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THE OLD CHURCH OF ST. CHARLES
DE LACHENAIE

by

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and

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THE little village of Lachenaie stands on the banks of the Rivière des Mille Îles, a few miles below Terrebonne. The parish was founded in 1684 and the first church was probably a wooden structure. At some time about 1730 a stone church seems to have been built, as was being done in so many parishes throughout the Province at this period. But of this building we have no record.

The earliest accounts are contained in an unbound book in the archives of the church; they begin in 1726 but are very fragmentary and contain no items which deal with building. They include an item of 42 livres paid in 1736-38 to the Sieur Labrosse, the well-known sculptor of Montreal, "pour la sculpture d'un grand cadre."

Regular accounts do not begin until 1739 and by this time the stone church was evidently built.

Amongst the documents in the archives of the parish is a contract between the Marguilliers and a Sieur G. Bolvin, dated 1737. This is one of the earliest contracts of this kind still surviving and must be given in full. It is on a single sheet of paper.

"Le dessein du tabernacle paraffé par Monsieur la Combe tel qu'il a été accepté par Messieurs les Marguiers dela fabrique de l'église de St. Charles a lachenay, scavoir le Sr Louis Donay marguier en charge, et Sr pierre Garguepy et pierre truchon dit leveillez et autre habitant. promettant les ds marguilliers a leur propre et privé nom de payer au Sieur Bolvin entrepreneur du dit tabernacle pour les dits tabernacle la croix et les chandeliers avec six souches proportionné et semblables de façon et de la même grandeur de ceux de l'hotel de trois Rivieres, y compris les boetes pour mettre dans les barque le dits tabernacle et les epingles la somme de neuf cents trente livres. Laquelle ditte somme totale sera payé au dit Sr Bolvin scavoir celle de trois cents livres en argent dans le mois de mars prochain de l'année 1737, item trois cent livres en blez au prix courant prit a l'église ou argent a l'obtention de dits marguilliers au temps que le dit Sr Bolvin livrera le dit tabernacle qui sera dans le mois d'aoust de 1738 et le trois cents trente livres derniers aussy en blez ou argent a l'obtention des dit marguiers dans le cour du mois de juin sept cent trente neuf car ainsy sont convenu en semble les dits marguiers et Sr Bolvin. les dits Sr Marguiers prennent pour construction du dit tabernacle, les gradins de l'adroit le corp de l'entablement dela gauge avec les Reliquaires sera observé le cadre dela porte du soleil de ladroite, et sur la porte une

branche de vigne d'un coté et de lautre des epits de blez les deux niche seront garnies d'un Vierge d'un coté et de lautre un St Joseph et par dessus le tabernacle sera terminé d'un globe avec une croix enrichy, fais double a lachenay le 10 fevrier, 1737 le dit pierre truchon a declare ne scavoir siner de ce enqy apres lecture faite

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| louis daunay | pierre gariépi |
| G. Bolvin | J. Lacombe P.C. |
| J. augustin Quintal | Temoins |

The description in the latter part of the contract is obscure, but the general sense corresponds to the tabernacle as it exists. There are three carved grades in the lower part; above this is a projecting centre part containing the custode for the monstrance (le cadre dela porte du soleil). This is flanked by niches in which are still the two statues of Our Lady and St. Joseph. The reliquaries are above the niches on each side, the tabernacle is finished by a globe and enriched cross. On the door of the large custode are ears of wheat and around it is a very rich frame of vine branches.

The stipulation that payments might be made in wheat or in money was usual at this time. Some of the payments to Sieur Bolvin were so made and the grain shipped to him, as is shown by the receipts of the ship-masters.

Gilles Bolvin was a master sculptor of Three Rivers. He was born in 1711, the son of Jean François Bolvin of St. Nicholas d'Avesnes in the diocese of Cambrai in France. We do not know whether he was born in Canada but, if not, he must have come to the country at an early age since in 1732 he married Marguerite Lamarque in Three Rivers. Here he lived until his death in 1766.¹ From this contract we see that he was already well established as a master sculptor in 1737.

The story of the erection is given in the Livres de Compte. It commences in 1739 with the following entry. "Premièrement livré au Sre Bolvin Mtre Sculpteur cens cinquante minots de bled à 40s coe il parait par les reçus de Denauls et Brulos maître de Barques. cy 300 li².

On the same page is a second payment of thirty bushels of wheat amounting to 70 livres.

