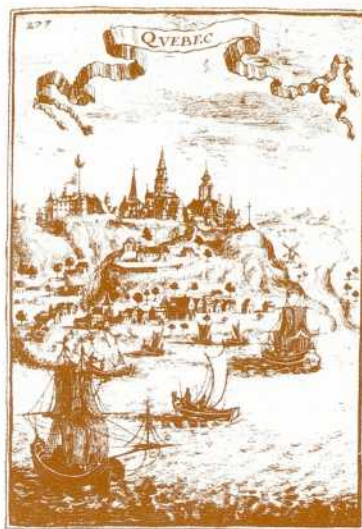


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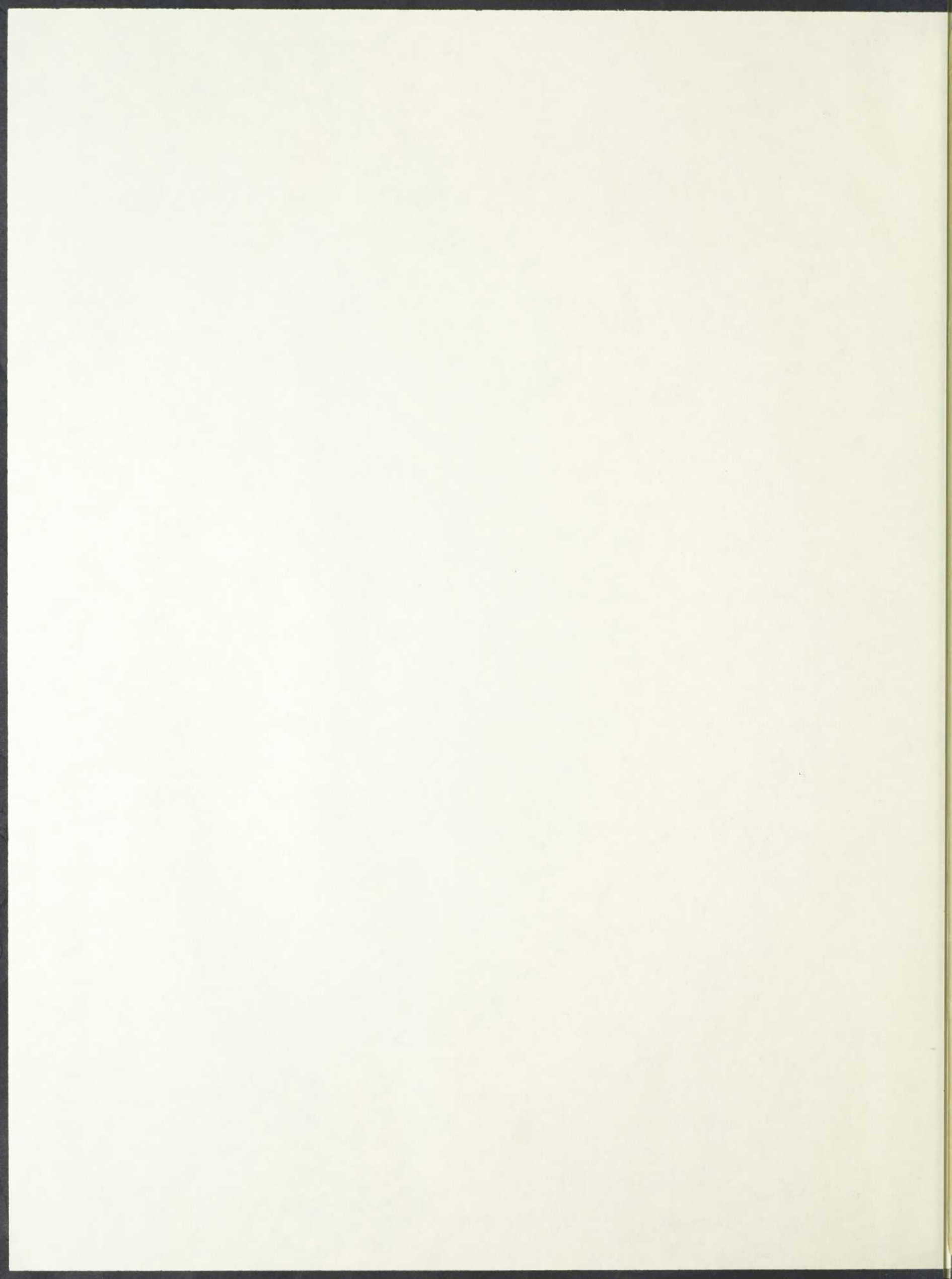
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THE OLD CHURCH OF ST. ETIENNE
DE BEAUMONT

by

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G. A. Neilson

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THE CHURCH OF ST. ETIENNE DE BEAUMONT QUEBEC

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

HISTORY

THE seigneurie of Beaumont is situated on the south bank of the St. Lawrence River about fifteen miles below Quebec. The district was settled at an early date but it was not until the end of the XVII century that a parish was formed and a church built for the inhabitants.

On the 2nd of December, 1693, Louis Marchand of Quebec gave two arpents of land for the erection of a church and presbytery.¹ Here in 1694 the first church was built, of wood, and here, upon the same site, the existing church was built between 1727 and 1734.

