openings above the arches thanks to a series of dormer windows in the roof, thus reproducing the device initially limited to the choir of the building (fig. 18). In this manner, Berlinguet emphasized the typology characteristic of European cathedrals by giving the impression of a real clerestory in the upper part of the nave.

In Tanguay's church, built with a more restricted budget, compromises had to be made, and the towers remained without spires (fig. 19), although the intention was to complete them at a later time.⁵³ The interior decoration is directly based on Berlinguet's church, replicating the Gothic arches and vault, as well as the panelling along the nave and around the choir. Designs for the main and lateral altarpieces were also prepared, and the specifications mention that a baldachin was projected, but none of these elements were meant to be realized immediately.⁵⁴ The choir, therefore, was left unfinished until 1932, when the existing monumental altar and reredos designed by architect Adrien Dufresne [1904-1983] were built.

For the openings above the arches in the nave, Tanguay obviously understood and



FIG. 20. CHURCH OF LA NATIVITÉ DE NOTRE-DAME, BEAUPORT (BUILT 1916-1918), GENERAL VIEW OF THE NAVE. TANGUAY ET LEBON, ARCHITECTS. | MARC GRIGNON, 2017.

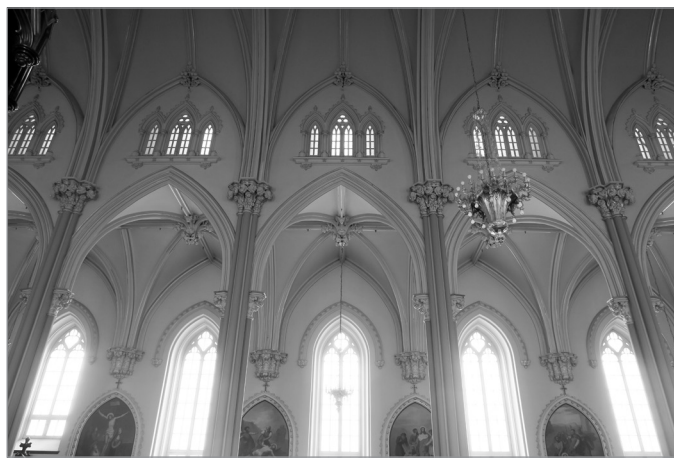


FIG. 21. CHURCH OF LA NATIVITÉ DE NOTRE-DAME, BEAUPORT (BUILT 1916-1918), SIDE VIEW OF THE NAVE. TANGUAY ET LEBON, ARCHITECTS. | MARC GRIGNON, 2017.

appreciated Berlinguet's device, since he developed it further, installing larger dormers on the roof and replacing the roundels with a triple-lancet window inside (figs. 20-21). The original idea for this arrangement in Berlinguet's church may have been borrowed from work done around the same time at St. Michael's Cathedral in Toronto, by Joseph Connolly [1840-1904].⁵⁵ According to architectural historians Glen MacArthur and Annie Szamosi, who discuss the Toronto Catholic cathedral in their study on architect William Thomas [c. 1799-1860], the transformation brought by Connolly was a failure, in that it did not solve the obscurity problem of the original design.⁵⁶ In our view, this critique misses the most important point about this arrangement, at least in the case of Beauport. The intention for such a device was not to make the interior of the church brighter—in that, it is also superfluous and ineffective—but rather to bring just enough light into the clerestory windows to give the impression of a true cathedral church, with a high nave and lower side aisles, even though this impression remains rather theatrical. This intention was clearly understood by Tanguay, whose interior gives a convincing impression of a clerestory raised high

above the side aisles. It is as though a fictional cathedral were set into a rectangular box covered with a large two-pitched roof—the interior is a masterful piece of make-believe, while the exterior remains very pragmatic, relying on an entire century of church construction in Quebec.