The first instalment of the tabernacle arrived in the same year. It is noted in two entries, "à friches pour transport du premier Etages du tabernacle livré..... 10 li.² and

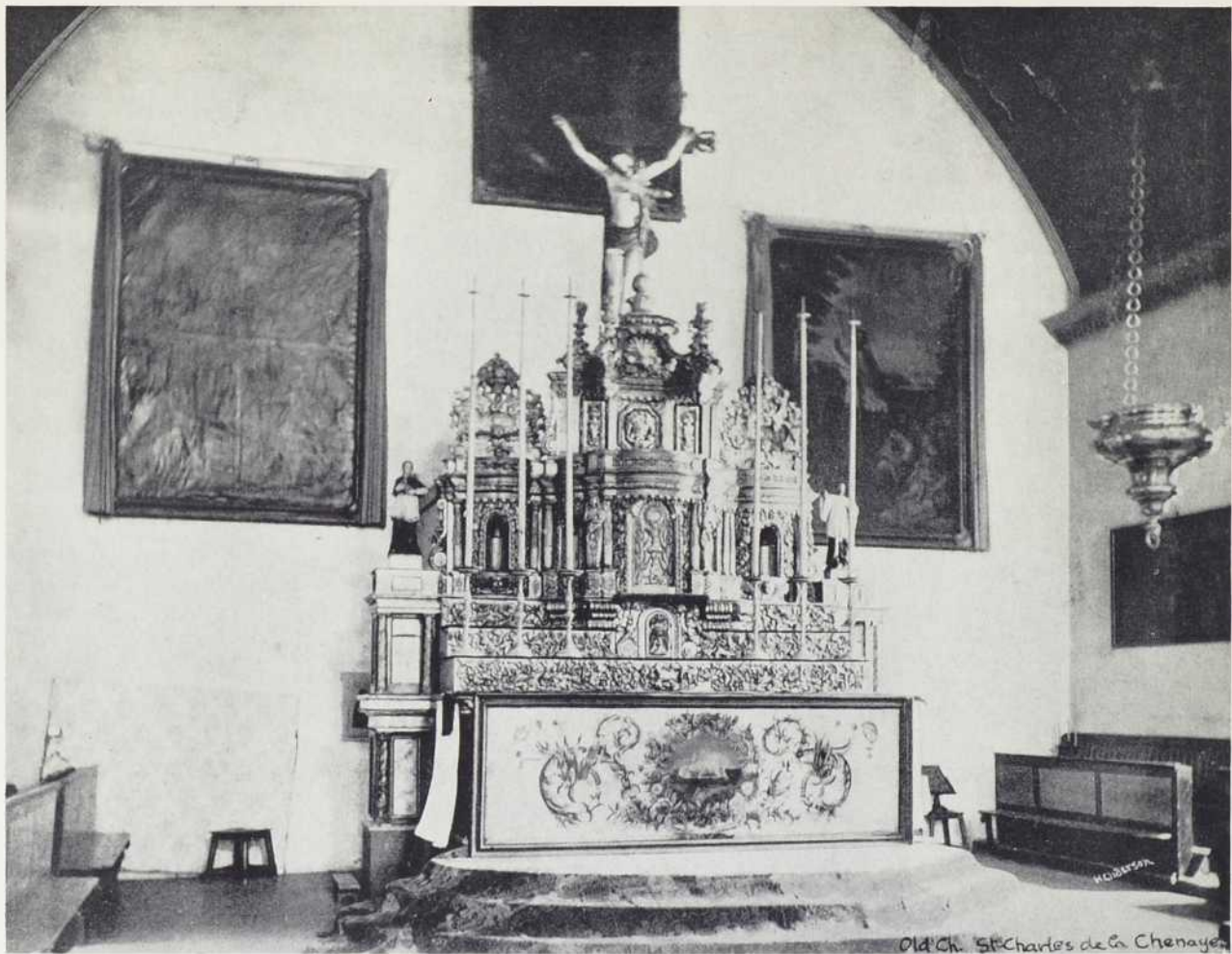
¹ Tanguay. Dictionnaire Biographique.
² Livre de Compte dep 1739 f2b.



PHOTO—HENDERSON (ABOUT 1880)

THE OLD CHURCH OF ST. CHARLES AT LACHENAIE, P.Q.

(Destroyed about 1882)



Old Ch. St. Charles de la Chenaye
PHOTO—HENDERSON (ABOUT 1880)

THE INTERIOR—CHURCH OF ST. CHARLES, LACHENAIE, P. Q.



PHOTO—R.T., 1953

THE TABERNACLE—CHURCH OF ST. CHARLES,
LACHENAIE, P. Q.