¹J. E. Roy. Bulletin des Recherches Historiques. Vol. I, 1895, p. 130.

The existing accounts of the parish begin in 1694. They contain no mention of expenses incurred in the building of the first church, only in 1699 and 1700 two payments of six francs were made to Jean Adam for repairs to the altar.¹ In October, 1700, a payment of 83 li. was made to M. Boutville for the roofing of the church and the presbytery and the accounts contain further items for shingles and nails.² In 1705 Jean Adam received 40 francs for making a seat for the churchwardens and a confessional³ and it is evident that the first church was by this time fairly complete.

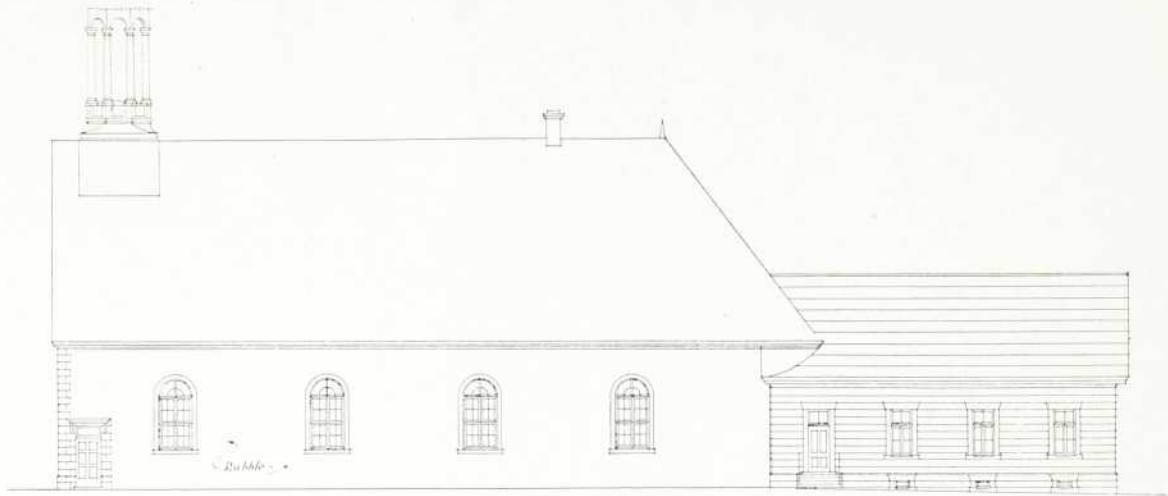
¹Livre de Comptes de Beaumont. Vol. I, dep. 1699-1700.

²L. de C. dep. 1700, notes.

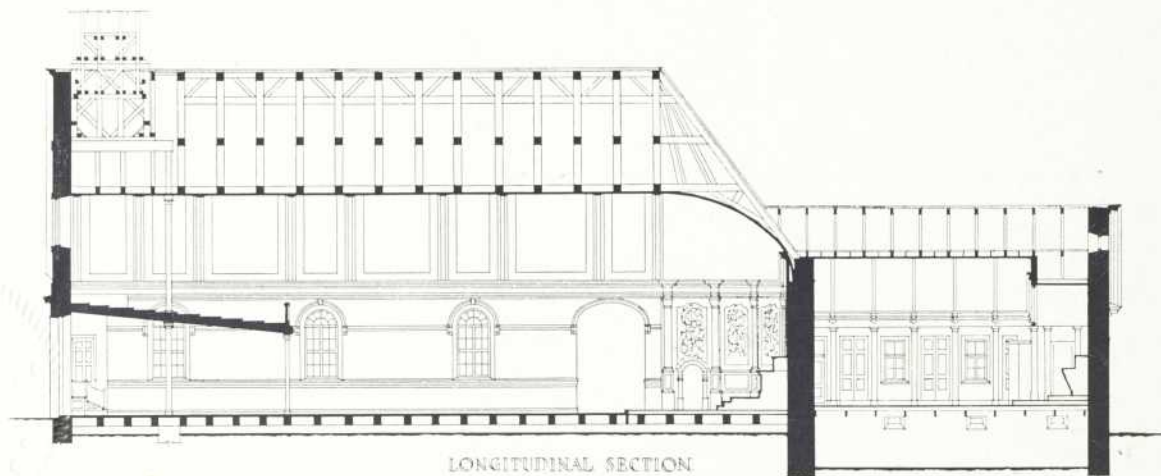
³L. de C. dep. 1705.

