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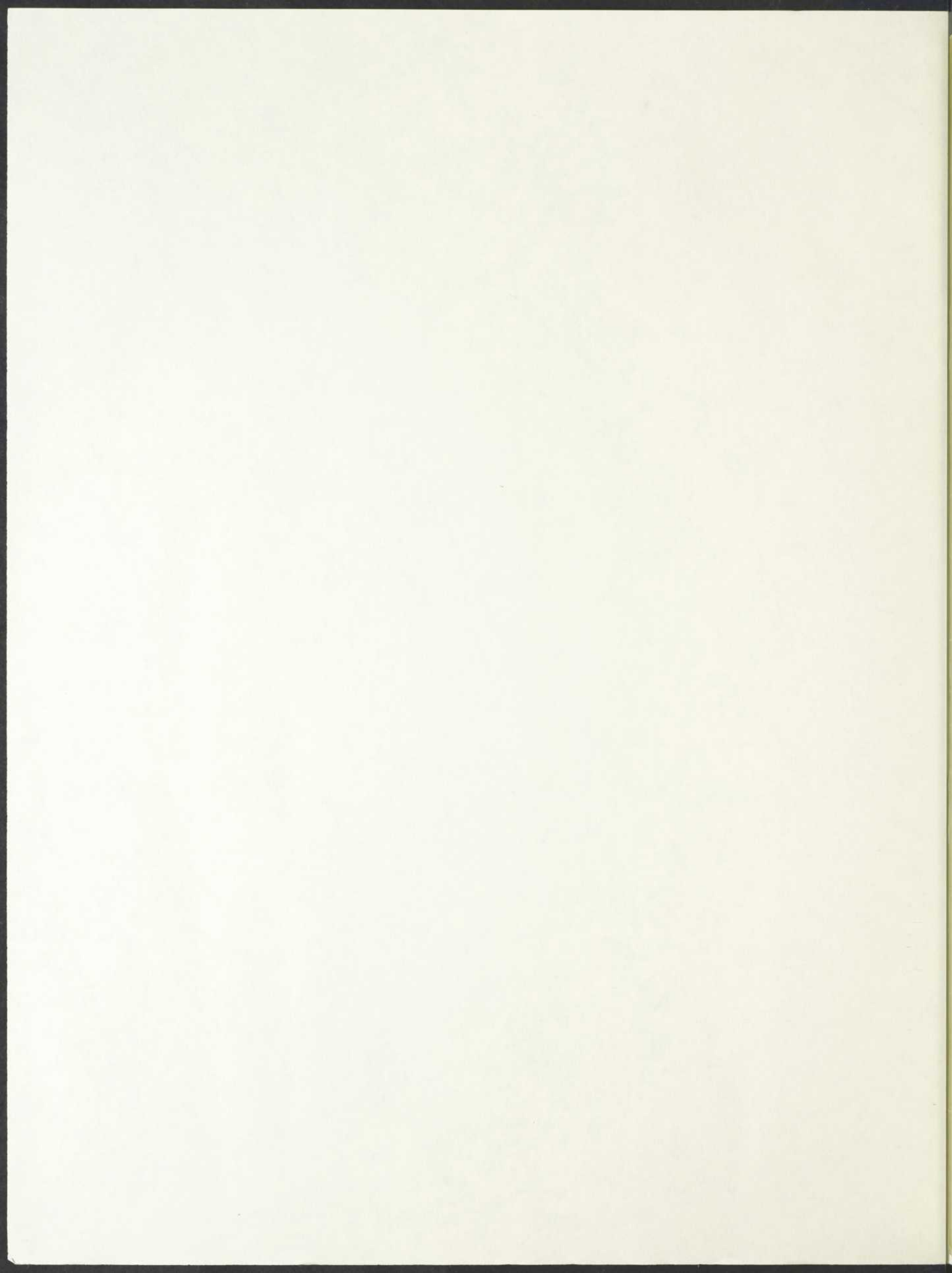
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THE OLD PRESBYTERY AT BATISCAN
QUEBEC

By

RAMSAY TRAQUAIR, M.A., (HON.) F.R.I.B.A.