"payé pour transport du premier étage du tabernacle de La Barque chez Lesieur Guy... 15 li."¹

The first part consisted of the three grades and the custode. Works of this kind are always made in pieces for convenience both in making and in setting up. The pieces are usually simply laid one on top of the other so that in case of emergency they can be dismantled at once.

The work proceeded quite steadily. In 1740 Bolvin received 50 li 10 sols in money² and in the same year the second stage was delivered.³

Finally in 1744 the third and final stage was brought to Lachenaie by road.⁴

Gilding was a necessary part of all work of this kind. It was very expensive, often costing more than the woodwork and carving. Much of it was done by the nuns and entries of payment for gilding to "les religieuses" are common in XVIII century accounts. The Ursulines and the Hôpital Général at Quebec and the Congregation at Montreal had gilding departments (la dorerie) and derived quite a considerable revenue from them. The Lachenaie tabernacle was gilded in Montreal.

In 1739 the Fabrique bought from Mr. le Normand, superior of the Seminary at Montreal, gold and silver leaf to the amount of 303 livres.⁵ In 1740 is the following entry:

"A la Soeur Ste Hypolite Depositaire par son reçu du 28 mars 1741 sur la dorure du tabernacle La Somme de vingt livres en dix Mts de bled cy..... 20 li."⁶

Similar entries continue until 1745 when we find a final payment of 77 li.⁷ making, if we include the first payment for gold leaf, a total of 936 livres in all, a great expense for so small a parish.

Under the accounts for 1742-43 is an interesting item:

"Pour le transport du 2^e étage du tabernacle de Montreal à la Chenaye celui de la quayne (?) aux chandeliers de lapointe aux trembles à Montreal ensemble pour avoir ramene a Montreal Les Soeurs Ste Therese et Ste Monique payé..... 31 li.⁸ and in 1744 a payment of 1 li. 20 sols was made to Jacques Vaudry for having taken back to Montreal "les soeurs qui etoient venu pour monter le tabernacle."⁹

Sieur Bolvin made the tabernacle and candlesticks in his workshop. As each piece was finished it was sent to Montreal, landing apparently at Pointe aux Trembles. In Montreal it was gilded by the nuns and sent either by road or by boat to Lachenaie where it was placed in position under

the supervision of the nuns who came down for that purpose.

After the erection of the tabernacle there is no mention of any work in the church until 1770 when a total amount of 4,073 livres was paid to "hardy" for a retable and similar work.¹ Included in these items is an amount of 138 livres paid to "jacson" for sculpture additional to Hardy's contract. Antoine Jacson is a known sculptor. He was living in Quebec in 1770 and is recorded as doing decorations in St. Pierre on the Island of Orleans in 1781-83. Who Hardy was we do not know. He was apparently a master sculptor but we have not previously met his name.

In 1772 two statues and eight "pots à feu" were bought from the well-known sculptor Le Vasseur.²

In 1782 the Marguilliers examined the drawings for a pulpit presented by Sr. Louis Fournier,³ master sculptor of Montreal, at an estimated cost of 1,200 livres. This, as well as a banc-d'oeuvre and an Easter candlestick, was carried out in the same year.

In 1819 large payments begin to Mr. Rollin and continue until 1825, amounting in all to 4,492 livres for work in the church. Rollin was an associate of Louis Quevillon and his work here must have been a complete redecoration of the church, including retable and side altars.

The old church was pulled down about 1882 when the present one was built but the old tabernacle was preserved and reused in the new church where it is still in use. Fortunately the old church was photographed both inside and out before its destruction and even more fortunately copies of these photographs have been preserved.

They show a simple, well-proportioned building of the typical early Quebec form with a square eastern termination, small side transepts, a large steep roof and a front gable surmounted by a graceful bell-spire.

The photograph of the interior shows the old tabernacle. It has since then been slightly altered. The grotesque terms on each side of the central compartment have been replaced by corinthian columns—they were probably regarded as too pagan for their position—and the lower custode has been brought down to the level of the altar table. Otherwise it is as it was when the nuns superintended its erection.

The tabernacle of the high altar at Boucherville is a replica of this at Lachenaie, excepting that the lowest carved grade is absent from the Boucherville tabernacle. There can be no doubt that both were executed in the same workshop and by the same sculptor. This identification is very welcome as the early books of Boucherville have been lost and

¹ idem f3a.

² Livre de Compte f4a.

³ idem f4b.

⁴ idem f12a.