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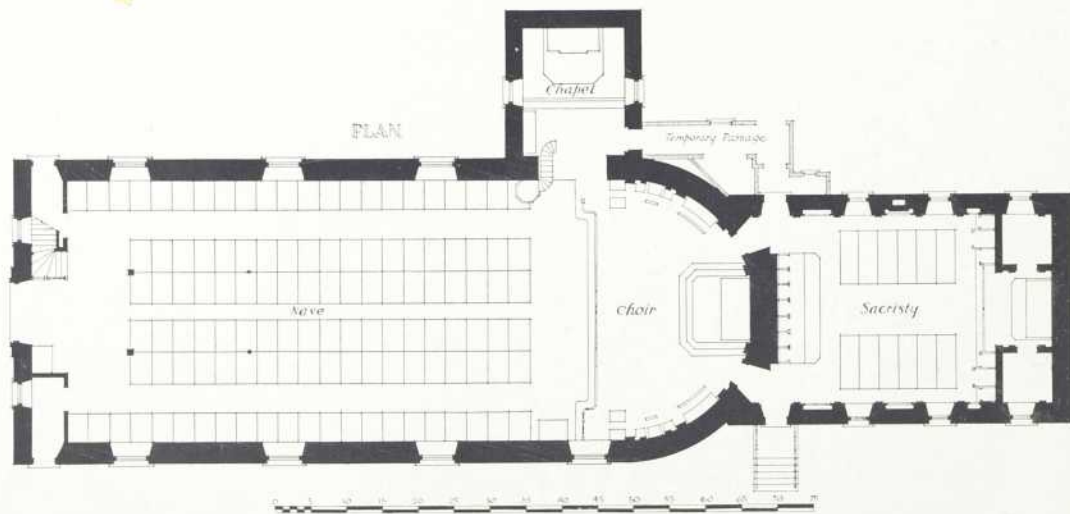
THE CHURCH OF ST. ETIENNE AT BEAUMONT, QUE.



SOUTH ELEVATION



LONGITUDINAL SECTION



PLAN

Scale of feet

Meanwhile the church was acquiring the necessary sacred vessels. In 1705 a silver ciborium was purchased for 100 li., in 1706 a silver monstrance for 40 li., a censer for 11 li. 10s and an Easter candlestick for 3 li., the last probably of wood. In 1712 a mass was celebrated for "Maranda qui a donné à l'Eglise un Crucifix et deux chandeliers".¹

The accounts for 1716 contain a number of items for repairs. M. Mercier received 72 li. for ironwork to doors and presses, René Adam and Joseph la Casse 72 li. for woodwork in the sacristy and Zacharie Turgeon 48 li. for work and wood on the gable of the church. In 1718 Joseph la Casse received 40 li. for a pulpit, and shingled the sacristy at a cost of 11 li.

In an ordinance, dated the 8th of July, 1715, the Intendant, Michel Begon, orders "That the land of the late Jean Cecille, habitant of Beaumont, should be sold at public auction and, once the debts and legacies of the said Cecille are paid, the balance of the money should be used to buy a tabernacle for the church of Beaumont, as stated in the said Cecille's Will.² The old tabernacle was sold to Camourasca in 1719 for 250 li. and the accounts contain a number of minor expenses incurred in fitting up the new one.³

On the 19th of May, 1721, the Intendant issued an ordinance ordering the people of Beaumont to build a stone church, "as the present wooden one is almost in ruins". The church was begun in July, 1726, according to the heading of a list of expenses for materials in the Livre de Comptes and, at the beginning of the accounts for 1727, is the following note:

"L'Eglise de la dt paroisse de St. Etienne s'Etant bati Cette presente année Il est impossible derendre un Compte bien Exact D'autant que c'est un detail quelque Infiny. On fera Le Compte de la depense aussy Juste que faire Le pourra mais pour La recepte comme on fait des quetes Et qu'on recoit bien des petits articles qu'on oublie Il Est difficile d'en faire un Etat."

The churchwardens were clearly in difficulties with their accounts; contributions were being made in materials, or in labour, and it was beyond their abilities to keep track of everything. Thus, at the end of the expenses of 1733, the book contains a copy of an act between Zacharie Turgeon and Le Fabrique, giving Turgeon a right to a seat, and 6 masses, in the new church in return for his having given the wood for the roof.

In 1727, 44 livres were paid for lime and 58 livres for cut stone. The masons were Jean Maillou of Beauport and Jean-Baptiste Nado, the carpenter was Augustin Couture, René Duprat furnished the cut stone.⁴

¹L. de C. dep. 1705, 1706, 1712.

²P. G. Roy. Inventaires des Ordinaires des Intendants, Vol. 1, p. 151.

³L. de C. 1719, recettes, et dep.

⁴L. de C. Vol. 1, Dep. 1727 and notes.

There had been serious delays in building the new church as some of the parishioners had not brought their share of the stone. On the 5th of February 1732 Archdeacon de Lotbinière orders those who had not fulfilled their duties to do so immediately and states that the old church is in such a ruinous state that they have had to remove the tabernacle as it was being damaged by the snow.¹

In 1734 the church was roofed with "fer-blanc", and an iron cross, weighing 150 pounds, was made by Laferiere at a cost of 40 li. The vaulted ceiling and gallery were finished in 1739, and on September 1742 a bell was consecrated. It weighed 297 pounds and was named Charlotte Jean. The church had taken fifteen years to build, from 1727 to 1742.

For the next sixty years little was done in the church excepting the necessary repairs. A statue for the main door was bought from le Sieur Levasseur in 1746 for 24 li. A little altar was made in 1760 for 12 li., some silver vessels, a benitier for 6 li., chalice, ciborium, Basin and Instrument de paix in 1784 for 453 li., a confessional, new seating, and so on.

Then, in 1810, we have an item of 3379 li. 14 sols. for a renewal of the vault, in 1811 new doors and 1215 li. for a retable, in 1812 a further payment of 800 li. and, in 1813, 2000 li. paid to Etienne Bercier to account of the retable. Further payments, from 1814 onwards reckoned in pounds sterling, continue until 1816 when Bercier received £25.13.10 in final payment of his work on the retable and pulpit. From 1817 to 1820 Bercier received £70 in payment of work on the cornice; between 1810 and 1820 the interior of the church was evidently completely renewed.