NOTES

1. This article expands on the subject discussed in Grignon, Marc, 2017, "La 'cathédrale' de Beauport et la question du néo-gothique," *Histo'Art (revue de la Société d'art et d'histoire de Beauport)*, no. 10, p. 12-17. A preliminary version was presented at the SSAC Annual Conference in Niagara-on-the-Lake in May 2017. I would like to thank Mr. Alain Rainville, historian and archivist, for his guidance through the archives of the Parish of La Nativité de Notre-Dame de Beauport, and for his overall support in this research.
2. As generally recognized in the historiography. See, for example, Kalman, Harold, 1994, *A History of Canadian Architecture*, Toronto, Oxford University Press, vol. 1, p. 194-199.
3. The church of Saint-Roch-des-Aulnais, Quebec, designed by Pierre Gauvreau in 1849, is also neo-Gothic, but relatively simpler. See Noppen, Luc and A.J.H. Richardson, 2003, "Gauvreau, Pierre," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Toronto/Quebec City, University of Toronto/Université Laval, vol. 11, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/gauvreau_pierre_11E.html], accessed June 7, 2017.
4. The churchwardens' minutes mention that "Le rapport du Sieur Régis Lapointe, architecte résidant à St-Roch de Québec, faisant connaître que les tours de l'église sont dans un très mauvais état et qu'elles peuvent causer des accidents bien déplorables, il a été résolu de faire abattre les dites tours le plus tôt possible," January 21 and February 4, 1849, "Livres des délibérations 1835-1861," p. 22-23, 324.01, Fonds de la Fabrique La Nativité de Notre-Dame de Beauport (FLNND), Archives de la Fabrique La Nativité de Notre-Dame de Beauport, Quebec City. The towers were actually demolished only in July, after the authorization given by Bishop Signay: "Requête/Permission de Mgr relative au cimetière et à la démolition de la vieille église," July 5, 1849, in "Construction (église) 1748-1892," 611.01, FLNND.
5. Bernard, Louis-Théodore, curé, and the parishioners of Beauport, Petition for the construction of a new church and sacristy, June 18, 1849, Archives de l'Archidiocèse de Québec, Quebec City, 61 CD Beauport 1, 40; Signay, Joseph, Decree for the construction of a new church and a sacristy in Beauport, June 30, 1849, "Ordonnances épiscopales 1820-1849," 371.01, FLNND.
6. Cazeau, Charles-Félix, Report on the Beauport church, June 29, 1849, Archives de l'Archidiocèse de Québec, Quebec City, 61 CD Beauport 1, 43.
7. See *Le Journal de Québec*, July 31, 1849, p. 2.
8. Contract between Joseph Parent, mason, and the Parish of Beauport, August 12, 1849, no. 568, minutes of public notary Felix Dugal de Valois, Centre d'archives de