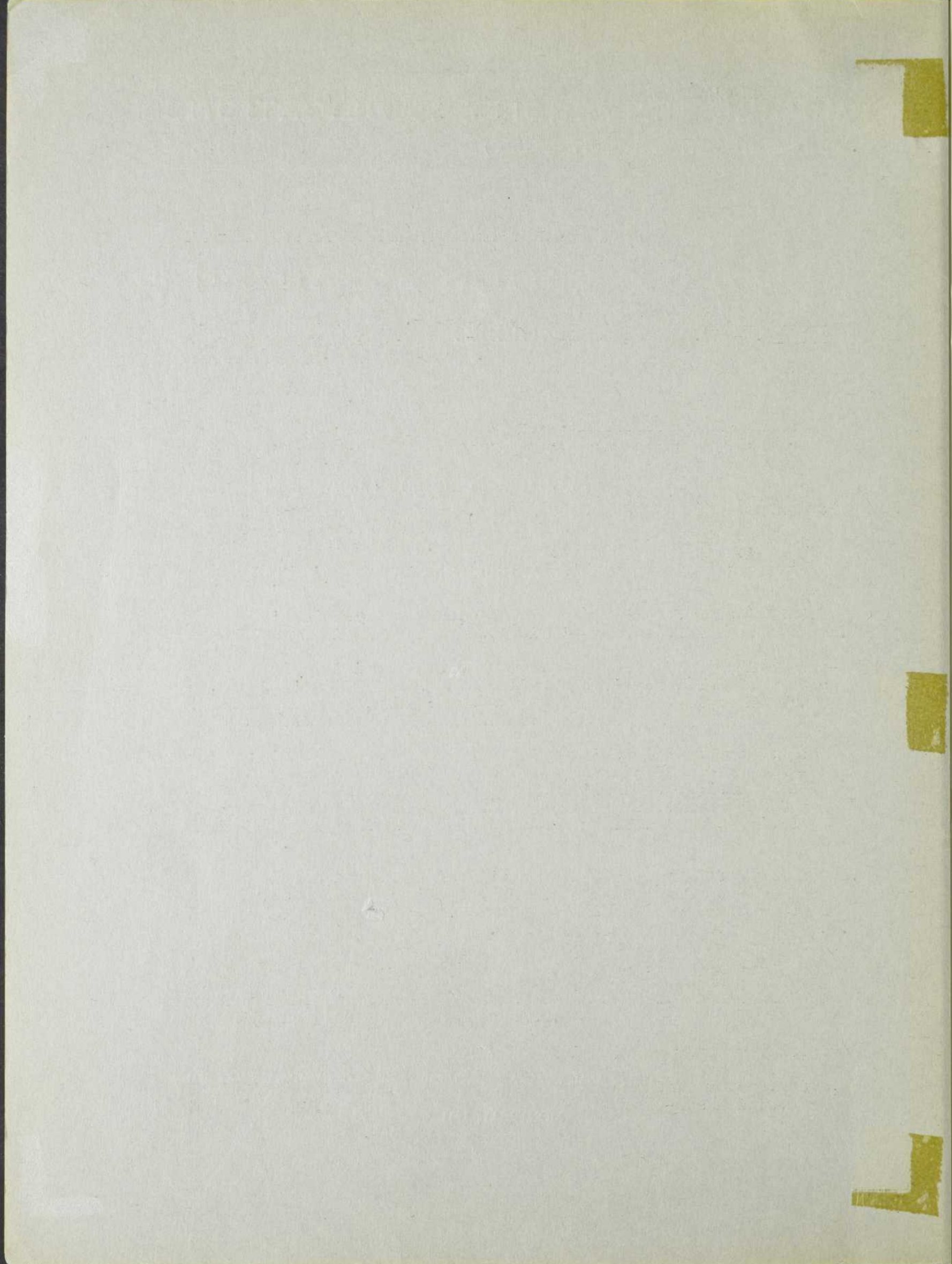
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MONTREAL, 1933



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THE OLD PRESBYTERY AT BATISCAN QUEBEC

By

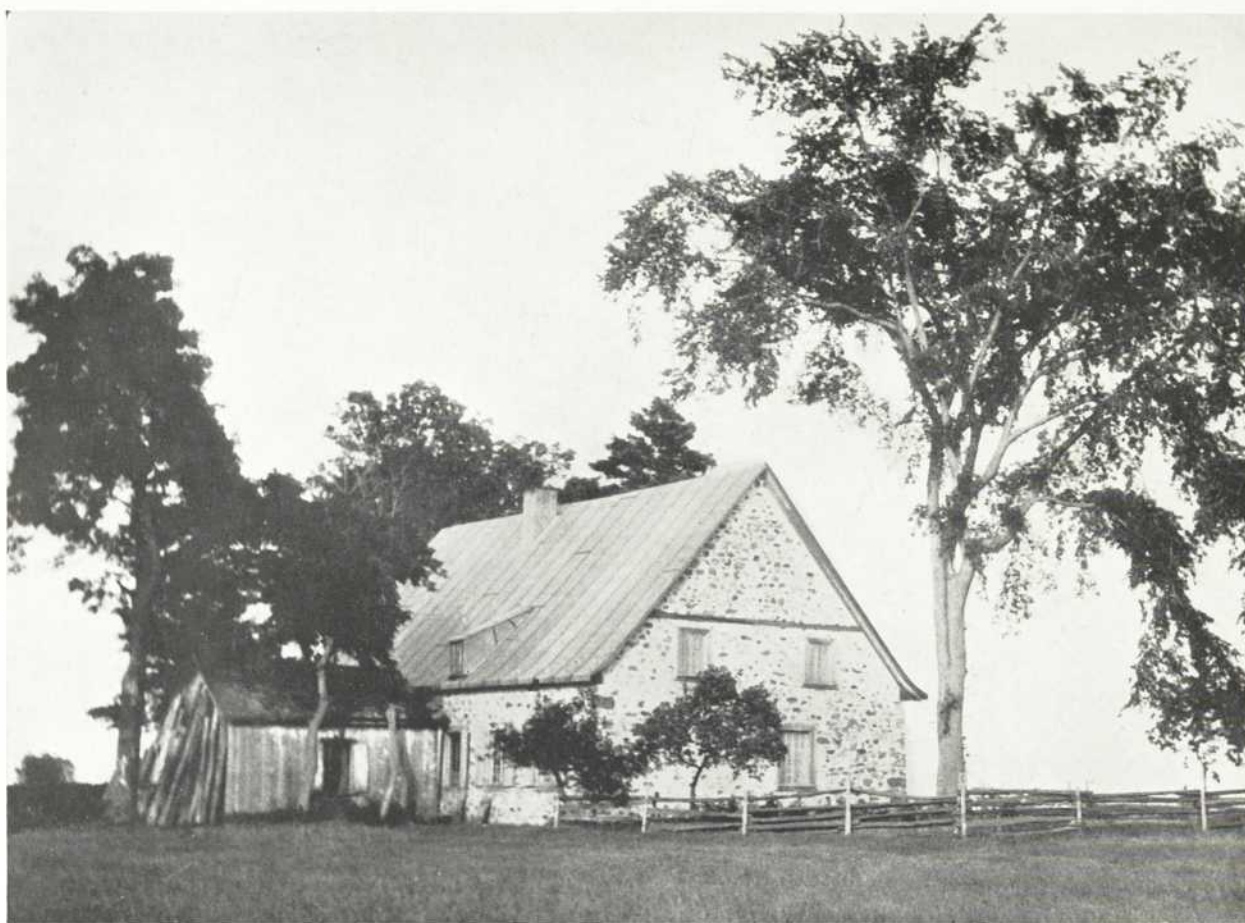
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VIEW FROM THE NORTH-WEST BEFORE RESTORATION

THE OLD PRESBYTERY AT BATISCAN

RAMSAY TRAQUAIR, M.A. (HON.), F.R.I.B.A., AND G. A. NEILSON

THE Seigniory of Batiscan is situated on the north shore of the St. Lawrence twenty miles east of the town of Three Rivers. It was granted to the Jesuit Fathers, "pour l'amour de Dieu," on the 15th of March, 1639, by Jacques de la Ferté, Abbé de Ste. Madeleine de Châteaudun, in the name of the Company of the Hundred Associates.¹ Although it remained Jesuit property up to the time of the dissolution of the Order in Canada, none of the Jesuits ever appear to have lived there. They built the usual mill and collected the seigneurial rents amounting, according to a Declaration of Revenue made by the Order to the King of France in 1701, to 300 li. a year, but that was all.²

(1) B. Sulte, *Hist. des Canadiens Français* Vol. II, p. 69.