This work, in the main unaltered, is still in the Church. It is an excellent example of the decorative work of the Montreal school of sculptors of the early XIX century.

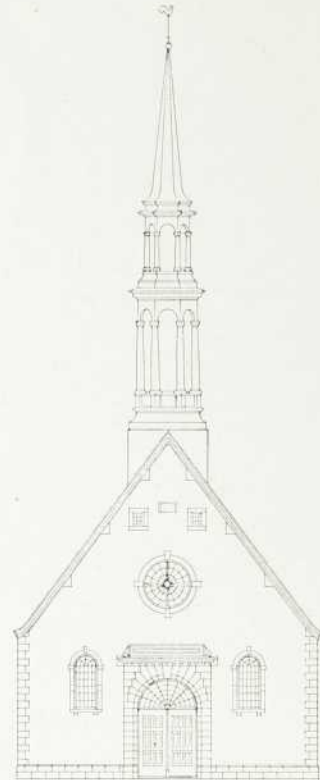
We do not know where Etienne Bercier received his training but his work is in many ways very similar to that found in a number of churches near Montreal, executed by various sculptors in the first quarter of the XIX century. This work is often connected with Louis Amable Quevillon who was the head of a firm of woodsculptors in St. Vincent de Paul from about 1795 to 1823 when he died. With him were associated Paul Rollin, Joseph Pepin and Rene St. James; the firm trained a great number of apprentices and its work is to be found in many churches throughout the province. As was natural most of their work was done near Montreal, but their names are found in the accounts of St. Laurent on the Island of Orleans in 1807.

¹L. de C. Vol. 1. Ordinance inscribed amongst the accounts of 1732.

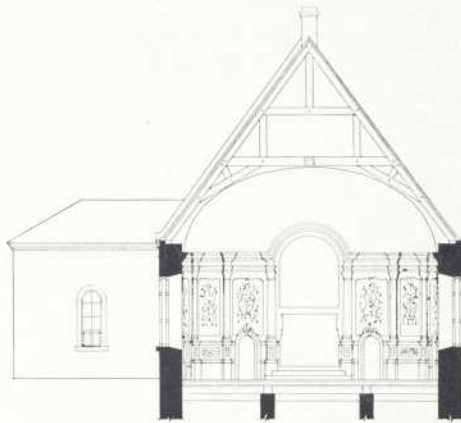
THE CHURCH OF ST. ETIENNE AT BEAUMONT, QUE.



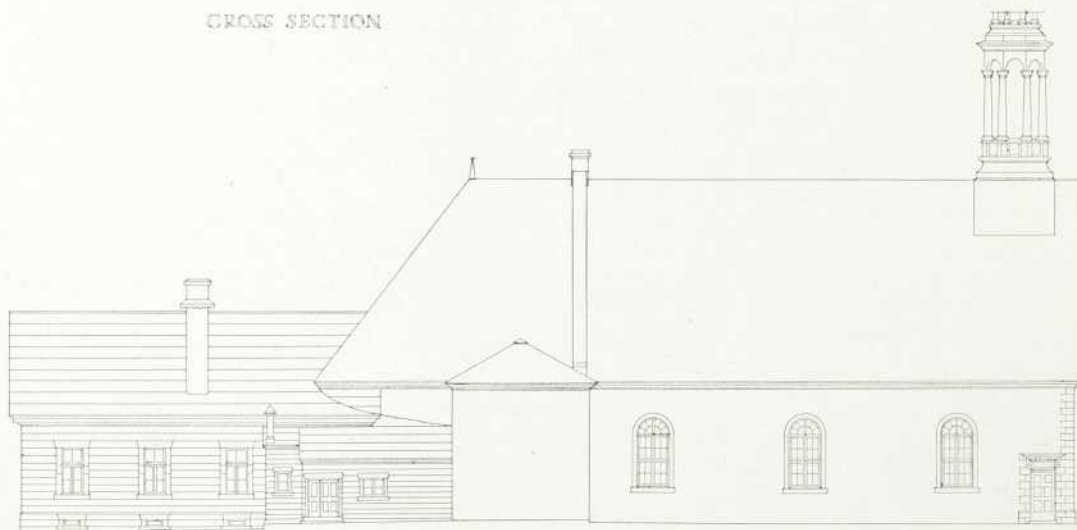
EAST ELEVATION



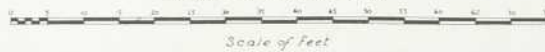
WEST ELEVATION



CROSS SECTION



NORTH ELEVATION



Scale of feet

Correction. The chapel on the north side and some internal repairs were done by Mr David Ouellet in 1894-95. The spire built in 1870 fell during the winter of 1925-26. The church was then lengthened 16 feet and the new front and spire added by Mr L. Auger, architect, of Quebec in 1926. The repairs of 1933 included a remodelling of the wood vault over the sanctuary.

St. Henri at Levis, St. Charles Bellechasse in 1806 and elsewhere.