⁵ Livre de Compte dep. 1739 f2b.

⁶ idem dep. 1740 f4a.

⁷ idem dep. 1744-5 f14b.

⁸ Livre de Compte f8b.

⁹ idem f12a.

¹ Livre de Compte dep. 1770 f47a.

² Livre de Compte 1772 f48a.

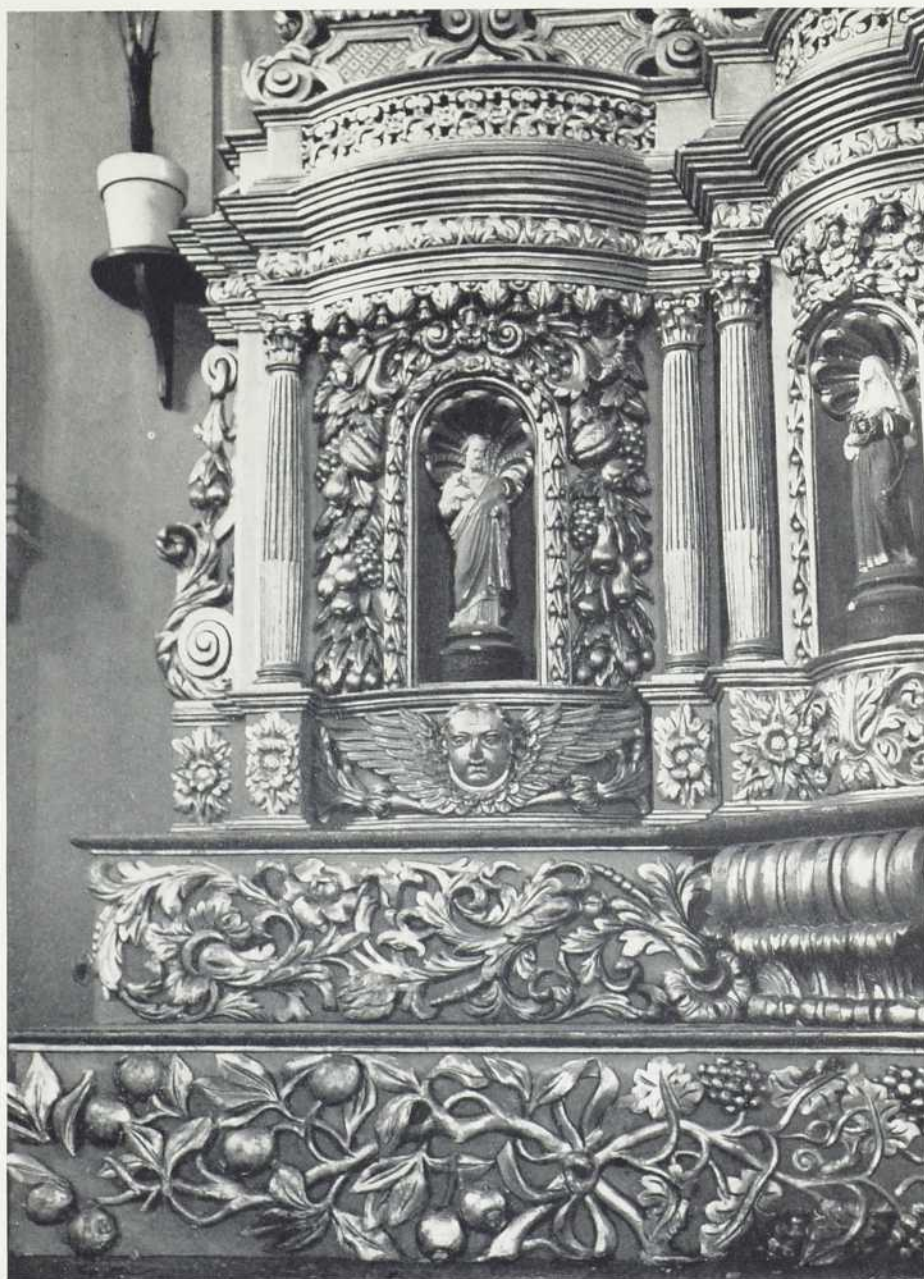
³ Livre de Compte dep. 1772 f57b. The name is otherwise unknown. It is difficult to read and might be "Fourcir" or Fourcin.

the artist of the tabernacle was unknown. It was by Bolvin and probably made about 1730-40.