(2) *Jesuit Relations and allied Documents*, ed. K. G. Thwaites, Vol. LXV., p. 183.

There is no evidence to show that the Jesuits ever built a house on the site of the old presbytery in the XVII century. Had they done so it would have been used by the missionaries on their visits to the parish. Yet in the Procès-verbal of the General Assembly of the parishioners who met to elect the first churchwardens (*marguilliers*) of the parish in 1670, it is definitely stated that "M. Morin, prestre Missionnaire, y exerçoit les fonctions curiales au logis di Sr. Nicholas Rivard de la Vigne, Lientenans de la Milice aud Batiscan."³ This statement makes it clear that at that date there was no presbytery in the parish.

In 1674 Père Louis Nicolas de la Compagnie de Jesus, in the name of his Superior, Père Claude Dablon, sold to the "noble homme Messre Germain

(3) *Livres de Comptes de Batiscan*, Vol. I.

THE OLD PRESBYTERY AT BATICAN

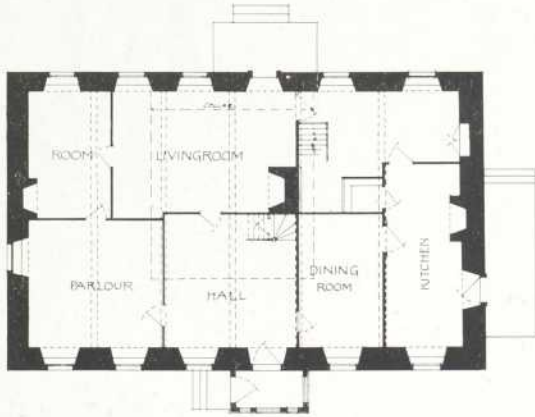
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FRONT TO THE RIVER



BACK TO THE ROAD



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



UPPER FLOOR PLAN



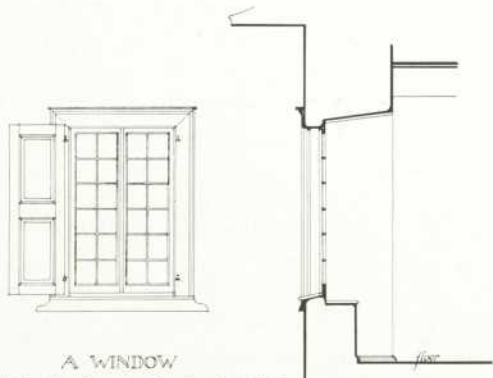
CROSS SECTION



WEST END

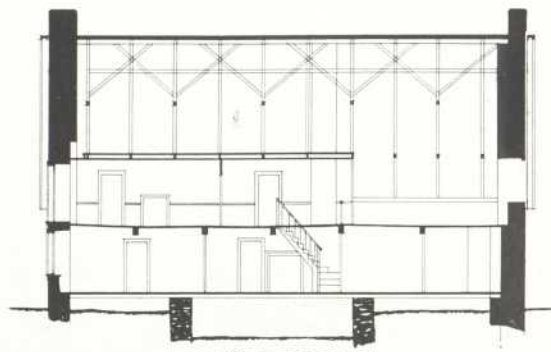


EAST END



A WINDOW

2 4 6 8 10 12 FEET



LONG SECTION

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THE SOUTH SIDE BEFORE RESTORATION



THE SOUTH SIDE AFTER RESTORATION

Photo R. F. 1929

Morin prestre faisant fonction de Curé en la paroisse de batiscan un emplacement ou est apresen sise et située Leglise paroissiales dud lieu de Batiscan de la consistance de cem quatre ving pieds de long y compri la place ou est batie la ditte Eglise,"¹ This deed of sale, which was drawn up by Jean Cusson, Notary at the Cap de la Madeleine, mentions no buildings excepting the church, though such deeds customarily enumerate carefully all buildings on the land.

Some years later, in 1706, a Mr. Roy, who was then Curé of Batiscan, gave a part of the property "sur laquelle est situé l'église et le terrain de la Cure," to the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame de Villemarie on condition that they opened a school for girls on the property.²

When M. Chartier de Lotbinière, the Grand Vicar of the Bishop of Quebec, visited the parish in the month of March, 1734, he found that the "presbitaire étoit prest de tomber en ruine."³ He appointed two of the parishioners, Jean Montgrin and Pierre Gouin, as commissioners to examine the building and have it repaired. But it appears that nothing was done and on the 23rd of July of the same year the Intendant Hocquart issued an ordonnance replacing Pierre Gouin by the S. Duclos de Carignant and ordering the commissioners to begin work immediately. This document is of first importance in the history of the building.⁴ It states that the presbytery was built in 1696 by the Sr. Foucault, Curé of the parish, at his own expense. At the date of the ordonnance, in 1734, the building threatened to fall down since the beams of the cellar were decayed by the floods which often rose into the building. The beams of the first floor were also much damaged by the rain which was destroying all the interior of the house. The roof was quite spoiled and unable to resist the weather. The north-east gable was beginning to fall, the masonry of that side threatened ruin which would soon involve the rest of the building and render it incapable of repair, thus causing a much greater expense to the parishioners.