- Québec, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ), Quebec City. Parent had submitted his tender a few days earlier: Parent, Joseph, letter dated August 5, 1849, in "Construction (église) 1748-1892," 611.01, FLNNDB. See also: Contract between Augustin Trépanier, stone cutter, and the Parish of Beauport, November 5, 1849, no. 592, minutes of F. Dugal de Valois, BAnQ; Contract between Régis Audet dit Lapointe, master carpenter, and the Parish of Beauport, May 26, 1850, no. 662, minutes of F. Dugal de Valois, BAnQ.
9. One of the tenders asked "2775 livres" for the stone required in the first version of the plans, and "1350 livres" for the second version: Trépanier, Augustin, letter dated August 2, 1849, in "Construction (église) 1748-1892," 611.01, FLNNDB. On the basis of the contract awarded to Trépanier on November 5, for the amount of "1350 livres," it seems that the simpler version was chosen.
10. Cameron, Christina, 1989, *Charles Baillairgé, Architect and Engineer*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill/Queen's University Press, p. 5.
11. *Id.*, p. 5-8, and appendix 3, p. 166-170.
12. Chassé, Sonia, 2003, "Signay, Joseph," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 7, Toronto and Quebec City, University of Toronto/Université Laval, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/signay_joseph_7E.html], accessed June 7, 2017.
13. Gagné, Armand, 2003, "Turgeon, Pierre-Flavien," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 9, University of Toronto/Université Laval, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/turgeon_pierre_flavien_9E.html], accessed June 7, 2017.
14. Noppen, Luc and Lucie K. Morisset, 1996, *Foi et Patrie. Art et architecture des églises à Québec*, Quebec City, Les publications du Québec, p. 30. See also Caron, Robert, 1980, *Un couvent du XIX^e siècle*, Montreal, Libre Expression, p. 49, 58-60. In the neo-Gothic style, Charles Baillairgé also conceived the churches of Isle-Verte (1853), Sainte-Marie de Beauce (1854), and Saint-Patrice in Rivière-du-Loup (1855-1856). See Cameron, *Charles Baillairgé*, p. 69.
15. After the episode concerning the convent of the Sisters of Charity, Charles Baillairgé's difficulties with diocesan authorities continued through the 1850s, and resulted in his being barred from religious commissions. See Cameron, p. 73-74.
16. Contract between A. Trépanier and the Parish of La Nativité de Notre-Dame, Beauport, November 5, 1849.
17. Designed by Sir William Tite, architect [1798-1873]. After being severely damaged in 1945, the church was finally demolished around 1955. See Colvin, Howard, 2008, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects, 1600-1840* [4th ed.], New Haven, Yale University Press, p. 1043-1044.
18. Cameron, *Charles Baillairgé*, p. 50.
19. Louis-Théodore Bernard was the parish priest at La Nativité de Notre-Dame from 1848 to 1854. See "Curés de Beauport," *P paroisse de la Nativité de Notre-Dame. Album souvenir 1684-2009* [Beauport, 2009], p. 25.
20. Contract between A. Trépanier and the Parish of La Nativité de Notre-Dame, Beauport, November 5, 1849. This clause appears in other contracts as well, for example the contract between R. Audet dit Lapointe and the Parish of Beauport, May 26, 1850.
21. "[L]es tours et le portail de la dite église devant être avancés d'autant": Turgeon, Pierre-Flavien, Archbishop, "Permission . . . d'allonger la nouvelle église de 36'," May 13, 1850, in "Construction (église) 1748-1892," 611.01, FLNNDB.