The churches of L'Acadie, decorated by the brothers Finsterer from 1801 to 1822, Ste Jeanne Ile Perrot by Joseph Turcault from 1812 to 1819, Pointe aux Trembles, Montreal, by Urbain Brien in 1822, and Sault au Recollet, decorated by Fleury David between 1816 and 1823 show work of the same school, though of definitely individual character in each example. We do not know that any of these sculptors were pupils of Quevillon though they undoubtedly bought altar tables and furnishings from the firm. We can only assert the existence of a school of woodsculptors in the Montreal district whose work shows evidence of a common training. Of this school Quevillon, and his associates, were leading members, and to this school Etienne Bercier belongs.

Bercier was a habitant of Beaumont, he received small amounts up to 1848 for work which he did in the church and in one entry of 1847 is referred to as architect. He was one of the notables who examined and signed the accounts in 1847.

Various repairs were executed in 1826, 27 and 28 when the galleries were constructed and work done in the sacristy, but no further decorative work was done in the church.

In 1870 a new spire was added by Mr. Ferdinand Peachey, architect of Quebec. This was replaced by the present front and spire when the church was lengthened by David Ouellet, a Quebec architect, in 1895.

The existing sacristy was built in 1886. In 1894 extensive repairs were executed. The wood vault of the church was renewed and the pilasters which had flanked the nave windows were removed.

In 1932, when the bicentenary of the church was celebrated, a new pulpit and banc-d'oeuvre were installed and a few minor repairs were made to the retable.

The altarpiece, representing the martyrdom of St. Stephen, was painted by Antoine Plamondon in 1826, when the church purchased it for £25.¹

THE CHURCH

The church is a simple hall, without transepts, 94 ft. 6 in. long by 42 ft. 6 in. broad over the walls. These are of field stone, about 3 ft. thick with cut stone dressings to the windows. It terminates in a semi-circular apse, to which is attached the sacristy built in 1886. A chapel was added to the north side in 1894, communicating with the church by an arch.

The church was lengthened, about 15 ft., in 1895 when Mr. Ouellet designed the new front. This is an excellent adaptation of the traditional type and is both dignified and graceful.

¹L. de C. Vol. II, dep. de 1826.

The interest of the church naturally concentrates in the decoration of the sanctuary.

The tabernacle is in carved and gilt wood with a central crown and floriated terminals to the side bays. The central custode has on the door a paschal Lamb, and is surmounted by a high custode for the monstrance. In the crown is a statue of Our Lady with the Christ-child, and six little adoring angels. The carved decoration is somewhat formal, with acanthus foliage, broken scrolls, oval medallions and rococo shells. The whole is in very good preservation.

The character of the work is that which we associate with the Levasseurs of the first half of the XVIII century.

The accounts of the church contain an order by the bishop in 1848 to have the tabernacle repaired and alterations made so as to allow the large monstrance to be placed in the custode, and to allow of candlesticks "de grandeur convenable a la grandeur de l'autel" being placed on the first grade. Later items show that these instructions were carried out, but otherwise there is no mention of a tabernacle until we reach the legacy left by Jean Cecille in 1715, for the purpose of buying one.

There can be little doubt that the present tabernacle is that given by Cecille to the old wooden church. The old tabernacle was sold to Camourasca in 1719 and this one must have been purchased in the same year. The accounts for that year contain a number of items for gold leaf for the "grande Custode" and for a "Voile dindienne", a muslin veil, to cover the tabernacle at a cost of 160 li.

The present altar table is modern but, in the boundary chapel is a very fine altar table with interlacing vine foliage which was probably made by Bercier when he was working on the retable. The general form is that of the Quevillon tables, but the decoration is very individual, of a type similar to that in the panels of the retable.

A small altar-table, of typical Quevillon form, has been incorporated into the front of the new Banc-d'oeuvre. It was probably originally purchased from Quevillon, for use as a side altar.