The building was, in fact, in very bad state, but not yet impossible to repair. The architectural

evidence shows that the necessary repairs were carried out, the building was at any rate rendered safe and in the *Aveu et Denombrement des terrains des Pères Jésuites en Canada* in 1781, it is stated that on the "Fief and Seignory of Batiscan there is a mill newly built and not yet finished; also a church and clergy house on a lot of land two arpents in superficies for the use of the Curé."⁵

The parish accounts contain no further entries regarding work done to the presbytery until 1835, when the Bishop of Quebec on his visit to the parish mentions as being completed "quelques ouvrages extérieures de l'Eglise et du presbytère."⁶

These were probably a part of the repairs of which Mr. Loranger, Curé of Champlain, writes in a letter to the Bishop in December, 1835, in connection with Batiscan, "M. Guillet qui conduit le tout, m'assure que le Presbitere, l'Etable et les choses actuellement nécessaires seront prêtes lors de l'arrivée du nouveau Curé."⁷ It would appear that for many years there had only been one Curé for the two parishes of Batiscan and Champlain. In 1854 the parishioners of Batiscan had written to the Bishop asking him to give them a resident priest and stating that for the past twenty-five years there had only been one Curé for the two parishes and that this Curé had always lived in Champlain.⁸

This explains the extensive repairs that had to be made; the old building had probably been uninhabited for twenty-five years.

At a meeting of the churchwardens on the 13th of March, 1836, it was agreed that, in view of the necessity of making repairs to the presbytery, both interior and exterior, there should be taken from the strong box of the fabrique and placed in the hands of the Curé and churchwardens the further sum of twenty-five livres for these repairs.⁹

Apparently there was some doubt as to what repairs were really needed, for the Bishop a few days later ordered M. Coté, Curé of Ste. Geneviève, to go and examine the presbytery at Batiscan. In his report, made on the 13th of April, M. Coté writes, "J'ai examiné les ouvrages et réparations à faire et les ai jugés absolument nécessaires et pour le logement de Mr. le Curé et pour la conservation du presbytère même. La requête fait connaître à votre Grandeur quelles sont ces réparations réellement nécessaires."¹⁰ Unfortunately this "requête" has not been found; it would apparently have given us a detailed account of the work, but we may conclude that the repairs were considerable or they would not have required so much consideration.

(1) Archives de l'Evêché des Trois Rivières, Cartable de St. Frs. X. de Batiscan, pièce No. 1.

(2) Livres de Comptes de Batiscan, Vol. I, f. 54a.

(3) Livres de Comptes de Batiscan, Vol. I, f. 16a.

(4) Archives de l'Evêché des Trois Rivières. Cartable de St. Frs. X. de Batiscan, pièce No. 3. An excerpt of the important passage follows: "Vu la request a nous présentée par le Sr. François Richard Prestre Missionnaire de Batiscan soutenant que le Sr. Foucault cy devant curé de lad Paroisse de Batiscan auroit faire construire en 1696 un Presbytere de pierre aud Lieu a ses frais et depens sans que les habitants y aientourny un sol de leur argent. Lequel Presbytere aujourd'hui menaceroit ruine par les poutres de la Cave que les eaux qui sont souvent montés dans led Bâtiment auroient pourris; Que les Poutres d'enhaut seroient aussy tres endommagées dont une entièrement sortie de la Muraille par les pluyes qui pourrissent tous les dedans de lad maison, La Couverture estant entièrement gâté et hors d'Etat de resister aux injures du temps; que les Pignons du Nord Est commenceroient a tomber. La muraille dud costé menaçant ruine, ce qui entraineroit bientot le reste du Batiment, le mettroit hors d'estat de pouvoir estre relevé; et causeroit par consequent unedep ense bien plus considérable aux habitants de lade Paroisse . . ."

(5) Jesuit Relations, Vol. LXXI, p. 81-82.

(6) Livres de Comptes de Batiscan, Vol. II, part I, f. 148 a and b.

(7) Archives de l'Evêché des Trois Rivières, Cartable de St. Frs. X. de Batiscan, pièce No. 25.

(8) Archives de l'Evêché des Trois Rivières, Cartable de St. Frs. X. de Batiscan, pièce No. 17.

(9) Livres de Comptes de Batiscan, Vol. II, Part I, f. 149a.

(10) Archives de l'Evêché des Trois Rivières, Cartable de St. Frs. X. de Batiscan, pièce No. 31.



Photo R. T. 1929

A WINDOW IN THE OLD PRESBYTERY AT BATISCAN

In 1845 the Bishop again called the attention of the churchwardens to the need of making certain repairs to the presbytery.¹

Finally, at a general meeting of the parishioners in 1855, it was decided that all repairs to the presbytery should be completed in the following summer and that in addition an extension kitchen should be added to the old house. One hundred pounds were spent on the building in that year.²

In 1865-66 a new church and presbytery were built about a mile to the east of the old church which was then disaffected. It fell into ruin and now there is no trace of it left, though a fine carved altar from it, by Levasseur in 1741, is preserved in the sacristy of the new church. The Curé moved into a new presbytery beside the new church and the old presbytery became a farm house. Whilst in this occupation it does not seem to have been seriously altered and finally in 1926 it was carefully restored for use as a summer house by Mr. A. R. Decary, in whose possession it still remains.³

II

The presbytery is a rectangular building, 56 feet 9 inches long by 35 feet 3 inches broad, in one storey, with an attic. It has rubble walls of field stone, about two feet eight inches thick. Under part of the floor is a low cellar with an earth floor and in the roof is a large loft, in the parts not occupied by the attic rooms. The roof is about fifty degrees pitch, with verges, twelve inches deep, at the gable ends. These gables were carried up in stone; that at the west end still is, but the east gable has had to be taken down to wall head level owing to its dangerous condition, and today the gable is only carried up in wood. It will be remembered that this is the gable that was threatening to fall in 1734. Old photographs show that it was sheathed in wood, a common practice to give protection against the northerly storms in winter. The chimneys have been restored. Originally there were three, as at present, but at some time the two in the gables were disused and the photographs before restoration show only one, in the middle of the building.