It is very curious that the photograph of the old interior shows plain plastered walls with no trace whatever of any retable whilst the accounts tell of two separate decorations, those of 1770 and 1819. No explanation of this can be offered. The retable of 1819 by Rollin must have been removed

or destroyed by some accident of which no record has been preserved.

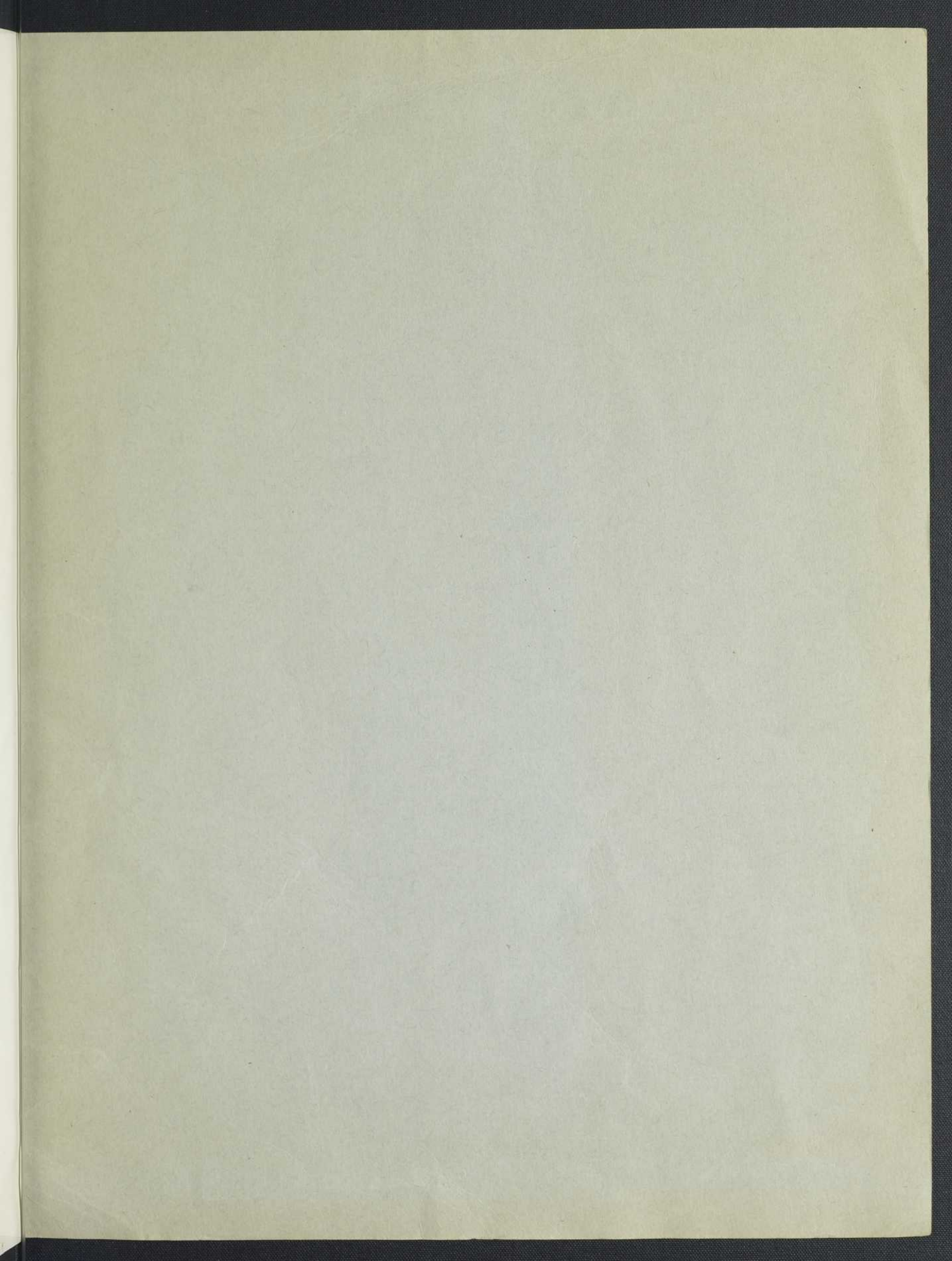
The accounts contain some interesting purchases of silver including in 1739 a ciborium from Roland Paradis, which is still in use in the church, and several articles from Mr. Delzenne, orfèvre, and Duval, orfèvre, which unfortunately have not been preserved.



PHOTO—R.T., 1953

DETAIL OF TABERNACLE—CHURCH OF ST. CHARLES, LACHENAIE, P. Q.

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