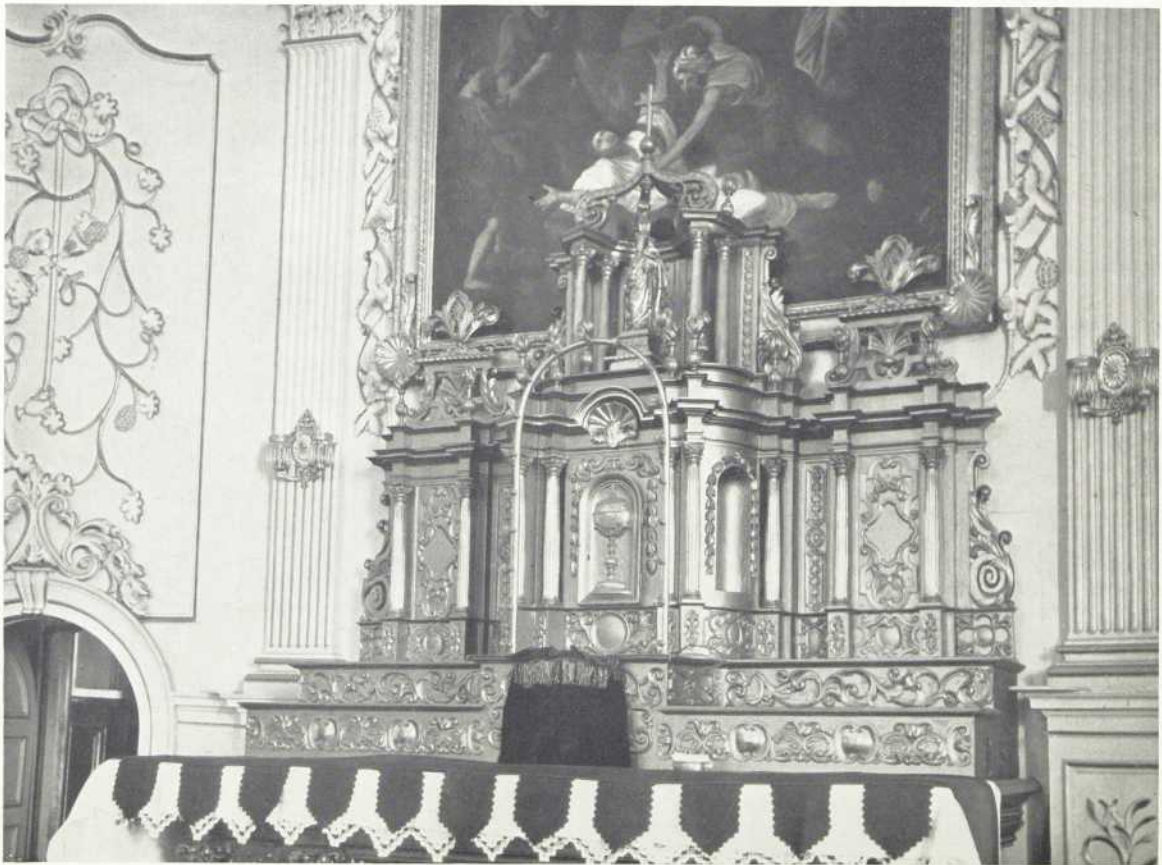
The retable has a large central arched bay, containing the altar-picture and surmounted by a semicircular arch with cresting of cornucopiae from which issue tangled branches of vine foliage.

On each side of this are three bays separated by corinthian pilasters on pedestals. In each bay is a single large panel with a curving top and filled with vine foliage and emblems. The stems, intertwining in loose curves are the principal feature, the leaves only add interest to what is essentially an interlace decoration.

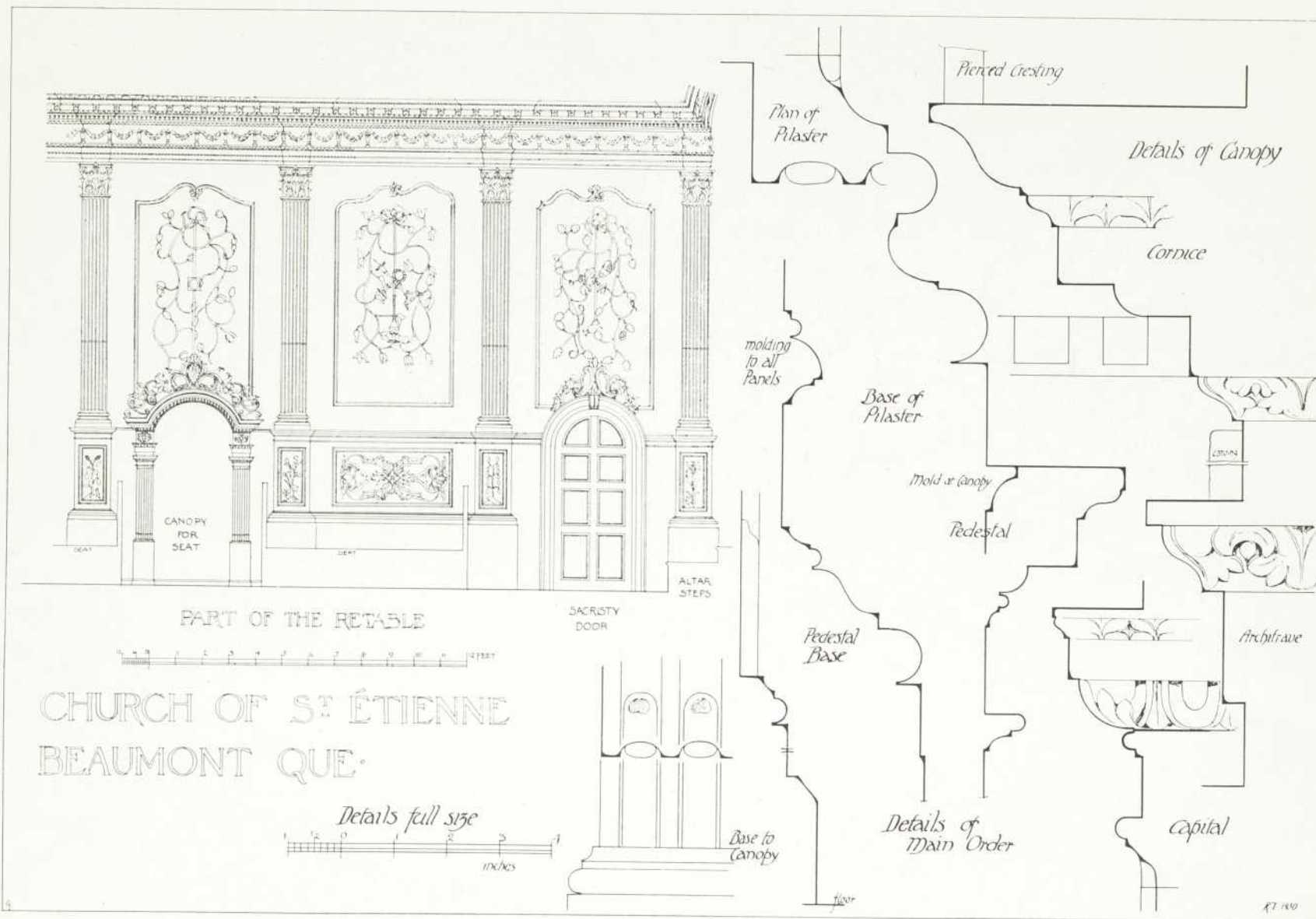
Stem decoration of this type is to be found in the Church at Sault-au-Recollet, in Ste. Jeanne on