The house is divided into six bays by five beams of pine wood, eight inches thick and ten inches deep, with a moulding on the exposed edges. These beams run from wall to wall, a span of over 30 feet and support a solid floor, three and a quarter inches thick, formed of two layers of boards laid crosswise, the under boards forming the ceiling. The two bays to the east are about two feet broader than the others. Originally these bays formed a parish hall with a separate door to the outside, in the south side of the end bay, the dwelling house occupying the western part of the building. The

plan is quite regular; the third bay from the east contains the two entrance doors, to front and back, the remaining bays each have a window on each side. This arrangement of bays and beams supporting a solid floor is an essential part of the structure and could not have been the result of alterations. Similar beams and floors are to be found in the Ferme St. Gabriel, at Pointe St. Charles, Montreal, of the end of the XVII century and in the older parts of the Hôpital Général at Quebec, of the early XVIII century. At Batiscan it is evident that the walls and beams at any rate belong to the house built in 1696 and repaired, but not rebuilt, in 1734.

This floor construction is old and good. It is strong, economical and very soundproof. It must be more fire-resisting than the modern floor of small joists, it takes up little room and looks extremely well. The spans of the three and a quarter inch floor vary from seven to nine feet, yet the floors are quite stiff, though the beams have sagged somewhat with time.

This sagging is worth a little notice. The three beams in the west, or house division, have sagged from two inches to three and three-quarter inches in the centre. The remaining two beams, one in the partition and the other over the old parish hall, where there were no rooms above, have only sagged about half an inch. The internal partitions are of inch and a quarter boards and would sustain a very considerable weight without being distorted. They and the doors in them show no signs of any distortion or strain, but have been carefully fitted to the curve of the beams. It is quite evident that they have been put in after the sag had had time to develop, that is, at some time after the original building was finished.

The roof cannot, of course, be the original roof, but it is framed in the old manner with six by eight inch posts, five by four inch rafters and diagonal wind bracing. The rafters rest on double wall plates, one on each side of the wall, connected at intervals by dovetailed cross pieces all out of seven inch square wood. The roof is in ten bays which bear no relation to the bays below. It has a moderate bellcast and eaves projecting twenty-six inches. Roofs continued to be framed in this manner until the middle of the nineteenth century and there is no reason to think that this roof is more than a hundred years old at most.

A number of the old window frames and sashes remain, glazed with the old thin glass. The windows have two casements with twelve panes in each, opening inwards. The frames are of wood, with wooden architraves and sills and double, panelled shutters. There is no cut stone in the building. The character of the architrave and other window mouldings indicate a date in the first half of the XIX century. They probably belong to the repairs executed in 1855.

(1) Livres de Comptes de Batiscan, Vol. II, part II, f. 9a and b.

(2) Livres de Comptes de Batiscan, Vol. II, part II, f. 16b.

(3) Care has been taken to preserve the original spelling on the excerpts from old documents.



Photo G. A. N. 1930

DOOR IN BEDROOM OVER PARLOUR



Photo R. T. 1930

THE LIVING ROOM

In the interior the stone walls are plastered direct and the ceilings and partitions are of pine, unpainted and darkened by age to a beautiful warm brown. The partitions on the ground floor are of boards an inch and a quarter thick, grooved and tongued and finished with a small bead. The boards are alternately grooved on both edges or tongued and beaded, not, as is the modern practice, grooved on one edge and tongued on the other. The doors are six panelled with L-shaped wrought iron hinges and exposed brass latches. The architraves have floor blocks and cornices. The character of the mouldings as well as the pattern of the panelling

on the other. At the floor is a shallow moulded base, at chair height a dado mould and at the ceiling a small concave cornice. The long upright strips formed by the boards are filled in at base, cornice and dado with thin cross pieces so as to form panels, with styles as broad as the panels and of quite irregular sizes.

The walls, ceilings and the cove of the roof are all covered with such wainscoting. It seems to have been in fairly common use in the province from the later years of the XVIIIth century. It is used in the Fargues House, 92 St. Peter Street, Quebec, as wall panelling and is a usual treatment for



Photo R. T. 1950

THE STAIRCASE

is early XIXth century. The iron work might be earlier, both hinges and latches are of a pattern in use in the later XVIIIth century, but such old-fashioned patterns continued in use in Quebec long after they had gone out elsewhere.

The partitions on the upper floor are of two varieties. Between the rooms marked 1 and 3 on the plan is a partition showing long wainscot panels to room No. 1, but plastered on the other. It is of inch and three-quarter boards grooved and tongued; the construction is shown on the drawing. Between the other rooms the partitions are designed to show wood wainscot on both sides. They are of inch and eighth boards, grooved and moulded, fitted together so that a panel on one side corresponds to a style

wooden ceilings. The double form, with panels on both sides, is very ingenious.