22. Testimony by L.-T. Bernard, November 18, 1851, in the case Joseph Parent vs. Germain Dubeau, no. 2016, Fonds Cour du banc du roi pour le district de Québec, TP11,S1,SS2,SSS1, BAnQ.
23. Testimony by L.-T. Bernard, November 18, 1851, in the case Joseph Parent vs. Germain Dubeau.
24. Agreement between François Normand, Sr., and François Normand, Jr., contractors, on the first part, and L.-T. Bernard and the Syndics of the parish of Beauport, on the other part, "pour les ouvrages des deux tours qui sera exécuté suivant le nouveau plans," September 27, 1851, in "Construction (église) 1748-1892," 611.01, FLNNDB. Full payment for this work is confirmed on the same document with a note dated January 21, 1853.
25. Baillairgé, Charles and Michel Patry, Expertise report, July 12, 1851, in "Construction (église) 1748-1892," 611.01, FLNNDB.
26. *Le Journal de Québec*, September 6, 1849, p. 2.
27. Bishop Turgeon approved the lengthening of the nave in the spring of 1850, which means that the modifications were planned during the winter of 1849-1850. See above, note 20.
28. See below, notes 30 and 31.
29. Bernard's successors, who had to deal with the situation, were Jean-Pierre-François-Laforce Langevin, from 1854 to 1858, and Pierre-Grégoire Tremblay, from 1858 to décembre 1884. See: "Curés de Beauport", p. 25.
30. Proposal by François-Xavier Berlinguet to the Parish of La Nativité de Notre-Dame, Beauport, May 20, 1856, in "Réparations générales 1784-1959," 612.01.01, FLNNDB. The agreement was concluded a few days later: Contract between F.-X. Berlinguet, sculptor and architect, and the Parish of Beauport, May 26, 1856, no. 1672, minutes of public notary François Huot, BAnQ. The work was immediately subcontracted to Pierre Maheux: Contract between Pierre Maheux, mason and farmer, and F.-X. Berlinguet, May 30, 1856, no. 1681, minutes of F. Huot, BAnQ.
31. "[V]u que le presbytère actuel est dans un état de vétusté . . . et vu que par sa proximité de l'une des tours qui offre peu de solidité, la vie des personnes qui l'habitent court quelque danger": Minutes of the parish assembly held on October 25, 1863, "Livres des délibérations 1861-1888," p. 13, 324.02, FLNNDB.
32. The committee had to "s'enquérir de l'état actuel des tours et du portail de l'église de la dite paroisse, du danger qu'il peut y avoir que ces tours viennent à faillir ou à s'affaisser sous le poids des clochers qui les surmontent, des causes déterminantes des lézardes qui se sont déclarées et qui sont en apparence quelque peu alarmantes": "Rapport des experts sur les tours etc. de l'église de Beauport," August 23, 1867, in "Réparations générales 1784-1959," 612.01.01, FLNNDB.
33. "Rapport des experts sur les tours etc. de l'église de Beauport," *id.*
34. See Stanton, Phoebe, 1966, *The Gothic Revival and American Church Architecture*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, p. 311 et seq.
35. Berlinguet then hired subcontractors for this entire work, as he did for the masonry of the towers: Contract between François-Xavier Audibert and Romain Marceau, joiners, and F.X. Berlinguet, sculptor and architect, July 1, 1856, no. 1725, minutes of notary F. Huot; Contract between Pierre Dassilva dit Portugais, roofer, and F.X. Berlinguet, August 28, 1857, no. 2181, minutes of notary F. Huot; Contract between Louis-Thomas Berlinguet, sculptor and architect, and F.X. Berlinguet, October 27, 1857, no. 3582, minutes of public notary Jean-Baptiste Pruneau, BAnQ. The final payment to Berlinguet "pour toute la décoration et autres ouvrages" was approved on August 24, 1862. See: "Livres des délibérations 1861-1888," p. 45, 324.02, FLNNDB.