THE INTERIOR LOOKING TOWARD THE HIGH ALTAR



THE TABERNACLE OF THE HIGH ALTAR



lle Perrot and in many of the Quevillon altars.

In the two outer bays are arched canopies for seats surmounted by thin carved crestings.

The cornice is decorated with swags hung from vases, the vault is covered by small square panels.

The whole decoration is thoroughly "Montreal" in type. Specific characteristics are the small

to Quebec. 300 li. on account of a bill of 520 li. was sent in a draft to Mr. Larcher of Paris in payment in the same year. It is a very fine piece, and unmarked.

The church also possesses a good ciborium of early XVIII century type. The mark is worn but seems to be D.G. and a rose, with the crown, fleur and grains. A ciborium was purchased in 1782,



ALTAR TABLE
(Now in the Boundary Chapel)

coffers in the vault, the frieze decoration of swags, the Louis XV type of panel-heads, the cornucopiae over the central arch and the stem foliage.

Yet, of course, the work is not a copy of any Montreal work, nor can it be called with any strictness "Louis XV". It is an extremely individual design of the Montreal tradition.

The Sanctuary lamp was brought from France in 1744. The accounts contain an item of 25 li. paid to a Mr. Parent for freight from La Rochelle

which may be this one. Amongst the other silver vessels is a fine chalice by François Renvoyzé, a benitier by Laurent Amyot of Quebec, probably that bought on the bishop's recommendation in 1817 and a small "sauce-boat" by François Sasseville.

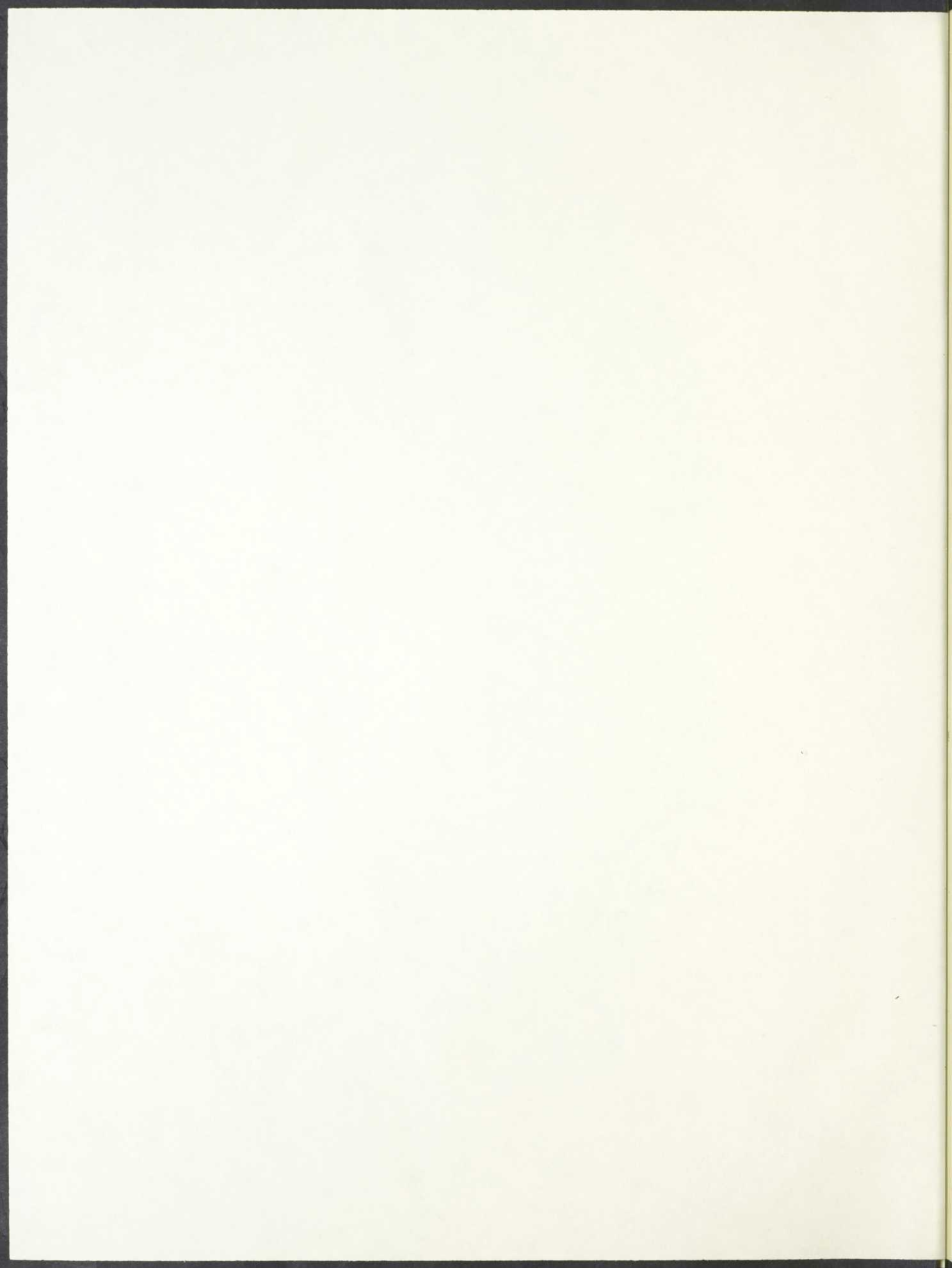
St. Etienne of Beaumont is a typical small parish church of the province. It has always been well cared for, it stands on a magnificent site overlooking the river, a memorial to the skill and artistic abilities of the French Canadian craftsmen.