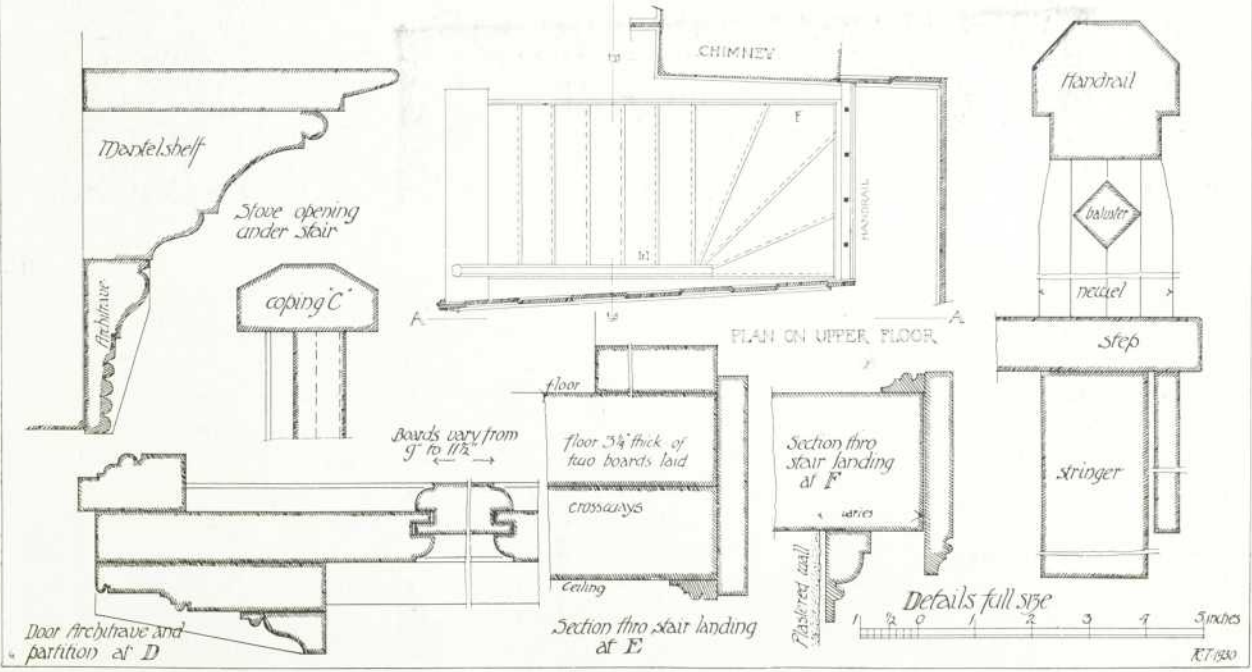
The stair rises from a corner of the living-room with a turn of three steps and reaches the upper floor in eleven steps of eight and three-quarter inches rise by seven and a half tread, with one square baluster, set diagonally, on each step. The steps have a cut stringer and shaped brackets and on the turn at the bottom is a tapered octagonal newel. The partition above, between the staircase and the front bedroom, is left open at the top and at the end of the stair opening is a curious little balcony entered from the bedroom. These openings were probably in part intended to allow the warm air from the living-room to reach the bedroom.

THE OLD PRESBYTERY AT BATISCAN



THE STAIR AND ROOM ABOVE ON THE LINE A-A

SECTION ON B-B



Details full size
RT 1930

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The stair is very charming. It is simple and direct and, in spite of its extreme steepness, not at all uncomfortable.

Underneath the stair is a stove opening, now boarded up, evidently meant to communicate with the kitchen stove, and beside it is a door glazed in the upper part. Glazed doors seem to have been usual in Quebec houses and were sometimes quite elaborately shaped and moulded.

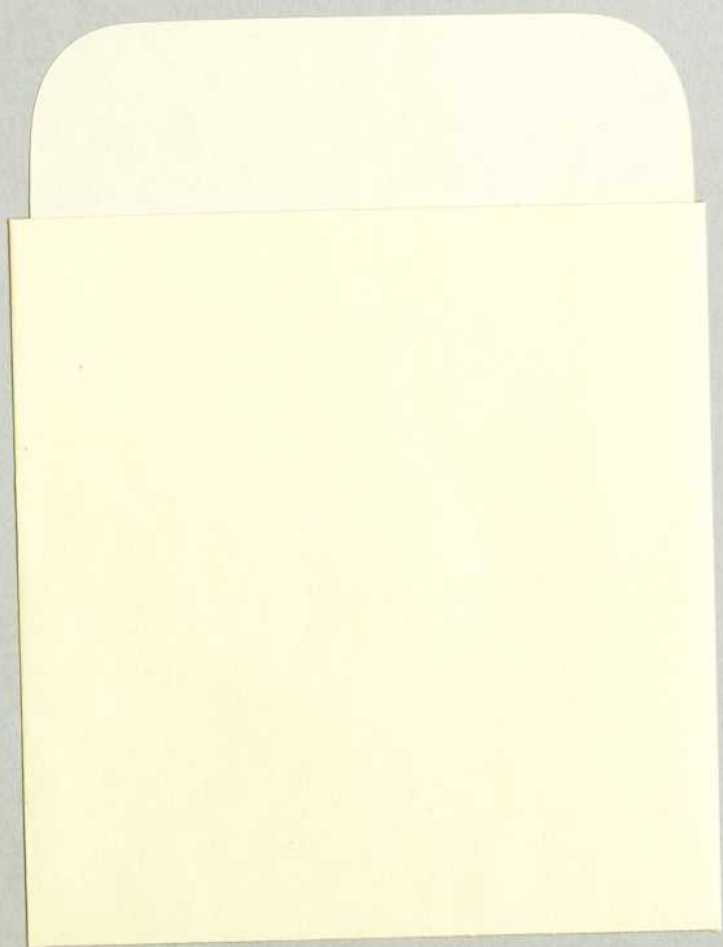
A careful examination of this very interesting woodwork and of its mouldings leaves not the slightest doubt that it was all executed during the first half of the nineteenth century. For confirmation of this we may turn to a house in the village of Batiscan, now used as a telephone exchange and belonging to Mlle. Machildon. This house was built by the great-grandfather of the present owner, Thomas Machildon, and must therefore be about one hundred years old.