36. The plans and the specifications can be attributed to Berlinguet with relative certainty. In July 1862, the *Journal de Québec* notes: "Cette église est dans le genre gothique et les travaux intérieurs font le plus grand honneur à F.X. Berlinguet, architecte de cette ville, sous la surveillance et d'après les dessins duquel ils ont été exécutés." *Journal de Québec*, July 24, 1862. See also: Légaré, Denyse, 2003, "Berlinguet, François-Xavier," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 14, Toronto and Québec City, University of Toronto/Université Laval, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/berlinguet_francois_xavier_14E.html], accessed June 16, 2017.
37. As mentioned in the specifications: "L'entrepreneur sera sujet à la surveillance du curé, des marguilliers nommés à cet effet par la fabrique, et d'un architecte que la fabrique pourra choisir à cette fin": "Devis des ouvrages à être faits à l'Église de Beauport," 1856, in "Construction (église) 1748-1892," 611.01, FLNNDB.
38. "Devis des ouvrages à être faits à l'Église de Beauport," *id.*
39. In 1886, the local newspaper notes that "Les travaux de décoration de l'église de Notre-Dame de Beauport sont terminés . . .," and "Les Messieurs Gauthier, de Saint-Roch, ont donné et exécuté les plans et toutes ces décorations." *Journal de Québec*, August 23, 1886, p. 2. Payments to "M. Gauthier sur peinture de l'intérieur" are recorded in the parish accounts for 1885-1886: "Dépense extraordinaire . . . pour les grands travaux de réparation," in "Comptes-Reddition 1837-1901," p. 274, 442.04, FLNNDB.
40. "Au centre des panneaux principaux existants à la naissance de la voûte, et dans chacune des mailles, il y aura un ornement triangulaire sculpté, tel qu'indiqué au plan. Ces derniers ornements, dans le chœur vis-à-vis des œils de bouc seront vitrés en verre colorié": "Devis des ouvrages à être faits à l'Église de Beauport," *op. cit.*
41. Minutes of the Parish assembly held on February 9, 1890, "Livres des délibérations 1889-1916," p. 6-11, 324.03, FLNNDB.
42. On August 14, 1898, the churchwardens assembly decides to proceed with the completion of the church, and on August 21, "la proposition de substituer dans la construction du portail de l'église de cette paroisse la pierre granit de la Rivière à Pierre à la pierre de Beauport que demande le devis des architectes Berlinguet et Lemay" is adopted unanimously. The new bells were ordered in 1901 and installed in 1902.
- "Livres des délibérations 1889-1916," p. 87-89, 118-119, 134-138, 324.03, FLNNDB.
43. François Parent was the mayor of Beauport from 1887 to 1890. Letendre, André, 1993, *Beauport. Ville du Québec riche d'histoire*, Beauport, André Letendre, p. 62.
44. Copy of a letter from Charles Baillairgé to François Parent, deputy mayor of Beauport, January 29, 1890, in "Construction (églises) 1748-1892," 611-01, FLNNDB.
45. *Id.*
46. *Id.* These buttresses do not appear on the July 1849 plans. We can suppose that Baillairgé here refers to the new plans made in the summer of 1851.
47. Copy of a letter from Charles Baillairgé to François Parent, January 29, 1890.
48. *Id.*
49. As opposed to synthetic eclecticism. See Mignot, Claude, 1984, *Architecture of the Nineteenth Century in Europe*, New York, Rizzoli, p. 100.
50. Baillairgé, Charles, 1893, "A Plea for a Canadian School of Architecture," *The Canadian Architect and Builder* (October), p. 107.
51. Opinions about the degree of similarity between the three successive buildings vary between historians, but, for a good general assessment, see: Bourque, Hélène, "Église de la Nativité-de-Notre-Dame, 1916-1918," *Les Églises de Québec*, [http://eglisesdequebec.org/ToutesLesEglises/LaNativiteNotreDame/LaNativiteNotreDame.html], accessed October 29, 2015.
52. On February 12, 1911, the churchwardens "voulant se conformer au désir et à la volonté que les paroissiens ont exprimés dans une assemblée de paroisse tenue le vingt-deux janvier, et désireux de leur procurer, comme compensation des énormes sacrifices qu'ils se sont imposés jusqu'à ce jour, la grande joie de pouvoir jouir, durant leur vie, de leur magnifique église, ont réglé ce qui suit: les bancs de l'église, le maître-autel, la chaire et l'orgue seront faits dans le courant de l'hiver." And on March 3, 1912, the churchwardens "décident unanimement de faire la dite installation de la lumière électrique pour décorer le baldaquin et l'autel." "Délibérations 1889-1916," p. 226, 227, 250, 324.03, FLNNDB.
53. The specifications say that the carpentry structure on the towers should be strong enough to support "les clochers qui seront construits plus tard." Tanguay et Lebon, "Église de Beauport. Cahiers des charges générales et particulières [suivi du] Devis descriptif," June 28, 1916, p. 14, in "Construction (église) 1896-1916," 611.02, FLNNDB.
54. "Les ameublements de l'église et des sacristies, tels qu'autels, baldaquin, confessionnaux, chaire, abat-voix, buffet et armoires, ne font partie du présent contrat." Tanguay et Lebon, "Église de Beauport – Finition intérieure," April 5, 1917, p. 15, in "Église Notre-Dame-de-la-Nativité / Tanguay et Lebon," Fonds Raoul Chênevert, P372, D44, BANQ.
55. See McArthur, Glenn and Annie Szamosi, 1996, *William Thomas, architect*, Carleton University Press, p. 40.
56. *Ibid.*