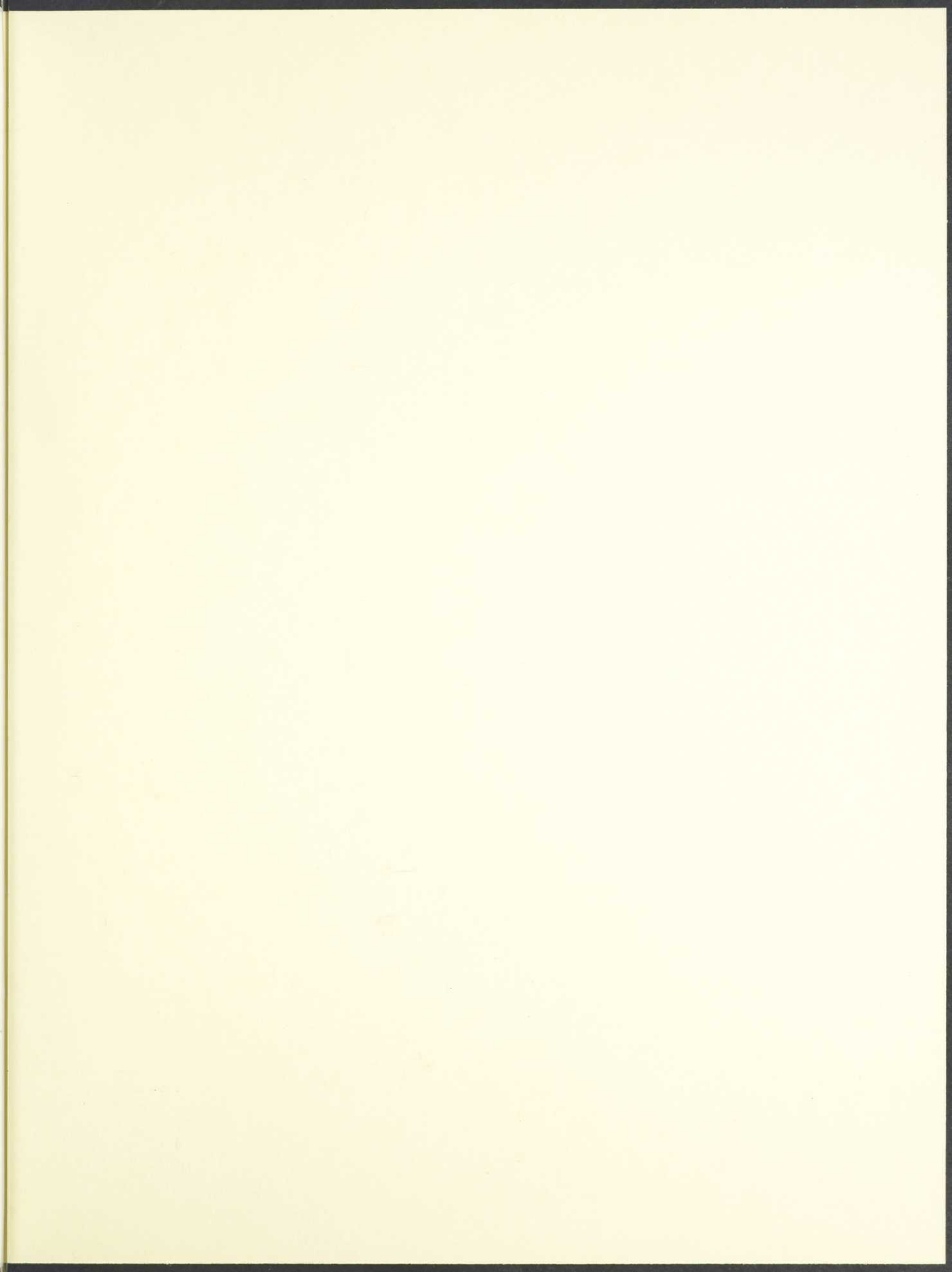
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