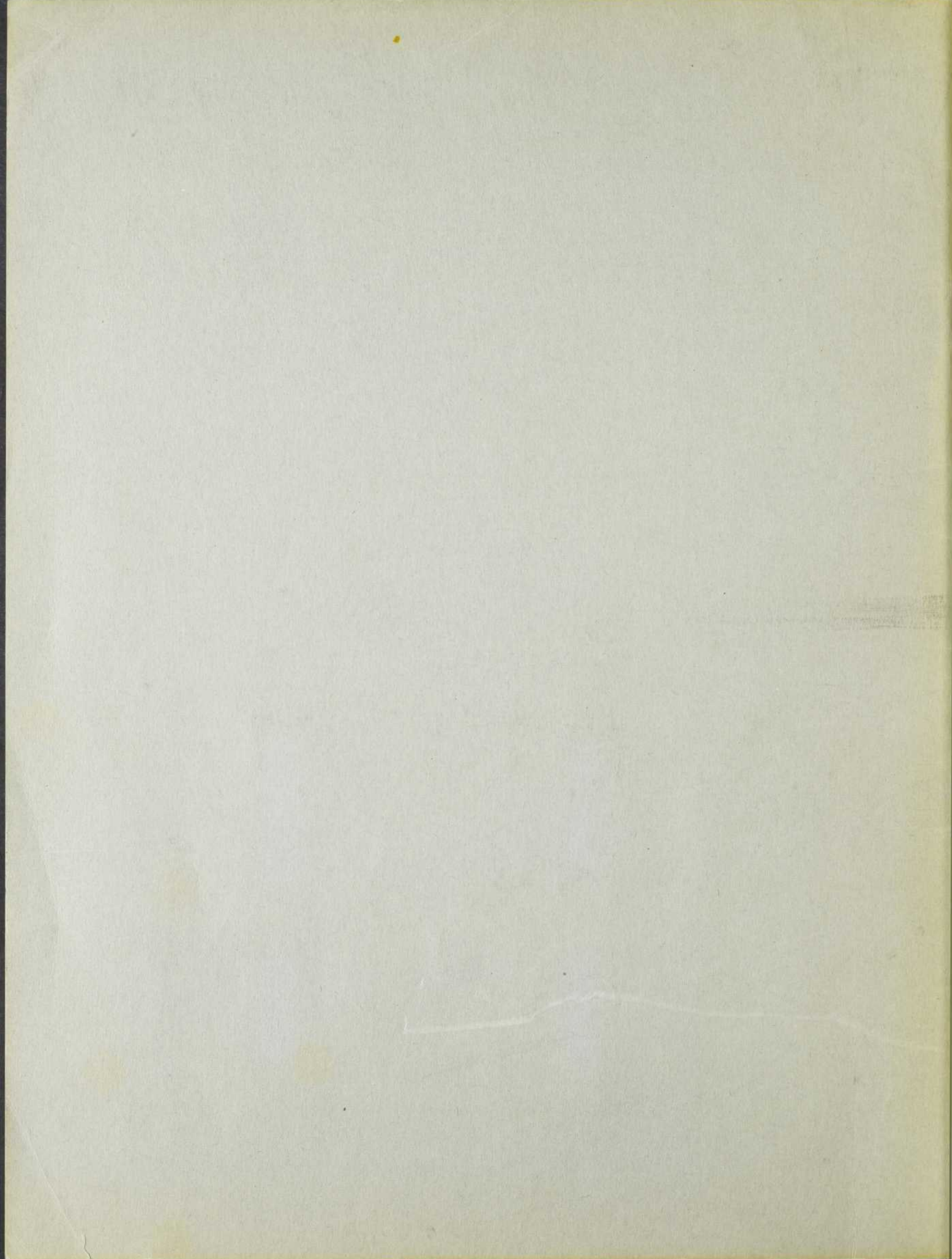
The house is wood-framed and its internal partitions and doors are identical with those of the presbytery. The staircase is of the same character with winding steps, cut strings and shaped brackets. The woodwork must be of about the same age as that of the presbytery; it looks as if it had been made by the same man. Now at the presbytery

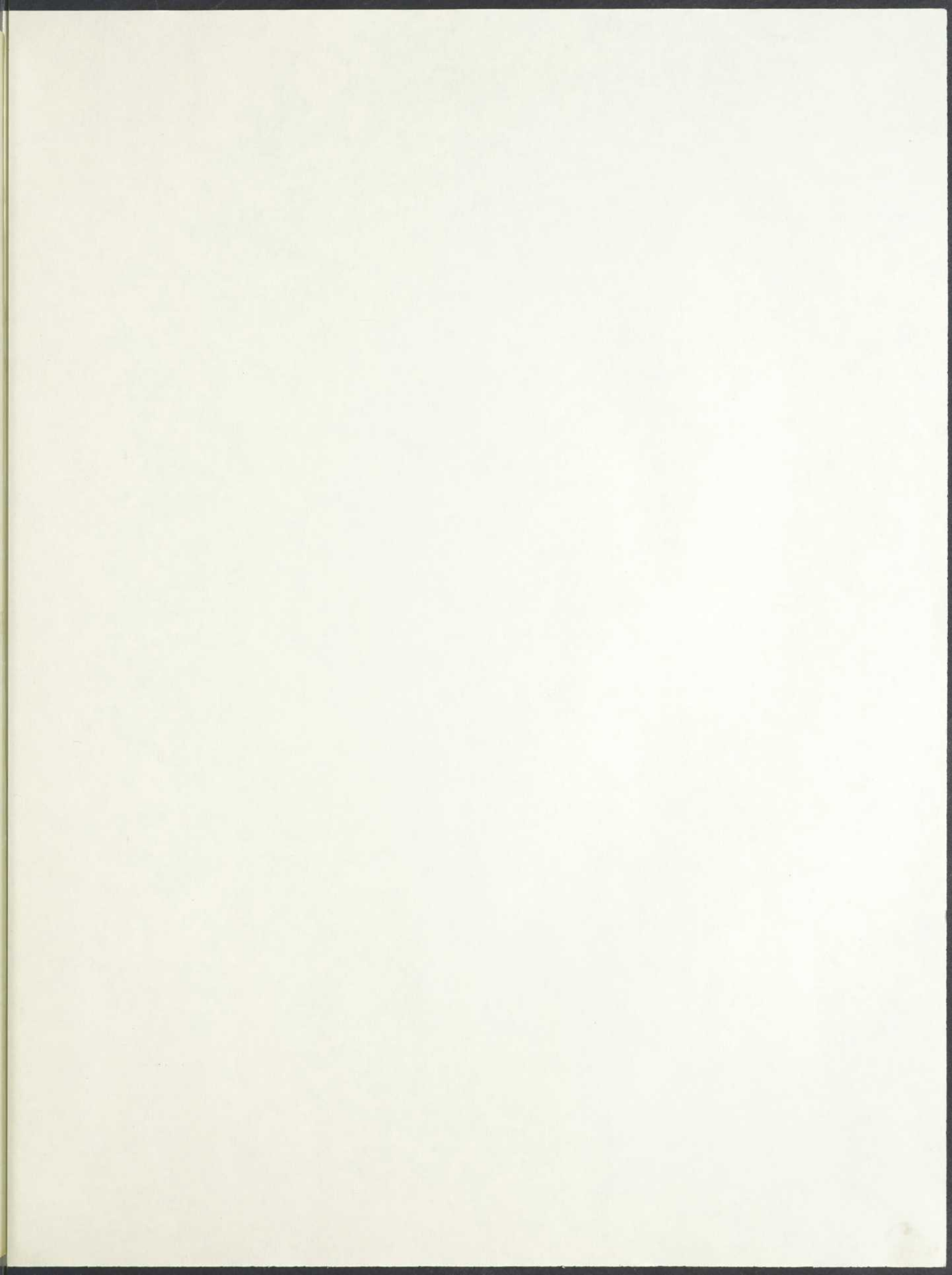
alterations and repairs were going on from 1836 to 1845 and again in 1855, when the extension kitchen was added. This feature can be seen on the old photographs and was of very rough workmanship. The present porch and door to the river are of much heavier and coarser workmanship and moulding than the interior woodwork and were probably made after it.

The history of the building seems quite clear. The walls and beams date from 1696, though they were repaired in 1734 and may in part be of that date. Thereafter the building was neglected until 1835, when it was thoroughly restored and renovated to receive a resident curé. The present internal woodwork dates from that restoration. Further work was done in 1855 when the kitchen was added and the porch placed on the river front, which at that time faced the old high road.

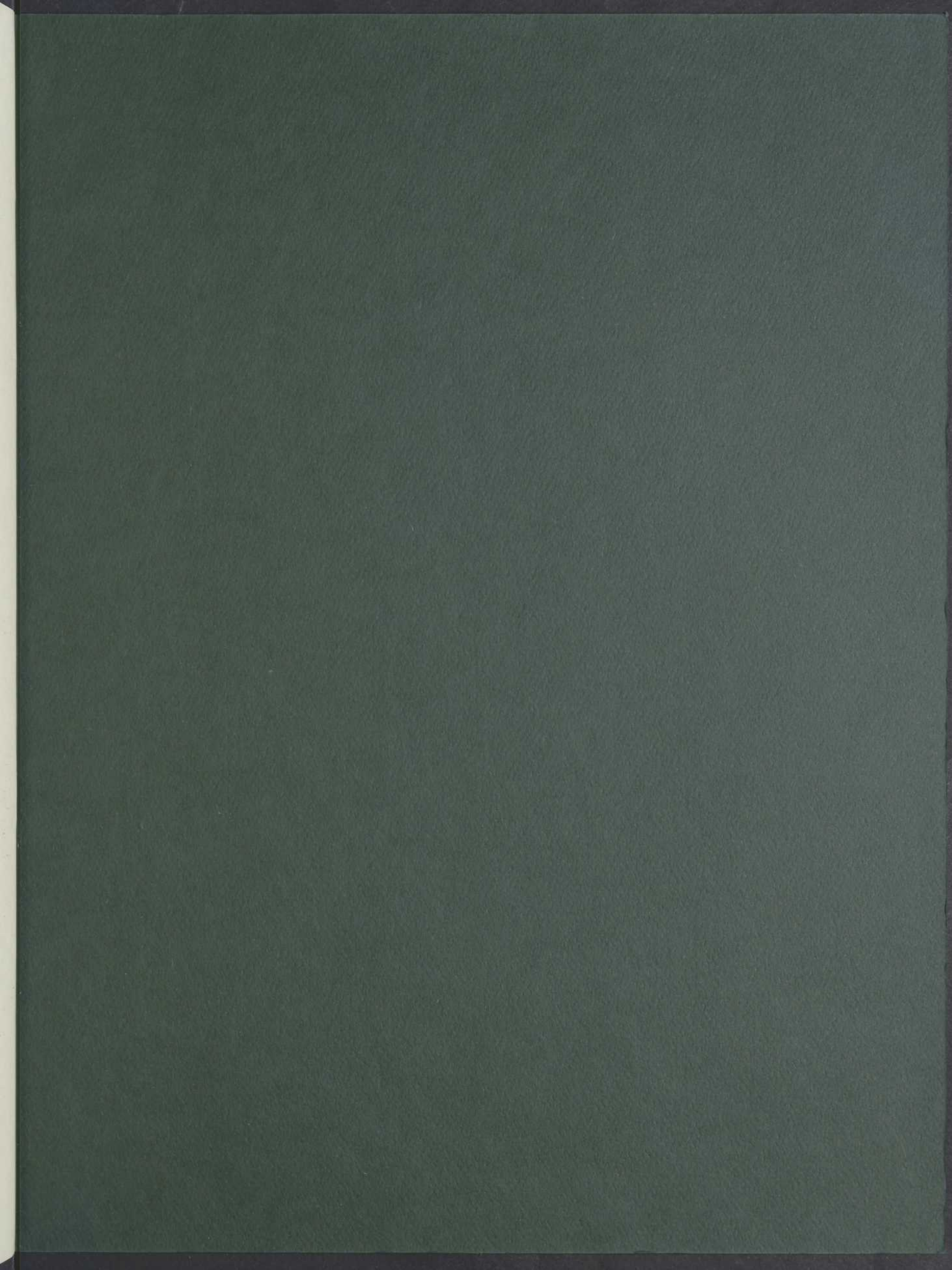
Since then little or nothing was done to the building until 1926, when it was restored by Mr. Decary. Of his work it is only necessary to say that it shows a love of the old building and a respect for its traditions. The old presbytery at Batiscan is one of the most perfect and most interesting of our small houses and it is fortunate in having fallen into such good hands.











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